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THE COLLOQUIUM

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MISSION STATEMENT

To address, ponder, and critique the political issues of past and present

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Colloquium is Boston College's leading political science publication. Serving as a forum to promote academic dialogue and exchange both within and outside of the University's political science community, the Colloquium expands upon the traditional offerings of a political science education. Coupled with the discipline's intensive writing and critical thinking nature, the Colloquium furthers the means through which students are able to address, ponder, and critique the political issues of past and present.

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William Blake, *Jacob's Dream*, pen, ink, and watercolor, Yale Center for British Art, ca. 1805, https://pdimagearchive.org/images/cde12e40-1a93-4cde-a690-7828a48a9c18/.

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Pieter van der Borcht the Elder, *The Difficulty of Ruling over a Diverse Nation*, Rijksmuseum, 1578, https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-difficulty-of-ruling-over-a-diverse-nation-1578/

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CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

It is our pleasure to present the Spring edition of Volume VI of *The Colloquium: The Undergraduate Political Science Journal of Boston College.* We received an impressive number of submissions from both undergraduates and graduate students alike, making this edition particularly competitive. We are also excited to feature not only articles from students but an interview with one of Boston College's own professors, Thibaud Marcesse, regarding the publication of his new book.

This edition features first an overview and analysis of the John Birch Society by Matthew Antonecchia, bringing up important discussion of how the conservative movement and the political zeitgeist continue to be influenced by the advocacy group. Next, Bangjie Xu utilizes Marx's historical-materialist method to situate liberal and conservatives conceptions of property, rights, liberty, and tradition within the framework of class relations and, through this reorientation, examines what can be normatively derived as valuable from them. Then, we feature an interview with Professor Thibaud Marcesse regarding his recent book, *The Accommodation of Democracy: A New Political Economy of Poverty Alleviation in Rural India*. He discusses the process of democratic accommodation—compared to democratic deepening—at the local level in India, revealing much about bureaucracy's influence on democratization and the reality of how policy implementation occurs. Afterwards, Callie Walsh provides insights into the disparities inherent in policy designed to confront homelessness, highlighting how urban-centric frameworks leave those in rural areas vulnerable and unconsidered. Lastly, Clara Taft places Euripides's *Ion* in conversation with Athenian concepts such as nationalism and femininity, and reveals how political concerns of the contemporary audience force further understanding and support for Kreousa.

Our cover art is William Blake's *Jacob's Dream*, imagining the Genesis story in which Jacob dreams of a ladder ascending to heaven. On the back cover, Pieter van der Borcht the Elder's *The Difficulty of Ruling over a Diverse Nation*, envisions an amalgamation of various different animals, with disparate heads protruding from every part of its body. These coalesce in a depiction of the dichotomous priorities of our political zeitgeist: collectively seeking normative change through reaching upwards and becoming encapsulated by the heterogenous differences that comprise ourselves. Too often does the latter take up our time and efforts, becoming too lost in the weeds of identity instead of utilizing these differences to propel us towards our cumulative, latent potential. Many countries, especially the United States, have been captured by populist movements and with rhetoricians claiming that diversity weakens us. A turn towards the ladder is necessary: it is time to raise our heads from the mud and reach toward the stars.

As Co-Editor in Chiefs for the past two years, we are now approaching our graduation and as a result are excited to hand the journal off to our next editorial board. Reviving *The Colloquium* has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of both of our undergraduate careers, and we are extremely grateful for the hard work, dedication, and lively attitudes of our teams that made this effort possible. Most importantly, we are grateful for the relationships and intellectual engagement that *The Colloquium* has afforded us. While we are sad to say goodbye, we know that the journal is in good hands and are excited to read future editions published by a new board.

We recognize again our status as Boston College's political science journal and the university's status as a Jesuit institution. Our utilization of a Biblical painting is a recognition of the importance of these Jesuit values to the mission of the journal, but its placement in juxtaposition to *The Difficulty of Ruling over a Diverse Nation* is an insistence that such values should incite empathy and concord rather than religiously-cited division and hatred. We hope you appreciate the research and effort evident in these works, and we thank you for reading this issue of *The Colloquium*.

Sincerely,
Joseph J. Murphy IV & Jessica K. Orrell
Co-Editor-in-Chiefs

The John Birch Society: Its History, Platform, and Impact

MATTHEW ANTONECCHIA

This essay uses existing scholarship to examine the founding, rise, and current standing of the ultra-conservative group known as the John Birch Society. At its inception, the John Birch society prioritized isolationist, protectionist policy to secure the United States against communism, alleging communist plots even within the government. These accusations secured its status as a conspiracist group early in its lifetime. The Society found the majority of its support and lobbying through grassroots organizing by using local factions of the group to encourage members to engage. Today, they still work to combat "Big Government" and encourage economic protectionism and isolationism through grassroots campaigns. Although the John Birch Society began as an extremist offshoot of the Republican Party, this essay demonstrates that the modern Republican Party has shifted to the point that the two are indistinguishable, signaling a massive ideological shift in the Republican Party and the significance of extremist groups. This research could be used as a broader study to understand the rise of ultra-right conspiracy groups and their role in the increasing radicalism in the American right.

I. Introduction

The objective of this paper, broadly speaking, is to provide a comprehensive outline of the conservative American political advocacy group known as the John Birch Society. In order to fulfill this task, the report will inspect the founding and history of the John Birch Society, the current status of the group, how such a status has evolved over time, the political presence and activity of the Society, and its central legislative priorities. It is imperative to note at the outset of this paper that the John Birch Society's influence as a political advocacy group has waned considerably since its heyday; despite this, recent ideological and electoral shifts in the Republican Party, and on the political right at-large, have been reflective of numerous ideologies espoused by the group. This report will thus pay special attention to that which propelled the John Birch Society into existence, and how a group often confined to the fringe continues to affect policymaking in the present day, even if this influence is less direct than that of other groups.

II. The Early History and Founding Ideology of the John Birch Society

While most reports concerning a certain interest group are more likely to speak of the nature of that group as it exists in the present day, a study of the John Birch Society warrants a closer look at its foundational ideologies and early growth patterns. Much of what drove the Society into being remains instrumental to its functioning today. In a broader sense, an examination of how this interest group contributed to policymaking and political rhetoric, some of which exists beyond the efforts of their direct involvement, demands a look at what caused these views to first become embedded.

Robert W. Welch, Jr. (1899-1985), made his fortune working for his brother's confectionery manufacturing firm, the James O. Welch Company. Beyond the candy-making

industry, Welch was a political activist and organizer who devoted much of his resources to the promotion of his staunchly conservative, anti-communist views. The John Birch Society was founded by Welch and a small group of men in December of 1958 at a conference in Indianapolis; Welch had elected to name the group, and thus center its whole identity, around the then little-known John Birch, a Baptist missionary and American Air Force officer. Birch had been stationed in China when, for reasons not entirely known, he was executed by officers of the Chinese Communist Party. Welch thus regarded Birch as the first American casualty of the Cold War, and claimed the federal government had attempted to conceal the details of his death from the public. It was this attitude, one of grave distrust and suspicion toward institutions of government, of constant unrest about the security of the nation and the loyalties of those within, which would characterize the John Birch Society as the group became politically active.

The John Birch Society immediately benefited from the wealth of several of its founding members; the oil engineer Fred C. Koch, father of Charles and David Koch, was influential in the founding of the group, as were other affluent industrialists, such as Harry Lynde Bradley and Robert Waring Stoddard. The Society's ideological positions were protectionist, isolationist, and apocalyptic from the outset. Welch alleged the existence of a "conspiratorial cabal of internationalists, greedy bankers, and corrupt politicians"[1] who were endeavoring to relinquish American sovereignty in favor of a socialist New World Order. Traitorous actors within the American government were suspected of acting in concert with the Soviet Union, in order to turn the nation over to a collectivist, worldwide government controlled by the latter. Welch thus viewed any evidence indicating collectivism and socialism in society as a gradual step in the process to this ultimate conversion to communism. According to Welch, "You have only a few more years before the country in which you live will become four separate provinces in a

[1] Robert Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society*, (Western Islands, 1961), Introduction.

world-wide Communist dominion ruled by police state methods from the Kremlin."[2] In this way, the John Birch Society can be seen as having formed under the "disturbance theory" of interest groups: it assumed a covert operation to betray the United States to this international "uniparty," and sought to deploy the resources of its prominent members to counter this internal invasion.

The Society's membership grew quite rapidly as the 1950s gave way to the 1960s, this is attributable to a twofold series of developments. The first pertains to the manner in which Welch and other founding Birchers endeavored to organize and structure the group. Power was to be concentrated heavily at the top and distributed downwards in a highly-controlled manner. Local chapters of the John Birch Society were intended to be very small in number and meet frequently; if a chapter became too large, it was supposed to splinter into two. Ironically, the tightly-regulated nature which Welch first brought to the John Birch Society resembled the strictness of the anathematic communist regimes. Welch's ability to effectively organize and mobilize people to work on the ground was instrumental in the J.B.S. 's proliferation into the political arena. The Society did rely upon methods of spreading information not unseen in other groups, such as pamphleteering and public speaking engagements; but it is the unconventional nature of their platform which distinguished them from most political advocacy organizations. Thus is the nature of the second factor which the Society's rapid growth can be attributed to: the propagation of ideas so conservative that they were radical and conspiratorial in nature, but which nonetheless caused membership to blossom at the same time. One prominent effort of the J.B.S. was, and continues to be, voracious resistance to international organizations such as the United Nations, in the form of their long-running "Get US Out! Of the U.N." rallying cry. But it was not merely within large, influential groups or associations that the Society detected a degree

[2] Charles J Stewart, "The Master Conspiracy of the John Birch Society: From Communism to the New World Order," *Western Journal of Communication* 66, no. 4 (2002): 423, https://doi.org/10.1080/10570310209374748.

of perversion and anti-American sentiment. Various campaigns were also concentrated at the state and local levels of politics and government. J.B.S. leadership began what was then the novel practice of encouraging members to become involved in their local Parent-Teacher Associations and school board elections, so as to prevent these groups from also becoming infiltrated with collectivist and communist positions. It is clear then, that the John Birch Society detected the opportunity for treachery in any place where political organization occurred, no matter how large or small the issue or forum may have been.

The most controversial belief espoused by the Society came into public view by the summer of 1960, when it was revealed that Welch had implicated President Eisenhower in his assertion of a communist conspiracy. He wrote: "With regard to Eisenhower, it is difficult to avoid raising the question of deliberate treason."[3] One can detect parallels between the boldness of this claim and the charges leveled by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Where they differ, though, is in the resultant effects of these assertions. McCarthy eventually fell from power and was censured by the Senate before dying young in relative disgrace. Both Welch and the John Birch Society, however, were able to withstand the torrent of criticism which came with accusing the honorable Eisenhower of treason. This is not to say that there was not some fallout; William F. Buckley, Jr. swiftly disavowed the group and became a prominent critic of the Society and its ideology as he attempted to rid the political right of its influence.

The post-World War II political climate was marked saliently by the Red Scare and the United States' policy of containment toward the Soviet Union, developments which precipitated the Society's founding. However, the communist paranoia had died down to a certain degree, and men such as Buckley endeavored to make the conservative movement more politically viable,

[3] Lisa Graves, "The Koch Brothers: The Extremist Roots Run Deep," *The Progressive Magazine*, July 10, 2014, https://progressive.org/latest/koch-brothers-extremist-roots-run-deep/.

such that it represented a stable force born out of legitimate political tradition, rather than a hastily-deployed reactionary weapon. The question which remains, is how the John Birch Society was able to remain prominent enough, despite criticism from Buckley and others, such that its membership continued to expand throughout the 1960s. Certain political scientists and historians have charged that the Society's presence in this decade was formidable enough to grant it unofficial third-party status, due to its influence upon political discourse in general. Despite its overtly conservative position, it did not always align with the traditional conservative causes of the time. For example, the Society believed the country's involvement in Vietnam to be another element of the planned communist takeover, and urged the United States to remove itself from the war. One can detect a similarity between this rhetoric and the isolationist bent of the Republican Party today, and thus also the beginning of a serious divergence about foreign policy within the political right.

In looking at the development pattern of the John Birch Society throughout the 1960s, an observer will find that much of its growth can be attributed to its enhancement and expansion of usual ways in which interest groups reached the public, and also to the deployment of new strategies. The Society organized various grassroots lobbying campaigns to rally citizens around a myriad of issues, all of which linked back to the grand conspiracy which Welch and the Birchers alleged. Several letter-writing campaigns and petition drives were initiated to spread awareness about particular concerns, and a robust publishing arm of the Society emerged so that the platform could be better understood by the public. The J.B.S. launched a magazine known as *American Opinion,* whose publication continues today under the name *The New American*. Its purpose is to cover the same issues which a Society meeting or other engagement would highlight, and the magazine soon became a ubiquitous presence around the country. It also

established a publishing subsidiary known as Western Islands, which continues to produce the aforementioned magazine and other literature relevant to the J.B.S. platform, along with various books which align with the Society's views. The subject matters driving these political mobilization attempts and literature publications ran the gamut from large to small, federal to local. One prominent and long-running campaign was centered around identifying grounds of impeachment for Chief Justice Earl Warren, a prime target of the Society. Another long-running campaign endeavored to deploy resources and people at the local, school board level to oppose the introduction of sexual education into the curriculum. Some of the causes almost seem facetious; the Society at one point alleged that the government-mandated fluoridation of drinking water was part of a communist mind-control plot; they were also against the establishment of Earth Day, claiming it too was a communist scheme.

