

Bums, Revolutionaries, or Citizens? A Political History of Youth in Twentieth-Century America

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**Abstract**

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Under what conditions do political elites begin to fear that young people will fail to become responsible citizens? What do these conditions and the solutions adopted tell us about the values and skills associated with American citizenship at specific points in time? What types of young people does the state try to develop into desirable citizens, and how has the state's approach to youth who lie on the margins and are at risk of failing to adequately take on the role of citizen changed over time? How do changing beliefs, practices, and policies around youth and citizenship intersect with issues of race and state-building in America?

To answer these questions, I examine key debates and policies from the Progressive Era through the 1970s. I focus on legislative initiatives, statements political actors made in support and opposition, and public and media reactions. I attend specifically to restrictions on child labor (1900s-1920s), the Civilian Conservation Corps (1934) and National Youth Administration (1935) during the New Deal, the G.I. Bill (1944), and youth voting through the 1970 Voting Rights Act (1970) and the Twenty-Sixth Amendment (1972). Ostensibly designed to benefit youth, these policies reflected fears of youth apathy, radicalism, and criminality and the desire to

craft a malleable, disciplined workforce. The resulting youth-oriented legislation, including child labor laws, employment and education programs, and a lower voting age, sought to redirect young people into traditional means of political and economic activity. Through this redirection, each policy – implicitly or explicitly – defined what it meant to be an adult citizen. This project, then, is not simply a study of American youth. Rather, I use academic works, government documents, and popular and elite media to examine how elites constructed and reconstructed norms of American citizenship during the twentieth century.

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to four people:

Tobie Hurst entered my world just when I began this project in earnest and has improved my life in ways I could not have imagined. I have benefited enormously from his encouragement, his pride in my work, and his reminders of the world outside of academia.

My parents, Bill and Judy, have always encouraged my education whether that meant driving me to debate camp in Michigan, flying to a ceremony in Missouri, or moving me to Washington. They have found my career path perplexing but have never wavered in their support.

Finally, I dedicate this piece to my grandfather, Rev. Dr. Frederick D. Hill. A history professor at a liberal arts college in Indiana, his sharp but humble intellect and dedication to undergraduate education set a standard I strive to live up to.

## Acknowledgements

I have been incredibly lucky to have conducted my graduate work alongside a collection of supportive mentors and colleagues. In his role as committee chair, Mark Smith paid attention to my project at a level above and beyond my expectations. He constantly pushed me to strengthen my claims through clear writing and rigorous methodology. The instructor for my first graduate seminar, Chip Turner has offered incisive commentary on my writing and thinking from day one. His refusal to pull his punches made me a better scholar. Naomi Murakawa provided a model for how to talk to colleagues about their work. Thanks to her ability to simultaneously praise and identify the flaws in my work, I left each of our meetings with a better project and more confidence. It is a skill I am actively working to develop. While not a member of my committee, Christine DiStefano provided valuable support from my earliest days at the UW. I want to extend a special thank you to my grad school colleagues for taking time away from their own work to read and comment on mine. The intellect, generosity, and humor of Katie Banks, Betsy Cooper, Jennifer Fredette, Heather Pool, Kirstine Taylor, and Hannah Walker improved my time in graduate school and this project.

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## Chapter 1: Youth as a Site for Political Analysis

It is a truism that adults frequently view members of younger generations as less moral and less capable than their own cohort. That concern reflects little more than an older generation's discomfort with changing norms. Several times during the twentieth century, however, political and social elites have constructed specific fears about the inability of young Americans to successfully take on the mantle of citizenship. I examine moments in American history when elites transformed fears of youth into major pieces of legislation: anti-child labor debates (1900s-1920s), two New Deal programs: the Civilian Conservation Corps (1934) and National Youth Administration (1935), the G.I. Bill (1944), and youth voting through the 1970 Voting Rights Act (1970) and the Twenty-Sixth Amendment (1972).

