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DEMOCRACY'S FANATICS:
POLITICAL EXTREMISM AND DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN THE EARLY
AMERICAN REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Democracy's Fanatics:

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Extending insights from contemporary democratic theory to the history of American political thought, this dissertation examines how extremism and fanaticism shaped practices of popular democratic politics during the American Founding era. Focusing on the ways that political actors advocated intractable positions and used passionate, intolerant, and often violent means to resist perceived obstacles to democratic political equality, this project demonstrates that extremism can be a democratic tool when it animates public opinion to resist and remove obstacles to political equality. Concentrating on the discourse of patriotism, zealotry, insurrection, and popular sovereignty surrounding the Boston Massacre and its memorialization, the unrest of Shays's Rebellion, the political thought of Democratic Societies, and American reactions to the French Revolution, this dissertation argues that American democratic theory must rethink how popular democratic politics is conceptualized and address the theoretical question of what role a democratic politics shaped by extremism plays in the democratic life of the American polity. Following this insight, a new appreciation for the role of "extremists" in advancing democratic claims is necessary.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract of the Dissertation	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Fanaticism, Democracy, and the American Founding Era	
Chapter Two: Patriots in The Court of Pandæmonium	41
Massacre Day and the Patriot Zealot in Revolutionary Boston, 1770-1783	
Chapter Three: Hostis Republicae	111
Extremism and Popular Deliberation in an American Insurrection, The Massachusetts Regulation of 1786–1787	
Chapter Four: Democratic Friends and Aristocratic Enemies	166
Extreme Speech and Popular Sovereignty in the 1790s Public Sphere	
Chapter Five: Faction’s Jacobin Fanaticks	232
The Democratic Extremist as an Object of Political Fear	
Chapter Six: Conclusion	285
The Challenge of Democratic Extremism	
Bibliography	309

Chapter One: Introduction

Fanaticism, Democracy, and the American Founding Era

“Fanaticism is to superstition what delirium and rage are to anger...Once fanaticism has corrupted a mind, the malady is almost incurable.”¹

Fanaticism, according to Voltaire in the *Philosophical Dictionary*, is a disease whose epidemic tide can only be turned-back by the inoculating power of “philosophical spirit.”² As a political malady, fanaticism is a contagion that sickens the body politic as it sickens the man. Clouding his mind with irrational thoughts believed to be “Truth,” the fanatic lacks all reason. Within man, fanaticism degenerates reason, infecting the body and corrupting the mind. Within the body politic, fanaticism infects political discourse, threatening democratic polities by spreading intolerance, subverting reasoned deliberative discourse, and undermining liberal democratic regimes. The figure of the fanatic looms large in modern democratic history. Derided and rejected since before the Age(s) of Enlightenment(s), the fanatic is a figure whose alleged commitment to abstractions, rejection of the terms of political rationality, ardent devotion to a singular cause, unchecked passionate fervor, intolerance, and Manichean worldview have caused him to be dismissed as irrational and intolerable. Yet fanaticism, zealotry, and extremism have also historically accompanied the revolutionary and post-revolutionary prosecution of popular democratic politics. This juxtaposition of political extremism with the struggles

¹ François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, “Fanaticism,” from *The Enlightenment Reader*, ed. by Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 117-118.

² Voltaire, “Fanaticism,” 118.

of democracy reveals an overlooked and intimate relationship between the two.

From its beginnings, the practice of democratic politics in the United States has frequently involved conflicts over the continuing institutionalization of democracy, as well as the limits and forms of popular democratic practice. These often bitter and sometimes violent disagreements consistently feature the clash of two forces. On one side, we see constituted authorities, institutions, political elites, and governing officials that promote the hegemony of a particular interpretation of political order. On the other side, we find citizens, insurgents, and mass movements that seek to reform, resist, or remake this political order. Over the course of American history, clashes between these two forces have featured actors denounced as fanatics and extremists. This observation alone invites a theoretical and historical inquiry into the nature of this association in early American political thought. Yet, the need for an investigation into these historical, philosophical, and conceptual associations, the nature of practices that are both democratic and extremist, and the power relations and political conflicts in which they are enmeshed also derives from a more immediate and practical observation. Democratic practices today continue to be associated with extremism, rightfully or not.³

³ Reactions to contemporary democratic movements such as Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and Black Lives Matter (BLM) by both governmental agencies and popular commentators demonstrate the persistence of this association. In December, 2012, the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund released documents revealing that the FBI investigated OWS as a potential threat of “domestic terrorism.” (Alice Hines, “FBI Investigated ‘Occupy’ As Possible ‘Terrorism’ Threat, Internal Documents Show,” *The Huffington Post*, 24 December 2012, www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/23/fbi-occupy-wall-street_n_2355883.html). Newspaper commentators frequently highlighted the supposed extremism of OWS (e.g., Jonah Goldberg, “Occupy Wall Street protesters are the extremists, not the tea party,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 11 October 2011). This trend continues with more recent criticisms leveled against BLM, which has been described as advocating violence by New Jersey governor Chris Christie and Texas senator Ted Cruz, among others. In October 2015, Fox News host, Bill O’Reilly, compared BLM to the militant neo-Nazi group, Stormfront, saying “They’re an extreme group, the Nazi party. Black Lives Matter is also an extreme Group.” (Judah Robinson, “Bill O’Reilly Cuts Off Black Lives Matter Advocate: ‘Your Time Is Done,’” *The Huffington Post*, 23 October 2015,

The work that follows begins from a straightforward observation. Popular politics and popular political thought during the American Revolution and the early Republic was not just highly contentious, deeply fractured, and bitter. Rather, these contests often took the form of violent political clashes between antagonistic extremes. Even after the end of the Revolution in 1783 and Ratification in 1787, perceived obstacles to the deepening and expansion of political equality were repeatedly challenged by actors in ways that signaled a rejection of the possibility of moderated consensus, appealed to partisan repression and force, and passionately promoted the intensification of invidious and antagonistic political differences between opponents. Popular political actors appeared to be zealots, extremists, and fanatics who rejected the terms and limits of legitimate political contest and hegemonic visions of political order at the same time that they fought to remove undemocratic obstacles to political equality. These observations led me to inquire how fanaticism, extremism, and zealotry may have shaped practices of popular democratic politics in the Founding era, while this line of inquiry further prompted me to ask a more normative question about whether a democratic politics shaped – perhaps, tainted – by extremism played or could play a positive role in the democratic life of the American polity. In the pages that follow, I contend that recurrent conflicts over the democratization of the United States often feature democratic practices associated with extremism at least as far back as the American Revolution and early Republic, and that they continue to reverberate to the present day. There is, in effect, a continual recurrence

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bill-oreilly-cuts-off-black-lives-matter-advocate_us_562a367ee4b0aac0b8fc83e6). Though their decentralization and lack of formal hierarchy make it difficult to generalize about OWS and BLM, both social movements have advocated for democratic political and legal reforms, and have demonstrated democratic organizational tendencies. For background on the role of democracy in OWS see Mark Bray, *Translating Anarchy* (Winchester, UK & Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2013), 80–91.

of “democratic fanaticism” or “democratic extremism” in the American polity that demands the attention of theorists of American democracy.

Considering how extremism shaped democratic practices in the early Republic and the normative question of what effect democratic extremism might have on the democratic nature of the American polity raises a number of theoretical questions. First, examining democratic extremism asks us to question what it means to *understand* and *label* democratic actors as fanatics, which then compels us to further question whether or not the democratic actors so perceived *are* indeed extremists. Second, we are invited to consider what it means for democratic actors to *be* fanatics and what the implications of this extremism might be for democratic theory and our understanding of the social practices of democracy more generally. Third, where democratic politics are rightfully understood as demonstrating the characteristics of fanaticism, we must consider the role of force in democratic practices and how democratic actors negotiate questions of violence, reconciling (or failing to reconcile) the use of force with the normative imperatives of democracy. Addressing these questions, this work offers a new appreciation for the role of extremism in the American democratic tradition and the practices of early modern and contemporary democratic politics beyond institutional contexts.

Beyond informing American democratic theory more generally, each of the lines of inquiry I pursue below raises important questions for, and contributes to, our understanding of the history and contemporary practice of American democratic politics, as well as the theory of fanaticism – questions such as the role of passion in political

practice, the place of insurrection in post-revolutionary America, the value of deliberative and anti-deliberative speech in a contested public sphere, how fanaticism operates in both word and deed, and the politics of fearing extremism. Delving into practices of democratic extremism can inform both our understanding of the nature of popular democratic politics as well as the nature of fanaticism as concept and phenomenon.

What is Fanaticism?

It should come as no surprise that Americans are not and never have been immune to fanaticism. But though the concepts of fanaticism and extremism are frequently invoked in popular political discourse, their use and our understanding has often been plagued by a significant degree of conceptual ambiguity. Though early modern and contemporary uses of the category of “fanaticism” often suffer from this ambiguity, they gather together common descriptive characteristics such as ardent devotion, anti-deliberative intolerance, a friend-or-enemy framing, intense emotional passion, and a willingness to appeal to force. At times an empty invective, “fanaticism” has a long history in the way we talk about and understand our political reality, particularly in the way we think about and discuss bitter disagreements that have the perceived potential to violently disrupt an existing political order.

The origins of “fanatic” and “fanaticism” stretch back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though their roots extend further back to the Latin of *fanatic*, *fanatica*, and *fanaticum* which appear in the writings of Cicero and Juvenal.⁴ Then, fanaticism commonly signified an excessive enthusiasm for frenzied notions, if not

⁴ Dominique Colas, *Civil Society and Fanaticism: Conjoined Histories* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 11–13, 372n6.

madness or demonic possession.⁵ In its English form, "fanatic," (and its alternative forms, "phanatik," "phanatic," and "fanatique") has seemingly always held a pejorative connotation linked to the excesses of enthusiasm and the powers of the demonic. It is this sense of fanaticism or zealotry as inherently irrational, extreme, and threatening that has underpinned the style of discourse that Joel Olson has called the "pejorative tradition" of rhetoric and analysis.⁶ Discourse within this tradition, when it is not outright condemnatory or dismissive, has tended to produce accounts of fanaticism that are almost invariably negative.⁷ The pejorative tradition simply tends to treat the subject of fanaticism as a psychological or moral defect in the individual rather than as a form of political activity and thought, frequently characterizing fanaticism in a reductive manner as irrational and intolerant. Approaching the pejorative tradition genealogically, Olson mapped four common characteristics of how the discourse of this tradition today conceptualizes fanaticism and fanatics: against reason, against tolerance, fundamentalist, and ultimately terrorist.⁸ Yet, if we are to approach the discourse of fanaticism from a critical standpoint, we must critique – and may ultimately reject – the presuppositions of the pejorative tradition. Instead of surrendering to this tradition, it is important to develop a theoretically and historically rich account of the conceptual characteristics of fanaticism. Rather than merely a psychological or moral defect, fanaticism should be examined as a contested form of violent political activity and a highly charged weapon of

⁵ Colas, *Civil Society*, 15–16.

⁶ Joel Olson, "The Freshness of Fanaticism: The Abolitionist Defense of Zealotry," *Perspectives on Politics* 5.4 (2007): 685–701. Throughout this dissertation, the terms fanaticism, zealotry, and extremism will be used interchangeably.

⁷ Olson, "Freshness," 686.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 686–687.

rhetorical conflict, as well as something meriting fear.

Rethinking fanaticism against the presuppositions of the pejorative tradition requires us to suspend deference to the authority of the past and cast doubt on the hallmark of this tradition – the assumption of fanaticism's inherent irrationality and of the fanatic's unreason. Doing so does not suggest that all fanatics and fanaticisms are perfectly reasonable and acceptable, nor that the authors of the pejorative tradition are entirely wrong, only that the frequently presupposed equivalence between fanaticism and irrationalism ought to be held suspect until better understood. To approach fanaticism from the standpoint of political critique suggests theoretically parsing-out conceptual and phenomenal analysis. With the work of the pejorative tradition already done under the assumption of fanaticism as a form of irrationalism, we benefit from proceeding in an opposite manner, one capable of understanding fanaticism as political tactic, mode of behavior, and complex of practices rather than simple mental or moral aberration. That is, looking to the concept of fanaticism as gesturing *towards* something and reflective *of* something apart from irrationalism.

We can begin to better understand the meaning of “fanaticism” by considering the conceptual and rhetorical relation between it and “enthusiasm,” because the earliest English usages of “fanatic” in political rhetoric connoted an excess of enthusiasm – itself a historically polyvalent term in English and one whose modern usage primarily carries an almost neutral connotation “so casually and routinely employed as to have lost any real rhetorical force.”⁹ Enthusiasm was contested in its historical development between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whereas the seventeenth century saw

⁹ Jan Goldstein, “Enthusiasm or Imagination?: Eighteenth-Century Smear Words in Comparative National Context,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60.1–2 (1997): 29.

enthusiasm as a largely negative trait, the eighteenth century saw those who would condemn fanaticism also praising enthusiasm as a form of energetic creativity. Commenting on the character of New England's puritan forefathers, John Adams admitted that though they were "[r]eligious to some degree of enthusiasm...Had this, however, been otherwise, their enthusiasm, considering the principles on which it was founded and the ends to which it was directed, far from being a reproach to them, was greatly to their honor..." Invoking the zeal and idealized strength of puritan enthusiasm, Adams remarked, "...I believe it will be found universally true, that no great enterprise for the honor or happiness of mankind was ever achieved without a large mixture of that noble infirmity."¹⁰ Adams's use of "enthusiasm" is indicative of how, by and large in the pejorative tradition and the canon of Western political thought, this "noble infirmity" is understood as a trait that can support and create, but which must be constrained by forces of moderation (e.g., education, law, religious and civil institutions, art, censorship, etc.) lest it intensify to the threat of fanaticism. The linguistic roots of the English "enthusiasm" stretch back to the Greek *enthousiasmos* which carried "the Latinate meanings of infusion and inspiration: the in-pouring or in-breathing of the divine, which comes to inhabit the person possessed, as it did the inspired pythoness at Delphi, bringing the power to prophesy, which in turn can come to mean both to foretell and to speak with tongues not one's own."¹¹ Though the link between *enthousiasmos* and possession carries no inherent suggestion that such possession is necessarily malevolent or false, J. G. A. Pocock has noted that the negative secondary meaning of "enthusiasm" as referring to a

¹⁰ John Adams, *A Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law*, in *The Portable John Adams*, ed. John Patrick Diggins (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 214.

¹¹ J. G. A. Pocock, "Enthusiasm: The AntiSelf of the Enlightenment," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60.1&2 (1997): 9.

false or malevolent possession "tends to take precedence over the original primary meaning of *enthousiasmos*, and the history of its usage is often that of a weakened and generalized term of abuse."¹² Pocock's investigation into the history of "enthusiasm" from the end of the Wars of Religion through the English Enlightenment ends in a modern philosophical definition of enthusiasm as "the mind's identification with the ideas in it...[which] in turn [are] defined as correspondent or identical with the substance of reality."¹³

Though a single universal definition of "fanaticism" is beyond the scope of this work, there are common characteristics that give meaning to the concept. Surveying its use and historical development against the pejorative tradition's emphasis on "irrationality," I offer some common characteristics gathered under the concept of extremism or fanaticism: ardent devotion and excess of passion, intolerance and anti-deliberative action, a willingness to appeal to force and violence, a rejection of consensus, and a friend-or-enemy framing. Emphasizing these characteristics as common referents of fanaticism helps to resolve the conceptual ambiguity and lack of inherent content in the terms' everyday use.

Democracy, Practice, and Indeterminacy or, What is "Democratic Politics?"

Like the historically and rhetorically contested concept of fanaticism, "democracy" has also had a tumultuous history. Democracy is an essentially contested concept. Contemporary political theorists and political philosophers engaging the

¹² Pocock, "Enthusiasm," 10.

¹³ Ibid., 26. Here we should note the overlap between enthusiasm's philosophical relation to the realization of an abstraction (i.e., mind identified with itself and realized in reality) and fanaticism's motivation toward the realization of an unmediated abstraction in concrete reality.

meaning of “democracy” have taken-up a variety of positions with which they treat the concept in terms of its tactical employment, popular rhetoric, semiotic structure, cultural symbolism, and normative content. Some theorists, such as Wendy Brown, have sought to revitalize elements of the concept while ultimately recognizing “democracy” as an empty signifier.¹⁴ Other political thinkers have taken the extreme position that the concept of democracy has been so co-opted by capitalist markets and non-democratic forces as to be impoverished daily, a term to be replaced by another rallying emblem like an ostensibly democratic ideal of “communism.”¹⁵ In this vein, Jodi Dean has suggested that for some political theorists, “...democracy is an aspiration that occupies a place once held by communism,” in the sense that it is constituted by concepts of equality and participation aligned with communist thought.¹⁶ However, she argues that today, democracy is “inadequate as a language and frame for left political aspiration...” because “the right speaks the language of democracy...” and because “contemporary democratic language employs and reinforces the rhetoric of capitalism...”¹⁷

In the United States, “democracy” has been the watchword of neoconservative and leftist alike. Today, its derivatives “democrat” and “democratic” are so entangled in the culture and rhetoric of the American two-party system that the self-proclamation of

¹⁴ Wendy Brown, “‘We Are All Democrats Now...’,” in *Democracy in What State?*, Giorgio Agamben, et. al., Trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 44–57.

¹⁵ Alain Badiou, “The Democratic Emblem,” in *Democracy in What State?* (see note 14), 6–15.

¹⁶ Jodi Dean, “Politics without Politics,” *Parallax* 15.3 (2009): 20.

¹⁷ Ibid. Dean has gone so far as to not only argue that rhetorics of democracy ring hollow in modern politics, but to lump conceptually and historically distinct categories such as “capitalist,” “bourgeois,” and “neoliberal” with “democrat” and “democracy,” and reject all as denoting the same forces of domination. In so doing she may be guilty of reinforcing the association of the term with forces that detract from it. See Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2012). For an opposite approach that seeks to disentangle democracy, liberalism, and capitalism see Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London & New York: Verso, 2005): 102–116.

"democrat" invariably requires further clarification, even distance from all specifics of domestic American politics; to identify as a "democrat" in the minds of many is to identify as a "Democrat" rather than an "independent" or a "Republican."¹⁸ Historically, "democracy" has not always suffered from its modern form of indeterminacy, yet, its varying indeterminacy reflects a common point of miscommunication and conceptual confusion articulated by Giorgio Agamben: democracy can refer to both a technique of governing and a way of constituting a body politic, that is, "...democracy designates both the form through which power is legitimated and the manner in which it is exercised."¹⁹ This confusion suggests that even the conceptual direction of democracy's indeterminacy, the sort of *thing* "democracy" gestures towards, is itself indeterminate. Regardless of this persistent problem, the history of modern democratic revolutions suggests that in a given period, democracy (and even "republicanism") can have enough of a commonly shared meaning to inspire political struggle in its name. Democratic revolutions demonstrate that "democracy" is often a watchword for an ideal political order characterized by a contested though frequently occurring set of common ideas such as rights and limitations in law, and the self-constitution of a people into a political community. Still, these commonalities do not detract from the abstract nature of democracy. Rather, they provide points of overlap or family resemblance that appear in the history of attempts at translating the abstraction of democracy into concrete reality.

The work of political theorists and scholars of democracy to elucidate the historical meaning of the term is a necessary and important endeavor because of the

¹⁸ This conceptual confusion is likewise with self-identifications of "republican," "progressive," "conservative," and "liberal" among other polyvalent and politically charged terms.

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, "Introductory Note on the Concept of Democracy," in *Democracy in What State?* (see note 14), 1–2.

complexity of its cultural, and political development; its centrality to Western conceptions of political identity; its enduring use in political rhetoric; its appearance as descriptor of widely varied regimes and political parties; and the conceptual baggage of its constituent and related ideas. In addition, work in democratic theory concerned with the normative articulation of formal democratic structures, democratic institutions, constitutional theory, foundational justifications, and the politico-cultural norms necessary for the governance of democratic regimes and the constitution of democratic societies contributes to our enduring concerns with promoting, defending, and living within democracies. As important as these areas of concern are, democratic theorists must also pay attention not to “democracy” *per se*, but to the *democratic*, the practices and processes that enact or seek to prosecute democracy. Looking to the practices of democracy, we must turn our attention to the myriad actions and experiences of democratic actors, the polyphonic voices of democratic subjects, and the creation of democratic figures through both positive processes of self-subjectivation and the denigrating exclusionary processes of subjectification and domination by an other.²⁰

Doing so, requires us to present some of the basic contours of an operational

²⁰ I note both “self-subjectivation” and “subjectification” to draw attention to two different processes of subject formation. Following Judith Butler, I use “subject” as a critical category that, “rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a place-holder, a structure in formation” that “individuals come to occupy.” See Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 10–11. I use “subjectivation” to refer to the process of an individual’s being made into a subject more by their own active power than by being subordinated to an external authority. Self-subjectivation is a positive process in which the individual becomes a subject by exercising their own active power of identity formation, or through dis-identifying with other categories of identity and subjectivity imposed on them. In contrast, I use “subjectification” to refer to the formation of the individual as a subject that results from the subordination of the individual to the exercise of external power. Where self-subjectivation can be a largely positive process of constituting oneself with a certain identity, subjectification is a predominately negative process of subordination and coercion. See Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 10–18; and Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 35–42.

understanding of what is meant by “democratic politics” just as we have begun to investigate the phenomenon of fanaticism by elucidating its characteristics of family resemblance.

Establishing three basic criteria, I take *democratic politics* as gesturing toward social practices that: (1) presuppose an open community of equals; (2) presume the subject’s membership in or belonging to this community of equals (which entails the subject’s presumption of his or her equality); and, which, (3) enact or invent this community. This constellation leaves-off questions of form, allowing for the inevitable indeterminacy in the shapes which democratic practice takes in both its abstract form and its historical appearances. This operational understanding of democratic politics gestures towards a multitude of contingent social practices that each bear a family resemblance with one another more so than it defines a specific social practice.

A key theoretical dimension of democratic politics is that of struggle and contention. *Politics*, be it the routinized conflicts of congressional practice, the formal processes of multiparty elections, its more everyday forms such as “office politics,” or as the realization of some disputed notion of *the political*, is always an activity, a social practice. Democratic *politics* accordingly relates an activity, which takes place by and between human beings. Taking place under conditions of human plurality, democratic politics entails struggle and contention between agents with the purpose of combatting domination and undemocratic obstacles to the political equality on which a democratic polity rests. As social practices of struggle amid conditions of human plurality, consideration of democratic politics invites us to consider both the recognition of the subjects of democratic politics (i.e., the agents), as well as the dynamic tensions of the

formation of will, the exercise of volition, and the subsequent potential of the imposition of will (i.e., the actions).

That democratic politics presupposes an open community of equals does not mean that democratic politics only occur in a territorial community comprised of equals. In the words of Jacques Rancière, it is not to presuppose a belief that “...the principle of the community of equals and the principle of the social body [are] one and the same.”²¹ The community of equals that is presupposed in the practices of democratic politics is an insubstantial community, a community of “...individuals engaged in the ongoing creation of equality.”²² I adapt the idea that democratic politics presuppose a community of equals from the work of Rancière, and suggest that it is the necessary basis on which democratic claims are made.²³ The presupposition of the community of equals is the community of “all men” that are “created equal” inscribed in the American *Declaration of Independence* (1776); the community of “Man” and “Citizen” in the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (1789); the community of “members of the human family” in the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948); etc. Without this presupposition, there can be no basis for the claims of equality that underpin democratic practice because to claim equality necessitates a belief in community or else there is nothing and no one to be equal with.

Key to this account of democratic politics is the presumption of any given subject’s membership in the community of equals presupposed. Democratic subjects presume their equality, an equality of identity with the constituents comprising the

²¹ Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, Trans. Liz Heron (London & New York: Verso, 2007), 81.

²² Rancière, *On the Shores*, 84.

²³ *Ibid.*, 63–92.

community. Where subjects do not recognize themselves as belonging to a community of equals, they can make no claim to equality, social or otherwise, they can only lend their voices or inaudibility to the defense of an existent community of division and inequality. Social practices can only express claims of democratic equality when they are the product of a subject that bears the equality claimed and which recognizes itself as a part of the community of equals grounding such claims.²⁴ Though I have attempted to clearly disentangle the first two elements of my understanding of democratic politics for the purposes of exposition, it should be apparent that they are mutually implicated in one another; to claim equality necessitates a community of more than one as well as a claimant that is presupposed to be equal. Accordingly, democratic politics ought to be understood as pointing towards social practices in which claims of equality are articulated by the subjects of such practices, and the antecedent conditions for such claims have been met. Beyond these two interrelated parts, I suggest that the social practices that constitute democratic politics enact or invent the community presupposed and, by extension, serve to verify or demonstrate the equality they presume.

Though practices of democratic politics turn on the normatively favorable principle of equality, questions about force, violence, intolerance, repression, and

²⁴ This requirement is reflected in Rancière's democratic theory where the presupposition of belonging to the community of equals and the presumption of the subject's equality is necessary for a democratic politics of equality opposed to a politics of inequality, which is inclusive even of progressive or reformist politics that seek to lessen inequality: "Those who say on general grounds that the other cannot understand them, that there is no common language, lose any basis for rights of their own to be recognized. By contrast, those who act as though the other can always understand their arguments increase their own strength — and not merely at the level of argument...This means starting from the point of view of equality, asserting equality, assuming equality as a given, working out from equality...By contrast, anyone who starts out from distrust, who assumes inequality and proposes to reduce it, can only succeed in setting up a hierarchy of inequalities, a hierarchy of priorities, a hierarchy of intelligences — and will reproduce inequality ad infinitum." Rancière, *On the Shores*, 50–52.

exclusion arise when we consider political practices that differ from and disrupt that of the existing social body. These sorts of tensions raised by the will to enact a community of equals on the same grounds as an existing social community of inequality are deeply embedded in the phenomena I examine as appearances of democratic fanaticism. The difference between the will to enact or realize the abstract community and the will to defend the integrity of an existing social order is at the core of both the fear of fanaticism noted above and the politics of anti-democratic or tyrannical domination. This unsettling overlap between fanaticism and democratic politics underlies the theoretical inquiry into the ways extremism shaped practices of popular democratic politics in the American Founding era and the role of democratic extremism in the American polity that occupies the pages below.

What is “Democratic Fanaticism?”

In the broadest sense, these pages comprise a historical and theoretical investigation into the association of democracy and democratic politics with fanaticism, zealotry, and extremism in early American popular politics. As an analytical and descriptive work of American political thought, I examine some of the ways in which the speech and perception (i.e., language and sense) of political actors hides (and excludes) the potentially democratic subjects at the heart of disruptive and violent political contests in the early American polity. This descriptive work accordingly explores how that which may be democratic is subordinated under the concept of fanaticism, and then excluded from the realm of legitimate political deliberation. I am interested then, in highlighting the descriptive characteristics that give meaning to fanaticism and extremism as

categories and exploring how labeling and understanding political actors primarily through these intertwined categories may obscure their democratic nature, keeping us, as well as those confronted by “fanatics,” from fully appreciating them as nuanced subjects of political contest. Through these investigations, we encounter democratic subjects and democratic politics that are hidden beneath a conceptual and rhetorical veil draped by the language of those that resist the impulses and imperatives of democratic practice. Yet in these encounters, we also find that despite the negative associations of being understood as fanatics, they may be simultaneously democrats as much as zealots and extremists. To uncover the democrat beneath the tarnish of fanaticism may still reveal a kind of extremist. Though the association of democratic politics with fanaticism may have the effect of hiding the democratic subjects of political contests, we may obscure them further if we fail to attend to that which may be fanatic in the constitution of the democrat.

It is through this descriptive work that the normative endeavor of these pages as a work of historically-situated democratic theory emerges. Beyond investigating how democratic politics were and may continue to be associated with the politics of fanaticism in a way that conceals the democratic subject of political contest, I suggest that the democrat may also be fanatical. Seeing only extremists where there are democrats is as much a case of tunnel vision as seeing only democrats where there are extremists. Labeling subjects fanatics covers up that they might in fact be democrats. Noting the ways in which subjects might be democratic and subsequently naming them as democrats may equally cover-up their fanatical nature. Either form of tunnel vision impedes our understanding of political events, the figures at their center, and the demands

they make. Both demand that we learn to see not only the subjects that confront us in everyday disagreements and times of crises, but to inquire into *how* it is that we see and make sense of these figures. Understanding the intertwining of democracy and fanaticism in subjects of American politics, and how we reconcile or fail to reconcile this entanglement when making sense of American politics may teach us something about the history of American democracy, as well as contemporary democratic theory and practice. There may be something to learn by looking to those who are alternately celebrated and reviled in American political history.

To accurately describe these figures of politics, I suggest recourse to a concept of "democratic fanaticism." "Democratic fanaticism" gestures towards an identity that is equally characterized by practices that are both "democratic" and "fanatic." This endeavor in concept-formation serves to open-up a clear space in which to think democratic politics through the tensions endemic to the history and theory of democracy; tensions between the imposition of democracy or the will of a democratic subject on a stage of bitter contest and the motivating imperatives of democracy as an egalitarian abstraction. These authoritarian tensions, the tensions of force and the imposition of democratic will, expressed in the phenomenon of democratic fanaticism are a reflection of these same tensions as they have appeared in the thinking and practice of democratic politics more generally. Noticing and negotiating this tenuous relationship has been a recurrent feature of Western political thought. Where democracy has been understood as a dynamic process of enactment, an unfulfilled promise, or a contingent struggle, a concern with negotiating the imposition of violence or popular democratic will while staying true to the imperatives of democracy has frequently inflected democratic theory

and its practice. Whether it be in speculative, historical, or contemporary works of democratic theory, “democratic politics” names the pursuit of the democratic ideal, the praxis of democracy, the prosecution of its imperatives, and the imposition of its will in contentious, uncertain, and often undemocratic times. Democratic fanatics are agents of these tensions between the abstraction of democracy and the imposition of democratic will in times of struggle, and these figures invite us, to consider how extreme, zealous, intolerant, idealistic – that is, fanatical – politics might be understood as an expression of democracy during perceived undemocratic times, or as having a role in the advancement of democracy by resisting obstacles to democratic political equality. How are we to think about the often violent, intolerant, and extreme imposition of democratic subjectivity in its dispersed and variable sites and what can we learn from observing how democratic politics may be shaped by the dilemmas of force, repression, and exclusion? Confronted by events in which we see both elements of democratic politics and a politics of fanaticism, how should we go about deciphering this blend when it appears in the words and deeds of democratic subjects, anti-democratic adversaries, or both, particularly where such tensions have left an indelible mark on our political history?

Re-approaching Popular Democratic Politics in the American Founding Era

To respond to these questions in a manner centered on the action of *real* politics, I turn to the legacy of the American Founding era, an originary moment in the democratization of the United States and a period of significant, dispersed, and varied events of popular democratic politics. Prior approaches to the history of early American political thought largely ignored consideration of the relationship between popular

democratic politics and popular violence or extremism. Often such approaches focused primarily on the American Founders and the thought of political elites, paying little to no attention to political thought as it was expressed in the popular culture and popular politics of ordinary people.²⁵ Subsequent approaches have corrected and compensated for earlier inadequacies, but have continued to down-play the popular violence of revolutionary and early republican America, particularly in direct contrast with that period's other great popular revolution in France.²⁶ More recently, early American historians working on political and cultural history have begun to revisit expressions of popular political violence such as mobs, riots, and "rough music."²⁷ Because of these "histories from below," we have gradually acquired a revised and fuller picture of the American Founding as a messier period of popular politics, one in which ordinary Americans motivated by democratic and republican ideas, engaged in acts of violence against neighbors and figures of authority beyond the battlefield. Yet, even with this fuller picture, little consideration has been given to what American instances of

²⁵ The historian Albrecht Koschnik has argued that "before the advent of the new social history, historians either placed little significance on the behavior of men and women who rarely explained their thoughts and actions in writing or dismissed them—following the bias of their elite sources—as members of bloodthirsty 'mobs' misled by demagogues and ambitious whig politicians." It was only in the 1960s that American historians began paying attention to the rational and controlled behavior of crowds following a growing literature on collective violence in European history. Albrecht Koschnik, "Review of *Riot and Revelry in Early America* by William Pencak, Matthew Dennis, Simon P. Newman," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60.2 (2003): 459–462.

²⁶ For more on this and the historiography of popular political violence in early America see chapter three below. Often, earlier histories of the American Revolution's supposed lack of popular violence appeared in comparison with the well-recognized bloodiness of the French Revolution and the Terror. See for example Gordon S. Wood, "A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 23.4 (1966): 635–642; and Bernard Bailyn (ed.), *Pamphlets of the American Revolution 1750–1776* Vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965): 581–586.

²⁷ See for example the essays collected under the section on "Riot and Rough Music" in William Pencak, Matthew Dennis, and Simon P. Newman ed., *Riot and Revelry in Early America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); and chapter 3n23 below.

democratic extremism might reveal about the relationship between popular force and democratic practice, how and what it means for Americans to understand political actors as fanatics, and what the recognition of some early American actors as both democratic and extremist might imply for contemporary American democratic theory.

Like their counterparts in early American studies, political theorists have also been guilty of reproducing inattention to popular violence and popular democratic politics in the Founding era. Also like their counterparts, theorists have often neglected inquiry into the politics of the everyday for the politics of the Founders, strict re-readings of American founding documents, nuanced readings of well-known canonical political philosophers and their influence on the American founding, or a popular politics absent its violent dark side.²⁸ Recent works have seen political theorists revisiting expressions of popular political violence entangled with democratic politics, focusing on social movements and key figures of nineteenth and twentieth century American political thought.²⁹ Yet, much less attention has been paid to the eighteenth century.³⁰ Where

²⁸ These trends have been particularly present in the work of scholars influenced by Leo Strauss. See for example Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Kenneth L. Deutsch and John A. Murly Eds., *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Catherine Zuckert and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), particularly 197–227; Harry V. Jaffa, *How To Think About the American Revolution* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1978); David Tucker, *Enlightened Republicanism* (New York: Lexington Books, 2008); and Thomas L. Pangle and Lorraine Smith Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993). Theorists influenced by Leo Strauss are not alone in emphasizing the Founders over the everyday in early American political thought. See for example, Judith Shklar, *Redeeming American Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

²⁹ Examples of this include Jenet Kirkpatrick, *Uncivil Disobedience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Kimberly K. Smith, *The Dominion of Voice* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1999); Olson, “Freshness of Fanaticism” and “Friends and Enemies, Slaves and Masters: Fanaticism, Wendell Phillips, and the Limits of Democratic Theory,” *The Journal of Politics* 71.1 (2009): 82–95.

approaches to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have explored the place of popular violence in political practice, theoretical inquiry into the place of force and extremism in popular democratic politics during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries remains mired in conventional and limited interpretations about the character of politics during the American Founding era. That is, political theorists have given little acknowledgment to the violent and dispersed character of popular politics or paid little attention to the negotiation of forceful political practices by average revolutionary and early republic Americans. In so doing, we have lost touch with a difficult historical legacy that continues to reverberate today. Responding to these concerns and inadequacies, I look to the Founding era as a means of both investigating the theoretical and historical association of democratic politics and fanaticism and recapturing this period as a time of intense conflict that witnessed the negotiation of force and violence alongside democratic practice at the level of popular politics, rather than a period of internally stable ideas explainable purely or primarily through the thought of political elites.

Hannah Arendt's American Revolution

Tackling these concerns abstractly, and as they are concretely reflected in the beginnings of American political history gives us pause to consider how the figure of the political theorist might encounter and read such contentious political moments of popular

³⁰ Robert W. T. Martin's, *Government by Dissent* and Jason Frank's, *Constituent Moments* are exceptions to this, though both are more broadly concerned with democratic radicalism and expressions of constituent power than on the relationship between democratic politics and violence or extremism. See Robert W. T. Martin, *Government by Dissent* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); and Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 41–101.

violence, extremism, and democratic activism were he or she to recognize them. Hannah Arendt's seminal work in *On Revolution* provides us with one of the most influential, perceptive, and significant engagements with the authoritarian tensions of democratic politics and their appearance in two foundational revolutions in modern democratic history.³¹ It also provides us with an illustrative example of a conventional theoretical account of early American politics that persists as a contemporary canonical background for engagements by political theorists with American political thought and democratic theory today. Though often lauded for its elaboration of eighteenth century French and American political thought, the conceptual development of "revolution" and the nature of revolution as a politico-existential concept, as well as its penetrating critique of early European constitutional theory, revolutionary government, and the political thought of the American framers, *On Revolution* has also been subjected to critique by political theorists and historians alike. Regardless, Arendt's text remains a foundational work for both American political theory and democratic theory. Indeed, *On Revolution*, with its "...remarkable interpretation of the American Revolution..." is, as Jason Frank has remarked, a "landmark of historically situated democratic theory," one that demands the attention of any attempt to rethink democratic theory in the context of early American political history.³² Its powerful insights as well as its flawed readings have continued to inform theoretical approaches to the character of politics and political thought in eighteenth century America.

In *On Revolution*, Arendt critically celebrated the American revolutionaries' experience of promising, compact, and constitution against that of the French, who

³¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

³² Frank, *Constituent Moments*, 42.

attempted to invoke and impose a singular sovereign national will. *On Revolution's* appraisal of the first two modern revolutions can be read as a case study of the theorist's interpretive engagement with the authoritarian tensions I find embodied in the democratic fanatic and recurrent in the history of democratic revolution and action. Confronted by the stark contrasts between the two keystones of modern democratic revolution, Arendt interrogated the divergent trajectories of American and French politics and the means by which they negotiated revolutionary times. In her account, we read the American Revolution as consisting of a politics inscribed with the principles and imperatives of democracy and republicanism, bereft of popular violence and political excess, and witness to what she called "...the great...perhaps the greatest American innovation in politics...the consistent abolition of sovereignty within the body politic of the republic, the insight that in the realm of human affairs sovereignty and tyranny are the same."³³ In contrast to this reading of the exceptional nature of the American revolutionary experience, the French Revolution is read as a saturnal event of passional popular politics, in which the national imposition of a singular political (albeit, democratic) will led the nation to devour its own children. However, Arendt's "storytelling" account of the American founding, and her inattention to the dispersed, extreme, sometimes violent, impositions of explicitly patriotic, republican, and democratic will is an interpretive account of American revolutionary politics seen through clouded eyes, unable or unwilling to acknowledge the violence and authoritarian tensions of the popular democratic politics present therein.³⁴ Arendt simply does not see the many conflict-ridden

³³ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 144.

³⁴ On Arendt's political theory as "storytelling" see Seyla Benhabib, "Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative," *Social Research* 57.1 (Spring 1990): 170.

iterations of contested constituent power and the extreme politics surrounding the forceful exercise of political will in contests between democratic action and antidemocratic power. Because of this, Arendt fails to grasp the significance of popular democratic conflicts during the American Revolution, many of which did not end in 1783. Her misreading is both a case of what I introduced above as a kind of tunnel vision with respect to observing fanaticism and democracy, and a call to return the gaze of the political theorist to the American founding era as a time of disruptive, extreme, fanatical, and yet, *democratic* politics. *On Revolution* thus presents us with a highly influential and illustrative account of the political theorist's neglectful reading of popular American democratic politics, particularly with regard to the role of force and extremism in advancing American democracy.

One of the most central elements of Arendt's study of revolution is her emphasis on the influence of contingency. The significance of history underpins what leads her to celebrate the American Founding and to critique France, but it is developed in such a way as to imply that the authoritarian tensions of democratic politics – which are explicitly revealed for Arendt in the French case while noticeably absent in the American – might be entirely mitigated by the luck of historical draw. Unlike the French, Americans broke from a king and parliament that held no *potestas legibus soluta*, no power absolved from law.³⁵ Because the Americans did not break from an absolute power above law, "...the framers of American constitutions, although they knew they had to establish a new source of law and to devise a new system of power, were never even tempted to derive law and

³⁵ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 148.

power from the same origin [as had the French].”³⁶ In America, law and power were divided, with power originating in the people and law originating in a written constitution, “an endurable objective thing,” which Arendt suggests “...was never a subjective state of mind, like the will.”³⁷ Surprisingly, Arendt reads this as a nearly unanimous stance, and suggests that dissenting positions holding constitutional supremacy to be rooted in popular will — thereby combining the different sources of law and power, and anchoring both in the will of the people — were those subscribed to by a fraction of “lonely figures.”³⁸ The problem of deducing the sources of law and power which had “..appeared in France as a genuine political or even philosophic problem...came to the fore during the American Revolution in such an unequivocally vulgar form that it was discredited even before anybody had bothered to make a theory out of it.”³⁹

Where the French Revolution sought to empower but direct popular political power in constituted assemblies that ultimately lacked legitimate authority, “the great good fortune of the American Revolution was that the people of the colonies, prior to their conflict with England, were organized in self-governing bodies...”⁴⁰ For Arendt, the Revolution “did not throw them [Americans] into a state of nature... there never was any serious questioning of the *pouvoir constituant* of those who framed the state constitutions and, eventually, the Constitution of the United States.”⁴¹ Rather than the contested

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 148–149.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 156.

⁴¹ Ibid.

notions of the authorization, nature, and invocation of constituent power in France, American representatives at all levels of constituent assembly and vested with the power to constitute and frame constitutions, “...were duly elected delegates of constituted bodies...” who “...received their authority from below, and when they held fast to the Roman principle that the seat of power lay in the people, they did not think in terms of a fiction and an absolute, the nation above all authority and absolved from all laws, but in terms of a working reality, the organized multitude whose power was exerted in accordance with laws and limited by them.”⁴² Thus it was for Arendt, that in America, popular political power was organized and directed with restraint because of a legacy of institutions vested with popular legitimacy.

Time-and-time-again, Arendt comes back to the historical absence of absolutism in America and the American colonial experience of covenanting and promising. Where the French Revolution liberated a multitude of power and violence, the American Revolution “...liberated the power of covenant and constitution-making as it had shown itself in the earliest days of colonization.”⁴³ Calling attention to this tradition of colonial covenanting and the self-organized formation of English colonizers into political societies, Arendt contended that

“The conflict of the colonies with king and parliament in England dissolved nothing more than the charters granted the colonists and those privileges they enjoyed by virtue of being Englishmen; it deprived the country of its governors, but not of its legislative assemblies, and the people, while renouncing their allegiance to a king, felt by no means released from their own numerous compacts, agreements, mutual promises, and ‘cosociations’.”⁴⁴

Unlike their French peers, Americans had no need to preoccupy themselves with

⁴² Ibid., 157.

⁴³ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 172–173.

questioning the origins of law and power, no pre-commitment to a politics in terms of an absolute, and no conflict-ridden popular negotiation of resorting to force and imposing sovereign will. Almost unanimously holding that the basis of political power stemmed from compact and promising, the question of imposing political will was never a crucial matter for revolutionary Americans. Indeed, for Arendt, political authority was so adequately maintained throughout the revolutionary break, that there was little need to broach the potentially contentious issue of sovereignty in terms of internal politics and political order, hence her insistence on Americans' consistent abolition of sovereignty within the body politic. Where the men of the French Revolution were caught-up in the presumed necessity of and manner by which sovereign political power was formed and exercised, "The men of the American Revolution, on the contrary, understood by power the very opposite of a pre-political natural violence. To them, power came into being when and where people would get together and bind themselves through promises, covenants, and mutual pledges..."⁴⁵ For the Americans, only this power, "which rested on reciprocity and mutuality, was real power and legitimate," in stark contrast with the "so-called power of kings or princes or aristocrats," which "did not spring from mutuality but, at best, rested only on consent," and was therefore "...spurious and usurped."⁴⁶

It was this experience and these historical conditions that explained, for Arendt, the successful negotiation of revolutionary waters in America. At the heart of the American revolutionary and colonial experience is the fundamental insight that

"...binding and promising, combining and covenanting are the means by which power is kept in existence; where and when men succeed in keeping intact the power which sprang up between them during the course of any particular act or

⁴⁵ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

deed, they are already in the process of foundation, of constituting a stable worldly structure to house, as it were, their combined power of action.”⁴⁷

Thus we are left with the “unforgettable story” of the American Revolution, which Arendt employs didactically to teach us the “unique lesson” of the importance of deliberate, mutual, covenanted, action; “for this revolution did not break out but was made by men in common deliberation and on the strength of mutual pledges.”⁴⁸ But is this mutually respectful and covenanting politics really all there is to be seen in the early American experience? Is such a seemingly fraternal politics of elites the only face of American democratic founding?

Even if Arendt is correct in asserting the maintenance of authority and the ease of revolutionary transition in America, this condition of elite resolution does not necessarily extend to the level of popular political contests and the confrontations between actors violently imposing different political wills. That is, time and again during the Revolution and the early Republic, political actors organized, enacted, and proceeded in terms of exercising some form of violent political will whether it was the will of a patriot rabble channeling the sovereign will of “country” against loyalists and officials of the crown, or the post-revolutionary frontier dissenter forcefully attempting to impose his or her political will as a part of the sovereign “people” against a supposedly counter-revolutionary federal government. Departing from Arendt’s narrative, Americans repeatedly confronted the dilemmas of invoking political will against conditions deemed counter to the liberty and security of the people, the republic, or the public liberty. Arendt’s reading of the Revolution and the Founding appears to miss the tension between

⁴⁷ Ibid., 166.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 206.

the imposition of political (i.e., democratic) will and the adherence to democratic principle because it narrates the politics of the Revolution as the near-unanimous combinational construction of political power rather than the imposition of will in contending sites of political practice. In so describing early American politics and political thought, Arendt's American Revolution does not feature a politics of contending wills apart from an American will and a British will, but rather, the construction of will from a preexisting condition of compromise. Arendt tells the tale of the American Revolution as a revolution concerned with the creation of a new and robust republican form of power. If her tale is true, then this grand constituted republican power, in its abolition of sovereignty within the body politic, ought to have abolished the popular exercise of sovereignty in all of its dispersed and varied sites. Yet, Arendt's reading neglects the dispersed exercise of democratic will and constituent power.

For Jason Frank, who is specifically interested in Arendt's critique of constituent power, her contrast between the American and French Revolutions "ultimately veils the dilemmas of popular authorization created by the American Revolution and its very different invocation of a dispersed and interpretive, as opposed to centralized and willful, understanding of constituent power."⁴⁹ Taking issue with the claim that the innovation of American revolutionary politics is the founding abolition of sovereignty within the republic's body politic, Frank contends that

"[d]espite Arendt's central claims in *On Revolution*, revolutionary and postrevolutionary American political culture was marked by a continuing contest over competing 'sources of authority regarding the interpretation and application of law,' over competing claims of popular authorization. Arendt too quickly subsumes these forms of popular contention under a consensual practice of

⁴⁹ Frank, *Constituent Moments*, 44.

‘mutual promising,’ and under the persistence of formal legality.’⁵⁰

Democratic politics as the imposition of a democratic will must be authorized by (i.e., in accord with) the principles of democracy and its imperatives. For Frank to contend against Arendt that the dilemmas of self-authorization were indeed present in the Founding era and that they were “...politically navigated through a layered complexity of diverse political cultures and overlapping jurisdictions” is an affirmation of the reality that the revolutionary and post-revolutionary eras were populated by myriad dispersed sites of democratic (i.e., constituent) politics.⁵¹ Contrary to Arendt’s position, the revolutionary era and the early Republic saw a multiplicity of stages on which we find popular political subjects wrestling with the authoritarian tensions of democratic politics where “...Arendt cleansed the postrevolutionary years of their agonism...”⁵² Ironically, in dismissing dispersed popular attempts of exercising sovereignty in America, Arendt neglected a plethora of events in which fractions of a *demos* exercised political action as self-authorization and will, the very form of human capacity substantiating the *vita activa* she elaborates in *The Human Condition*.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 52.

⁵³ Of the three activities that make up the *vita activa* – labor, work, and action – Arendt singled-out action as the activity that distinguished human beings in their uniqueness. Arendt understood action as the natural human capacity to begin something new, to realize freedom through new beginnings and the creation of novelty – hence her emphasis on the relationship between action and natality – and it is action that is the uniquely political activity of human life. Following *The Human Condition*, *On Revolution* holds-up revolutions as examples of action, noting that revolutions can only be understood as attempts to realize freedom and experience a new beginning. In the revolutions she examines, Arendt emphasizes the actions of individuals to interrupt routine and create social spaces of public freedom. By dismissing dispersed popular attempts of exercising sovereignty in America, Arendt neglects the efforts of individuals to exercise human freedom through their self-authorization as political actors willing new beginnings. Arendt’s dismissiveness is a lost opportunity to apply the framework of *The Human*

Practicing democratic politics in undemocratic times requires democratic subjects to negotiate, if not resolve, the tension between the practice of imposing a democratic will and the normative requirement of adhering to the abstract imperatives of democracy. Such a situation appears almost entirely unavoidable. Arendt's misreading of the American Revolution wrongly suggests that historical and politico-cultural conditions can circumvent this necessary encounter. Her narrative re-telling of the American political founding does not simply omit reference to key sites and tensions of democratic contest that appeared within the Revolution, it may be seen to actively cover-over them. Failing to see the varied and dispersed instances in which the authoritarian tension of democratic politics was negotiated makes these negotiations (and their necessity), where they may appear, into an "other" of the experiences of American politics. They become something that takes place "over there" but not "here." Allowing the reproduction of this logic of othering smacks of an uncritical American exceptionalism while impairing the reader's capacity to read the politics of crisis and the everyday in a manner attentive to these negotiations. Unable to see the dispersed ways in which actors and events of democratic politics negotiated these perilous tensions in our own history may keep us from recognizing the inevitable incivility, intensity, and potential violence of democratic practice outside the bounds of institutionally, legally, or culturally delimited spaces of legitimated political practice. Arendt's misreading invites us to return our gaze to the American Revolution and the early Republic to see how the negotiations she omits actually operated, and to see how popular democratic practices of the early United States were shaped by extremism.

Condition to the realities of political revolution. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 1998); and Arendt, *On Revolution*, 18–25.

Scope and Focus of this Study

Re-approaching the political thought and popular politics of the American Founding era with eyes that see the combination of extremism with democratic politics points us towards real democratic fanatics whose actions call us to reevaluate the role of political extremism in the development of American democracy. Political subjectivity constituted in this way reflects the authoritarian tension deep in the marrow of democratic practice and the violence that generally accompanies it. If we then look at how such subjects are formed – how they come to “be” – we stand to clarify what the subject of a given discourse is (e.g., a person, a word, a force of nature, etc.) and subsequently, how the authoritarian dilemma may be navigated by the subject so created or sensed. That is, we stand to clarify the agency, force, and materiality (if any) of feared, denigrated, and excluded political subjects. Doing so may further reveal the conditions and dynamics that make the subject of democratic fanaticism a recurrent possibility and feature of American politics.

To this end, chapter two examines how the language, passion, memory, and political ritual of patriot oratorical performance engendered a particular political subject: the zealous republican patriot. Reading the discursive environment of British America in the 1770s, and the performance of Massacre Day memorial orations in commemoration of the Boston Massacre between 1771 and 1783, reveals how passionate public speech may create a distinct political subjectivity of patriotism and fanatical zeal, of authoritarian violence and democratic practice. Rallying public opinion to resist the undemocratic obstacle of British rule, patriot orators outlined the contours of an

emotional, fervent, and enthusiastic political actor, one whose devotion to principles of republican judgment and “public liberty” pervaded his or her subjectivity on an all-consuming affective level. One of the most defining features of fanaticism – as I have sketched the concept above – and zeal – as it was understood in the eighteenth century – is the presence of passion united with devotion. Passion and devotion are both held in high esteem by the fanatic as signs of commitment and assets of social practice.⁵⁴ They are also symptoms that focus the fear of the fanatic’s opponent.⁵⁵ Chapter two examines how performative language shapes the substance of a zealous actor on the level of affectively constituting the actor as a political subject, both the embodied concrete identification of a political cause, and the subject of fear confronting partisan and opponent alike. Affectively constituting a zealous subject in-part relies on and promotes the intensification of political differences. Clarifying how a zealous subject is created through emotional speech allows us to examine how processes of subjectivation, especially when they concern the creation of a democratic subject, entail the intensification of political difference, heightening conflict and disagreement, the tactical and behavioral hallmarks of fanaticism. The subjectivity of patriotic zeal, characterized by its ardently devoted passional volition, served to intensify political difference in an accelerating conflict among and between British Americans and the English Crown. Interrogating the creation of this contingent figure allows us a window on the localization of fanaticism’s ardent devotion, intolerance, friend-or-enemy framing, and violence in a democratic political agent prosecuting democratic social practices. With the Massacre

⁵⁴ See, for example, John Adams’s appreciation of Puritan enthusiasm quoted above.

⁵⁵ See my discussion of Loyalist fears of “New England Fanaticks” discussed below in chapter two.

Day orations, we clarify not only how ritual performance and performative language produce a democratic fanatic, but how passion is formative of this mode of political subjectivity.

The possibility that a democratic subject or an instance of democratic politics might be obscured by being understood purely as an instance of fanaticism is a recurrent problem in American democratic politics, one that motivates much of the work that follows. Democratic politics, as I have outlined it here, is an inherently insurrectionary form of social practice, one in which resisting obstacles to political equality entails enacting a community of equals through political practices that necessarily displace or seek to displace an established community of inequality. That the displacing violence of democratic politics may be symbolic rather than material, or that its constitutive acts may be limited as often as they are totalizing and revolutionary, takes nothing away from the reality that such violence stands in a relation of resistance to the established authority of the existent community. When confronted by events of democratic politics, the members of a democratic polity are forced to exercise evaluative political judgment in which they make sense of insurrection and grapple with the implications of the insurrectionary nature of democratic practice. The possibility that events of extremist insurrection might be democratic accordingly necessitates evaluative political judgment capable of determining the legitimacy of contingent insurrections as instances of legitimate democratic practice. It is to this end that chapter three examines the discourse of opposition to Shays's Rebellion as a means of interrogating the dynamics at play in perceiving and judging potentially democratic, and wholly insurrectionary, political practices. My intent, is to use this American insurrection to demonstrate how practices of political extremism may

raise public awareness of pressing political grievances, prompting the members of a democratic polity to publicly deliberate the nature of extremist acts, public policies, institutions, and the existing political order itself. Challenging the political order of post-revolutionary Massachusetts on some of its own revolutionary terms, Shays's Rebellion prompted opponents and sympathizers alike to question the nature and legitimacy of American politics and political order, particularly with regard to the relationship between insurrection and republican politics.

Reading the words of opponents to the Massachusetts Regulation of 1786–1787 (i.e., Shays's Rebellion), we are struck by the inability or unwillingness of critics to see the events as anything more than illegitimate chaotic rebellion, though critics were themselves the products of a recently experienced insurrectionary event (the American Revolution) and had experienced a long history of sometimes legitimate popular uprisings which were greeted with deliberation and judgment. It is not so much that critics did not see the uprising as the democratic practice it may have been, but that there was little popular consideration of its potential legitimacy, little reflexive public exercise of evaluative and deliberative judgment considerate of the claims articulated and actions taken by the partisans of the rebellion. To explain this, I suggest that when called on by circumstance to defend the politics and political order of Massachusetts, opponents of the rebellion responded with justifications and language that revealed an understanding of political reality in which existing institutions and policies were identified with republicanism and political order itself. In defending a particular understanding of republican reality, opponents of Shays's Rebellion departed from a popularly deliberative approach to insurrectionary practices that had been present in the colonial and

revolutionary eras, and demonstrated an unwillingness to consider the possibility that the insurrection was anything other than self-interested and seditious criminality and violence. Though opponents of the rebellion were unwilling to read the event as anything other than seditious violence, many of the insurrections constitutive acts were read in radically different terms by partisans and critical sympathizers of the insurrectionary event. Against the interpretation offered by opponents, chapter three also engages one of the most prominent of these sympathetic interpretations. Dr. William Whiting's sympathetic but highly critical commentaries on the insurrection suggest that the events compelled him to deliberately evaluate the existing political order of Massachusetts, the grievances of "Shaysites," and the limits of extreme or violent political practice. Ultimately, the reasoning and rhetoric from across the spectrum over Shays's Rebellion helps demonstrate how democratic extremism has the capacity to push Americans to rethink how they make sense of their existing political reality.

Investigating the creation of a zealous democratic subject and the dynamics involved in perceiving and evaluating a potentially democratic, extremist, and insurrectionary event, we begin to realize that when such actors are perceived as fanatics, these descriptions gesture towards the inherent possibility of violence in democratic practice. That is, when democratic agents are perceived or labeled as fanatics, zealots, and extremists, it is not always or only a conscious means of denigration and exclusion; it may point to an existent dimension of force and partisan repression. Acknowledging and investigating this element of force in contingent instances may clarify some of the dynamics and strategies by which the violence of democratic politics has been and may continue to be carried out in American post-revolutionary politics.

Though the theoretical analysis and clarification of fanaticism in general ought to examine instances of material violence, too often the force and intolerance associated with concepts of fanaticism and extremism is understood in purely or primarily material terms. Filling this gap, chapter four begins the work of developing a theoretical description of fanatical speech as a distinct kind of speech act. Clarifying what fanaticism or extremism looks like in terms of the speech of the fanatical subject contributes generally to the theoretical investigation of fanaticism as a political phenomenon, but it has particular value for the theoretical investigation and evaluation of democratic fanaticism. Examining the speech of democratic-republicans and partisans of the French Revolution in the American public sphere of the 1780s and 1790s, with a particular focus on the Democratic Societies, I suggest that fanatical speech makes use of language to prosecute a position of intractable conflict within the public sphere and the larger political community. Employing performative speech acts that individualize the members of its audience, zealous speech divides a public in terms of friends and enemies, intensifying and exposing political differences, and subverting the unmolested deliberation of other publics. That divisive, manipulative, and intolerant speech issues from the tongues and pens of democratic actors, and suggesting that democratic actors may thereby threaten the openness of a public sphere by marginalizing segments of a deliberating public raises concerns for contemporary democratic theory beyond those raised for the historical interpretation of late eighteenth century American democracy. That fanatical speech may serve to prosecute a democratic politics within and against the public sphere invites a reconsideration of the potential value (if any) in anti-deliberative discourse generally, and with regard to its appreciation in American democratic

development.