Despite the varying nature of the issues at hand, they were each held in common through their role in the great conspiracy: an invasion of the Soviet Union's communist doctrine systematically carried out from within the country, from both the Chief Justice's bench and the kitchen faucet. Welch and the J.B.S. were thus successful in broadening the scope of conflict around the Red Scare; the issue became salient in every aspect of American political and social life, and outlived the lifespan it had within the political mainstream through the John Birch Society. In this way, the Society was in some ways a single-issue group at this time, since countering the communist infiltration was its principal goal. However, the far-reaching nature of this supposed invasion plunged the J.B.S. into the center of multiple issues. This helps explain why the Society was never restricted in its membership; there were never racial or religious barriers to entry, since Welch perceived this threat great enough to involve all citizens, regardless

of sectional or personal affiliations. This was commonly utilized as the grounds for a defense against charges that the J.B.S. was a racially prejudiced or antisemitic organization.

III. Later History and Present Status

By the end of the 1960s, the John Birch Society had arguably matured into its place among conservative political advocacy groups in the United States. Though its membership information is not readily available, it is thought to have peaked in the middle of that decade at about one hundred thousand. The social upheaval which marked the 1960s provided the Society with plenty of material to continue its assertion of the communist conspiracy. During this time period, the nature of the conspiracy was altered, as the necessary foundation was already set. One example of this widening can be observed as the civil rights movement unfolded; the Society charged not that the effort had fallen victim to communist infiltration, but was entirely manufactured by them from the outset. Thus, the urgency of the J.B.S.'s message assumed new significance here. The subversion was not confined merely to a charge leveled against a sitting public official; rather, an entire social movement, in which various groups and entities participated in at differing levels, was implicated. This is the manner in which the John Birch Society has been able to remain influential in some ways: by arousing suspicion and concern over an issue for which the entire potential is uncertain and remains to be fleshed out. It is not difficult to radicalize people against a possibly destructive cause, especially when different motives and approaches exist within that cause, as seen in the civil rights issue. The John Birch Society today ardently combats that which it perceives as "big government" intervention and obstruction in the lives of ordinary American citizens. It also advocates for economic protectionism and isolationism. To create national civil rights legislation is an example of the federal government's potential to overreach, just as a free trade agreement or international

security organization is. There is clearly an emphasis placed on highlighting how dangerous policies contradicting their political philosophy are. In this way, the underlying mission and the means utilized to effect it have not changed since the Society's founding.

It can be said that the history of the John Birch Society can be divided into two periods: before and after the death of Robert Welch in 1985. Much of the J.B.S. 's expansion can be attributed to Welch's tight organizational style and promotion of then-new grassroots lobbying efforts. After his death, the Society vacated its headquarters in the Boston suburb of Belmont, Massachusetts, in favor of a new location in Appleton, Wisconsin. This move was quite symbolic, considering Appleton was Senator Joseph McCarthy's hometown. Today, the J.B.S. occupies a small complex there, wherein very little has changed since its founding over six decades ago. The Chief Executive Officer at the time of this report, Bill Hahn, reports that the Society "continues to be a growing operation,"[4] despite the ostensibly small nature of the group and its limited physical plant. One may argue, though, that a group such as the John Birch Society need not possess a large or impressive headquarters at all. Its power is concentrated in its ability to disseminate its platform, which has become easier with the emergence of modern media . The small newsroom in the basement of the headquarters, utilized for producing online news reports, is indicative of this. Steve Bonta, the editor of their long-running *New American* magazine, believes that the Society has embraced a more mainstream position.[5] Perhaps the overtly conspiratorial nature of its messaging has been subdued in some respects. However, Mr. Bonta's assertion can also be flipped on its head: the John Birch Society has not altered its platform in any significant way such that its position fits more within the conservative

[4] Tim Sullivan, "At Birch Society headquarters, looking for the roots of the modern American conspiracy theory," *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 2024, https://www.latimes.com/lifestyle/story/2024-01-21/birch-society-headquarters-modern-american-conspiracy-theory.
[5] Tim Sullivan, "At Birch Society headquarters, looking for the roots of the modern American conspiracy theory," *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 2024, https://www.latimes.com/lifestyle/story/2024-01-21/birch-society-headquarters-modern-american-conspiracy-theory.

mainstream, but that what actually constitutes the conservative "mainstream" has shifted to the point that the Society neatly conforms with it.

One of the principal challenges which arises when studying the John Birch Society is the closely-guarded nature of much of its membership and financial information. As stated previously, the Society reached its highest membership levels in the mid to late 1960s, and the number has been declining ever since. The extent of this decline, and the present figure, have not been reported by the J.B.S., nor by any reputable external source. Such is also the nature of how the Society derives much of its funding; its establishment was financed by wealthy businessmen and, of course, Welch himself, though there is scant information about who contributes or donates directly to the Society. As with many other interest groups, one can elect to join the Society by contributing annual dues, which would ostensibly provide much of their organizational maintenance. At the time of this report, three membership categories existed: a standard level with a print subscription to the Society's newsletter (The J.B.S. Bulletin) and *The New American* magazine, a slightly less-expensive version which provides only digital access to these publications, and a lifetime membership which can be acquired for a flat fee of five-thousand dollars. It is of note that the membership dues are significantly reduced should a married couple apply together.[6] This promotional measure appears to conform to the platform of the J.B.S. at-large: an encouragement of the traditional family structure, despite what it sees as society's attempts to undermine this institution. Any donations directed to the Society are not eligible for tax-exempt status, since the J.B.S. is not registered as a 501(c)(3) organization; this tradition began with Welch, who sought to protect member interests by not revealing to the federal government who contributed.[7] This represents how the Society's attitude of deep

[6] "Join the John Birch Society," John Birch Society, JBS.org.
[7] JBS, "Donate to JBS."

suspicion towards government entities is reflected not only in their messaging, but in the organizational structure and operations of the group itself.

IV. Platform and Legislative Priorities

Since the advent of the World Wide Web, interest groups have been given the means to promulgate their message in a more streamlined and readily-accessible fashion. The John Birch Society is no exception: its webpage reveals much about the current status and legislative priorities of the group. The nature of the Society's primary message has not evolved much since 1958; but it has expanded to include different actors and ideologies which reflect the changing nature of political discourse. The webpage's front section begins with a call to action. It reads: "Now, more than ever, your patriotic leadership is needed. Is this the America our Founders envisioned? Their principles, and the Constitution itself, are under attack by forces that include socialists, Marxists, globalists, and the Deep State."[8] The urgency with which the Society views its message is evident here; the conspiracy appears as powerful as it was at the founding, poised to infringe upon individual liberties and the founding documents which undergird these rights. One notable shift in the rhetoric which the Society employs is the increasingly ambiguous nature of this conspiracy. Welch believed it to be a mechanism of the communists and the Soviet Union, which he clearly identified; this strategy was of course less effective after the Cold War. Today, the J.B.S. publishes statements like the following:

> America has been moving away from its founding principles of protecting life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Today, many of the forces that have done this operate in the open. Deep State, Big Government, the Establishment, the Insiders, the Conspiracy, or whatever name is attached, these forces have driven America $20+ trillion into debt, while trampling our liberties, our country's independence, and our way of life.[9]

[8] JBS, main page.
[9] JBS, main page.

Despite the ambiguity of this statement, the Society maintains with conviction that it knows precisely what is damaging the country, and possesses the necessary remedies. It thus sees the conspiracy in any effort that either seeks to draw power away from the local level in favor of a larger overseer, or is in opposition to a strict, states-rights interpretation of the Constitution.

The John Birch Society is claiming, in effect, that it is the sole conservative political advocacy group that detects the complete scope of this issue. It presents itself as a sort of underground, omniscient society that is identifying and countering the threats of other secret organizations . However, this particular secret society is also ever-seeking to expand and evangelize. There is great emphasis placed on the publication and media branches of the group; the primary benefit to membership is access to these subscriptions. In effect, then, the Society's air of superiority is rooted in the knowledge which they believe to possess. In keeping with Welch's philosophy, the J.B.S. endeavors to educate and inform people on the ground. They must be in it for the right reasons, though. Individual membership in the Society must be approved by a Local Coordinator, another vestige of Welch's desire to control all aspects of the group.. Furthermore, a clause in the application states explicitly that a membership may be revoked at any time, "without stated cause."[10] Once a member is admitted, he is expected to participate in his local chapter, which subscribes to the national group in its adherence to the platform and protocol of the "National Agenda." In the words of the Society, the group is structured as such so that: "members create great pressure and influence originates locally and is felt nationally."[11]

The extent to which the John Birch Society's influence is felt nationally is a matter of debate. As previously stated, a distinguishing factor of this group is that it does not advocate on behalf of one cause, as to not restrict the scope of their agenda.. Rather, it focuses on anything

[10] JBS, "Member application form."
[11] JBS, "Who We Are: About the John Birch Society."

which can be deemed a threat to American liberty and constitutionality. This net continues to be cast wide, just as in Welch's day. The J.B.S website includes a section delineating various "action projects"; these categories each represent a salient talking point for the Society, and for each section corresponding resources are provided. At the time of this report, the following can be identified as the most pressing concerns for the J.B.S., based on their presence here and plethora of literature, videos, and other resources provided. Namely, they are: "To Expose the Deep State," "Save Our Children," "Restore Election Integrity," "Covid-19 Overreach," "Stop a Constitutional Convention," "Stop the Globalists' Trade Agenda," "Get US Out! Of the UN," "Support Your Local Police," "The Constitution is the Solution," "Get US Out! Of the USMCA," "Make America States Again," "Stop the NAU," "Stop Mass Migration," "End the Fed," and lastly, "Stop Agenda 2030"[12]. Some of these, such as "Covid-19 Overreach" or "Stop Agenda 2030," are priorities reacting to more recent political developments, but still correspond to the overarching platform. Others, such as "Save Our Children," "Get US Out! Of the UN," and "Support Your Local Police," have always been prominent in the J.B.S. agenda.

Each of these categories seem to offer resources which attempt to educate concerned citizens and provide them with tools to translate their knowledge into action; such is the twofold mission of the Society. An inspection of the Deep State section is particularly enlightening, since this sort of language has essentially replaced the original communist threat. A page known as "Action Tools" begins with a definition of the concept:

> The Deep State's globalist plan for what insiders refer to as the 'New World Order'- basically, a global government controlled by themselves- begins with submerging the sovereignty of nation-states into regional 'orders'. These are better understood as regional governments built using 'free trade' deals as the foundation, with the European Union serving as the premier example.[13]

[12] JBS, "Action Projects."
[13] JBS, "Expose the Deep State: Deep State Action Tools."

This is helpful for understanding the Society's platform in several ways: it alleges a great conspiracy, advocates for economic protectionism, and derides the European model, wherein individual liberties have been sacrificed for an internationalist, secular government. The section also includes a *New American* publication entitled "What is Biden's 'New World Order'? Deep State Tyranny, Worldwide"[14]; while this references a sitting politician, it also reflects tradition. The Society was also highly critical of the first George Bush presidency Not only did Bush represent the anathematic establishment Republicanism, but the "New World Order" aspect of 1991 State of the Union address was major fodder for the J.B.S. Thus, the Society cannot be called an entirely partisan organization, given its tendency to attack any member of the two-party system who seems to further the conspiracy in some manner.

In terms of its lobbying activities and expenditures, the John Birch Society does not have a particularly notable presence. Much of its lobbying efforts are centered around its grassroots strategy: informing citizens such that they can mobilize and inform other citizens. This practice is referred to as "Birching,"[15] and it relies upon direct, local methods, including door-knocking and literature dropping, and lately, utilization of social media platforms. The Society employs Field Coordinators, whose function is to oversee these activities in individual districts. It also encourages a program known as the "Power of 500," which endeavors to see at least five-hundred dedicated Birchers within each Congressional district, since they believe this number to be a minimum threshold for maintaining an informed, constitutionally-bound electorate in that area.[16] The structure begins to resemble a sort of multi-level marketing arrangement in this way, since a local chapter is charged with evangelizing the Birch message so it reaches a greater audience, who in turn do the same. At the surface, Birching maintains the

[14] JBS, "Expose the Deep State: Deep State Action Tools."
[15] JBS, "John Birch Society Agenda."
[16] JBS, "The Power of 500."

appearance of a home-grown effort, but it is controlled quite closely by the national organization with the parameters set forth in the Society's agenda. It seems unlikely that an organization such as the J.B.S. would rely upon any high-powered Washington lobbyists, given their role in consorting with "Deep State" actors. To this effect, the Society explicitly prohibits itself from seeking out regular lobbying at all,[17] further evidence of its refusal to participate in the traditional political channels.

It is quite active, however, in terms of its electoral activity. Following in the model of other interest groups, the Society ranks elected officials based on how well they conform to its platform and mission. Unlike some other groups, it neither endorses nor opposes specific candidates. The rating scorecard is published every year in the *New American,* and is based on a system known as the "Freedom Index." Per the most recent edition: "The Freedom Index rates members of Congress based on their adherence to constitutional principles of limited government, fiscal responsibility, national sovereignty, and a traditional foreign policy of avoiding foreign entanglements."[18] In determining its ratings, the Freedom Index catalogues the important matters which come to a vote in both the House and Senate, and advises a "yea" or "nay" based on the Society's policy goals. Legislators are then assigned a percentage score based on how well they conformed to the index. In keeping with the J.B.S.'s emphasis on local matters, the *New American* produces the same scorecard for members of the state legislatures. The Society also maintains a system for sending "Legislative Action Alerts," which are intended to inform citizens of impending legislation which is potentially infringing. Further, it provides several resources for effectively contacting elected officials.[19] All of these undertakings are

[17] JBS, "John Birch Society Agenda."
[18] *The New American*, "Freedom Index: A Congressional Scorecard Based on the U.S. Constitution", (John Birch Society, 2024).
[19] JBS, "Legislative Action Alerts."

indicative of local, citizen-oriented, "men on the ground" methods of political organization and maneuvering.