By taking what Paul Pierson calls a “moving picture” as opposed to a “snapshot” approach to understanding these events, this project covers more than just the young people who experienced each policy.<sup>1</sup> Rather, I examine youth as a site from which to question our understandings of citizenship, state-building, fear, and race as political issues in twentieth-century America. This chapter begins by discussing two criteria that make youth a unique site from which to consider American politics. I then turn to a targeted discussion of how this project speaks to important concepts in the field of American political development, including citizenship, race, and state-building. Finally, I offer a brief summary of each subsequent chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

## I. Youth as a Unique Site of Analysis

A focus on the developmental and inclusive nature of youth provides a valuable perspective from which to consider American politics. Yet, to the extent it has addressed youth, the discipline of political science has treated the category in one of two ways. First, scholars focus on the political participation of those in a fixed ‘youth’ demographic typically ranging from 18 to 26 or 29 years of age.<sup>2</sup> For example, various studies examine the size and composition of, as well as trends within, the “youth vote.” Second, scholars limit their examination of youth in American politics to subsections (such as black youth) or a single historical period.<sup>3</sup> These research strategies have yielded valuable insights, but their narrow scope means that no one has yet used youth as a lens through which to view all of American politics. I argue that attending to the developmental nature of youth as well as its inherent inclusivity allows us to track the shifting relationships between the state and its citizens.

### *Developmental Nature of Youth*

In 1904, psychologist G. Stanley Hall conceived of a category of development between childhood and adulthood. Drawing on well-established theories such as the Great Chain of Being and recapitulation, Hall proposed adolescence as a turning point when youth either “jumped to a developed, superior, Western selfhood or remained arrested in a savage state. Adolescence became the dividing line between rational, autonomous, and moral white bourgeois men, those

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel M. Shea and John C. Green, *Fountain of Youth: Strategies and Tactics for Mobilizing America’s Young Voters* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007). Other examples include Michael Connery, *Youth to Power: How Today’s Young Voters are Building Tomorrow’s Progressive Majority* (New York: Ig Publishing, 2008); Tony Kelso and Brian Cogan, eds., *Youth Voters, Popular Culture and Democratic Engagement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Cathy J. Cohen, *Democracy Remixed: Black Youth and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

civilized men who would continue the evolution of the race, and emotional, conforming, sentimental or mythical others, namely primitives, women, and children.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, youth is a transition point between the civilized and the uncivilized—or, the incorporated citizen and the marginal citizen. From its inception, then, the category of youth involved racist, sexist, and colonialist assumptions rooted in the presumption that only a small number of young people (namely white males) deserved to or were capable of becoming full adults. Hall asserted that all others necessarily failed to reach that final stage of development. Historian Paula Fass observes that “G. Stanley Hall endowed youth with a spiritual, almost religious, quality, and looks to adolescence to provide a new hopefulness that earlier Americans had seen in childhood.”<sup>5</sup>

In her 2001 work *Act Your Age*, sociologist Nancy Lesko argues that the racist, classist, sexist, and colonialist undertones of Hall’s theory embed within the notion of coming of age “an evolutionary arrival in an enlightened state after a lengthy period of backwardness.”<sup>6</sup> In reviewing the work of Hall and others who promoted this new category of development, Lesko argues that “In my view, adolescence was strategized as the right age to get boys to imagine and desire a particular national and international order. In desiring a particular nationalism, boys would likely become willing to struggle and sacrifice for this national identity.”<sup>7</sup> Lesko addresses the role of religious and co-curricular organizations (such as the Boy Scouts in both

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy Lesko, *Act Your Age: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 55.

<sup>5</sup> Paula S. Fass, *Children of a New World: Society, Culture, and Globalization*. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 252.

<sup>6</sup> Lesko, *Act Your Age*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Lesko, *Act Your Age*, 41.

England the United States) in creating this desire but she does not investigate the political processes at work.