Where the anti-deliberative public speech of democratic actors might corroborate the association of democratic politics with fanaticism, we must not lose site of the ways in which speech has been used to exclude democratic politics from legitimate consideration by collapsing the democratic subject under the weight of the attribution of fanaticism. Turning again to the circulation of texts throughout the public sphere of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, chapter five examines the figure of the democratic extremist as an object of collective political fear by focusing on the grammar of a concept central to the public discourse of Federalists in the early Republic: “Jacobin.” Where chapter four focuses on the speech *of* the democratic fanatic, chapter five continues by concentrating on the speech *about* this figure. In the formation of discursive regularities or habits of speech in the Federalist use of “Jacobin” and its association of democratic politics with fanaticism, we see the public construction of the democratic fanatic as a knowable object of political fear within the public sphere of the early Republic. Yet, interrogating how this figure of the democratic fanatic was constructed in the speech of Federalist writers and politicians does not bring us to know the material target of Federalist derision, rather, it reveals the ambiguous immateriality of an apparently threatening political other and invites us to examine the work that such linguistic constructions perform. Observing the creation and use of the American Jacobin in popular political discourse, I argue that for Federalists and American anti-Jacobins, this figure of fear obscured its substance and origins, and pushed consideration of popular democratic politics and populist democratic actors out of the realm of informal political persuasion and the constitutionally-protected public sphere, and off to the hinterlands in

the realm of insurrection, insurgency, criminality, and force – i.e., of de-legitimated politics. When writers and politicians promote objects of anti-political fear in response to the appearance of democratic and extremist politics, they distract or undercut public deliberative discourse by seeking to frame issues of disagreement and deliberation as matters of antagonism and combat – that which cannot be discussed, only dismissed or destroyed.

Interrogating the sometimes intimate association between democratic politics and extremism in the American Founding era calls the theorist to reevaluate how the necessity of imposing political will and the violent rejection of consensus can shape the social practices of popular democratic politics. This inquiry also suggests a need for democratic theorists to normatively reconsider the conceptual nature of democratic politics in the American polity. In this spirit, chapter six concludes this work by explicitly situating democratic fanaticism in the context of the American democratic tradition and questions of contemporary democratic theory. In doing so, I will defend the value of democratic zeal and demonstrate that recognizing the role of extremism in the historical formation of democratic politics in the American polity has significant implications for how contemporary Americans should make sense of themselves, their political practices, and the violent eruptions of popular politics which repeatedly confront them.

Chapter Two: Patriots in The Court of Pandæmonium

Massacre Day and The Patriot Zealot in Revolutionary Boston, 1770–1783.

“...these rebellious Republicans, these hair-brained fanaticks, as mad and distracted as
the ANABAPTISTS of MUNSTER...”¹

“Language is too feeble to paint the emotions of our souls, when our streets were stained
with the BLOOD OF OUR BRETHREN...”²

On the morning of March sixth, 1775, Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie sat among the pews of the Old South Meeting House in Boston. There among a number of his fellow British officers, Mackenzie took note of the “immense concourse of people” that had assembled in the Church to hear a public oration.³ Around eleven o’clock, silence held the gathered mass as “...Doctor Joseph Warren, an Apothecary of Boston came in, and ascended the Pulpit; which was hung with Black Cloth.”⁴ Commenting in his diary that “...this assemblage was undoubtedly intended to inflame the minds of the people,” Lieutenant Mackenzie recorded how he watched as “...all the most violent fellows in town, particularly [John] Hancock, the Adams’s, [Benjamin] Church, [Samuel] Cooper,

¹ [Thomas Bradbury Chandler?], *A Friendly Address to all Reasonable Americans, on the Subject of our Political Confusions* (New-York, [printer unknown] 1774), 31.

² Joseph Warren, *An Oration Delivered March 5th, 1772* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1772), 13.

³ Frederick Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston*, ed. By Allen French (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 37.

⁴ Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier*, 37.

and the rest of the Select Men” attended after the doctor, taking their seats in a pew near the dolefully adorned pulpit. Apart from a number of British officers, Mackenzie sat among an audience of colonial Bostonians whose “...every countenance seemed to denote that some event of consequence might be expected.”⁵ In front of this apprehensive and mostly solemn crowd, Warren delivered an emotionally intense, vivid, and sharp oration intended to ““commemorate *the Bloody Massacre* of the 5th of March 1770.””⁶ It was the fifth such memorial oration given on the occasion of Massacre Day, and Warren had been formally selected to give the annual oration by the Boston Board of Select Men.

Tensions among those in attendance (and those conspicuously absent) were high. Remarking on the unease among the audience, Lieutenant Mackenzie recorded that “The towns people certainly expected a Riot, as almost every man had a short stick, or bludgeon, in his hand; and it was confidently asserted that many of them were privately armed.” He conjectured that “They no doubt supposed that some violent expressions in the Oration would have induced the Officers to act improperly, and strike, or lay hands on some of the party, which would have been the signal for Battle.”⁷ Though the veracity of detail in his account cannot be sufficiently confirmed, Lieutenant Mackenzie certainly grasped the anxiety and unease occasioned by the performance of this annual ritual particularly at a time of intensifying political differences in the lead-up to armed hostilities between colonists and Crown. Indeed, Mackenzie noted in his account that “It is certain both sides were ripe for it [a battle], and a single blow would have occasioned

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 38.

⁷ Ibid.

the commencement of hostilities.”⁸ This state of unease touched General Thomas Gage, who, acting as Royal Military Governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, was apprehensive enough on the occasion to have ordered regiments of British regulars to be ready in case of alarm.⁹ Fearing that Warren’s temper would inflect his oration and insight violence, John Adams expressed his personal unease in a letter to Samuel Savage writing that “Peoples expectations are alive for the Oration and Exhibition next Monday; I own myself the Companion of fear and anxiety, and *sincerely wish* the day and evening happily over—I know the undaunted spirit and fire which animates our friend [Warren] and fear some expression that’s *high seasoned* may draw on him more malice and influence some dirty tool to stir up to revenge the bloodshed.”¹⁰ Fortunately, Mackenzie reported that other than a few hisses from British soldiers during Warren’s speech and some confusion among the audience at its conclusion, no hostilities ensued nor was anyone injured.¹¹

Beginning in 1771, orations “To Commemorate the Bloody TRAGEDY” of the Boston Massacre were delivered on or around the March fifth observance of “Massacre Day” in Boston by patriot orators formally chosen by the Boston Board of Select Men. Recurring yearly until 1783, the annual Massacre Day oration served to both memorialize

⁸ Ibid., 38–39.

⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰ John Adams to Samuel Philips Savage, 5 March 1775, in *Savage Papers*, Vol. 2 (Massachusetts Historical Society), 154. Cited in Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 197.

¹¹ Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier*, 39. During the oration, someone in the audience responded to Warren’s mention of “the Bloody Massacre” by shouting “Oh, fie!” Some of the audience in the gallery thought there was a fire and a brief disturbance ensued when they jumped out of the Church’s windows and ran into a parading regiment of British soldiers. See Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier*; and Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution 1763–1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 197.

the victims of the Massacre – as well as subsequent victims of British-colonial hostilities after 1775 – and to give an account of the causes and conditions that had led to the tragedy, placing particular emphasis on the perceived pernicious effects of standing armies and the quartering of troops among citizens in peace time. For Jonathan Williams Austin, the solemnity and design of the day and oration was “To commemorate the deaths of those men who fell unhappy victims to brutal violence—To show the dangerous tendency of standing armies in populous cities in time of peace,...to trace its connexion and effects, as they have been, and are now display’d, in different parts of America...”¹² These introductory remarks, taken from his 1778 Massacre Day oration, reflect the intentional design of the annual event as a means of institutionalizing and publicly marking a sacred moment of purposeful reminiscence. Calling attention to a tragedy of personal, private, and public dimensions, the annual oration imposed a painful recollection on its audience and promoted political education and direction through an appeal to the embodied experiences of a patriot or would-be patriot public.

In all, but particularly between 1773 and 1779, these orations reveal spectacular public performances of political zeal and a dynamic process in which a unique political subject, the zealous patriot, was linguistically produced through a rhetoric that made use of declarative utterances, narratives of subjective emotional experience, and the demonstrative promotion of particular modes of political behavior proprietary to this distinct political subject. These spoken, reprinted, and widely distributed orations – indicative of a verbal culture and its linked development with a burgeoning print culture – functioned as distinct expressive and communicative forms in the rhetorical-political

¹² Jonathan Williams Austin, *An Oration Delivered March 5th, 1778* (Boston: B. Edes and T. & J. Fleet, 1778), 5.

context of mid-eighteenth century colonial and revolutionary America.¹³

Passions, sentiments, affects, and feelings pervade much of eighteenth century Anglo-American moral and natural philosophy. Twentieth and twenty-first century political thought has tended to concern itself with the ways in which the passions can be subordinated to their supposed antipode of reason, or how institutions and communicative procedures may be designed to eliminate or, at the very least, restrain the influence of public and private passions in democratic politics.¹⁴ By contrast, many of our most influential eighteenth century predecessors understood human identity and subjectivity in terms inclusive of a determinative role for passions and were more concerned with conscientiously channeling the inescapable pull of our passions towards the public good. Seventeenth and eighteenth century moral philosophers such as John Locke, David Hume, and Adam Smith, influential continental thinkers such as Charles Louis de Secondat (Baron de La Brède et Montesquieu), English republican writers such as John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon (“Cato”), medico-political “natural philosophers” such as Benjamin Rush, and other political thinkers in late colonial British America and the revolutionary transatlantic world viewed the inevitable determination of human behavior

¹³ C.f. Elizabeth Wingrove, “Sovereign Address,” *Political Theory* 40.2 (2012), 139.

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action is a notable example of this tendency with its emphasis on the need for individuals to interact in a deliberative and argumentative manner consistent with “communicative rationality” rather than in a “strategic” manner that appeals to competitive desires and fears. See Habermas, *The Theory Communicative Action* vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983) and *The Theory Communicative Action* vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987). Sharon Krause provides an excellent critical engagement with this tendency in normative theories of democratic decision making, particularly that of Habermas and John Rawls in *Civil Passions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1–47. Likewise, Cheryl Hall critically engages the “trouble with passion in liberal political theory” in *The Trouble with Passion* (New York & London: Routledge, 2005), 21–38.

by what Alexander Pope characterized as the “gale” of passion.¹⁵ Though such views led some towards more pessimistic ideas of human nature and its reconciliation with social order, such as Bernard Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* (1714), others tackled the central question of how man’s passions could be reconciled with a just political order by guiding rather than purely subduing passion.

Students of early American political thought are most familiar with debates over this issue as they appear in *The Federalist*. There the resolution of the clash of private passions and public goods is pursued in the discussion of faction and the balancing of competing interest in the Ratification debates.¹⁶ But before the political architectonics of the Constitutional Convention, the power of passion played a central and tension-ridden role in the disruptive politics of colonial reform that led-up to the conflagrations of 1775, the summer of 1776, and the revolutionary events that followed. Passion was key in terms of both the theoretical exposition of constitutional liberty and the tactical politics of republican speech and action. Operating with the common precept of passion as determinative of man’s behavior, radical colonial British Americans and revolutionary New England patriots often employed political rhetoric and performative speech with strong affective dimensions to marshal the passions of Americans in support of the cause of “publick liberty” or the “common weal” in addition to the reasoned constitutional

¹⁵ Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, in Alexander Pope, *The Major Works*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1734] 2008), 284. This fitting description is indebted to the title and critical analysis of the historical reception of Pope’s *Essay on Man* that appears in Nicole Eustace’s aptly titled, *Passion is The Gale* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

¹⁶ I point the reader specifically to Publius’ discussion in *The Federalist* No. 9–10. Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, *The Federalist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 36–46.

arguments which have been the subject of much scholarly analysis.¹⁷ This appeal to affects, emotions, sentiments, feelings, and passions in the cause of republican politics orients us directly within the theoretical nexus of democratic politics and fanaticism that forms the backbone of this work. Where passions are stoked to fuel the furnaces of political struggle, the shape of the subject of politics may be obscured by linguistic and affective smoke, refracting the firelight into shadowy figures of both noble patriots and “Republican fanaticks.”

Throughout the 1770s, American political actors used a language of personal decay to understand the broad sources and effects of a perceived environment of corruption encroaching on American citizens.¹⁸ Responding to this hazardous climate, patriot political actors promoted a robust normative and descriptive account of political

¹⁷ The historical development and nuance of elite and popular constitutional theory during the Founding Era and early Republic has been, and continues to be, thoroughly examined in the historiographical work of scholars attentive to the Anglo-American “republican synthesis,” conceptual history, or the intellectual history of “civic humanism” with their emphasis on the role of ideas in American history, while recent exciting work on the development, nuance, and use of emotions in American colonial and revolutionary politics has advanced in the “history of emotions” or the so-called “affective turn” in American history. For the former, see the classic works of Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969) and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992); J.G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); and Robert Shalhope, “Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 29 (1972): 49–80 for a more programmatic statement. For examples of the latter, see Eustace, *Passion*; Carol Zisowitz Stearns and Peter N. Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America’s History* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986); Peter N. Stearns and Jan Lewis, eds., *An Emotional History of the United States* (New York & London: New York University Press, 1998), among others.

¹⁸ As I will show here, though much of this corruption was resolutely attributed to the influence and control of Britain (where the causes of corruption were spoken of in terms akin to a biological foreign body) some colonial critics attributed American corruption to various manifestations of American sin (e.g., John Witherspoon) while others attributed it to both American sin and Britain (e.g., Sam Adams).

subjectivity resisting corruption and acting in defense of the common good. Using performative and passionate speech that intensified political difference and actively united ardent devotion with republican political judgment, patriot linguistic performances engendered a distinct political subject: the zealous patriot, a figure that confronted British Americans eliciting both empathetic and antipathetic responses.

In what follows, I look at how leading patriot critics understood the causes and effects of corruption on Americans as political subjects, and demonstrate how these threatened figures were understood to be determined by a complex of divided passions and reason susceptible to assault by corruption, luxury, vice, and subjugation. For many patriot writers, only a zealous patriotism could secure individual Americans and the American community as a whole against corruption. Reviewing the conceptual relationship between corruption, patriotism, and zeal in the writings of political and religious figures, I will then focus on some of the memorial speeches delivered by Boston patriots as part of the formal observance of Massacre Day between 1771 and 1783. Looking to these texts and attending to the conventions of public political ritual with which they were produced, I will argue that these orations entailed linguistic performances that produced a figure of patriotic zealotry in which powerful passions and faculties of political reason were united. Massacre Day orators performed a certain kind of patriotic republican zeal producing and re-producing republican zealots from their audience, intensifying already existing political differences, and seeking to motivate extreme political action. Rather than subduing or eliminating passion from the practices of republican politics, patriot speech often actively stoked and led the emotions and sentiments of friends and enemies alike. Indeed, the passions of anger, grief, rage, joy,

and hope were often front-and-center in public political discourse whether on the side of Crown, country, or something other.

Investigating the performative dimension (i.e., the illocutionary force or “the work”) of passionate patriot speech, we find efforts by radical patriot orators to shape colonial Americans into American republican patriots — distinct political agents whose subjectivity (i.e., their internal subjectivity of inner experience as well as their outward behavior) was to be determined by embodied human passions (sensations, emotions, and affective experiences). Yet, the passions of this patriot were to be framed by political judgments reasoned from core republican principles. Fusing the patriot’s political principle with his affective experience and behavioral comportment was *zeal*, an intense devotion and attachment to an object of desire. The passionate, feeling, and acting patriot was therefore a figure of severe zealotry whose experience and behavior was to be determined by his natural emotions working in concert with republican political judgments that were derived from his attachment to the object of patriotic desire: “common weal,” “publick liberty,” “country,” *patria*, etc.

Examining how language and performance aid in the production of political subjects requires that we look to both the performative language itself and the site of its production.¹⁹ With the Massacre Day orations, the site of production is a space of public spectacle and political ritual. In this space, patriot orators manipulated convention, ritual, and language to produce a zealous identity in terms of emotional devotion and declared commitment. Venues of collective memorialization, and their near ubiquitous feature of memorial oration, provide fertile grounds for performances of political zeal and the

¹⁹ C.f. Wingrove, “Sovereign Address,” 138.

prescriptive framing of what “proper” zeal ought to look like. At such occasions, public eulogies and commemorative orations are able to take advantage of proper modes of emotional comportment appropriate to the occasion by convention, and orators are able to manipulate proper ways of acting to perform the intense devotion of political zeal in such a way that “proper” emotional comportment comes to be determined by its association with the object of intense devotion.

To examine the performance of political zeal in a memorial oration is to theorize the politics of speech, emotion, and perception in the context of the political rituals of the everyday. It is to interpretively reflect on the contours of political contest amid all-too-common spectacles that refract and distort the equally all-too-common tragedies of everyday life. In instances of commemorative political ritual, public mourning remakes a tragic loss – no matter how private and personal – into something public. In the annual orations held in Boston to commemorate the tragic events of the Boston Massacre – as well as deaths resultant from conflicts of the Revolutionary War after April, 1775 – the significance of the tragedy was deeply entwined with the performance of zeal and with the production of a patriot zealot subject characterized by empathy, anger, and action.

Corruption and “Publick Virtue”

Polemical, yet didactic in their emotionally charged tone, the Massacre Day orations responded both to specific historical events (e.g., the Boston Massacre, the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the death of Joseph Warren, the victories and losses of the Revolutionary War, etc.) and to the pervasive strain of a generalized anxiety widely present in the words of patriot speakers, writers, and political thinkers. In 1774, John

Hancock began his oration by elaborating on the corruption that plagued the citizens of Boston at the hands of the British troops quartered among them. For Hancock, these troops sought to morally and religiously corrupt Bostonians through an intentional disrespect for religious services, and the promotion of debauchery, luxury, and idleness. This, in turn created an atmosphere primed for subjugation and slavish submission. As well as emphasizing how British troops subjected Bostonians to verbal insult and physical violence, Hancock recounted how

“Our streets nightly resounded with the noise of riot and debaucher: our peaceful citizens were hourly exposed to shameful insults, and often felt the effects of their violence and outrage. As though they [British regulars] thought it not enough to violate our civil Rights, they endeavoured to deprive us of the enjoyment of our religious privileges, to viciate our morals, and thereby render us deserving of destruction... Hence, impious oaths and blasphemies so often tortur’d your unaccustomed ear. Hence, all the arts which idleness and luxury could invent, were used, to betray our youth of one sex into extravagance and effeminacy, and of the other to infamy and ruin; and did they not succeed but too well? Did not a reverence for religion sensibly decay?”²⁰

With this sensationalist account, Hancock drew his audience’s attention towards how the corruption by British soldiers reached into the interiors of American youths, enervating their virtue and undermining an identity of equivalence in which to be American meant to be a virtuous republican. So great was their corruption that Hancock asked “Did not our youth forget they were Americans, and regardless of the admonitions of the wise and aged, servilely copy from their tyrants those vices which really must overthrow the empire of Great Britain?”²¹

Inveighing with a call to action, Hancock’s remarks serve as a direct connection

²⁰ John Hancock, *An Oration; Delivered March 5, 1774, at the Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston: to Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March 1770* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1774), 8.

²¹ Hancock, *An Oration* (1774), 8.

between the promotion of patriotism and efforts to combat the influence of corruption.

Two years before the start of armed hostilities, he intoned,

“SURELY you never will tamely suffer this country to be a den of thieves... I conjure you by all that is dear, by all that is honourable, by all that is sacred, not only that ye pray, but that you act; that, if necessary, ye fight, and even die for the prosperity of our Jerusalem. Break in sunder, with noble disdain, the bonds with which the Philistines have bound you. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed by the soft arm of luxury and effeminacy, into the Pit digged for your destruction. Despise the glare of wealth. That people who pay greater respect to a wealthy villain, than to an honest upright man in poverty, almost deserve to be enslaved; they plainly shew that wealth, however it may be acquired, is in their esteem, to be preferr'd to virtue.”²²

Here, Hancock implores the patriot to exercise his volition in political action against enemies and a more subjective personal action against the corruption of one's self. Hancock's oration reflects both the increasing, almost feverish, anxiety of patriot actors and their defensive resort to the cultivation of an all-consuming republican patriotism to safeguard British Americans.

During the years of transition from resistance and reform to full-scale revolution, talk of “corruption” pervaded late colonial discourse. The words of patriots often reflected concern that Americans found themselves at a troublesome crossroads. For them, Americans were daily forced to choose between accepting the enervation of their mind, body, and spirit by the deceptive hands of conspiratorial British corrupters, or zealously rousing their virtue as (republican) American patriots against forces of decay. The American of the anxious patriot mind was thought to be under siege from conspiratorial forces of corruption emanating from across the Atlantic, and even where English decadence and licentiousness may not have been blamed as the sole cause of the assault on individual Americans – for example, in the sermons of Calvinist preachers

²² Ibid., 18.

such as John Witherspoon for whom Americans' self-corruption was caused by Americans' own sin – American corruption was still posited as resulting from a lack of virtuous action in the face of decay in addition to reflecting man's inherent sin. In his 1777 oration, Benjamin Hichborn extended the rhetoric of corruption to its conceptual kin of contamination, describing the siege of America and the attempts of the crown to militarily subvert the new nation as efforts to “contaminate the only column of free air in both hemispheres...”²³ It was from under a clouded environment of corruption and contamination that the figure of the patriot zealot was to emerge.

Concern with the threat to Americans posed by British luxury and corruption was not relegated simply to the rhetoric of patriot political leaders, but could be seen in all manner of the decade's public speech. In a well-known oration he gave before the American Philosophical Society meeting in Philadelphia in February of 1775, David Rittenhouse digressed from his eloquent overview of the importance and development of astronomy to consider the relation between luxury and tyranny, and to warn his audience of luxury's enervating influence. Reflecting the widespread colonial obsession with the supposed corruption imperiling American virtue, Rittenhouse called his audience's attention to the influence that luxury and tyranny have had on the great civilizations and scientific achievements of the past. Recognizing the significant advancements made by European and ancient astronomers, Rittenhouse warned “...that *luxury* and her constant follower *tyranny*, who have long since laid in the dust, never to rise again, the glories of Asia, are now advancing like a torrent irresistible, whose weight no human force can

²³ Benjamin Hichborn, *An Oration, Delivered March 5th, 1777, at the Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston; to Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1777), 15.

stem, and have nearly completed their conquest of Europe...” Rittenhouse warned of the duplicity – the “...vile affectation of virtues...” – with which luxury and tyranny posed as patrons of science and philosophy and “...at length fail not effectually to destroy them...” At the height of his reflections, Rittenhouse wished to “...make a voyage to Europe as impracticable as one to the moon.” He lamented, that even though “... by our connections with Europe we have made most surprizing, I had almost said unnatural, advances towards the meridian of glory...” it might also be that because of this proximity to the Old World centers of luxury that “...in all probability, our fall will be premature,” and “May the God of knowledge inspire us with wisdom to prevent it: Let our harbours, our doors, our hearts, be shut against luxury.”²⁴

That luxury might lead to man’s fall was a lesson for which Jean-Jacques Rousseau had gained so much fame earlier in the century. With his *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, Rousseau sounded the alarm against luxury, a disease born of “idleness and men’s vanity.”²⁵ In lines a republican patriot might soundly agree with, Rousseau insisted that “...good mores are essential to the continuance of empires and that luxury is diametrically opposed to good mores...” so much so that those leaders who cling to wealth would inevitably learn how “with money one has everything but mores and citizens.”²⁶ Preceding Rittenhouse’s critique in a far more extreme manner, Rousseau suggested not only that luxury and tyranny had often been the duplicitous benefactors of the arts and sciences but that “...the sciences and the arts owe their birth to our vices...”

²⁴ David Rittenhouse, *An Oration, Delivered February 24, 1775, Before the American Philosophical Society, Held at Philadelphia, for Promoting Useful Knowledge* (Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1775), 20.

²⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts,” in *Basic Political Writings* 2nd ed. (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2011), 15.

²⁶ Rousseau, “Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts,” 16.

and "...we would be less in doubt about their advantages if they owed... [their birth] to our virtues."²⁷ At issue in the question of luxury was, for Rousseau,

"To know whether it is more important for empires to be brilliant and fleeting or virtuous and long lasting. I say brilliant, but by what luster? The taste for honesty. No, it is not possible for minds degraded by a multitude of futile needs ever to rise to anything great; and even if they had the strength, they would lack the courage...While the conveniences of life increase, the arts are perfected and luxury spreads, true courage is enervated, military virtues disappear, and this too is the work of the sciences and of all those arts that are practiced in the darkness of study."²⁸

Americans themselves were not alone in calling attention to and condemning the decay and corruption which were said to plague Great Britain and which reached across the Atlantic. The Welsh radical, republican pamphleteer, and nonconformist preacher, Richard Price – whose later public support for the French Revolution would spur the harsh rejoinder of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* – contrasted the virtue and piety of zealous American republicans, whom the British condemned, with the iniquity and corruption that characterized Britain. Addressing Britons, Price warned that "In this hour of tremendous danger, it would become us to turn our thoughts to Heaven. This is what our brethren in the Colonies are doing. From one end of North-America to the other, they are FASTING and PRAYING." But, where Americans acted on principles of piety in a time of hardship, their English countrymen were "...ridiculing them as Fanatics, and scoffing at religion." While Price praised the piety and virtue of Americans, he castigated Britons, noting that when Americans were steeling themselves with a passion for liberty, Britons were "...running wild after pleasure, and forgetting every thing serious and decent at Masquerades...gambling in gaming-houses; trafficking for Boroughs; perjuring ourselves at elections; and selling ourselves for places." Noting

²⁷ Ibid., 14.

²⁸ Ibid., 17–18.

the decay of Britain and the escalating conflict with her American colonies, Price asked “Which side then is Providence likely to favour? In America we see a number of rising states in the vigour of youth, inspired by the noblest of all passions, the passion for being free, and animated by piety.—Here we see an old state, great indeed, but inflated and irreligious; enervated by luxury; incumbered with debts, and hanging by a thread.”²⁹ Back across the Atlantic, Congregationalist minister and patriot leader, Peter Thacher echoed Price’s sentiments and used his Massacre Day oration in the year of independence in part to denounce the corruption and decay of the “British Lion” itself. For Thacher, the once formidable Britain

“...hath now lost his teeth; universal dissipation hath taken place of that simplicity of manners, and hardiness of integrity, for which the nation was once remarkable: the officers of the British army, instead of inuring themselves to discipline, and seeking for glory in the blood-stained fields, wish alone to captivate the softer sex, and triumph over their virtue. The legislature of Great-Britain is totally corrupt; her administration is arbitrary and tyrannical; the people have lost their spirit of resentment and, like the most contemptible of animals, *bow the shoulder to bear and become servants unto tribute.*”³⁰

Increasingly throughout the 1770s, patriots expressed their anxiety and fear that this oppressive environment of corruption and decay was spreading its gloom over the colonies. In 1772, John Adams privately expressed his anxiety over the state of British America in a letter drafted to Catherine Maccaulay. In it, Adams remarked, “My Country is in deep Distress, and has very little Ground of Hope, that She will soon, if ever get out of it. The System of a mean, and a merciless Administration, is gaining Ground upon our Patriots every Day...The...Flower of our Genius, the Ornaments of the Province, have

²⁹ Richard Price, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America* (London & Boston: T. And J. Fleet, 1776), 94.

³⁰ Peter Thacher, *An Oration Delivered at Watertown, March 5, 1776. To Commemorate The Bloody Massacre At Boston Perpetrated March 5, 1770* (Watertown: Benjamin Edes, 1776), 13. Emphasis in the original.

fallen, melancholly Sacrifices, to the heart piercing Anxieties, which the Measures of Administration have occasioned.” Adams lamented the advance of malignant vices that enticed the divided passions of colonial Americans, drawing them away from the characteristics and hard work of a virtuous republican disposition and towards the satisfaction of base passions and private gain. For Adams, “The Body of the People seem to be worn out, by struggling, and Venality, Servility and Prostitution...eat and spread like a Cancer.”³¹

Corruption and the enervation of body and spirit resultant from luxury and vice, as well as the extractions of corrupt ministerial officials and the presence of British soldiers, were not simply perceived as the unfortunate iniquitous overflow of European and British society spread to America through close bonds of history, law, and affection. Patriot figures anxiously spoke of the corruption of vice and luxury as intentional weapons that assaulted the very freedom of Americans. Joseph Warren’s 1775 oration warned that Americans could be “brought into a state of vassalage...” by either force “...or those more dangerous engines, luxury and corruption.”³² For Samuel Adams, the luxury and corruption that undermined the pious and virtuous dispositions of American patriots and risked reducing them to servile submission was a clear product of foreign conspiratorial intent. Writing to John Scollay in April of 1776, Adams remarked, “I have long been convinced that our Enemies have made it an Object, to eradicate from the

³¹ John Adams to Catherin Maccaulay, 31 December 1772, in *John Adams Diary 16 December 1772-18 December 1773*, Paper Book No.19, Vol.3, 8–9. Electronic edition available at *Adams Family Papers Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive.

³² Joseph Warren, *An Oration; Delivered March Sixth, 1775. At The Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston To Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770* (Boston: Edes & Gill and Joseph Greenleaf, 1775), 19.

Minds of the People in general a Sense of true Religion & Virtue, in hopes thereby the more easily to carry their Point of enslaving them.” For Adams, the security and future of American liberty was ultimately in the hands of a wise and just God who judges his people “...according to their general Character.” Reflecting the religious foundations of his political beliefs and the mix of piety and republican reason that guided his actions, Adams concluded that the “diminution of publick Virtue is usually attended with that of publick Happiness, and the publick Liberty will not long survive the total Extinction of Morals...Could I be assured that America would remain virtuous, I would venture to defy the utmost Efforts of Enemies to subjugate her.”³³

That the corruption of vice might penetrate the very souls of Americans was a common feature of patriot speech, which often framed the threat in terms of a question demanding a decision on the part of those confronted. In an article from 1772 later attributed to Samuel Adams, “Valerius Poplicola” declared that it was “High Time” for Americans to take it upon themselves and decide the important question of explicitly answering “..whether they will be Freemen or Slaves?” Such a question “...concerns us more than any Thing in this Life,” for the very “...Salvation of our Souls is interested in the Event...” With an acceptance of tyranny and its corrupt agents, came the degradation of morality and one’s mortal soul. An open resistance to tyranny was necessary because “...wherever Tyranny is establish’d, Immorality of every Kind comes in like a Torrent.” The corruption of the soul was a prerequisite and harbinger of tyranny so much so that

“It is in the Interest of Tyrants to reduce the People to Ignorance and Vice. For they cannot live in any Country where Virtue and Knowledge prevail. The Religion and public Liberty of a People are intimately connected; their Interests

³³ Samuel Adams to John Scollay, 30 April 1776 in Harry Alonzo Cushing ed., *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, Vol. 3, 1773-1777 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1907), 286.

are interwoven, they cannot subsist separately; and therefore they rise and fall together. For this Reason, it is always observable, that those who are combin'd to destroy the People's Liberties, practice every Art to poison their Morals. How greatly then does it concern us, at all Events, to put a Stop to the Progress of Tyranny. It is advanced already by far too many Strides."³⁴

The people were at risk from the corruption that crept in to their midst and surrounded them, and it was only through the fostering of virtue and piety that they might resist the illicit enticements of vice. Without virtue, Americans' souls were endangered which in turn endangered their immortal existence. Without virtue, Americans could not hope to secure the public good and liberty of free republican government for not only would God not raise up a people lacking virtue, but a republic could only subsist with a virtuous constituency. It was only by way of a virtuous disposition among the people that freedom might be secured, "After all, virtue is the surest means of securing the public liberty... Every thing that we do, or ought to esteem valuable, depends upon it. For freedom or slavery...will prevail in a country according as the disposition and manners of the inhabitants render them fit for the one or the other."³⁵ This rhetoric of decline, repentance, and the possibility of renewal was in-keeping with the longstanding New England tradition of the jeremiad. As a rhetorical form, jeremiads lamented the present as a decline from the past. Evoking a "dynamic tension between despair and hope," jeremiads identified turning points of decline and called for reform, repentance, or

³⁴ Valerius Poplicola [Samuel Adams], "Article Signed 'Valerius Poplicola,'" 5 October 1772, *Boston Gazette*, reprinted in *The Writings of Samuel Adams* Vol. 2, ed. By Harry Alonzo Cushing (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), 336–337. Samuel Adams's remark that it is in the interests of tyrants to reduce the people to ignorance and vice is in-keeping with John Adams's reasoning in *A Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law*. There, John argued that subordination of the people to canon and feudal law kept them ignorant of the rights they held by divine grace. See John Adams, *A Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law*, in *The Portable John Adams*, John Patrick Diggins ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 209–232.

³⁵ Samuel Adams to Elbridge Gerry, 29 October 1775, in Harry Alonzo Cushing ed., *The Writings of Samuel Adams* Vol. 3, 1773–1777 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), 231.

renewal.³⁶ The jeremiad, “as a recognizable social and literary form...came into its own in second-generation New England” particularly between 1660 and 1685.³⁷ The influence of the jeremiad, as a feature of the cultural landscape of New England, was present during days of thanksgiving where public speeches mixed politics with piety, persisting long after the form’s American beginnings in the puritan sermons of Increase Mather and others.³⁸

Sharing Adams’s link between corruption and the flourishing of tyranny, William Tudor’s 1779 oration used a similar reasoning, asserting that

“Similar causes will forever operate like effects in the political and moral, as well as in the physical world: Those vices which ruined the illustrious republics of Greece, and the mighty common wealth of Rome; which are now with rapid progression ruining Great-Britain,... must eventually ruin every State, where their deleterious influence is suffered to prevail. Need I add that luxury, corruption, and standing armies are those destructive efficient?”³⁹

This deeply and psychologically entrenched aversion to luxury provided a central frame for Tudor’s Massacre Day address in which luxury was portrayed as a siren, treacherously serenading “..her deluded votaries to destruction, or to infamy” and who “...no sooner finds admittance into a State than she becomes the parent of innumerable evils, public and domestic...”⁴⁰ Tudor drew the audience’s attention to the “baneful effects” of “...a general dissipation of manners and a declension of private virtue, which

³⁶ Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12, 6–10.

³⁷ Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, 22.

³⁸ For an account of the jeremiad’s beginnings in early New England as well as the place of the jeremiad in American political rhetoric through to the modern day see Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*.

³⁹ William Tudor, *An Oration, Delivered March 5th, 1779, at the Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston; to Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770* (Boston: Edes & Gill, 1779), 6–7.

⁴⁰ Tudor, *An Oration* (1779), 7.

begets effeminate habits, and by a natural gradation, a base pliability of spirit” that were symptomatic of corruption.⁴¹ Tudor’s account of luxury is instructive for its nuanced articulation of corruption’s logic and the train of reasoning that drives from luxury to the decay of patriotism and the ascent of tyranny. “[E]ver the foe of independence,” luxury was said to create artificial wants while simultaneously precluding the means needed to satisfy them.⁴² Luxury “...first makes men necessitous, and then dependent,” but most frighteningly for the patriot, it “first unfits men for patriotic energies, and soon teaches them to consider *public virtue as a public jest*.”⁴³ When, after luxury has detracted from public virtue, private pursuit is substituted for public good and the “promotion of [self-]interested pursuits, and the gratification of voluptuous wishes, a ready sacrifice is made of the general good at the shrine of power.”⁴⁴ Where patriotism and public virtue had formerly fostered the righteous, “...jealousy of public men and public measures... wont to scrutinize not only actions but motives,” now “...that active zeal, which, with eagle-eye watched, and with nervous arm defended the constitution” would fall into the disuse of slumber.⁴⁵ In the end, Tudor echoed the common refrain, concluding that “...before a nation is completely deprived of freedom, she must be fitted for slavery by her vices.”⁴⁶

This notion that a republic necessitated a virtuous people followed from the common principle, to which patriot figures such as Samuel Adams, John Adams, William Tudor, John Hancock, Joseph Warren, and others subscribed, that the political formation

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 7–8.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.

that governed a community reflected its populace and must always be in-keeping with the dispositions of the governed. This line of reasoning resonated with the highly influential thought of Montesquieu in his *Spirit of the Laws*, no less than that of Rousseau in the *First Discourse* and *The Social Contract*. Both writers stressed the necessity of virtue for the security of popular government in a republic. Comparing the underlining principles of monarchy, republicanism, and aristocracy, Montesquieu held that “There need not be much integrity for a monarchical or despotic government to maintain or sustain itself. The force of the laws in the one and the prince’s ever-raised arm in the other can rule or contain the whole. But in a popular state there must be an additional spring which is virtue.” For Montesquieu, only virtue could sustain a republic, for when it ceases “ambition enters those hearts that can admit it, and avarice enters them all. Desires change their objects: that which one used to love, one loves no longer. One was free under the laws, one wants to be free against them. Each citizen is like a slave who has escaped from his master’s house...The republic is a cast-off husk, and its strength is no more than the power of a few citizens and the license of all.”⁴⁷

The Love of Country

In-keeping with the logic of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and the sentiments of Adams and Tudor, Samuel Williams wrote that “As different governments are founded on different principles, and moved by different springs...*a free government*, which of all others is far the most preferable, cannot be supported without *Virtue*.” The historian,

⁴⁷ Charles Louis de Secondat (Baron de La Brède et Montesquieu), *The Spirit of the Laws*, translated and edited by Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 22–23.

preacher, and politician, then explicitly asserted that “This virtue is the Love of our country.”⁴⁸ Echoing the republican sentiments of the Massacre Day Orations, Samuel Williams’s well-known pamphlet, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*, printed in 1775 and originally delivered as a public sermon on December 15th, 1774 – an official day of thanksgiving less than half a year before the first violent clashes between British Regulars and colonial militiamen – presents an explicit account of the constituent meaning of patriotism. In Williams’s *Discourse*, we find both the use of patriotism as a behavioral concept and its relation to psychological concepts of affective experience. The kind of patriotism Williams describes in this common republican work strongly resembles the concept of patriotism we will see performed in the Massacre Day Orations.

For Williams, the patriotic virtue of the “Love of our country” was a necessity for the preservation of any free government. Compared to “...all the other devices that sound policy or the most refined corruption have, or can suggest” the love of one’s country was thought to be “...the most efficacious principle to hold the different parts of an empire together, and to make men good members of the society to which they belong.” Even a free government that operated in accordance with the reasoned logic of sound policy was thought to necessarily rely on the people’s virtuous love of country for its security and stability. Other principles and mechanisms of political obedience, shorn from this virtuous love would “...in a course of time interfere, clash, oppose, and destroy each other’s influence: Or else, and which is more likely and infinitely worse, they will jointly operate to destroy virtue, and to produce universal vice and oppression.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Samuel Williams, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country; Delivered On a Day of Thanksgiving, December 15, 1774* (Salem: Samuel and Ebenezer Hall, 1775), 13.

⁴⁹ Williams, *A Discourse* (1775), 13.

Patriotic virtue, for Williams and his republican peers, was the antipode of anxiety-inducing corruption. Corruption drew the divided and contradictory interests comprising the interior of man in the direction of their individual satisfaction. In so doing, corruption pulled Americans apart at the seams in pursuit of an unrealizable and divided self-satisfaction. Luxury directed his interest towards objects of decadence; wealth and ease drew him toward idleness and the promise of status; the perquisites of sinecure attracted him towards corrupt and parasitic office; and all vice drew his will away from the virtuous core of the common good and the security of public liberty. A free government could not sustain itself with a people pulled by corruption toward the pursuit of divided and contradictory interests that subverted the interests of the common good for private gain. Nor could a corrupt people protect themselves from the enervating and chaotic contradictory pull of external vice which threatened their corporeal strength, intellectual progress, and immortal soul. In contrast, the virtuous centripetal force named by Williams as the “Love of our country” constrained and secured American interiors, directing their divided interests towards a common center of affective attachment for the common good. Williams likened the love of patriotic virtue to the pull of gravity which would “...ever draw towards the common centre.”⁵⁰ Such a force was not one of reasoned counterbalancing between multiple interests but the restructuring of interests and their objects by the pull of a central attachment towards country and common good. This central core of love of country was then thought to determine the objects of interest, directing a patriot’s external actions in the world to be in line with an orbital path ultimately fixed by the central object of common good. Patriotism was thus thought to

⁵⁰ Ibid.

draw the divided interests that plagued a corrupted and private life towards a common center that reached outside of the individual reorienting his or her will towards the public. To acquire and maintain patriotic virtue accordingly meant authentic contrition and the elimination of all vice that undermined the good of the country and undermined the unity of the patriotic political subject. Thus, for Williams, “The surest way we can take to promote the good of our country, is to...repent of all the vice, wickedness, and moral evils that are among us...to renounce whatever is contrary to the rules of religion, to purity of morals, and the prosperity of the state...to reform every kind of extravagance, superfluity, and unnecessary expence.”⁵¹

Williams’s patriotism, denoted in the amicable and ostensibly irenic terms of the “Love of our country,” is the antithesis of the servile and self-serving disposition brought about by corruption and sin. Where the climate of corruption assaulted the American, pulling him towards self-indulgence and perverting his integrity by eliciting his divided and contradictory interests, patriotism marked a unity of character founded on a benevolent affective attachment towards man, a subjective experience of love, and the canalizing of his interests toward the common good. Williams’s *Discourse* does more than elucidate patriotism as the antithesis of the corruption that many spoke of as plaguing Boston and New England, if not all of British North America in the 1770s. It describes the meaning of patriotism, not simply as descriptive of willful behavior intentionally serving the common good, but also as describing particular modes of emotional comportment and even particular ways of feeling and interpreting one’s subjective experience. With Williams’ meditation on the “Love of our country” and his

⁵¹ Ibid., 27.

use of patriotism, we see how the grammar of this concept was – and perhaps, *is* – such that its meaning is derived from a nexus of normative-descriptive behavior and subjective emotional experience.

Broadly speaking, patriotism is a concept of behavior directed and determined by an orientation toward the common good. It entails certain obligations and modes of behaving with the express purpose of serving the community. But it is also descriptive of behavior that expresses social markers of personally-felt subjective experience. Social behaviors such as the public performance of grief, sadness, and loss, are understood as expressions of patriotism, they are described as “patriotic.” We see this in Williams’s interpretation of expressions of Christ’s public grief, which Williams holds-up as a model of emotional comportment understood as patriotic. Joining verses from Matthew 23:37 — in which Christ expresses his devotion and sympathetic love for Jerusalem by sorrowfully telling of his past efforts to gather Jerusalem “as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings” — with lines from Luke 19:41 — in which Jesus weeps at the sight of a corrupted Jerusalem before casting out of the temple “them that sold therein, and them that bought” — Williams exclaimed “With what tenderness and compassion did this blessed friend of man, weep over the approaching miseries and calamities of his countrymen?...How beautiful is the language? How generous are the sentiments? How affectionate the regard that this great Saviour of mankind here expresseth to his native country?”⁵² With this example of “...him who was the author and finisher of our faith,” Christ is figured “to teach us this patriotic virtue.”⁵³ Yet, patriotism is not simply used to describe and make sense of particular modes of emotional behavior such as Christ’s expression of tender and

⁵² Ibid., 12.

⁵³ Ibid.

compassionate grief. It is also used to describe a particular way of feeling and interpreting the sensations and stimuli of subjective experience. Patriotism gestures towards subjective experience in which sense is conditioned by affective attachment to “country,” “community,” “body politic,” “common good,” or the other such family-resemblant concepts referring to the political community or *patria*.

Rather than begin with clarion calls of duty or a revivalist condemnation of iniquity, Williams’s *Discourse* begins with an emotive account that relates the psychological and physical experience of the Ancient Israelites during the Babylonian Captivity as it was recorded in the Book of Psalms (137:5-6). A great sense of loss and sadness plagued these “unhappy people,” who “[f]rom liberty, peace, and plenty, in their own land...were carried away to endure all the miseries of subjection and slavery, in a kingdom where no other law or liberty was known to them, but the arbitrary will of a proud, cruel, despotic monarch.”⁵⁴ Yet, Williams calls attention to both the particular sensations of pain and the source of their conditioning, “...amidst all their gloomy prospects, the interest and welfare of their country lay nearest to their hearts. With a beauty, force, and energy, that nothing but this noble patriotic passion could inspire, the author in the psalm, in the language of his own feelings, thus expresseth the love, regard, and attachment, they *all* bore to her.”⁵⁵ Taking Psalm 137 as his point of departure, Williams anchors his exposition of patriotism in language that describes the painful sensations of loss and desire, both intimately connected to a sense of duty. Such painful sensations are in-turn determined by experiences of love and patriotic nostalgia for a lost nation. When the Israelite psalmist writes of sadness it is normatively and descriptively

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

interpreted in terms that directly relate it to patriotism. Subjectively and emotionally, the sadness of the author is the product of his loving patriotic attachment to the nation of Israel and its subjugation in captivity. To make sense of this sadness as patriotic is to interpret it as one public expression of how patriots behave. Patriots express their attachment to the common good of the country as sadness when faced with subjugation. But, we must keep in mind that it is a normatively descriptive concept concerning the proper and actual emotional comportment of the patriot in captivity. It is both how patriots *ought* to behave and how they *do* behave in their emotional expressions. That such sensations are patriotic or of the nature of the “Love of our country” is to establish a conceptual link between patriotism and particular modes of subjective sensation such as painful sadness. Whereas with Christ’s public grief, patriotism described a model of behavior, the sensations in psalm 137 describe subjective sensory experiences as patriotic. Indeed, the “love of country” is itself explicitly described as an *affection* when Williams writes that it is “...a regard and affection to the *common good*; to the interest and welfare of that community, or body politic, of which we are a part.”⁵⁶

This concept of patriotism is clearly not relegated to the role of describing behavior, but also does the work of associating particular behaviors (such as public sadness and lamentation) with particular sensations (e.g., painful loss) determined by affective attachment and the presence of conditions that shape the experience of such attachment (e.g., love of country is sensed as loss rather than joy when absent from or subjugated within one’s country). In describing the sadness of the Israelites in captivity or the grief of Christ in connection with the concept of patriotism we see that patriotism is

⁵⁶ Ibid., 10.

used in part to gesture toward particular sensations and emotional experiences of attachment in which behaviors such as crying and lamenting, where appropriate, are understood as expressions of the subjective experience of attachment and affection to country, community, common good, and body politic. Hence, patriotism as constituted by a nexus of emotion and behavior gestures toward a distinct experience of affective attachment and conventional or stylized modes of its behavioral expression.

Williams's articulation of patriotism in terms of belonging suggests an additional dynamic wherein "belonging" to a "proper community" describes modes of behavior that connect subjects to their community rather than a static state. "The great community of which we are a part, is such a body politic, or well-regulated society. And to this society we are joined, by many and strong connections. We live in her dominions; we believe in her religion; we think her laws and government are best suited to our state, disposition, temper, and climate; and we partake in all her calamities and prosperity."⁵⁷ It is through these behavioral connections that the political community becomes an object of our emotional attachment, an object of "...our attention, veneration, reverence, and regard."⁵⁸ Patriotism is thus both a concept of subjectively sensed emotional attachment associated with modes of emotional expression, and a mode of behavior that gives rise to distinct emotional attachments.

True Zeal

The concept of patriotism in colonial British America should be understood as gesturing toward a particular normative and descriptive configuration of the early modern

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9–10.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 10.

American. One which featured a synthesis of Whig or republican political principles and an affective element of desire and devotion that combined to form a concept of proscriptive virtue and descriptive identity. As we see in Williams' discourse, patriotism did not coldly and machine-like subvert the divided interior of man toward the communal good but instead, reoriented the interior passions and affects – i.e., the subjective but communicable feelings of emotion and sentiment such as love, sadness, hate, anger, and joy – toward the object of *country* and *common*. Descriptively associating particular modes of behavior and emotional experience with *country* and *common* as the objects of attachment, intensity and devotion may vary in each instance of patriotism's appearance. But where high intensity and strong devotion are invoked, patriotism is emboldened by *zeal*. Though the variations and disagreements between Whig and Tory, patriot and loyalist formulations of patriotism abound, it is clear that in the popular conception of patriotism among late colonial and revolutionary Americans, zeal played a common and frequently significant role. Unlike its conceptual kin of enthusiasm (in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) or fanaticism (then and today), "zeal" carried and continues to carry both positive and negative associations in its use.

At the conceptual marrow of *zeal* we find *devotion* and *intensity*. Samuel Johnson defined "zeal" as a "passionate ardour for any person or cause," and similarly employed this language of intensity (i.e., "ardour" and "ardent") in the definitions of *zeal's* related forms.⁵⁹ The association of *zeal* with intensity in ardency and devotion finds clear correlation in the sermonizing of Gilbert Tennent for whom "*Ardent Love* is termed

⁵⁹ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol.2, 3rd. ed., s.v. "zeal,"; "zealous," "zealously," and "zealousness" (London: 1766). "Zealot," tellingly was defined with the addition that such a description of a person was "Generally used in dispraise" (Ibid., s.v. "zealot").

ZEAL.”⁶⁰ In 1760, this Great Awakening evangelist, spurred on by “the sorrowful Apprehension” he had of “the low State of *vital Religion*,” delivered a sermon to a Philadelphia congregation on the subject of religious zeal. His work, in which he expounded on the nature of zeal with an eye towards promoting “The RIGHT USE of the Passions in Religion” and urging the “Excellency and Importance” of “true” religious zeal, takes great pains to explicate and cultivate the passionate intensity and devotion of zeal while combating its rejection by the moderate and the “lukewarm,” or the misdirected intensity of its false expression. For Tennent, true zeal offered a means of combating moderate, restrained, and inattentive religious faith, and he implored his congregation, “Be ZEALOUS, shake off your Sloth and Lukewarmness, and Labour earnestly in the Use of all appointed Means to recover your first Love...”⁶¹

Interestingly, Tennent’s conception of zeal has no intrinsic object of attachment. Even in its righteous formulation of true or “pious Zeal,” the concept of *zeal* abstracted from *piousness* “...is not a distinct Grace by itself, but the *Vigor* and fervent Operation of every *Grace*.”⁶² The intensity and devotion denoted by the use of “zeal” has no intrinsic

⁶⁰ Gilbert Tennent, *A Persuasive, to the Right Use of the Passions in Religion, or, The Nature of religious Zeal Explain’d, its Excellency and Importance Open’d and Urg’d* (Philadelphia: W. Dunlap, 1760), 6.

⁶¹ Tennent, *A Persuasive* (1760), 7. Though he preached the necessity of zeal and used his sermon for its promotion, there is a strong sense of anxiety and urgency in Tennent’s need to specify the nature and orientation of the form of zeal which he seeks to promote and to clearly differentiate between its “bad and good” twofold character while combating criticisms that “all Zeal is no better than the foolish Passions of deceived Men.” To this end, Tennent identified at least nine different forms of zeal, hierarchically organized by the value of the object to which zeal was attached. These forms of zeal ranged from the “not positively Evil” form of “natural zeal” through the manifold sinful kinds of zeal such as “ignorant zeal,” “hypocritical zeal,” “proud zeal,” “factious zeal,” “superstitious zeal,” “envious zeal,” and “malignant zeal.” Only “pious Zeal” which is the “Fervency of Grace” was a properly righteous and good form of zeal. See Tennent, *A Persuasive* (1760), 7, 8–13.

⁶² Tennent, *A Persuasive* (1760), 13.

object of attachment, it is impartial in that the object of zealous devotion is the sole determinant of its intensity and activity.⁶³ For Tennent, the object of true zeal was love to God and of man.⁶⁴ The intensity of this zeal was posited against the “malignant Iniquity of *Lukewarmness*” which was marked “...with the plausible Pretext of *Moderation*.”⁶⁵ The immoderate intensity of zeal opposes “lukewarmness” and “...immoderate Desires, Fears, and Cares about earthly Things” not immoderately pious passions for God.⁶⁶

As Tennent’s sermon suggests, the intensity and devotion invoked by zeal may serve many causes and attachments. Regardless of its object of desire, zeal describes activity and behavior. Zeal is not simply an intense inward devotion but an animating force, that “...animates Endeavours, as the Motion of the *Heart*, diffuses the Blood into the Veins, and the Spirits into the Arteries, to convey Life and Motion into all Parts of the Body.”⁶⁷ Tennent’s broadly informative theological examples are only a few demonstrative instances of zeal’s reference to action and process, yet they reflect that zeal, like patriotism, is descriptive of sentiment, behavior, and action. One is always *doing* zeal even when the descriptive language is that of declaratively *being* zealous. When one is described as a zealot it is because they do something zealously or are engaged in some zealous activity. Zealotry can be “true” or “false,” it may serve “right” or “wrong,” “justice” or “injustice,” but it always points towards active performance.

The conceptual overlap between patriotism and zeal, the performative dimensions

⁶³ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁴ For Tennent, though zeal in its association with devotion is “love,” its expression may also be a “compound of Anger and Grief, both which proceed from love to God and Man...” Ibid., 15.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 29

⁶⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 26.

of both, and the explicit invocation of patriotism and zeal against corruption in the 1770s raises key theoretical questions of *how* zeal is performed or what it means to perform zeal?⁶⁸ Why and how is the performance of zeal significant for theoreticians and analysts of politics not to mention those subjects and persons involved in a contingent political situation in which zeal is performed? To examine this, we may turn to the domain of public spectacle and political performance, and look to the performance and production of *patriotic zeal* or *zealous patriotism*. *Patriotic zeal* or *zealous patriotism* is a contingent form of zeal which describes the performance of intense devotion to the object of patriotic attachment, and one of the most dramatic stages on which this form of zeal is performed is the spectacle of the public political ritual. Attending to the domain of public political spectacle allows a clearer elaboration of the performative dimension of zeal, and will allow us to take stock of how the performance of zeal operates on behavioral and emotional levels in a descriptive and normative way to produce a particular political subject.

Ritual and Remembrance

The observation of Massacre Day, and its formal requirement of a memorial oration, enabled patriot orators to combine patriotism and zeal through public performance in a manner that intensified political difference. These annual speeches acted in part to produce a particular subject characterized by patriotism and zeal, and formed in contradistinction to the corruption in which the patriot political rhetoric of the

⁶⁸ My emphasis here on the link between patriotism and zeal should not be taken as suggesting that zeal cannot be linked to anything other than patriotism. Indeed, as the above analysis of Tennent's sermon on zeal should suggest, the object and character of zeal can vary. Hence, there is no reason why one cannot be a zealous tyrant as opposed to a zealous patriot.

era was awash. As a somber occasion of public political ritual, Massacre Day sacralized and politicized a communal moment of reflection. The Boston Board of Selectmen, in proclaiming the fifth of March to be Massacre Day, constructed a temporal institution that was removed from the lived experience of an everyday life prone to corruption and unprotected from the gravitational pull of patriotism. In being so sacralized, the day provided something akin to what the theologian, Abraham Joshua Heschel, called an “*architecture of time*.”⁶⁹ Yet, where Heschel’s sacred architecture described the ritual observance of a Sabbath day hallowed by God and severed from the everyday concerns of material and social contingencies, Massacre Day appears as a form of patriotic profanation. Departing from the remove that a time like the Sabbath produces, Massacre Day sacralized the prosaic and profane, while it profaned that which was un-patriotic. It was an intervention in both the narrative temporal ordering of the personal experience of quotidian time, as well as an intervention in the uncertain time of political crisis. Distinct from the Judeo-Christian Sabbath, the sacred time of Massacre Day was hallowed out from all consideration, reflection, and action *not* determined by the object of political attachment and patriotic desire. It was a memorial day of zeal through-and-through and not a day for personal grief, some sort of authentically pure religious reflection, nor dispassionate analysis. It was a moment in which the personal was made public and the public was politicized; a time in which the personal passions of grief and anger were forged into something formative, public, and political.

Seen as a ritual of public memorial, a forced remembering, Massacre Day offered a renewed invitation for New Englanders, and Bostonians in particular, to grieve as a

⁶⁹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2005). Emphasis in the original.

social collective. In the eighteenth century, the act of mourning, be it public or private, was often a show of respect for the departed. Yet, as Nicole Eustace has written of the period, "...statements of grief conveyed critical social commentary in the eighteenth century...expressions of grief could also be interpreted as a sign of rebellion."⁷⁰ Eustace points tellingly to the shared roots of "grief" and "grievance," noting that though today the terms are different and distinct, their synonymy continued through the nineteenth century, and suggesting that "Any eighteenth-century statement of grief thus held the potential to challenge the standing social order at the very moment it was in its most exposed and fragile state."⁷¹ At the moment of grief, all figures of authority appear as possible targets for the transformation of grief into grievance. The annual invitation for Bostonians to grieve over what had been and what became further blended into a politicized tragedy, taking place in the midst of an increasingly bitter and violent political climate between 1774 and 1779, was always a public spectacle in which public grievability might allow grief to transform into the issuing of grievance thereby necessitating redress.

Formalized and renewable expressions of grief, especially in eighteenth century North America, often transformed sadness and loss understood as subjective and private into social experiences and behaviors of political resistance, and we will see how the public performance of zeal shapes and is shaped by grief. Grief and mourning were central elements of eighteenth century conceptions of religious piety and social life.⁷² Something readily apparent when we recall Gilbert Tennent's impassioned exhortation on

⁷⁰ Eustace, *Passion* (2008), 286–287.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 289, 293.

religious zeal, wherein we saw that grief is a compound element of “true zeal,” and that grief and mourning were demonstrative expressions of piety and reverence for God.⁷³ Resolutely private and personal loss was to be a private affair while a loss of social importance was to be public in its observation. In mourning persons, the public presence of the deceased authorized a consonant expression of public grief. Such became the case with the Boston Massacre in which the figures of the victims of the Massacre, relatively obscure in life, in death, became figures of great public import, eulogized in poems, and openly mourned years after the tragedy on each March fifth.