V. The John Birch Society's Influence on Conservatism Today

It is the view of several political scientists and historians that the present nature of the Republican Party, and the conservative right in general, is more reflective of the platform of the John Birch Society than ever before. It no longer serves as a sometimes-influential but sometimes-derided faction capable of affecting some elements of the system, as it was in previous decades. It has merged with the conservative movement to the point that it is no longer as distinguishable in its subversiveness. The group seems to be keenly aware of this, one former C.E.O., Art Thompson, offered the following comment: "The bulk of Trump's campaign was Birch. All he did was bring it out into the open."[20] Much of what Thompson claims here can be observed in the approach which Trump and his brand of Republicanism utilize. As *The Los Angeles Times* writes: "The Society had spent decades calling for a populist president who would preach patriotism, oppose immigration, pull out of international treaties, and root out the forces trying to undermine America."[21] One of the most salient points of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign was to "drain the swamp" in Washington. A more restrained interpretation may read this as a pledge to rid the federal government of bureaucratic inefficiency and excess; some analysts, however, have likened this to the Bircher allegation that an unseen group holds immeasurable political influence, and will use it to further internationalist causes at the expense of the people. Should the latter hold true, this is quite an accomplishment for a group which has largely existed at the fringes of the political right, no matter how much coverage its activities may have generated. What William F. Buckley denounced as a group "far removed from

[20] Sullivan, "Headquarters."
[21] Sullivan, "Headquarters."

common sense"[22] who would "anathematize the entire right wing"[23] appears to have slid into the center of the Republican platform, even if this development can be said to exist outside of the Society's direct involvement.

Much of the resemblance between the longstanding traditions of the J.B.S. and conservatism today is attributable to the former's insistence upon waging a "culture war" in American politics. Most analysts pinpoint the culture war's intensification in the United States in the 1990s. The emergence of paleoconservatives such as Pat Buchanan, and their growing influence in the party, reflects this trend of issue-framing in moral or religious terms. An examination of the root of this phenomenon, however, must not overlook the role of the John Birch Society, which was waging a "culture war" of its own before the phrase was ever coined. The platform advanced by the Society was noteworthy from the beginning, since it sought to apply the argument that the religious and moral character of the United States was imperiled by the various bad actors who would relinquish the country to communist forces. The growing prominence of this position came to pass with the emergence of the Christian Right by the 1980s, and the political influence which this faction continues to hold. Thus, they served as the forerunners in expanding the scope of conflict for this issue: the threat which they perceived is not only an economic one, but it also threatens to erode the fundamental character of the United States if left unchecked, such that the nation becomes susceptible to internationalism and Godlessness. As a result, much of the J.B.S. platform finds its justification in a Republican Party which is increasingly isolationist, and is concerned far more with the changing nature of the country than it is changing the nature of governments abroad.

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[22] William F. Buckley, "Goldwater, the John Birch Society, and Me", *Commentary Magazine*, March 1, 2008, https://www.commentary.org/articles/william-buckley-jr/goldwater-the-john-birch-society-and-me/.
[23] John Savage, "The John Birch Society Is Back," *Politico Magazine*, July 16, 2017, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/07/16/the-john-birch-society-is-alive-and-well-in-the-lone-star-state-215377/.

VI. Conclusion

A close examination of the John Birch Society reveals five salient points about the nature of this organization: vis-à-vis its history, current status, legislative priorities, methods employed to achieve said priorities, and influence upon politics in general. Firstly, the Society was born out of a desire to cordon off the United States from communist influence, opposing both small and large policy points, and the local and national politicians who would seemingly bring this effect about. Secondly, the Society has shifted from its communist bent with the end of the Cold War, such that it now alleges a conspiracy which is just as broad yet less defined. It thus opposes any international organization, anything which could be seen as "big government" intervention, and any policy which threatens a strict reading of the founding documents. Thirdly, the Society is an ardent believer in political education and mobilization, since it believes a well-informed citizenry is the only effective means to combatting this conspiracy. It does not rely upon traditional, Washington-based methods of interest group politicking as a result. Fourthly, the Society views itself as patriotic rather than partisan in its refusal to participate with the two-party system. It also sees itself as politically mainstream, despite some characterizations saying otherwise. Lastly, the G.O.P. and general conservative movement have relied less upon their moderate or neoconservative factions, in favor of a platform which more closely resembles the Society's in several key aspects. This is principally an effect of the Society having asserted the existence of a "culture war" before most others found it politically useful to do so, and it has thus contributed to their seemingly outsized influence in policymaking and political rhetoric, especially given the limited nature of the group.

Whether the John Birch Society will reap the benefits of its apparent effect in shaping the conservative movement as it stands today remains to be seen. The Society has recently reported

an increase in membership in its Texas chapters. What this may indicate is some sort of feedback loop, wherein people become attracted to the Society's platform as politics become more accommodating to it, even though this shift in politics is itself the result of ideological and priority realignment which occurred over several decades and went through various iterations, but ultimately found its origin in the John Birch Society. In the present day, the Society's influence is felt well beyond the confines of the organization proper. Donald Trump's victory in the last presidential election should be taken as a sign that the John Birch Society's platform is more salient than any other brand of conservatism in today's Republican Party. At the broadest level, the election result signaled the G.O.P.'s general affirmation of the interesting brand of conservatism which endeavors to utilize the spirit of the founding and the presumed morality of the public as a means to overcoming both deep-seated forces of internal opposition and the sense of an overwhelming external threat.

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Marx Against Bourgeois Law: A Historical-Materialist Critique of Liberal and Conservative Jurisprudence on Property, Rights, and Tradition

BANGJIE XU

This essay contends that Marx's historical materialist method furnishes a sustained critique of liberal and conservative jurisprudence by situating doctrines of property, rights, liberty, and tradition within the class relations that generate them. Reading Locke, Bentham, Mill, Burke, and Rousseau alongside Marx, it argues that these frameworks, though presented in universal terms, are historically specific formations bound to bourgeois social organization. Simultaneously, Marx does not simply discard these traditions; he exposes the tension between their formal ideals and the material conditions of their realization. Liberal legality and conservative appeals to inherited order thus emerge as juridical forms that both express and stabilize structures of domination. What remains normatively valuable within those traditions, including freedom, equality, and communal life, can be realized more fully only through the transcendence of bourgeois law and the social relations on which it rests.

I. Introduction and Thesis

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Manifesto of the Communist Party* launched a radical critique of modern liberal and conservative theory by exposing their roots in the bourgeois epoch and reframing them through a materialist, class-centered lens.[1] Classical liberal thinkers such as John Locke grounded political authority in natural rights, consent, and a labor-based account of property, whereas Bentham and Mill advanced utilitarianism, insisting that law's legitimacy is ultimately judged by its contribution to overall welfare.[2] Conservatives like Edmund Burke defended inherited hierarchy, tradition, and the "decencies" of civilized order against rationalist revolution.[3] Rousseau, meanwhile, articulated a republican ideal of the general will that sought to reconcile freedom and equality through a political community oriented to the common good.[4]

Marx, drawing especially on *The Communist Manifesto* and "On the Jewish Question," turns these projects on their head.[5] Locke's natural right of private property becomes, in Marx's account, a historically specific regime of "bourgeois property," neither eternal nor just.[6] Bentham's and Mill's exaltation of individual liberty and rights reflects the "egoistic" isolation of man in bourgeois civil society.[7] Burke's reverence for feudal "chivalry" appears as "feudal socialism," a nostalgic but ultimately reactionary critique of capitalism.[8] Rousseau's vision of a unified people legislating through the general will points beyond liberal individualism and conservative traditionalism, yet for Marx, it remains trapped within a political form that leaves

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[1] Karl Marx and Freidrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *Marx/Engels Selected Works vol, 1, (1969).*
[2] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, (Hackett Publishing, 1980), 39; Jeremy Bentham *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, (William Tait, 1843), 42; John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Batoche Books 2001), 13.
[3] Edmund Burke, *Reflections On the Revolution In France* (1790), 28.
[4] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract,* trans. Jonathan Bennett (2010), 7.
[5] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 22; Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, (Marxists Internet Archive, 1844), 12.
[6] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 39; Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 22–23.
[7] Mill, *On Liberty*, 13; Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham,* 42; Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 42.
[8] Burke, *Reflections On the Revolution In France*, 63.

underlying class relations intact.[9] In each case, political and moral ideals are explained as expressions of material relations and class interests rather than timeless principles.[10]

This paper argues that Marx's historical-materialist method enables a penetrating critique of liberal and conservative jurisprudential foundations, namely, doctrines of property, rights, liberty, and tradition, by revealing them as ideological reflections of bourgeois class power, to be superseded by a classless society grounded in collective emancipation. This paper proceeds by first outlining Marx's historical-materialist method, then contrasting it with Locke on property, Bentham and Mill on rights and liberty, Burke on tradition, and Rousseau on the general will.

II. Marx's Historical Materialist Method

Marx's analysis begins from a historical materialist premise: social and political doctrines cannot be understood apart from the material conditions and class relations that produce them.[11] The *Communist Manifesto* famously opens by asserting that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."[12] Each epoch's dominant ideas reflect the ruling class's interests and the prevailing mode of production. Thus, doctrines of natural rights, liberty, and tradition are, for Marx, ideological forms of the bourgeois or feudal eras. Modern bourgeois society arose from the revolutionary dissolution of feudalism and is structured by the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.[13] Marx argues that "the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie"; that is, even when liberal-democratic states proclaim universal equality and rights, their typical tendency is to stabilize and administer capitalist class relations.[14] This contrasts sharply with social-contract theories like Locke's, which posit abstract, pre-social individuals who freely agree to form civil

[9] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 12; Marx & Engels, *Manifesto*, 22–23.
[10] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 22.
[11] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 25.
[12] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 14.
[13] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 15.
[14] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 15.

society to protect their natural rights. In "On the Jewish Question," Marx argues that the very language of the "rights of man" presupposes a split between man as a citizen in the political sphere and man as an isolated, self-seeking individual in civil society.[15] Political emancipation, that is, formal equality, rights, and citizenship, is real but partial.[16] It leaves intact a bourgeois order in which private property, competition, and market dependence continue to divide individuals.[17]

For Marx, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas." Capitalist society strips away feudal mystifications and bases itself on "naked self-interest" and "cash payment," yet still clothes its own relations in universal terms: "liberty," "equality," and "rights."[18] These ideals correspond to real changes (the freedom of commodity owners in a market) but are limited by their class basis.[19] Marx reads this definition of liberty as law-governed non-interference as functioning like a right of separation: each individual's protected sphere is bounded the way property is bounded, universal in form yet bourgeois in social meaning.[20] Marx's method is therefore to demystify political doctrines by situating them within the history of class formation and struggle.[21] He does not simply reject liberal and conservative theories; he seeks to sublate them to explain their origin, preserve what truth they contain, and show how they are transcended in a higher, non-bourgeois form.[22]

III. Locke and Property vs. Marx's Critique of Bourgeois Property

John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* grounds private property in individual labor. In the state of nature, the earth is held in common, but "every man has a property in his

[15] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 6, 11.
[16] Marx, *On the Jewish Question,* at 5, 7.
[17] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 13, 14, 20.
[18] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 15–16.
[19] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto,* 14.
[20] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 12.
[21] Marx, *On the Jewish Question,* 3, 5.
[22] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 25, 26.

own person," and by "mixing" his labor with natural objects, he makes them his own, so long as he leaves "enough and as good" for others and does not allow what he claims to spoil.[23] The invention of money relaxes this "spoilage" limit by providing a durable medium through which people can, by consent, accumulate far beyond immediate needs, thereby legitimizing large inequalities of wealth.[24] For Locke, the chief end of civil government is the preservation of "property" (life, liberty, and estate): political power is fiduciary, bound by settled law and "indifferent" judgment, and arbitrary seizure without consent is tyranny, hence the right to "appeal to Heaven" when rulers betray their trust.[25] Even Locke's own discussion of enclosure, commerce, and monetary consent marks a shift from the "first ages" toward more complex property relations but not yet a fully developed wage-labor economy.[26] Locke, in other words, theorizes property under pre-industrial conditions.[27] Read charitably, then, Locke is not offering a blank check for unlimited accumulation; he frames appropriation through moral constraints and a trust-based account of legitimate authority aimed at social peace and reciprocal security.[28] On a Marxian reading, the issue is not that Locke celebrates exploitation, but that his moral vocabulary of labor, improvement, consent, and property can be redeployed to legitimate capitalist relations once the underlying social conditions shift.[29] In that new setting, the same categories can help naturalize historically contingent relations: wage labor is redescribed as voluntary exchange among formally free rights-holders, dispossession is reframed as the legitimate boundary of ownership, and law's protection of accumulation presents itself as safeguarding the fruits of labor.[30] In my reconstruction, Locke supplies an idiom of legitimacy

[23] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 11, 12.
[24] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 14.
[25] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 40, 42, 53.
[26] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 11–15.
[27] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 11–15.
[28] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 11–15.
[29] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 26.
[30] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 28.

that can outlive its original context, where it is carried forward to rationalize a society in which workers must sell their labor power to live (that is, where labor-power itself functions as a commodity).[31]

Marx targets this picture in *The Communist Manifesto* by arguing that liberal property theory reflects the historical perspective of the bourgeois proprietor.[32] The famous summary of communist theory "abolition of private property" refers specifically to the abolition of bourgeois private property: the private ownership of the social means of production by a class of capitalists.[33] Marx distinguishes this from "the personal possession of the products of labour," which capitalism has already largely destroyed for small peasants and artisans.[34] Under capitalism, wage labor produces capital, not property for the laborer.[35] The worker sells labor power and receives only a subsistence wage; the product and surplus value accrue to the capitalist.[36] Capital is "a collective product" and a "social power," yet it is privately controlled by the bourgeoisie, enabling them to exploit labor.[37] In this context, Locke's claim that each person has a right to the fruits of his labor is inverted: the fruits of many people's labor are appropriated by a few.[38]

Locke's property right appears as a right of independence; Marx responds that bourgeois property deprives the majority of independence and property.[39] In bourgeois society, "living labour is but a means to increase accumulated labour (capital)."[40] The past, embodied in capital, dominates the present, embodied in workers.[41] When liberals object that abolishing private

[31] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 18.
[32] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 23.
[33] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 22.
[34] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 23.
[35] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 21.
[36] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 23.
[37] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 23.
[38] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 11; Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 18.
[39] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 42; Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 23.
[40] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 23.
[41] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 23.

property would destroy personal freedom, Marx answers that for the proletariat, there is almost no property to lose; they possess only labor power, which reproduces capital for others.[42] Marx thus reframes Lockean property as the ideological expression of an epoch in which the bourgeoisie has already expropriated the producers. The liberal state that Locke imagines as an impartial guardian of property is, in Marx's account, the guarantor of bourgeois property relations, defining "theft" in a way that criminalizes a hungry worker taking bread but legitimizes the systematic appropriation of surplus labor as "profit."[43]

Historically, Marx credits the bourgeoisie with having shattered feudal privilege and unleashed enormous productive forces, realizing a progressive moment of human development.[44] But once capitalism becomes a fetter on further development and a source of mass immiseration, bourgeois property itself must be overcome.[45] In a communist society, the social means of production would be commonly owned, and accumulated labor would serve the free development of living labor.[46] Marx presents this as the true fulfillment of the intuition that labor should receive its due: not by reasserting Lockean small proprietorship but by abolishing the class structure that allows some to live from others' labor.[47]

IV. Bentham and Mill vs. Marx on Rights and Liberty

Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill articulate a liberal vision of rights and liberty grounded in utilitarianism and individualism.[48] Bentham dismisses natural rights as "nonsense upon stilts."[49] Rights exist only as legal constructs, and laws should be evaluated by their contribution to "the greatest happiness of the greatest number."[50] He supports security of person

[42] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 22.
[43] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 42; Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 29.
[44] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 15.
[45] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 17.
[46] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 23.
[47] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 15. 26-27.
[48] Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham,* 121; Mill, *On Liberty*, 14.
[49] Jeremy Bentham, "Anarchical Fallacies; Being an Examination of the Declaration of Rights Issued During the French Revolution," *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, vol, 2, 1843, 501.
[50] Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham,* 121–22.

and property not because of metaphysical entitlement, but because they incentivize industry and promote general welfare, where radical leveling, he contends, would undermine security and thus prosperity.[51]

Mill, while also a utilitarian, gives pride of place to individual liberty. In *On Liberty*, he articulates the "harm principle": power may be exercised over individuals against their will only to prevent harm to others; over "his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."[52] Liberty of thought, expression, and lifestyle is justified both because it promotes human flourishing ("individuality") and because it advances truth and social progress.[53] Mill grounds these claims in "utility in the largest sense," not in natural-rights theory, but treats robust individual freedom as a central condition for human happiness, that is, one that must be protected not only against the state but also against the informal tyranny of social opinion.[54] On this reading, liberal rights are not merely "egoistic shields"; they can function as institutional preconditions for critique, association, and movements that contest domination.[55] The Marxian question, then, is not whether Mill values freedom, but whether formal liberties can reliably secure genuine independence under capitalist relations of production.

Marx sees Benthamite and Millian liberalism as limited by their embeddedness in bourgeois civil society. In "On the Jewish Question," he closely analyzes the "rights of man" proclaimed by the French Revolution. Liberty, defined as the right to do anything that does not harm others, is interpreted as "the right of separation," the right of the isolated individual concerned with his private interests.[56] The right to property is defined as the right to dispose of

[51] Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham,* 554.
[52] Mill, *On Liberty*, 13.
[53] Mill, *On Liberty*, 53.
[54] Mill, *On Liberty*, 14.
[55] Mill, *On Liberty*, 20, 25, 101.
[56] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 12.

one's goods "without regard for other men, independently of society."[57] Security becomes "the insurance of egoism."[58] None of these rights, Marx argues, transcends "egoistic man… separated from the community."

Mill's sovereign individual fits this model of the "restricted individual": formally free and equal but socially embedded in relations of economic dependence.[59] Marx emphasizes that legal equality and contractual freedom coexist with deep material inequality between the capitalist and the worker.[60] The liberal vocabulary of "each to count for one" obscures this asymmetry. In the labor market, the owner of capital and the propertyless worker meet as legal equals, yet the worker's lack of alternatives makes this "equality" largely illusory.[61]

Bentham's utilitarian calculus also presupposes this world of individual interests and market relations.[62] Marx derides Bentham as a codifier of bourgeois common sense.[63] While both Bentham and Marx reject natural-rights metaphysics, Bentham resolves rights into legal protections justified by aggregate utility; Marx insists that legal and civil rights in a class society remain tied to the reproduction of that society's structure.[64] Formal rights of property and contract, even if universally distributed, stabilize the capitalist mode of production.[65]

Marx's point is not that liberty and rights are worthless, but that under capitalism they are structurally limited.[66] The liberal right to property becomes, in practice, the right of capitalists to own the means of production and of workers to own nothing but their labor power.[67] The liberal right to liberty becomes the worker's "freedom" to sell his labor under compulsion of need and

[57] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 12.
[58] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 13.
[59] Mill, *On Liberty*, 13.
[60] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 13.
[61] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 20.
[62] Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham,* 122.
[63] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1: The Process of Production of Capital*, (Progress Publishers, 1887), 424.
[64] Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham,* 541; Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 14.
[65] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 21.
[66] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 18.
[67] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 18.

the capitalist's freedom to exploit that labor.[68] Marx's line that "between equal rights force decides" captures the idea that legal symmetry does not prevent material domination.[69]

Communism, in Marx's view, would realize a deeper form of freedom. In a classless association where the means of production are commonly owned, individuals would no longer confront one another as competitors guarding separate spheres but as associates jointly directing their collective labor.[70] *The Communist Manifesto*'s vision that "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" recasts liberty not as non-interference among isolated individuals but as shared control over the social conditions of life.[71] Marx thus shifts the question from "How much liberty does the individual have against the state?" to "What social order enables genuine human emancipation?"[72]

V. Edmund Burke and Marx on Tradition: "Feudal Socialism" Unmasked

Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* offers a classic conservative defense of tradition, hierarchy, and the moral "drapery" of social life.[73] Burke laments that "the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded," mourning the loss of "pleasing illusions" that once "made power gentle and obedience liberal."[74] For him, the French Revolution's appeal to abstract rights and popular sovereignty destroys an organic social order, that is, a "partnership… between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."[75] Charitably read, Burke is also offering an epistemic caution: rapid rationalist redesign can destroy tacit social knowledge and fragile practices of mutual obligation, even where hierarchy is unjustified.

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[68] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 18.
[69] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 164.
[70] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 27.
[71] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 27.
[72] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 3.
[73] Burke, *Reflections On the Revolution In France*, 64.
[74] Burke, *Reflections On the Revolution In France*, 63.
[75] Burke, *Reflections On the Revolution In France*, 80.

Marx analyzes this kind of reaction under "Feudal Socialism" in *The Communist Manifesto*. Dispossessed aristocrats, unable to restore the old regime, turn to literary criticism of bourgeois society.[76] To gain a hearing, they "waved the proletarian alms-bag in front of them as a banner," styling themselves defenders of the poor against the crass bourgeoisie.[77] Their critiques often contain "witty and incisive" observations about capitalist vulgarity and social disintegration.[78] But Marx insists that this position is "ludicrous" and historically impotent: it fails to grasp that the bourgeoisie is the "necessary offspring" of feudal society itself.[79] Feudal socialists decry the reduction of all ties to "naked self-interest" and "cash payment," but what they truly resent, Marx says, is not exploitation as such but the bourgeoisie's destruction of the paternalistic forms and "illusions" that once adorned exploitation.[80] They also quietly adapt to capitalist reality, investing in industry while publicly romanticizing the past. When workers actually act for themselves, these aristocrats "join in all coercive measures against the working class."[81]

Burke exemplifies this pattern.[82] His denunciation of "sophisters, economists, and calculators" overlaps with Marx's acknowledgment that the bourgeoisie strips away feudal sentimentality.[83] But where Burke sees only catastrophe, Marx sees a necessary step in historical development. Feudalism, with all its "chivalry," was itself a system of class domination.[84] The bourgeoisie's rise is progressive insofar as it shatters feudal privilege, revolutionizes production, and clarifies social relations, even if it simultaneously subjects workers to new, intensified forms

[76] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 28.
[77] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 28.
[78] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 28.
[79] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 28.
[80] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 28.
[81] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 28.
[82] Burke, *Reflections On the Revolution In France*, 63.
[83] Burke, *Reflections On the Revolution in France, 63*; Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 15.
[84] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 15.

of exploitation.[85] Marx's critique of feudal socialism is therefore double-edged.[86] On the one hand, he takes its indictment of bourgeois society's moral and social costs seriously.[87] On the other hand, he insists that any attempt to "roll back the wheel of history" is reactionary and impossible.[88] The only forward-looking solution is not a return to feudal cohesion but a transition beyond both feudalism and capitalism to a classless, socialist order.[89] In such a society, some of what Burke cherished, such as social solidarity, mutual obligation, and a sense of shared destiny, could be realized without hierarchy or mystification.[90]

VI. Rousseau's "General Will" vs. Marx's Class Politics

Rousseau's *Social Contract* treats the general will as the authentic will of a people oriented toward the common good: in obeying laws that express this will, the citizen "obeys only himself."[91] Legitimate law reconciles freedom and authority by having each person participate in collective self-rule.[92] Behind this political ideal stands a more romantic anthropology: Rousseau thinks humans were once more equal and independent, and that the rise of private property and social comparison generated domination, envy, and dependence.[93] Civic re-education is therefore central.[94] Through institutions that cultivate public spirit, citizens can be reshaped so that they identify with the whole and partially recover a lost, more "natural" equality.[95] Arguably, even from a Marxian perspective, Rousseau's insistence that law express the common good pushes beyond mere interest aggregation.

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[85] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 16, 20.
[86] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 28.
[87] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 17.
[88] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 18.
[89] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 27.
[90] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 27.
[91] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 7.
[92] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 18.
[93] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 18.
[94] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 20.
[95] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 20.

Marx takes this democratic, anti-oligarchic impulse seriously, but subjects it to his historical materialist method.[96] Instead of asking whether institutions conform to a timeless "general will," he asks what social relations and property forms make such a will possible or impossible.[97] In a society organized around private ownership of the means of production, the separation between a political state and civil society means that any purported general will is likely to be formal and ideological.[98] Equal rights and popular sovereignty are proclaimed in the political sphere, while in civil society, individuals confront one another as owners and non-owners, capitalists and workers, bound together by "cash payment" and competition. The liberal language of rights and citizenship, as well as conservative appeals to organic tradition, therefore expresses in different registers the same underlying reality: bourgeois class power embedded in the economy.[99]

From this standpoint, Rousseau appears as a transitional figure for Marx. Rousseau's critique of property and inequality points beyond liberal individualism, but he remains at the level of political will and moral education.[100] Marx argues that the alienation Rousseau diagnoses cannot be overcome by better lawgivers or more virtuous citizens alone; it is rooted in the way production and property are organized.[101] As long as a minority controls the means of production, the "people" will be fractured into classes with antagonistic interests, and the general will is destined to be captured by the dominant class.[102] Historical materialism, therefore, both preserves and radicalizes Rousseau's insight: the idea of a unified popular will is valid, but only as the

[96] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 20.
[97] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 14.
[98] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 14.
[99] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 20.
[100] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 15, 26.
[101] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 20.
[102] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 27.

outcome of a material transformation that abolishes the social conditions producing inequality and dependence.[103]

A genuinely general will, on Marx's view, becomes possible only in a classless society.[104] Once private ownership of the means of production is abolished and collective control over social labour is established, there is no longer a structural gap between the interests of rulers and ruled.[105] The "public power" ceases to be an instrument of class domination and instead administers common affairs; the distinction between state and society begins to wither.[106] In that setting, what Rousseau imagined as a contract among formally equal citizens is realized in a different key: not as an abstract agreement among possessive individuals, but as conscious coordination by associated producers over their shared conditions of life.[107] Marx's critique of liberal rights and conservative tradition is thus not merely negative.[108] By revealing them as ideological reflections of bourgeois class power, he clears the ground for a higher form of collective self-rule, that is, one in which the emancipatory promise of the general will is fulfilled, not in the language of abstract rights, but in the concrete social relations of a classless, collectively emancipated society.[109]

VII. Conclusion

Marx's historical-materialist method ultimately reorients how we should understand the foundations of Western law.[110] Against liberal and conservative theorists who treat property, rights, liberty, and tradition as either natural or normatively self-justifying, Marx insists that these categories are historically specific expressions of class relations.[111] Locke's natural right of

[103] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 20.
[104] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 34.
[105] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 27.
[106] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 27.
[107] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 6, 7.
[108] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 34.
[109] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 15.
[110] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 6.
[111] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 6.

private property, Bentham's and Mill's exaltation of individual liberty and utilitarian welfare, and Burke's defense of inherited hierarchy and chivalric "decencies" all appear, from Marx's perspective, as ideological forms adequate to the bourgeois epoch.[112] They stabilize and legitimize a legal order in which the protection of property and contractual freedom is paramount, while the underlying relations of exploitation and domination remain obscured.[113]

At the same time, Marx's critique is not merely destructive. In each case, he exposes a tension between the ideological form and its emancipatory content.[114] Liberal doctrines of subjective rights and personal liberty articulate a genuine aspiration to security of person, freedom from arbitrary domination, and meaningful self-development; conservative appeals to tradition and community express a longing for social cohesion, mutual obligation, and a substantive common life.[115] Marx's point is that, under bourgeois conditions, these ideals are systematically constrained and distorted by private property, the wage relation, and the competitive market. Liberal rights become "egoistic rights" of isolated individuals in civil society; conservative invocations of tradition collapse into nostalgic defenses of feudal or bourgeois privilege. The law, in turn, codifies and reproduces these limitations by presenting contingent class arrangements as universal and necessary.