David Ramsay, in his near contemporaneous history of the American Revolution observed of the Massacre and its annual memorialization that,

“[t]he events of this tragical right, sunk deep in the minds of the people, and were made subservient to important purposes. The anniversary of it was observed with great solemnity. Eloquent orators, were successively employed to deliver an annual oration, to preserve the remembrance of it fresh in their minds. On these occasions the blessings of liberty—the horror’s of slavery—the dangers of a standing army—the rights of the colonies, and a variety of such topics were presented to the public view, under their most pleasing and alarming forms. These annual orations administered fuel to the fire of liberty, and kept it burning, with an incessant flame.”⁷⁴

Ramsay’s observations highlight how the annual orations in remembrance of the Massacre and the day itself were intentionally designed to preserve alarming and pleasant memories of affective experience associated with the tragedy and with the brave history of colonial Americans’ successful resistance, as well as the particular complex of politics (standing armies, impositions on colonial rights, etc.) that gave rise to such experiences. His remark that the tragedy to be memorialized was “subservient to important purposes”

⁷³ Ibid., 293.

⁷⁴ David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution* Vol. 1. (Philadelphia: Aitken, 1789), 91.

is telling in its explicit acceptance of the framing of such experiences in terms of political judgments and contingent events.

Addressing a Massacre Day audience embroiled in the thick of Anglo-American civil war, Jonathan Williams Austin spoke of sympathy and sentiment, praising what was imputed to be a dutiful and patriotic audience in their proper expression of grief, “TO weep over the tomb of the patriot—to drop a tear to the memory of those unfortunate citizens, who fell the first sacrifices to tyranny and usurpation is noble, generous and humane. Such are the sentiments that influence you, my countrymen, or why through successive periods, with heartfelt sensations, have you attended this solemn anniversary, and paid this sad tribute to the memory of your slaughter’d brethren.”⁷⁵ Like Williams’s discourse before it, Austin characterized such grief and its public display in the terms of a biblical patriotism noting that, “[t]he most amiable part of the creation share the grief, and, soft pity beaming in their countenances, like *the daughters of Israel*,” who “...annually lament the fate of others, and weep over the miseries of their country,” entreating his countrymen to “Come then, my friends, let us enter the solitary courts of death, and perhaps an hour spent in such reflections, may afford as solid improvement as nature *in her gayest scenes*.”⁷⁶

For Austin, “[t]he shocking scene of that dreadful night...[was] beyond description.”⁷⁷ Likewise, Benjamin Hichborn remarked that the violence of the Massacre “...produced a scene of confusion and wretchedness so complicated and compleat, that

⁷⁵ Austin, *An Oration* (1778), 5.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 10.

the power of the richest language must ever fail in describing it.”⁷⁸ Though the rite of the Massacre Day called for each orator to publicly remember the tragedy, such an event was presented as beyond descriptive language; it was an event wherein “No one... that was not a spectator, can [could] conceive it.”⁷⁹ Looking back over the horrific vision of “...a brutal soldiery, scattering promiscuous death through a defenceless unarmed multitude, till yonder street was crimsoned with the blood of its Citizens, while a tender Mother, frantic with grief, pours forth the anguish of her heart over a beloved son, now incapable of any returns of gratitude...” Austin held that such a scene could be felt but it could not be linguistically expressed.⁸⁰ Obligated to remember, he recalled a “scene, which the distressed heart may painfully feel, but which the tongue cannot express.”⁸¹ Before him, Hichborn had similarly remarked, “It is impossible for any who were not witnesses of that shocking event, to conceive the terrors of that dreadful night, and they who *were* must have images of horror upon the mind they never can communicate.”⁸² Rhetorically unable to *report* or objectively give an account of the event, it was the felt experience of the tragedy and the emotions affixed to it that were to be expressed in the orations. Though such a task might seem doomed to fail considering the statements of orators denying the ability of language to adequately describe the scene, their words served more to arouse a proper affective response than to relate nuanced description of the event. Austin’s admission of an inability to conceive of the event speaks to the affective and performative nature of the orations, not as a mere annual recitation of events or report of

⁷⁸ Hichborn, *An Oration* (1777), 11.

⁷⁹ Austin, *An Oration* (1778), 10.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Hichborn, *An Oration* (1777), 10.

political progress reaching out from a fixed point in time (e.g., March 5th, 1770), but as a rite of affective recall that publicly performed a collective memory, in order to remind the people of Boston of the collective tragedy *they* had experienced and its political source. Thus, Austin declared “May this Institution, sacred to the memory of your murdered Brethren, be ever carefully preserved. Yes, ye injured Shades! We will still weep over you, and if any thing can be more soothing, WE WILL REVENGE YOU.”⁸³

This emotionally charged language of experience and action that pervades the Massacre Day orations may be described as a form of rhetoric, but only in so far as it resembles language that “...does not desire to instruct, but to convey to others a subjective impulse [*Erregung*] and its acceptance.”⁸⁴ Though all thirteen orations between 1771 and 1783 admit of some amount of constitutional argumentation or explication of republican propositions, their occasion of solemn public ritual steeped in a New England tradition of religious public rituals such as formally proclaimed days of fasting or thanksgiving days of prayer, their form as memorial oration, and their reliance on affect suggests that reasoned exposition and persuasive argument may have had only a secondary function if any. These spoken, printed, and circulated works — carefully calibrated both to the ear and the eye — served a rhetorical function of communicating a subjective sense more so than purely or primarily communicating reasoned persuasion.⁸⁵

⁸³ Austin, *An Oration* (1778), 10.

⁸⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Nietzsche’s ‘Lecture Notes on Rhetoric’: A Translation,” translated by Carole Blair, *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 16.2 (1983): 107.

⁸⁵ Yet, attaching the label of “rhetoric” to these orations may raise the specter of the cynic revisionist, who, doubtful of the patriot speaker’s hyperbolic tongue, proceeds with the pejorative connotation that the category of “rhetoric” signifies for modern audiences. The standpoint of cynical mistrust might, with respect to these orations, be further compounded by the now well-known and exceedingly politicized presentations and re-presentations of the deaths of five men and the injury of six more in a tragedy immediately sensationalized as a “Massacre.”

Identity and Affective Attachment

In those orations prior to 1776, orators presented emotionally charged accounts of the sentimental bonds of affection that linked the paired identities of British Americans and Britons reflecting the wide affinity of Americans for Britain and their relation to the crown. Early Massacre Day orators repeatedly offered accounts of the historical trajectory of the affective and sentimental bonds that had existed between Americans and Britons prior to and after the Boston Massacre. These accounts utilized both reasoned political judgment and rational interest coalesced with sentimental feeling and affection to describe the felt relationship of British Americans and Britons. Such accounts directed the gaze of the audience to a time when American identity was intimately bound-up with British identity, itself constituted by the bonds of the crown and hearkening back to historical and cultural basis of American loyalty. Through the temporal ordering of affective narrative, the sentiments of kinship and the bonds of love said to have united Britain and America are seen to have unraveled on both sides of the Atlantic due to the malfeasant plotting of corrupt conspiratorial ministers, as well as the King himself after 1776, and general corruption leading both Americans and Britons to distrust one another.

In-keeping with this appeal by patriot speakers to the sentimental language of friendship between Britain and the American colonies, Joseph Warren noted that “By an intercourse of friendly offices, the two countries became so united in affection, that they thought not of any distinct or separate interests, they found both countries flourishing and happy.”⁸⁶ Within such bonds of affection, the colonist “found himself free, and thought

⁸⁶ Warren, *An Oration* (1775), 10.

himself secure: He dwelt under his own vine and under his own figtree and had none to make him afraid: He knew indeed that by purchasing the manufactures of Great Britain he contributed to its greatness: He knew that all the wealth that his labour produced centered in Great Britain: But that far from exciting his envy filled him the highest pleasure; that thought supported him in all his toils.”⁸⁷ So much did American colonists identify with Britain through these bonds of sentiment that “When the business of the day was past” the colonist “...solaced himself with the contemplation or perhaps entertained his listening family with the recital of some great, some glorious transaction which shines conspicuous in the history of Britain: Or perhaps his elevated fancy led him to foretell, with a kind of enthusiastic confidence, the glory, power and duration of an empire which should extend from one end of the earth to the other...”⁸⁸ Here we see Warren’s recognition of the means by which social bonds of affection can produce an identity in which to be an American is to take pride in the close relations between American and Briton. Yet the patriot’s account of Anglo-American sentimental bonds narratively begins to unravel at the point just before the Boston Massacre: “These pleasing connections might have continued; these delightful prospects might have been every day extended; and even the reveries of the most warm imagination might have been realized; but unhappily for Britain, the madness of an avaricious minister of state has drawn a sable curtain over the charming scene, and in its stead has brought upon the stage, discord, envy, hatred and revenge, with civil war close in their rear.”⁸⁹ It is because of the actions of corrupt ministers that the relations between Americans and Britons have strained so

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

much so that, “The hearts of Britons and Americans, which lately felt the generous glow of mutual confidence and love, now burn with jealousy and rage...now the Briton too often looks on the American with an e[n]vious eye, taught to consider his just plea for the enjoyment of his earnings as the effect of pride and stubborn opposition to the parent country. Whilst the American beholds the Briton as the ruffian, ready first to take away his property, and next, what is dearer to every virtuous man, the liberty of his country.”⁹⁰ Warren and others will return to this affective bond and its tragic unraveling as a constant refrain through which to understand the tragedy, consequences, and causes of the Boston Massacre.

Performative Declarations

Beyond the frequent appeal to the former bonds of Britain and America, one constant act, present in each of the orations, is the explicit declaration of the speaker’s object of attachment. With each declarative utterance, the patriot orator publicly proclaims – that is, declares – his commitment to the cause or object of patriotic devotion. These public declarations of attachment inaugurate the speaker as a particular subject whose social identity is self-defined by his appeal to a particular system of political judgments. Each declarative utterance of patriotic attachment is no mere description of a constituent element of a preexisting identity or subjectivity, but a performative act by which a particular patriot subject is produced. With each declaration of attachment to “publick liberty,” “my country,” or “common weal,” the speaker performs a declarative speech act in which “...the state of affairs represented in the

⁹⁰ Ibid., 13–14.

proposition expressed is realized or brought into existence by the illocutionary force indicating device, cases where one brings a state of affairs into existence by declaring it to exist, cases where, so to speak, ‘saying makes it so’.”⁹¹ The declaration of the patriotic orator before the solemn gathering of kith and kin — and at times, British soldiers like Lieutenant Mackenzie — does not simply report a prior status of a preexisting subject that is attached to country or common weal. Through his performance of the utterance, the speaker brings about the existence of this state of affairs; he performs, and in so doing, introduces the patriotic subject he is.

In the earliest oration of 1771 — the first after the original fifth of March — James Lovell set a precedent of explicitly declaring one’s position as patriot, identifying himself to be an “American Son of Liberty of true charter-principles.”⁹² At a time when American patriot politics appealed to the rights of Americans as Englishmen, Benjamin Church proclaimed in his 1773 oration that “The constitution of England, I revere to a degree of idolatry; but my attachment is to the common weal.”⁹³ With this, Church identified his primary attachment with the object of the “common weal,” an object of political judgment closely identified with the defining elements of eighteenth century Anglo-American republicanism. Like those before him, though inaugurating a new height of drama and tension, John Hancock introduced his 1774 oration with a rhetorically ubiquitous display of public humility, imploring his audience that his “...sincere

⁹¹ John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 16.

⁹² James Lovell, *An Oration Delivered April 2d, 1771. At the Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston; to Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1771), 16.

⁹³ Benjamin Church, *An Oration, Delivered March Fifth, 1773. At the Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston; to Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770* (Boston: New Printing Office, 1773), 13.

attachment to the interest of my country, and hearty detestation of every design formed against her liberties” ought to be taken as an “apology” for his inadequate ability for the task at hand.⁹⁴ He further declared his own political identity in terms of the conflict concerning an object of patriotic attachment, making an explicit distinction between those that “...boast of being *friends to government*...” and himself, “...a friend to *righteous government*, to a government founded upon the principles of reason and justice,” and emphasizing that “I glory in publically avowing my eternal enmity to tyranny.”⁹⁵ He thereby issued a declarative utterance that served to both positively substantiate his identity by affirming the object of his political attachment and which added further self-definition in terms of what he, a patriot, loved and hated. Following Hancock, Joseph Warren’s second oration (1775) offered a declaration of patriotic attachment linked explicitly to an outward declaration of the inner experience of grief: “...I mourn over my bleeding country: with them [Hancock, Church, and Lovell] I weep at her distress, and with them deeply resent the many injuries she has received from the hands of cruel and unreasonable men.”⁹⁶ Here the declaration of attachment is linked to a declaration of that which determines behavioral comportment and affective experience. Just as in Williams’s exegesis of psalm 137, grief is expressed as a determination of the abuse suffered by the object of one’s attachment.

The patriotic declarative utterance does not only bring about the existence of the speaker as a particular political subject. It also gestures towards a particular point of narrative authority, an “I” from which subjective experience is extensive and may be

⁹⁴ Hancock, *An Oration* (1774), 6.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Warren, *An Oration* (1775), 5–6.

temporally ordered. This “I,” in its printed and widely distributed form, will signify an author and subject of zealous voice and character to Tory and Patriot alike. This point of narrative authority is located in the speaker himself but, as we will see, it is also distributed across an audience that is drawn-in and transformed into the subjects of patriotic zeal. In the case of the orator, the “I” that is an “*American Son of Liberty*,” idolatrously revering of the English constitution but attached to the “common weal,” or sincerely attached to the interests of country, is not only the “I” of the patriot, James Lovell, Benjamin Church, or John Hancock, it is also the part of speech that gestures towards the (inter)subjective narrator of patriot-zealot experience.

Affective Narratives

At the heart of the most dramatic orations lie narratives of subjective emotional experience laden with a powerful affective resonance. Intensely expressive, the words of Hancock, Warren, Thacher, Tudor, and Austin (among others) narrate the feeling of colonial Boston life lived among a standing army (i.e., what we might anachronistically label an “occupation”), the tragic scene of the Boston Massacre itself, and, as the decade wore-on, the trials and tribulations of armed conflict during the Revolutionary War. More than presenting a legalistic or cultural snapshot of New England colonial life, or a dispassionate account of the events that transpired the evening of March 5th, 1770 — i.e., the *facts*, which to this day remain clouded by a fog of confusion — these dramatic and charged works utilized a passionate rhetoric of pathos, ethos, and thumos to narratively convey a distinct subjective experience. With a sanguinary and theological rhetoric, these narratives allowed the orators to perform and produce particular subjective experiences

and particular modes of emotional comportment — i.e., the outward expression of an apparently inward experience. In so doing, orators conveyed a distinct and temporally organized interpretation of subjective experience associated with patriot political judgments and the patriotic object of attachment. Weaving a tapestry of vivid imagery, zealous patriot orators narrated the emotional experience and emotional response to events such as the Massacre, not from any recorded account, but from the narrative vantage point of a zealous patriot subject presupposed to exist even before its production.⁹⁷ Lamenting a collective experience of corruption and subjugation, these orators employed the language of passion and devotion to produce affective narratives of British military occupation, violence against British-turned independent-Americans, the decay of British-American sentimental bonds, models of patriotic zeal, and dynamic histories of the present of how zealous patriots ought to and do act. By narratively giving an account of issues and events from the standpoint of an ambiguous position of patriot subject, each orator produced (in speech) and re-produced (in writing) an identity or subject position to be occupied by both speaker and public alike. In so doing, these performances conveyed subjective experience and linguistically produced a patriotic zealot.

The Massacre Day orations, particularly those speeches delivered between 1772–1779, presented dramatic accounts that related how the felt experiences of the Massacre

⁹⁷ The presupposition of the subject prior even to the subject's formation presents the study of processes of subject-formation with a paradox of subjection that Judith Butler has described as a "paradox of referentiality," "namely, that we must refer to what does not exist." For Butler, the "moment we seek to determine how power produces its subject, how the subject takes in the power by which it is inaugurated, we seem to enter this tropological quandary...The figure to which we refer has not yet acquired existence and is not part of a verifiable explanation, yet our reference continues to make a certain kind of sense... Through a figure that marks the suspension of our ontological commitments, we seek to account for how the subject comes to be." Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 4.

and the Revolutionary era were sensed by the particular subject(s) of these experiences. In presenting these narrative accounts, the orators produced and re-presented the experiences of a certain kind of zealous patriot subject. These narratives served first to publicly re-present the experience of personal and communal tragedy, populating and shaping the emotional content and subjective experience of a patriot-zealot subject. Yet they did not simply give an account of such a subject, nor did they merely declare such a subject's existence. Rather, they attempted to emotionally transform their audience into the grieving zealots that experienced the tragedy, struggle, and glory of revolutionary events. Beyond simply positing and presenting a zealous subject of American patriotism, these orations acted to performatively transform both orator and audience alike, producing and re-producing, forming and re-forming subject(s) of patriotic zeal. To investigate this dynamic of narrative subject formation and interpellation, I first consider how the orators' accounts of the Boston Massacre, British occupation, and early revolutionary struggle worked to narratively substantiate the emotions and experiences of a particular subject. I then demonstrate how these narratives served to interpellate their audience as the subjects whose experiences and emotions are narratively presented. That is, I highlight the ways in which these ritual orations presented narratives of events that audiences came to encounter as their own emotionally-charged subjective experiences regardless of whether or not the body or person addressed actually experienced the events.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ "Interpellation" here refers to the way in which narrating an affective account of subjective experience may act to address an audience or individual as the subject whose subjective emotional and historical experiences are being narrated by another speaker or performer. I use this term to describe the dynamic in which a body is hailed as being the locus of a set of emotional experiences or characteristics and affective responses. My use of this concept is borrowed, but substantially departs, from Louis Althusser's initial formulation of "ideological

On Saturday, March 5th, 1774, John Hancock addressed a crowded gathering of Bostonians from the pulpit of the Old South Meeting House. In what John Adams described as an “elegant, a pathetic, a Spirited Performance” before a “vast, Croud” with “rainy Eyes,” Hancock delivered an impassioned performance of patriotism and zeal.⁹⁹ Like Lovell, Warren, and Church before him, Hancock began with a reasoned assertion of the most basic premises of republican thought: denunciation of corruption, the celebration of virtue, and the justification of resistance that amounted to a sort of republican syllogism of resistance and reform common to the New England patriot of the day.¹⁰⁰ But though Hancock began his address from this common point, he proceeded to almost entirely eschew all dedicated discussion of constitutionality and legal argument

interpellation.” Althusser argued that ideology served to define who we are and what we are at the most basic level of self-recognition, and hailed or interpellated “...*concrete individuals, as concrete subjects*” (Louis Althusser, *On The Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London: Verso, 2014), 190. Emphasis in the original.) In this sense, ideology “‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way as to ‘recruit’ subjects among individuals...or ‘transforms’ individuals into subjects... through the very precise operation that we call *interpellation* or *hailing*” (Althusser, *Reproduction* (2014), 190. Emphasis in the original.) The emotional and narrative interpellation I write of acts according to a similar logic. With emotional interpellation, we recognize our emotional experiences in those that are performed and projected on us from the outside of individual experience. That is, a set of emotional experiences or a style of emotional comportment is linguistically projected onto us by a narrative performance and, if successfully done, the performance is reciprocated by the joining-in of the audience. This performance gives an account of emotional experience that arouses in us a recognition of ourselves as the subject whose experiences are narrated. The dynamic of emotional interpellation operating in the Massacre Day orations works because of narrative authority and the inherently social quality of interpreting and making sense of emotional experiences and behaviors. Emotions are a fundamentally social phenomena as are the conventions and means by which we make sense of their appearance in ourselves and others. Emotional interpellation *works* because of the narrative authority achieved by a speaker and the social need of persons to make sense of their experiences and feelings. With emotional interpellation and the subjectivation of the zealous patriot, performative language serves as a means to reorient agency and subjectivity away from the primacy of reflexive self-interest and toward a social and intersubjective agency predicated on a communally affective patriotic desire.

⁹⁹ John Adams, *Diary*, 5 March 1774. In “John Adams Diary 20, 28 February - 25 June 1774” [electronic version]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. www.masshist.org/digitaladams/

¹⁰⁰ Hancock, *An Oration* (1774), 6.

that appeared in previous Massacre Day orations and the political works that circulated throughout New England. From its first spoken words and its first printed pages, Hancock's oration focused on passion and affect taking precedence over the logic of constitutional argument.

Mid-way through his oration, Hancock "reluctantly" came to an increasingly charged description of the night of the Boston Massacre. In language that evokes the theological passions of Heaven and Hell, he graphically recounted the "transactions of that dismal night, when in such quick succession we felt the extremes of grief, astonishment and rage; when Heaven in anger, for a dreadful moment, suffer'd Hell to take the reins; when Satan with his chosen band open'd the sluices of New-England's blood, and sacrilegiously polluted our land with the dead bodies of her guiltless sons."¹⁰¹ Painting the image in terms of tragedy and tyranny, he presented an outward expression of the grief and indignation proper to a patriot. In so depicting the scene, Hancock associated himself as a particular patriot subject with a particular mode of emotional comportment and a particular sort of subjective experience. Yet he also associated the emotional experience and behavior of grief with the object of political attachment and patriotic desire. His oration demands of its addressee a particular set of emotional responses to the story of the Massacre and affectively sets the tone of patriotic emotional display. In it, Hancock implores his audience, as those who experienced the ghastly horror of British brutality, to emotionally experience and mourn according to a particular mode of affective comportment, a comportment that combines grief with masculine indignation:

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 9.

“Let this sad tale of death never be told without a tear; let not the heaving bosom cease to burn with a manly indignation at the barbarous story, thro’ the long tracts of future time; Let every parent tell the shameful story to his listening children till tears of pity glisten in their eyes, and boiling passion shakes their tender frames; and whilst the anniversary of that ill-fated night is kept a jubilee in the grim court of pandæmonium, let all America join in one common prayer to Heaven, that, the inhuman, unprovok’d murders of the Fifth of March 1770... may ever stand on history without parallel.”¹⁰²

What is striking in Hancock’s narrative of the Boston Massacre is that while it has the trappings of a personal narrative meant to relate a singular subjective experience, it is not *Hancock’s* personal narrative. Though it bears the markings of an epic myth or other work of narrative fiction with its imagery of the battle between heaven and hell and its description of how “Satan with his chosen band open’d the sluices of New-England’s blood,” it pulls back from myth and offers no explicit fiction. Though it wears the guise of eye-witness account, Hancock was not present at the event nor can the particulars of his narrative account be correlated to the actual experience of any present subject. This perplexing position leaves us with questions of narrative and subjectivity. Not of the narrative’s subject of address — which is clearly the audience given the circumstance of public memorial and the format of oration — but of the subject to whom the emotionally charged patriotically determined experiences belong. Not of the source of the narrative — its source was Hancock’s delivery, though its composition might have been the product of more than one hand — but the authority that legitimates this narrative as a believable narrative of subjective experience.¹⁰³ That is, who is the subject that experienced this

¹⁰² Ibid., 9–10.

¹⁰³ Historians have speculated that John Hancock may not have written or may not have been the sole author of the oration he performed in 1774. One of his biographers has suggested that the composition was actually the collaborative work of Samuel Cooper, Samuel Adams, and Hancock himself. It has also been suggested that the speech was entirely written by Joseph Warren and Benjamin Church. See William M. Fowler Jr., *The Baron of Beacon Hill* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980), 165; and David James Kiracofe, “Dr. Benjamin Church and the

massacre and which is now called to experience its memory four years later?

Hancock's account has the narrative authority of a position of *non-presence*. For Judith Butler, "Narrative authority does not require being at the scene. It requires only that one is able to reconstruct the scene from a position of non-presence in a believable way or that one's unbelievable narration is compelling for its own reasons."¹⁰⁴ This status of narrative non-presence highlights that Hancock's account, like those that will follow it, is not to be understood as a report of his singular unique experience incommunicable to an other. Rather, that it is the narration of the personal experience of a subject distinct from that of "John Hancock." Were it simply a narrative of personal experience, an instance of Hancock giving an account of himself as the subject "John Hancock," than it might merely be a report of a singular experience — one that would be far less compelling given his personal non-presence. A narrative to which an audience might relate but which they could never *know*; a story of affectively evocative experiences but not an account they could experience as their own. The subject whose experiences of the Boston Massacre are narrated in Hancock's oration, as well as the orations of others, is a subject whose formation is presupposed as having already taken place. It is a locus of experience, agency, and subjectivity whose being is already evident to those that would give an account of it. Though the narratives of tragedy, tyranny, virtue and resistance related in each oration serve to present the emotional experiences of a subject that is only produced through its performance, that the subject already exists and is partly constituted

Dilemma of Treason in Revolutionary Massachusetts," *The New England Quarterly* 70.3 (1997): 449.

¹⁰⁴ Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 4. Narrator and narration have a complex relation with the formation of subjectivity. Butler has remarked that "Narrative gestures...find their place in nearly any theory of subject formation."

by subjective emotional experiences is presupposed by the narrator(s). A prior operator holds the place of the subject presupposed in each oration. Hence, the orators narrate experiences of the Massacre, occupation, and war from the standpoint of a presupposed patriot subject. These experiences are structured in relation to the object of patriotic devotion, attachment, and desire. Beyond relating the affective experiences of a patriotic subject, these narratives serve as demonstrations or performances of patriotic zeal. Each spoken and printed oration performs zeal and patriotism because they express how the interpretive experience of the orator as himself a subject of the oration he performs is intimately structured by his devotion and identification with the patriotic object of attachment.

One of the clearest, and arguably most dramatic narrative re-presentations of the experience of the Massacre appears in Joseph Warren's 1775 address. Warren reservedly introduces his emotionally fraught and intense account of the Massacre as a sad remembrance of an "...unequaled scene of horror..." a "...sanguinary theatre..." of "...baleful images of terror [that] crowd around" him and which bring him and his audience back to the "...discontented ghosts with hollow groans..." that "...solemnize the anniversary of the FIFTH of MARCH."¹⁰⁵ Framing his foray into emotional account as the recollection of a "...melancholy walk of death," Warren introduced a cast of characters whom he figuratively leads to walk among the carnage of a memory to be recalled by a presupposed subject whose public grief and personal experience is framed by patriotic desire. The cast of this memory includes the "gay companion" who is called to "...drop a farewell tear upon that body which so late he saw vigorous and warm with

¹⁰⁵ Warren, *An Oration* (1775), 14–15

social mirth”; the “tender mother” who is led to “weep over her beloved son”; the “widowed mourner” who is asked to “...behold thy murdered husband gasping on the ground”; and the “infant children” brought in each hand to “bewail their father’s fate” but warned “Take heed, ye orphan babes, lest whilst your streaming eyes are fixed upon the ghastly corpse, your feet slide on the stones bespattered with your father’s brains.”¹⁰⁶

As the narrative subject wades through the gore of patriots and innocents, Warren’s address is punctuated by moral rectitude and righteousness. Purposively interrupting a recollection of the horror against Americans and nature alike, he interjects “Enough! This tragedy need not be heightened by an infant weltering in the blood of him that gave it birth. Nature reluctant shrinks from the view, and the chilled blood rolls slowly backward to its fountain.”¹⁰⁷ And with this, the account pauses and shifts registers from the severe exposition of brute visceral terror to the shock of awareness of what has transpired. Warren’s collective subject, surrounded by the recalled scene of clouded, hellish, and visceral horror stands amid the violence, wildly staring about,

“and with amazement, ask[s], who spread this ruin round us? What wretch has dared deface the image of his God? Has haughty France or cruel Spain sent forth her myrmidons?^[108] Has the grim savage rushed again from the far distant wilderness? Or does some fiend, fierce from the depth of Hell, with all the rancorous malice which the apostate damned can feel, twang her destructive bow and hurl her deadly arrows at our breast? No. None of these—but, how astonishing! It is the hand of Britain that inflicts the wound. The Arms of George our rightful King have been employed to shed that blood which freely would have flown at his command when justice or the honour of his crown had called his subjects to the field.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ The Myrmidons were the hardened soldiers commanded by Achilles in Homer’s *Iliad*. It is noteworthy that Warren references Catholic France and Spain as the presumed enemies that the shocked American subject of his narrative would first attribute the carnage to before realizing its treacherous British author.

¹⁰⁹ Warren, *An Oration* (1775), 16.

With the ghastly scenes publicly recalled and the tragedy of victimization at the hands of a beloved monarch emphasized, all presupposed distinction between the subject of address and the subject of oratorical narrative collapses. Fluidly moving between a collective subject of “we” distinct from the personal subject of Warren’s “I” to the second person plural “you” of his audience, Warren first declares how “...pity, grief, astonishment, with all the softer movements of the soul must now give way to stronger passions.”¹¹⁰ It is then that he explicitly pulls his audience into the subject of narrative, simultaneously inquiring about and narrating the affective response of his fellow citizens to the tragedy. Warren explicitly places each constituent of his public within the experience of the event, not from the vantage point of his personal experience but from the personal experience of the patriot subject. With his public so framed as the narrative subject of the event, each one finds themselves in the thick of the tragedy. Spectrally situated as party to the scene, one feels the cobblestones of King Street beneath his feet, smells the acrid scent of spent saltpeter hanging low in the air, hears the groans of the dying, the wails of kith and kin, the rush of air as witnesses scatter to safety. Emotionally, the audience is hailed to feel the pangs of empathy, the immediate sense of grief and loss, of astonishment and confusion that clutches the survivor of tragedy at the inquisitive moment just after shock. Then, such affective experiences descriptively and prescriptively give way to the experience of stronger passions, and most importantly, the increasingly interpellated subject seethes with rage at the realization of horror perpetrated by a standing army of the Crown. With this scene of displaced temporality set, Warren speaks to his fellow citizens, patriots transported through memory back to King Street,

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

inquiring “what dreadful thought now swells your heaving bosoms...” and describing the felt experience of the subject as second person thus, “You fly to arms—Sharp indignation flashes from each eye—Revenge gnashes her iron teeth—Death grins an hideous smile secure to drench his greedy jaws in human gore—Whilst hovering furies darken all the air.”¹¹¹ Stoking the passionate fury of an audience framed as having experienced the event of the Massacre — and in the moment of hearing or reading Warren’s words, *re-experiencing* the event — Warren interjects,

“But stop, my bold adventurous countrymen, stain not your weapons with the blood of Britons. Attend to reason’s voice—Humanity puts in her claim—and sues to be again admitted to her wonted seat, the bosom of the brave. Revenge is far beneath the noble mind. Many perhaps, compelled to rank among the vile assassins, do from their inmost souls, detest the barbarous action. The winged death, shot from your arms, may chance to pierce some breast that bleeds, already from your injured country. THE storm subsides—a solemn pause ensues—You spare upon condition they depart. They go—they quit your city—they no more shall give offence.—Thus closes the important drama.”¹¹²

With this, Warren’s patriot feels the affective pull of rage and the seductive clutch of vengeance but is stopped by the gravitational pull of virtuous patriotism that does not subordinate his passions to the command of reason, but restrains them with both reasoned consideration and the empathetic bonds of other sympathetic, innocent, and feeling living beings. That “the winged death, shot from your arms, may chance to pierce some breast that bleeds already from your injured country” is spoken to the compassionate subject situated at the scene of the tragedy.¹¹³

Soundly incorporated as the narrative subject of Boston’s tragic memory, Warren’s oration moves to form his audience not merely in the image of a battered

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 15–16.

¹¹³ Ibid., 16.

survivor, but of a virtuous American patriot, a figure that lacks “...not zeal or fortitude.”¹¹⁴ Warren’s patriot is a subject of severity, piety, sensitivity, faith, and above all, zeal. A figure whose love of country girds him against the corruptions of luxury and vice. Moving beyond the emotionally interpellative endeavor of shaping the ghastly memories of persevering New Englanders, he hails a starkly severe and definitively zealous figure:

“You then, who nobly have espoused your Country’s cause, who generously have sacrificed wealth and ease—who have despised the pomp and shew of tinsel’d greatness—refused the summons to the festive board, been deaf to the alluring calls of luxury and mirth, who have forsaken the downy pillow, to keep your vigils by the midnight lamp, for the salvation of your invaded country, that you might break the fowler’s snare, and disappoint the vulture of his prey, you then will reap that harvest of renown which you so justly have deserved. Your country shall pay her grateful tribute of applause. Even the children of your most inveterate enemies, ashamed to tell from whom they sprang, while they in secret curse their stupid, cruel parents, shall join the general voice of gratitude to those who broke the fetters which their father’s forg’d.”¹¹⁵

In this concluding address we see the emergence and formation of a directly interpellated zealous subject. One who is not only formed as having a distinct memory of tyrannous horror, but which possesses a particular patriotic experience of the present, as well as a descriptive mode of practical political judgment and, as we will see, a prescriptive imperative of political action.

This pattern of emotional interpellation through a narrative of tragic experience and subjugation that emerged in the orations of Hancock and Warren, persisted in Peter Thacher’s oration of 1776, a year and a month from the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Like Warren’s address the previous year, Thacher’s narrative slips fluidly between “we” and “you,” the subject of experiential narrative and the subject of address.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 22.

Addressing the very subjects of which he gives an account, Thacher laments, “We experienced the most provoking insults; and at length saw the streets of Boston strewed with the corpses of five of its inhabitants, murdered in cool blood, by the British mercenaries.”¹¹⁶ Collapsing the subject of narrative into the subject of address, he speaks to “THE indignant rage which swelled your bosoms upon this occasion [the Massacre], the fortitude and humanity which you discovered, the anguish of the friends and relatives of the dead and wounded,” and “...all the horrors of that memorable night.”¹¹⁷ Persisting with the collective reminiscence of deep psychic and material trauma by speaker and audience as one singular subject, Thacher’s narrative seamlessly moves from the memory of six years prior to a history of the present:

“...the past year hath presented us with a Tragedy more striking... A Tragedy, which more plainly proves the fatal effects of keeping up standing armies in time of peace, than any arguments whatsoever: We have seen the ground crimsoned with the gore of hundreds of our fellow-citizens,—we have seen the first city in America for wealth and extent, depopulated, we have seen others destroyed, and heard our savage enemies breathing out thirstings for our blood.”¹¹⁸

This passage inaugurates a shift in Thacher’s narrative from involving the audience in the experience of the Massacre and life among a standing army towards their joining-in as the subject of a patriotic struggle in *medeas res*. Where the previous years’ orations had begun to substantiate the memories and means of experiencing the Massacre, from 1775 on, memorialization shifts more-and-more to the re-presentation of a contingent memory of the present conflict.

Turning to recent events, Thacher presents the patriot’s experience of the battles of Lexington and Concord, doing so from the standpoint of a collective personal subject,

¹¹⁶ Thacher, *An Oration* (1776), 9.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

one that was “AROUSÉD by the unprovoked injury,” which, “like a lion, awaking from his slumber...sprang to arms!”¹¹⁹ Pulled into the sense of victoriousness and virtue, Thacher’s audience is confronted by a *we* that “felt ourselves inspired with the spirit of our ancestors,” that “...heard our bretherens blood crying to us for vengeance,” that “...rushed into the midst of battle...”¹²⁰ Though granted the “favour of heaven” and confident in his bodily martial strength, Thacher’s subject is, like Warren’s, a passionate, feeling one, who is viscerally possessed of sentiment and sense, and plagued by a deeply felt sense of pain and loss even at the moment of patriotic victory. The recent past of victory felt as that “elation of spirit,” is “damped by our feeling the calamities of war.” The patriot is pained “To hear the expiring groans of our beloved countrymen; to behold the flames of our habitations, once the abodes of peace and plenty, ascending to Heaven, to see ruin and desolation spread over our fruitful villages, must occasion sensations in the highest degree painful.”¹²¹

Such sensations of grief and loss, the pains of mourning felt in the midst of both victory and hellish struggle, are experienced as particularly acute where the loss is sensed as the loss of a model patriot, one whose own zeal had been readily performed in past experiences of tyranny. Joseph Warren, who had delivered his memorial oration only one year prior, fell at the battle of Bunker Hill on June 17th, 1775. The acute pain of Warren’s death imputed to Thacher’s subject of narrative demonstrates both how the subject’s patriotic desire ought to determine the emotions he feels as well as the sense and depth of such sensations. Offering a panegyric to Warren’s patriotic memory,

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 11.

Thacher extolled that potent mix of sympathetic sentiment and righteous indignation that had served John Hancock's oration so well. Implored to recollect both the vision of Warren's patriotism and the tyrannous desecration of his body at the hands of the British, Thacher asked,

“...what tender, what excruciating sensations such as once upon our burdened minds, when we recall his lov'd idea! when we reflect upon the manner of his death; when we fancy that we see his savage enemies exulting o'er his corpse, beautiful even in death; when we remember that destitute of the rites of sepulture [burial], he was cast into the ground, without the distinction due to his rank and merit; we cannot restrain the starting tear, we cannot repress the bursting sight! We mourn thine exit, illustrious shade, with undissembled grief; we venerate thine exalted character; we will erect a monument to thy memory in each of our grateful breasts, and to the latest ages will teach our tender infants to lisp the name of WARREN, with veneration and applause!”¹²²

The Zealot's Passional Volition

These narratives of experiential memory populate the internal emotional life of the patriot. Yet, the production of a subject entails the production or attribution of agency in addition to the development of a framework of internal subjectivity.¹²³ The production

¹²² Thacher, *An Oration* (1776), 12. Joseph Warren had fought alongside colonial militiamen at Lexington and Concord in April, 1775. Appointed a Major General by the Provincial Congress in June of that year, Warren volunteered as a private and fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775, where he was killed while fortifying Breed's Hill. The patriotic scene of his death was immortalized in John Trumbull's painting, "The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775." Warren's death was memorialized as an act of patriotic martyrdom and it was further sensationalized by reports that his corpse had been repeatedly desecrated by British soldiers.

¹²³ A "subject," in contrast to other models of human and non-human action or agentic capacities, joins subjective experience to capacities and modes of action. Other signifiers, such as Jane Bennett's "actant," operationally hold the place to which action or agentic capacities are attributed without necessarily attributing an experiential capacity to the same localized point. The distinction between a model of subjectivity or a political subject and a model of localized agency that elides subjectivity is worth a few words of further discussion. Unlike a subject, an actant is "a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events" (Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), viii). The term, originating in the work of Bruno Latour, is a central consideration in Jane Bennett's work on "vibrant materialism." Bennett's theoretical contributions to the capacious category of "new

and sensibility of a subject therefore requires that both experience and agency be attributed or produced. To say that the Massacre Day orations produced and re-produced a zealous patriot as a kind of subject, requires us to go beyond demonstrating the way in which this subject's affective inward experience was performed and represented. It necessitates a demonstration of the subject's supposed agency.

On one level, such agency reveals itself in the patriot's narrativized external emotional comportment. Williams's example of Christ's public grief is instructive here. Just as Christ's tears are read as an outward criteria of an internal experience – or a behavioral expression of an emotional experience of patriotism – so we can read the patriot's tears that are wept over the bodies of those martyred on King Street. With the Massacre Day narratives, the patriot does not simply feel the pain of tragic loss when confronted by American deaths. Rather, he wails, he cries, and exhibits the grief of a patriot confronted with the public loss of fellow countrymen. In this way, this figure has both internal subjective experience and its external expression with the latter being an undivided expression of the former. The agentic capacities of our zealot are not restricted to the shedding of patriotic tears but are also observed in the narrative accounts of the political actions the patriot was said to have taken, not to have taken, and implored to

materialism" seeks to develop a "vocabulary and syntax for, and thus a better discernment of, the active powers issuing from nonsubjects," highlighting the "material agency effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things" eliding the "philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends" which, she claims, "is too often bound up with fantasies of a human uniqueness in the eyes of God, of escape from materiality, or of mastery of nature; and even where it is not, it remains an aporetic or quixotic endeavor" (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (2010), ix). The actant/subject distinction is important to our current endeavor because of our emphasis on the production of an explicitly human political agency. Regardless of its corporeality or incorporeality and its discursive-affective creation, the zealous patriot is understood in terms of human agency. This is not to reject the work of new materialists investigating nonhuman agency, but rather, to highlight the historical, cognitive, and linguistic boundaries at play in the production of political agency in eighteenth century Boston. In contrast, "subjectivity," as it is used here, refers to a localized point of both agency *and* personal/internal subjective experience.

take.¹²⁴ After linking the feeling of loss to the behavior of mourning, Austin explicitly joined the experience of pain with the patriotic ideals of liberty and virtue. Remarking that “...it is not sufficient to drop a transient tear to the memory of departed Heroes...”

Austin contended that

“...the best way to express our affection for such great and good Men, is to rouse and revenge them. To hurl still fiercer bolts of vengeance on an inhuman Soldiery, who instead of affording the last honors, sacred to the dead, and which a generous Enemy will ever regard,—after grinning with hellish pleasure on the mangled Corpse, [of Warren] which alive could strike terror into their boldest hearts, lodged it in a promiscuous grave...—O Britain! Thou hast, and shall still weep tears of blood for this!”¹²⁵

Similarly, Thacher prodded his audience of potential patriots to be animated by the felt experience of corruption and subjugation and to “...strain every nerve in the service of our country!” asking “What are our lives, when viewed in competition with the happiness of such an empire! What is our private interest, when opposed to that of three millions of men!”¹²⁶ Looking within to the “warmth” of patriotism, Thacher implored “...let us sacrifice our ease, our fortunes and our lives, that we may save our country.”¹²⁷ This patriotic call for self-reflection and sacrificial action matched the agency Thacher identified as having already been exercised by his patriot public. For Thacher, “...the respected inhabitants of the Town of Boston...” had already and clearly manifested the public virtue that “...may transcend every private consideration.”¹²⁸ Giving an account of how such patriots had acted, he extolled their sacrifice, “firmness,” and resistance against

¹²⁴ Indeed, the entire design and setting of these oratorical rites may be said to instruct or inculcate the agency and ways of acting that are presented by patriot orators as proper to the patriot figure.

¹²⁵ Austin, *An Oration* (1778), 11.

¹²⁶ Thacher, *An Oration* (1776), 15.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

“...every attack of arbitrary power!” and with the rhetoric of a zealous and triumphant martyrdom, declared “With zeal let us exert ourselves in the service of our country, in life: And when the earthly scene shall be closing with us, let us expire with this prayer upon our quivering lips, O GOD, LET AMERICA BE FREE!”¹²⁹

The actions and emotions of this zealous figure are presented as expressions of commitment to the central object of desire; they are signs of the patriot’s devotion. Just as his internal emotional experience is shaped by the intensity of his devotion, his outward emotional behavior is likewise a social expression of this devotion, giving a public account of his zeal and zealous identity. It is the inevitable social expression of the zealot’s devotion wherein we most clearly see the political implications of zeal, for it is not simply that the zealot feels things intensely and sufficiently emotes them, but that he acts from intensely experienced devotion. Grieving the present, recalling the past, the orators move beyond presentations of the experiences of the patriot and its figured models. Beyond what is felt, seen, or thought, these narratives describe, prescribe, and perform what is done by the patriot. He does not just inwardly experience anger, he seeks vengeance and justice extensive from a passional volition, tempered by political principle, and forged in the furnace of patriotic desire.

Taking-up the movement of passion from grief to fury to action in the immediate aftermath of the shootings on King Street, Hancock both criticized Bostonians for not immediately turning the pain of loss into a just vengeance against British troops while ingeniously celebrating the fact that the patriot public were capable of this fault. Moving from painting a dramatic scene of ghastly pandemonium, Hancock praised the zealot’s

¹²⁹ Ibid.

tension between virtuous fury and virtuous restraint, all the while upholding a “manly” comportment of affective feeling that is both of rage and love, and which is accompanied in its passionate volition by the dictates of political reason. With this we see how Hancock narrated the experience of fear channeled into the passion of rage and then exercised within the frame of republican virtue. Decrying the scene just after the shootings of the Massacre, Hancock questioned “But what, my countrymen, withheld the ready arm of vengeance from executing instant justice on the vile assassins? Perhaps you fear’d promiscuous carnage might ensue, and that the innocent might share the fate of those who had performed the infernal deed.”¹³⁰ Hancock’s pointed questioning grew more critical asserting, “But were not all guilty? Were you not too tender of the lives of those who came to fix a yoke on your necks?”¹³¹ Yet, his criticism transitioned into a more nuanced account of how passion was transformed into action guided by political judgment when he remarked, “But I must not too severely blame a fault, which great souls only can commit. May that magnificence of spirit which scorns the low pursuits of malice, may that generous compassion which often preserves from ruin, even a guilty villain, forever actuate the noble bosoms of Americans!”¹³² That passion drives the action of the patriot is emphasized throughout, but such passion is always to be united with the dictates of political judgments determined by an idealized republican virtue, itself extensive from patriotic desire. The passion of patriotic loss is to be transformed into the passion of patriotic fury, which is the catalyst of patriotic action, but such patriotic fury is to be realized in accord with the dictates of contingent politics and republican virtue. It is

¹³⁰ Hancock, *An Oration* (1774), 10.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

not that furious vengeance is necessarily to be eschewed, but that its blindness must be averted by the foresight of republican virtue. Hence, Hancock is quick to remark that the apparent hesitance of Bostonians to act against the gathered soldiers is not a sign of weakness but a sign of the patriot's strength,

“...let not the miscreant host vainly imagine that we fear'd their arms. No; them we despis'd; we dread nothing but slavery. Death is the creature of a Poltroon's brains; 'tis immortality, to sacrifice ourselves for the salvation of our country. We fear not death. That gloomy night, the pale fac'd moon, and the affrighted stars that hurried through the sky, can witness that we fear not death.—Our hearts, which at the recollection glow with a rage that four revolving years have scarcely taught us to restrain, can witness that we fear not death; and happy 'tis for those who dared to insult us, that their naked bones are not now piled up an everlasting monument of Massachusetts's bravery.”¹³³

Notably, the zealous agency on display in the orations of Hancock, Warren, Thacher, Tudor, and Austin, explicitly conforms to a logic of passional volition. In passional volition, passion serves as a catalyst while volitional judgment directs the catalyzed energy of emotion. In the passional volition of the political zealot, it is passion that motivates (political) action. Yet, what and how the zealot feels (as well as the intensity of feeling) is framed by the zealot's attachment to the political object of desire. One acts because one feels, and what or how one feels is framed by one's attachment to the object of patriotism. This model of passional volition and subjective experience, explicitly framed in terms of zealous devotion, is what confronts patriot and loyalist, friend and enemy alike, and which elicits sympathy, empathy, antipathy, and revulsion. Passional subjects, whose agency is driven by some configuration of both desire and political judgment, have been a recurrent feature in western political thought and have returned with a vengeance in the turn to affects and emotions in more recent works of

¹³³ Ibid.

political theory.¹³⁴ Though many modern and present-day political theories of agency rest on a descriptive supposition of the human agent's rational autonomy (however evenly or unevenly distributed), "[t]he needs and passions of the body have always been seen as powerful sources of motivation for human action, and hence the human body is widely recognized to have a role in instigating agency."¹³⁵ Indeed, Sharon Krause reminds us that "...insofar as human beings are physical creatures, the human body is inevitably a vehicle for the exercise of agency."¹³⁶

Conclusion: Confronting the Patriot Zealot

With its decidedly confrontational and overtly zealous constitution, the patriot (re)produced in narrative on each Massacre Day, resembled the figure of zealotry and extremism that was often sensed by the loyalist and faced with a panoply of antipathetic responses. Confronted by a figure of passionate zeal, loyalist writers anxiously, fearfully, and imperiously described a wretched and frenzied figure of fanaticism. The patriots of Boston, were portrayed as "New-England fanaticks," "obstinate, hot-headed Zealots," "rebels and apostates," men "...deluded by such sophistry," "criminal," the representatives of a "crooked and perverse generation," "raving enthusiast[s]," "rebellious Republicans," "hair-brained fanaticks," "mad and distracted," and ultimately "under the undue influence of prejudice and passion."¹³⁷ The critical reader might be

¹³⁴ For examples of the "affective turn" to emotions in political theory see Cheryl Hall, *The Trouble with Passion* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), and Sharon R. Krause, *Civil Passions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), among others.

¹³⁵ Sharon R. Krause, "Bodies in Action: Corporeal Agency and Democratic Politics," *Political Theory* 39.3 (2011): 299–324, 300.

¹³⁶ Krause, "Bodies in Action," 300.

¹³⁷ Anonymous [Thomas Bradbury Chandler], *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans*,

prone to suspicion, doubting that such sensationalist rhetoric is the authentic expression of a writer's sense and perception, or that such remarks are purely the hyperbole of calculated exclusion. Yet, if we turn from the patriot as he was produced in the orations, and note the tenor of loyalist utterances responding to this figure's presence, we may find that the "raving enthusiast" and "New-England fanatic" maps squarely on to the zealous patriot that appeared each Massacre Day.

In an anonymous pamphlet printed in 1774 and later attributed to Thomas Bradbury Chandler, the loyalist author of *A Friendly Address* sought to warn "...all reasonable Americans..." against the "...darkness of a rising tempest..." that had begun to "...overspread our land."¹³⁸ In addition to engaging a host of specific political issues, the author sought to discredit "our political incendiaries," drawing attention to "...the conduct and characters of these men," allowing his reader to "...be convinced that no representations of theirs are worthy of regard. For, in all their motions, they discover themselves to be under the undue influence of prejudice and passion."¹³⁹ The prejudice and passion of "Boston Fanaticks" and "political incendiaries" was a "dark and misty medium" through which "...every object appears to them under a violent distortion; and as thus distorted, they must ascribe it to others."¹⁴⁰ This darkness and distortion which checkered the minds and speech of New England patriots was a thick miasma of

on The Subject of Our Political Confusions: in which The necessary Consequences of Violently opposing the King's Troops, and of A General Non-Importation Are Fairly Stated (New York: 1774), 33, 47, 8, 9, 15, 40, 18, 19, 31, 23.

¹³⁸ Anonymous [Chandler], *A Friendly Address* (1774), 47, 4. There has been a fair amount of disagreement between historians over the authorship of this pamphlet. Though I have noted its archival attribution to Chandler, historians have also attributed this work to Myles Cooper. See, for instance, T.H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 258–259, 320n46.

¹³⁹ Anonymous [Chandler], *A Friendly Address* (1774), 22–23.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

antimonarchical sentiment which the anonymous Tory author read into the historical succession of New Englanders from their first settlements. In a footnote, the author of *A Friendly Address* singled-out New Englanders for bearing this mark of republicanism noting that “...in *New-England* I conceive, the real sentiments of the people are of a *peculiar* complexion...those original settlers of *New-England* stiffly maintained, and zealously endeavored to propagate their own antimonarchical principles; and those principles have been handed down by an uninterrupted succession, from father to son, and from generation to generation, to the present day.”¹⁴¹ Though the author felt that many in New England had “acquired liberal sentiments and have renounced the bigotry and prejudices of their well-meaning fore-fathers...” he noted that a hereditary aversion to monarchy had been “animated and inflamed by a set of *Pulpit Incendiaries*, for which that part of the country has been ever famous.”¹⁴² Reasoning with these obstinate and incendiary figures “...who are at the bottom of all our confusions...” was impossible.¹⁴³ For “arguments would be as much wasted upon them, as upon men that are intoxicated with liquor.”¹⁴⁴ One could not now reason with such figures, nor could one expect to reason with them should they achieve their goal of building a republic. Rather, “[t]here would be no peace in the colonies, till we all submitted to the republican zealots and bigots of New-England; whose tender mercies when they had power in their hands, have been ever cruel, towards all that presumed to differ from them in matters either of

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 47.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

religion or government.”¹⁴⁵ Ultimately, “...no order or denomination of men amongst us would enjoy liberty or safety, if subjected to the fiery genius of a New-England Republican Government.”¹⁴⁶

Looking to the antipathetic responses of loyalists, our subject seems to move from patriotic zealot to bigoted fanatic. Yet, this passional subject is a figure determined by a desire for the public good and oriented toward a deep ethic of care that explicitly disengages private self-interests and sympathetically experiences the sentiments of the patriotic other. Even its intensification and prosecution of difference is organized in terms of public sympathy, for it is the active intensification of political difference between two groups: those whose sentiments are sympathetically engaged (one’s compatriots) and those whose are excluded. Understanding the figure of the patriot, represented and reproduced each Massacre Day as both zealot and fanatic does not elide either its redemptive or reprehensible qualities. It need not conceal the subject of politics at all. Nor does such a reading ask of us to cynically dismiss the virtuous or noble image of the American patriot of Boston, circa 1776. To read this subject as patriot, fanatic, and zealot is to name the uneasy combination of democratic and authoritarian dynamics introduced in the previous chapter as they are present in this figure’s subjectivity. It is also to clearly identify it as the figure named by both its producers (e.g., Massacre Day orators) and those which it confronted (e.g., loyalists). With this, we ought to read the orators and the loyalists as both gesturing towards different elements of, but referring to the same political subject; we ought to accept that the patriot *is* the fanatic. To do so, to read this dynamic in which the same political subject is both patriot and fanatic is to read the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 53.

naming of a subject in terms that reflect and are symptomatic of the authoritarian tension endemic to extremist politics I introduced in the previous chapter.

The difference between the two means of signification or reference is not simply a matter of perception (e.g., the old cliché that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”). It is not a matter of differences in perception or making-sense at all because each side perceives, senses, reads the same subject of politics with the same attributes of subjectivity and agency. The patriot orator and the Tory writer both sense the same zealous political subject, and they both readily recognize how this creature’s agency and subjectivity is affectively determined by zealous devotion to an object of desire. What distinguishes the words of the patriot or would-be patriot and the loyalist respondent is how their descriptions of the zealot (e.g., “patriot” or “fanatic”) and the characteristics they emphasize (e.g., “noble” or “mad”) reflect how either party recognizes themselves in relation to the antagonism highlighted by the patriot zealot and his or her object of attachment. Both sides sense the zeal and patriotism of this subject. Where they differ is in their success or failure to recognize themselves as the subject of patriotic zeal and/or as belonging to the set, the public, the *patria*, the object of patriotic desire to which the subject is zealously devoted.

Reading the difference in perception between orator and loyalist reveals persistent tensions that exist in myriad forms of political agency more generally, as well as the specific plurality of forms of democratic agency. Understanding the narrative subject of the Massacre Day orations as both zealous patriot and New England fanatic has much in common with theories of democratic subjectivity and agency that are marked by the endemic tensions of pursuing democratic equality through violent or extreme means. By

reading the loyalist response to the patriot figure, mapping the same figure of patriotism in the orations as the subject of extremism in loyalist anxieties, and noting how neither one elides the subject of politics and merely emphasizes different elements of its constitution, we see how the tensions of extremism and democratic politics at the core of this revolutionary political subject, as with other democratic figures, may hide in plain sight. That is, the subject of politics may be both patriot and zealot, democrat and fanatic, and the tension-ridden dichotomy of democracy and fanaticism is a recurrent presence in American political history from its very origins. If we accept the sincerity in both the orator and the loyalist's descriptive accounts of the New England patriot, we will see how this convergence of disparate descriptions around the same point of subjectivity reflects recursive and endemic tensions at the core of radical politics. Further, that these recursive tensions are no less endemic in *democratic* political subjects.

Chapter Three: Hostis Republicae

Extremism and Popular Deliberation in an American Insurrection, The Massachusetts

Regulation of 1786–1787

"...whenever any incroachments are making either upon the liberties or properties of the people, if redress cannot be had without, it is Virtue in them to disturb the government."¹

"...politics is first of all a battle about perceptible/sensible material."²

Writing to David Humphreys from Mount Vernon in late December of 1786, George Washington expressed "...the deepest and most heartfelt concern..." at news he received regarding ongoing disturbances and civil unrest in Western Massachusetts. Following the developing tumults from a distance, Washington had learned that "...the insurgents of Massachusetts, far from being satisfied with the redress offered by their General Court, are still acting in open violation of law and government, and have obliged the chief magistrate in a decided tone to call upon the militia of the State to support the constitution." Shocked at this state of affairs so soon after the end of the Revolutionary War, he lamented "What, gracious God! is man, that there should be such inconsistency and perfidiousness in his conduct? It is but the other day, that we were shedding our blood to obtain the constitutions under which we now live; constitutions of our own

¹ William Whiting, "Some brief Remarks on the present State of publick affairs," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* ([1786]1956), 132.

² Jacques Rancière, Solange Guenoun, James H. Kavanagh, and Roxanne Lapidus, "Jacques Rancière: Literature, Politics, Aesthetics," *SubStance* 29.2 (2000), 11.

choice and making; and now we are unsheathing the sword to overturn them.” Requesting that Humphreys continue to keep him apprised of events, the then retired General and Commander-in-chief of the Continental Army expressed his confusion at the contradictory accounts of who it was that was rising against the state, what it was that had compelled them to do so, and what it was that they sought to achieve. Washington turned to his former aide de camp to help him make sense of events he found so difficult to account for that he had to persuade himself that he was not “under the illusion of a dream.” Reading the accounts of the press, Washington was bewildered,

“At one time, these insurgents are spoken of as a mere mob; at other times, as systematic in all their proceedings. If the first, I would fain hope, that like other mobs it will, however formidable, be of short duration. If the latter, there are surely men of consequence and abilities behind the curtain, who move the puppets, the designs of whom may be deep and dangerous. They may be instigated by British counsel, actuated by ambitious motives, or, being influenced by dishonest principles, had rather see the country in the horrors of civil discord, than do what justice would dictate to an honest mind.”³

Washington was not alone in expressing his condemnatory shock and confusion in reaction to the events often remembered as “Shays’s Rebellion.” Across the newly independent states, Americans sought to make sense of what appeared to be an insurrection that threatened the stability of the free republican government they had so recently achieved. Making sense of this tumultuous event, many Americans in late eighteenth century New England relied on a common picture of political reality, a background against which they could determine the meaning of these disturbances, judge their legitimacy, and respond accordingly.

In what follows, I examine pieces of the picture of political reality that was

³ George Washington to David Humphreys, 26 December 1786, in Worthington Chauncey Ford ed., *The Writings of George Washington* Vol. 11 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1890).

common among late eighteenth century Americans, and describe how this picture grounded the narrative organization of politics and existing institutions through which Massachusites made sense of the tumultuous events that defined the early days of the Republic just prior to Ratification. Pursuing this task theoretically and historiographically, I interrogate public reactions to the Massachusetts Regulation of 1786–1787 (Shays’s Rebellion) – the Western Massachusetts insurrection that shocked elites of the early Republic and helped ignite the movement towards convening a constitutional convention. My intent in this chapter is to use the case of Shays’s Rebellion to demonstrate how practices of political extremism can serve to raise public awareness of pressing political grievances and compel American citizens to publicly deliberate over extremist acts, concrete politics, and the existing political order itself. I suggest that by challenging the political order of post-revolutionary Massachusetts on its own revolutionary republican terms, the Regulation called opponents and sympathizers alike to question the nature and legitimacy of American politics and political order, particularly with regard to the relation between insurrection and republican politics.