Marx's engagement with Rousseau highlights this dialectic particularly clearly.[116] Rousseau's notion of the general will pushes beyond both liberal atomism and conservative particularism by imagining a juridical order oriented to the common good rather than the aggregation of private interests.[117] But for Marx, Rousseau remains trapped within the abstract

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[112] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 39; Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham,* 121–22; Burke, *Reflections On the Revolution In France*, 63; Mill, *On Liberty*, 59.
[113] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 14.
[114] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 15.
[115] Burke, *Reflections On the Revolution In France*, 63.
[116] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 7.
[117] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 7.

framework of political rights in a society still structured by private property.[118] The promise of a truly general will, that is, one that could unify freedom, equality, and community, is realizable only when the material conditions that generate class antagonism have been overcome.[119] In a classless society, the content of liberal and conservative ideals could be preserved and transformed: rights would no longer function as juridical shields for property, liberty would no longer mean merely market freedom, and tradition would no longer serve as a legitimating rhetoric for hierarchy.[120]

For contemporary legal theory, this analysis has a sharp implication because Marx invites us to treat liberal and conservative doctrines of property, rights, and state authority not as neutral foundations of Western law, but as historically contingent expressions of bourgeois class power.[121] His critique measures these doctrines against the very values they profess: freedom, equality, community, the common good, and argues that those values can be fully realized only beyond the bourgeois legal order that first articulated them. In this way, Marx both negates and redeems the liberal and conservative traditions: he reveals their juridical ideals as ideological yet insists that their emancipatory content points beyond capitalism and its law to a transformed social and legal order grounded in collective emancipation.

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[118] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 7; Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 6.
[119] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 6.
[120] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 6.
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AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR THIBAUD MARCESSE

JOSEPH J. MURPHY IV

Thibaud Marcesse is an Assistant Professor of Comparative and South Asian Politics at Boston College. He received his Ph.D. in Government from Cornell University in 2018, and his research examines how institutional change in poverty alleviation affects the strategies pursued by political parties in rural India. His recent book, *The Accommodation of Democracy: A New Political Economy of Poverty Alleviation in Rural India*, analyzes the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in Uttar Pradesh and, through quantitative and qualitative data, reveals the existence of democratic accommodation, rather than true democratic deepening, at the local level in India.

JM: Hello, Professor Marcesse. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me to discuss *The Accommodation of Democracy*. I wanted to begin with a clarification regarding what some of the major terms utilized mean. You distinguish between the veil of democratic deepening in India and the reality of democratic accommodation beneath it. How do you distinguish between these terms and how can one differentiate between them?

TM: The broader point of this distinction is that there has been a tendency among recent scholars, who have looked at the evolution of India's democracy, especially at the local level, to assume that the fact that there are now elections at the local level means that democracy has effectively deepened. The question of a democratic deepening is itself, I think, problematic because assuming that having more elections is going to result in a better democracy is incorrect in my opinion. The democratic deepening is often sort of seen as a matter of fact, just because elections are happening when they were not, which in and of itself is a big deal.

The fact that there are elections at the local level is a huge deal. But I think there is a tendency among scholars not to really reflect on the meaning of those elections and to what extent are those elections meaningful. Do people actually freely express their preferences? Do they have the opportunity to run for office unimpeded? Yes, elections are happening. So, quantitatively, there's an element of democratic deepening, if you wish. And so the idea of an accommodation was to sort of emphasize or show, by contrast, that having elections did not mean that the meaning of democracy, which is accountability, was effectively happening. So elections are happening, but accountability, the sort of accountability that elections produce, is not really happening, or it's not always happening. It is happening in some places, but not everywhere.

JM: Do you think that the fact that not all of the electorate is being engaged is kind of a necessary step in democratic actualization, or do you think it's an aberration that sometimes occurs, like in the United States with portions of the U.S. electorate not having the ability to engage? Do you think that's something that is inevitable?

TM: It's a good question. I think it is inevitable to some extent because of the very sort of conditions in which democracy takes place. I would like to take the American example again.

Elections happen on a Tuesday. Some would say by design, right? It's more complicated, obviously, but this is going to have an effect, an impact on turnout and the broader engagement with democratic institutions that citizens should have. So, I think in the case of India, it's the same. Elections happen on Sundays and turnout remains very, very high for local and national elections in India, in fact, higher than in the U.S. But a lot of people are going to be excluded. A lot of people are not gonna be engaged the way they should be for a variety of reasons.

India is still a country in which about one person in five lives in poverty, severe poverty. And the measurement of poverty is itself very controversial. If you were to go by very standard measures of the poverty line, you would have very low numbers of people in poverty. But the reality is different. There are a lot of people in India who are either poor or economically vulnerable, right above the poverty line, which means that you're not officially poor anymore but you're not safe. So I think, in that sense, ideally there would be no form of democratic accommodation in that the bureaucracy would not meddle with the expression of popular preferences. Can that possibility be completely eliminated? I don't think so. Could it be more systematically pushed away? Yes.

JM: And to that end, with regards to the normative relationship between a bureaucracy and the actualization of democracy: how do you see the bureaucracy's role in relation to it?

TM: This is something that has been at the center of my sort of research and academic pursuits. It's something that has a lot of relevance in the U.S. today as well. Well, this is a conversation in the U.S. that has been going on for a long time, and I think it's a central tension in democratic societies, where the bureaucracy technically should be the executive arm of the people. What the people want should translate into legislation, that then gets implemented by the bureaucracy. However, we do know that in practice the bureaucracy has its own interests that it is also committed to sometimes.

A friend of mine wrote a book about how the bureaucrats actually do help with the implementation of policies in India, specifically in the field of education, by very simply exercising discretion. So sometimes a bureaucrat is faced with effectively implementing a policy that mandates that a school will be built in a specific district, and then it so happens that the

people living in the district are not living there permanently. They migrate. So in the winter they go in the hills, they take their cattle and move to the hills, and so that bureaucrat decided that applying the legislation, applying the policy by the book, was a mistake.By building a school half of the year, the school would be empty, the kids would not be attending because they would be with their parents in the hills. So he tweaked it in such a way that teachers could be moving along with the community and teach people in the hills. Well, that's evidently going against the letter of the law. But it's a good thing, right? So even though there's a popular mandate for a policy that says there should be a school in every district so that every kid can go to school and attend primary school, the bureaucrat found himself or herself in a situation where he or she had to exercise discretion, and that was good. It sort of resulted in a better outcome, an outcome that probably the majority of the population wants.

So there's a bit of a tension here. I think the tension can be limited to the extent that bureaucrats are well-trained and committed to democratic ideals, which is to say, they're committed to implementing policies that the people have decided they wanted to see implemented. But there's a bit of a tension, and we can see this here. Here it's very obvious, and now it's sort of centering on the discussion of independent agencies: are independent agencies part of the executive or not? It's kind of a gray zone, right? Like, it appears the Supreme Court says that it's part of the executive, it's the unitary executive theory. But not the Fed, apparently? So this is a tension that's found everywhere in all democratic systems. India is no exception to this. My experience of dealing with bureaucracy has been an experience where I've seen people distort the implementation of policies in a way that is not optimal, that the majority of the population would say is not good: taking bribes, charging additional fees, fudging data. But I can't rule out that in very different settings, another part of India, perhaps, bureaucrats would behave the way the bureaucrats of my friend behave, where they tweak the policy in a way that actually makes it better for citizens.

JM: Sometimes I suppose that level of specialization is needed for the proper implementation of policy.

TM: Yes and bureaucrats have agency. They exercise their agency. They have to make decisions. They have to make a decision on a very short notice and their judgment is involved, their sort of past experience, their sense of efficacy, all kinds of things. The bureaucracy is a living being in a way. We see it as a monolith. We see it as this very boring kind of executive arm of the state, but it's much more complicated in practice.

JM: So moving on to more about the methods on which your argument is based, there's a lot of quantitative data, from the census and the National Sample Survey Office. But touching on the more qualitative aspect of it, how did you find the experience of interviewing different bureaucrats and others? And did you ever run into any issues in translating these interviews into the larger points you were trying to make?

TM: The qualitative part of the work was by far the most enjoyable. The quantitative data is useful because it tells a story as well. Data are social product. I have a chapter that describes how bureaucrats enter data, and sometimes fudge data. So data are by definition social products. So they're not a faithful reflection of the objective empirical world. It's much more complex. They should be. And in most cases, they tend to be. But they're not. And so that's an interesting part of the story, but it's very limiting; you don't get a sense of how precise the data is or how the data is produced, and you don't get a sense of how people who actually produce the data deal with it, interpret it. The qualitative part of the work has been extremely rewarding in that sense because it has added a human story in addition to actually helping me make sense of the production of data. The human story has been really, really fascinating: shadowing bureaucrats, following bureaucrats, interviewing bureaucrats. And interviewing bureaucrats has sometimes involved just like chitchatting, getting to know them, hearing their personal stories, joking with them, hearing some of their more offensive jokes or comments. There's a human element here that has made working in this book absolutely very rewarding.

JM: Your book ends with a contrasting of local level democratic accommodation against national level democratic backsliding. So how would you say these two processes sort of interact and inform the actualization of democracy?

TM: Yeah, I think that's another really good question. I think the story of the democratic deepening is sort of showcased against the broader backdrop of democratic backsiding, which is very real in India today. India is a democracy that is becoming much less liberal and much more centralized. India is technically and theoretically a federal country in which local government agencies and state level government agencies have a lot of autonomy, and a lot of this is being taken away by the central government. So there's a story of backsliding, institutionally speaking, centralization, and also ideologically speaking. There's a move away from liberal democracy and pluralism, with an embrace of majoritarianism, a very distinct strain of majoritarianism: religious nationalism. So the local level is paradoxical because local elections are non-partisan. Local elections tend to be insulated from this broader trend. This is not to say that there are no tensions between communities at the local level either. But local elections, by and large, from what I've seen, (and I'm working on the second book now that is trying to understand why the local level politics is so detached from it, so insulated, and can continue to be insulated from national level politics), is that local level politics tends to be relatively immune to the broader sort of ideological shift at the national level, which is good. So my conclusion is local democracy is very good, normatively. But in practice, it doesn't exactly happen the way we would like it, or the way the people who reformed India's constitution thirty-five years ago now to promote local democracy, really envisaged it originally. But it is a story of resilience, especially given the sort of national level backsliding and ideological shift.

Local elections are very much about, you know, fixing a road. It's the same in the U.S. Yes, you vote for council members affiliated with either party, but by and large, local elections, especially in small towns and rural communities, are not very partisan. Because they're really about bread and butter issues and small sorts of infrastructure problems and what we call valence issues in political science, non-ideological issues. Everyone wants a good road. Everyone wants street lights to work. Everyone wants access to broadband network internet access. And I think it's the same in India to some extent. I think there's something to be said about how democratic resilience at the local level, despite its shortcomings, is a good thing given the sort of broader national level shifts. I actually don't even think the BJP in power at the national level really wants to change the rules of the game at the local level. Because they don't really think it's all that relevant, and I think this would really create a backlash, a huge backlash. People really do

like to vote at the local level now. The local elections are very popular. The turnout is very high. In every single village, there's a system of reservations, which constrains the ability of people to run for office. But where there are no reservations, and even places that have reserved seats, they have a very, very high number of candidates. These elections are very competitive in a good way, which is to say a lot of people run for office, and people do value local elections. They really think that this is an important accountability mechanism.

JM: Discussing applicability to students and their conception of democracy in the U.S., do you think that our electorate is provided with enough tools and resources to meaningfully engage with democratic processes?

TM: I'm pessimistic and optimistic at the same time, which I know is not a very satisfying answer to your question. This is year two of the second Trump term. A lot of scary things were done in my humble opinion last year, but it's not been as bad as I thought it could be. The midterms are still six months away and like a lot of things would happen in six months. But I do think people have the tools, like, look at the turnout for the “No Kings” protests. Massive turnout. There was a bit of an age gap, which is, I think, a matter of concern, because young people are not nearly as engaged in those protests as older people. But I do think people have the means to express themselves freely, make claims on the state, express dissatisfaction with state policies when those state policies are considered to be unacceptable. Minneapolis in general is a good example of that.

My concern for the democratic system doesn't have so much to do with the ability of people to express themselves. It has to do more with the disconnect between institutions, the way institutions operate, and the way people express their preferences. Which is another way to say what people actually want does not really translate into a policy for a variety of reasons, some good, some bad. Institutions are there for a reason. They help sort of organize participation. It is a good thing. It's a good thing to have a House and Senate with their rules. But the expansion of the role of money in politics today is a major threat to what should be a translation of people's preferences into policies at the institutional level. That's happening less and less in this country, and that is a major concern. All of this can be traced back to *Citizens United*, but money was

already a problem before that. It just became more of a problem. It's the fact that this is a government of oligarchs, for oligarchs, by oligarchs. India has similar problems, mind you, at the national level, at least.

JM: Are there any last thoughts you would want to get out about your book or any lessons to be taken away regarding India or democracy as a whole?

TM: Every book wants to engage the existing scholarship. And so I've been really driven by this desire to tell my colleagues who've written books before on the same subject or similar subjects, "I don't think you're getting the story right," or, "You might be right, but you're not seeing everything that I think we need to sort of look at." So that has been a big motivation for the book. Whenever you tell people, "I wrote a book about bureaucracy." A lot of people are gonna be like, "Sure." If you write a book about political violence, you're likely to have an audience. So I would love for people to see that this is much more than about the bureaucracy.

This really gets to this fundamental tension that I was telling you about at the very beginning. How can the bureaucracy be held accountable? One, should it be held accountable? Because, by law, it is technically accountable. It is supposed to be implementing policies voted by the people. But in practice, that's not always the case. So how do we solve that tension? Can that tension be solved or not? This is of relevance, not just to an Indian audience, but also to an American audience. Can the state really be held accountable by citizens? In the American political tradition, the state is the pure expression of the people. The state exists because the people want it to exist. In the European tradition, the state exists almost as a prior. So democracy makes the state legitimate. But the state existed before, and will continue to exist, presumably. It has its own kind of separate life trajectory, if you wish.

I would love for undergraduate students to read this book and say, "This is really making me think about what the real meaning of democracy is, given that the state is still involved in our lives and shaping our material lives on a daily basis, and what kind of state do I want? Do I want a state that is perfectly accountable to me, even in cases where policies are not effectively working? Or do I want a state that has a little more autonomy, that I can still hold accountable one way or another?" And that was the purpose of democracy at the local level. Oftentimes local

elected officials are at the mercy of bureaucrats, which is not okay, but that's the reality of it. So can we find a middle ground where bureaucrats do effectively implement policies with an element of discretion, because it benefits people, while at the same time being held accountable?

JM: That is a very wide-reaching and inevitable tension that needs to be addressed. Thank you again, Professor Marcesse, for your wonderful answers and for taking the time to meet with me to discuss *The Accommodation of Democracy*.

If you are interested in learning more about the matters discussed in the interview and about processes of democratization more broadly as well, please read *The Accommodation of Democracy: A New Political Economy of Poverty Alleviation*, available on Amazon and at Barnes & Noble.

The Forgotten Front:

Rural Homelessness and the Limits of Urban-Centric Policy

CALLIE WALSH

Rural homelessness is a persistent yet consistently overlooked dimension of housing insecurity in the United States. This paper argues that definitions of homelessness often fail to capture the realities of rural populations, due in large part to fundamental differences in how homelessness manifests across rural and urban contexts. In rural areas, homelessness is often less visible, taking forms such as couch surfing, living in vehicles, or residing in temporary or substandard structures, rather than the more publicly recognizable form of "rough sleepers," as seen in many urban environments. Drawing on existing research, this paper first redefines homelessness in a rural context, highlighting its episodic, seasonal, and "hidden" nature. It then examines the key structural causes of rural homelessness, including economic dependence on single industries, limited affordable housing, and lower educational attainment. Finally, this paper critiques the limitations of broad federal policies and demonstrates how urban-centric approaches can neglect or even worsen rural conditions. Ultimately, it argues that effectively addressing rural homelessness requires both a conceptual shift in how homelessness is defined and a structural shift toward targeted, responsive policies that reflect the realities of rural life.

I. Defining Rural Homelessness

Many Americans carry with them a preconceived notion about homelessness. This mental picture may include overcrowded shelters, tent cities, and people asleep on city sidewalks. While this image is innately urban-centered, homelessness itself is not. The Housing Assistance Council estimated that in 2024, over 175,000 individuals in rural America were experiencing some form of homelessness.[1] However, this reality does not align with the general public's conceptions of homelessness. As a result, less attention is given to how homelessness manifests itself in non-urban settings. Effectively addressing rural homelessness, therefore, begins with recognizing its prevalence. Unfortunately, it is often overlooked because many definitions and frameworks inherently exclude rural communities.

In the context of rural America, the traditional definitions of homelessness must be reexamined. This is due in part to fewer "rough sleepers" in these communities. Instead of sleeping on the street, in rural areas, many "homeless" individuals live in cars, bounce from couch to couch, or camp in the warm months. In her book *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Homeless Children and Families in Small-Town America*, Yvonne M. Vissing highlights this difference. When Vissing conducted her study of rural homelessness, she often got the response, "We don't have any homeless kids in our town." Vissing explained that this sentiment is due to the fact that homeless children and families in small towns are essentially invisible.[2] Because most do not sleep on park benches or panhandle at intersections, many wrongly assume they do not exist.

This issue has continued to pervade discussions of rural homelessness. In 2007, the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) published a fact sheet acknowledging that "rural

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[1] Daniel Stern, "RURAL RESEARCH BRIEF: Homelessness Continues to Increase in the U.S. and in Rural America," *Housing Assistance Council* (blog), March 28, 2025, https://ruralhome.org/rural-homelessness-ahar-2024/.
[2] Yvonne M. Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Homeless Children and Families in Small-Town America*, 1st ed. (University Press of Kentucky, 1996), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt130jdq7.13, 6-30.

homelessness requires a more flexible definition of homelessness." They explain that "restricting definitions of homelessness to include only those who are literally homeless…on the streets or in shelters…does not fit well with the rural reality."[3] According to the NCH, one of the most popular parameters used for defining homelessness, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, does not count people living in rural substandard structures as homeless. This exclusion leaves a significant amount of the homeless population unrecognized.

Some scholars have attempted to remedy this gap by creating their own definition of homelessness, tailored to the needs and circumstances of rural communities. In 1990, a statewide study of rural homelessness, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, interviewed 919 homeless adults in twenty-one randomly selected rural counties in Ohio.[4] The study adopted an operational definition in which respondents were defined as homeless if they "(1) slept in limited or no shelter for any length of time, (2) slept in shelters or missions operated by religious organizations or public agencies that serve homeless people and charge either no fee or a minimal fee, (3) slept in inexpensive hotels or motels where the actual length of stay or intent to stay was 45 days or fewer, or (4) slept in other unique situations where the actual length of stay or intent to stay was 45 days or fewer, including staying with family or friends for short periods of time."[5] The authors noted that the fourth element was essential, since many rural areas lack formal services such as shelters for unhoused individuals. By slightly broadening the definition, the study was able to include individuals who may be "couch surfing" or sleeping in tents or other substandard structures. Rather than relying on narrow, urban-centric criteria, the

[3] "Rural Homelessness" (National Coalition For the Homeless, August 2007), https://nationalhomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Rural-Homelessness-Fact-Sheet.pdf.
[4] Richard J. First, John C. Rife, and Beverly G. Toomey, "Homelessness in Rural Areas: Causes, Patterns, and Trends," *Social Work* 39, no. 1 (1994): 97–108.
[5] First, Rife, and Toomey, "Homelessness in Rural Areas," 99.

researchers adapted their methodology to the rural context, an important step that many other studies overlook.

Once these definitional blind spots are acknowledged, it becomes possible to understand rural homelessness more accurately. One of the most striking differences between urban and rural homelessness is the demographic profile. Homeless individuals in rural areas are more likely to be white, married, currently working, homeless for the first time, or homeless for a shorter period of time than those in urban areas.[6] Further, in rural America, single women and children make up a significantly larger share of the homeless population. Vissing's study found that their rates of homelessness in rural areas were nearly double those in urban settings: 32.3 percent compared to 15.8 percent.[7] The 1990 Ohio study also found that the women interviewed were more likely to be heads of families with children.[8]

Vissing identifies four different types of homelessness in her analysis: episodic, intermittent, seasonal, and chronic.[9] Vissing found that episodic homelessness was the most common cause of homelessness among the individuals she surveyed. Episodic homelessness could happen at any point during the year and be accidental, situational, or slowly accumulating in cause. Among those surveyed, 45% experienced episodic homelessness.[10] The instability of episodic homelessness is a direct reflection of the crisis-driven nature of rural poverty. In rural areas, job loss, illness, or eviction can occur rapidly, displacing individuals in environments with minimal structural resources to help them through these challenges.

Intermittent and seasonal homelessness are also common, though they tend to follow more predictable patterns. For those who are intermittently homeless, the lack of housing is not

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[6] "Rural Homelessness" (National Coalition For the Homeless, August 2007).
[7] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 13.
[8] First, Rife, and Toomey, "Homelessness in Rural Areas," 101.
[9] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 160.
[10] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 160.

unexpected; it is simply part of a pattern. Similarly, for the less than 10% of Vissing's subjects who experienced seasonal homelessness, their experiences were somewhat predictable.[11] Many would camp outside during the warm months and then have to find a place to stay when it got too cold. These homeless individuals are likely some of the hardest to spot since being unhoused is something they have had to adapt to. In an article for *Barn Raising Media*, Lance George, director of Research and Information at the Housing Assistance Council, echoed this point, drawing attention to how easy it is to overlook rural homeless populations, especially farmworkers:

> [Farmworkers are] a really overlooked group," says George. "These are people who are working [in settings where] there's no place to stay. So, they're living [and] sleeping under trees or in their cars. And that is truly a homeless population. I think it's really in the shadows.[12]

George's insight affirms Vissing's findings. Many homeless individuals in rural areas remain out of the public view because the conditions of their homelessness differ so drastically from what is the norm in urban areas.

The final category of homelessness presented by Vissing was those who experience chronic homelessness. This is the most infrequent type of homelessness in rural areas, although it is the most common among children. Vissing credits this to the lack of social safety nets present for those who are estranged from mainstream society.[13] Without family or friends to lean on, such individuals are more likely to experience chronic homelessness due to the lack of government infrastructure and shelters. Vissing points out that the tight-knit nature of rural communities means they can often step in and address residents' basic needs when the government fails. However, if isolated from this network, individuals have access to even fewer

[11] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 163.
[12] Kristi Eaton, "Taking Stock of Rural America's 'Hidden' Homeless," Barn Raiser, March 18, 2024, https://barnraisingmedia.com/taking-stock-rural-homelessness-affordable-housing/.
[13] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 163.

resources than their urban counterparts. Take Charley, one of Vissing's respondents, for instance. Charley lives in a rural area where he was not born and says, "...it's a lot harder living in little towns than it ever was in the city. People in the city accept each other more–in this town, only them born here belong…"[14] Charley does not get to benefit from the town's social infrastructure because he is an outsider. Charley's story reveals how social exclusion in rural communities can magnify the consequences of structural failures, leaving individuals with nowhere to turn.

Each of these categories demonstrates that rural homelessness is not only distinct from urban homelessness but also internally diverse, shaped by a wide range of lived experiences. The following section builds on this foundation by examining the structural and policy-driven forces that exacerbate these manifestations of homelessness. Just as rural homelessness takes many forms, so too do the underlying causes that jeopardize the stability, safety, and livelihood of rural Americans.

II. Causes of Rural Homelessness

Many causes of rural homelessness are similar to those experienced by urban residents. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, and drug usage are present regardless of geographic region. However, the ways in which these causes manifest in rural and urban areas are often distinct.

In contrast to urban settings, one of the most distinct causes of rural homelessness is economic dependence on a single local industry. In her book, Vissing underscores the precarity of rural economies, noting that many small towns will rely heavily on a single factory or business to support their economies. If and when that institution fails or downsizes, the community is left vulnerable, and residents can quickly find themselves without a stable income

[14] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 164.

or housing.[15] This is also identified as a leading cause of homelessness in the National Health Care for the Homeless Council's report, "Hard to Reach: Rural Homelessness & Health Care." The report further highlights the challenges faced by towns reliant on declining industries such as mining, timber, or fishing.[16] In Appalachia, the declining coal industry has been a source of chronic poverty and homelessness. The report uses the town of Hazard, Kentucky, as an example. Many of the younger residents are unwilling to take up the mining careers their fathers held, putting increased pressure on the much smaller emerging telemarketing industry.[17]

One significant fallout of rural America's "economic squeeze" is a greater demand for affordable housing. In the 1990 Ohio study, the authors noted that many of their respondents were "receiving income from employment or public assistance sources and were still unable to secure affordable housing."[18] While the cost of living may be lower in rural areas, so too are incomes.[19] Similarly, Vissing claims that rural homelessness is a "top-down" phenomenon: "Rural areas do the best they can to use scarce resources to support as many citizens as possible."[20] She uses New Hampshire as an example of a lack of affordable housing. At the time of *Out of Sight, Out of Mind's* publishing, housing costs had increased by four hundred percent in New England.[21] This left renters unable to buy a home or afford a place in the first place, causing bankruptcies, foreclosures, and evictions to skyrocket.

Ironically, economic growth can also lead to a lack of affordable housing and increased homelessness. Although it may seem counterintuitive, this piece is essential to understanding the challenges rural communities face on all sides. The National Health Care for the Homeless report

[15] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 166.
[16] Patricia A. Post, "Hard to Reach: Rural Homelessness & Health Care" (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, January 2002), 7.
[17] Post, "Hard to Reach," 5.
[18] First, Rife, and Toomey, "Homelessness in Rural Areas," 103.
[19] "Rural Homelessness," (National Coalition For the Homeless, August 2007).
[20] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 165.
[21] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 167.

identifies Boone, North Carolina, as the prime example of this phenomenon. Boone has become an increasingly popular destination for vacationers looking to stay in one of the town's mountain resorts. This attracts a much more affluent crowd, increasing the number of second homeowners and reducing the stock of affordable housing.[22] This problem is not unique to Boone. According to the Barn Raiser article,

> One reason there's less affordable housing stock in rural America is due to the rise of 'vacation homes,' or homes unoccupied for seasonal or recreational use. Approximately 6 million homes, or 20%, are unoccupied in rural America, lower than the nationwide average of 11%. According to the report, about 53% of all vacant seasonal or recreational homes nationwide are in rural areas, which account for nearly half of all rural home vacancies.[23]

There is evidence to suggest that this trend may be disproportionately harming the already vulnerable single-mother population in rural America. Hospitality House, a homeless shelter in Boone, has seen a 28% increase in homeless families within the past year, a sign that homelessness may be hitting female-headed households especially hard.[24] With already low wages, the lack of affordable housing becomes more than many can manage.

Finally, although there are many interconnected causes of rural homelessness, the last cause this paper will address is a factor that underlies much of the economic and social instability in these regions: the lack of education. In the National Health Care for the Homeless report, Minnie Bommer, the founder of Children and Family Services, an organization that serves low-income families in southwestern Tennessee, described the problem as such: "There aren't many jobs available for people at their level or education or training…The reading comprehension level of homeless parents is typically low; few have completed even a high school education."[25] As a result, many of Bommer's clients are unemployed. Without an

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[22] Post, "Hard to Reach," 5.
[23] Eaton, "Taking Stock of Rural America's 'Hidden' Homeless."
[24] Post, "Hard to Reach," 5.
[25] Post, "Hard to Reach," 6.

education, it is difficult to secure a job, especially one that allows them to afford the increasingly expensive housing. In a "Statistical Portrait of Rural Homelessness" created from the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, of the individuals who received targeted homeless services, 64% had completed less than a high school education.[26] This is a factor that distinguishes rural from urban homeless individuals. The unhoused clients from rural areas were more than twice as likely to be high school dropouts when compared to their urban counterparts.[27] This connects back to the single female population this paper identified as especially vulnerable. Vissing says, "If women do not have good education, marketable job skills, and the self-esteem to get work, they are doomed to dead-end occupations or public assistance. Finding work in rural areas when one does not have a good education is especially difficult."[28]

These structural issues such as economic homogeneity, lack of affordable housing, and lower education levels, reveal the complexity of rural homelessness and suggest that adequately addressing it will require more than short-term solutions. Instead, only nuanced and targeted policy solutions can begin to address the challenges facing unhoused rural Americans.