Conspicuous among the language of the popular opposition to the Massachusetts Regulation was an absence of consideration for the possible legitimacy of the events’ insurrectionary character. Where in the colonial and revolutionary period, popular consideration over the legitimacy of particular insurrections (e.g., mob actions, riots, protests, “rough music,” and revolution) circulated widely, no such consideration was significantly evident among elites and non-elites that publicly condemned the Regulation. Yet, at the same time, the Regulation elicited some highly critical, yet sympathetic voices that demonstrated an alternative perspective to which opponents could have appealed,

while still ultimately judging the Regulators' insurrectionary acts to be illegitimate. Indeed, some of the Regulation's most well-known sympathizers (including Thomas Jefferson, William Manning, and William Whiting) weighed the possibility that the event might have been an instance of legitimate insurrection – an exercise of the supposed right of resistance – though ultimately determining the circumstances as not warranting recourse to such violence. The notion that insurrections ought to be met with careful consideration was a common element of colonial and revolutionary political thinking, and so it is all the more surprising that post-revolutionary Massachusites seemed unwilling to entertain the possibility of an insurrection's legitimacy, particularly in light of the reality that critical deliberation does not necessitate or equate to legitimation.

To begin, I briefly introduce the primary events of the Regulation, providing some of the historical context for its “judicial interruptions” which will feature prominently in the analysis that follows. With the stage set, I will investigate the political imagination of the Regulation's public opponents by looking at some of the key contours of the era's political thought, interrogating political tracts and private correspondences surrounding the event and the issues of insurrection it raised, and examining public commentaries in contemporaneous Western Massachusetts newspapers. I will argue that this common picture of political reality ought to be understood as a late eighteenth century Atlantic republican variation of what Jacques Rancière has described as “parapolitics” – an approach to politics, social ordering, and the nature of political reality in which an assumption that the most virtuous ought to govern the polity is held in direct tension with the assumption (or reality) of the community's equality.⁴ I argue that a parapolitical

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 71.

picture of post-revolutionary America as a republic shaped the rhetoric surrounding the Regulation, even as this interpretation was itself challenged by the dramatic event. Called on by necessity to defend the politics and political order of Massachusetts, opponents responded to this challenge with justifications and language that revealed a picture of political reality in which existing institutions and polices were identified with republicanism and political order itself. In defending this picture of republican reality, opponents departed from the popularly deliberative approach to insurrectionary practice of the colonial and revolutionary eras, and were unwilling to consider the possibility of the Regulation as anything other than an instance of self-interested sedition and illegitimate insurrection.

Yet, while the challenge of the Regulation to reevaluate politics and political order was met by its opponents with their total rejection of insurrection and their affirmation of the existing political order, the Regulation also compelled potential dissenters from this vision to reconsider existing politics and political order, though without necessarily legitimating extremism and violence. Though opponents of the Regulation were unwilling to read the event as anything other than seditious insurrection motivated by private interests and personal failings, many of its constitutive acts – such as the convening of extra-legislative county conventions to democratically determine the course of political action, the formal and orderly petitioning for the redress of grievances to state legislators, the establishment of correspondence between oppositional groups, the assembling of informal but well-ordered militia units, and the extra-legal court-closings – were evaluated in radically different terms by partisans and critical sympathizers of the events. In contrast with the interpretation offered by opponents, the latter section of this

chapter offers a preliminary reading of the “seditious” writings of Dr. William Whiting as giving an account of the Regulation as an event of democratic dissensus. Whiting’s highly critical but sympathetic commentary on the insurrection suggests that these acts of potentially *democratic* extremism compelled him by a sense of necessity to deliberately evaluate the existing political order of Massachusetts, the grievances raised by the Regulators, and the limits of political practice. In so doing, Whiting expressed a less deferential approach to politics than the parapolitical outlook of opponents, while also arguing for popular deliberation over political, legal, and economic matters of public concern.

Political extremism prompts American citizens to ask fundamental questions about the limits of politics while pushing them to reconsider their political order, its actual and potential failings, and its ideal form. The reasoning and rhetoric of Shays’s Rebellion helps demonstrate how democratic extremism in the United States has ignited debate over the democratic nature of politics, political order, and political extremism itself. Democratic extremism has done so in part because it uses the insurrectionary practices and democratic claims of a democratic-republican political order to challenge the shape of that order. In so doing, extremism has provoked, and may continue to provoke, public debate over fundamental questions of democratic legitimacy, calling on Americans to exercise their capacities of deliberation and political judgment.

The Massachusetts Regulation of 1786–1787

For Massachusetts and much of the new Republic, the late summer and early fall of 1786 would mark a significant test of the stability of the an independent United States

and the legitimacy of its revolutionary settlement. On August 22nd, 1786, representatives from fifty Hampshire County towns met at a county convention in Hatfield, Massachusetts, in response to the twin problems of massive public debt incurred during the Revolutionary War and a North Atlantic credit crisis – in which British creditors demanded payment from American debtors resulting in a cataract of debt and privation that tumbled down disproportionately from merchants to yeoman farmers. At the meeting, these “convention men” sought to consolidate a list of popular grievances against the state government in Boston and devise a means by which they might compel the changing of the state constitution in the hopes of obtaining a government and local bureaucracy more responsive to the region’s hardships. After consistently ignoring, dismissing, and circumventing the petitions and pleadings of rural townspeople from throughout western Massachusetts, the state legislature continued to demonstrate a pattern of neglect and opposition, having met ten days earlier and deciding to adjourn until January 31st, 1787 without addressing rural concerns. The attendees of the convention sought constitutional changes to their state government that would compel elected officials to address the economic, political, and judicial problems that had plagued post-revolutionary life in rural Massachusetts. Western Massachusetts, along with much of New England, experienced economic hardship following the Treaty of Paris and the conclusion of Anglo-American hostilities in 1783 owing in part to the significant debt incurred during the Revolutionary War that was passed on to the people through harsh taxation measures combined with a scarcity of the specie currency demanded by creditors and lacking among debtors. Not simply a result of economic gloom, Western Massachusetts had been on a post-revolutionary path towards acute civil

unrest due to a collapse of institutional legitimacy in the wake of the Revolution and popular fears that “an unaccountable provincial bureaucracy reaching down into the county courts would be the agent of impoverishment, stratification, and a progressive erosion of household independence...”⁵ Indeed, as John L. Brooke has noted, “as much as the pervasive pressure of public and private debt, the failure to achieve an acceptable revolutionary settlement of county institutions in Hampshire played a critical role in shaping the tumultuous politics of the 1780s in Western Massachusetts.”⁶ Among the twenty-five articles adopted by the Hatfield convention there were at least twenty concerning grievances and demands including the abolition of the upper house of the state legislature, revisions of the mode of representation in the lower house, the abolition of the Courts of Common Pleas and General Sessions of the Peace, the relocation of the state legislature out of Boston to a location more accessible to the rural areas of Western Massachusetts, and the immediate recall of the state legislature to address these grievances. The convention’s articles ranged from relatively reform-minded measures to demands that would necessitate the rewriting of the state constitution as a whole.⁷ A week after the convention on August 28th, almost fifteen hundred armed and unarmed townsmen, spurred on by the sentiments that had spread throughout the area, marched on the Northampton courthouse and blocked the entrance of three justices and a sheriff, preventing the sitting of the Court of Common Pleas. Throughout the late summer, fall,

⁵ John L. Brooke, “To the Quiet of the People: Revolutionary Settlements and Civil Unrest in Western Massachusetts, 1774–1789,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46.3 (1989), 428.

⁶ Brooke, “To the Quiet of the People,” 433.

⁷ Benj. Bonney, “A Convention,” *The Hampshire Herald*, 5 September 1786. For an account of the convention, see Leonard L. Richards, *Shays’s Rebellion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 8–9.

and winter of 1786 into 1787, bands of rural Massachusites sought redress by launching attacks specifically directed at the disruption or “interruption” of the courts, the most unresponsive agent of their judicial, economic, and political woes. On September 5th, over three hundred insurgents closed the debtor court at Worcester, and a week later, three more court closings occurred with more than three hundred townspeople stopping the debtor court at Concord, five hundred stopping the court at Taunton in Bristol County, and eight hundred Berkshire residents closing down the great Barrington Court. From September 25th to September 28th, fifteen hundred self-declared “Regulators” occupied the Springfield courthouse, and a week later, two hundred again closed the court in Berkshire County with one hundred fifty closing the court at Taunton. These judicial interruptions resonated in Connecticut and Vermont, and on November 21st, one hundred fifty Regulators closed down the Court of Common Pleas in Worcester. At the height of the Regulation, Massachusetts witnessed scenes bordering on civil war in which armed and well-organized Regulators confronted an army commanded by General Benjamin Lincoln and raised by the private funds of Governor Bowdoin and Boston elites. In late January of 1787, armed regiments of Regulators attempted to seize the federal arsenal in Springfield but were routed by twelve hundred militiamen under Major General William Shepard, and shortly thereafter, a surprise attack on Regulator positions in Petersham by General Lincoln’s forces effectively ended the war-making capacities of the Regulators. By the end of February, the insurrection had begun to quietly smolder with a few skirmishes in Berkshire county and some largely unsuccessful attempts to revive armed resistance with all hostilities gradually subsiding completely by the spring of 1787.

Opponents of the Regulation dismissed the legitimacy of the county conventions, condemned the court closings, and denounced the armed insurrection calling for its suppression and harsh punishments for its leaders. This harsh opposition was not restricted to the immediate conflict of court closings, “riots,” and the armed uprising and resistance. Previously, opponents had alternately opposed and ignored the post-war calls for economic relief and proposals for paper money, tender laws, as well as judicial and constitutional reform that had come from rural townspeople and which had been present in some areas as early as 1774. The rhetoric of such opponents was replete with moral outrage, religious fervor, cries of insanity and irrationality, intellectual supremacy, political virtue pitted against the threat of republican decay, and even charges of tyranny, despotism, and dictatorial aspirations against the supposed leaders and ignoble followers of the “Shaysite” movement. Such cries echoed from a clamor in defense of a particular perception of post-revolutionary political reality that was not confined in its focus to the organization of political processes or the administrative institutionalization of republican relations of power. That is, the discourse of the opposition demonstrates an unwillingness on the part of opponents to perceive and consider the alternative perspective of Regulators and sympathizers, and suggests a particular picture of political reality that formed the background or horizon of the language of opposition with regard to the events. To understand the public response of the Regulation’s opponents, we must understand the early post-revolutionary political order of Massachusetts, not simply as the result of an armed conflict and the subsequent project of constructing a republican administrative state. Rather, we must understand the construction of American post-revolutionary democracy as a project of creating a new political reality complete with a

narrative interpretation of American political order as the translation of republicanism into its concrete form. The construction of a new narrative acted as a picture through which the events, facts, institutions, politics, legal and social structures of the early Republic were to be sensed, understood, judged, and navigated. By interrogating the picture of political reality undergirding common oppositional responses to the Regulation we are able to account for the radical divergence in how opponents and partisans of this event made sense of it.

American Parapolitical Republicanism

Much of the political thought in late eighteenth century Massachusetts can be understood as what Rancière has termed, “parapolitics.” In parapolitical thought, a political reality organized in accordance with the greatest good must be organized so that the best and most capable leaders govern, thereby necessitating a hierarchical distinction of the political community’s parts between the part of those who rule (the most qualified, the “best”) and the part of those who are ruled (those not qualified or capable of ruling). Yet, in addition to this hierarchical logic of rule by the best, parapolitical thought is also committed to the organization of the social community in accordance with the greatest good of equality. Though it directly recognizes the equality of the people inhabiting a political reality, parapolitics limits and often seeks to eliminate the expression or articulation of such equality in the people ruled by a parapolitical regime.⁸

Rancière’s account of parapolitical thought is strikingly descriptive of the root tensions in the American republicanism that dominated post-revolutionary Massachusetts

⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 44, 74.

at the time of the Regulation. The republicanism of the early Republic was aristocratic and patrician-led in nature, characterized by a belief in the necessity of a virtuous many that was actively deferential to the virtuous few, though committed to juridical, political, and cultural inscriptions of equality.⁹ At the core of this republicanism was a dedication to the promotion of “civic virtue” or “public virtue,” a republican disinterestedness in which elite meritocratic men of virtue (or what was increasingly elaborated to be a “natural” as opposed to a “hereditary aristocracy”) led a democratic people by tapping into the objective interests or the common good of the Republic as a whole, controlling and diverting the private self-interests of disparate constituents, clamoring mobs, and demagogues.¹⁰ The republican ordering of political reality was not a fully modern democratic sentiment nor was it a dynamic and fluid conception of equality in praxis. It was a system of political judgment that envisioned an aristocratic or patrician leadership where, as Joseph Lathrop wrote in 1786, “[i]n elective governments the people may encourage and promote virtue by a wise and judicious choice of rulers...” always aware that it is “...unsafe to commit their interests into the hands of men who are themselves void of those virtues on which the happiness of society depends” and knowing that “[v]irtue exemplified in government will diffuse its salutary influence through the

⁹ Gordon S. Wood, “Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution,” in Richard Beeman, Edward C. Carter II, and Stephen Botein eds., *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 83.

¹⁰ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1969), 53–65, 65–70, 477–480; J. G. A. Pocock, “Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3.1 (1972), 124–125. For an account of the development away from the early Revolutionary conception of government according to republican disinterest and deference see Richard R. Beeman, “Deference, Republicanism, and the Emergence of Popular Politics in Eighteenth-Century America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 49.3, 401–30.

society.”¹¹ This form of elite American, and distinctly parapolitical, republicanism provided the political elite and a deferential people with a lens through which private interests were understood as excluded from the arena of statecraft. Additionally, a reason-possessing citizenry was to defer politico-juridical reasoning to the leadership of a wiser republican elite and action falling under the purview of “politics” was to remain within the boundaries of republican institutions. The form, desert of commitment, and authority of these republican institutions were derived from the new republican political reality’s originary foundations in voluntary civil compact. The disinterested republican was to be, as Samuel Johnson’s dictionary defined, “[w]ithout regard to private advantage; not biased by particular views; impartial.”¹² It was a classical conception of disinterestedness, a virtue of individual autonomy and independence that supposedly allowed the naturally elite individual man of virtue to lead in accordance with the public interest by subverting his own private interest and being free from influence by individual design or populist unreason.¹³

It was a conception of virtue not isolated and confined to constrain or guide the decisions of the elite, but one that was accompanied and supported by the active

¹¹ Joseph Lathrop, *A Miscellaneous Collection of Original Pieces*, in Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz eds., *American Political Writing During the Founding Era, 1760–1805* Vol.1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, [1786] 1983), 660.

¹² Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language in which the Words are Deduced from their Originals, and Illustrated in their different significations by Examples from the Best Writers, to Which are Prefixed, A History of the Language, and An English Grammar* (London: 1785), s.v., “Disinterested.”

¹³ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 515–516. Pocock generally approaches the subjects of deference, disinterestedness, and republican virtue in the context of early American political thought more fully on 506–552).

deference of political subordinates and the common citizen.¹⁴ As with other pictures of political reality, the core distinction in the parapolitical picture of republican order was a distinction between politics or that which is political and everything else – a distinction which conceptually overlaps with the distinction between that which is legitimate and that which is illegitimate. “Politics,” for the post-revolutionary Massachusite, referred to human action on public matters that took place within the delimited bounds of the constitutional ethico-juridical order. The republican New Englander understood this order to be republican, operating in accordance with, as an extension of, and reinforcing the perceived foundation of post-revolutionary republicanism itself: civil compact. Civil compact served as the foundation of the picture of political reality produced by American republicanism and its image of post-revolutionary Massachusetts as being an actually-existing republican order. Civil compact marked an originary foundation for the perceived transition of republicanism from abstract ideal animating revolution to concrete political regime and a binding organizing principle of social reality. As such, civil compact served to define and legitimate the republican order of the post-revolutionary American states. An emphasis on and appeal to the centrality of civil compact was commonplace in late eighteenth century American political writing and we may note the common 1786 sentiment that “...in order to the forming and establishing of any government, it is necessary for individuals to give up, by a civil compact, some of their natural rights, for securing to themselves others which they would retain.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Beeman, “Deference,” 407.

¹⁵ Amicus Republicae, “Address to the Public, Containing Some Remarks on the Present Political State of the American Republics, etc.,” in Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz eds., *American Political Writing During the Founding Era, 1760–1805* Vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, [1786]1983), 639.

As an extension of the original foundation of civil compact, and as definitively republican and exclusively possessed of a civil compact prerogative, the republican governments of the American states enforce and define the acceptable bounds of politics. And, because of this pictured foundation, all action or interest that undermines this order by going beyond the delimited bounds and sphere of politics is perceived as, by extension, an affront to the original compact. Hence we find the contention of one contemporaneous commentator on the political tumults in New England that,

“The states of America have respectively, by civil compacts voluntarily and solemnly entered into covenant for the defence of liberty, life and property. The subjects in each state have, voluntarily given up some of their natural rights, that they might be secured in the enjoyment of those, that they would retain: and the public interest and welfare being the end of this civil combination, those that have solemnly engaged to be governed by the voice of the major part, in all administrations of government corresponding with their several compact”

prefaced with the declaration that,

“...it is directly incompatible with the end of government, and every civil constitution, for subjects to claim the exercise of those natural rights which they have given up by their civil compact, in any mode but such as their constitution shall warrant and point out;—for then, had they such a right, all ideas of civil government would be exploded, and they would be in the most strict sense, in a state of nature.”¹⁶

Thus, insurrectionary social practices such as violence, rebellion, and all extra-legal or extra-legislative action critical of the order itself was to be made sense of as disobedience and treasonous to republican government, and a violation of civil compact. Such violations were admissible to the parapolitical narrative only as antagonism and public enmity to be forcefully excluded from politics. The illegitimacy of insurrectionary practices in a post-revolutionary republic was effectively understood as *prior* rather than *subject* to judgment. This picture of ordered political reality allows for contention,

¹⁶ Republicae, “Address,” 639.

misunderstanding, and faction, but it cannot allow conflict that goes beyond the supposed limits of reason and acceptability that are pictured as enabling civil compact and that defines the political and distinguishes politics as reasoned, distinct from the aberrations of tyranny, evil, and irrationality. Thus, the factionalism or contention that may plague the operations of a post-revolutionary republican state may be lamented, but they are not necessarily extremes that threaten to undermine the very constitution of republican order. Politics, in this picture, is restricted to the sphere of the constitutionally-bound political. Only actions conducted in accordance with the legal and political structure of constituted republican government (e.g., elections, instructions for representatives, petitions of grievances, etc.) and of a strictly public nature (contrasted with the personal interests that are to be wholly excluded from political deliberation) may legitimately occupy the sphere of politics and be admissible in the considerations of democratic deliberation. This sphere allows for misunderstanding and contention within it, but it does not admit of questioning, contradicting, undermining, or disrupting the existence of the sphere itself by those participating in politics, and it fosters a foundational support for the preservation of the constitutional forms and institutions of parapolitical republicanism against all enemies from within and without.

In the political discourse surrounding the insurgencies of the Regulation we see key elements of this parapolitical picture in the writings of elite republican figures. Writing to Noah Webster in 1784 in regard to the extra-legislative and extra-legal tumults that would give rise to the Regulation, Samuel Adams remarked that

“It is prudent for the People to keep a watchful Eye over the Conduct of all those who are entrusted with Publick Affairs. Such Attention is the Peoples great Security. But there is Decency & Respect due to Constitutional Authority, and those Men, who under any Pretence or by any Means whatever, would lessen the

Weight of Government lawfully exercised must be Enemies to our Happy Revolution & the Common Liberty.”¹⁷

Here, Adams asserts that the constitutional authority of republican state government is the lawful exercise of government itself and subsequently equates that which “lessens” by critique or undermining with that which is inimical to the Revolution and liberty. Government instituted among men as a means of translating and securing the abstractions of republicanism, liberty, and equality is not restricted to a particular instantiation of an ideal or a particular regime, it is equated with republican government as it is being built among free and independent but united states. To “lessen the Weight” of such government is antithetical to the foundations of a particular republican democracy, and by extension, to democracy, republicanism, and political order itself.

Adams’s equivalence between republicanism and the institutions of a republican government is echoed elsewhere in popular political tracts. Noting first that “...after any people have adopted, and voluntarily established, a civil compact, which is the result of their united wisdom, they ought to adhere to, and endeavor to support it...,” the pseudonymous *Amicus Republicae* contended that “If the people of the states cannot be happy under, and will not support the governments they have already established, it is evident they will never voluntarily support, nor will they be happy under any constitution of government whatever...”¹⁸ Betraying the pervasiveness of a particular narrative picture of political reality in its determination of the meaning of actors and actions counter to constituted government, *Amicus Republicae* highlights the personal failings

¹⁷ Samuel Adams to Noah Webster, 30 April 1784, in Harry Alonzo Cushing ed., *The Writings of Samuel Adams* Vol. 4 (New York: Octagon Books), 305.

¹⁸ *Republicae*, “Address,” 642–643.

and moral aberrations of subjects that would undermine the republican order, equating opposition to a particular republican order with opposition to all order:

“...whilst the governments are vested with sufficient power to secure the great end of government among a virtuous people, there are in the several constitutions, sufficient checks provided against all exorbitant power; and the subjects that would subvert such a constitution of government as this, must be actuated not by their virtues, but their vices...they would be restless and dissatisfied under every government, and would return to a state of nature, unless their wills were bent by some irresistible force.”¹⁹

Those that act within the ambiguous realms of extra-legal and extra-legislative action, even if articulating or guided by democratic and republican claims, must be understood as moving beyond the delimited realm of politics. Such figures thereby emerge as restless and dissatisfied subjects actuated by vice, against all government, intent on reverting back to the ever-present threat of the state of nature, rather than potentially legitimate democratic or republican actors responding to public grievances. In such a view, only disaster can result from an unwillingness to see or address all disruptions of republican order, “...the states being convulsed and rent in sunder by intestine contentions...would present a picture of the greatest calamities; and demonstrate the impossibility of any republic long existing, in this state of moral imperfection” and should republican government go unsupported “...we can reasonably expect nothing but national ruin....”²⁰ Rather than engage in insurrectionary practices, the subjects of this parapolitical order ought to trust in the form of state government as the embodiment of the republican principle of civil compact, regardless of its error or maladministration: “...our civil rulers, as a body at least, deserve our confidence and support. But should

¹⁹ Ibid., 643.

²⁰ Ibid., 644–645.

those in administration commit an error, this ought not to disaffect us to our governments.”²¹

Such an unwillingness to entertain the possibility that insurrectionary practices — social practices characterized by open resistance against established authority or governmental restraint — might be legitimate was a conspicuous departure from the vibrant consideration of insurrection that had taken place earlier in the colonial and revolutionary eras. Such exercises in practical political judgment and philosophical speculation were necessitated by the very real occurrence of popular disturbances and social eruptions that had been recurrent since the days of the first settlements and on through the eighteenth century.²² American colonists and revolutionaries were well-acquainted with periodic eruptions of extra-legal political violence, particularly in the shape of “rough music,” “mobs,” “crowds,” and other popular disturbances.²³ Looking

²¹ *Ibid.*, 645.

²² Gordon S. Wood, “A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly Third Series*, 23.4 (1966), 635.

²³ The literature on mobs and popular uprisings in colonial and revolutionary America is voluminous. Summary studies that have informed my remarks here include Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750–1776*, Vol.1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 581–586; Gordon S. Wood, “A Note,” 635–642, and *Creation*, 319–328; Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), and “Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America,” *William and Mary Quarterly Third Series* 27 (1970): 3–35; Kimberly K. Smith, *The Dominion of Voice* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1999), 11–50; Dirk Hoerder, *Crowd Action in Revolutionary Massachusetts, 1765–1780* (New York: Academic Press, 1977); Robert W. T. Martin, *Government By Dissent* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 21–54; and Paul Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987). Accounts of more specific forms of extra-legal popular violence can be found in Barbara Clark Smith, “Food Rioters and the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51.1 (1994): 3–38 on food or price riots during the Revolution; Brendan McConville’s *The King’s Three Faces: The Rise & Fall of Royal America, 1688–1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) details accounts of both pre-revolution pro-royalist crowds and revolutionary anti-royalists crowds; David P. Szatmary, *Shays’ Rebellion, The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), Leonard L. Richards, *Shays’s Rebellion, The American Revolution’s*

back on these regular events, it would seem as though eighteenth century Americans “accepted the existence of popular uprisings with remarkable ease.”²⁴ Though popular uprisings may not have been widely encouraged, “...in certain circumstances, it was understood, the people would rise up almost as a natural force, much as night follows day, and this phenomenon often contributed to the public welfare.”²⁵ Discontented and aggrieved groups regularly resorted to extra-legal acts of violence and intimidation in efforts to seek redress.²⁶ Even an abbreviated list of some of the most notable and violent pre-1776 political mobilizations that have attracted the attention of historians, and which often occurred along the country-city divide, would include Metacom’s War (1675–76), Bacon’s Rebellion (1676), the Virginia Plant-Cutter Riots (1681–83), the Yamasee War (1715–1717), the Conojacular War (1732–37), the Jersey Land Riots (1745–1755), the New York rent riots (1753–1766), the Cherokee War (1759–61), Pontiac’s Uprising (1763), the Paxton Riots (1763–64), the North Carolina Regulation (1764–71), the South Carolina Regulation (1767–69), the Yankee-Pennamite Wars (1769–84), and the Vermont insurgency (1770–75) at the least.²⁷

Apart from the more notable and named instances of insurrectionary violence, historians have documented a significant number and variety of lesser or everyday

Final Battle (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); and Robert A. Gross (ed), *In Debt to Shays, The Bicentennial of an Agrarian Rebellion* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993) situate Shays’s Rebellion in different contexts of popular violence and resistance.

²⁴ Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 3.

²⁵ Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 3.

²⁶ Wood, *Creation*, 320.

²⁷ This list has been adapted from Ed White, *The Backcountry and the City* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 1.

popular uprisings and collective disturbances. Some resembled targeted and well-organized collective actions, organized from the top-down, and directed by the leadership of elites. Others were political mobilizations led from below in which women and other marginalized actors accessed radical trans-Atlantic cultural resources of popular mobilization without elite ideological leadership and deferential accommodation. Still others resembled disorderly vandalism or had the chaotic character of public brawls between rival gangs that would occur at annually appointed times such as the November fifth celebration of Pope's Day or erupt so as to coincide with local elections such as the 1742 election riot in Philadelphia.²⁸

²⁸ For accounts of more orderly and elite-guided mobs see Maier, "Popular Uprisings," 3–35. Maier discusses how ideology contributed to the guidance and restraint of mobs in *From Resistance to Revolution*, 27–50. For examples of sometimes orderly but less elite-guided crowd actions see Smith, "Food Rioters," 3–38. Smith suggests that food and price riots "followed Old World precedents" testifying to Americans' access to the cultural resources of English plebeian culture, and arguing that they "challenge interpretations [of crowd action] that place eighteenth-century crowds solely in a vertical framework defined by elite ideology and accommodation" (Smith, "Food Rioters," 4–5). For an account of a Pope's Day brawl and the broader context of Pope's Day as an often violent ritual see McConville, *The King's Three Faces*, 1, 56–63. The 1742 election riot in Philadelphia is discussed in Smith, *The Dominion of Voice*, 13–16. Revisionist debate on the character of early American popular uprisings persists in more recent additions to the historiography of its violence. Earlier perspectives predominately tended to note a prominent role for physical intimidation in the Revolutionary movement while emphasizing the comparatively tepid nature of American crowds compared to those of the French Revolution. An illustrative example is that of Bernard Bailyn who asserted that "Not a single murder resulted from the activities of the Revolutionary mobs in America, and when blood was accidentally spilt, it was made to go a very long way." (Bernard Bailyn, "Introduction to Pamphlet 12, [*Benjamin Church*], *Liberty and Property Vindicated*" in Bailyn, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution* Vol.1, 581). The characterization of American revolutionary era popular violence as near bloodless is undermined by more recent histories that have suggested a more vicious and violent quality, and which have noted more graphic accounts of popular violence. One illustrative scene is an account of the death of John Taylor in 1774 provided by T.H. Breen. A New Hampshire man, who may have voiced support for parliamentary policies, Taylor was forced by a group of local men and women to ride a "wooden horse," where he was secured to a long fence rail and violently bounced up and down while being beaten. Physically assaulted by the gathering crowd, Taylor suffered a deep wound and bled to death. Though only one example, this case and other similarly violent incidence undermine the once common assertion of the relatively ordered and restrained American crowd. See T.H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots*, 14–15. Breen's work is not alone in rethinking the scope, scale, and place of popular political violence in revolutionary America. Brendan McConville has suggested that the period between 1765–1773

More than just a recurrent force of nature, many of these instances of violent collective action had a quasi-legal and quasi-legitimate character. Though some colonial uprisings “...defied established laws and authorities in the name of isolated private interests alone...” others were specifically organized in pursuit of a public or community interest such as many of the numerous food or price riots which occurred in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut between 1776 and 1779.²⁹

Writing in the 1970s against a backdrop of modern American unrest, Pauline Maier observed that

“Not all eighteenth-century mobs simply defied the law: some used extra-legal means to implement official demands or to enforce laws not otherwise enforceable, others in effect extended the law in urgent situations beyond its technical limits. *Since leading eighteenth-century Americans had known many occasions on which mobs took on the defense of the public welfare... they were less likely to deny popular upheavals all legitimacy than are modern leaders.*”³⁰

For Maier, an identifiable pattern emerges in examining the many instances and varieties of eighteenth-century popular uprising, one in which the mob was seen to be capable of operating as the “extra-legal arm of the community’s interest.”³¹ Acting as such, many mobs and uprisings were not so much instances of anti-authoritarian rebellion, but appropriations of force outside the bounds of law by populist groupings done in a manner that was not necessarily intended to subvert or oppose the authority of established

inaugurated a period of “terror” in which “Attacks against specific royal officials gave way to a generalized assault on the language and physical symbols that maintained the king’s authority and the king’s peace. This terror expanded to engulf those private individuals and groups whose hostile words seemed to threaten the cause of American liberty...colonists frequently used mobbings, rough-music ridings, and other forms of intimidation against those perceived hostile to ‘the country...’ See McConville, *The King’s Three Faces*, 286–300.

²⁹ Maier, “Popular Uprisings,” 4; Smith, “Food Rioters,” 3.

³⁰ Maier, “Popular Uprisings,” 4. My emphasis.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

political institutions.³² That is, many colonial mobs and uprisings had what Maier described as an “extra-institutional” rather than an anti-institutional character.³³ Still, even those extra-legal crowd actions that enforced or supplemented established political authority – e.g., through the enforcement of price controls – might still be considered as acts of insurrection because in their popular appropriation and exercise of authority, they went against the authority of governors exercising restraint.³⁴ Speaking to this tension between the quasi-legitimacy and potentially insurrectionary nature of popular disturbances, Kimberly K. Smith has emphasized that

“up until the late eighteenth century, [the crowd] did not challenge social and political hierarchy per se; rather, it enforced the traditional moral order by punishing those (including public officials) who violated community norms...the traditional mob might object to particular exercises of authority, but not to the idea that public authority should be held by the social elite. Its aim was at most the moral reform of existing authority structures, not their elimination or transformation.”³⁵

Yet Smith also argues that riots and mobs, still posed a threat to particular instantiations of political authority, and speaking to the insurrectionary nature even of mobs supportive of government, she contends that amid a culture of political deference, crowd action “even in defense of the constitutional order, could have serious implications for political legitimacy.”³⁶ Mob action constituted a failure of deference and an insult to authority

³² Ibid., 7.

³³ Ibid., 8.

³⁴ The example of the *posse* presents an interesting case in terms of insurrectionary practice. As a legal obligation to aid established authorities in matters of enforcement, the action of the posse was an extension of established political order, but one that relied directly on the partial assumption of authority by what was essentially a legally sanctioned mob. On this dynamic see Smith’s discussion in *Dominion of Voice*, 27–28; and Maier’s note in, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 16, 19.

³⁵ Smith, *Dominion*, 21.

³⁶ Ibid.

where it arose in opposition against local authorities or when it appropriated the prerogatives of political elites. As such, mob actions could represent "...the other side of the culture of deference" replacing "the forms and conventions of deference with ritualized insults."³⁷

Whether acting specifically in defiance of local authorities, institutions, and forms of governmental restraint, or as extra-legal extensions of local political power, mobs, riots, and other forms of extra-legal popular violence, unlike in the post-revolutionary parapolitical order, were the subject of reasoned evaluation and political judgment rather than peremptory condemnation. Popular uprisings were afforded a "...certain presumptive acceptability that was founded in part on colonial experience with mass action," and admitted as an almost natural occurrence.³⁸ Frequently, colonial Americans understood the appearance of popular insurrection as a symptom, not of the failings of the people, but as a sign of failings in established political order and authority. That "Mobs and Tumults never happen but thro' Oppression and scandalous Abuse of Power" was a common enough sentiment and one that echoed the logic of *Cato's Letters* wherein John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon wrote how the people "...are not wont to hate their governors, till their governors deserve to be hated."³⁹ Writing as "Determinatus" in *The*

³⁷ Ibid., 22.

³⁸ Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 21.

³⁹ *New York Journal Supplement*, 4 January 1770 quoted in Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 22; John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters: or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, And other Important Subjects* Vol.1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, [1720–1723], 1995), 176. The popularity of Cato's Letters in the colonial period has been noted by modern and eighteenth-century scholars, even receiving specific mention in David Ramsay's, *The History of the American Revolution*, where he notes that though colonists did not possess many books nor the time to read, those that did had a taste for "...those fashionable authors, who have defended the cause of liberty..." Among them, "Cato's letters...and such productions, were common in one extreme of the colonies, while in the other, histories of the Puritans, kept alive the remembrance

Boston Gazette in 1768, Samuel Adams's words exemplified this sentiment when he declared that, "If it be a truth, as I take it to be, that the people are seldom if ever discontented, without just cause, we may conclude, that the wheels of good government there are somewhat clogged... That the people of this province are universally uneasy, all must allow; but that they are dispos'd to be mobbish, I utterly deny, and take it upon me to say, that to assert it is a vile abuse of them."⁴⁰

Sentiments like those of Adams implied that insurrections demanded evaluative political inquiry, much like the symptoms of a fever demand the examination of a doctor. If popular disturbances were indicative of political failings, then the source of corruption ought to be identified and made right. Such inquiry was itself a matter of popular evaluation intimately joined with the potential of legitimating insurrection as a check against oppression, a relationship reflected in one minister's words before the Georgia Provincial Congress that "When a people think themselves oppressed and in danger, nothing can be more natural than that they should inquire into the real state of things, trace their grievances to their source, and endeavor to apply the remedies which are most likely to procure relief."⁴¹ Delving into the consideration of particular insurrections and popular uprisings or of the potential recourse to such practices, colonial and revolutionary era Americans might deliberate in the context of a Whig or republican language that

of the sufferings of their forefathers, and inspired a warm attachment, both to the civil and the religious rights of human nature." See David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, in Hyneman and Lutz (ed.), *Political Writings*, Vol. 1, 723.

⁴⁰ Samuel Adams, "Article Signed 'Determinatus,'" in Harry Alonzo Cushing ed., *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, Vol.1 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), 237.

⁴¹ Quoted in Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots*, 253.

adjudicated the legitimacy of insurrection in terms of obligation and resistance.⁴² The language of a popular obligation to resist the corrupting failures of governors was a commonplace of the eras even among those writers with otherwise conservative positions. Jonathan Mayhew, in his *Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission*, possibly the most famous sermon delivered in pre-Revolutionary America, preached that “disobedience to civil rulers in the due exercise of their authority is not merely a *political sin* but an heinous *offense against God and religion*,” yet he entreated his parishioners that in cases where rulers act in contradiction to the public good,

“...in such cases a regard to the public welfare ought to make us withhold from our rulers that obedience and subjection which it would, otherwise, be our duty to render to them. If it be our duty, for example, to obey our King merely for this reason, that he rules for the public welfare...it follows by a parity of reason that when he turns tyrant and makes his subjects his prey to devour and to destroy instead of his charge to defend and cherish, we are bound to throw off our allegiance to him and to resist...Not to discontinue our allegiance, in this case, would be to join with the sovereign in promoting the slavery and misery of that society the welfare of which we ourselves as well as our sovereign are indispensably obliged to secure and promote as far as in us lies.”⁴³

The commitment to a logic and obligation of resistance, and the common sentiment that popular insurrection was at least as likely to imply failures in governance as it was to suggest a failing in the people, led Americans, such as the Reverend Andrew Eliot, to inquire and articulate the symptomatology of oppression. Observing that “It is exceedingly difficult to determine exactly where submission ends, and resistance may

⁴² Though commonly understood in terms of a Whig or republican “right of resistance,” most eighteenth-century American formulations justifying resistance to authority did so in terms of a collective obligation to resist arbitrary power more so than as an individual right so often anachronistically employed today. See Smith, *Dominion of Voice*, 25–27.

⁴³ Bernard Bailyn, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution* Vol.1, 204; Jonathan Mayhew, “A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Nonresistance to the Higher Powers,” (Boston: D. Fowle and D. Gookin, 1750) in Bernard Bailyn ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution*, Vol.1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 220, 232.

lawfully take place, so as to leave no room for men of bad minds unreasonably to oppose government, and destroy the peace of society...” Eliot determined from personal experience that “When punishments are mediated and inflicted to gratify revenge, or merely to show power and superiority; or when they greatly exceed the demerit of the crime; or involve a whole community in distress for the offenses of a few; when acts are made and continued, yea, and enforced by military power, which, in general, are considered as unconstitutional and grievous; all these are instances of oppression.”⁴⁴ Concerned with articulating the signs of oppression meted-out by established authority that warranted resistance, Eliot just as thoroughly spoke of the capacity of the people in rebellion or insurrection to mete-out oppression to others, attributing the possibility of populist oppression to the guidance of purely private interests.⁴⁵ What is key for our purposes is that evaluative determination, the judgment of the legitimacy of recourse to insurrection was a very real potentiality to be determined by the people subject to established power and vested with a capacity of insurrectionary discernment.

Thus it was that even before the summer of 1776 formally inaugurated Anglo-American civil war and tenuously began the founding of a republican order, instances of popular violence could be understood as legitimate insurrectionary practices in defense of public welfare and resistant to established authority and governmental restraint. It was not that *all* insurrections were necessarily legitimate, but that the adjudication of their

⁴⁴ Dr. Andrew Elliot, “Election Sermon,” quoted in Nathan Fiske, *The Importance of Righteousness to the Happiness, and the Tendency of Oppression to the Misery of a People; Illustrated in two Discourses Delivered at Brookfield, July 4, 1774. Being a Day observed by general Consent through the Province, (At the Recommendation of the late House of Representatives) as a Day of Fasting and Prayer, On Account of the Threatning Aspect of our Public Affairs.* (Boston: John Kneeland, 1774), 27, 32.

⁴⁵ See Eliot quoted in Fiske, *Righteousness*, 33.

legitimacy was a very real possibility recognized as a necessity when circumstances demanded rather than a peremptorily dismissed farce. So attentive to this possibility were Americans that popular resistance on behalf of public welfare was at times completely severed from the concept of *the mob*. Where Samuel Johnson's mob was purely "The croud; a tumultuous rout," the Reverend Nathaniel Niles specified that "The true spirit of a mob consists in unconstitutional violence, done with a design to bring about some private end, and therefore the term is alike applicable to armies, or navies, or a mixed multitude of madmen, minors and slaves when they are engaged in such unconstitutional violence..."⁴⁶

Mobs were by no means the only form of insurrectionary practice which colonial Americans experienced as legitimate and potentially so, and which Revolutionary Americans would turn to in full force in the declared revolution of 1776 and the insurgency that had begun shortly prior to independence. There were a wide range of insurrectionary political practices to which Americans resorted as means of resistance including the convening of conventions unsanctioned by established authorities and consisting of local representatives, the establishment of extra-legal "committees of public safety" or "committees of public safety and observation" which administered popular justice and gradually assumed powers of governance during the Revolution, as well as more formal insurrectionary practices such as the general assumption of powers by the Continental Congress, or the various non-importation agreements promoted (and

⁴⁶ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words are deduced from their Originals, Explained in their Different Meanings, and Authorized by the Names of the Writers in whose Works they are found. Abstracted from the Folio Edition, By the Author*, Vol. 2, 3rd edition, (London: 1766), s.v. "Mob"; Nathaniel Niles, *Two Discourses on Liberty, delivered at the North Church, in Newbury-Port, On Lord's-Day, June 5th, 1774, and Published at the general Desire of the Hearers* (Newbury-Port: I. Thomas and H.W. Tinges, 1774), 30n.

enforced) as opposition to parliamentary acts between 1765 and 1774, among others.⁴⁷ The very form of the Revolution itself might be understood as insurrectionary and comprised by a multitude of constitutive insurrectionary practices ranging from the treasonous signatures of Founders on the Declaration of Independence and the armed rebel force of the Continental Army, to the insurgent actions of extra-legal committees and militias, or the often violent intimidation and harassment of loyalist elites, royal governors and officials, and Anglo-American merchants by rural insurgents, urban mobs, and wharf gangs.⁴⁸ These forms of insurrectionary practice moved fluidly along the continuum of symbolic and material violence, insulting established royal authority and assaulting both its agents and loyal subjects.⁴⁹ That insurrectionary practices were

⁴⁷ On committees of safety see Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots*. For the politics of non-importation agreements see Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 74–5, 114–138, and 251–253.

⁴⁸ On the targeted insurrectionary nature of violent and militant practices in New England during the early days of revolutionary activity just prior to the Declaration of Independence, T.H. Breen's *American Insurgents, American Patriots* is particularly helpful. Presented as a history of "the people's Revolution," Breen's work focuses on rural insurgency in New England between 1773–1775. Admitting that the American Revolution was itself an insurrection constituted by a multitude of insurrectionary practices seems at once both a common sense generality and an overly simplistic account of an incredibly nuanced phenomenon. In a general sense, we might consider it an insurrection as a whole because of its reference to an armed conflict between a violent insurgent political movement, complete with governance and its own military, against an established ostensibly legal political authority. Yet if we adopt a position like that of David Ramsay, one of the foremost contemporaneous historians of the Revolution, determining its insurrectionary character becomes more complex. In his 1789 history of the Revolution, Ramsay noted that with the signing and promulgation of the *Declaration of Independence*, "every thing assumed a new form. The Americans no longer appeared in the character of subjects in arms against their sovereign, but as an independent people, repelling the attacks of an invading foe...The army received it [the *Declaration*] with particular satisfaction. As far as it had validity, so far it secured them from suffering as rebels, and held out to their view an object, the attainment of which would be an adequate recompense for the toils and dangers of war. They were animated by the consideration that they were no longer to risque their lives for the trifling purpose of procuring a repeal of a few oppressive acts of parliament, but for a new organization of government, that would forever put it out of the power of Great Britain to oppress them." David Ramsay, "*The History of the American Revolution*" in Hyneman and Lutz, 744–745.

⁴⁹ e.g., A convention or revolutionary committee of safety might usurp the established authority

frequently used and legitimated suggests that the pictures held by colonial and revolutionary era Americans enabled them to concretely evaluate insurrection, adjudicating its actual and possible legitimacy without ruling-out practices of insurrection as a whole. The repeated occurrence of insurrection accompanied by public deliberation of it demonstrates that Americans understood themselves to be self-governed judges responsible for evaluating what failures in politics and political order insurrection might be symptomatic of, rather than dismissing potential symptoms without proper inquiry.

A recognition of this history of legitimate insurrection persisted into the post-revolutionary era, where the revolutionary founding was recognized by Americans as a legitimate endeavor, an exercise of the right and obligation of resistance. Thus the relationship between revolution and the post-revolutionary order persisted in terms of historical recognition. Historical insofar as Americans recognized that the founding had been an event of armed resistance (e.g., the armed conflicts of the Revolutionary War or American War of Independence) and as the product of the contingent necessity of taking-up arms (e.g., the reasoning articulated in the Continental Congresses' adoption of *The Causes and Necessities of Taking-Up Arms* (1775), or the arguments put forth in the *Declaration of Independence* (1776)). We can see this in the recurrent invocation of the memory of the Revolution by critics of the Regulation, particularly in their language of self-recognition that enthusiastically identified American agency as responsible for effecting the insurrection of the "Glorious Cause." Thus we can revisit Washington's aforementioned lamentation of shedding blood in revolution for our constitutions one day

of the Crown in a form of institutionalized symbolic violence in the course of terrorizing loyalist officials and assuming local governing authority while also enforcing the dictates of revolutionary order through everyday acts of material violence and intimidation beyond the popular image of patriot militias arrayed against treacherous redcoats.

and unsheathing sword to overturn such constitutions the next, as well as the comments of Western Massachusites opposing the Regulation which often resorted to invoking the people's participation in the hard-fought battle to secure republican liberty and order.⁵⁰

Yet not only was the relationship between insurrectionary revolution and the post-revolutionary order one of historical memory, it also persisted in abstract philosophical terms. Abstractly, the potential of legitimate insurrection was retained in the sense that insurrection could not be purged from the political philosophical foundation of the new republic. A post-revolutionary republican order could not renounce the right of revolution or the obligation of resistance because it was this that legitimated the insurrectionary acts on which the order was itself founded. To renounce the right of revolution and the potential legitimacy of insurrection would be to undermine the revolutionary foundation of the republic and deny the picture of political reality in which the establishment of an actual republic was a product of armed resistance and revolution. Called to reevaluate the nature of their political order by the challenge of Shays's Rebellion, post-revolutionary parapolitical republicans rejected the possibility of legitimate insurrection *in practice* because such an act would be against a republican order (i.e., an order against which, armed revolution was illegitimate and to be sensed as tyranny). Republican parapolitics foreclosed the possibility of attacking the political order, not because it settled on a rejection of a right of revolution, but because it framed the revolutionary founding (which was itself an attack against an existing political order, i.e., an insurrection) as a discrete, unique, and singular event, one that could not be repeated, and which had been settled in 1783. Though the historical logic of revolution or the distant

⁵⁰ See my discussion below of popular opposition to the Regulation that appeared in Western Massachusetts newspapers contemporaneous with the event.

speculative possibility of taking-up arms remained, its practical potentiality or actuality in terms of active political judgment was foreclosed. Likewise, those claims of grievance and injustice that might be offered to justify insurrection were accordingly de-legitimated and necessarily undermined. Where no act of insurrection could be legitimate, no grievance could make it so.

Reading Western Insurrection

During the transitional period of the 1780s, the republican parapolitical picture, with its features of disinterestedness, popular deference to political authority, belief in political leadership by a government of virtuous elites, and a purely historical and abstract commitment to the potential legitimacy of resorting to insurrection, was a common picture of political reality – though one that would undergo challenges and transformations as the decade wore-on. This image continued to shape and structure elite and popular perceptions of interest, equality, inclusion, and exclusion among many Massachusites. As such, it forged the experiences, perceptions, and understandings of elite and popular political agents throughout the pivotal post-revolutionary period. Yet the legitimacy of this picture of political reality was challenged by the disruptive and confusing events of Shays's Rebellion. By its conclusion, the insurrectionaries of the Regulation were suppressed by the arms of the state government and denounced as fanatics, traitors, and enemies of the republic. Seeking to make sense of an event that appealed to the insurrectionary and republican claims on which the post-revolutionary order was founded, yet which seemed to threaten the stability of what was understood to be a properly ordered republic, public opponents of the Regulation evaluated and judged

the event in the terms consistent with parapolitics. Presented with a challenge to the political order of Massachusetts, opponents of the Regulation understood the interests of the Regulators not as equal to the public concerns of other Massachusites nor as public concerns at all, but as greedy private interests to be ignored, dismissed, and then violently opposed. The partisans of Regulation themselves were understood as lacking the republican virtues of deference to legitimate authority, reason, and acting outside the bounds of legitimate politics in their recourse to illegitimate insurrection. Rather than the public deliberative speech of equally political subjects possessed of reason and capable of governing themselves, the voices of the partisans of Regulation were understood as the unreasoned clamor of an undifferentiated mob. We can see this in the condemnation by elites and the popular press's coding of the interest of the Regulators as articulating private interests and showing no deference or appreciation for the established institutional government.

Writing under a pseudonym originally in the *Massachusetts Gazette*, "A Citizen" responded to the meeting of county conventions, warning readers that "...there are some among us who appear uneasy; and, deluded by the lens of fraud and violence, they seem to be desirous of again changing their political situation." Castigating Convention Men and Regulators, "A Citizen" railed that

"[i]nstead of cheerfully paying, as far as they are able, their own private debts, retrenching their idle, unnecessary expences, and contributing their portion to support a government of their own making; we see them assembling in conventions to do acts treasonable to the state, and to concert measures to defraud their own and the publick creditors. These are the real objects with those who promote such assemblies, whatever they may profess,"

concluding that "they are ever busy in sowing sedition, and stimulating the simple and unwary, under the specious pretence of redressing grievances, to destroy that government

which alone protects them.”⁵¹ Likewise, in a viciously satirical fictional account of an anonymous county convention originally appearing in the *American Herald*, chairman “Wile Restless” reported that among the “very cruel and desperate grievances” plaguing Convention Men, Regulators, and rural Bay Staters were “[t]he emptiness of our coffers!,” “The abuses in the practice of the law, whereby our persons and property are liable to attachment for debts we have, or may hereafter contract!,” “The Supreme Judicial Court, or any other Courts, whereby we are compelled to act contrary to our ideas of right and justice,” as well as “[t]he unreasonable and unnecessary restraints of bars and locks on our neighbour’s houses! Whereby we are deprived of that darling right of freemen—of rioting on the property of others—of accumulating wealth by their industry—and indulging ourselves in idleness, as good and faithful subjects!” “Wile Restless,” on behalf of the fictional convention, went so far as to mix personal insult with the specter of British subterfuge reporting that the convention adjourned to a later date and place “when and where all British emissaries, bankrupts, gamesters, and all persons whatever, the dissolute, idle and abandoned, who are in any respect disaffected to the present government, are requested punctually to attend.”⁵²

Many like sentiments abound in the rhetoric of condemnation against the Regulation including descriptions of the Regulators as lazy debtors bereft of personal responsibility, fools and simple dupes easily misled by aspiring tyrants and dictators, irrationalists lacking reason and waging a war against it, British sympathizers, licentious

⁵¹ A Citizen, “To the Citizens of Massachusetts. On CONVENTIONS,” *Worcester Magazine*, 22 August 1786.

⁵² Wile Restless, “From the American Herald. Printed at Boston,” *Worcester Magazine*, Sept 1786.

reprobates, and radical levelers despising of property, economy, and industry. Such vituperation was common surrounding the conventions and disturbances with the popular press exhibiting a particular passion to such a degree that, “columns that conventionally carried advice on curing sores or cultivating bigger turnips...[gave] way to angry broadsides and impassioned denunciations”⁵³ Yet apart from an expression of vehement sentiment, this discourse of condemnation should be read within the context of a particular world picture and a reaction against extremist political actors that appeared to challenge this picture with similar practices and claims on which it was based. Here, the Regulators’ practice of forming committees of correspondence, petitioning the state legislature, sitting in county conventions, and even obstructing the operation of the state judiciary and taking up arms against state forces appear to ape the insurrectionary practices and democratic claims underpinning the republican order they threatened.

Originally appearing in the *Massachusetts Centinel* in response to the meetings of county conventions that would call for the initial judicial interruptions of the Regulation, an editorial by “An American” contended that while the growing public unease was a product of important abuses demanding of remedy, the actual grievances of Convention Men and Regulators were illegitimate, writing that “...our friends in some of the back towns, having none of these [legitimate] calamities to complain of, wish neither to pay their debts, or taxes; or in other words they must wish, in effect, to annihilate the present government, and to reduce things to a state of nature...” “An American” expressed the common refrain that the grievances of the disaffected were a personal matter and lamented that “[u]nhappily we are too apt to connect those effects with the state of the

⁵³ Michael Lienesch, “Reinterpreting Rebellion: The Influence of Shays’s Rebellion on American Political Thought,” in Gross ed., *In Debt to Shays*, 163.

government, which ought in fact to be attributed to our private misconduct.” The economic and political grievances of disaffected townspeople and the partisans of Regulation were a private affair caused by personal misconduct warranting the folksy admonition that “[t]he man who spends that time in unavailing complaints, which should be devoted to the support of his family, must be sure to suffer.” Rather than seek redress for grievances of a “private” nature, “The best citizen leaves the government to its natural operation, until real grievances arise, and then will only seek redress in the way which the constitution has designated; while the artful demagogue expects to conceal his private deficiencies in the confusion of a civil war, or in the tumult of sedition.”⁵⁴

Where “An American” perceived all of the grievances articulated in the Regulation as private, “An Inhabitant of Worcester County” expressed the more nuanced perception that the mass of public complaints ought to be divided between legitimate grievances capable of being remedied by legislative authority and individual private grievances personally addressed. Yet, the legitimate grievances were understood as largely confined to those that specifically targeted legislative action such as the moving of the capital out of Boston and delays in legal administration. Ultimately, “An Inhabitant” soundly echoed the common refrain of the Regulation’s opponents, condemning all extra-legal action and imploring the citizens of a republican Massachusetts to defer to the talent and wisdom of state authorities:

“Let us cease from all unreasonable jealousies and complaints against our constitutional authority; the times have been and still are difficult; our rulers have many perplexities and embarrassments; let us not weaken their hands by a petulant temper and conduct; they are certainly better judges of what is necessary for the publick safety and happiness than we are...”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ An American, “Conventions! And Paper Money!,” *Worcester Magazine*, August 1786.

⁵⁵ An Inhabitant of Worcester County, “For the Worcester Magazine,” *Worcester Magazine*,

“An Other Citizen” in the *Massachusetts Gazette* questioned the competency, let alone the legitimacy, of the county conventions declaring that they “are as incompetent for that business [articulating public grievances] as they are unconstitutional, and to be discountenanced by every true friend to his country...” Rather, it was the prerogative and purpose of the state government overseeing the republican order of Massachusetts to examine, articulate, and remedy public concerns. Thus, it is “...a reasonable presumption, under such form of government, that no law will pass, and no measures be pursued, but such as are necessary and expedient for the whole, however they may be inexpedient for some particular men, a particular town, or perhaps district.” “An Other Citizen,” also stressed a sentiment of public deference by upholding the operation of government “without being liable to the debate and revision of a county convention, which cannot be a judge of it” and abiding by the principle that “...though all power originates from the people, it does not remain with them; by our constitution it is delegated to a Senate and House of Representatives, and it may not be reassumed, nor the constitutional exercise of it disturbed with impunity; and in some cases not without incurring the guilt of treason.”⁵⁶ This sentiment of deference to state authority was expressed by the selectmen of Medford who responded to the proposed sitting of conventions and committees that directed the judicial interruptions by expressing their “disapprobation of such an unwarrantable attempt to take publick business out of the hands of those whom the constitution has lodged it...” Objecting to the economic grievances expressed by the Regulation’s partisans, the selectmen of Medford counseled that

September 1786.

⁵⁶ An Other Citizen, “To the Free and Independent Citizens of Massachusetts: On Conventions,” *Worcester Magazine*, September 1786.

“Sudden and great changes in point of property, and plenty of money, generally attend a state of war; these induce habits of dissipation and extravagant modes of living in people, which, as they cannot easily be reclaimed upon the return of peace, must be considered as the almost universal parent of our private distresses, and of that scarcity of money of which we so loudly complain.”⁵⁷

These common perceptions of public grievances as private affairs and the defense of deference to republican state authority are in-keeping with the parapolitical picture of Massachusetts in 1786 as a republican political reality. Further, the support of deference against extra-legal direct action focused on a form of insurrectionary practice that was perceived as necessarily threatening the foundations of republicanism itself. Likewise, this picture structured opponents’ perceptions of the demands of Regulators for paper money (i.e., paper money, like not deferring to the rule of “legitimate” republican representatives, threatened the institutionalization of republicanism in America itself.)

In general, merchants, speculators, and political elites in Massachusetts tended to reject post-war proposals for paper money and tender laws (laws that would allow yeoman farmers and rural Massachusites to discharge specie debts through paying creditors in goods), viewing paper money as undesirable and perceiving that “...a paper medium would allow yeomen to pay for past purchases in inflated currency and thus to pass a portion of the post-war economic burden to the mercantile elite.”⁵⁸ For many of the commercial-minded elite that opposed the demands for paper money and debt relief echoing from Western Massachusetts, the possibility of paper money was perceived as a threat to individual livelihood and a moral aberration that undermined the very basis of contract and compact with implications that extended from personal business to the heart

⁵⁷ Selectmen of Medford, “PROCEEDINGS of the Town of Medford, respecting a CONVENTION,” *Worcester Magazine*, August 1786.

⁵⁸ Szatmary, *Shays’ Rebellion*, 44.

of republican stability. Indeed, for Noah Webster “[b]argains, conveyances, and voluntary grants, where two parties are concerned, are sacred things; they are the supports of social confidence and security; they ought not to be sported with, because one party is stronger than the other; they should be religiously observed.”⁵⁹ Webster’s rhetoric mixes the protection of contract and private property, with the moral health and protection of liberty: “As the state has no right to break its own promises, so it has no right to alter the promises of individuals. When one man has engaged to pay his debt in wheat, and his creditor expects the promise to be fulfilled, the legislatures has no right to say, the debt shall be paid in flax or horses. Such an act saps all the supports of good faith between man and man; it is the worst kind of tyranny.”⁶⁰ Webster continued, arguing that “...all tender laws, which oblige a creditor to take, for his debt, some article which he never intended nor engaged to take, are highly unjust and tyrannical...” declaring with vituperative righteousness and moral condemnation that “... man should pay an acknowledged debt, not because there is a law to oblige him, but because it is just and honest, and because he has PROMISED to pay it.”⁶¹ The moral condemnation of paper money was made explicit in the words of three retailers from Springfield, William Pynchon, Thomas Stebbins, and Reuben Bliss who described paper money as “iniquitous in itself, pregnant with innumerable evils, both political and moral ...contrary to the spirit of our constitution, and inconsistent with the rights of mankind.”⁶² The issuance of paper

⁵⁹ Noah Webster, *A Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings* (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1790), 41.