III. Policy Solutions

Rural homelessness differs from urban experiences due to distinct structural, geographic, and economic conditions. These differences require moving beyond one-size-fits-all policy approaches. Otherwise, interventions may fail to alleviate housing insecurity and may even worsen it. The Wagner Act is one example of this. As explained in the National Health Care for the Homeless Report, the legislation was likely enacted in good faith to protect migrant workers by requiring companies to guarantee housing and appropriate services for job postings on

[26] Post, "Hard to Reach," 8.
[27] Post, "Hard to Reach," 9.
[28] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 18.

employment security listings. However, because there was no limit on the number of referrals per job, many individuals arrived to find that the listed positions had already been filled. As a result, they often took other, unlisted work. These opportunities fell outside the scope of the Wagner Act, leaving workers vulnerable to housing instability and, ultimately, homelessness. According to the report, "the result is increased homelessness in rural areas across the United States where migrant workers have been lured by sometimes elusive job opportunities, or seasonal employment without affordable housing or services."[29] This example highlights how even well-meaning legislation can have unintended consequences when it is not grounded in the specific context of the rural labor and housing system.

However, advocating for these smaller, rural-focused initiatives is often difficult. As highlighted by Vissing in the chapter titled "Getting the Rural Homeless the Help They Need," when "economic rationality" and "balance sheet mentality" are applied to rural-centric programs, it becomes hard to justify their cost. As Vissing explains, "It is more costly to serve small, dispersed populations of poor people than large, concentrated ones. Because of the higher per-person cost and the smaller number of people to be served, policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels often justify inaction by arguing that "we simply cannot afford to serve those in rural areas."[30] This mindset justifies the false conglomeration of rural and urban needs. The two areas are diverse and need to be treated as such. The federal government may be best positioned to address these disparities. Still, it seems unable to shift its focus away from the more cost-efficient and public-facing battle of urban homelessness. Ideally, rural homelessness would be met with programs designed specifically for rural realities, perhaps initiated from the local or

[29] Post, "Hard to Reach," 7.
[30] Vissing, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, 136-137.

state government levels.[31] However, for this paper, the focus remains on how to strategically adapt and capitalize on broad federal frameworks such as McKinney-Vento to better serve rural populations, even if those frameworks were not originally designed with them in mind.

In 2022, Representative Cynthia Axne, a Democrat from Iowa's 3rd district, proposed an amendment to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The bill would "expand the authorized activities under the Continuum of Care program to include activities that address barriers to transitioning families in rural areas to permanent housing, and for other purposes."[32] The proposal would allow Continuum of Care program grants to fund specific activities tailored to rural homelessness, including:

> (A) *Payment of short-term emergency lodging, including in motels or shelters, directly or through vouchers. (B) Repairs to units—(i) in which homeless individuals and families will be housed; or (ii) which are currently not fit for human habitation. (C) Staff training, professional development, skill development, and staff retention activities*.[33]

As this paper has shown, rural areas often lack formal shelters, leaving individuals to sleep in cars or rely on unstable arrangements like couch surfing or substandard housing structures. According to the NCH report, "problems of housing quality also contribute to rural homelessness: in rural areas, 30% of nonmetro households, or 6.2 million households, have at least one major housing problem...Rural residential histories reveal that homelessness is often precipitated by a structural or physical housing problem jeopardizing health or safety."[34] This proposal would lay the groundwork for more money to be granted to alleviate those issues.

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[31] While this paper centers on federal responses, it's worth noting that many scholars argue for rural homelessness solutions to originate at the local or state level, where programs can be more responsive to the specific needs, geographies, and community dynamics of rural areas. Further research might explore how locally-driven initiatives could best fill in the gaps left by generalized federal policy.

[32] Cynthia [D-IA-3 Rep. Axne, "Text - H.R.7196 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Flexibility in Addressing Rural Homelessness Act of 2022," legislation, July 20, 2022, 2022-03-24, https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/7196/text.

[33] Cynthia [D-IA-3 Rep. Axne, "Text - H.R.7196 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Flexibility in Addressing Rural Homelessness Act of 2022," legislation, July 20, 2022, 2022-03-24, https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/7196/text.

[34] "Rural Homelessness" (National Coalition For the Homeless, August 2007).

Axne's proposal offers a promising model of what rural-conscious policy could look like. While modest in scope, this amendment represents a meaningful step towards reframing rural homeless policy to better reflect the reality of rural residents. It acknowledges what this paper has shown: rural homelessness cannot be equated to the experience of the unhoused populations in urban areas. This bill models the type of structural and localized thinking necessary to adequately address the needs of rural Americans. Even the most well-intentioned acts will need to be tailored to address rural needs sufficiently. As was highlighted by the NCH, the very definition of homelessness used in this piece of legislation fundamentally overlooks rural residents. While the provisions in this bill were ultimately incorporated into the original legislation, it is just one instance of a much larger theme that must take place.[35] Axne's proposal should serve as a model for policymakers nationwide seeking to confront rural homelessness. Federal policies and initiatives are not all infeasible; in fact, when leveraged correctly, they can create real change in communities. The key is keeping rural voices central to the conversation. Only once we move away from the broad sweeping efforts and more closely examine the needs of rural Americans will federal policy be able to reach everyone, no matter where they live.

[35] "42 USC 11383: Eligible Activities," accessed May 7, 2025, https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=(title:42%20section:11383%20edition:prelim)#11383_1_target.

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Athenian Nationalism and Other Feminine Concerns in Euripides's Ion

CLARA TAFT

This article considers the central conflict in the play Ion by Euripides, in which the protagonist thinks her son is actually her husband's illegitimate child who will inherit her family's estate and accordingly tries to kill him. I will argue that the play ultimately asks us to accept that jealousy is a universal response to infidelity for both men and women, but it also draws parallels between a woman's jealousy and everyday political problems like citizenship, inheritance, and Athenian nationalism to encourage the audience to identify with a potentially controversial female character and her concerns.

I. Introduction

The play *Ion* follows the eponymous protagonist, whose mother, the Athenian princess Kreousa, was raped by Apollo and exposed Ion as a baby. Kreousa does not know that Ion was taken in by a temple of Apollo. When the oracle of Apollo suggests that Ion is Kreousa's husband's illegitimate child, she tries to kill him out of fear that she will be evicted from her home and a foreigner will become the king of Athens. However, Athena and a prophetess of Apollo intercede and resolve the misunderstanding before anyone dies.

One might, and many critics have, analyze the play by looking at the themes of xenophobia and Athenian autochthony.[1] However, I will also be focusing on the narrative's disapproval of illegitimate children and the implicit disapproval of the behavior that leads to fathering illegitimate children. The play presents an exaggerated nightmare situation in which a woman who ostensibly has no surviving children will be forced to pass down her family's political authority and distinguished estate to her husband's supposedly illegitimate son. The problems that arise deal with real-life concerns (i.e., inheritance, citizenship) and are sufficiently universal to appeal even to audience members who disapprove of jealous women: first, Ion is a threat not only to Kreousa's status and way of life, but also to Athenian ideas of sovereignty and the preservation of the *oikos* (household). These universal concerns are the most prominent, but they encourage the audience to sympathize with Kreousa's more fundamental and controversial concerns: her husband betrayed her simply by fathering an illegitimate child, a concern that many characters echo while they express varying degrees of solidarity with Kreousa. The play draws similarities between the experiences of men and women, and characters argue that it is better for a couple to share the same fortunes with respect to their children (or childlessness):

[1]Arlene Saxonhouse, "Myths and the Origins of Cities: Reflections on the Autochthony Theme in Euripides' *Ion*," in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, ed. J. Peter Euben, (University of California Press, 1986); K.H. Lee. *Euripides: Ion,* (Aris & Phillips, 1997), 35.

neither a man nor a woman should have to resign themself to their spouse having an illegitimate child. It is difficult for an audience member to avoid sympathizing with Kreousa without also adopting a certain carelessness about the preservation of Athenian identity.

Modern readers might wonder why it is so surprising that Kreousa is upset that her husband fathered a child with another woman, but male infidelity was relatively trivial for Athenians. For example, an adultery/justifiable homicide law allowed a man to kill with impunity another man who slept with his wife or female relative,[2] but no equivalent law existed to punish an adulterous husband who slept with a noncitizen or enslaved woman.[3] Moreover, Ancient Greek men speak of affairs with enslaved women without any sense of moral judgement[4] suggesting that the phenomenon "required no apology."[5] A woman who has a problem with her husband having an affair with another woman, therefore, is somewhat innovative in giving his behavior moral significance—which is why I assume that the audience is not predisposed to agree with Kreousa that her husband did something wrong.

II. Ion as a threat to Athens

Before the play begins to suggest that an extramarital sexual relationship is wrong per se, it deals at length with the threat Ion poses to Kreousa and the city because he is not her child and a foreigner. In the most obvious sense, Kreousa is afraid of Ion because she thinks he will become Xouthos's heir and seemingly because she thinks he will kill her. When Ion confronts her in Apollo's sanctuary after she has tried to poison him, she says, "I tried to kill you because you were an enemy to my house."[6] He asks if she thinks he is attacking "with what torches or

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[2] Dem. 23.53.
[3] Cheryl Anne Cox, *Household Interests: Property, Marriage Strategies, and Family Dynamics in Ancient Athens*, (Princeton University Press, 1998), 73.
[4] Dem. 59.122; Xen. *Oec*. 10.12; Lg. 840e–842a; Lys. 1.12–13.
[5] David Kovacs, "Three Passages from the Andromache," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 81, (1977): 131, https://www.jstor.org/stable/311115.
[6] Euripides, *Ion*, 1291; All translations are my own.

what flame?" and she responds, "You were intending to settle in my house and take it from me by force."[7] Kreousa echoes the fear which the old man expressed earlier; he claimed, "We are being thrown out of the house of Erechtheus."[8]. When Ion asks, "And then you tried to kill me in fear that I intended to do this?" Kreousa responds, "So that I wouldn't die, if you were not [merely] intending."[9]

In addition to Kreousa's fear for her personal safety and way of life, the chorus—as well as Ion himself—express concerns that it is insulting to the city of Athens that Ion, the heir to the kingship, is a foreigner. The situation is particularly serious because Ion's ostensible father, Xouthos, is an Aeolian who married Kreousa because he was a military ally of Athens, and Kreousa's father has no other living children—he killed her sisters as a sacrifice.[10] Ion himself realizes that the Athenians, who consider themselves indigenous to Athens, will not accept a foreigner ruling over them: "They says that the famous Athenians came from the earth and are not an imported people; there I am invading having acquired two problems: being a bastard child, and born of a foreign father."[11] He fears that he will be hated by the powerless as well as the politically inactive and the established elites, who "are the most hostile to rivals."[12] The chorus (a group of female servants who sing songs about their perception of events) also sings about their distaste for Ion. They hope that Kreousa will successfully kill him and that "someone else from another house may never rule the city, except for the noble descendents of Erechtheus."[13] They call her "my mistress born from the earth," referencing the Athenian autochthony myth.[14] Kreousa and the chorus feel that rule by a foreigner would be so upsetting

[7] Euripides, *Ion*, 1294-95.
[8] Euripides, *Ion*, 810-11.
[9] Euripides, *Ion*, 1300-01.
[10] Euripides, *Ion*, 296-98, 277-80.
[11] Euripides, *Ion*, 296-98, 589-92.
[12] Euripides, *Ion*, 606.
[13] Euripides, *Ion*, 1058-60.
[14] Euripides, *Ion*, 1054.

that the chorus says Kreousa would kill herself if her plan was not successful: "For she would not tolerate, while she is alive in the shining light of the son, other foreign people ruling her house, she who was born from a noble house."[15]

The chorus's lament is particularly appealing to the audience because it exploits their national feelings based on their belief that their ancestors literally sprung from the earth—which Ion and the chorus reference as the reason for their xenophobia.[16] The myth is very helpful for establishing their conception of themselves as a self-governing people: it creates a unity that "differentiates this city from others…, it offers a world whose boundaries are dictated by nature and not by human reason," and it "eliminates another embarrassing question as well: to whom does, or did, the land belong?"[17] The autochthony myth conveniently establishes Athenian nationalism defined in the sense of Benedict Anderson's imagined communities: the Athenians have an (imagined) political community that is "inherently limited and sovereign."[18] This community is imagined because all Athenians feel as if they possess a common identity despite the fact that they are, in reality, too distanced from one another to be a literal community. It is limited because someone not descended from the original earth-born Athenians cannot be an Athenian, and it is sovereign because the autochthony myth gives a very good justification for why they deserve to rule the land. According to this perspective, a foreigner "threatens the unity and hierarchy of the city" because he has no claim to being a member of this imagined community.[19]

The plot of *Ion* recalls several established customs, which, if kept in mind by the audience, would remind them that Ion threatens not only Kreousa, but all Athenians who care

[15] Euripides, *Ion*, 1069-73.
[16] Saxonhouse, "Myths and the Origins of Cities," 255.
[17] Saxonhouse, "Myths and the Origins of Cities," 255.
[18] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (Verso, 1983), 6.
[19] Saxonhouse, "Myths and the Origins of Cities," 256.

about the city. The most significant is the idea of Athenian autochthony, which I have referenced, but the play also treats Kreousa as an *epikleros* (heiress) and alludes to Pericles's citizenship law. The audience of the play would be familiar with these institutions in their everyday lives, and it might make Kreousa's problems feel more relevant to problems they could empathize with, such as the preservation of insular Athenian identity and the *oikos*.