⁶⁰ Webster, *A Collection*, 41.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶² Quoted in Szatmary, *Shays’ Rebellion*, 45.

money (understood as devaluing contractual gains) and tender laws (which would undermine the terms of contractual obligations) were condemned in rhetoric that often seamlessly flowed along a continuum between ethics, politics, and economics. Wherein, this moral condemnation stretched from the economic consequences of the requested mechanisms of debt relief, implicated political instability, and targeted the individual agent and their personal moral defects. At play here, was a logic of moral and political perception, in which the mechanisms of debt and economic relief requested by Western Bay-Staters and embodied in the demands of the Regulators as the “body in arms,” were peremptorily condemned on the grounds that they undermined the contractual foundation of the Republic. Here the republican picture of judgments surrounding the inviolability of contractual relations (political, economic, and social) restricted consideration of the topic of economic burden, debt, and the like to the confines of personal responsibility. In so doing, the interests of debt relief expressed by Regulators and articulated in terms of paper currency, tender laws, and the like were understood as the private interests of debtors abrogating their personal moral responsibility to pay what they owe and keep their promises.

At its core, paper money was perceived as undermining everyday contractual relations and was, by extension, understood as a threat to the social contract basis of the political order of republican Massachusetts. This chain of reasoning effectively displaced actors that articulated a desire for this sort of economic relief, replacing them with the concern for the sanctity of the contractual relationship. Rather than an equal party with an equal interest to be recognized, the actor or actors that advocate a desire for such means of relief, are primarily perceived as a threat to contracts and a threat to the very basis of

American republican liberty. They are therefore excluded and displaced from everyday politics, relegated to the status of defective and unknowing individual debtors bereft of personal responsibility (regardless of whether or not the individual advocates of debt relief measures were in fact debtors, of which many that participated in the Regulation were not).

Here, in the perception of the Regulators' demands as private self-interest, their actions as illegitimate insurrection and an assault on normative deference to legitimate republican institutions, and their desire for economic relief that was sensed as directly undermining the foundation of the republican order of Massachusetts, we see ways in which a parapolitical picture of reality structured perceptions, judgments, and agency in a post-revolutionary political order. A particular picture shaped opponents' perceptions of the demands of the Regulation and its partisans in such a way that they were delegitimated prior to any self-reflective deliberative judgment, framed to be noise that echoed from the private interests of debtors and yeoman, rather than as the political speech of equals in public life (regardless of whether or not the clamoring New England townspeople and later Shaysites, Regulators, and insurrectionaries were or were not debtors or yeoman farmers). The discourse of opposition that frequently condemned and dismissed the demands of Regulators should in part be interpreted as a product of a predetermined perception of the status of the Regulators. This perception reflected a particular picture of political reality whose adherents responded to the challenge of the Regulation in language that showed their belief in an identity between existing political institutions, and republicanism and order itself. When confronted by the practices and claims of rural Massachusites, opponents accordingly perceived them as demands and

actions echoing from private interests (e.g., personal debt, a personal inability to pay taxes or purchase luxuries). As such, the Regulators and their demands were perceived as separate from public political life and were easily dismissed as the noise of greed, irrationality, or (more commonly) a collective defect of personal morality rather than the legitimate concerns of public politics, while their insurrectionary practices were peremptorily de-legitimated as threats to republican order itself. This perception allowed an expression of anger coming from the Regulators to be heard by their opponents – and in more sympathetic moments, to be interpreted by opponents as the clamoring noise of suffering from rural Massachusetts – but it would not be heard as the public speech of deliberative politics, the demands of a reasoning republican public, or the catalyst for potentially legitimate insurrection in need of public judgment and meaningful consideration. Yet, when the pitch of the clamor rises to confront Massachusites not simply as anger and noise from the Western counties but as an open insurrection that violently challenged the existing political order with practices and claims similar to those on which the order itself was founded, New Englanders were compelled to take a stance on the insurrection, the order it challenged, and the questions it raised.

William Whiting's Seditious Remarks

Examining pieces of the parapolitical picture revealed in the language of the Regulation's opponents allows us to make sense of how these critics understood the insurrection, and how they responded to the challenge it posed and the questions it raised. Yet, there was a marked divergence in how the phenomena gestured to by "Shays's Rebellion" – particularly the court closings or "judicial interruptions" – were understood

by their partisans and sympathizers. If reconstructing opponents' picture of political reality helped us to understand how they reaffirmed their political order in response to the challenge of the Regulation, perhaps reconstructing how that picture was disrupted might help us to understand how sympathizers reconsidered their political order in the face of insurrection. Doing so will further clarify how it is that practices of political extremism have the power to force public evaluation of existing order and policy.

Opponents responded to the challenge of Shays's Rebellion by affirming the republican nature of the existing political order, affirming the illegitimacy of post-Revolution insurrection, and did so in a way that identified existing political order with order itself. On the other side of this event, sympathizers responded very differently, though they still condemned the actual insurrection. Sympathizers responded to the challenge of insurrection in a way that also identified and affirmed republicanism with legitimate political order, but which did not identify existing politics and institutions with republicanism itself placing them beyond reproach. Though sympathizers still condemned the insurrection as illegitimate, their comments reflected an appreciation of it as a symptom of something more than the failings of the people in arms. Sympathetic voices such as those of William Whiting and William Manning affirmed the republican nature of their political order, but were open to the possibility that the grievances of the Regulators might be legitimate. Such sentiments revealed an approach to politics reminiscent of the colonial and revolutionary republican outlook on insurrection as a symptom of deeper failing, and promoted a less deferential and more popularly deliberative approach to politics than the approach present in the writings of opponents.

One often-noted but rarely interrogated set of commentaries that radically

diverged from the way opponents understood the Regulation, was written by the hand of Dr. William Whiting who, on April 4th, 1787, was found guilty of making seditious remarks and writing a seditious libel.⁶³ Whiting's sympathetic, yet critical writings in defense of the insurgent inhabitants of western Massachusetts, composed during the disturbances (to say nothing of his involvement in the contested meetings of the controversial County Conventions that led-up to and guided the Regulation), may provide us with a discourse of what Rancière has named as a politics of "dissensus." A politics of dissensus occurs when a sensible order rooted in a particular picture of political reality is confronted by a political subject that is inadmissible or excluded from the established framework of perception. In this political process, oppressed agents presume themselves to be reasoning persons capable of self-governance and of equal political status within the community, and then act to verify this presumption by demonstrating their equality. A politics of dissensus accordingly features a prominent dynamic of disidentification in which oppressed political agents not only demonstrate their presumed equality, but effectively dis-identify with or diverge from the hierarchically ordered and subordinate identities allotted them within a particular ordering of political reality.⁶⁴

⁶³ Stephen T. Riley, "Dr. William Whiting and Shays' Rebellion," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 66 (1956), 130. In February 1787, Whiting was arrested under a State Warrant. By March, he had been removed from his judicial post and tried before the Supreme Judicial Court. Convicted on April 4th of seditious libel and seditious remarks, he was sentenced to seven months in prison and fined £100. After petitions from Whiting and those of his friends who had opposed the Regulation were sent to Governor Bowdoin, Whiting's prison sentence was remitted, though the heavy fine and a period of probation remained. See Riley, "Dr. William Whiting," 120–131.

⁶⁴ The account of dissensus presented here is taken from Jacques Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," *October* 61 (1992): 58–64; *Disagreement; Hatred of Democracy* (London and New York: Verso, 2006); "Thinking Between Disciplines"; *On the Shores of Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 2007); "A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière," *Parallax* 15.3 (2009): 114–23; and *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, (London: Continuum, 2010).

A leading physician of Berkshire County, William Whiting occupied a variety of local and provincial positions throughout the 1770s, representing his area in the General Court and Provincial Congress between 1774 and 1776, earning a commission as a Justice of the Peace in 1775, and officiating throughout the Massachusetts constitutional crisis of 1778. It was during this crisis that Whiting authored a pamphlet urging the people of Massachusetts to support the state government at a time when Constitutionalists – those who rejected the Continental Congress’s recommendation that Massachusetts be governed by its old royal charter and who called instead for the adoption of a new state constitution – rejected the authority of justices that had been appointed by the Governor and sought to close-down courts, preventing their operation until the post-revolutionary state constitution went into effect in 1781.⁶⁵ By the end of the Revolutionary War, Whiting had firmly established himself as a member of a coterie of conservative politicians that largely dominated the political and legal affairs of Berkshire County, and would go on to not only be re-commissioned as a Justice of the Peace under the new constitution but would also be made Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas of Berkshire County.

Pushing-back against the rhetoric of the "friends of government," Dr. Whiting’s remarks suggest that he encountered a political event entirely discordant with that condemned by the Regulation’s opponents. The doctor’s insightful commentaries on the disturbances primarily appear in two texts composed in the fall and winter of 1786, which were later used as evidence at his trial before the Supreme Judicial Court. “Some brief

⁶⁵ Whiting’s pamphlet in support of the Massachusetts state government’s authority during the constitutional crisis is notable for the marked contrast it presents to his later stance during the Regulation. See William Whiting, “An Address to the Inhabitants of Berkshire County, Mass,” in Hyeneman and Lutz, *Political Writings* Vol. 1, 455–479.

Remarks on the present State of publick affairs,” was composed just prior to the armed interruption of the Court of Common Pleas that was scheduled to meet at the Great Barrington Courthouse in mid-September. It was during this appointed time that Justice Whiting and three other judges were prevented from conducting the scheduled business of the court by armed insurgents who had seized the Courthouse prior to the Judges’ arrival and demanded that the justices sign an agreement to not sit “until the Constitution of Government shall be revised or a new one made.”⁶⁶ “Some brief Remarks,” written for publication as one of a series of proposed articles pseudonymously signed as “Gracchus,” was drafted, according to Whiting, to “Sooth and Quiet” the uneasiness of those who wanted to interrupt the court by letting them know his sympathetic sentiments in the hopes that they “would Engage that the Court would be permitted to set in peace.”⁶⁷ This initial article, as well as a longer and more substantive manuscript drafted in December and comprised of remarks that may have been publicly delivered before a November County Convention titled, “Some Remarks on the Conduct of the Inhabitants of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in Interrupting the Siting of the Judicial Courts in Several Counties in that State,” offers an account of the Regulation sensed as an instance of dissensus and provides us with an example of how an insurrectionary democratic politics may disrupt a picture of political reality and challenge a public to rethink their political order. To read Dr. Whiting’s words as an account of an event that disrupted the republican picture of parapolitics is to read them outside of the normal context of social history, and to understand how they present an account of a politics that reinvented

⁶⁶ Quoted in Riley, “Dr. William Whiting,” 125.

⁶⁷ William Whiting, “Some brief Remarks,” 131–135; William Whiting To Theodore Sedgwick, 13 September 1786, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 66 (1956), 135.

“...the relation between a situation and the forms of visibility and capacities of thought which are attached to it.”⁶⁸

In contrast to the publicly stated perceptions of the Regulation’s critics, Whiting did not perceive the political disturbances in question as the product of an undifferentiated collective agent characterized as an unreasoned mob of debtors driven by private interests that ought to be excluded from matters of political deliberation. Rather, the doctor took great pains to differentiate the varied types of people that made up the Regulators as a collective political subject. Rebuffing the slanderous utterances of a “Set of Designing men” that represent the “People who have been concerned in stoping the Siting of the Courts” as “a Profligate Licentious Banditi, Who wish to Destroy all Law and Government, that they may Live as they List and Do only that Which is Right in their own Eyes,” Whiting carefully distinguishes between the different persons that constitute the party of insurgents.⁶⁹ Making use of the marshal imagery of “Two Separate Corps in Battle” arrayed on either side of the conflict, we see on one side “...those who are for haveing them [the courts] Suspended untill a thorough Redress of Grievances can be obtained” while on the other we find “...those Who are for Supporting Courts of Law under the present Situation of our Public affairs...”⁷⁰ Whiting’s enumeration of the former begins with the “poor and most Laborious part of the people, Who having began the World with Little or nothing, were Necessitated to Contract Debts; and have now for Several years been almost Constantly Harrassed...” spending all their money on court

⁶⁸ Jacques Rancière, “Thinking between disciplines,” 9.

⁶⁹ William Whiting, “Some Remarks on the Conduct of the Inhabitants of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in Interrupting the Siting of the Judicial Courts in Several Counties in that State,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 66, 142.

⁷⁰ Whiting, “Some Remarks,” 142.

fees, interest rates to creditors, lawyers' fees, etc., ultimately finding that the "Small Pittance which Remained for the Support of themselves and families was but barely Sufficient to keep Soul and Body together, and their future prospects were an assurance that the same Tragedy would be acted over again the next year."⁷¹ But the poor are not alone, and it is not their particular hardships nor their private interests that define the subject of the Regulation as Whiting perceives it. Though his account highlights the tragic circumstances faced by the poor, "Some Remarks" stresses the presence and role of "...almost all the Middling, and a Great Number of the first Rate farmers, together with a Large Body of Reputable Mechanicks."⁷² Opponents of the Regulation had consistently perceived its partisans as an undifferentiated mass of debtors actuated by ignorance, vice, and privation resultant from licentiousness and profligacy during the Revolution. In light of this, it is significant that Whiting not only sees the constituents of the Regulation to be more varied than a mob of debtors – even those who are poor are thought to be so due to circumstances not of their choosing – but as a collective subject motivated by reasons of public interest and comprised of many

“...men Who have never, as yet, been harrassed With Executions themselves nor Stand in the Least feer of Criminal prosecutions but were Induced to act the part they are now Engaged in from What they at least Conceived to be motives of humanity and benevolence...From all this they have been Induced to Believe that there must be Some material Defect in the mode of our Judicial administration, and that it is much Better that the Courts of Law should be Suspended untill those Defects Shall be Remmedied then that the poorer Sort of the people Should be utterly Ruined.”⁷³

Whiting's remarks present the collective agent of the Regulation as being

⁷¹ Ibid., 142–143.

⁷² Ibid., 143.

⁷³ Ibid.

constituted by a sociologically and economically diverse array of persons united as a political subject in the pursuit of the public interest of economic, judicial, and political reform rather than actuated by mere private economic interests (tainted by vice or otherwise). They are presented as figures of a potentially legitimate insurrection rather than the nefarious agents of rebellion. This runs wholly counter to the assertions of both contemporaneous opponents and latter-day historians that, up until recently, have tended to uphold the view that most, if not all, of those involved in the Regulation were debtor-farmers.⁷⁴ Dr. Whiting's account suggests a disidentification at play in the politics of judicial interruption. Each constituent person noted in Whiting's account dis-identifies with their allotted position within the parapolitical picture by diverging from their individual status as a member of the deferential part of the people and uniting as a collective political agent articulating a public interest, thereby claiming a voice as an equal deliberative subject. In so doing, they dis-identify from the picture of deferential people and assert a new political subjectivity predicated on their collective taking-part in the equality and capacity for self-rule inscribed in the foundation of the republican order. Where opponents made sense of the agent of Regulation as a mob in pursuit of private interests, Whiting encountered a political subject that departed from this picture, one that acted as a virtuous equal republican people. His account of those involved in and supportive of the judicial interruptions provides a record of disidentification occurring in

⁷⁴ The historiography of Shays's Rebellion is replete with reductionist categorizations of its participants as debtors and poor farmers motivated by poverty and the general pursuit of debt-relief (though some accounts are more sympathetic than others). Examples of variations on this tendency can be found in George Richards Minot, *The History of the Insurrections in Massachusetts, in the Year MDCCLXXXVI, and the Rebellion consequent thereon* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1788); Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion*; and Gross, *In Debt to Shays*. Attempts to problematize, if not correct this tendency can be found in Richards, *Shays's Rebellion*; and Brooke, "To the Quiet of the People."

the event of Regulation, and suggests the power of potentially democratic extremism to challenge a picture of political reality by compelling the public deliberation of pressing concerns and political order itself.

These two sets of remarks can be read as further documenting a politics of disrupture because they evidence the recognition of a common equality of reason and a shared capacity for self-government distributed equally between the Regulation's opponents, partisans, and Whiting himself. These texts might even be said to take-part in the dissensus they record by offering a written mediation of Whiting's own disidentification and temporary emancipation from the parapolitical picture of republican reality. We can see this common recognition of a shared equality and a further dimension of disidentification in the way Whiting directly engages the insurgents in a dialogue that presupposes them to be equal political subjects possessed of reason and republican virtue. Unlike the public utterances of opponents who advocated for the harsh suppression of the Regulation and spoke only against the insurgents on the grounds that an unreasoned mob could know no language but force, Whiting speaks candidly to those who are for "stopping the Setting of the Courts" as the reason-possessing people of a "free Republican Commonwealth."⁷⁵ At times his words are stern, reproachful, and decidedly critical, such as when he admonishes the insurgents that "...if the people at large do not pay greater attention to the preserving their Liberties than they have done for several years past, particularly with respect to the Persons they chuse into the Legislature their liberties will be of but a very short duration," or that they ought

"...to be Sensible that your own Inattention to public affairs for Several years past, has been the principle Door through Which those Evils in Government you

⁷⁵ Whiting, "Some Remarks," 142, 147.

now Complain of have Crept in upon you; for had you Vigilently and Carefully from time to time, Exercised those Governmental powers Which the Constitution has placed in your hands...You might probabbly have prevented any occation for adopting the present Violent measures which are pursuing in this State for the Redress of Grievances...”⁷⁶

Though his words are critical of the violence, they ultimately record a sense of the justness of the demands articulated and a clear empathy with the logic underpinning the actions carried out by the Regulation as a political movement. They call to mind the colonial and revolutionary sentiment that insurrections are symptoms of deeper failings and as such, must be examined for the good of the body politic, and they suggest an approach to politics that does not assume the total illegitimacy of post-revolutionary insurrection. That Whiting sought to understand the Regulation with his use of a language of equality, sympathy, and the possibility of legitimacy while ultimately determining that the violence of the Regulation was unwarranted (i.e., that it is *not* a legitimate insurrection) is an example of how reasoned deliberation does not necessitate legitimization. In both their substantive content and deliberate framing, Whiting’s commentaries record his agreement with the presupposition of the equality of the people of the Regulation, not as a mediated potentiality as in the parapolitical picture, but in terms of directly presupposing the equal distribution of reason and political judgment. By engaging the partisans and participants of the Regulation as a constitutively varied but united reason-possessing subject, recognizing their demands and goals as belonging to the category of public interests, and empathetically understanding the judicial interruptions, county conventions, and political disturbances as the actions of the people, Whiting’s remarks record and participate in Shays’s Rebellion as a politics of disruption,

⁷⁶ Ibid., 132, 151–152.

dissensus, and potentially legitimate — though ultimately unwarranted — insurrection.

Conclusion: Insurrection and early American Democracy

In 1798 William Manning wrote a wide-ranging but short treatise on government addressed to the “Republicans, Farmers, Mekanicks, & Labourers in the United States of America.” Among his many subjects, the Massachusite who “lived near wheir this affair hapned” and who had “received some frouns from the actors on both sides of the act” because he was opposed to their measures offered a brief account of the causes of the “Shais Affair in Maschusets.”⁷⁷ Referring to the armed judicial interruptions, Manning wrote that they

“...shook the government to its foundation, for instead of fatherly counsals & admonitions, the dog of war was let loose upon them [Regulators] & they were declared in a state of Insurrection & Rebellion. In these circomstances, the few ware all alive for the separte of Government, & all those who would not be continually crying Government—Government—or dared to say a word against any of their measures ware called Shasites & Rebels & thretned with prosicutions &cc. But a large majority of the peopel, thinking that their was blame on both sides, or vueing one side as knaves & the other as fooles, it was with grate difficulty & delay before a sefitient number could be raised & sent to surpriss them.”⁷⁸

Looking back on the chaotic event, Manning appreciated the insurrection as a reaction to legitimate public grievances, noting that “Under all these circumstances the peopel ware drove to the gratest extremity.”⁷⁹ However, just like Whiting, Manning ultimately viewed the uprising as illegitimate. The insurrection was a clear symptom of

⁷⁷ William Manning, *The Key of Libberty* in Samuel Eliot Morison, “William Manning’s The Key of Libberty,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 13:2 (1956), 242.

⁷⁸ Manning, *Key of Libberty*, 242–243.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 242.

failings in the post-revolutionary order on the part of both existing political institutions and their leaders, as well as the people who had not been properly vigilant and critical of political affairs in the region. Yet after the Regulation had been suppressed, Manning wrote that it had "...put the peopel in the most zelous sarches after a remedy for their greivences."⁸⁰ Having thrust the significant problems of political order, as well economic and judicial policy to the forefront of public awareness, the insurrection inspired popular involvement and deliberation in political affairs. Manning recorded that

"Thousands & thousands of miles ware rode to consult each other on the afaire, & they [the people] happily effected it in a few months. Ondly by using their priviledges as electors, Bodoine [Bowdoin] was turned out from being govenour (& in a few years sickened & dyed) & Hancock was almost unanimously Chosen in his rome. Many of the old Representitives shaired the same fate, & a full Representation sent to Cort from every parte of the State, which soone found out meens to redress the grevances of the peopel...So that everything appeared like the clear & plesent sunshine after a most tremendous storme."⁸¹

For Manning, this tempest of political extremism, brought about by economic, legal, and political woes compelled New Englanders to confront the violence of insurrection. In its aftermath, Massachusites vigilantly paid attention to their political order and popularly deliberated its actual and potential failings, while envisioning its ideal form. With sympathy toward the causes that gave rise to the insurrection and criticism of the failings of both government and the people, the Regulation appeared to affirm rather than undermine republican order, proving to Manning to be a "streiking demonstration of the advantages of a free elective government..." and demonstrating that "...a peopel may run themselves into the gratest difficultyes by inattention in elections..."⁸² Though

⁸⁰ Ibid., 243.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

sympathetic to the plight of the people who had taken up arms, Manning believed that the Regulation showed how a people could “...retrewe their circumstances again” only through public vigilance and electoral participation.⁸³ Challenged to understand the insurrection, he concluded that “This Shais affair neaver would have hapned if the peopel had bin posed of a true knowledge of their Rights, Dutyes, & Interests, or if the government had done their duty according to the oaths they ware under...”⁸⁴

The remarks of Whiting and Manning do not easily fit within the two dominant categories of contemporaneous public reflection on the Regulation. They are not utterances of condemnation by the so-called “friends of government” aimed at the irrationality of a supposed minority faction of the people, nor do they offer belittling sympathy for the ignorance of a misguided mass. Rather, these remarks speak directly to the Regulators in a manner that presupposes their possession of reason and their equality of political subjectivity departing radically from the parapolitical picture of republican political reality. Their words serve as evidence that events of political extremism have the power to push Americans to rethink how they make sense of their existing political reality. The reflections offered by Whiting and Manning demonstrate how much of a catalyst to public deliberation the Regulation proved to be and they are a reminder that moments of political extremism in the American political tradition have raised awareness of public concerns and ignited important public debates on matters of political order and policy. Confronting a political order with insurrectionary practices similar to those on which that order was founded, forms of political extremism may serve to spark public

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

deliberation over fundamental issues of policy and political order, requiring American citizens to exercise the faculties of public deliberation that are fundamental to a vigilant and involved democratic citizenry.

Chapter Four: Democratic Friends and Aristocratic Enemies

Extreme Speech and Popular Sovereignty in the 1790s Public Sphere

“The truth, I believe is the Democratic Society is only dangerous to Aristocracy, and her supporters, and the noise they make, are here dying groans.”¹

“...a Democratic Society—that horrible sink of treason,—that hateful synagogue of anarchy,—that odious conclave of tumult,—that frightful cathedral of discord,—that poisonous garden of conspiracy,—that hellish school of rebellion and opposition to all regular and well-balanced authority.”²

On an August day in Boston in 1794, the Massachusetts Constitutional Society held a meeting in Faneuil Hall to draw-up a circular letter outlining the group’s political principles with the intent of distributing the letter to other like-minded informal political associations and the general public. Though small, the political influence of the group had grown since its formation earlier in the year, and by August, their presence had begun to trouble ranking Federalist leaders in the area.³ Among those Federalists concerned by the group’s activities was Fisher Ames, a representative to Congress from

¹ “A MEMBER OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY,” *New York Journal*, March 22, 1794, in *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, ed. by Philip S. Foner (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 157-158.

² “Xantippe,” *Virginia Chronicle*, 17 July 1794, cited in Eugene P. Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790–1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 174.

³ See Winfred E. A. Bernhard, *Fisher Ames: Federalist and Statesman* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 235–236; and Massachusetts Constitutional Society, “Circular Letter to All Republican Societies in the United States, August 28, 1794,” *General Advertiser*, 6 November 1794, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 259.

Massachusetts. Writing to Thomas Dwight, Ames remarked that “The democratic club met lately in Faneuil Hall. This is bold, and every thing really shows the fixed purpose of their leaders to go desperate lengths. It is a pleasant thing for the yeomanry to see their own government taken out of their hands, and themselves cipherized by a rabble formed into a club. Thus, Boston may play Paris, and rule the state.”⁴ For Ames, the meeting of this informal political association was no less than a threat to the security of the American Republic. In September, Ames again took-up the subject of this sort of association, writing that the group was “born in sin, the impure offspring of Genet. They are the few against the many; the sons of darkness (for their meetings are secret) against those of light...their extinction is more to be wished than expected; and if they exist at all, it will be like a root of an extracted cancer, which will soon eat again and destroy.”⁵ Federalist criticisms of these small political groups often centered on their electoral activity – the possibility that Democratic Societies might engage in electioneering to undermine electoral gains of Federalist politicians – and their divisive rhetoric that undermined the deferential view of politics espoused by Federalist elites and directly targeted Federalists as enemies of the people. For Federalists, these self-identified democratic groups were nothing but divisive, zealous, Francophile conspirators that sought to seize the reins of government at both the local and federal level.

The use of supposedly divisive and marginalizing speech, and the practice of zealous intolerance in pursuit of popular democratic claims that such groups purportedly engaged in gets to the heart of a tension in the relationship between the public sphere and

⁴ Fisher Ames to Thomas Dwight, 8 August 1794, in Seth Ames ed., *Works of Fisher Ames* vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1854), 146–147.

⁵ Fisher Ames to Thomas Dwight, 11 September 1794, in *Works of Fisher Ames* vol. 1, 150.

democratic legitimation. On one side of this tension lies the liberal and deliberative democratic presumption of the need to shape and protect the public sphere as a unitary space of open and reasoned public deliberation. On the other side, zealous political actors subvert the aspirational or actual unity of the public sphere by stoking partisan differences and marginalizing opponents while articulating democratic claims. For the former, a unitary public sphere can help legitimate democratic order by carving-out a protected space for equal members of a democratic public to engage in unmolested and reasoned deliberative discourse over issues of public concern. With the latter, zealous actors subvert attempts to unify the public sphere and instead divide it into opposing camps of friends and enemies because they perceive attempts to unify as anti-democratic threats, the efforts of aspiring hegemons to lessen the role and weight of popular deliberation. Challenging hegemony over the public sphere, zealots engage in counter-hegemonic practices that marginalize and try to subordinate segments of the public they perceive as anti-democratic in the name of protecting spaces of popular democracy. The use of extreme speech and tactics on behalf of democratic claims challenges ideas about the value and need for tolerance in the public sphere because it complicates the presumption that democratic politics – even in its speech, let alone in its material actions – must practice tolerance or run the risk of subverting conditions necessary for legitimate democratic deliberation. It is in some sense a variation on the idea of “repressive tolerance” raised by Herbert Marcuse in his contribution to *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*.⁶

Speaking to the tumult of the 1960s, Marcuse argued that as long as the

⁶ “Repressive Tolerance” in *The Essential Marcuse*, ed. Andrew Feenberg and William Leiss (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 32–59.

conditions of universal equality and freedom from authoritarian or hierarchical oppression do not prevail, "...the conditions of tolerance are 'loaded': they are determined and defined by the institutionalized inequality..."⁷ So long as a society was shaped by repressive conditions, there could be no objective commitment to tolerance. Rather, "...the realization of the objective of tolerance would call for intolerance toward prevailing policies, attitudes, opinions, and the extension of tolerance to policies, attitudes, and opinions which are outlawed or suppressed."⁸ Tolerance, for Marcuse, was an explicitly partisan goal, a "subversive liberating notion and practice" but one that could only function as the necessary means of egalitarian deliberation under certain requisite historical conditions.⁹ For tolerance to function as an enabling condition of egalitarian – i.e., democratic – deliberation, historical conditions of repression and exclusion could not be dominant: "...the function and value of tolerance depend on the equality prevalent in the society in which tolerance is practiced."¹⁰ Articulating democratic claims, political actors might legitimately practice zealous and intolerant politics in the public sphere by pursuing the partisan repression of regressive or reactionary forces opposed to democratic claims or which undermine egalitarian deliberation.

Marcuse's exploration of repressive tolerance spoke to a political climate in the United States where revolutionary, reactionary, insurrectionary, and reformist political speech washed across the nation in a heavily partisan sea. His work took aim at a

⁷ Marcuse, "Tolerance," 35.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

tendency in public discourse to decry alternative political positions as extreme, violent, and fanatical. Yet what does the political outlook or tactic of fanaticism or extremism look like within the public sphere aside from the images of explicit violence and calls for physical violence commonly associated with extremism and zealotry? How can fanaticism be said to be exercised in speech? Is extreme speech simply passionate, uncivil, and unpleasant rhetoric or does the speech of the zealot *do* something? Does it reveal anything about the fanatic him- or herself? And how is extreme speech received by a broader public? In this chapter, I will examine how zealotry and political extremism, as forms of tactical political activity, operate within the discursive field of the public sphere generally and specifically with regard to the contentious public sphere of the late eighteenth century United States; a pivotal time in the historical development of what we might call, since Jürgen Habermas's pioneering work, the structural transformation of the relationship between the state and civil society.¹¹

Expanding on the significant work of Joel Olson in re-theorizing and reevaluating fanaticism, I will offer a descriptive account of a type of fanatical speech act or form of *illocutionary zealotry* by focusing on the zealous speech of democratic-republican actors and groups with particular attention to the private political clubs of the 1790s loosely denoted as the Democratic Societies.¹² Rather than focusing on their potential contribution to the development of a public sphere (as is often the approach of recent scholarship particularly focused on the Democratic Societies) or further supporting their

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991).

¹² See Joel Olson, "The Freshness of Fanaticism: The Abolitionist Defense of Zealotry," *Perspectives on Politics* 5.4 (2007), 685–702; and, "Friends and Enemies, Slaves and Masters: Fanaticism, Wendell Phillips, and the Limits of Democratic Theory," *The Journal of Politics* 71.1 (2009), 82–95.

status as a democratic subaltern counterpublic, I will argue that these actors practiced a divisive politics of democratic extremism. I suggest that the Democratic Societies zealously fought a counter-hegemonic struggle to frame popular understanding of the relationship between public opinion and the formal deliberations of the state, conducting this struggle in, and yet against the public sphere.

Against Federalist and elite sentiments about the nature, proper constitution, and restricted role of public opinion, Democratic Societies advocated a more open and pluralist public sphere with a greater participation and influence of ordinary Americans in matters of political deliberation. The Democratic Societies articulated the belief that in a republic, public opinion was the direct expression of popular sovereignty or the general will. Because they believed public participation was central to preserving the popular base of republican government, Democratic Societies sought to increase the level of political participation by ordinary Americans beyond their involvement in periodic elections. Because they understood public opinion as an expression of popular sovereignty, Democratic Societies also sought to increase the weight of public opinion on matters of formal policy decision-making. Not only did the Democratic Societies seek to increase the influence of public opinion, they also sought to influence its formation and strengthen the general will through political education. To this end, these political associations provided public and semi-public spaces for ordinary Americans to discuss political matters, and promoted public deliberation by disseminating political information and criticism through correspondence, public celebrations, and popular publications (e.g., newspapers, broadsides, and circular letters). Yet, in pursuing their goal of empowering public opinion and promoting public deliberation, Democratic Societies and other

democratic-republicans often engaged in forms of political speech – as well as organizational and social practices – that framed opponents as enemies and marginalized publics that they perceived as anti-democratic. While their goals and ideas reflect principles of popular democracy and a commitment to strengthening popular sovereignty through public deliberation, their political practices display markings of authoritarianism and zealotry, revealing the tense relationship that often exists between political extremism and the practice of democratic politics.

The writings of the Democratic Societies (as well as other democratic-republicans) afford us examples with which to examine the operation of zealotry as tactical political activity in speech within the public sphere and the fanatical perceptions that may guide it. Expanding on Olson's account of zealous "talk," I will argue that fanatical speech is more than just blanket agitation. Extreme speech makes use of language to prosecute a position of intractable conflict within the public sphere and the larger socio-political community. Employing speech acts that individualize the members of its audience, zealous speech divides a public in terms of friends and enemies at the level of the individual reader or listener, and marginalizes alternative and oppositional positions framed as antithetical to popular democracy. Yet, that such divisive and intolerant speech may arise from the tongues and pens of democratic actors, and suggesting that democratic actors may threaten the openness of a public sphere by attempting to marginalize other publics, as I contend was the case with democratic-republicans of the 1790s, raises broader concerns for democratic theory. To this end, I will introduce questions which the presence of democratic extremism within the public sphere raises for contemporary democratic theory. Ultimately, while the Democratic

Societies and other figures of oppositional democratic-republican politics may be rightfully understood as examples of popular democratic activism contributing to the structural transformation of a democratic public and a late eighteenth century public sphere, they ought also to be understood as examples of zealotry and political extremism on behalf of democratic claims and a struggle for hegemony within and yet against the public sphere.

Public Opinion, the Democratic Societies, and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic

Addressed to the editor of the *National Gazette* in April of 1793, a letter from the German Republican Society of Philadelphia, announcing its formation, remarked that “It would be to the advantage of Pennsylvania and of the Union if political societies were established throughout the United States, as they would prove powerful instruments in support of the present system of equality, and formidable enemies to aristocracy in whatever shape it might present itself...”¹³ Between 1793 and 1794 American popular politics witnessed the foundation of at least thirty-five such Democratic Societies across the United States, each formed with the avowed intent of raising public awareness about pressing political concerns of the day.¹⁴ Self-organized and popularly constituted from

¹³ German Republican Society of Philadelphia, “To Friends and Fellow Citizens,” *National Gazette*, 13 April 1793, in Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies*, 53.

¹⁴ Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 196. The actual number of Democratic or Democratic-Republican Societies throughout the 1790s has been a figure of some dispute. The figure of thirty-five societies formed between 1793 and 1794 is in-part derived from Eugene P. Link’s chronological breakdown of the number of societies formed between 1793 and 1798 which estimated the foundation of some forty-two Democratic Societies (see Link, *The Democratic-Republican Societies*, 13–18). Various newspapers of the period reported the foundation of other societies which have not been confirmed as having actually existed beyond the printed declarations and many Democratic Societies themselves publicly estimated the existence of numerous other fellow societies making the determination of a total number of societies difficult. Matthew Schoenbachler has estimated

among the ranks of the wealthy and the middle-class, the urban merchant and the frontier land-owner, the mechanic and the artisan, these societies declared their intent to foster the dissemination of politically-important information, provide public or semi-public areas of political debate protected from the spaces of elite deliberation, aid in the formation of public opinion, promote public deliberation, and stand vigilant watch over the deliberations of government and the formal deliberators charged with the powers of representative authority.

With a deep sense of patriotic obligation that typified the rhetoric of these organizations, the German Republican Society of Philadelphia proclaimed that “In a republican government it is a duty incumbent on every citizen to afford his assistance, either by taking a part in its immediate administration, or by his advice and watchfulness, that its principles may remain incorrupt; for the spirit of liberty, like every virtue of the mind, is to be kept alive only by constant action.”¹⁵ Likewise, and with explicit reference to the popular struggle of the American Revolution, the Democratic Society of Canaan, Columbia County proclaimed that “patriotic vigilance can alone preserve what patriotic valor has won.”¹⁶ The obligation to exercise public vigilance over government administration was a central principle of Democratic Societies throughout the United States, and it reflected an active and direct theory of popular sovereignty to which

that there were more than fifty such popular societies formed in the United States in the 1790s, accounting in his estimates for “Democratic,” “Republican,” “Democratic-Republican,” “True Republican,” “Constitutional,” “United Freemen,” “Patriotic,” “Political,” “Franklin,” and “Madisonian” named societies (“Republicanism in the Age of Democratic Revolution: The Democratic-Republican Societies of the 1790s,” *Journal of the Early Republic* (1998) 18.2: 237–238).

¹⁵ German Republican Society of Philadelphia, “To Friends and Fellow Citizens, April 11, 1793,” *National Gazette*, 13 April 1793, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Society*,” 53.

¹⁶ Democratic Society of Canaan, Columbia County, “Constitution, March 8, 1794,” *New York Journal*, 8 March 1794, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Society*,” 237.

Democratic Societies subscribed. Not content to confine public involvement in political affairs to the ritual of annual elections, Democratic Societies promoted the active and constant engagement of a republican citizenry. Their belief in the need to promote political participation in the form of public attention to public affairs followed from these groups' ardent commitment to the promotion and protection of popular sovereignty, which they held to be the basis of Republican government. Across the nation, the writings of Democratic Societies were rife with declarations of the popular nature of Republican sovereignty, a common tenet revealed in sentiments such as "All power originated from the people, and there can be no legal authority, but by their consent."¹⁷ Though the idea that sovereignty originated in the people was a popular, if not default, position in the early Republic, Democratic Societies tended to articulate an idea of popular sovereignty that was more actively wielded and constantly applied than in more conservative and Federalist accounts. Popular sovereignty was not an abstract means of legitimation appealed to as a way to ground the formal governmental decisions of a guiding elite. Rather, Democratic Societies described it as something to be protected and regularly exercised by citizens in defense of the Republic. Some Democratic Societies were so concerned with the idea of preserving and exercising popular sovereignty that they went as far as to argue that it was never actually surrendered or transferred to elected representatives, though popularly approved law could be considered to be a mediated expression of the people's power. In Vermont, "That no rights of the people are surrendered to their rulers, as a price of protection and government" was prominent

¹⁷ Democratic Society of the Borough of Norfolk, "Address to Friends and Fellow Citizens, June 9, 1794," *Virginia Gazette and Richmond and Manchester Advertiser*, 3 July 1794, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Society*, 348.

among the declarations that made-up the constitution of The Democratic Society in The County of Addison.¹⁸ This Democratic Society further declared that

“the constitution and laws of a country, are the expressions of the general will of the body of the people or nation, that all officers of government are the ministers & servants of the people, and, as such, are amenable to them, or all their conduct in office.–That it is the right, and becomes the duty of a people as a necessary means of security and preservation of their rights, and the future peace and political happiness of the nation, to exercise watchfulness and inspection, upon the conduct of all their public officers; to approve, if they find their conduct worthy of their high important trusts–and to reprove and censure, if it be found otherwise.”¹⁹

Though the Democratic Society of the Borough of Norfolk differed from that of the Addison democratic-republicans in admitting that “...mankind, by entering into the social compact, resigned to the society at large, all those natural rights which were necessary for the preservation and good of the society,” they believed just as strongly that the people retained most of their original power and had both the right and duty to exercise such authority. Even when delegating popular power to elected rulers, these Norfolk democratic-republicans promoted the active use of the public’s popular sovereignty, declaring “we claim a right, when those to whom power is entrusted, pervert it to the oppression of the people, to call them to an account, to reprimand, to displace and punish them for exercising that power which was delegated to them for the good of the community, to the destruction of their liberty and happiness...” In no uncertain terms, they continued that “...although, to redress these grievances, every lenient and emollient remedy should be applied, yet if from the obstinacy and perverseness of our rulers, this

¹⁸ Democratic Society in the County of Addison, “Constitution, September 9, 1794,” *Farmer’s Library*, 9 September 1794, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Society*,” 275.

¹⁹ Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 275–276.

should prove ineffectual, *coercive applications would be justifiable...*²⁰

In declaring their principles, Democratic Societies did not simply extoll the abstract necessity of popular oversight for the maintenance of republican government, they sounded an alarm against what they saw as the inattention of the public and its failure to exercise its popular power against the threat of aristocratic subversion. For the Democratic Society of Canaan, “the supineness of one generation, too frequently destroys the liberty, bought by the noble ardor of the preceding,” while the German Republican Society of Philadelphia observed,

“It unfortunately happens that objects of general concern seldom meet with the individual attention which they merit, and that individual exertion seldom produces a general effect; it is therefore of essential moment that political societies should be established in a free government, that a joint operation may be produced, which shall give that attention and exertion so necessary to the preservation of civil liberty...”²¹

In Virginia, the Norfolk and Portsmouth Republican Society adopted an explicitly alarmist and defensive tone. Closely linking their commitment to popular sovereignty and its defense of “equitable government” to the exercise of a “pure spirit of Republican vigilance,” they decried the “...inattention which many of our fellow citizens discover toward the dearest rights, privileges and immunities of freeman” as “a matter of serious concern and regret,” one which “behoove[d] men who are experiencing the blessings of liberty, to be ever on the guard against the machinations of those enemies to mankind.”²² This emphasis on public watchfulness was heightened for many Democratic Societies by the climate of both international insecurity and domestic subversion that they perceived

²⁰ Ibid., 348–349.

²¹ Ibid., 53–54.

²² Quoted in Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 9.

threatening the Republic and which they felt necessitated their efforts to promote public awareness and popular participation. For the Norfolk and Portsmouth Republican Society, Americans were blinded by “the imaginary security into which we have been lulled, by our remote situation from the combined despots of Europe and other considerations,” which could have “the most fatal tendency” and “if not to destroy our independence as a nation, at least... sap the foundation of that glorious fabric upon which our liberties rest—our free and excellent constitution.”²³ Democratic Societies avowed a commitment to popular political deliberation with sentiments that “it becomes Republicans at all times to speak their sentiments freely and without reserve,” but the call for popular attention and participation through vigilance and deliberation was made more pressing during a time of international crisis and domestic unease:

“...particularly at this alarming period, when we behold the Tyrants of the world combined, and every engine of despotism employed in making a grand effort to crush the infant spirit of freedom, recognized by our brethern of France... That it is the truth, not less notorious than it is to be lamented, that in the bosom of our own country we have men whose principles and sentiments are opposed to all free governments, that such are just objects of suspicion.”²⁴

Lamenting the “present crisis in the politics of nations,” the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia condemned the “European Confederacy, transcendent in power, and unparalleled in iniquity, [that] menaces the very existence of freedom.”²⁵ Yet in addition to international crisis, there were other causes of the current state of “apprehension and solicitude.” Echoing the sentiments of revolutionary republicans and New England Whigs during the revolutionary era, these Philadelphia democrats noted

²³ Quoted in Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, “Circular Letter to the Counties, July 4, 1793,” *National Gazette*, July 17, 1793, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 66.

that “the seeds of luxury appear to have taken root in our domestic soil; and the jealous eye of patriotism already regards the spirit of freedom and equality, as eclipsed by the pride of wealth and the arrogance of power.”²⁶ Emphasizing local matters of political distress and perceived anti-democratic threats, the Norfolk democratic-republicans declared that corrupted and wicked rulers,

“...have too great an ascendancy in our councils, for we see men at the head of departments, whose principles are repugnant to the right of man, we see others, even in a legislative capacity, who are unfriendly to their country, more attached to their own interest, and more influenced by lucrative motives than the good and happiness of their country...America now ranks as a nation, but such is the incapability of her councils, the imbecility of her laws, and the want of energy in her government, that unless some alteration is speedily effected, she will be a derision to every wise and enlightened nation.”²⁷

How were these groups to raise the public vigilance deemed necessary to defend the Republic against subversive threats at home and abroad? For the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, the answer was straightforward: “A constant circulation of useful information, and a liberal communication of republican sentiments” which were “thought to be the best antidotes to any political poison, which the vital principles of civil liberty might be attacked; for by such means, a fraternal confidence will be studiously marked; and a standard will be erected, to which, in danger and distress, the friends of liberty may successfully resort.”²⁸ Not only did the Societies seek to publish and circulate their political beliefs, observations, and public censures of policies and representatives, they often thought of themselves as private associations charged with the duty of investigation and self-education on political matters so as to fulfill a public duty to

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 349–350.

²⁸ Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 66.

educate and bolster the broader citizenry. It was a “necessary precaution for the patriots of these states to associate, animate and inspire the rising generation with sentiments, worthy the hearts of the heroes of the American revolution. Because,” as the Democratic Society of Canaan argued, “the political happiness of every enlightened people depends on their observance of the Democratical form of republican government, which is untenable without social union and communication...” and so they concluded “...we think societies formed for political investigation the best mean, at present, of answering the desirable purpose.”²⁹

Their practices of meeting to learn and deliberate about politics, publishing their views in newspapers, and establishing networks of correspondence through which different clubs could communicate with one another and increase the range of their publications testifies to the importance Democratic Societies placed on public opinion. Each of these practices were undertaken with the purpose of adding to, promoting, and shaping public opinion. In-keeping with their commitment to an actively asserted popular sovereignty in the face of perceived political threats, Democratic Societies gave tremendous weight to public opinion as the means by which vigilance was exercised over the formal deliberations of the state. For the Democratic Society of the City of New-York, “*Public opinion...is the foundation of all our liberties, and constitutes the only solid ground-work of all our Rights.*”³⁰ Fearing efforts to constrain the formation and influence of public opinion, the Republican Society of the Town of Newark declared that

²⁹ Democratic Society of Canaan, Columbia County, “Constitution” *New York Journal*, March 8 1794, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 237.

³⁰ Democratic Society of the City of New York, “Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States, May 28, 1794,” *New York Journal*, May 31 1794, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 179.

“the different members of the government, are nothing more than the agents of the people, and as such, have no right to prevent their employers from inspecting into their conduct, as it regards the management of public affairs.”³¹ For these New Jersey democratic-republicans, the freedom of each member of the public to formulate and express their opinion was a “right inherent in nature” one that “...never was intended to be surrendered to government.”³² They warned that “if the government possess an uncountrouable power over the opinions of the citizens, a tyranny of the most despotic nature may at any time be exercised, and the liberties of the people, laid prostrate at the feet of their public agents.”³³ Because “...the operation of public opinion forms one of the most important guards against a bad administration of government” the Democratic Societies sought to protect its expression and foster its formation rather than “...invest the public agents with the tremendous power of shackling the mind,” which would sweep away “every substantial pillar on which the sacred temple of freedom is erected...” and trample “that holy edifice with Goth barbarities in the dust, and with it the happiness of the great body of the people.”³⁴ The Massachusetts Constitutional Society described Democratic Societies – of which it numbered – as a “great bulwark” which could protect the people “against the artful designs of men, who are secretly endeavouring to destroy those fundamental principles of liberty and equality, on which are founded the happiness

³¹ Republican Society of the Town of Newark, “Resolutions Adopted Upholding Freedom of Speech, Writing, and Publishing, December 17, 1794,” *Woods’s Newark Gazette*, December 31, 1794, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 148–149.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

and security of mankind.”³⁵ These popular bulwarks were formed “...in order that the people should obtain the best information on all political subjects, and act with *efficacy* in their measures,” and instituted “...to harmonize the public mind, by becoming sources of authentic information, by which means the people become equally guarded against the ambitious and designing views of men both *in* and *out of government*.”³⁶ So committed to strengthening public opinion and promoting popular political education by informing the public, Democratic Societies believed that “*Information* is the great source of political knowledge, and the great cement of Society: while this is diffused the liberties of the people will ever be secure, and none but the dishonest will endeavor to check its progress, or attempt to annihilate the organ through which it is conveyed.”³⁷ So it was that the Democratic Societies should be understood not as political parties advancing particular candidates for public office, but as “conduits of ‘political knowledge,’ fabricators of an alternative political culture, a counterpublic sphere.”³⁸

Political theorists and historians of the early Republic have often sought to articulate the dynamics of this crucial period in the formation of American national identity and democratic order through an exploration of the discursive formation of Americans’ self-understanding of national identity and the acceptable operation of national politics. Often, scholars have examined this through the historical transformation

³⁵ Massachusetts Constitutional Society, “Circular Letter to All Republican Societies in the United States, August 28, 1794,” *General Advertiser*, November 6, 1794, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 259.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ John L. Brooke, “Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies: Voluntary Association and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic,” in *Launching the ‘Extended Republic,’* eds. by Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Hoffman: 273–377 (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1996), 316.

of the networks through which such discourse was made possible and the discursive spheres constituted by the flourishing of associational life and the proliferation of texts. In so doing, scholars have paid significant attention to the formation and content of a late eighteenth century public sphere and the development of its various publics and counterpublics. Much of this work is theoretically indebted to the historical and philosophical concept of the public sphere developed in the work of Jürgen Habermas.

Initially in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and then expanded and refined interactively with his ongoing work in the two volume *Theory of Communicative Action, Between Facts and Norms*, and elsewhere, Jürgen Habermas traced the eighteenth century development of a social space of rational discourse that mediated between the state and civil society, the public and the private, an area wherein “private people come together as a public” and simultaneously constituted this discursive space.³⁹ In this early work, Habermas philosophically, sociologically, and historically elaborated the concept of the *public sphere*, “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed.”⁴⁰ The public sphere was that which mediated between society and the state, the social space in which “the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion.”⁴¹ Nancy Fraser has summarized the Habermasian concept of the public sphere as designating

“...a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their

³⁹ See Habermas, *Structural Transformation; The Theory Communicative Action*, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983) and vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987); *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996); and elsewhere.

⁴⁰ Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article,” in *Critical Theory and Society* ed. by Stephen Eric Bronner and Eric Mackay Douglas (New York: Routledge, 1989), 126.

⁴¹Ibid., 137.

common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction...conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state...it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations...”⁴²

Historically, the public sphere as it developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the emergence of discursive institutions and norms that allowed for the separation of political discourse from the direct purview of the state. Habermas’s concept reflected a faith in the human capacity for reason and suggested its potential expression in the formation of a rationally determined public opinion capable of channeling public deliberative participation through influence on the state apparatus and political leaders. Habermas’s ideal form of the public sphere conceptualized this space as an autonomous arena in which reasoning subjects could articulate claims, criticize the validity of their own claims, and deliberate on those of others thereby discursively and rationally deliberating on political issues and the very framework of politics itself. Indeed, his historical inquiry into the development and permutations of the public sphere led him to conceive of the bourgeois public sphere as “...the sphere of private people come together as a public” subsequently confronting the ambiguous and absolutist domination of public authorities through the historically unprecedented medium of “people’s public use of their reason.”⁴³ Tracing the historical development of the public sphere in Western Europe ultimately led Habermas to revive the normative conception of the public sphere as a realm of ideal rational deliberation, but it also led him to conclude that the public sphere in the twentieth century faced the closure and disruption of its autonomy and

⁴² Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 110–111.

⁴³ Habermas, *Structural Transformation* (1991), 2.

thereby did not allow the communicative deliberation his conception of democracy entailed.

In Habermas's revised account, the public sphere is presented not as an institution or system, but as "...a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes)" wherein "the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public opinions*."⁴⁴ Conceived of as a network, the public sphere is outwardly characterized "by open, permeable, and shifting horizons," reproduced through communicative action, and distinguished through a communication structure that "...refers neither to the *functions* nor the *contents* of everyday communication but to the *social space* generated in communicative action."⁴⁵ The public sphere is unique in that it is a structure of communication engendering of a social space through and within its constitutive communication. This space exists when people acting communicatively meet in a situation which they simultaneously constitute and inhabit through their cooperatively negotiated interpretations.⁴⁶ This space of encounter does not simply preexist its interlocutors, interlocutors constitute the area in which they meet as an intersubjectively shared space: this "intersubjectively shared space of a speech situation is disclosed when the participants enter into interpersonal relationships by taking positions on mutual speech-act offers and assuming illocutionary obligations."⁴⁷ A linguistically constituted public sphere unfolds when actors encounter

⁴⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 360.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 360–361.

each other as active participants that reciprocally attribute communicative freedom to one another. The spatial nature of this abstraction may be simple and episodic, but such a space may be “expanded and rendered more permanent in an abstract form for a larger public of present persons.”⁴⁸ As Craig Calhoun has noted, the importance of the public sphere historically and normatively, “lies in its potential as a mode of societal integration” and “[p]ublic discourse... a possible mode of coordination of human life.”⁴⁹

Since Habermas’s initial study, historians, literary scholars, sociologists, and political theorists have all turned to theories of the public sphere in describing the development of the preconditions for democratic revolutions, political development, and legitimation in the eighteenth century, as well as the historico-normative role of popular civic participation and public opinion in the development of modern democracy. Notably, the trend in cultural history to explicitly utilize the concept of the public sphere in studies of eighteenth century American political and cultural development began with Michael Warner’s, *The Letters of the Republic*, which, by focusing on the production, circulation, and audience of printed texts, sketched the development of the public sphere in the seventeenth and eighteenth century American colonies and then newly independent states, demonstrating the development of a thriving public sphere of discourse among pre- and post-revolutionary Americans.⁵⁰ These studies have tended to make use of the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁴⁹ Craig Calhoun, “Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Calhoun ed. (1992), 6.

⁵⁰ Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). For critical overviews of historical studies of the different aspects of the public sphere in eighteenth century America see John L. Brooke, “Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXIX:I (1998): 43–67; and Bryan Waterman, “The Bavarian Illuminati, the Early American Novel, and Histories of the Public Sphere,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62:1 (2005): 9–30. More general discussions and interpretations of

Habermasian concept of the public sphere and the agenda of inquiring into its structural transformation so as to demonstrate the historical existence and development of the discursive relations that characterize a shifting public space of deliberation beyond the formal deliberations of government, and to generally explain the vibrant contests of eighteenth century politics. Some of this body of work problematizes Habermas's initial historical arguments and contradicts elements of his historico-philosophical project, particularly his argument concerning the corruption and closure of the public sphere as an arena of rational discourse over time.⁵¹ Though some studies may undercut some of the authority of Habermas's initial claims concerning the historical formation and normative contribution of the public sphere, the Habermasian concept and framework remains valuable to historical analysis and it persists as a tool in the scholar of early America's toolbox. Indeed, Bryan Waterman has suggested that "the narrative of competing partisan conceptions of the new nation's public sphere has been central to new cultural histories of partisan politics that, by looking beyond politicians and preachers to popular associations and newsprint, account for a broader public (or publics) than Habermas or his most influential followers had recognized."⁵²

this trend in cultural history to utilize the concept of the public sphere can be found in James Van Horn Melton, "Introduction: What is the Public Sphere?" in *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1-16; Harold Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians," *Journal of Modern History* 72:1 (2000): 153-182; Brooke, "On the Edges of the Public Sphere," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62.1 (2005): 93-98; and David Waldstreicher, "Two Cheers for the 'Public Sphere'...and One for Historians' Skepticism," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62.1 (2005): 107-112.

⁵¹ Works that have generally problematized Habermas's initial formulation and historical account of the public sphere, and from which he has subsequently modified his theory include Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere" in *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992); and Geof Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in Calhoun ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992), 289-339.

⁵² Waterman, "Bavarian Illuminati," 10.

As an interpretive model, the public sphere offers us a means to situate and categorize the various types of actors and the varying modes of activity that comprised the political life of the early Republic. It is particularly useful for conceptualizing modes of politics that occurred outside and at the margins of the state apparatus. Examining politics in relation to the public sphere allows us to attend to and account for the significant influence of culture and associational life in the development of the early American constitutionalized state and social order. It provides a great deal of analytical clarity with which to compare and speak of the dynamic and contentious relationship between a nascent civil society and a newborn republican government.

Adopting the general contours of Habermas's normative and conceptual model, historian John L. Brooke has proposed a revised model with which to interpret the public sphere and its relationship with the post-revolutionary American state. Though departing from Habermas's original formulation, Brooke's account, with its focus on persuasive activity within the public sphere, is in accord with Habermas's more recent formulation of the public sphere, which elaborates two stages of deliberation with the first consisting of opinion formation in the public sphere of civil society, and the second stage of will formation in the deliberation of the state which is shaped by the first.⁵³ In Brooke's account, the politically-relevant purposeful communication of eighteenth century Americans is usefully divided between deliberation and persuasion.⁵⁴ Deliberation is broadly understood in terms that emphasize an equality of condition and the formality of

⁵³ John L. Brooke, "Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and The Early American Republic," in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004):207-250.

⁵⁴ Brooke, "Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere," 209.

outcome, defined as “the structured and privileged assessment of alternatives among legal equals leading to a binding outcome.”⁵⁵ In contrast with the equality and formality of deliberation, persuasion is characterized by an inequality of condition and an informality of outcome. It is a mode of purposeful communication that often takes place in circumstances of cultural, social, and economic disparities between interlocutors, and unlike the formal, legal, and binding outcomes of deliberation, “a persuasive outcome is informal and often imperceptible.”⁵⁶

In this historical model, the state and its practices of formal deliberation that determine executive, judicial, legislative, administrative, and military policy occupy the center of political activity. This closed, seemingly impermeable and sometimes opaque domain of deliberation within the state apparatus is ringed (even constrained) by a more porous realm of deliberation in which an enfranchised public “are supposed to enact their express consent in the formal politics of debate, election, legislature, and courtroom: the constitutional-bound arenas of the making and administration of law.”⁵⁷ This realm of formal, normatively rational, public deliberation is interpenetrated by persuasion, and it is here in which we class the deliberative processes of jury trials, elections, and publicly binding legislative resolutions. This realm of public deliberation on formal politics is surrounded and penetrated by the incredibly pervasive presence of informal persuasion by political and cultural activity. Hence, for Brooke, “Formal ‘rational’ deliberation is intermingled in the public sphere with a much more pervasive, informal cultural persuasion. Each acts on the other: deliberation through political outcomes in law, and

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 228.

persuasion in informal political outcomes in language.”⁵⁸ In the domain of informal persuasion, actors may seek to realize a change in another actor such as persuading an actor to change their publicly stated opinion with the hope that this will translate into influence over a formal deliberation such as through the medium of voting, but all actors in the domain of persuasion are themselves subject to informal persuasion. For Brooke, “persuasion can be either hegemonic or it can be subversive, and it works most effectively when its operation is invisible to the persuaded.”⁵⁹ All of this is in-turn enveloped by the constitutionally protected ambit of civil society under the rule of law. We are left with a model of eighteenth century political life composed of concentric circles surrounding the firm borders of the internal politics of the state apparatus and radiating out with increasingly porous and interpenetrated domains of deliberation and persuasion until the frontiers of civil society run-up against the brute divisions between legality and illegality. Outside of this realm is the domain of force in which deliberation, persuasion, and politics itself is subordinated to the direct application of force. In this domain of force, the challenges of politics are interpreted, communicated, and confronted solely in terms of coercive force and violence, and political activity is interpreted and communicable only as insurgency, slavery, criminality, and the like.

It is within the domain of persuasion and informal public deliberation that we should situate the agents and activities of the Democratic Societies. These contentious political forms of private associational life sought to guide the formation of public opinion, keeping vigilance over the formal deliberations and deliberators of the state, promoting popular political education, and influencing the formal deliberations of the

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 209.

state through the informal medium of public opinion. The vibrancy of the public sphere as it has been portrayed by historians of the early Republic and modeled in Brooke's modified account was shaped by a variety of contentious conflicts inclusive of a central conflict over the nature of public opinion and the structure of the public sphere itself. This broad issue, and the threat against public opinion perceived by democratic-republicans occupied a place of primacy in the animating concerns of the Democratic Societies as evident above in, for example, the fears of the Republican Society of the Town of Newark. Approaching these groups, we ought to interpret their politics as a popular democratic politics. Democratic Societies, and democratic-republicans more generally, presumed the equality of ordinary Americans in their ability to understand and actively take part in matters of public concern. From this basic belief, they endeavored to build a community of equals in the sense that Democratic Societies sought to promote popular deliberation among equal individuals over matters of public policy thereby involving equal citizens in the communal affairs of the Republic and stressing popular political education to deepen the public's democratic involvement.⁶⁰

Since their initial formation and public announcements, the Democratic Societies were condemned by elite Federalist politicians and writers as wholly subversive of American order. The source of much of this condemnation is attributable to a particular challenge to the shape of the public sphere which the Democratic Societies posed against that of Federalists, as well as the counter-conception of public opinion these groups actively promoted and which had taken root among oppositional democratic-republicans. Describing the development of the American public sphere from the 1770s to 1800,

⁶⁰ See the overview of the basic criteria of "democratic politics" I put forward in the section, "What is Democratic Politics?" in chapter one above.

Brooke has argued that the mid-1790s saw a clash between a classical conception of a unitary public sphere backed by Federalist ambitions of having “‘but one opinion formed of all’ in a monolithic and hegemonic public sphere...” and an alternative radical republican conception of an oppositional public sphere.⁶¹ At the center of this clash over the nature and shape of the public sphere was a contest over the meaning and significance of public opinion itself.

Since before the founding of the Republic, public opinion had been a key component of everyday American life and politics, though its meaning and significance would undergo a contentious transformation as the eighteenth century wore-on. In the colonial period, public opinion, primarily in the sense of a commonly shared recognition of a person’s reputation, was key in determining social rank, particularly for colonial elites in a monarchical setting that lacked hereditary and legal titles of nobility for local aristocracy.⁶² Commonly held sentiments of a person’s character, family, accomplishment, and place in the colonial order buttressed individual social rank, estimated honor, and determined credit-worthiness, among other matters related to socio-political hierarchy.⁶³ As a society of patronage and a deferential political order, public opinion largely supported popular deference to elite political opinions and judgments. Even as the colonial era gave way to the Revolution, the “public,” in terms of having a public opinion on political matters, was largely conceived of as restricted to an elite, a line of thought reflected in John Randolph’s comment that “When I mention the public, I mean to include only the rational part of it. The ignorant vulgar are as unfit to judge of

⁶¹ Brooke, “Ancient Lodges,” 297, 309.

⁶² Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 38–39.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

the modes, as they are unable to manage the reins of government.”⁶⁴ In the post-revolutionary era, public opinion, as the aggregate sum of the people’s individual opinions on matters going beyond recognition of personal reputation, and encompassing everything from literature to politics, increasingly supplanted deference to elite guidance, challenging the quarantine of political deliberation to the purview of elites.⁶⁵ Americans of the early Republic faced what Gordon Wood called an “epistemological crisis” in which the dispersion of intellectual authority and the diffusion of individual determinations of truth underpinned a radical re-envisioning of the formation, determination, and influence of a general will capable of deciding the course of politics itself.⁶⁶

In contrast with Federalist visions of politics as governed by the constant application of relevant truths discoverable only by an elite of enlightened and reasonable men, democratic-republicans expressed beliefs that opinions on political questions were dispersed throughout the land and that the truth of such opinions could not be arbitrated by a select group of educated elites. Rather, the truths that ought to govern politics and win the deliberations of the Republic were to be determined by the opinion of the whole, the public opinion. Public opinion was the sentiment of the individual American “...multiplied by the number which compose the society...” and scaled-up to “...the

⁶⁴ Randolph’s palpable contempt was not necessarily the norm, but his idea of the public consisting of an elite was shared by many Revolutionary leaders. Quoted in Gordon S. Wood, “The Democratization of the American Mind in the American Revolution,” in *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*, ed. by Robert H. Horowitz (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986), 113–114.

⁶⁵ Wood, *Radicalism*, 361–365.

⁶⁶ C.f., Wood, *Radicalism*, 360–363.

majority of the whole nation, who give law to the community.”⁶⁷ The democratization and validation of individual judgment and its public expression became increasingly common, so much so that Charles Nisbet sarcastically remarked in 1789 that he expected to see popular books with titles such as “Every Man his own Lawyer,” “Every Man his own Physician,” and “Every Man his own Clergyman and Confessor.”⁶⁸ Against this “democratization of truth,” Federalists responded with vocal criticisms aimed against the influence and value of public opinion as an arbiter of political decision. At the most basic level, Federalists argued that “Truth, has but one side and listening to error and falsehood is indeed a strange way to discover truth.”⁶⁹ While a reasoned and virtuous elite could decipher truth and deliberate in the most rational manner so as to properly chart the political course of the nation, public opinion as the aggregate opinion of the whole was prone to include error, thereby leading political decision-making astray.⁷⁰ The perceived contention, error, and scandalous nature of public opinion so disgusted the Federalist, Theodore Sedgwick, that he felt it was “of all things the most destructive of personal independence and of that weight of character which a great man ought to possess.”⁷¹

It was the mission of the Democratic Societies to aid in the formation and defense of a public opinion influential in the political deliberations of the state and through which

⁶⁷ German Republican Society of Philadelphia, “Address to the Free and Independent Citizens of the United States,” *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, December 29, 1794, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Society*, 62

⁶⁸ Quoted in Wood, *Radicalism*, 361.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Wood, *Radicalism* 363.

⁷⁰ Even Thomas Jefferson, the great idol of democratic-republicans admitted that the people could not always be properly informed and were not always properly informed when driven to insurrection, see Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, 13 November 1787, in *Jefferson: Political Writings*, ed. by Joyce Appleby and Terrence Ball (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 107–110.

⁷¹ Quoted in Wood, *Radicalism*, 364.

American popular sovereignty could be directly and frequently exercised in the expression of a publicly formed general will. Such a mission was distinctly democratic because it predicated the rule of right and truth that was to govern national politics on the democratic dispersion of equal intellectual reason and authority on matters of public concern expressed in public opinion. Key in the conception of public opinion represented by the Democratic Societies was a dynamic of ongoing and active deliberation that positioned public opinion as a form of active constitution in matters of politics. In contrast to more conservative conceptions of public opinion in which it served as a periodic constraint on the legislation and statecraft of elites by holding them accountable through discrete regular elections, the more radical model that animated the Democratic Societies conceived of the active deliberation and popular oversight constitutive of public opinion to be a constant and continually engaged mode of popular political constitution-making. Indeed, the public vigilance over political affairs advocated by the Democratic Societies went well beyond electoral politics, stressing that "...in elective governments, the security of the people...is not confined to the check which a constitution affords, or the periodical return of elections; but rests also on a jealous examination of all the proceedings of administration, and an open expression of their sentiments thereon."⁷² Believing that "...rulers have no more virtue than the ruled," the "equilibrium" between ruler and ruled could only ever be "...preserved by proper attention and association; for the power of government can only be kept within its constituted limits by the display of a power equal to itself. The collected sentiment of the people."⁷³ For elements of the

⁷² Quoted in Robert W. T. Martin, *Government by Dissent* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013), 93.

⁷³ Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 62.

Democratic Societies, the continual formation and expression of an active public opinion allowed for the expression of a sovereign American general will constitutive of a democratic politics. With this we see the democratic ethos directing the political speech of these private associational groups. Subtending their often divisive and combative words was a counter-hegemonic effort to influence the formation of a public sphere radically divergent from that on offer by Federalist ideology. Against the democratic-republican efforts, “Federalists urged Americans to reject such Jacobinical ideas, focus on election day as the primary moment of political action, and leave the decision making up to their more qualified, chosen leaders.” Instead of constant political debate and action, “Federalists encouraged citizens to focus on private institutions—families and churches—as the primary arenas of virtuous action.”⁷⁴ Rather than an informal public sphere that consensually reached a single passive public opinion deferential to the leadership of elites except during elections and rare occasions of censure (the Federalist classical conception), the Democratic Societies sought a public sphere that would nourish the critical and democratically dispersed constituents of public deliberation so as to continuously, actively, and vigilantly check the formal deliberations of representatives before, during, and after elections. Such a conception of the public sphere necessitated efforts aimed toward the exclusion of the more repressive and unitary model promoted by Federalist elites, especially in light of the threat to the popular sovereignty of American republicanism which Federalists were perceived to pose.

The political rhetoric and activities of the Democratic Societies were often framed

⁷⁴ Seth Cotlar, “The Federalists’ Transatlantic Cultural Offensive of 1798 and the Moderation of American Democratic Discourse,” in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, Ed. by Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 277.

as a form of resistance to the perceived efforts by Federalists and other “aristocrats” to subvert the expression of popular sovereignty, be it through local corruption or the national subversion of public opinion and participation. Such counter-democratic efforts were understood by democratic-republicans as stymieing the formation of public opinion and disallowing it influence over the formal deliberation of the state. Historian Albrecht Koschnik has argued that “Federalists could not conceive of a separate state and public sphere and expected to see a unified, indivisible, and consensual public that extended the reach of the federal government and affirmed traditional elite rule.” In stark contrast, “the societies asserted the public sphere’s independence from the state and refused to accept limitations on public deliberation.”⁷⁵ Whereas Federalists held fast to a position that “did not distinguish between public sphere and government,” Democratic Societies “sought to claim the public sphere for unrestricted political expression,” a position that saw Federalists condemning them as a “competing or parallel government, as ‘Republican Societies in the midst of a Republican Government.’”⁷⁶

Faced with alarming criticism by Federalists writers about their illegitimacy – which only increased with the backlash against them during and immediately following the Whiskey Rebellion – Democratic Societies often framed their critics, not as an equal opposition in the contests of the public sphere, but as foes of popular republican government itself. Responding to their critics, the Patriotic Society of Newcastle suggested that the “real aristocracy, the few who wish to govern will reply, that the societies will become dangerous; that they will corrupt and mislead the people and

⁷⁵ Albrecht Koschnik, “The Democratic Societies of Philadelphia and the Limits of the American Public Sphere, Circa 1793–1795,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58.3 (2001) 617.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 625.

instigate them to the subversion of the government,” but added that in making such criticisms against the Societies, critics “...unwarily drop the Mask...” and show that “...it is not the societies they fear, but *the people*; who may be corrupted by the societies, and stimulated to overrun the government...”⁷⁷ Against what they perceived as the counter-democratic ideas of a Federalist elite, the Democratic Societies advocated a democratic politics concerned with the organization and expression of popular sovereignty through the formation and promotion of public opinion and public vigilance. Yet, as we have already introduced above, the public speech of these democratic actors often took-on an extreme and confrontational tone. Examining this rhetoric more closely and in the context of a broad and contentious public sphere, I suggest that the speech of Democratic Societies often took the form of a politics of zealotry, giving voice to a form of democratic extremism in early post-revolutionary civil society, raising again the tense interrelation between fanaticism and democratic politics animating this study.

Recent scholarship has sought to illuminate the contribution of Democratic Societies to the creation or democratization of an American public sphere or as the early, if inchoate, progenitors of what would become American political parties. Even those scholars that have been critical of these contentious manifestations of associational life, noting their failure to properly open-up public deliberation, their illegitimate self-representation as speaking on behalf of the people as a whole, or their implosion as political groupings just prior to the turn of the century and the ascendancy of the Jeffersonian presidency have acknowledged their contribution or intent to open-up the public sphere and provide a democratic civic education to the everyday American of their

⁷⁷ Patriotic Society of the County of Newcastle, “Circular Letter to Patriotic-Societies Throughout the United States, n.d.,” in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 326. My emphasis.

time. Yet historians and historically-oriented political theorists have neglected the operative dynamics and implications of the zealous partisanship explicit in the speech of these ostensibly democratic actors. Focusing on the Democratic Societies general role of promoting a popular political culture, the reader of their writings could conclude that they are yet another fascinating instance of persuasive politics in the late eighteenth century public sphere, an influential and contentious agent of cultural and informal politics, and an instance of private, but politically significant, associational life outside of the state apparatus. Rather than non-partisan publicists of deliberatively-relevant facts or dispassionate promoters of persuasive reasoning, the politics of the Democratic Societies ought to be interpreted as taking the form of a zealous prosecution of intractable conflict in manipulative, anti-deliberative or, at the very least, non-deliberative, and coercive speech that better reflected the perceived mentality of the partisan zealot more so than the normatively rational and ideal deliberating member of a reasoning democratic public. Coming to grips with the political legacy of these often under-appreciated and under-studied agents of a transitional politics between the foundation of the Republic and the turn of the century requires us, as Jason Frank has remarked, to grapple “with their double valence as both fading remnants of a revolutionary past and harbingers of a partisan democratic future.”⁷⁸ As we will see, this double valence calls us to wrestle with both the onset of a democratic future and the furor of revolutionary zealotry. Far from the calm dispassionate speech of ideal deliberators, the political speech of the Democratic Societies, displayed the markers of extremism and zealous politics that actively subverted all attempts to promote a unitary public sphere and resembled a distinctly fanatical mode

⁷⁸ Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 130–131.

of political speech.

Zealous “Talk”

To begin to understand how zealous, extremist, or fanatical speech operates within the public sphere, we ought to conceptualize fanaticism and zealotry, not as a normatively determined category of irrational action, but as a form of intentional political activity. In his insightful re-theorization of fanaticism against what he labeled as “the pejorative tradition,” Joel Olson defined zealotry as “*political activity, driven by an ardent devotion to a cause, which seeks to draw clear lines along a friends/enemies dichotomy in order to mobilize friends and moderates in the service of that cause.*”⁷⁹ In this schema, fanaticism is understood as a mode of political activity that is explicitly driven by the commitment and avowed passion of the intractable political agent as true believer. Fanaticism is a “political mobilization of the refusal to compromise” and a “form of engagement that seeks not to come to terms with an opponent but to defeat it.”⁸⁰ It is willed and fueled by the ardent commitment of the zealot, proceeding undeterred and irrespective of “...boundaries of ‘respectable politics,’” characterized by the prosecution of a friends-or-enemies distinction, and typically engaged in “...activities that lie outside the boundaries of conventional politics.”⁸¹ Olson’s conception of fanaticism posits it as an approach to the prosecution of politics against, not only a specified enemy in Carl Schmitt’s sense of an existential threat that stands in the way of the zealot’s political objective and the *raison d’être* of its political identity, but the referent of *moderation*

⁷⁹ Olson, “Freshness of Fanaticism,” 688. Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁰ Olson, “Friends and Enemies,” 83.

⁸¹ Olson, “Freshness,” 689.

itself as a political category. In contrast with the extreme dichotomy of the fanatic's friend-or-enemy perspective,

“...moderation is understood as the middle of the political or moral spectrum, a willingness to compromise, and a bulwark against the extremes of the spectrum, which threaten social stability...the moderate asserts that the essence of politics is not conflict between friends and enemies but reasonable compromise to avoid extremes and maintain the ship of state.”⁸²

From the standpoint of the zealot, moderation is to be attacked as “a bulwark of oppression.”⁸³

The existence of the cause that motivates the zealot, the “wrong” that must be made “right,” is primarily attributed to the zealot's concrete enemy. But, in Olson's reading of this extreme phenomenon, though the enemy is the responsible primary agent of oppression “the moderate is culpable in her own way because her desire to trim between the opposing camps leads her to tacitly sanction at least some of the oppressive practices of the enemy.”⁸⁴ What results, is the fanatic's perspective of what Olson refers to as a “three-corner fight among friends, enemies, and the moderate middle.”⁸⁵ This three-corner fight entails a politics of contention against the primary target of struggle (the “enemy”), but accordingly involves a struggle against moderation itself, seeking to press those that would occupy the ground of moderation into the camps of enemies and friends, as a result of foregrounding the culpability of the moderate. The purpose of this is to “win as many moderates as possible over to the fanatical position and to push the

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

rest into the enemy camp in order to clear the way for a final showdown.”⁸⁶ Though predicated on the centrality of Carl Schmitt’s distinction between friends-and-enemies, Olson’s account of fanaticism subsequently develops this bipolar framework around three distinct categories, such that zealotry “actually implies three categories: one side of the duality (e.g., friends), the other side (e.g., enemies), and an unstable category of those who are presently neither” and he insists that “any dualism always has its ‘borderlands’ between contending sides.”⁸⁷

Olson’s emphasis on the category of moderate is crucial in his conceptualization of the target of zealotry, because part of what defines fanaticism as political activity is an explicit denial of the moral legitimacy of the middle-ground. Though the fanatic prosecutes the friend-or-enemy distinction against a specific primary agent of wrong (i.e., the enemy), it also prosecutes this distinction against those that seek to occupy a middle ground as a legitimate moral and political position. The strategy of the zealot whereby the moderate is confronted with moral culpability in an effort to gain friends from the body of moderates and designate those that remain as enemies, seeks to deny the legitimacy of any sort of middle ground between the persistence of what the fanatic construes as a wrong and the zealot’s goal of its elimination. Denying the existence of a middle ground effectively makes what could be understood as the middle ground in an issue of contentious politics “the site of political conflict rather than a refuge from it” and forces those that would occupy this middle “to openly choose one side or the other.”⁸⁸

One of the most theoretically refreshing and analytically useful contributions of

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 692–693.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 693.

Olson's work on fanaticism, zealotry, and extremism, is his attention, not simply to the physically and materially violent expressions of fanaticism against property and bodies, but to the operation of fanaticism in speech. Examining the militant abolitionist movement of the mid-1800s, Olson highlighted the tactical dynamics of zealous abolitionist discourse, particularly in the writings and orations of Wendell Philips.⁸⁹ Drawing on the work of Kimberly Smith, Olson conceptualizes Philips's zealous abolitionist discourse, not as a model of rational deliberation, but as a form of anti-deliberative discourse in which the aim was to foster empathy toward the oppressed with which the fanatic identifies and inspire empathy-motivated active zeal in the listener (thereby allying them to friends against enemies) rather than the verbal enunciation of rational deliberation.⁹⁰ The purpose of such zealous discourse is to turn a listener against the object of derision and animate them with the zeal necessary to oppose it. Philips's politics, as a form of zealotry are concerned with shaping public opinion, particularly through the anti-deliberative discourse of "talk."⁹¹ The concept of zealous "talk" emphasizes that speech ought not hold a subordinate place to the use of physical political power. Rather, "talk" is conceived of as a form of political power itself.⁹² The purpose of zealous talk is "not to deliberate in a reciprocal fashion or to turn enemies into adversaries. Rather, it is to forge a new public opinion...and through it to win the struggle between friends and enemies... *to increase political agitation in a struggle for*

⁸⁹ See Olson, "Freshness" and "Friends and Enemies."

⁹⁰ Olson, "Freshness," 691. See also, Kimberly K. Smith, *The Dominion of Voice: Riot, Reason, and Romance in Antebellum Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

⁹¹ Olson, "Friends and Enemies," 90.

⁹² *Ibid.*

hegemony...to mold public opinion and thereby shape the laws and customs of society.”⁹³ Zealous talk is to be tactically understood as a discursive means of agitation rather than deliberation or even agonistic engagement.⁹⁴ It is accordingly a tactic in pursuit of hegemony that “...does not presume a common ethico-political playing field. Rather, it constructs opposing frameworks and encourages conflict between them.”⁹⁵

Olson’s account of fanaticism, while making significant contributions to the descriptive re-conceptualization of zealotry as a form of intentional political action, inadequately addresses the role of the zealot’s perception in guiding his or her tactical actions. In so doing, it lacks an adequate explanation from perception and will-formation to intentional political action. To more fully understand fanaticism from the standpoint of the zealot and his or her enemy, as well as fanaticism as a strategic form of political activity issuing from and interacting with these perceptive actors, we must examine zealotry in terms sensitive to the underlying logic of the fanatic’s perception, terms that are explicitly conditioned by a logic of Schmittian political distinction. Olson’s account of the fanatic’s active drawing of lines, or the fanatic’s prosecution of the friend-or-enemy distinction invites the question of the perceptions and beliefs in which the fanatic’s political activity is based. To question the perceptions of the fanatic further invites us to question the reception of the zealot’s work by the surrounding public to which it is addressed.

As noted above, a definitive feature of Olson’s fanatic is that he or she seeks to draw a line between friends and enemies, and yet orients his or her zealous political

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 90-91. Emphasis in the original.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

activity as much towards actors aligned to the moderate middle as those already understood to be enemies. That is, the fanatic prosecutes the friend-or-enemy distinction and its conflict against those perceived to be enemies and moderates alike. Yet, I suggest that this characterization pays inadequate attention to the logic of Carl Schmitt's political distinction between friend and enemy which underpins Olson's account.⁹⁶ As a result, Olson's descriptive account of zealous talk does not adequately address the link between perception of the zealous agent and the action of political fanaticism (particularly in speech). The fanatic's strategic push to prosecute this Schmittian distinction is based on a belief that this distinction accurately characterizes political reality. The logic of the distinction between friend and enemy entails that when difference or disagreement reaches the intensity of identifiable existential threat, then all identity is determined by the distinction between friends and enemies, which is itself determined by one's concrete relation to the conflict. As a result, if the Schmittian distinction characterizes or is perceived as characterizing political reality – if a disagreement accelerates to the intensity of existential threat determining the identity of all parties to the conflict – there can be no moderate middle, there are only friends whose orientation or concrete political position in relation to the conflict is supportive of the struggle of friends and opposed to enemies, or enemies whose active orientation or concrete political position stands in the way of the goal of friends. In the eyes of the fanatic, there is no discursive conflict waged against moderates in an attempt to sway them to a cause. It is not that the Schmittian distinction admits of a borderland in which the moderate resides and which the fanatic targets through his or her fanaticism (as Olson's account suggests) but that the fanatic targets

⁹⁶ See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

only friends and enemies for he or she acknowledges only these poles and nothing in-between.

From this, I suggest that though fanatical political activity seems directed as much at a moderate middle as it is towards an avowed enemy, the fanatic does not actually sense (in terms of both sensing through perception and making-sense through interpretation and framing) the existence of a moderate middle, and subsequently ought not be said to *speak to* the moderate. Rather, the subject of address of fanatical speech must be framed in the binary terms of friends and enemies. The tactics of the fanatic characteristically seek to undermine the legitimacy of any possible formulation of a moderate position with regard to the wrong against which the fanatic struggles. Such tactics do so through a performative politics that asserts or constructs the nonexistence of the middle ground. Yet, with the middle removed as a perceptible grounding in the political conflict in which the fanatic is engaged and through which he or she perceives reality, we must ask to whom it is that the fanatic's tactical political speech is directed if it is not directed at an existing moderate as a distinct political position, and yet, appears to target the middle as an illegitimate position? All persons and publics to which the fanatic addresses him- or herself must, in accordance with the fanatic's bifurcated perception of political reality, occupy a grounded (i.e., *concrete*) position in relation to their collective identity, itself determined along an axis of friends and enemies. With the denial of the middle as an existent ground recognized by the fanatic, what is the public and who is the audience to which the fanatic's zealotry is performed in speech? If in the eyes of the fanatic, there are no moderates, then to whom does the fanatic speak? To address this question requires us to examine the public and dynamics of fanatical speech as a form of

political action. Accordingly, I propose to theorize fanatical speech in terms of speech acts and the public or publics towards which they are addressed. Doing so will advance our theoretical understanding of zealous and extreme speech by distinguishing its intractable, anti-deliberative, and antagonistic character from that of the deliberative reasoning associated with institutional communication (i.e., speech which occurs within and as a part of accepted politics) and the influence of a reasoning public sphere.

The audience to which the fanatic addresses him- or herself is always determined by its relation to the conflict or “wrong” that frames the fanatic’s reasoning and motivates political action. In accordance with this, the audience can only ever be composed of friends and enemies. The individual speakers and readers to whom fanatical speech is addressed, are perceived as friends and enemies on an individual level, and the speech of the fanatic aims toward the decisive individuation of the public to which it is addressed. As an audience, the public of fanatical speech may be made-up of unrecognized or unrealized friends and enemies that might be identified by others or that self-identify as “moderate,” but the fanatic never perceives this as so. The public to which the discourse of the zealot is addressed may be a sympathetic public of friends, a hostile public of enemies, as well as an always-open public, but it cannot be a specifically *moderate* public. If the fanatic cannot perceive the moderate as actually existing, to address a “moderate” public would be to address something non-existent akin to conversing with a ghost though one’s materialism forbids it. So the question is whether or not the fanatic ever actually addresses the moderate and what that might mean in a speech situation given the fanatic’s perception as determined by a friend-or-enemy distinction and the fanatic speaker’s inability to intentionally act towards that which he or she does not

sense.

The Public

Extending from the logic of address in a reasoned speech situation, the fanatic, speaking within the public sphere, can be said to be addressing, not the public sphere as a whole — which we might conceive of as *the* public — but *a* public, one that is distinct from any specifically bounded or determinate audience (e.g., the audience of a film in the physical space of a movie theater).⁹⁷ The sense in which fanatic speech within the public sphere is addressed to *a* public refers to a simultaneously personal and impersonal relationship between the speaker or writer and a semi-indefinite or indeterminate, self-organized, attentive, and temporally bounded audience, itself engendered by being addressed and formative of a social space of attentive readership “created by the reflexive circulation of discourse.”⁹⁸

For Michael Warner, “a public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself.”⁹⁹ The reality of a public as something communicatively addressable, its very existence, is partly a product of the mere fact of its being addressed, hence our understanding of its *discursive* creation. One of the advantages of using a concept of “public” borrowed from Warner is that it conveys both the breadth of the entirety of the social totality to which the fanatic’s perception, speech, and action extends (the possibility of an always open public, that public speech is always, in some sense, openly tossed-out for anyone to receive), as well as the more specific and contingent

⁹⁷ Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* 14.1:49–90.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

groups framed by the fanatic's perception and individuated by the fanatic's prosecution of the friend-or-enemy distinction. Though *a* public may appear to speakers and constituents as *the* public, (i.e., the broader social totality) this is a misconception because a public is never just the sum of persons who happen to exist or who exist as a certain empirical group, but is instead a self-organized body that is addressed in discourse independently of an external framework.¹⁰⁰ This element is crucial for the relation between *a* public and the broader public sphere because, as Warner contends, "the way *the* public functions in the public sphere—as *the people*—is only possible because it is really *a* public of discourse."¹⁰¹

One of the key dynamics that must be taken into account when examining any form of public speech (particularly in the case of argumentative or polemical speech such as zealous speech) is the indeterminate and potentially unpredictable composition of a public. In contrast with private speech that may be either personal or impersonal, "*the address of public speech is both personal and impersonal*," it must be taken as both addressed to us or the individual *and* the strangers to which the text speaks and to which we relate as mutual participants in the discursive space engendered by a public textual address.¹⁰² Warner's account emphasizes that a public may consist of agonistic interlocutors coupled with passive interlocutors, enemies coupled with indifferent strangers, and "...parties present to a dialogue situation with parties whose textual location might be in other genres or scenes of circulation entirely"¹⁰³ Public and private

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 51–52.

¹⁰² Ibid., 57.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 63.

speech are both contingent in terms of specific address but public speech is addressed to an indeterminate discursive space within a larger social totality. In contrast, private and singularly personal speech is directed toward a definite and personal singular audience. The discursive space of public speech is enabled by the discourse itself in which multiple groups and individual readers simultaneously develop personal and impersonal relationships with the public speaker or author and others within the discursive space. Public speech may address indeterminate multiple subjects at the same time that it personally addresses the individual. That is, public speech may simultaneously speak to you personally as an individual addressee, as an impersonal member of a larger audience, and as a semi-personal individual related to other members of the public audience by the very act of attentively and reflexively reading or listening.

With the zealous public speech of the fanatic (whether this fanatic be democratic or not), the purpose of engendering such a public does not lie in the creation of its unity, it is not to bring groups of individuals into an ideal speech situation and reconcile them through the deliberation of public reason as we might suppose the inclination of a democratic politics to be. It is also not simply to speak to a singular public of friends, nor a unified public of enemies. Rather, the purpose and illocutionary force of zealous speech is to individuate the constituents of a public into the camps of friends and enemies they are perceived to be in by the nature of their relation to the “wrong” of the fanatic’s political judgment. We will see that with zealous public speech, though the address may be open, the substance is offensive; though the writing might appear in wide circulation, its content is polemically divisive, intolerant, and manipulative. In this sense, the public to which the utterances of zealous speech are addressed is never a moderate public in

which sometimes harsh or hyperbolic deliberation is injected. It is always a reflection of the collectively determined, but individually reflexive, distinction between friends and enemies that determines the perception of the fanatic prior to the discourse initiated. The tactics of the fanatic are always predicated on bringing-out the friend-or-enemy distinction that is irreconcilable outside of the definitive resolution of the conflict over the “wrong” that motivates the fanatic’s zealotry. The political speech of the zealot extends from this by forcing the reflexive individuation of the constituents of a public in terms of friends and enemies. Hence, the tactics of the fanatic in speech ought to be an extension of this perception and are subsequently as fundamentally anti-deliberative as their Schmittian framework suggests.

By speaking to a public, the zealot is able to address both a broad reflective segment of the greater social totality, as well as the individual subject. Fanatical speech speaks to the indeterminate collective audience it enables and the individual reader whose individual and predetermined status as friend or enemy the fanatic seeks to bring-out. A public thereby provides a space in which zealous speech may work to individuate members of the broader social totality. This individuation is a primary dimension of the illocutionary force of zealous speech which confronts the individual constituent of the public audience with their own personal relation to the central “wrong” or conflict animating the zealot. This dynamic of individuation, by which a member of a public is individually confronted, is the core performative dimension of fanatical speech which derives its performative meaning from what the language employed actually *does* or the work it performs. In this case, zealous speech is used to individuate its public and compel the reflexive identification of the individual in terms of the fanatic’s friend-or-enemy

distinction.

Zealous speech, just as with Olson's conception of zealous "talk," is in part a form of agitation, but in its address to a public, the quality of agitation serves the performance of individuation and confrontation rather than empathy. Fanatical speech addresses a public to promote an individuated reflexivity through which readers and listeners would understand themselves as the individual friends and enemies of the fanatic's binary perception and relative to the wrong articulated in the zealot's discourse. It attempts to form a relationship of individuation with its audience and seeks to establish or reinforce communities of division. Though they do not necessarily eschew all deliberative speech, speech acts of extremism are primarily anti-deliberative, employing language to performatively deny the middle ground and individuate the public in the zealot's binary terms. Fanatical speech performs an assertion of the constitution of political reality, forces the self-reflection and active declaration of friends, asserts the existence of enemies and compels individuals to recognize them, and broadly manipulates the public sphere through the marginalization and exclusion of supposed enemies. All of which aims toward the advancement of hegemony over public perception of the constitution of reality, ultimately in service of radically diverging from a majoritarian or persistent ethico-political order to which the zealot is opposed.

The Performance

Remarking that "Experience has shewn, that, the hope of impunity, has tended to the encouragement of crimes, in public, even more than in private life" and that "the man, who virtue may not restrain from the breach of an important public trust, may be awed by

the vigilant and piercing eye of his fellow citizens,” the Democratic Society of Kentucky declared its commitment to characteristic procedural and general aims of Democratic Societies: “to disseminate those principles [of vigilance], and to conciliate affectionate sentiments towards each other among their Democratic fellow citizens.” To accomplish such tasks and like many other Societies, the Kentucky society proposed, “not only to discuss the proceedings of Government, but to examine into the conduct of its officers in every department...” and “...discuss and examine with candor, but with the firmness and freedom becoming citizens, zeallus for the liberties of their country.”¹⁰⁴ Though diverse in their socio-economic status and geographic distribution, Democratic Societies largely shared a common associational form (private clubs with elected membership and evening meetings), networks of communication (establishing committees of correspondence like their revolutionary antecedents), and linguistic habits (the resort to a common rhetoric of revolution, liberty, and citizenship). Above all, these groups shared a commitment to the promotion and preservation of active popular sovereignty and the political principles they identified with the American Revolution – and which they saw reflected in the French Revolution. This commitment was paired to a defense of Franco-American revolutionary politics, and an opposition to the perceived betrayal of such principles in the policies of George Washington’s increasingly Federalist administration – not to mention the political designs of their most public foe, Alexander Hamilton.

Looking at the writings of Democratic Societies throughout the 1790s we can see the zealotry of their speech at work as it was employed within the decade’s contentious

¹⁰⁴ Democratic Society of Kentucky, Lexington, Fayette County. “Circular Letter to the Citizens of Kentucky,” *Kentucky Gazette*, August 31, 1793, in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 358–359.

public sphere. Addressed towards a public seemingly comprised of friends, enemies, and moderates, the speech of these groups often set about linguistically prosecuting the Schmittian distinction between friends and enemies, democrats and aristocrats in the name of promoting and strengthening public opinion and popular oversight over the formal deliberations of the state. In promoting the active deliberation of the ordinary public over political affairs, Democratic Societies often employed divisive forms of speech that addressed a mass public and proceeded to divide this general public into publics of friends and enemies, and then further sought to marginalize – if not wholly exclude – opponent publics as national and anti-democratic or anti-republican enemies. To see this in action, we can begin by noting the audience toward which the public speech of the Democratic Societies was often directed, then move to look at examples of how their zealous speech individuated the constituent members of a public into friends and enemies. Finally, we will look to how the zealous speech of these groups can be read as marginalizing publics perceived as enemies by framing matters of public concern in the friend-or-enemy terms of supporting or opposing democracy and republican government.

The most recorded and visible activity of the Democratic Societies was the publication and promotion of their positions and principles in public printed form. Examining the contemporaneously published utterances (i.e., public letters, opinion editorials, broadsides and other signed texts or published records of spoken utterances) of Democratic Societies we see that the public addressed is consistently defined by its belonging to an active readership that is engaged with these texts. The audience of public address, where it was not a specific individual such as the editor of a newspaper or the

author of a recently published opinion editorial, was often wide and inclusive in terms of personal and political bonds. Addresses published in newspapers were directed toward “Friends and Fellow Citizens,” “Fellow-Citizens,” “Friends and Countrymen,” or the “Free and Independent Citizens of the United States.”¹⁰⁵ Such terms directed these utterances towards a public of indefinite address and openness where active attention to the discourse constituted a text’s public. Extrapolating from this, and noting the wide publication of Democratic Society writings in newspapers for public readership, the public to which the writings of the Democratic Societies are primarily addressed is an attentive and personalized public. This readership of an attentive public is open to any that would pick-up and read the signed utterances of these political clubs or “self-created societies” as they came to be pejoratively known, and there is no one that is specifically excluded from possibly being a part of this public save those that are unable to read or listen to the texts. The signatures with which these writings were penned, their manner of publication, and their mode of stated address indicates an attempt by the Democratic Societies to form a relationship between an individual or collective signatory author with as general and open a readership as might be attentive – indeed, it often seemed as though enemies were as much an anticipated audience as friends. In what we should understand as their zealous speech, the Democratic Societies intended for all to read and be a part of the public engendered by their public discourse so that what unites the audience or the public so discursively created is attention and engagement with a politics of democratic zealotry.

In their “Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States” published in

¹⁰⁵ See examples in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 55, 57, 175, among others.

May, 1794 in the *New York Journal*, The Democratic Society of the City of New York exemplified many of the dynamics of zealous speech through its individuation, denial of the middle ground, and framing in terms of friends and enemies.¹⁰⁶ With this public address, the association also sought to define itself against its political opponents by declaring its purpose, principles, and political identity. In-keeping with the tactical Schmittian outlook of the zealot, the association self-identified in terms that aligned the Democratic Society with the American Republic and the American people against the opponents of Democratic Societies who were aligned with conspiracy, elitism, falsity, aristocracy, and self-aggrandizement. The address as a whole can be understood as a performance of a public's individuation by the author. As a public text intended to be published around the young country by "The different Printers in the United States," the work is addressed to "FELLOW-CITIZENS AND REPUBLICAN FRIENDS" and its substantive utterances consistently issue from the standpoint of the first-person personal plural *we*. Throughout the text, the audience addressed is primarily a semi-definite public defined by the author's presupposition of readers as firmly "Republican" and wholly belonging to "the people" formative of public opinion (on which all rights and liberties are said to rest). The only departures from this explicitly designated audience are those instances in which the author performs an explicit address to the opponents of the Democratic Societies, responding to indefinite criticisms and supposed calumnies. Rather than interpreting this shift in explicit audience as a divergence or break, we ought to read the multiple audiences of republican or democratic *friends* and anti-republican or opponent *enemies* as constitutive of the text's mixed (between friends and enemies) and

¹⁰⁶ Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 171–181.

open public.

Throughout, the text effects a performance of individuation by addressing a public collectively defined by its presupposition to be republican readers at the same time that it addresses the individuals of an open public on a personal level as friends and enemies. Yet, though presupposed to be republican, the audience is consistently asked to judge the veracity of the text's assertions and to self-reflect on whether or not the individual reader accepts the way the text frames public debates over such issues as the potentially subversive nature of Democratic Societies, the importance of popular political education, the question of Franco-American relations, and even the character of those who oppose or differ from the positions of these political clubs. Framing matters of public deliberation (e.g., whether or not the United States should support Republican France or what role political clubs should play in popular politics) in the terms of friends or enemies, the text ultimately prompts the reader or listener to decide if he or she accepts the way issues have been framed and whether or not they recognize themselves as friends, as well as whether or not they recognize opponents and alternative perspectives as enemies. That is, the text asks whether or not the individual constituents of the public to which it speaks accept or reject the animating standpoint of the zealous democratic-republican: that the spirit of 1776 is threatened by the conspiracy of men who would restrict popular political participation to periodic elections and otherwise sever public deliberation from the exercise of political rule.

The illocutionary force of individuating the text's public, and framing matters of political discussion in terms of friends and enemies by performing the reality of the distinction and sometimes offering it as a sophisticated or anti-deliberative "personal

choice” runs throughout. Take for example its entreaty to “our *Republican* fellow-citizens, to determine clearly and upon good grounds, Whether *they* [opponents of the Democratic Societies] or *we* are most your friends; and the friends of our joint country and government,” or the fluid shift from individuation to collective affinity amongst presupposed friends: “Already, fellow citizens, you have doubtless observed the striking contrast between our sentiments, and the opinions of your [i.e., “our”] opponents.”¹⁰⁷

Throughout the address, the New York democratic-republicans attempted to reframe key political discussions of the day in terms that fall along the distinction between friends and enemies, vilifying alternative positions as elitist, anti-republican, anti-democratic, or aristocratic. Engaging the popular debate on American involvement or neutrality in the international conflict between Britain and Republican France, the Democratic Society of the City of New-York reframed the discussion of Franco-American relations from one between alternative positions on national security and foreign policy to the explicit terms of a conflict between republican friends and anti-republican enemies. Declaring “Yes, fellow-citizens, we take a pleasure in avowing thus publicly to you, that we are lovers of the French nation,” the authors identified themselves as the political friends of Republican France, sympathizing that “we esteem their [the French Republic’s] cause as our own.”¹⁰⁸ In so identifying themselves with the French Republic, they did not simply identify themselves as sympathetic friends, but emphasized that in their friendship with France, they were enemies,

“the avowed enemies of him or those who dare to infringe upon the holy law of *Liberty*, the sacred *Rights of Man*, by declaring that we ought to be strictly neutral, *either in thought or speech*, between a nation fighting for the dearest, the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 178, 180.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 175.

undeniable, the invaluable Rights of Human Nature, and another nation or nations wickedly, but hitherto (we thank God) vainly, endeavoring to oppose her in such a virtuous, such a glorious struggle.”¹⁰⁹

The New York Democratic Society was not alone in identifying itself with Republican France and framing alternative positions as existential threats to liberty and republican government. The Republican Humain Society of Portland, Maine declared that

“the cause of France is our own, that our Interest, Liberty and public happiness are involved in her fate, that we are bound to support her by every type of principle and gratitude as well as principle of self preservation. That for any man or set of men either in private or public, and particularly those to whom the welfare of our community are intrusted to advocate doctrines and principles derogatory to the cause of France or her commerce with America, or in support of the base measures of the combined despots of Europe, particularly that Piratical Nest of British is a convincing manifestation of sentiments treacherous and hostile to the interest of the United States and well deserves the severest censure from all true Republican Citizens of America.”¹¹⁰

Identifying themselves with France was an extension of their position as the political friends of liberty, republicanism, democracy, etc. In self-identifying as friends of France, they defined opponents to American support of the French Republic against its international belligerents not as opponents just of France but as enemies to liberty and the “sacred Rights of Man.” In so doing, advocates of American opposition to France as well as proponents of neutrality were swept-up in the vilifying frame as enemies of the founding principles of liberty and what was often described colloquially as the “spirit of ’76.” The vilification of opponents and alternative positions takes on an explicitly exclusionary tone in the address of the Democratic Society in the City of New-York meant to undermine and marginalize:

“If this is the language of treason, if this is the language of faction and sedition, come forward, ye votaries of opposite principles, ye stoical apathists, who can set with folded arms, with sullen silence, with unmoved composure, while the house

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 128.

of your next neighbor, your former benefactor, your only real friend, is on fire, without affording even one single solitary bucket of water, to aid in quenching the raging, the wide spreading flame; ye secret abettors of tyranny and despotism, ye hermaphroditical politicians...”

Though the text occasionally takes efforts to pull-back from the harshest talk of antagonism, such efforts are immediately undercut with a reinforcement of the basic binary of conflict. When the authors first write that “We would not be understood to mean, that every man who opposes our societies, is an enemy to this country, or even an aristocrat in his heart...” they immediately follow-on by reintroducing the frame of their opponents as unable to be republicans, the key position defining the political identity of the Society, stating “we most firmly believe, that he who is an enemy to the French Revolution, cannot be a firm republican...and therefore, though he may be a good citizen in every other respect, [he] ought not be entrusted with the guidance of any part of the machine of government.”¹¹¹ In the equivalence made between being an enemy of the French Revolution and not being a firm republican we also see a performance of the denial of the existence of any middle ground between republican and anti-republican, pro-French and anti-French, that characteristic action of zealotry and fanaticism to which Olson pointed.

At moments, the text of the New York Society borders on stoking populist rage, even suggesting the threat of popular violence – should constitutional measures fail – against those that might use the power of the state to suppress popular support for France and the exercise of vigilant public opinion. Speaking to its open public, threatening its enemies and emphasizing its popular force to friends, the text issues a dramatic warning to enemies to

¹¹¹ Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 175.

“be cautious! Could ye select, in this land of freedom, such an execrable group of judges and jurymen [who would condemn the Democratic Societies]...our brethren, who we now address, would not only rise as one man, and, by every constitutional method, prevent the iniquitous, the unjust sentence from being put into execution, but would, if they failed therein, open the sluices of their justly provoked wrath, and crush forever the nefarious opposers of these principles; principles which they know, we know, and you *ought* to know, brought forth the most glorious epoch in the annals of our country, the ever memorable 4th of July, 1776.”¹¹²

We ought also note this passage’s expressive declaration of faith in the rectitude of the author’s cause both in terms of a faith in the truth of the way in which reality is asserted and a faith in the inevitable display of popular support, that is, the devoted faith of the zealot we have seen before in the rhetoric of providence and assurance evident in the Massacre Day orations and elsewhere.

Framing their critics and oppositional government officials in terms of being explicitly anti-democratic, aristocratic, or tyrannical was a consistent feature of the circulated writings of the Democratic Societies, whether they were expressly penned for a wide public readership or as letters to be distributed among other associations. In one such circular letter concerning attacks against the Societies, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania targeted its public and governmental critics, linking them to aristocratic interests and subversive conspiracy, writing to fellow democratic-republican friends that, “It has ever been a favorite and important pursuit with aristocracy to stifle free inquiry, to envelop its proceedings in mystery, and as much as possible, to impede the progress of political knowledge. No wonder therefore that societies....should become obnoxious to *designing men*.”¹¹³ Noting the opposition they had faced since their founding, they

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, “Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793 to January 1, 1795,” in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 94. My emphasis.

remarked how “Our society with others established upon similar principles in this and the different states were early viewed with a jealous eye by those who were hostile to the rights of man.”¹¹⁴ Some democratic-republicans did not simply suggest that their opponents might be self-interested and conspiratorial “designing men” but even implied that those opposed to the formation of Democratic Societies or those that criticized them were remnants of aristocracy. For a New Jersey supporter of Democratic Societies, “It must be the mechanics and farmers, or the poorer class of people (as they are generally called) that must support the freedom of America; the freedom which they and their fathers purchased with their blood” because, as it was plainly evident to this author, “the *nobility* will never do it – *they* will be always striving to get the reins of government into their own hands, and then they can ride the people at pleasure.”¹¹⁵ Likewise, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania warned that “so indefatigable are the aristocratical faction among us, in disseminating principles unfriendly to the rights of man—at the same time so artful as to envelop their machinations with the garb of Patriotism, that it is much feared, unless vigilance, union and firmness mark the conduct of all real friends to equal Liberty...”¹¹⁶ So intent on exposing their Federalist critics as threats to liberty, they noted that “certain influential and public characters have ventured to publicly condemn all political societies” and warned that “[s]ometimes by a nice stroke of policy, or by a combination of some favorable circumstance, which the address of the Libercide turns to his advantage, the imposition gains ground...” and stressed that history “has taught us that this influence has too frequently given a death wound to Freedom, it is the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Republican Society of the Town of Newark, “‘Republicanism’ to Friends and Countrymen, March 19, 1794,” in Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Society*, 145. My emphasis.

¹¹⁶ Foner (ed.), *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 93.

indispensable duty of every man, who is desirous of enjoying and transmitting to posterity equal Liberty to guard against its pernicious effects.”¹¹⁷

Zealous Counterpublics?

That late eighteenth century America witnessed the bitterly contested hegemony of a single unitary public sphere by its more plural, yet divisively advocated, democratic-republican alternative brings us back to some of the arguments raised by critics of the Habermasian model. Echoing the critical historiography that challenged Habermas’s initial formulation in which the bourgeois public sphere was conceptualized in an ostensibly unitary manner akin to that of the contemporaneous Federalist conception, Nancy Fraser suggested that in the absence of formal incorporation for marginalized groups, “...there were a variety of ways of accessing public life and a multiplicity of public arenas.”¹¹⁸ For Fraser, the idea that marginalized groups were totally excluded from the historical public sphere (as critics of the historical subject of Habermas’s account may suggest) “...rests on a class- and gender-biased notion of publicity, one which accepts at face value the bourgeois public’s claim to be *the* public...” when “...the bourgeois public was never *the* public.”¹¹⁹ Rather, “...virtually contemporaneous with the bourgeois public there arose a host of competing counterpublics...there were competing publics from the start, not just in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Habermas implies.”¹²⁰ Fraser’s purpose in marshaling critical historiographic work on the

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 93–94.

¹¹⁸ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 116.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

emergence and shape of the public sphere was not to discount the utility of Habermas's concept, but to refine it so as to better reflect the contestatory interactions of multiple publics of varying positions in a more plural conception of the public sphere, one which maps onto both Habermas's Europe and the Democratic Societies' America. Rather than presuming the dominance of a particular bourgeois instantiation of the public sphere, Fraser insisted that "...not only were there always a plurality of competing publics, but the relations between bourgeois publics and other publics were always conflictual. Virtually from the beginning, counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech."¹²¹ In contrast to historiographical evidence, Habermas's initial account stressed "the singularity of the bourgeois conception of the public sphere, its claim to be *the* public arena, in the singular..." presenting a narrative of the development and normative value of the public sphere that was "informed by an underlying evaluative assumption, namely, that the institutional confinement of public life to a single, overarching public sphere is a positive and desirable state of affairs, whereas the proliferation of a multiplicity of publics represents a departure from, rather than an advance toward, democracy."¹²²

Working with this pluralized conflict-ridden understanding of the public sphere, Fraser developed the concept of *subaltern counterpublics* as a way of referring to subordinated groups that constituted alternative publics and to signal such publics as "...parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities,

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 122.

interests, and needs.”¹²³ Subaltern counterpublics situated amid conditions of a stratified society have a dual character where, “On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.”¹²⁴ For Fraser, the dialectic embedded in this dual character gives these counterpublics an emancipatory potential because it “enables subaltern counterpublics partially to offset, although not wholly to eradicate, the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of dominant social groups in stratified societies.”¹²⁵

Fraser’s concern was not simply or even primarily a historical one, focused on correcting the historical record of the shape of the public sphere. Rather, against Habermas’s initial normative-historical formation of a unitary (bourgeois) public sphere, she argued that a pluralized public sphere of multiple publics was more democratic. Her comments on the benefit of a pluralized and contestatory public sphere amid conditions of social stratification are worth quoting at length. Considering the case of stratified societies – “...societies whose basic institutional framework generates unequal social groups in structural relations of dominance and subordination” – Fraser argued that

“in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public...it is not possible to insulate special discursive arenas from the effects of societal inequality...where societal inequality persists, deliberative processes in public spheres will tend to operate to the advantage of dominant groups and to the disadvantage of subordinates...these effects will be exacerbated where there is only a single, comprehensive public sphere. In that case, members of subordinated groups would have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies. They

¹²³ Ibid., 123.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 124.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

would have no venues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not, as it were, under the supervision of dominant groups...this would render them less able than otherwise to articulate and defend their interests in the comprehensive public sphere.”¹²⁶

Fraser’s theoretical work on subaltern counterpublics has been appropriately used in recent interpretive approaches to the Democratic Societies and their historical context. Robert W. T. Martin has explicitly identified the Democratic Societies as counterpublics noting that their organization and political practices resembled the dual character of subaltern counterpublics articulated by Fraser. For Martin, the Democratic Societies experienced “...a tension at the heart of counterpublicity.”¹²⁷ Martin suggests that a primary activity of the Democratic Societies was to contribute to the creation of a democratic public sphere such that “Publicizing their constitutions, resolutions, declarations, letters, and addresses—and then calling on their opponents for a public response—all created the public sphere.”¹²⁸ Yet, the Societies “...were not simply writing essays and speaking at public meetings; they were creating clubs that met privately, with membership effectively restricted to like-minded individuals...The private space provided by the clubs allowed members to air their tentative views to a sympathetic audience and then hone their arguments before exposing them to public critique.”¹²⁹ This decision by many Democratic Societies to restrict membership and hold private meetings was seemingly at odds with their equal commitment to the democratic value of open debate, yet it was crucial in building the confidence of members in their political

¹²⁶ Ibid., 122–123.

¹²⁷ Martin, *Dissent*, 101.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

determinations formed at an organized remove from more dominant political forces.¹³⁰ For Martin, the privacy of closed doors and restrictive membership exercised by the Democratic Societies were part of the “...core values at the heart of the practice of counterpublicity: solidarity, confidence, and empowerment, all in the face of plural disadvantages, all in the service of effective dissent.”¹³¹

Martin’s account of the Democratic Societies as reluctantly instituting counterpublicity and Jason Frank’s contention that they enacted “populist republican politics and a confrontational public sphere” both compellingly contribute to the reevaluation of these groups beyond the common assumption of their status as the early forerunners of party politics, and both further support the interpretive understanding of these associations in Fraser and Warner’s terms of counterpublicity.¹³² Situating these actors thusly within the context of a highly contested plural public sphere as agents of counterpublicity and insurgent citizenship enables us to make sense of their political practices subversive of dominant political forces yet potentially marginalizing in their own right.

Conclusion: Zealous Speech and the Expansion of Public Deliberation

Examining the use of zealous speech by Democratic Societies is in contrast with other recent accounts, such as the work of Martin and Frank, but it does not disagree with this line of counterpublic categorization. Rather, it enriches our theorization of

¹³⁰ Ibid., 101–102.

¹³¹ Ibid., 102.

¹³² See Frank, *Constituent Moments*, 130; and Martin, *Dissent*, 98. See also Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780–1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), and Eugene P. Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies*.

counterpublicity and democratic politics to note the use of divisive speech by agents simultaneously addressing a democratic counterpublic and the greater publics at large. Focusing on the dynamics of public speech contributes to the project of a “critical political sociology of a form of public life” proposed by Fraser, which necessitates “...theorizing about the contestatory interaction of different publics and identifying the mechanisms that render some of them subordinate to others.”¹³³ The zealous speech of the Democratic Societies is a tool operating in the contestatory interactions of multiple publics, an element in the practices of counterpublicity. Yet, while zealous speech addressed in-part to a counterpublic might challenge the aspirations of a unitary public sphere on behalf of a plurality of publics, it may also be a mechanism that renders, or aims to render, some publics subordinate to others.

In-keeping with Fraser’s argument in favor of a plural public sphere of multiple publics and her account of the dual character of subaltern counterpublics, zealous speech serves the emancipatory potential of counterpublics by subverting the space of a unitary or aspiring hegemonic public sphere. Doing so supports the promotion of a public sphere composed of a plurality of publics which may in turn better promote participatory parity in socially stratified societies.¹³⁴ However, zealous speech serves this task by actively subordinating and excluding particular publics framed as enemies. This raises the concern of whether democratic counterpublics that employ zealous speech can do so as counterpublics that compete with and alongside the other publics of a plural public sphere, or if they inherently do so as counterpublics in pursuit of the selfsame dynamic of hegemony they oppose.

¹³³ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 128.

¹³⁴ C.f. Fraser, “Rethinking,” 122–123.

In her elaboration of the nature of counterpublicity, Fraser was quick to clarify that subaltern counterpublics are not always necessarily virtuous.¹³⁵ She suggested that “Some of them, alas, are explicitly antidemocratic and antiegalitarian, and even those with democratic and egalitarian intentions are not always above practicing their own modes of informal exclusion and marginalization.”¹³⁶ Yet, even when they may demonstrate anti-democratic or anti-egalitarian characteristics, counterpublics that emerge as a response to greater exclusion and marginalization within dominant publics “help expand discursive space.”¹³⁷ The expansion of discursive space may be an unintended consequence of exclusion by publics because, with the emergence of counterpublics “assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation will now have to be publicly argued out. In general, the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive contestation, and that is a good thing in stratified societies.”¹³⁸ Fraser’s point is crucial for joining the account of zealous speech elaborated above with the description of the Democratic Societies as agents of counterpublicity operating within a highly contested public sphere. Guided by a Schmittian logic and framing a public in terms of friends and enemies, zealous speech, though wielded by democratic actors, inherently practices a form of marginalization and exclusion exemplified in its anti-deliberative quality. Though it serves to disrupt the aspirational hegemony of a more restrictive and unitary public sphere akin to the Habermasian bourgeois conception which Fraser identifies with promoting “weak publics” – that is

¹³⁵ Fraser, “Rethinking,” 124.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

“...publics whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not also encompass decision making” – zealous speech does so by manipulating the communicative spaces constitutive of a public sphere, marginalizing and attempting to exclude alternative positions and viewpoints – behavior that seems to violate the ethos of a pluralist and open public sphere, and which differs from more tolerant and temperate non-zealous speech.

Directed at multiple open publics, the speech of the zealot enacts the identification, marginalization, and exclusion of constituents of its public that articulate or are presumed to articulate a competing hegemonic conception of the public sphere or particular public policies. Yet, even so, the use of zealous speech by democratic actors helps to expand discursive space. The divisive speech of zealotry and performative intensification of political differences may serve to expand discursive space instead of simply contracting it. This ostensibly counterintuitive dynamic works because democratic zealous speech works to individualize a collective subject of address in terms that include the reflexive recognition of democratic constituents on an individual level while it simultaneously identifies and marginalizes anti-democratic publics. Addressed as a democrat, a subject of zealous speech can be incorporated into public deliberation in response to his or her prior exclusion from public deliberation by a dominant and aspiring hegemonic public. The use of zealous speech, for all its performative manipulation and divisiveness, can expand discursive space because it demands that what a dominant or elite public excludes, occludes, or marginalizes (what Fraser identified as “...assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation”) must be publicly deliberated.¹³⁹ What

¹³⁹ Ibid., 124.

the Democratic Societies promoted as counterpublics is substantively important because of the way it forced public reconsideration of assumptions about public opinion and public political participation that were previously exempt from contestation. The re-imagination of popular sovereignty and public opinion that challenged Federalist and elite assumptions about the role and nature of public opinion expanded discursive space. That these groups helped to expand discursive space while also using extreme and divisive speech is significant for an additional reason. The way the Societies practiced intolerance, marginalization, and vilification of alternative viewpoints and publics is significant in its own right because it demonstrates that democratic practices meant to expand public deliberation and involvement may also display behaviors of exclusion and marginalization that would seem to run counter to the common presumption that democratic practice should not seek to marginalize and exclude alternative positions from debate. Thus we are left with the counterintuitive insight that some instances of clearly anti-deliberative discourse, such as the zealous speech of eighteenth century democratic-republicans with its vilification of alternative positions, may expand discursive space through its attempted marginalization of perceived counter-democratic publics.