Since her father has no surviving sons, Kreousa would be an *epikleros* in contemporary Athens.[20] Although she would not herself inherit his estate, the family property would be passed down to her children two years after maturity.[21] Kreousa's family situation does not completely adhere to the relevant laws; she should technically be married to her father's closest male relative (i.e., her uncle or cousin, most likely), and if she was already married with no children—and she is—she should divorce Xouthos to marry this relative.[22] Although Euripides takes some creative liberties, one imagines the audience would have been aware of the similarities between her situation and the situation of *epikleroi*. The purpose of the law was to perpetuate the male line and keep property within the family;[23] the audience might at least find it jarring that, from their perspective, Kreousa's marriage is legally irregular and fails to keep her inheritance in the family. The situation with Ion is an additional insult, since her heir is ostensibly not even her own child. Kreousa herself is concerned about this as well; she laments, "I will live in desolation in a house with no heir."[24] Her speech, "though not quite technical… suggests concern with producing an heir in order to keep the kingship and her father's property within the family."[25]

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[20] David Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 25; John C. Gibert, ed., *Euripides: Ion*, (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 247.
[21] Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece*, 26.
[22] Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece*, 28.
[23] Kirk Ormand, "Marriage, Identity, and the Tale of Mestra in the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women." *American Journal of Philology* 125, no. 3 (2004): 330, https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/173393; Cox, *Household Interests*, 95; Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 143-44.
[24] Euripides, *Ion*, 791-92.
[25] Gibert, *Ion*, 245.

Ion also makes reference to the Athenian citizen law proposed by Pericles in 451/450 which establishes that only the child of two Athenian parents is an Athenian citizen.[26] He tells Xouthos of his worries that his mother might not be an Athenian: "If it is expedient, I pray that the woman who gave birth to me is an Athenian, so that I will have free speech rights from my mother."[27] He stresses that a foreigner who "enters the unadulterated city" does not have such rights.[28] His father is not a native Athenian, so he would not meet the requirements of the citizenship law anyway, but I will return to the significance of this later. Cynthia Patterson writes that the citizenship law reflected in part a desire to limit the number of "shareholders" in the prosperity of Athens;[29] when the chorus says that they feel insulted by an invader, their indignation might also arise from a fear of sharing their portion with a foreigner in a very important position. She also suggests that the law prohibited "foreign claims on Athenian property" by disqualifying from citizenship the children of Athenians and foreigners, which is exactly the concern that characters in the play have about Ion.[30]

Ion fears that the city will not accept a foreigner, but he also seems to think that this problem would be resolved if his mother were Athenian. In reality, this is not how the citizenship law functioned. The play is not calling back to an earlier citizenship law either, since, as far as we know, there *was* no official preexisting citizenship law, and if there was, it likely mandated that a citizen only had to have an Athenian father.[31] Nicole Loraux admits that Euripides incorporates real-world legal inspiration quite haphazardly but says there is "no way to give an account of Kreousa's legal position except to involve every possible approach simultaneously."[32]

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[26] Cynthia Patterson, "Athenian Citizenship Law," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Law*, ed. Michael Gagarin and David Cohen, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 278.
[27] Euripides, *Ion*, 670-72.
[28] Euripides, *Ion*, 673.
[29] Patterson, "Athenian Citizenship Law," 279.
[30] Patterson, "Athenian Citizenship Law," 282.
[31] Patterson, "Athenian Citizenship Law," 283.
[32] Nicole Loraux, *The Children of Athena*, trans. C. Levine, (Princeton University Press, 1993), 203.

Euripides seems to be again taking creative liberties with his depiction of Athenian citizenship laws with the result that he emphasizes Kreousa's role in "bestow[ing] legitimacy" and makes Ion a citizen from the perspective of the audience, who knows his mother is an Athenian (provided they will play along with his judicial activism).[33]

I will move on to discussing the characters' objections to the Ion situation that have more to do with Xouthos's unfaithfulness itself than its threatening consequences for Kreousa and the city. Kreousa and the characters who sympathize with her express that Xouthos has betrayed her because he fathered an illegitimate child. The average ancient audience member might not see any problem with a husband's unfaithfulness. Perhaps for this reason, the playwright has contrived the unrealistic nightmare situation in which Ion threatens Athenian autochthony itself as well as Kreousa's feelings. Kreousa's situation is quite extreme; if she or her father had more children, or if they were not such important people, the stakes of the play might not seem as high, particularly for Kreousa. Since the play deals with such an extreme example of the problem it identifies, it perhaps appeals to the audience more than it would otherwise: if Athenian men struggle to understand why an ordinary woman would feel threatened or offended by her husband's illegitimate child, they might be more sympathetic if the child also threatened Athenian sovereignty. The playwright hopes that the audience will suspend any disdain for a jealous woman if some of her motivations make sense to them.

III. Ion as a threat to Kreousa's feelings

The characters in *Ion* are all very aware that Ion threatens their ideas of Athenian self-rule and the preservation of the house of Erechtheus, and these are most likely the primary reasons that the conflict arises between Kreousa and Ion. However, Kreousa and her associates

[33] Loraux, *The Children of Athena*, 189; On the other hand, one wonders whether Athenians would really have a problem accepting the child of an Athenian and a god as a citizen.

(such as the chorus and the old man) also feel outraged because they believe her husband did not, in fact, happen upon a child given to him by Apollo; rather, they think he secretly fathered a child outside of their marriage because he was unable to have a child with Kreousa. This would be exclusionary to Kreousa and a grave betrayal of the agreement between a married couple that they will share the same fortunes. The old man claims that Xouthos violates this implicit agreement by seeking his own personal good fortune at Kreousa's expense.

> The foreigner who married you and came into the city and the home and received your inheritance has gathered the fruit of a child from another woman in secret... Since he perceived that you were childless, he was not content to bear the same fate as you, and he took a slave girl and slept with her in secret, and he had a child, and he made him a stranger and gave him to someone in Delphi to bring up.[34]

The old man first emphasizes that Xouthos has gained a great deal from his marriage to Kreousa: he shares her home, city, and inheritance, but he is unwilling to experience the same struggle as her with respect to their childlessness.[35] He criticizes Xouthos for betraying her trust and fathering a child in secret. The old man suggests that there is an element of solidarity in an ideal marriage: the responsibility to support one's spouse through shared misfortunes should supersede one's interest in avoiding misfortune altogether. The old man's values resemble a modern idea of marriage as an equal partnership, at least insofar as a husband and wife have similar responsibilities to each other. Just as it would be illegal and frowned upon for an Athenian woman to commit adultery, he believes that Xouthos should not sleep with an enslaved woman, even if his marriage to Kreousa does not produce any children.[36] He elaborates, "It would be a simpler problem if, having persuaded you by speaking of your childlessness, he brought into the house a child of a well-born mother. And if this was bitter to you, he should have sought after a

[34] Euripides, *Ion*, 813-21.
[35] There is perhaps some implicit resentment when the old man calls him a foreigner (*xenos*) or a belief that a foreigner should be especially grateful to receive a position and wealth that a citizen deserves more.
[36] Athenian law required that a husband should divorce his adulterous wife (Dem 59.87) or else become disenfranchised; the woman was not allowed to attend public religious rituals (Dem 59.85).

marriage to an Aeolian."[37] The old man still would not completely approve of Xouthos fathering an illegitimate child with Kreousa's consent, but he says that this would be preferable to the actual situation as he understands it. So, although *Ion* is not about a jealous woman in the same way that others of Euripides's plays (such as *Andromache* and *Medea*) are, a character still expresses the recurring belief that a woman should be allowed to have strong opinions about her husband's sexual behavior.

Both Kreousa and the chorus (who identify very strongly with Kreousa until she becomes violent), echo the old man's sentiments that her husband betrayed her when he ostensibly had a child with another woman, and they also suggest that adulterous men should be criticized like adulterous women.[38] Kreousa asks, "Didn't my husband become a traitor?" and the chorus joins her in criticizing the actions of men who mistreat women—most notably, men who engage in the same schemes as Xouthos.[39] In response to the old man's accusation that Xouthos fathered an illegitimate child secretly to whom he is intending to pass down the kingship of Athens, they respond, "Alas, I always hate evildoing men, who construct injustices and then embellish them with their scheming."[40] Later, the chorus clarifies that they are upset with men for injustices pertaining to sexual immorality: "See, you who sing with discordant songs, when you sing, about our beds and unholy couplings of unlawful Cypris, how superior in piety we are to men's unjust procreation. Let discordant and contrary-speaking songs attack men with respect to their sexual behavior."[41] They criticize Xouthos specifically (although the explanation of his transgressions also describes Apollo): "In his house he did not share with my mistress their procreative fortune, but he granted another favor to Aphrodite and obtained a bastard child."[42] The chorus, like the

[37] Euripides, *Ion*, 839-42.
[38] Loraux, *The Children of Athena*, 191.
[39] Euripides, *Ion*, 864.
[40] Euripides, *Ion*, 829, 832-34.
[41] Euripides, *Ion*, 1090-98.
[42] Euripides, *Ion*, 1101-05.

old man, feels that it is a transgression for a man to sleep with another woman if his wife can't have children.

They suggest, moreover, that Xouthos acted this way out of base desire (associated with Aphrodite); they do not even consider that he might have wanted to father an heir or continue his lineage, and one assumes that they would have mentioned this consideration if they thought it was legitimate. The chorus questions why women face such accusations of promiscuity when men act this way, as well. This is a particularly egalitarian statement, since men mention their own extramarital relationships frequently; these relationships are simply not frowned upon in the same way as adultery involving a married woman. Again, even in a play where illegitimacy is more at issue than romantic jealousy, the characters associated with the protagonist assign blame to the man who slept with another woman and fathered the illegitimate child in the first place. Even Ion himself echoes the concern that Kreousa will feel abandoned when she realizes that her husband had a child without her: "When I come into someone else's house as a foreigner, and your childless wife, who previously shared her misfortunes with you and now has drawn a bad lot and carries it bitterly by herself, how will I not reasonably be hated by her?"[43] He points out, like Kreousa and the chorus and the old man, that she will reasonably be very upset that she no longer can share her disappointment with her husband, and she will take it out on Ion.

It is remarkable that so many of the characters speak with one voice vindicating Kreousa's anger at her husband for fathering an illegitimate child. In general, Kreousa is the most authoritative figure in the play, and, accordingly, the narrative and the characters treat her almost like a Mary Sue. Loraux writes that Kreousa is at the center of the play: everything revolves around her, and everything depends on her. The other characters and the eventual resolution agree with her grievances; moreover, Kreousa "recognizes the child [Ion] and

[43] Euripides, *Ion*, 607-11.

transmits to him the land of Athens and the power to rule it," and she "alone presumes to upset the plans of Apollo."[44] When the play discusses the transgression of men against women, Kreousa speaks from her own perspective. We hear of her rape by Apollo almost entirely from her: she discusses its negative impact on her and the brutality of her experience.[45] She admits that she intends to "violate the norms of female discourse and prove…Xuthus and Apollo to be ungrateful traitors," but Euripides still chooses to tell this part of the story through her eyes, and the chorus agrees with her both with respect to "a particular idea of the condition of woman, who is born unfortunate" and in that they also "have consistently refused to be reduced to silence."[46] It is unusual in a Euripides play for the chorus to be so directly involved in the action of the plot. The role of the chorus (according to Horace) is to keep a secret, but the chorus in *Ion* tells Kreousa that her husband has been given a child, even though Xouthos told them to stay quiet under pain of death. In this way they foil Apollo's plan to keep Kreousa in the dark.[47] The chorus subverts the authority of the king of Athens and a god, but they are loyal to Kreousa. Even when she transgresses against expected female behavior, the play tacitly approves; this should also apply to her indignation that her husband fathered an illegitimate child who now threatens her city.

There is one final, albeit less obvious, reason that the play asks us to side with Kreousa over Xouthos: as I have mentioned, she is an *epikleros* responsible for passing down her father's estate to her son. Aside from raising the stakes of the play, this status somewhat detaches her from the authority of her husband. The epiklerate reflects a concern for the continuation of the *oikos* and creates an edge case regarding the question of whether women "belong to their fathers

[44] Loraux, *The Children of Athena*, 189-90.
[45] Euripides, *Ion*, 877-80, 891-904.
[46] Gibert, *Ion*, 260; Loraux, *The Children of Athena*, 190-91.
[47] Louise Matthaei, *Studies in Greek Tragedy*, (Cambridge University Press, 1918), 65; Hor., *Ars P*. 200; Lee, *Ion*, 666-67, 760, 774-75.

or to their husbands."[48] In the case of an *epikleros*, her husband certainly had the same authority over her as in any other marriage, but he did not own her father's estate, and she could be taken away from him and married to a relative: according to Ormand, "she is never really 'his'" because "the woman belongs to the paternal line."[49] Insofar as was possible in ancient Athens, Kreousa is very much her own woman. She is not entirely subsumed by her husband, and, if she should instead be subsumed by her father and his family, her father is dead, and no one in her family has taken responsibility for her.[50] She is, by default, the leader of the house of Erechtheus. Kreousa is the spiritual foremother of all Athenians, which gives her a certain mythological status surpassing Xouthos. It should be at least as counterintuitive for the audience to prefer the concerns of a foreign ruler over those of one of the *original* Athenians as it would be for them to sympathize with a woman who feels insulted by her unfaithful husband.

If the audience is not inclined to agree with Kreousa's feelings of betrayal, they must at least agree with the concern for the preservation of Athenian sovereignty and the *oikos*. The challenge for the audience is not to understand why there is any conflict at all—the challenge is to understand that, just as a woman can share their concerns about the city, a woman can also experience the same betrayal from an unfaithful husband. The conflict is not totally one-dimensional without this understanding, but the audience does not have a complete perspective of Kreousa's personal feelings and motivations without it.

[48] Ormand, "Marriage, Identity, and the Tale of Mestra," 330.
[49] Ormand, "Marriage, Identity, and the Tale of Mestra," 329-30.
[50] Indeed, it is only possible for Kreousa to have this uniquely independent position because Euripides makes his characters neglect inheritance law.

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