Chapter Five: Faction's Jacobin Fanatics

The Democratic Extremist as an Object of Political Fear

“Democrat. One who maintains the rights of the people; an enemy to privileged orders, and all monarchical encroachments, the advocate of peace, œconomy and re-form.”¹

“It never has happened in the world, and it never will, that a democracy has been kept out of the control of the fiercest and most turbulent spirits in the society; they will breathe into it all their own fury, and make it subservient to the worst designs of the worst men.”²

In times of political uncertainty, we seek answers. Experts, politicians, and writers are quick to offer us their informed insights. Looking to their own anxieties, as well as ours, experts and leaders commonly seek out an object of fear and condemnation. Often, writers and politicians offer us a figure of political extremism as the object on which to focus our collective fear. Faced with perceived crisis or instability, we are rallied to combat the terrorist, the fanatic, the radical, or the zealot. The inclination to localize our anxieties on to a particular object of fear naturally follows from the human desire to make sense of our world. Moments of crisis and sensations of fear compel us to search for causes so that we might learn how to navigate uncertainty and confront our anxieties. But

¹ Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary* (New York: Thomas Greenleaf, 1796), 18.

² Fisher Ames, “The Dangers of American Liberty,” in *Works of Fisher Ames*, Vol. 2, Ed. by Seth Ames (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1854), 356.

localizing our collective fear onto a particular object or person is not without risk. The object could be the wrong one, the person could be a fiction, both could distract us from the real causes of our fear or from other, potentially more pressing problems and sources of public anxiety.³ When politicians and writers direct our attention to a particular object or subject of political fear, we must be critical and interrogate it. This is especially true when the object of horror is a figure of extremism and democracy. By its very definition the extremist positions him-or herself against the status quo order and politics as usual. But whether the extremist is a threat and the rightful object of political fear requires interrogation, deliberation, and judgment. The extremist always seeks to displace something, but what and in what way always requires further consideration. Examining the extremist as an object of political fear may teach us much about the object itself, but it may tell us more about the subjects that carry and preach such fear.

In this chapter, I look to a period of political uncertainty and interrogate the democratic extremist as a discursive subject of political fear. To do this, I examine the varied meanings of the term “Jacobin” as it appears in works of popular literature and political discourse at the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. By examining the politicized meaning of “Jacobin,” I interrogate how a figure of democratic fanaticism was constructed in the speech of American Federalists and anti-Jacobin writers amid a climate of contentious popular politics. I demonstrate how the use of “Jacobin” by these writers in reference to a specifically domestic figure – as opposed to something foreign and appropriately French – reveals the concept’s ambiguous referential substance and its use in gesturing towards a threatening political “other.” The

³ Not to mention, such mistaken objects of fear might have harmful consequences for those persons that may become the object.

Federalist use of the term “Jacobin” directly linked diverse negative phenomena such as madness, disease, violence, and even the demonic with general characteristics and expressions of popular democratic politics, thereby engendering a particular figure that could be spoken of, referred to, and to which agency was often attributed. As such an object of discourse, the American Jacobin became a figure defined by a particular combination of democracy and extremism: a democratic fanatic – a political subject whose substance in Federalist and anti-Jacobin discourse was ordinarily defined by the association of democratic beliefs and politics with conspiratorial fanaticism, extremism, and zealotry all within the same breath. Observing the creation and use of the American Jacobin in popular political discourse, I argue that for Federalists and American anti-Jacobins, this figure of fear obscured its substance and origins, and pushed consideration of popular democratic politics and populist democratic actors out of the realm of informal political persuasion and the constitutionally-protected public sphere, and off to the hinterlands on the border of civil society at the realm of insurrection, insurgency, criminality, and force – i.e., of de-legitimated politics.

First, I set the stage for the analysis that follows by looking at George Washington’s condemnation of “self-created societies” and the contentious congressional debate that ensued. At the center of this conflict was a debate over the meaning of “self-created societies” and the attempt by some politicians to fix the meaning of this term by connecting it to the perceived threat of popular democratic activism. The debate over the meaning of “self-created societies” lays bare early efforts of Federalist leaders to tarnish popular democratic activism with blanket accusations of being a threat to the security and liberty of Americans, raising the specter of political fear. Noting this discursive conflict, I

then move to the analysis of the figure of the American Jacobin that will occupy the bulk of this chapter. I begin by introducing the figure of the Jacobin as a foreign entity that threatened the stability of the nascent American Republic as it appeared in the popular press and American reprints of British and European anti-Jacobin texts in the early- to mid-1790s. Noting the regularity with which Americans discussed politics with reference to “Jacobins,” I look to popular political works in which the Jacobin as a foreign “other” was depicted in terms of its brutality, other-worldly violence, and cannibalism. I then turn to American anti-Jacobin works in which the Jacobin was explicitly linked to domestic politics and gradually became a figure divorced from its origins in Revolutionary France, transforming into a decidedly American actor of popular extremism and democratic politics. Focusing on the writings of Fisher Ames and William Cobbett, I map the constituent elements that make-up the American Jacobin as a feared figure of political discourse and deconstruct the way this figure associated violent extremism with democratic politics so as to denigrate and exclude both from reasoned public deliberation. Reasoning by analogy, I suggest that the American Jacobin is productively understood in contrast to both the eighteenth century disease of “Hydrophobia” and to another fictional but potentially substantive figure, the mythical half-rabbit half-antelope jackalope of American folklore. Expanding on these comparisons, I argue that the concept of the American Jacobin is capacious and flexible enough to be materially filled by the contingent democratic actors of the day, and that its use creates a space which may be voluntarily or involuntarily occupied by a democratic actor. Yet, even without a materially existent subject to directly refer to, “Jacobin” maintains the markers of political agency because it can be used to point to a *potentially* existent political subject

that may be a future or possible threat to the American political order. The use of this figure linguistically engenders a political subject with the capacity of exhibiting agency understood and spoken of as a democratic fanatic.

By examining what the fear of the Jacobin consists of and demonstrating that this figure does not materially exist, I reveal two related insights: first, that the American Jacobin is the product of a deeply felt anxiety and antipathy – a demo-phobia – towards democracy held by Federalists writers and politicians; and second, that this figure is an expression of a kind of political fear that takes public objects of democratic deliberation and political judgment (e.g., the nature of popular sovereignty and the concrete implications of this principle for voting rights, freedom of information, political education, and the role of the public in decision-making) and reframes them as non-political threats. This is not to argue that anxieties about democracy and political extremism are baseless nor that the Federalist fear of the Jacobin – or, for that matter, the democrat – was completely without merit. Apprehensions about the practices of popular democracy and fears of extremism are both theoretically and historically legitimate. Such apprehensions may even strengthen the democratic life of a polity when, confronting these fears, citizens are driven to understand the object and cause of their fears in a deliberative but apprehensive manner. However, if we understand the objects of our political anxieties as inherently non-political or anti-political and belonging to a domain of de-politicized antagonism, we may blind ourselves to the repressive and anti-democratic character of our fears, as well as strengthen, if not wholly create, objects of political terror. That is, approaching our political anxieties about democracy and extremism in de-politicizing ways may actually create the democratic fanatic, the

terrifying extremist, and the horrifying other of the anti-Jacobin imagination.

Critically interrogating the Federalist fear of the American Jacobin allows me to demonstrate how some kinds of political fears about popular democracy can work to de-politicize consideration of what democracy and democratic politics entails, their necessary conditions, and their concrete translation into policy and institutional organization. Uncritically relying on pejorative, invidious, and exclusionary descriptive categories to confront contingent appearances of disruptive democratic politics and crisis significantly impairs, if not wholly subverts, our capacities for reasoned political judgment as the constituents of a democratic public. When writers and politicians preach a kind of anti-political fear that de-politicizes its object in response to extreme and disruptive forms of politics, they distract or undercut public discourse by framing issues of disagreement and deliberation as matters of antagonism and combat.

Self-Created Incendiaries of Public Peace and Order

“...we cannot withhold our reprobation of the self-created societies, which have risen up in some parts of the Union, misrepresenting the conduct of the Government, and disturbing the operation of the laws, and which, by deceiving and inflaming the ignorant and the weak, may naturally be supposed to have stimulated and urged the insurrection.”⁴

On November 19th, 1794, George Washington delivered his Sixth Annual Address to Congress. Surveying the lead-up to the events of the Whiskey Rebellion on the Pennsylvania frontier, in which a 1790 decision of Congress to levy excise taxes on

⁴ Representative Thomas Fitzsimons as recorded in *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 2nd sess., 899.

distilled grain was met with violent protest and extra-legislative action, Washington informed the joint-session of Congress that “combinations of men who, careless of consequences and disregarding the unerring truth that those who rouse can not always appease a civil convulsion, [had] disseminated, from an ignorance or perversion of facts, suspicions, jealousies, and accusations of the whole Government.”⁵ In condemning the recent insurrection as partly a product of misinformation and incendiary speech spread by careless and conspiratorial men, Washington noted that “certain *self-created societies*” had played a key role in fomenting violent resistance to the enforcement of Federal regulations. In his address, Washington linked “self-created societies” to a recent instance of political extremism and insurrection, and it was his most public expression of an association between “self-created societies” and the fear of agents of insurgent extremism threatening republican government. Such an association had begun to emerge in Washington’s private correspondence as early as September through an explicit link to the Whiskey Rebellion that would be quelled by the end of October with the arrival of federalized militia troops.

In his letter of 25 September 1794 to Burges Ball, Washington wrote of the “...incendiaries of public peace and order...” and their

“attempts to spread their nefarious doctrines, with a view to poison and discontent the minds of the people against the government; particularly by endeavoring to have it believed, that their liberties were assailed, and that all the wicked and abominable measures that can be devised under specious guises are practised to sap the constitution, and lay the foundation of future slavery.”

Here, Washington described the insurrection in Western Pennsylvania as “the first ripe *fruit* of the Democratic Societies,” which he confessed he did not expect “would come to

⁵ George Washington, *Annals of Congress*, 788; 791.

maturity so soon.” Washington’s words here are instructive because, though private, they explicitly reveal the operations of the concept of “self-created societies” in Washington’s speech. In a lengthy, somewhat uncharacteristic, descant on the subject of self-created societies and an encomium on republican institutions, Washington wrote,

“...can any thing be more absurd, more arrogant, or more pernicious to the peace of society, than for self-created bodies, forming themselves into permanent censors, and under the shade of night in a conclave resolving that acts of Congress, which have undergone the most deliberate and solemn discussion by the representatives of the people, chosen for the express purpose and bringing with them from the different parts of the Union the sense of their constituents, endeavoring as far as the nature of the thing will admit to form *their will* into laws for the government of the whole; I say, under these circumstances, for a self-created *permanent* body (for no one denies the right of the people to meet occasionally to petition for, or remonstrate against, any act of the legislature) to declare that *this act* is unconstitutional, and *that act* is pregnant with mischiefs, and that all, who vote contrary to their dogmas, are actuated by selfish motives or under foreign influence, nay, are pronounced traitors to their country? Is such a stretch of arrogant presumption to be reconciled with laudable motives, especially when we see the same set of men endeavoring to destroy all confidence in the administration, by arraiging all its acts, without knowing on what ground or with what information it proceeds?”⁶

Such statements were again echoed in a letter written to Edmund Randolph in mid-October in which Washington remarked, “My mind is so perfectly convinced, that, if these self-created societies cannot be discountenanced, they will destroy the government of this country.”⁷ Two and a half weeks prior to his address before Congress, in a letter addressed to John Jay, Washington wrote that self-created societies “have spread themselves over this country, have been laboring incessantly to sow the seeds of distrust, jealousy, and of course discontent, thereby hoping to effect some revolution in the

⁶ George Washington to Burges Ball, 25 September 1794, in *The Writings of George Washington* Vol. 12, Ed. by Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1890), 465-466.

⁷ George Washington to Edmund Randolph, 16 October 1794, in *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 12, 475.

government” and detailed what would later be elaborated before Congress and the nation, that self-created societies “...have been the fomenters of the western disturbances admits of no doubt in the mind of any one, who will examine their conduct; but fortunately they have precipitated a crisis for which they were not prepared, and thereby have unfolded views, which will, I trust, effectuate their annihilation soon than it might otherwise have happened.”⁸ With his congressional address and private correspondences, Washington’s discourse set the initial standard by which the Democratic Societies, and any extra-governmental group of radical democrats, would be associated with the event of the Whiskey Rebellion and the specter of sedition, treason, insurrection, extremism, and fanaticism. Washington’s address provided an initial public instance in the formation of a Federalist framework for the repeatability of the concept of self-created societies in its pejorative and classificatory sense – a sense engendering of a figure of democratic extremism resounding here and echoed later in the proliferation of statements regarding “Jacobins” in the United States. In Washington’s writings, we begin to see how particular concepts were associated with a particular form of associational life in eighteenth century America, the Democratic Societies. Washington’s words also formally promoted a constellation of relations between forms, statements, and acts of democratic politics from the point of an elite cultural and political power: the presidency of the United States and the august revolutionary personage of George Washington.

Following Washington’s address to both houses of congress, an obligatory committee chaired by James Madison drafted a response. Though in previous years Congress’s reply to the annual address was an uneventful echoing of the President’s own

⁸ George Washington to John Jay, 1 November 1794, in *The Writings of George Washington*, 486.

words, Madison and the committee's response of 1794 ignited a contentious congressional debate – one that would move quickly into a broader public of American newspapers – over the meaning and implications of Washington's reference to “self-created societies” because, as Pennsylvania Representative, Thomas Fitzsimons noted, the initial draft of the Congressional response “...omitted all notice of so very important an article in his [the President's] Speech as that referring to the self-created societies.”⁹ Giving rise to a congressional debate that would last for more than a week, Representative Fitzsimons proposed that the House response drafted by the committee be amended to include that “...we cannot withhold our reprobation of the self-created societies, which have risen up in some parts of the Union, misrepresenting the conduct of the Government, and disturbing the operation of the laws, and which, by deceiving and inflaming the ignorant and the weak, may naturally be supposed to have stimulated and urged the insurrection.”¹⁰

In its broad outline, the general debate over whether or not to amend the House's response concerned four key debates: (1) a procedural debate over whether or not the President's address signaled the executive's desire to refer the matter of censuring so-called “self-created societies” to the House, (2) a broader debate about what “self-created society” referred to in general terms as well as the specifics of the phrase's use in relation to the recently quelled Whiskey Rebellion, (3) whether or not the House should censure the Democratic Societies (assumed to be the subject and referent of the term in question), and (4) the moral, political, and legal culpability of any or all Democratic Societies for

⁹ See Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America* (Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia Press, 2011), 190-191; and *Annals of Congress*, 899.

¹⁰ *Annals of Congress*, 899.

the insurrection in Western Pennsylvania. The formal debate that ensued ostensibly focused on the question of whether or not to mention the supposed role of self-created societies introduced in the President's address. However, a thicker description of the discourse must also see it as an instance of the formal and institutional dialogic elaboration of the meaning of the term "self-created society," as well as the relations between this term and utterances concerning, insurrection, private political association, the formation and role of public opinion, the forms of legitimate political opposition, and even the very limits of constituent power within a constitutionalized representative democracy.

Though ambiguities in the precise referent of the term "self-created societies" are present to some degree in the initial debate, the meaning of the term as referring to a particular object constituted by an association of dispersed relations was gradually solidified over the course of congressional deliberation. The referential ambiguities that remain at the debate's conclusion appear relegated to a split between two types of statements used in association with the term. On the one side are those statements that relate an association between "self-created societies" and *all* Democratic Societies, that would allow for some form of general censure by the House of all such associations. On the other side are those statements that segment the reference of the term to more specific associations between Democratic Societies that had been explicitly associated with the Whiskey Rebellion by participants in its suppression (or those Democratic Societies that could possibly be empirically associated with the recent insurrection in the future) and those that were not — a distinction that left unresolved the association of self-created

societies with insurrection, sedition, deception, and despotism.¹¹

The immediate response of congressional defenders of the Democratic Societies to Fitzsimons's proposed amendment stressed the inappropriateness of the House acting to censure the private gatherings and public opinions of American citizens, emphasizing that the legality of "self-created societies" hinged on whether or not specific groups and individuals violated the law. Initially questioning the meaning of the term, Representative William Branch Giles of Virginia "...entered into an examination of the propriety of the expression employed by the PRESIDENT, with regard to self-created societies" declaring that "...there was not an individual in America, who might not come under the charge of being a member of some one or other self-created society...The Baptists and Methodists, for example might be termed self-created societies" and suggested that if the amendment were passed and the censure delivered "Every pulpit in the United States might be included in this vote of censure." Though questioning the use of the term, Giles's comments are instructive because they follow the precedent of Washington's speech in associating the object of self-created societies with the Democratic Societies discussed in

¹¹ This acquiescence to the association of Democratic Societies as the operative referents of "self-created societies" spread throughout the discourse of some of the Societies' most steadfast supporters. Thomas Jefferson, commenting on Washington's address in a letter to James Madison, did not question whether Washington's use of the term did or did not refer broadly to the Democratic Societies, writing that "The denunciation of the democratic societies is one of the extraordinary acts of boldness of which we have seen so many from the fraction of monocrats. It is wonderful indeed, that the President should have permitted himself to be the organ of such an attack on the freedom of discussion, the freedom of writing, printing & publishing." Jefferson, beloved hero of many a democratic-republican and an increasingly vocal critic, like other critics, went on to contrast the denunciation of the Democratic Societies "whose avowed object is the nourishment of the republican principles of our constitution" with the Society of the Cincinnati (of which Washington was only the most prominent member), "a *self-created* one, carving out for itself hereditary distinctions, lowering over our Constitution eternally, meeting together in all parts of the Union, periodically, with closed doors, accumulating a capital in their separate treasury, corresponding secretly & regularly, & of which society the very persons denouncing the democrats are themselves the fathers, founders, & high officers." Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 28 December 1794, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* Vol. 28, Ed. by John Catanzariti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 228-230.

a way that places them under suspicion though Giles's statements ultimately defend them: "If the House are to censure the Democratic societies, they might do the same by the Cincinnati Society. It is out of the way of the Legislature to attempt checking or restraining public opinion. If the self-created societies act contrary to law, they are unprotected and let the law pursue them."¹² As evident in Giles's speech, and the record as a whole, the debate proceeds with the usage of the term "self-created societies" in direct relation to the Democratic Societies and expands out in relation to all supposed private political societies concerned with the public distribution of information or the formation of public opinion. Hence it was that even in a debate they would ultimately lose, Federalist habits of speech would set the terms of political dialogue.

A common feature of the Federalist construction of statements concerning self-created societies was the relation between the object of self-created societies and Democratic Societies with the definition of the Societies' *raison d'être* to be "the dissemination of improper sentiments" and the consistent censuring of legitimate government.¹³ Contending descriptive statements concerning the societies consistently assert the prevalence of censuring government in their public speech.¹⁴ Representative William L. Smith of South Carolina was careful to distinguish legitimate forms of public deliberation and the conspiratorial deliberations of self-created societies asking "...would any one compare a regular town meeting where deliberations were cool and unruffled, to these societies, to the nocturnal meetings of individuals, after they have dined, where they shut their doors, pass votes in secret, and admit no members into their societies, but those

¹² *Annals of Congress*, 899-900.

¹³ *Annals of Congress*, 901-902. See chapter four above for an overview of the activities of Democratic Societies.

¹⁴ See, for example *Annals of Congress*, 912.

of their own choosing?”¹⁵

Self-creation as a pejorative statement associating Democratic Societies and other oppositional or radical democrats with insurrectionary subjects of loathing (the “Whiskey Rebels”) and a sense of rootlessness (as in the contrast highlighted by John L. Brooke between Masonic “Ancient Lodges” and democratic-republican “self-created societies”) spread throughout the cultural and political networks of communication of the 1790s public sphere.¹⁶ Though its use was widespread, the tendency or capacity of this term to associate the political activities and utterances of constituent-formed “combinations of men” with the exclusionary grounds of zealotry, fanaticism, and extremism in considering democratic politics, lacked the simultaneous humor and terrifying sentiments of the concept of the American “Jacobin.” The term “self-created society” was used as a pejorative classification to categorize and refer to a certain type of collective political actor but, even in its inaugural and most specific application in Washington’s utterances where it was used to gesture toward supposed actual participants in the Whiskey

¹⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 901-902. Throughout these deliberations the legal ambiguity of self-created societies goes seemingly unresolved and the most prominent statements to this effect were the expressions of pro-Administration representatives that sought to censure the groups: “The question before the House was not whether these societies were illegal or not, but whether they have been mischievous in their consequences;” “These institutions are not strictly unlawful, yet not less fatal to good order and true liberty; and reprehensible in the degree that our system of government approaches to perfect political freedom.” (*Annals of Congress*, 902, 899.) This congressional debate is instructive in drawing the connection between the discursive object of the self-created society and that of American Jacobin, a connection made explicit by Representative William Vans Murray of Maryland who remarked: “The scene of their [self-created societies] birth-place was well adapted to the wholesome display of their powers. In France, where a Despotism, impregnable to public opinion, had reigned—where no channel opened a sympathy by Representation with the great body of the nation—those societies were admirably adapted to break down and subvert the old bulwark of habitual authority. But in America the case was widely different.” (*Annals of Congress*, 907.)

¹⁶ John L. Brooke, “Ancient Lodes and Self-Created Societies: Voluntary Association and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic, in *Launching the “Extended Republic,”* Ed. by Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1996), 273-377.

Rebellion, the term as a noun never actually names a specified existent object or determinate class of objects to which existent collective political actors could be grouped. The specific referent of the term is actively debated by pro- and anti-administration politicians, but though its meaning as referring to an objectively existent referent is never fixed, consensus emerges in its use to gesture toward an ambiguous form of oppositional associational life, the Democratic Societies. In the use of the term, we begin to see the linguistic construction of a figure of democratic fanaticism that is held-up by Federalists as an object of political fear to be combatted, not debated. An ambiguous and abstract subject of speech that will take-on a more invidious form with the increasingly negative use of “Jacobin” in the grammar of Federalist political speech.

A Den of Thieves and Jacobins

“*Jacobin*. Every man who dares to object to any [sic] part of the conduct of administration; every man who disapproves of the present war with France; and every man who wishes for a parliamentary reform and an equal representation of the people.”¹⁷

“...but the jacobins, like salamanders, can breathe only in fire.”¹⁸

By the late 1790s and early 1800s, “Jacobin” was on the tongues and pens of many Americans where earlier in the decade, the fear of insurrection, sedition, and misdirected populist rage had been largely identified with the Massachusetts Regulation

¹⁷ Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary* (New York: Thomas Greenleaf, 1796), 73.

¹⁸ Fisher Ames, “Laocoon, No. 1,” *Works of Fisher Ames* Vol. 2 (Boston: T.B. Wait & Co., 1809), 98. First published in the *Boston Gazette*, April, 1799.

of 1786–1787, the Whiskey Rebellion, and earlier associations with the denunciation of “self-created societies.” Much like the deployment of “self-created societies,” the “Jacobin” came to signify for Federalists an association between “democratic” politics and an impending political threat. “Jacobin” became a terrifying linguistic harbinger of an uncertain instability, a configuration of consonants and vowels that pointed to an ever-present wolf at the door ready to be loosed on the young Republic. As early as 1792, we see popular instances of the fear of the domestic Jacobin present in the private discourse of notable figures.¹⁹ Writing to Abigail Adams in early December, John Adams related an anecdote that had transpired among a large gathering of what were described as “Federalists and Antis, Whigs and Tories, Clintonians & Jaysites” that had met in conversation concerning the recent affairs of the French Revolution and had particularly sought to condemn the plans and conduct of the Parisian Jacobins. John related to Abigail that at the meeting “...a Jaysite and Federalist observed that We had Jacobins in this Country who were pursuing objects as pernicious by means as unwarrantable as those of France.”²⁰ John’s words were not the only ones written by an Adams relating such fears. Writing to his mother in August of 1793, Thomas (the youngest son of Abigail and John), related a first-hand account of the presence of American Jacobins, commenting that

“The people of N York many of them are raving mad with French Politics, & the sober part are asleep—or if awake dare only yawn & gape...The Coffee-House,

¹⁹ Though some historians of American and British anti-Jacobin sentiment have traced the use of the term “Jacobin” in its pejorative sense (without explicit reference to the Jacobin Society of Paris) to letters of Edmund Burke in 1793 which then transferred to its use by American conservatives, Rachel Hope Cleves has suggested that this pejorative sense contemporaneously and independently appeared in the United States at least as early as 1792. See Rachel Hope Cleves, “‘Jacobins in this Country’: The United States, Great Britain, and Trans-Atlantic Anti-Jacobinism,” *Early American Studies* 8.2 (Spring 2010): 410-445.

²⁰ John Adams to Abigail Adams, 7 December 1792. *Adams Family Correspondence*, Vol 9. *The Adams Papers Digital Editions*, Massachusetts Historical Society.

proper only for the resort of Merchants, is converted into a *den of thieves & Jacobins*, and the Citizen Mechanicks have deserted their Shops & occupations for the less arduous task of settling the affairs of the Nation.”²¹

These two recollections of the presence of the Jacobin in the United States are instructive, not simply because they convey the felt anxiety at supposed domestic presence of Jacobinism, far afield from its birthplace in Revolutionary France – a place that the staunch anti-Jacobin Federalist politician, Fisher Ames, would describe as an “...open hell, still ringing with agonies and blasphemies, still smoking with sufferings and crimes.”²² They also display two categorical moorings that thematically group the phenomena and concepts which the term will collect and associate with the specter of democracy as the contentious decade unfolds. These remarks show us the deployment of the “Jacobin” in a manner that points to or signifies both the domestic and the foreign, the private conspiratorial and the public mob, the criminal and the statesman, the symbol and the reality, the forewarning and the alarm.

American reactions to the French Revolution and its ensuing Revolutionary Wars were never univocal in either their optimism or pessimism toward the revolutionary event. Though widespread interest took root in the early Republic from the exhilarating first days of French republican furor in 1789, news of the September Massacres of more than 1,400 prisoners across France in 1792 marked the proliferation of dramatically divergent and polarizing views between opponents and supporters of Republican France. From its very beginnings, the contentious American discourse around the revolutionary event slipped easily from reference to the concerns of foreign wars and American

²¹ Thomas Boylston Adams to Abigail Adams, 10 August 1793. *Adams Family Correspondence*, Vol 9. *The Adams Papers Digital Editions*, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²² Ames, *Works* Vol. 2, 97.

diplomatic entanglement between the French Republic and her European foes to concerns of domestic political strife between Federalist and democratic-republican politics disconnected from the direct reach of the Jacobin Club in Paris. One key element of the earliest meanings of “Jacobin” for eighteenth century Americans – and enduring long after “actual” Jacobins existed in any politically viable sense – related the signifying noun, “Jacobin,” to the felt reach of a transnational French political conspiracy as it was said to have spread from its epicenter in Paris across Europe, to the political underground of the British Isle, on a direct path to North American shores. Whether the networks of Jacobin power were spoken of in the formal conspiratorial terms of a clearly orchestrated transnational conspiracy complete with designing puppet-masters, or the more common and subdued terms of domestic insecurity resultant from French political intrigue and influence over American public opinion, the site of outrage and rancor commonly originated with that of the body of the French Jacobin himself.²³ Here, the discursive object of the Jacobin body served as both (1) a terrifying object of publicly performed violence (gruesome and horrific in its own right) and (2) an illustrative account of the chaos to which Jacobin politics inevitably would lead. The image of the Jacobin as a horrifying figure was sensationally expressed throughout the decade in the scurrilous publications of William Cobbett among others, as well as translations and reissues of

²³ Augustin Barruel’s widely published *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire du jacobinisme*, is an excellent and influential example of the more formal model of Jacobin conspiracy that was popular in America, while William Cobbett’s, “History of the American Jacobins” presented a more reticent account of the international attempts of French Jacobins to influence foreign politics under the direction of a “Propogande at Paris.” Barruel’s well-known work was encyclopedic in its scope, presenting the French Revolution as a plot orchestrated by Voltaire, Rousseau, the Freemasons, and the Bavarian Illuminati in a bid to destroy monarchy and Catholicism worldwide. On Barruel, see Bryan Waterman, “The Bavarian Illuminati, the Early American Novel, and Histories of the Public Sphere,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62:1 (2005): 9-30; and Amos Hofman, “Opinion, Illusion, and the Illusion of Opinion: Barruel’s Theory of Conspiracy,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 27.1 (1993): 27-60.

William Playfair, Augustin Barruel, and Friedrich Von Gentz. Works such as *The Cannibal's Progress* and *The Bloody Buoy* epitomized the concerted attempt to depict the Jacobin as an embodied material menace that directly threatened the actual bodies of innocents at home and abroad. Such excessively violent but humanized depictions were sensational in their narrative detail of supposed Jacobin inhumanity. Yet depictions of the Jacobin as an object of discourse were not only concerned with the human form of the Jacobin as a figure of horror but often with sensationalizing the Jacobin body inclusive of its seemingly otherworldly passion, zealotry, and orientation toward epic violence which mixed with and inspired the violence (or threat) of American sympathizers.

The noun, “Jacobin,” relating a human body to a portrayal of dark otherworldly zeal or a demonic passion for violence and insurrection can be illustrated with reference to the satirical portrayal of the spirit of Faction said to guide the spread of Jacobinism in Europe and America as the creature was depicted in J.S.J. Gardiner’s 1795, *Remarks on the Jacobiniad*. Gardiner’s *Remarks* are a perfect example of the intertwined conceptions of the Jacobin as a body that could be mocked but must be feared, one whose physical form is both comically denigrated and yet linked to both the specter and actuality of popular violence. Composed as a critical and summary commentary on an epic poem, “The Jacobiniad,” *Remarks* contextualizes a vicious lampooning of a meeting of the thinly veiled “*Constitutional Society, (alias Jacobin Club)* at Boston” within an age of spreading Jacobinism. The “Jacobiniad” is said to relate the rise of Jacobinism, “its progress, its present situation in Europe and America; and describes the principal supporters of it in both countries.”²⁴ At the helm of the march of international Jacobinism

²⁴ J.S.J. Gardiner, *Remarks on the Jacobiniad*, (Boston: Wild & Greenough, 1795), 7-8.

we find the spirit of “*Faction*, the illustrious patroness of the *order of confusion*,” who “having visited the various societies, established in Europe, for the support and propagation of *jacobinism*, and encouraged them to persevere in the *glorious* cause... takes her flight for America.”²⁵ Offering a combination of excerpted verse attributed to the *Jacobiniad* and commentary detailing the narrative of the fictional poem, the divine Jacobin patroness, *Faction*, is portrayed as a demonic hag-like spirit, whose personage is described in verse as having “baleful eyes with frantic wilderness stare; A thousand snakes supply the place of hair: Of darkest hue, though marked with sanguine dies, Loose to the gale her robe funereal flies,” who, with a “...dread right hand, distained with civil gore, A thundering trump, of size enormous, bore: The blast, she blew, resounded wide and far, And roused the maddening populace to war.”²⁶

Faction is said to have arrived in America and visited various Jacobin clubs (notably self-styled as “constitutional societies”), held close conference with the infamous Citizen Genet, and finally flies to Boston where she is received with joy by her worshipers in the Jacobin Clubs whom she exhorts to “persevere in the *glorious* cause, and not to desist until they have destroyed the federal constitution, and reduced all things to the happy state of nature,” or as it is written in verse to “Strain every nerve, our sinking cause to save, Then shall no God alarm, no laws enslave, O’er these dread foes, our flag shall fly, unfurled, And we, my sons, victorious, rule the world.”²⁷ Notable in these last lines of verse is the explicit intent of *Faction* to sow confusion and dissent in America. Here, the fear of chaos in its own right is directly associated with the subversion of law.

²⁵ Gardiner, *Remarks*, 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

We see the association of Jacobinism with opposition to law in total, and with its thinly veiled critique of the Democratic Societies, the association of democratic-republicanism with opposition to all law. The democratic fanatic as the Jacobin – the conflated subject of both democratic politics and fanaticism – is not a figure associated with opposition or condemnation of a specific issue, legislative act, or regime within the bounds of accepted procedural politics, but with agency opposed to law itself. That is, the Jacobin is an enemy of republicanism and order not of a particular point of loyal or legitimate opposition. Even Shays’s rebellion is co-opted in this joining of all insurrection to the spirit of Jacobinism when the goddess is said to extol a “...gentleman, who is, it seems, one of her greatest favorites, for the unwearied pains he took to excite Shays’s rebellion, which she calls, ‘The glorious cause of RAPINE and of ME.’”²⁸

Gardiner’s personification of Faction as the divine embodiment of Jacobinism is noteworthy for its explicit emphasis on violence as a central characteristic of the nature of Jacobinism, and by extension, democratic-republican or popular politics. Faction extols her approval of violence, and the presence of compassion or humanity in the heart of a loyal American democrat and sympathizer is a cause for her apprehension;

“Though to my soul congenial is your zeal, In some weak moments have I known you *feel*, Rapine and murder dare to disapprove, And nearly sacrifice the cause I love. When by the stroke of justice, Louis bled, Did not your heart condemn the righteous deed? I saw, unseen myself, your cheek turn pale, Your eyes shed pity at the glorious tale, Cease, cease the deeds of murder to deplore, Or you and Faction must be friends no more.”

To which the sympathetic American Jacobin is compelled to reply that “though he could not but lament the cruelties of the French Jacobins, yet was he warmly attached to their

²⁸ Ibid., 9-10.

cause; and, that he was a friend to anarchy, and a foe to the federal constitution.”²⁹

Where Gardiner’s *Remarks* expressed the horrific zeal and will to violence of the spirit of Jacobinism through the demonic figure of the spirit of Faction, Jacobin tales of violence and cannibalistic imagery such as William Cobbett’s 1798 Philadelphia republication of *The Cannibal’s Progress; OR THE DREADFUL HORRORS OF FRENCH INVASION, As displayed by the Republican Officers and Soldiers, in their perfidy, rapacity, ferociousness and brutality, exercised towards the innocent inhabitants of Germany*, sensationalized the horrific body of the Jacobin as a physical French body terrifying by virtue of the violence which it spreads across Europe. The violence of the Jacobin was central to the discursive configuration of the threatening effects resultant from the presence of the Jacobin body and was particularly exhibited in terms of cannibalistic populist and military forms of violence. Drawing attention to the persistence of cannibalistic imagery spread throughout anti-Jacobin literature, Rachel Cleves has shown that this imagery signified the centrality of violence in the elaboration of the critique of Jacobinism. Noting that the trope of cannibalism had played a central role in redefining moral attitudes toward the use of violence in seventeenth century England, Cleves contends that a hundred years later, when Anglo and American “...anti-Jacobins launched attacks against every facet of the French Revolution—its mass executions, its mobs, its militarism, its religious persecutions, its assaults on property, its agitation of slaves—they turned again and again to imagery of cannibalism to reveal the violence that resulted from each Jacobin evil.”³⁰

For Cleves, the accounts of cannibalism generally signified the anarchic quality of

²⁹ Ibid., 13.

³⁰ Cleves, ““Jacobins in this country,”” 433-434.

Jacobin violence to the terrified reader.³¹ William Cobbett's anti-Jacobin publications, most notably, *The Blood Buoy*, were among the most grotesque and terrifying accounts associating Jacobinism with purported instances of actual cannibalism. Cobbett, an immigrant from England, had left his native country after leaving the British military and publishing works critical of military authorities. Fleeing to France, the onset of the Revolution drove him to America where he settled in 1792, moving to Philadelphia two years later. In Philadelphia, Cobbett became "a virulent antidemocrat indifferent to the corruption of English institutions and an enemy of all Frenchman except the king and his defenders, whom he championed because they opposed their base, frog-eating countrymen."³² Composing and publishing numerous anti-democratic screeds under the name "Peter Porcupine," Cobbett adopted a vicious stance of "high Federalism" and used his pen in constant defense of an elitist political order. Cobbett's grotesque and terrifying anti-Jacobin work in *The Bloody Buoy* includes a helpful table with "the most striking Facts" pointing the reader to a plethora of graphic descriptions of French Jacobin atrocities inclusive of: "A man tears out a woman's heart reeking, and bites it with his teeth;" "A man shows his sabre and boasts that he had just cut off sixty heads with it, One invites another to taste the brains of an aristocrat;" "Goullin beats his own father on his deathbed, and says no man ought to be accounted a good revolutionist who has not the courage to drink a glass of human blood;" "A cut-throat wears the ears of murdered persons pinned to his national cockade;" "A man's heart torn from his body and placed palpitating on a table before the magistrates;" and an account which cannot be named but

³¹Ibid., 436.

³² Keith Arbour, "Benjamin Franklin as Weird Sister: William Cobbett and Federalist Philadelphia's Fears of Democracy," in *Federalists Reconsidered*, Ed. by Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 187.

must be suggested as, “The most savage cruelty that the sun ever beheld.”³³ Cobbett’s American re-publication of *The Cannibal’s Progress* linked the supposed cannibalism of French *sans culottes* and Jacobin revolutionists in the streets of Paris to the militarism of French bodies as they rapaciously marched across Europe. Re-published in the United States in 1798 at the outbreak of the Quasi-War, the work suggested to its readers that a French “...*Invasion*, though difficult, is yet *possible*;” and proceeded to warn Americans that “...nothing can be more useful at this time, than to prove to you, from the example of other invaded nations, the calamities, the horrors, the hellish barbarities, to which you, your parents, your wives, and your children would be exposed, should their [France’s] savage hordes once get a footing, and, though, but for a short time, maintain their ground on your country.”³⁴ The work, which purports to be an account of the cruelty and savagery of the French Revolutionary military campaign culled from a “copious collection of facts, taken by the magistrates of Suabia” presents a treasure of graphic and grotesque accounts of the barbarity and rapacity of French Republican troops as they sought to conquer and subjugate foreign lands. Celebrating in the final pages the will of Britain to confront the French, the work concludes with a warning to America: “Independence, with all its attendant blessings, is yet within your power; but, as it was obtained by arms, so it must be maintained; and you have not a month, nay, not a day, left you to consider, whether you shall assume those arms, or basely bend your necks to the

³³ William Cobbett [Peter Porcupine], *The Bloody Buoy, Thrown out as a Warning to the Political Pilots of America; or, a FAITHFUL RELATION of a Multitude of Acts of Horrid Barbarity, such as the eye never witnessed, the tongue never expressed, or the imagination conceived, until the Commencement of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Davies, 1796) 3-6.

³⁴ Anthony Aufrer (trans.), *The Cannibals’ Progress; OR THE DREADFUL HORRORS OF FRENCH INVASION, As displayed by the Republican Officers and Soldiers, in their perfidy, rapacity, ferociousness and brutality, exercised towards the innocent inhabitants of Germany* (Philadelphia: William Cobbett, 1798), 3.

galling yoke of the insolent blood-thirsty tyrants of France.”³⁵ Though the most viscerally affective, gore-ridden, sensationalist, and conspiratorial accounts of Jacobinism in late eighteenth century American discourse seem reserved for fictionalizations of Franco-American partisans and accounts of French Jacobins themselves, the discursive creation of the decidedly *American* Jacobin was no less instrumental in contributing to Americans’ understanding of “Jacobin” as a descriptive category or referential noun in the discourse of domestic politics. It is in the transition from the Jacobin as a foreign body to the Jacobin as a decidedly American political figure that we see the curious linguistic construction of the *American* “Jacobin” and its attendant creation of a figure of democratic fanaticism.

Fisher Ames’s American Jacobin

The Jacobin body, freed from its native moorings as the popular tyrant of France, foreign invader, and cannibalistic terror of Europe, emerged as a subject of American political speech that channeled domestic fears and domestic politics. Elsewhere, the Jacobin terror served as both a cautionary tale from abroad about the propensity of an unrestrained populist movement expressive of idealized collective sovereignty to bloom into unrestrained collective violence, and a warning of wolves at the door from the ancient houses of Old Europe. From the mid to late 1790s on an increasingly audible strand of American talk of the “Jacobin” gestured toward an indigenous point. Rather than naming a foreign figure, “Jacobin” gestured toward a subject loosely characterized by an array of dispersed phenomena, but one that was decidedly American and only

³⁵ Aufreer, *Cannibals’ Progress*, 47.

nominally French. This figure of the American “Jacobin” appears in the public speech of Federalists of all stripes. Yet nowhere does this domestic threat appear as clearly and astutely as in the statements of Fisher Ames. Ames, a well-known Federalist and congressional representative from Massachusetts – who once wrote of himself being “...habitually a zealot in politics” and prone “to represent things too strong” – provided an incredibly descriptive catalog of the complex of characteristics which combine to associate American democratic politics with fanaticism, and discursively form the object of the distinctly American Jacobin.³⁶ Writing in the *Boston Gazette* at the end of the decade, Ames composed a sort of informal political teratology and defined the American Jacobin explicitly in terms of zealous character and public threat paired to a descriptive reference in which the Jacobin represents both the general factional combination of men opposed to the administration of John Adams and a far more nefarious figure that blurs the lines between “the democratick or jacobin party.”³⁷ Writing with clear disappointment at the lack of Federalist zeal in combating the Jacobin menace in national and local electoral politics, Ames lamented that “any great exertion not only tires, but disgusts the federalists: their spirit, after flaming brightly, soon sleeps in its embers; but the jacobins, like salamanders can breathe only in fire. Like toads, they suck no aliment from the earth but its poisons.”³⁸ Against Federalist political lethargy in defense of republican government, Ames held-up the character of the Jacobin as an inverted model to emulate;

“whether it is envy that seeks political power for the sake of plunder, or ambition that considers plunder as the instrument to get power; whether their characters are formed by the weak facility of their faith, or their faith determined by the sour,

³⁶ Fisher Ames to T. Dwight, 31 December 1792; Fisher Ames to G. Minot, 29 May 1798; quoted in Charles Warren, *Jacobin and Junto* (New York: AMS press, 1970): 45.

³⁷ Ames, *Works*, 94.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

malignant, and suspicious cast of their temperament, yet all agree in this one point, all are moved by some fixed prejudice or strong passion, some powerful spring of action, so blended with self-interest, or self-love, and so exalted into fanaticism, that the ordinary powers of the man, and the extraordinary powers conferred on the enthusiast, are equally devoted to their cause of anarchy.”³⁹

Ames’s Jacobin is a passionate and enthusiastic figure whose zealous temperament combines with a profound hatred of government to produce a kind of rabid madness that cannot be overcome but by zealous and impassioned anti-Jacobin defense. The Jacobin is a figure of immense political energy contrasted with the quiescent citizen that “...may be compared to the still water in the lake...” while the Jacobin resembles “...that part of it which falls over a cataract at its outlet: the former having a thousand times the greatest mass, but no energy, and scarcely motion enough to keep it sweet; the latter dashed into foam, and scooping deeper channels in the rocks adamant.” Against the rabid zeal of the Jacobin, a federalism of “...sober duty and a timorous forecast are feeble antagonists,” for “it is flat tranquility against passion; dry leaves against the whirlwind; the weight of gun powder against its kindled force...To weight we must impart motion; correct good sense must acquire the energy of zeal.”⁴⁰ These descriptive statements outlining the threat of the domestic Jacobin, are accompanied by a description of the means by which such a threat may be countered: public opinion, the ballot, and the last resort of arms. For Ames, the American Jacobin is not merely an imported symbol of Parisian democratic mobocracy, nor is it a simple pejorative label applied to political enemies as a means of intentionally associating them with the French Revolution’s perceived failure. Ames’s Jacobin is something else, something real, a figure of popular sovereignty grounded in republicanism but transformed by rabid zeal, deluded principle, and knavish leaders into

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 98-99.

a public threat to the basic foundations of the American Republic. A figure which must be publicly condemned as wicked and monstrous and opposed at the polls. An enemy against which, should Federalist zeal not be displayed, arms must defend.

Ames's domestic Jacobin is spoken of in the common terms with which extremists and fanaticism have come to be understood and condemned in liberal political thought since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Jacobin as a "fanatic" is clearly to be condemned because of his fanaticism and his fanatical cause, and there is a particular emphasis in Ames's account on the character of the Jacobin as resultant from a blending of passion and prejudice with self-love and often, gullibility. But one of the most interesting dynamics is that it is not passion, zeal, nor enthusiasm that is solely emphasized as that which signifies the Jacobin fanatic or that which condemns him, but rather, the complex grouping of characteristics that combines to form the regular meaning and appropriate usage of Jacobin fanaticism itself. Central among narratives of the fanatic in terms of these characteristics, as with much talk of "fanaticism" that persists to this day, is the place of passion in the perversion of individuals toward fanaticism. Passion plays a central organizing role in Ames's account of the Jacobin fanatic, it pervades the Jacobin mind, overturning reason "in selecting means for gratifying inordinate designs," retarding "moral doubts and perplexities" in decision-making, making the Jacobin "fearless of consequences."⁴¹

In this key work, Ames provides an account of the "honest" Jacobin, deluded by cause and passion worth quoting at length. It is illustrative for our examination into the eighteenth century association of democratic politics with fanaticism because it touches

⁴¹ Ibid., 110.

on the hallmarks of the pejorative thinking of the content and action of fanaticism as moral and mental aberration, and establishes a relation between individual aberration, extremism, perversion, and the individual cause of ostensibly democratic and Jacobin principles. Presuming the “*honest* among the jacobins to possess the ordinary degrees of self-knowledge,” Ames writes, that “on looking inward they will find there a consciousness of some moral principle, of some integrity of heart.”⁴² This political principle or “integrity of heart” is said to embolden the honest Jacobin making them “less distrustful of themselves, less apprehensive of the reproaches of others.” With a core of idealism, and “having adopted erroneous political maxims,” the Jacobin “will pursue their dark mazes with a fearless step.” Guided, invigorated, and encouraged by an erroneous but principled center, the Jacobin strikes out into the political dark and confusion, blind to the “natural” but “ill consequences” which “will seem to proceed from accident, and only stimulate their perserverance, or to be owing to the malice of the concealed aristocrats” which would “inflamm with a ten-fold heat the rancour of their hostility.” Ultimately, for this deluded and viciously enthusiastic figure “What was error becomes passion” and though the honest man “thinks, that he is summoned to the combat: the casuistry of a jacobin conscience spreads a mist before *his* eyes, which he thinks renders him invisible; obstinacy cases him in mail; French humanity puts a dagger into one hand, and party zeal, calling itself patriotism, a fire brand into the other.” And with this, the “*honest* jacobin, equally mislead by what he knows, and by the nature of his own principles and their tendencies, goes forth to assist knaves in what he deems the cause of *virtue*...[and] makes haste to spread ruin without compunction, and to perpetrate

⁴² *Ibid.*, 102.

crimes without remorse.” Thus, the “honest” Jacobin is a deluded figure “allured by imaginary good, that will be the sure reward of their patriot labours,” to which “The best institutions, the great safeguards of order, seem to them abuses: government an obstacle, and must be removed; magistrates are enemies, and must be conquered.”⁴³ Irrationally and erroneously employing a distinctly deluded form of means-versus-ends reasoning, Jacobin fanatics “...at last make conscience of committing the most shocking atrocities, and learn to throw their eyes beyond the gulph of revolution, confusion, and civil war, which yawns at their feet, to behold an Eden of primitive innocence, equality, and liberty in blossom on the other side.” There in the Eden of the Jacobin,

“these tigers of revolution...are to lie down with the lamb-like multitude, sometimes suffering hunger, yet forbearing to eat them. The rights of man are to be established by being solemnly proclaimed, and printed, so that every citizen shall have a copy. Avarice, ambition, revenge, and rage will be disenchanted from all hearts, and die there; man will be regenerated; by slaying half a million only once, four millions will be born twice, and the glorious work of that perfectibility of the species foretold by Condorcet and the Mazzei sect in America, will begin.”⁴⁴

Of course, such a deluded figure is only the honest Jacobin, not the knave, who leads the multitude and which harbors no such delusions of a “happy *future* state for jacobins in *this* world.”⁴⁵ Rather, the knave is simply a figure of “base heart” whose “...dupes act with a fervour, and rage” but which themselves are “cold thinking villians who lead” and which desire “to preserve the powers of government to usurp them” and “spare the wealth of the state to plunder it.”⁴⁶

Ames’s caustically poetic prose passionately decries a political figure possessed

⁴³ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 108-109.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

of a “Hatred of the government [that] becomes a mania, a *dementia quoad hoc*, and..[a] dread of all power but their own..” A hatred that “...resembles the Hydrophobia, baffling our attempts to describe its nature or its remedies,” for it is these “..fanaticks whom the federalists must oppose...”⁴⁷ From the emphasis on delusion, passion, and possession by furor, the Jacobin fanatic is to be understood as a figure of madness and disease, possessed by a maniacal hatred of government and a hydrophobic (or irrational and rabid) dread of all power they do not possess. This rhetorical appeal to “mania” and “Hydrophobia” is an example of the common tendency in modern Western political thought to employ medical metaphors in describing political phenomena, particularly with regard to politics that are disruptive of the political community conceived of as *body politic*.⁴⁸ The use of such metaphors extends to the modern day and it may not be without benefit to conceptual analysis and theoretical inquiry. Indeed, utilizing the metaphoric discourse of medicine, we might benefit by understanding Ames’s Jacobin “fanatick” in terms of a sort of symptomatology, that complex of symptoms expressed by a disease approached collectively as a singular object of study. To read the discursive formation of Jacobin fanaticism in Ames’s statements as a sort of political and conceptual symptomatology is illustrative because it suggests a useful heuristic of Jacobin fanaticism or Ames’s Jacobin “fanatick” as an ostensibly ambiguous subject of discourse.

In his theory of Hydrophobia, Benjamin Rush contended that a disease cannot necessarily be understood by reference to the one symptom that has imposed its name on

⁴⁷ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁸ It is also suggestive of the tendency still present in American political thought to medicalize questions of politics. For an informative examination of one such mixing of political and medical theory in eighteenth century America, see Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 101-127.

the malady. For Rush, the “dread of water” that was “said to give a specific character to the hydrophobia...occurs in diseases from other causes...” and “It is no more extraordinary that a fever excited by the bite of a rabid animal should excite a dread of water, than that fevers from other causes should produce aversion from certain aliments.”⁴⁹ Likewise with the Jacobin “fanatick” as an object in speech, the *symptom* of “Jacobinism,” i.e. fanaticism, though it may impose its name on the central subject of Ames’s speech, cannot alone be understood to define the Jacobin “fanatick” anymore than the fear of water defines the disease of Hydrophobia.⁵⁰ In an analogical sense, the Jacobin “fanatick” of Ames’s statements as a knowable object of speech to be identified, discussed, and analyzed must be understood as a particular complex of characteristics and a discursive object constituted by its symptomatology, rather than a simple substance such as a clearly identifiable ideology or belief or an object defined primarily by its zeal or passion.⁵¹ Ames’s Jacobin “fanatick” as a subject to know and defeat is further akin to the disease of rabies pointed to in these statements because its symptoms (e.g., passion, prejudice, zeal, self-love, self-interest, enthusiasm, violence, etc.) as a collective object are expressed, much like the vectors of viral transmission, in the service of reproducing in

⁴⁹ Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations: Containing an Account of the Yellow Fever, As it Appeared in Philadelphia in 1797, and Observations upon the Nature and Cure of the Gout, and Hydrophobia*, Vol. 5, (Philadelphia: Budd and Bartram, 1798), 214-215, 218.

⁵⁰ The disease of hydrophobia which appears in eighteenth century medical discourse referred to a diverse symptomatology inordinately characterized by the patient’s aversion to water. As with other conditions such as “hysteria,” hydrophobia bears some resemblance to better understood and far more nuanced definitions of modern medical maladies. What would have most commonly been understood as hydrophobia in the eighteenth century might be understood today as rabies. See Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy, *Rabid: A Cultural History of the World’s Most Diabolical Virus* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

⁵¹ This illustrative approach of symptomatology is akin to Foucault’s archaeological method in its pursuit of discursive formations, see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage, 2010).

the body politic the malady from which they emanate: anarchy and a hatred of government. As with the eighteenth century *constructed* disease of Hydrophobia, the discursive object of the Jacobin is knowable and communicable in speech only through a name that refers to a unique complex of dispersed relations and phenomena. As with this “disease,” in which the expression of its symptoms in one medium (the rabid animal) serves to reproduce it in another (the bitten Hydrophobic patient), the expression of the symptoms of passion, zeal, self-love, and violence that characterize the political disease of Jacobin fanaticism in the medium of individual men serves to reproduce it in the medium of public opinion, “the great auxiliary of good government...” that “soul of the republick’s soul...”⁵²

Departing from the specifics of Ames’s vitriol – and at times, paranoia – about the substance and threat of domestic Jacobin fanaticism – and its antecedents in the popularized public discourse over the meaning and threat of so-called “self-created societies” – we are now in a position to offer a theoretical account of the nature and significance of this term with regard to the late eighteenth century public sphere and the curious politico-linguistic relationships between democratic politics and fanaticism towards which it points. The term “Jacobin” and “self-created society” ought to be understood as objects in speech – i.e., “discursive objects” – that point towards or *suggest* an intelligible *thing*. Used as a communicable signifier, “Jacobin” allows interlocutors to speak with reference though it *does not* signify a single identifiable object that can be pointed to in an objective, empirical, and external world – i.e., some material thing that is ontologically real. Rather, the felicitous use of “Jacobin” is enabled by the way the

⁵² Ames, *Works*, 99-100.

signifier gathers together varied phenomena. Used *as-if* the term corresponds to a clearly existent type of political actor, the term can only *gesture* or *point* towards a relatively indeterminate object given meaning by a set of characteristic associations that provide the *sense* of the term. Though Fisher Ames may write about the threat of the American Jacobin *as-if* it corresponds to an existent figure complete with proper hierarchically arranged roles and conspiratorial political strategies, no ontologically real American Jacobin may be found in the world at large. Rather, the figure may only be known by gesturing to contingent expressions given meaning by the characteristics that Ames uses to discursively mark the American Jacobin as a material figure.

Among the characteristics that give meaning to this concept are forms and events of democratic politics, which associate a specific form of politics – i.e., democratic politics – with extremism. Doing so consequently links democratic politics with the constituent concepts that make up fanaticism and which are excluded from acceptable political speech and public deliberation – e.g., insurrection, violence, and the historical phenomena of the Whiskey Rebellion, the French Jacobin Club, the Parisian *sans culottes*, etc. The concept of the American Jacobin is a capacious one, having room for future or varied referential use and occupation. It is not strictly limited in substantive use but has the room to be used to denote a variety of different events of politics, agents, or forms of politics that may occur in the future — and in some instances, retroactively applied to the past.⁵³

⁵³ Examples of the retroactive application of the term appears in numerous Federalist invocations of anti-federalism with Jacobinism. For example, in “History of American Jacobins, Commonly Denominated Democrats,” which first appeared as an appendix to William Playfair’s *History of Jacobinism*, William Cobbett labeled anti-federalists as “Jacobins” though the Parisian Jacobin Club was not founded until 1789 and “anti-federalism” had ceased to be a viable umbrella after Ratification.

The Political Grammar of Jacobins and Jackalopes

In the above account, I detailed some of the most noticeable elements that formed the referential substance of the American Jacobin. In the process of doing so, it becomes apparent that this examination of discursive objects in terms of signifier and signified does not so much as suggest apparent ambiguities or mistakes in the formation of these concepts and what they mean, but that their contingent historical meaning lies in their *uses* rather than strictly or even primarily in their reference. The type of meaning that we are increasingly interested in does not lead us on a search for some sort of pure ontological referent behind “Jacobin” or “self-created society,” but the *use* of these terms. It is the use that we have been focusing on, and when we look at the dispersed phenomena that appear alongside and within statements featuring the Jacobin, we begin to see characteristic patterns, linguistic habits, and discursive regularities in the ways in which this term is used and the web of concepts within which it was frequently situated and given meaning. That is, we begin to see elements of what we can conceptualize as a distinct *political grammar* governing the proper use of the term, *where* it is used, *how* it is used, *what* other concepts it is used with, *what is included* in its use, etc.. The grammar of a word (a sign) is the set of rules that govern or guide how a word may be intelligibly and communicably used, it refers to the elements that give the sign its meaning. Following the insights of Ludwig Wittgenstein, grammar is what describes the use of the term, it is what tells us what kind of an object anything is, and it expresses *essence*.⁵⁴ Rather than looking at “self-created societies,” the American “Jacobin,” and the democratic fanatic as

⁵⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), para. 496; 373; 371.

phenomena, our investigation shifts away from any sort of explicit ontological inquiry and toward a grammatical one. In examining the characteristic usages and associations of these terms, we have moved toward providing a preliminary account of what Wittgenstein referred to as “...the ‘possibilities’ of phenomena...the *kinds of statement* that we make about phenomena,” a grammatical inquiry.⁵⁵

Investigating the grammar of a term like Ames’s “Jacobin,” we see that its primary use is not necessarily to refer to an empirically existent object or subject in the external world. Rather, it is commonly used to gesture toward a single linguistic object constituted by a set of dispersed phenomena; a linguistic object whose meaning is made possible by a variety of other concepts and conceptual relations. When Ames describes the characteristics of the “honest Jacobin” or details the dynamics that are said to animate this figure, we should note that these characteristics share a family resemblance with common usages of the eighteenth century concept of “fanatick,” as well as the modern concept of “fanatic” that endures in English today. Among these characteristics, we should highlight some of the most arresting from those examined above: madness and disease, violence, passion, and zeal. But Ames’s use of “Jacobin” also resembles common eighteenth century characteristic uses of “democracy,” “democrat,” and “democratical,” and its most commonly related concepts of the day: popular sovereignty, electoral action, demagoguery, insurrection, and anarchy. Attending to the grammar of Ames’s use of “Jacobin,” we see that the term’s *meaning-as-use* is made possible by a combination of “fanatick” and “democrat.” The political grammar guiding Ames’s pen collapses democratic politics into fanaticism through the deployment of terms like “self-

⁵⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, para. 90.

created society” and American “Jacobin.” The resultant grammar of “Jacobin” makes possible, and may even promote, the linguistic and cognitive entanglement of the characteristic usages and associations of “democracy” with all the characteristic usages and associations of “fanaticism.” Ames, however, is not alone nor anomalous in using “Jacobin” in a manner that reflects a particular political grammar in which the use of a single word combines fanaticism and democratic politics in the same breath of meaning. The same linguistic operation and political grammar governs William Cobbett’s pen, most notably in his “History of the American Jacobins, Commonly Denominated Democrats,” as well as the statements of other Federalist writers in the print culture of the public sphere.

It is the political grammar that we see reflected in the use of “Jacobin” that tells us that a certain phenomena, political actor, or group is “Jacobinical” or of the nature of “Jacobin.” Observing the discursive regularities governed by this political grammar, we also see that this grammar tells us that that phenomena which is “Jacobinical” is also “democratical” and “fanatical.” Ultimately, the use of this term and the operation of this grammar in Federalist speech is generative of a subject position of the democratic fanatic and associative of democracy with fanaticism, zealotry, and extremism. The grammar that governs Ames’s use of “Jacobin” doesn’t relate the noun “Jacobin” or its constituent phonemes to an external object by way of labeling a set of distinguishing features of the object. Rather, it relates other dispersed concepts and phenomena to the concept of the object named.⁵⁶ Hence, we observe that the noun, “Jacobin” is governed by a political grammar reflected in Federalist speech that relates the noun to the concepts of fanaticism

⁵⁶ C.f. Hannah Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 119.

and democratic politics along with their constituent conceptual relations. The common conceptual relations entangled by this grammar with the concepts of democracy and fanaticism, which I have isolated above, include the politically dominating and exclusionary concepts of violence, anarchy, insurrection, zealotry, madness, and disease that accordingly cast a pall on that which they are related to. In so doing, this grammar acts to control and order what concepts are relevant and related to “democracy” and its constituent concept of “democratic politics.” Associating democracy with fanaticism through a term or figure like the Jacobin acts to subsume democratic politics and exclude it from the realm of public deliberation. Exclusion results from this grammatical relation because the phenomena associated with fanaticism were primarily understood and discussed (i.e., related) through concepts of law, medicine and the application of force by the state rather than concepts of, and subject to, public deliberation. To subsume a political actor, phenomena, or mode of politics within the term “Jacobin” – and, to a lesser and weaker extent, the term “self-created society” – is to exclude it from deliberative politics.

In neither the work of Ames nor Cobbett is this to say that the use of “Jacobin” is necessarily restricted to its pointing or gesturing toward an abstract non-existent political figure that is both democratic and fanatic. “Jacobin” may indeed point at nothing, and this does occur throughout the public political discourse of the 1790s. But, just as how in every use of language, meaning is dependent in part on the contingent social circumstances of its production, so it is with the use of “Jacobin” by Ames and Cobbett. Both writers use the term to refer or point to actual figures in certain circumstances and so part of the meaning of the term in some situations is that it gestures towards materially

existent political bodies. In these examples, the bodies to which the term gestures may themselves be engaged in democratic politics. For Cobbett, the “Jacobins” are the French bodies of William Playfair’s *History of Jacobinism*, and Cobbett’s own *Bloody Buoy*, as well as the American bodies of anti-federalists and Democratic Societies.⁵⁷ For Ames, the “Jacobins” are the politically active democratic-republicans contending for electoral gains in Massachusetts state elections and more generally in populist politics. For both of these writers, the use of the pejorative “Jacobin” is not just a nominal labeling, it is a reflection of a cognitive-linguistic grammar through which actors and modes of politics are interpreted, publicly communicated, and judged.

Our investigation of the use and grammar of “Jacobin” reveals that the term’s meaning in the works of Ames and Cobbett (and to this we might add John and Thomas Adams, as well as other Federalist writers and politicians) collapses democratic politics and fanaticism together and may, in particular places, refer to actual political actors. But, our most curious and repeated observation is that the American referential use of the term “Jacobin” does not need to point to, refer to, or identify an objectively existent material actor to have a meaning that can be understood and communicated to a public. Ames and Cobbett’s use of the term linguistically creates the discursive object and political subject that it purports to label. This means first, that the American Jacobin, as a thing to which we can point, is an object about which we can speak and be understood though it does not or may not exist. This American “Jacobin” is therefore akin to the mythical American half-rabbit-half-antelope “jackalope,” about which we may speak and to which we may linguistically gesture, but which does not and cannot materially exist. To say that the use

⁵⁷ See Peter Porcupine [William Cobbett], *History of American Jacobins, Commonly Denominated Democrats* (Philadelphia, 1796).

of the term creates the subject it purports to name goes beyond the easily accepted claim that use creates an object of speech, it goes beyond a light-hearted equivalence between Jacobins and jackalopes. Though we may speak of jackalopes, they cannot be said to have a material form nor any substantively affective power of political agency. Though Ames and Cobbett may speak of the discursive object of American “Jacobins,” such objects *may* gesture toward a material form and *do* have substantively affective political power of agency. Though a rabbit may be shot, stuffed, mounted with antlers, and sold to us as a “real Jackalope,” when we know that it is a rabbit with antlers attached *post mortem* that is intended to materially fill the place of the mythical creature on our coffee table, we know it is a fraud and know it is not a “jackalope” in the fur. If I point to the stuffed creature and say “that is a jackalope,” the “that” to which I gesture by uttering the term “jackalope” while pointing to my curious feat of taxidermy is not a materially existent ontologically real jackalope, it is an image of a mythical creature denoted as “jackalope.”

Unlike, the fraudulent attempt to fill the un-fillable space of the jackalope occupied by my garish taxidermic curio, the concept of the American Jacobin is capacious and flexible enough to be materially filled by the contingent democratic actors of the day. The American “Jacobin” thus creates a space, or more accurately a *subject position* into which a contingent democratic political actor may willingly step or be forced. When filled, we can say that this “Jacobin” may have political agency and may affect politics as a political subject. So, part of what gives the “Jacobin” its political agency and influence is that it can refer to a materially existent political subject that can be gestured to as actually existing and therefore threatening the order of American

republicanism and politics. Yet, even without a materially existent subject to directly refer to, “Jacobin” maintains the markers of political agency because it can be used to point to a *potential* materially existing political subject that may be a future or possible threat to the American political order. Thus, when Ames and Cobbett use the term “Jacobin,” regardless of whether or not it points to or labels an object that materially exists, they speak as though it does. Doing so linguistically engenders a political subject with the capacity of exhibiting agency understood and spoken of (in accordance with a certain grammar) as a democratic fanatic.

Yet, why can we not say something similar of the jackalope? Do we not also linguistically engender a subject capable of exhibiting affective agency when, regardless of whether or not “jackalope” can be used to point to a materially existent thing, we speak as if an ontologically real jackalope exists saying something like, “the jackalope threatens the lives of Western American families?” Unfortunately, as much as we may desire to give some life to the concept of “jackalope,” in uttering such a statement today, we do not linguistically engender a subject capable of demonstrating agency because our contemporary characteristic use of “jackalope” includes the concepts of “mythical nature” and “non-existent” in the web of concepts, characteristics, and phenomena that allow it to be communicably used in an intelligible way (i.e., a way that would make sense to a public today when the statement is uttered). If we were ever to see an ontologically real living Jackalope in the fur, either our concept of “jackalope” would have to change to include its non-mythical nature, or we would have to give the creature a different name. Making such a statement about jackalopes today does not engender the jackalope agent, it makes the speaker a teller of tall-tales or a simple fool.

A Federalist political grammar, reflected in the use of “self-created society” and “Jacobin” effectively combined the grammars of “democracy” and “fanaticism” leading to their linguistic and cognitive entanglement in the Federalist political discourse of the 1790s and early nineteenth century. These sorts of entanglements impair public deliberation and understanding of democratic politics. Modes of politics and political discourse that take place within the constitutionally-sanctioned domain of civil society and the public sphere, when subsumed under capacious invidious concepts such as “Jacobin” and “self-created society,” may be linguistically shifted outside the realm of acceptable politics and understood as knowable only or primarily within the purview of the application of force (where the concepts of violence, anarchy, and insurrection dominated) or the non-deliberative analysis of medicine (where the concept of madness and disease dominated). By attending to the political grammar of highly politicized terms such as “self-created society” and “Jacobin,” we see the language of Federalism at the end of the eighteenth century as instrumental in associating fanaticism, extremism, and zealotry, with descriptions of democratic politics.

Conclusion: Demophobia and The American Jacobin

Regardless of its American immateriality, the Jacobin was an object of real horror; a quilted terror sewn together from a patchwork of anxiety and aversion. But though the Jacobin may have inspired deeply felt personal anxieties, it was an expression of a particular kind of fear with a resolutely public or political quality. Unlike private or personal fears that are the “artifacts of our own psychologies and experiences” with “little impact beyond ourselves,” *political* fears refer to “a people’s felt apprehension of some

harm to their collective well-being...”⁵⁸ Such fear has a dimension of publicity, emanating from society and having consequences for the public and polity as a whole. For Corey Robin, this kind of fear acts as a sort of tool, “an instrument of elite rule or insurgent advance, created and sustained by political leaders or activists who stand to gain something from it, either because fear helps them pursue a specific political goal, or because it reflects or lends support to their moral and political beliefs.”⁵⁹ As preachers of this sort of political fear, “leaders or militants can define what is or ought to be the public’s chief object of fear.” But politicians and writers rarely create the objects of political fear from whole cloth, when “choosing, interpreting, and responding to these objects of fear, leaders are influenced by their ideological assumptions and strategic goals. They view danger through a prism of ideas, which shapes whether they see a particular danger as threatening or not...”⁶⁰ Political fear rarely if ever comes from nothing.

As with all political fear, the fear articulated in reference to the American Jacobin was an expression of a deeply felt anxiety and antipathy towards something. The political fear of the American Jacobin obscures its origins in Federalist fears of the extension and deepening of democracy. At the close of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, Federalist writers and politicians regularly wrote of democracy in terms of intensely felt anxiety and aversion. Such fear was palpable in the words of Ames who described a horrific vision of political life under Jeffersonian democracy, as one in which

“[o]ur days are made heavy with the pressure of anxiety, and our nights restless

⁵⁸ Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), 2.

⁵⁹ Robin, *Fear*, 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

with visions of horror. We listen to the clank of chains, and overhear the whispers of assassins. We mark the barbarous dissonance of mingled rage and triumph in the yell of an infatuated mob; we see the dismal glare of their burnings and scent the loathsome steam of human victims offered in sacrifice.”⁶¹

Just as with his graphically violent descriptions of Jacobins and Jacobinism, Ames painted democracy itself as inherently violent and deeply troubling, a “creature of impulse and violence...,” a system that “in its very nature teems with faction and revolution,” one plagued by a “...licentiousness, that inbred malady of democracies, that deforms their infancy with gray hairs and decrepitude.”⁶²

Ames’s aversion to popular democracy was rooted in an anxiety common to Federalist writers and politicians about the implications of politically empowering a multitude. Throughout his writings, Ames displayed intense antipathy towards “the multitude,” and saw the extension and deepening of post-revolutionary democracy, liberty, and equality not as empowering individuals but as empowering this multitude, a sort of internal foreign body that needed to be contained and which ought to be feared, a malady of the republic that was set apart from the virtuous. Commenting on the popular celebration of democratic philosophies, both foreign and domestic in origin, Ames remarked that, “theories fit for angels, have been adopted for the use of a multitude, who have been found, when left to what is called their self-government, unfit to be called men...”⁶³ Going beyond denigration, Ames expressed intense alarm writing to Oliver Wolcott, Jr. that “the power of the people if uncontroverted, is licentious and mobbish...It is a government by force without discipline. It is led by demagogues who are soon supplanted by bolder and abler rivals, and soon the whole power is in the hands

⁶¹ Ames, *Works* Vol. 2, 354.

⁶² Ames, *Works* Vol. 2, 396, 360, 349.

⁶³ Ames, *Works* Vol. 2, 194

of our favorite, the boldest and most violent,” concluding with the stark judgement that “popular power is a military government in embryo.”⁶⁴

Such fears of empowering a hostile multitude were nothing new in the history of Western political thought, and were a part of a long tradition of anxious criticisms of democracy. This fear of democracy as the fear of a sovereign multitude echoes an oligarchic tendency to speak of democracy and democratic practices as the rule of the *demos* on behalf of itself. On its surface, such a fear would simply be the fear of the rule of all for the benefit of all. Yet, an important element of this demophobic outlook is that the *demos* is not understood in an egalitarian sense as the people, the citizenry, or the constituents of a polity as a whole. Rather, this sort of demophobic reasoning construes the *demos* in the style of the “Old Oligarch,” who, in *The Constitution of the Athenians* attributed to Xenophon, wrote of the Athenian *demos* as a distinct majoritarian or popular class characterized as “the poor” or “less valuable” in contradistinction to the *oligoi* – the rich, virtuous, and more valuable.⁶⁵

In *The Constitution of the Athenians*, the Old Oligarch firmly construed democracy as “the rule of the many” as opposed to both “the rule of all” or “the rule of the few.”⁶⁶ Viewing the referential ambiguity of *demos* in starker and anxious terms,

⁶⁴ Fisher Ames to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., 2 December 1802. Quoted in John W. Malsberger, “The Political Thought of Fisher Ames,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 2.1 (1982), 6.

⁶⁵ The ‘Old Oligarch,’ *The ‘Old Oligarch’: The Constitution of Athenians Attributed to Xenophon*, Trans. By J.L. Marr and P.J. Rhodes (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), 1.4–5, 7–9; 2.19–20.

⁶⁶ These comments on the “Old Oligarch” are indebted to the commentary on *The Constitution of the Athenians* in Marr and Rhodes (2008) as well as Melissa Lane, *The Birth of Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 86–88. The question of who rules in a democracy and on whose behalf, is a question marked by the ambiguity of “*demos*” itself, which can mean “both ‘the people’ as a whole and also ‘the common people’ (the ‘many’ or ‘the crowd’ or ‘the majority’, as opposed to the ‘few’)...” (Lane, *Birth of Politics*, 87).

classical oligarchs argued that “while democrats pretend to pursue the interests of all, a ‘democracy’ is merely a cover for using political power to advance the interests of the many at the expense of the few.”⁶⁷ Though more nuanced in his typology of constitutions than the analysis written by the Old Oligarch, Aristotle also offered an account of a form of democracy that framed the demos as a self-serving multitude ruling against the better few. Such a democracy was distinguished from other regimes by the characteristic that the multitude was sovereign and unbound by law.⁶⁸ In such a regime, “[t]he people becomes a monarch, one person composed of many, for the many are sovereign, not as individuals but as an aggregate.”⁶⁹ Similarly to the criticisms of the Old Oligarch, Aristotle argued that “such a people, in its role as a monarch, not being controlled by law, aims at sole power and becomes like a master, giving honour to those who curry its favour.” Ranking this democratic regime as the counterpart of tyranny among monarchies, Aristotle suggested that the general character of both was the same because “both play the master over the better sort of person” so much so that “the decrees of democracy are the directives of tyranny...”⁷⁰

Echoing the sharp appraisal and concerns of the Old Oligarch, Federalists were often quick to distinguish between the “swinish multitude” empowered by democracy and “the people” of principle and property who comprised the better, but less numerous part of the Republic. One Federalist writer summarized this distinction as a crucial one between “the *people* and the *mob* or *populace*” where the “populace” designated “certain

⁶⁷ Lane, *Birth of Politics*, 87.

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *The Politics*, Trans. by T. A. Sinclair (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 250/1292b39.

⁶⁹ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 250/1292a7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

of the lowest class in the community, who are alike destitute of property and principle, and may be emphatically stiled the *rabble*,” while “the people” meant the “great body of American farmers, merchants, mechanics, etc.”⁷¹ In similarly anxious oligarchic fashion, Gouverneur Morris distinguished the “Mob” in a letter to J. C. Mountflorencia as meaning “not so much the indigent as the vicious, hotheaded and inconsiderate Part of the Community together with that numerous Host of Tools, which Knaves do work with, called fools.” For Morris, the mob formed “the majority of all empires, kingdoms and commonwealths,” a reality particularly distressing because where the mob was “not restrained by political Institutions or coerced by an armed force,” it possessed

“the efficient power: And as power so possessed must needs be abused, it follows in direct consequence that the affairs of a democracy will ever be in the hands of weak and wicked men unless when distress or danger shall compel a reluctant people to chuse [sic] a wise and virtuous administration.”⁷²

Morris found the democratic rule of the multitude so troubling and counter to order that he felt it could not even be considered a “bad Species of Government” for it was in no way an actual form of government, but rather, the death of government itself.⁷³ For William Cobbett, the egalitarianism of democrats that undergirded the “*equal rights of man*” would end “as in France, in the ruin of the rich, and its inevitable consequence, universal poverty.” In terms similar to the skepticism of the Old Oligarch, Cobbett insisted that if democrats spoke the “language of their hearts; they would not say to their rulers: ‘You are vicious corrupt men; you are the curses of your country.’ No; they would say: ‘You are rich rogues while we are poor ones, change situations, and all will be

⁷¹ Jacob Bigelow, Jr. to Rev. Jacob Bigelow, 16 April 1807, quoted in David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 156.

⁷² Gouverneur Morris to J. C. Mountflorencia, 22 June 1805, quoted in Fischer, *Revolution*, 156.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

right.”⁷⁴

For Ames, a democratic multitude could only be moved by its passions, and it was the rule of the passions of a multitude in combination with the vices and ambitions of leaders that characterized a particular government as a democracy.⁷⁵ Even if measures to enlighten the multitude about public affairs and empower them to rule wisely were attempted, these efforts would quickly show that “No people on earth are or can be so enlightened as to the details of political affairs. To study politics, so as to know correctly the force of the reasons for a large part of the public measures, would stop the labor of the plough and the hammer; and how are these million of students to have access to the means of information?” The multitude lacked the capacity to reason properly on public affairs and govern the polity in the interest of the whole. Ultimately, Ames concluded that “it results, from the nature of democracy, that the ignorant will join, and the ambitious will lead their combination. Who, then, will deny that the vicious are armed with power, and the virtuous exposed to persecution and peril?”⁷⁶

The logic underpinning this strain of demophobia from the “Old Oligarch” to the Federalists treats the demos as an aggregate distinct from the phobic, and views the demos as something that must be constrained or combatted by force, manipulation, and institutions. In this way, the demos as multitude is an object of faction to be feared, an aggregate body of passion empowered by philosophy and sheer numbers with a dominant share of political rule to be exercised by the mass on its own behalf against the virtuous or valuable few. Anxieties about the exercise of repressive power against a minority by a

⁷⁴ William Cobbett, *Part II. A Bone to Gnaw, for the Democrats*, 2nd Ed. (Philadelphia: Thomas Bradford, 1795), 11.

⁷⁵ Ames, *Works* Vol. 2, 384, 392.

⁷⁶ Ames, *Works* Vol. 2, 364.

democratically empowered multitude are not without theoretical or historical merit. The Federalist refrain that democracy leads to despotism and the Old Oligarch's reading of the demos as a distinct class of the many against the few come together in the infamous declaration of the Jacobin leader, Maximilien Robespierre, delivered during the Terror of the French Revolution that "the revolution's government is the despotism of liberty over tyranny."⁷⁷

Such fears and criticisms reflected legitimate anxieties about democracy, particularly with regard to pure majoritarian and direct democracy. Likewise, Federalist anxieties about jacobinism had a kernel of truth born-out by the Terror and were not simply plucked from thin air. Yet even with its roots in legitimate anxieties about extremism and the excesses of democracy, the way in which the political fear of democracy and Jacobin extremism coalesced into the non-political figure of the American Jacobin is deeply problematic, not only because it obscures and misdirects attention from the political causes and objects of such fear – that is, the expansion of popular democracy and the anti-democratic aversion of Federalists to the multitude – but because it created its own object of terror. To think of the causes of political fear as nonpolitical objects "...only distracts attention from what political fear does."⁷⁸ Politically fearing the Jacobin shifts consideration of the causes of "Jacobinism" and the object of political fear away from the domain of deliberative judgment and consideration, and into the domain of friend-or-enemy groupings. But to de-legitimate popular democracy and extremism on its behalf, to move these varied and dispersed phenomena

⁷⁷ Maximilien Robespierre, "Speech on the Principles of Political Morality that Should Guide the National Convention in the Domestic Administration of the Republic," in *Slavoj Žižek Presents: Robespierre, Virtue and Terror* (London and New York: Verso 2007), 115.

⁷⁸ Robin, *Fear*, 16.

to the domain of existential antagonism between friend and enemy groupings, requires that they be grouped under the adversarial category of the feared enemy. The logic of political fear requires then, an enemy around which the causes and objects of anxiety coalesce. Indeed, Ames himself noted the natural inclination of people to search out an object of their emotions writing that “so far as men are swayed by authority, or impelled or excited by their fears and affections, they naturally search for some persons as the sources and objects of these effects and emotions.”⁷⁹ The logic of fear inclines people to seek out an object or person to which political fear can be attributed. For the political anxieties of popular democracy to be viewed as adversarial to the polity, the democrat must be an enemy. It is by this operation that political fear distracts from inquiry and judgment into the object and sources of anxiety while also engendering its object of horror.

The demophobia expressed by the creation of the American Jacobin as an object of political anxiety was a form of political fear that framed and interpreted public objects of deliberation and political judgment as non-political or de-politicized threats (e.g. demons, criminals, mad men, and foreign tyrants). By crafting the figure of the American Jacobin, Federalists obscured their aversion to a more radical democratic politics and their efforts to reshape American political order in a more repressive and hierarchical form. The discourse of the Jacobin allowed Federalists to push “radical interpretations of the American and French revolutionary traditions into the recently invented, marginalized category of Jacobinism” and “put forward quasi-Tory visions of American political life

⁷⁹ Ames, *Works* Vol 2, 359.

without the fear of being branded traitorous monarchists.”⁸⁰ Historian, Seth Cotlar, has argued that by effectively disseminating and capitalizing on stories of Jacobin conspiracy, “Federalist orators called upon American citizens to reject popular politicization and embrace a virtuously passive conception of citizenship,” and that “By erasing the distinction between political opposition and violent rebellion, the Federalists raised the stakes for those who voiced even mild doubts about the administration’s policies.”⁸¹ In his account of political fear, Robin draws attention to the way in which this “collective response to nonpolitical threats” has been shaped by intellectuals and elites into the “polity’s means of moral and spiritual regeneration.”⁸² For Robin, “...fear often serves as a ground for intellectuals in need of grounding arguments. At moments of doubt about the ability of positive principles to animate moral perception or inspire public action, fear has seemed an ideal source of political insight and energy.”⁸³ Robin suggests that by focusing on de-politicized objects of fear and looking to fears of those objects as “sources of civic instruction and collective renewal, our writers and leaders pay little attention to those forms of power that arouse repressive fears.”⁸⁴ Understanding political fear “as an opportunity for collective renewal in the face of nonpolitical threats, we help perpetuate the forms of fear that most constrain our aspirations and actions.”⁸⁵ In this sense, political

⁸⁰ Seth Cotlar, “The Federalists’ Transatlantic Cultural Offensive of 1798 and the Moderation of American Democratic Discourse,” in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, Ed. by Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 277.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 277, 279.

⁸² Robin, *Fear*, 23.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

fears may distract writers, politicians, and everyday citizens from other forms and sources of fear that may “reinforce a repressive social order, constrain freedom, and create or perpetuate inequality.”⁸⁶

Understanding the Federalist fear of the Jacobin helps us to understand a political fear of popular democracy. It reveals how politically fearing democracy treats its practices as a threatening non-political enemy “other” to be destroyed, rather than something to be interrogated, deliberated about, and politically judged. Tumultuous politics compel the members of a polity to confront important questions about the nature and organization of political order. The expansion and deepening of popular democracy – i.e., democratic practice itself – is something to be apprehensive about and which can often cause a sense of crisis. The condition of the modern democratic citizen may rightfully be that of anxiety. Understanding the subject of democratic anxiety offers us insight in how to and how not to approach our unease with democracy, but when writers and politicians promote objects of anti-political fear in response to the appearance of democratic and/or extremist politics they distract or undercut public deliberative discourse by seeking to frame issues of disagreement and deliberation as matters of antagonism and combat – that which cannot be discussed, only dismissed or destroyed. Apprehension and anxiety about democracy and extremism are perfectly legitimate and natural, but a commitment to democracy, political equality, or the practices of popular sovereignty requires that the citizens of a democratic polity adopt a deliberative disposition towards democratic practices, particularly in their most ostensibly extreme forms. Without such deliberation, the fear of democracy serves only to block

⁸⁶ Ibid.

consideration of its substance and sees only its constraint or elimination.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The Challenge of Democratic Extremism

The history of the American democratic tradition is sometimes portrayed as the rough story of a people's progressive development. The tale told is one of enacting democracy with a narrative arc shaped by the polity's proximity to consensus and the expansion of those who can and do consent.¹ Tinged with tragedy and hope, it is a dramatic tale founded on the promise of popular sovereignty, with each chapter read as the story of a would-be democratic people striving to realize, but often falling short of consensus. The appearance of democratic extremism disrupts this narrative. Its recurrence punctuates the already rough history of this political tradition with actors, acts, and discourses of intense division and force. These occasional violent and uncivil disruptions confront Americans with the demand that they reevaluate status quo politics in light of the divergent framing articulated in the claims and actions of the zealots, extremists, and fanatics. The pages above ought therefore to be read not as part of a counter-narrative of the early development of a political tradition, but as pieces of an often over-looked sub-narrative of this tradition. When recognized and interrogated, this unsettling sub-narrative, like all good stories, can prompt some kind of self-reflection. In recognizing this subplot we read the repeated appearance of a particular figure on the stage of early American popular politics. Again-and-again, the democratic fanatic appears with force and zeal, and sets about disrupting hegemonic and aspiring hegemonic interpretations

¹ See for example, Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

about the democratic nature and limits of American politics, the Republic, and political order. Because of this, Americans should recognize that their shared political history is a tale populated by intolerant republican zealots and violent democratic fanatics in addition to the heroic and august statesmen, moderate leaders that dial-down the hue and cry of “the people out of doors,” and the architects of what Tocqueville famously described as a “new political science” for a “totally new world.”² Americans have long celebrated the two sacred pillars of The Revolution and The Founding, and the history of American political thought, no less than contemporary American politics, is replete with invocations of a revolutionary past. Yet, even when invoking clear acts of insurrection such as the Revolution itself, the passion, violence, and intolerance, the extremism of the event is often downplayed or overlooked. The effect, like so many shallow appropriations of history, is an accumulation of lost chances to learn from the unsettling messiness of early American politics.

Extremists often appear as terrifying, intolerant, violent, and irrational actors that pose an existential threat to the polity. But, as I have sought to demonstrate above, the extremist may equally be a patriot defending the polity as well as a democrat resisting undemocratic obstacles and enacting a community of equals. That the extremist may legitimately be understood as equally fanatic and democratic makes his or her appearance, and the supposed wrong he or she seeks to address, difficult to recognize, deliberate, and judge appropriately. This difficulty is compounded by the promotion of the politicized fear of democracy – i.e., the demophobia introduced in chapter five – whose oligarchic publicists have also been present in the United States since before the

² Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 16.

founding of the Republic. Anxieties about extremism and democratic politics are based in legitimate apprehensions and insecurities considering the violence that may accompany either. In the previous chapters, I sought to examine how zealous, intolerant, and violent, but potentially democratic, popular political actors confronted and were confronted by the members of an early American polity. This historical inquiry cannot legitimate or provide us with any normative political claims but it does invite us to think through some important theoretically normative questions about democratic politics and the American polity, questions with contemporary salience.

Democratic Extremism and the American Polity

The fanatic is a figure of intractable conflict. Forceful, intolerant, passionate, and unwilling to compromise his or her principles, the fanatic does not simply disagree with particular policies but rejects general terms of political consensus and often seeks the enactment of a radically divergent ethico-political framework of order. It is because of their intractability, their position that principles always take primacy over interests, and their will towards antagonistic divergence that political extremists of any type pose a threat to the political order they speak of disrupting – a reality no different whether such extremists are of the democratic or non-democratic variety. It is because political extremism threatens political order that orders must seek to exclude extremism from the realm of acceptable political contention. Political extremism is not a matter of politics for political order; it is a matter of threat and survival. That political orders have sometimes tolerated antagonists or have been unable to resist them so much so as to enable them to take the reins of government and determine the shape of organized political life is a

tragedy of history we know all too well. Yet, if theorists and citizens are committed to the principles and practices of democracy, then recognizing that American politics has been historically shaped by democratic zealotry, and that the possibility of such extremism persists, suggests that merely defending the political order of contemporary American democracy from all forms of extremism is an inadequate approach. The presence and persistence of democratic extremism invites theorists and citizens to reconsider their approach to democratic politics in the American polity.

Recognizing that democratic practices may take the form of political extremism places a heavy burden on the shoulders of a democratic polity's members. That an extreme challenge to the ethico-political order of a democratic political community may itself be democratic, demands that when faced with potentially democratic fanatics, citizens must be capable of evaluating and deliberating whether or not status quo politics and political order fail to realize or enact the basic ideals and commitments of democracy. That is, democratic extremists compel the members of the polity to adjudicate whether the institutions, policies, and constitutional order itself are undemocratic obstacles, the legitimate source of the fanatic's wrong and motivation for the fanatical pursuit of redress. However, because of its violent and forceful quality, democratic fanaticism is potentially harmful. For all its potential contributions to the promotion of an unsettled and participatory democratic politics, theorists and citizens must also recognize the very real threat of violence and harm that accompanies extremism of any type. As much as the previous pages suggest the potential value of democratic fanaticism, they also draw attention to its dangers as a form of extremism and ought not be taken as a naïve celebration of violence or force.

Informed by appearances of extremism and zeal in early American popular politics, I contend that democratic fanaticism poses a challenge to democratic theory and contemporary democratic politics in the American polity. This challenge centers around three theoretical observations culled from above: first, that extremism can raise public awareness of important issues, potential wrongs, and the presence of undemocratic obstacles to political equality; second, that extremism can compel the popular public exercise of individual deliberative judgment, thereby promoting the critical reconsideration of the democratic nature of American politics and political order; and third, that democratic zeal resists any attempted “closure” or uncritical acceptance of the democratic nature of American politics, or efforts to displace politics whether by an ascendant power seeking to secure domination or other antagonistic force. That is, democratic extremism may impede hegemonic attempts to definitively affirm the status quo political order or concrete policies as being adequately informed by democratic principles, as properly resembling democracy, or as normatively settled. This challenge should be understood as disruptive of order, but beneficial for the democratic health of the polity.

Contingent acts, agents, and discourses of democratic extremism resist “closure” and attempts at what Bonnie Honig has called, the “displacement of politics,” by provoking the public reevaluation of policy and political order. As we have seen above, the practices of the democratic extremist are geared toward enacting a radically divergent ethico-political frame and are motivated by a perceived wrong or obstacle to the deepening and expansion of democratic political equality. These practices characteristically operate by framing political action in the friend-or-enemy terms of

intractable conflict. Antagonistically opposing the status quo, the extremist seeks to individuate the constituents of a popular public. Doing so, he or she demands that people acknowledge the friend-or-enemy frame offered by the zealot and then personally determine which side of the purported wrong they are on. As a *democratic* fanatic, the zealot impedes the closure of democratic order by raising awareness of a potential antagonism between democracy (i.e., the imperatives, principles, or ideals underpinning democracy) and the status quo of political order itself. Zealotry draws attention to public concerns and compels citizens to critically reflect on the democratic nature of concrete politics and political order. We saw this in chapter two where Massacre Day orators compelled colonial British Americans to evaluate the political order of the day by confronting them with the figure of the patriot zealot – an identity to be assumed, recognized, or resisted – and thereby rallied public opinion to resist the undemocratic obstacle of British colonial rule.

That instances of political extremism call attention to public concerns of politics and political order resonates with Thomas Jefferson's 1787 thoughts on insurrection. In epistolary dialogs with James Madison and William Stephens Smith, Jefferson mulled-over news of Shays's Rebellion, and upheld the value of insurrection while judging this particular instance to be inappropriate and "founded in ignorance."³ For Jefferson, the "turbulence" of insurrection was the principle "evil" to which popular government was subject.⁴ Yet, this evil was also "productive of good" because "it prevents the degeneracy

³ Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, 13 November 1787, in *Jefferson: Political Writings*, Eds. Joyce Appleby and Terrence Ball (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 110.

⁴ Thomas Jefferson to James Madison 30 January 1787, in *Jefferson: Political Writings*, 108.

of government and nourishes a general attention to the public affairs.”⁵ Insurrection reminds the governing that the people “preserve the spirit of resistance” and it can be taken as a sign that citizens have not fallen prey to what Jefferson described as a “lethargy” that is the “forerunner of death to the public liberty.”⁶ Though, the people “cannot be all, & always, well informed,” a will toward insurrection demonstrates that citizens will not suffer actual or misconceived abuses of political power, and that they are attentive to the public concerns of political order and policy – though they might be “led astray for a moment” by ignorance and mis-perception.⁷

The vigilance and energy that Jefferson observes in the act of insurrection are the qualities of a reflective and participatory political subjectivity that challenges the closure of political order. Even when such qualities lead to error and inappropriate political extremes, they still draw attention to the democratic nature (or lack thereof) of public affairs, compelling citizens of the polity to exercise critical re-evaluation. The vigilant American turning to insurrection “discontented in proportion to the importance of the facts they misconceive” is not alone in exhibiting democratic vigilance.⁸ The positive challenge of democratic zeal is posed by both the fanatic (judged to be democratic) and the democratic citizen confronted by the extremist. The citizen observer must be just as attentive to the democratic nature of political order and the democratic quality of the fanatic, as the fanatic is to the perception of an anti-democratic wrong.

In chapter four, I argued that fanatical speech acted to individuate and confront a

⁵ Jefferson, *Political Writings*, 108.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

public along the lines of the friend-or-enemy distinction held-up by the zealot. The direct and combative words of Democratic Societies and other democratic-republican partisans struck an American public and demanded that its members decide to recognize where each citizen fell along the divide between democrat or aristocrat, friend or enemy. In doing so, democratic speech was used to raise public awareness and call for critical evaluative attention to the pressing contest over the shape of the early American public sphere, yet it did so through a form of partisan repression. Again, we saw how democratic extremism can ignite public reevaluation of democratic order in chapter five where an investigation of the rhetoric of the American “Jacobin” suggested that even the rhetorical specter of democratic fanaticism calls citizens to critically deliberate about the democratic nature of the order the supposed fanatic confronts no less than the nature of the fanatic framed as a threat to the polity. Jefferson’s insightful comments on the value of insurrection seem just as applicable to the political speech of and about democratic fanaticism as much as they are to its contingent physical form in insurrection. Both the speech and acts of democratic fanaticism serve as catalysts toward reconsideration of political order, and both the fanatic and the citizen observer keep alive the constant push-and-pull of democratic life. Though the zealot – when justified – may resemble a vanguard of democracy, it is always up to the democratic citizen to judge the zealot and reevaluate the democratic nature of the political order the zealot opposes.

Democratic Extremism and Contemporary Democratic Theory

Political theorists have often developed competing strands of democratic theory when normatively evaluating how a contemporary democratic politics ought to be

structured and conceptualized, or how a political order might best realize the basic democratic principle that the people rule themselves as political equals free from domination. Yet, as Joel Olson has suggested, much of contemporary democratic theory seems unable or unwilling to adequately address the theoretical and practical problem of extremism. In his criticism of contemporary democratic theory, Olson charged liberal, deliberative, and agonal models of democracy in particular with inadequately addressing fanaticism.⁹ Focusing on the question of “whether public deliberation is irreducibly agonal or whether it should strive conceptually for consensus,” Olson argued that “both models [deliberative and agonal] overwhelmingly focus on conflict that takes place among parties who share a common liberal ethical and political framework that provides the principles and rules within which legitimate political contest takes place.”¹⁰ Because it largely ignores conflict over a common ethico-political framework itself, much of contemporary democratic theory ignores the problem of extremism.¹¹ Deliberative models tend to “limit themselves to conflicts within a common framework” thereby neglecting conflicts in which extremists contest the framework itself or the principles on which it stands.¹² Theorists of agonistic democracy often fault deliberative democrats as being averse to political conflict, yet Olson charged agonal theorists with failing to adequately address conflicts over frameworks of political engagement just as much as their deliberative counterparts. Both agonal and deliberative theorists end-up

⁹ Joel Olson, “Friends and Enemies, Slaves and Masters: Fanaticism, Wendell Phillips, and the Limits of Democratic Theory,” *The Journal of Politics* 71.1 (January 2009), 82-95.

¹⁰ Olson, “Friends and Enemies,” 82.

¹¹ I would add that in political science, much of contemporary political theory in general sidesteps the *theoretical* challenges of extremism, leaving analysis of extremism to the purview of scholars in International Relations, Comparative Politics, and Security Studies.

¹² Olson, “Friends and Enemies,” 83.

“sidestepping the problem of irreconcilable conflict in politics.”¹³ This failure is symptomatic for Olson of the tendency for contemporary democratic theorists to assume that extremism is inherently anti-democratic because it rejects the “official” or accepted framework of politics.¹⁴ Yet, though fanaticism often undermines democracy and serves forces of domination, when disagreement concerns an ethico-political framework itself, “zealotry can be a democratic tool if it rallies public opinion to expand the citizen body and its power.”¹⁵

The reasoning of contemporary political theorists in response to the pressures of intractable extremism has often echoed the abstract logic of political order with its rejection of all extremisms as threats to order itself. Norberto Bobbio’s analytical distinction between extremism and “moderatism,” outlined in his more general project of distinguishing the analytical difference between left and right political positions, is reflective of a common way of conceptualizing extremism as inherently antithetical to democracy. For Bobbio, the criterion that distinguishes the extremist from the moderate is not necessarily a difference in ideas, but in the radicalization of ideas. It is a difference in strategy for the implementation of ideas in practice, a difference of method and not of values.¹⁶ Arguing that the distinction between left and right is different from the distinction between moderate and extremist, Bobbio suggested that “opposing ideologies can have points of contact and agreement at their extremes, even though they are still quite distinct in terms of the political programmes and final objectives which define their

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 82.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 20, 27.

positions *vis-à-vis* the left/right distinction.”¹⁷ The point at which left/right extremists meet is in their shared rejection of democracy. Sharing an object of hate, “their rejection of democracy brings them together, not because of their position on the political spectrum, but because they occupy the two extreme points of that spectrum. The extremes meet.”¹⁸ Their shared “radical rejection of democracy” is the most persistent and significant point of contact between extremists across the political spectrum.¹⁹ As Bobbio’s theoretical distinction between left and right developed, he put the distinction between extremist and moderate in even starker terms, as a difference in their attitudes toward freedom.²⁰ Their varying regard for the ideal of liberty as it is “implemented through the fundamental rules and principles of democratic governments, and the recognition and protection of personal, civil and political rights” is key in allowing the difference between the extremist and moderate to be made.²¹ Though the moderate and the extremist might share similar positions and values, it is the extremist that holds the conviction that his or her ideals may only be implemented through force and authoritarian practice.²² For Bobbio, the analytical crux is clear, extremists reject democracy.

In his critique of contemporary democratic theory, Olson identified a common tension in just the sort of liberal democratic thought reflected in Bobbio’s comments on extremism. Liberal democracies are committed to freedom of opinion at the same time they are committed to the stability of the polity. This results in a tension when opinions

¹⁷ Bobbio, *Left and Right*, 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

and political positions threaten stability.²³ This “double-edged sword” of liberalism is an enduring tension in liberal democracy which theorists and actors constantly attend to while their critics articulate it as an irresolvable contradiction undermining the stability of liberal democratic order.²⁴ This tension in liberalism gives context to Olson’s general criticism of liberal democratic theory’s inability to properly conceptualize extremism. Liberal theory focuses on conflicts between competing parties that are not irreconcilably opposed because all parties abide by the accepted rules of politics. Where there is irreconcilable conflict, politics have failed.²⁵ The aim of liberal democratic theorists then, is to moderate conflict in a way that precludes irreconcilable conflict between friends and enemies. When confronted by the intractable opposition of the extremist, liberal democratic theorists tend to exclude it, treating the fanatic and the zealot as something apolitical to be excluded and opposed rather than as political subjects to be negotiated or contested with. For a liberal democrat, the politics of reciprocity exclude the extremist who rejects the consensual terms of mutual respect that ground liberal politics. Olson argued that this is problematic in practice because exclusion from a theoretical framework, while understandable for maintaining theoretical integrity, does not necessarily exclude the extremist from publicly voicing their opinions and acting on their positions. Though measures seeking to enact the exclusion of the extreme may inhibit some extremist activism (e.g., laws against hate speech might limit the amount of public speech by hate groups, just as laws against espousing the violent overthrow of

²³ Ibid., 83.

²⁴ Carl Schmitt’s critique of liberalism is a classic articulation of this latter position. See for example, Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985).

²⁵ Olson, “Friends and Enemies,” 84.

government might impair the ability of extremists to do just that), extremists often use legal and accepted means to promote their intractable opposition (e.g. extreme right wing parties in Europe such as the Freedom Party of Austria and the National Front in France, often participate in parliamentary elections while espousing positions hostile to national frameworks of governance). While liberal democratic models suffer from the practical problem of how to actually exclude extremists, they also suffer from a theoretical problem. By excluding all extremists as anti-democratic, liberal democratic theorists preemptively exclude fanatics that may make contributions to democratic practice, rejecting even the possibility that extremists may serve the extension and deepening of political equality.

Focusing on Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson's, *Democracy and Disagreement*, as a paradigm of deliberative democratic theory, Olson adopted the critical position that deliberative models, like liberal models more generally, exclude extremists that reject liberal principles of consensus and reciprocity.²⁶ Though they may be treated as a subset of liberal theory, theories of deliberative democracy differ in their focus, largely acknowledging the "relative priority of the constituent power," while deliberative theorists "are not primarily concerned with the constitutional protection of basic rights, but with the need instead to reform institutions in western democracies in order to improve the quality of democratic debate and deliberation."²⁷ In his criticisms, Olson stressed that the problem of extremism in deliberative theory is not that deliberative democratic models exclude extremists but that they do not account for the implications of this exclusion. Democratic deliberation admittedly does not seek to

²⁶ Olson, "Friends and Enemies," 86.

²⁷ Mark Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 83.

resolve deep moral disagreements but to contain them within a deliberative framework governed by a principle of respect and reciprocity. For Gutmann and Thompson, where deliberative consensus on deeply divided moral issues is not the goal of democratic debate because the divisions are too deep, processes of democratic deliberation would allow interlocutors to “find greater common ground than they had before” thereby making thorny issues “more tractable.”²⁸ Parties with opposing positions may be deeply and morally divided but they must be reasonable and open-minded when engaging in deliberation, they must enter with the intent of reaching agreement and be open to questioning fundamental beliefs and even changing their minds.²⁹ The problem here, is that the objective of the extremist is not agreement or mutually-beneficial resolution but zero-sum victory, and “the principle of reciprocity is ineffective when the objective of struggle is not to find fair terms of debate but to defeat one’s opponent.”³⁰ Though the zealot might respect her opponent, how could she be expected to abide by deliberative reciprocity when her zeal makes her unwilling to question her beliefs and the veracity of her animating cause is never in doubt? Deliberative democracy is bound to a liberal framework that excludes parties rejecting the framework. Accordingly, because the “deliberative principles of fairness and reciprocity predetermine what counts as legitimate political action,” extremists are treated as threats to democracy to be excluded if they do not yield to liberal terms of deliberation.³¹

²⁸ Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 54 quoted in Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 84.

²⁹ Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16-51.

³⁰ Olson, “Friends and Enemies,” 86.

³¹ Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 85. Not only are deliberative democratic models often unable to fully address extremism, but from an agonal perspective, they overly constrain the inherent

Like with deliberative democratic models and broader theories of liberalism, Olson faulted agonal democratic theorists as also inadequately theorizing extremism. For Olson, agonal democrats are too focused on understanding “conflict that takes place within a common, typically liberal, ethical, and political framework.”³² Agonal theories, unlike deliberative models, seek to accommodate conflict rather than constrain it, but echoing a common criticism of agonistic democracy, Olson argued that “agonistic democratic theories also place largely unacknowledged limits on political contestation.”³³

In his survey and reformulation of agonistic democracy, Mark Wenman argued that much of contemporary agonistic theory suffers from an almost exclusive emphasis on “augmentation.”³⁴ Borrowing from Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution*, *The Human Condition*, and “What is Authority?” a politics of augmentation “denotes moments of innovation that bring about genuine (i.e. open-ended and non-dialectical) change in existing norms and practices, but also, and at the same time, refer back to and expand a prior moment of authority or foundation.”³⁵ For some of the most paradigmatic theories of agonal democracy – Wenman cites for example, the work of Chantal Mouffe, Bonnie

pluralism constitutive of democratic politics and promote ideas incommensurate with the tragic view of politics that is characteristic of agonal theory. The deliberative emphasis on procedures that rationalize forms of democratic will formation, “subordinate the constituent power to determinant principles of rationality. In the deliberative model, the constituent power is either governed normatively from the start by transcendent principles of inclusion and reciprocity, and/or locked into a dialectical movement, where interlocutors progressively learn these virtues as they move towards the ideal of ‘unconstrained rational consensus.’” Models of democracy where “contest and fallibility are understood as contingent limitations on otherwise potentially rational forms of democratic will formation” are incompatible with “the wholeheartedly tragic vision of agonistic democracy where conflict is understood as intrinsic to political life.” See Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 84-85.

³² Olson, “Friends and Enemies,” 87.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 92.

³⁵ Ibid.

Honig, William E. Connolly, and James Tully among others – augmentation describes the "essential structure of the constituent power."³⁶ In emphasizing augmentation, agonal models are often unable to adequately conceive of politics that entail radical breaks, origins, or differences whether such politics are revolutionary or counter-revolutionary. This, combined with the tendency of agonal theorists to explicitly endorse the basic grammar, traditions, institutions, and practices of modern liberal constitutional democracies underpins Wenman's general criticism of contemporary agonism. Similarly in tone to Olson's line of critique, Wenman argued that "the combined effect of these assumptions is to limit agonistic politics to a non-dialectical expansion of the basic social and political forms that were founded in the eighteenth-century revolutions," which is problematic because forms of domination may require more radical politics of innovation to adequately address them.³⁷

In contrast to augmentation, Wenman conceptualized "revolutionary politics" to describe characterizations of constituent power and its expression as "an absolute beginning – and consequently a moment of radical rupture – that brings a new principle or set of norms and values into the world, as it were *ex nihilo*."³⁸ Just as agonal theorists emphasize augmentation as the only or most authentic form of constituent power – i.e. of democratic politics – Wenman charges theorists of "radical democracy" with equally emphasizing "the absolute priority of the constituent power in the form of revolution."³⁹ Radical democrats – under which Wenman categorized the work of Alain Badiou,

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 9.

³⁹ Ibid., 89.

Ernesto Laclau, Jacques Rancière, and Slavoj Žižek – reject the significance of augmentation as an authentic form of constituent power, stressing that “genuine moments of the constituent power, *always* take the form of a radical break.”⁴⁰ This exclusive emphasis on revolutionary breaks and radical origins as the authentic expression of constituent power leads radical democrats to be “inattentive to moments of genuine innovation found in less dramatic forms of politics.”⁴¹

Though focused on presenting a highly critical but sympathetic reformulation of agonal democracy, Wenman’s criticisms speak to the perceived inability of agonal theorists to properly conceptualize and account for extremism. Extremism, like Wenman’s understanding of revolutionary politics, is predicated on rejecting, disrupting, and breaking from a status quo order, established institutions, or basic terms of reciprocity and norms of consensus. Because agonal democrats privilege augmentation as the only authentic politics and liberal constitutionalism as the bedrock framework of consensus, they tend to reject extremism and revolutionary politics that go against and disrupt a consensus-based framework. Echoing Wenman’s criticisms, the general trend of Olson’s critique of contemporary democratic theory is that the horizons of deliberation and agonism are reached when a party to political contest rejects a common ethico-political framework. Agonal and deliberative democratic theory are unrealistic for Olson

⁴⁰ Ibid., 90. Emphasis in the original. Wenman’s category of “radical democracy” is useful for drawing-out a contrast with agonal, deliberative, and liberal political theory on the question of augmentation vs. revolution but I do not entirely agree with his categorization of particular theorists under this grouping. Though space does not allow for a fuller engagement, and I accept Wenman’s categorization for the purposes of explication, categorizing the political philosophy of Alain Badiou as democratic is deeply problematic not the least because of his rejection of “democracy” in favor of a reformulated non-Marxist ideal of “communism.” See for example, Alain Badiou, “The Democratic Emblem,” in *Democracy in What State?* Giorgio Agamben, et. al., Trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 6-15.

⁴¹ Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 91.

because they limit political contest to the confines of a consensus-based framework of commonality. This limit is a problem because with it, agonal and deliberative democrats pre-emptively exclude extremists that may contribute to democracy on the grounds of being assumed to be anti-democratic, and they fail to account for the excluded extremist's continued presence as an actual political force after he or she has been theoretically excluded. Like Olson, Wenman finds the tendency of agonal theorists to reject disruptive politics and their commitment to the framework of liberal constitutionalism to be problematic because forms of domination may require the radical disruption and new beginnings of revolutionary – or, we might add, extremist – constituent power as much as they may be handled best by the constituent power of augmentation.

In response to his own criticisms of agonal and deliberative democracy, Olson argued that democratic theory should incorporate the concept of hegemony.⁴² Where agonism aims to convert political contests between potential enemies into a contest between adversarial “friendly enemies” by creating a common symbolic space – i.e., a mutually respected framework of consensus in which agonists struggle to organize this common space in different ways – politics as a contest for hegemony between dominant and subordinate groups is a struggle to forge a common will out of disparate interests and identities in an effort to define the common sense of society against an alternative articulation. In emphasizing the theoretical necessity of hegemony, Olson recognized the potential tension between agonism and hegemony, writing that, “agonism contains conflict within a common ethico-political framework; hegemony overthrows one

⁴² Olson, “Friends and Enemies,” 94.

framework and replaces it with another.”⁴³ Rather than explicitly resolving this tension, Olson advocated the inclusion in democratic theory of conceptualizing politics as a struggle for hegemony so as to enable contemporary democratic theory to better address extremism, though he did not explicitly connect the introduction of hegemony to any particular form of democratic theory. Where politics is understood as a struggle for hegemony, the extremist can be accounted for as an agonist that may be politically contested with rather than an inherently anti-democratic and apolitical threat to be excluded, thereby allowing the appreciation of extremism as a potentially democratic tool. Similarly, Wenman’s theoretical project involved a reformulation of agonal democracy in a way that does not choose between augmentation and revolution. Rather, Wenman argued for the necessity of making room for both the extreme politics of revolution and the more acceptable politics of augmentation because the “principally strategic nature of agonism compels us to keep open the range of possible moves available to situated subjects.”⁴⁴

There is much in Olson’s critique of liberal, agonal, and deliberative democratic theories with which we can agree and much of it builds off of prior and common criticisms of these models noted in Wenman’s account. However, I depart from Olson’s theoretical position by suggesting that there may be room in agonal theory to negotiate the positive good and potential legitimacy of democratic extremism. Raising this suggests an important theoretical question: what then are the implications for an agonal theory of

⁴³ Ibid., 88. Though Olson identified this tension, in a footnote he noted that it was not irresolvable and suggested Ernesto Laclau’s formulation of a left populism as an example of the tension’s resolution. Olson, “Friends and Enemies,” 88n5. See also Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

⁴⁴ Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 93.

democratic politics if a mode of politics that explicitly rejects consensus, and may even resist the basic legitimacy of liberal constitutional order, may still be a legitimate expression of constituent power and a form of agonism productive of positive democratic good? What sort of politics might a recognition of democratic extremism imply for contemporary democratic theory?

For an agonal theory of democratic politics to negotiate democratic extremism, it would have to be reformulated in a way that would remove the originary grounding of democratic agonism in liberal constitutionalism so as to allow for politics and political subjectivities that reject or disrupt contingent political orders. Critics and skeptics might respond that unmooring agonal politics from its theoretical grounding in liberal constitutionalism would undermine this theoretical perspective entirely. Yet agonal theory may already have within it a different source of grounding; democracy itself. Agonal theories of democratic politics that explicitly ground themselves in liberalism may neglect the ends which liberal constitutional principles were historically intended to protect: freedom from domination and political equality. The limits to agonal contestation ought to be a commitment to the security and perpetuity of democratic agonism, not the status quo, liberal constitutionalism, or contingent liberal orders.⁴⁵

Such a vision of agonal politics would conceptualize undemocratic actors and positions as threats to the polity to be excluded and struggled against in defense of a commitment to the perpetuity of democratic contest. This approach would exclude the undemocratic extremist, not because of his rejection of a common institutional order or a

⁴⁵ Unmooring agonistic democracy from its grounding in liberal constitutionalism does not necessarily entail opposition to all liberal orders or all vestiges of liberalism. It merely suggests that liberal orders, institutions, and practices ought not be seen as ineliminable forms structuring democratic life.

shared respect for contingent policies (or rights), or because of the extremist's intractability, but because he promotes a political subjectivity rooted in domination and an alternative framework of political order that obstructs the pursuit of political equality on which a democratic polity must be based. The undemocratic extremist would be excluded in theory, and energetically contested against in practice. In contrast, the democratic extremist would not necessarily be excluded from being a subject of democratic politics and its agonal contests.

Extremism and American Democratic Citizenship

Democratic fanaticism may be beneficial to American democracy by impeding its calcification through the zealot's demand for reevaluation of order by the polity's citizens and by resisting undemocratic obstacles to political equality. Though confronted by the zealot with the potential that an antagonism exists between democracy and status quo politics, citizens must be receptive to and capable of the deliberative reevaluation that extremism calls for. Democratic extremism is a recurrent phenomenon in American political history, and though I suggest that it always has value in calling for the reconsideration of politics and political order, it is only ever a spark for democratic citizens to engage in deliberative reconsideration and cannot take the place of popular deliberation among citizens.

Recognizing the repeated appearance of democratic extremism in early American history, its potential value as an impediment to the closure of democracy, as well as its authoritarian nature as a form of extremism, we ought to take the additional step of acknowledging that American citizens are in-part the historical products of political

extremism. Acknowledging this can help us to foster a critically self-reflective approach to contemporary and future appearances of fanaticism, and may serve to continuously call contingent democratic policies and concrete democratic orders into question. Recognition has the potential to invigorate an open and agonistic democratic politics of constant participation through critical reflection on the democratic nature of the status quo. In light of this recognition and the need for us to grapple with the productive challenge and potential threat of democratic zeal, I want to conclude this work by suggesting that historically-informed democratic theory might best negotiate the challenge of democratic extremism at the level of the citizen in addition to theoretically reformulating agonal politics to be inclusive of a politics of augmentation as well as democratic forms of extremism.

Political orders create subjects from the selves of a polity, but in every settled order there is the inevitable creation of remainders, those selves that do not fit a political order's normative model of subjectivity or citizenship. As Bonnie Honig has noted, all formations of political subjectivity engender resistances and remainders.⁴⁶ Because "every politics has its remainders...resistances are engendered by every settlement, even by those that are relatively enabling or empowering..." and it is in defense of those "perpetually generated remainders of politics" that the perpetuity of political contest must be secured.⁴⁷ With each democratic contest in which undemocratic obstacles to political equality are resisted and remainders assert themselves as politically equal democratic subjects, new and other fissures, remainders, wrongs, and undemocratic obstacles are

⁴⁶ Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

⁴⁷ Honig, *Displacement*, 3.

revealed or engendered, demanding public attention, political reconsideration, and action.

Examining democratic extremism highlights the tragic nature of American politics with its constitutive pluralism, unending political contest, and perpetual need to vigilantly attend to the presence of undemocratic obstacles to political equality and the inevitable presence of remainders. These observations suggest that contemporary democratic theory would benefit from normatively and descriptively conceptualizing American democracy as broadly agonistic but, recognizing the challenge of democratic extremism, unbounded by unalterable and ineliminable frameworks. Yet, for all its celebration of pluralism and contestation, agonistic democracy relies on a grounding friend-or-enemy framing between the internal agonism bounded by consensus and the excluded other. In light of the challenge of democratic extremism, not only must agonal democracy make room for a democratic politics of extremism, it also ought to be grounded in a commitment to the preservation of democratic contest against the threat of undemocratic extremists, undemocratic orders, and undemocratic obstacles to political equality rather than respect for a contingent liberal constitutional order.

In addition to recognizing the agonal and sometimes extreme nature of democratic politics, theorists and citizens of the American democratic polity ought to rethink our normative ideas about the meaning of American democratic citizenship in-part because practices of democratic fanaticism which have and may shape democratic citizenship often take forceful, extra-legal, and insurrectionary forms. Insurrectionary practices explicitly reject ideas of citizenship bound by obedience to law and acquiescence to political order. Extremist and insurrectionary forms of political practice beyond the exceptional event of the American Founding contribute to the American democratic

tradition, influence the democratic nature of contingent status quo politics, and help shape the historical formation of the modern American citizen. Because of this, we must rethink what democratic citizenship as a form of participatory political inclusion should mean in a political order subject to the repeated reevaluation and challenge of its very core no less than its particular policies. Rethinking the meaning of American democratic citizenship in recognition of a sub-narrative history of democratic extremism is particularly important with regard to the obligations of citizenship and what it means to exercise and be capable of exercising democratic self-rule (e.g., obedience to law, political participation, etc.). Appreciating the value of democratic extremism to the American democratic tradition, Americans must be able to better recognize, evaluate, and politically judge the appearance and possibility of extremism. We must rethink what it means to be a democratic citizen in the American polity in terms that not only recognize a tradition influenced by agents, acts, and discourses that resemble political extremism as much as democratic politics, but which also stress the formation of Americans as democratic agents capable of seeing the possibility of extremism's democratic nature, deliberating the legitimacy of its claims, reaching an informed judgment of its legitimacy, and taking responsibility for the acceptance or rejection of its tactics. Such skills are necessary as much for the evaluation of the fanatic as the concrete political order in which Americans live.

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