Drawing on Hall and Lesko, I argue that the popular notion of youth as a stage of development wherein individuals become civilized (Hall) and moreover civilized to support specific forms of nationalism (Lesko) opens up an opportunity for thinking about the relationship between young people and the state in a new way. The vast majority of the young people that Hall and Lesko consider are, of course, legal citizens of the United States. Their legal citizenship is not what comes into question during this developmental stage. Rather it is their investment in the American ideology and their capacity to act on it. By adulthood, individuals are expected to embrace the practices and ideologies of capitalism and democracy through employment, family life, home ownership, and voting. Adults who identify with a different ideological system, such as socialists in the 1920s, can be dismissed as political enemies. Youth, on the other hand, are supposed to be in the process of developing into those relationships and commitments. Attending to youth as a time of development allows me to question and then identify the traits and values political elites view as necessary for individuals to acquire on the path to becoming adult (that is, “civilized” or well incorporated) citizens.

In recognizing youth not just as a category bounded by age and associated with specific institutions but as a stage during which individuals acquire the skills and values expected of adults, I explore what elites expect from the citizenry and, moreover, how elites enact policies to ensure that young people meet those expectations. By looking at elite discourse in moments when economic or political upheavals disrupt the traditional course of development, I examine how elites have rearticulated and shifted their conceptions of what citizenship requires and how public policy can create the citizens they desire.

### *Inclusive Nature of Youth*

The second unique aspect of youth is its supposedly inclusive nature. All individuals who survive until adulthood theoretically experience this developmental stage. To be clear, I do not mean that all individuals experience the stage of youth in the same way. In fact, as suggested above, early theorists of youth presumed that individuals of different races and genders experienced youth differently. Some contemporary scholars, including Nancy Lesko, suggest that the inherently colonialist, racist, and sexist history of youth as a category forces us to revise our understanding of the category itself. Charles R. Acland argues that “as a discursive construct, [youth] is given a sort of imaginary unity as though we could speak of American youth in general and as though America youth exists as a unity. This construct excludes certain forms of diversity, often with an imagined white upwardly mobile youth standing in for the United States as a whole.”<sup>8</sup> I agree that broad statements about “youth” flatten important differences that exist among young people based on class, race, gender, education level and more. Nevertheless, I maintain that the inclusiveness of the category permits us to identify which young people receive what type of attention from elites. Economic and political disruptions stoke concerns not about youth generally but about a particular subset of youth that elites identify with and intend to entrust with the task of maintaining the American system.

## **II. The Lens of Youth**

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<sup>8</sup> Charles R. Acland, *Youth, Murder, Spectacle: The Cultural Politics of “Youth in Crisis”* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1995), 20.

These two distinct aspects of youth – its developmental nature and its inclusivity – provide a unique perspective from which to view a variety of issues relevant to political science generally and the field of American political development more specifically. In the following section, I show how focusing on youth gives us insight into four major issues: citizenship, state building, political fear, and race.

### *Citizenship*

Lacking the historical roots that European nations used to create a national identity, America traditionally had a special interest in the beliefs and ideologies attached to citizenship: “In fact, it is a vision of America as a land of conscious and committed citizenship that characterizes the American experience.”<sup>9</sup> This idea of “conscious and committed citizenship” indicates how American citizenship transcends a mere legal status. American citizenship results from a political process deeply steeped in power structures and driven by elite actors who reinscribe contemporary conceptions of race, class, and gender. When economic changes, war, or political instability create significant sociopolitical upheavals, elites fear what America might become due to (1) the rise of a competing model of citizenship or (2) barriers that impede the development of active citizens from favored groups. In both cases, formal citizenship is not in question, for the targets of elite fears are technically Americans. Yet, the failure of these individuals to embrace the dominant economic and political values makes them seem like a threat. Thus, political elites push legislative agendas that construct and reconstruct the model of citizenship necessary to maintain their preferred vision of the American state.

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<sup>9</sup> David M. Ricci, *Good Citizenship in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15.

Focusing on youth allows me to attend to multiple questions concerning citizenship. First, the nature of state outreach to young people provides insight to the values and behaviors elites consider either threatening or beneficial to the nation's future success. Second, the characteristics of youth that the state does and does not target at different points in time makes it possible to determine which youth the state sees as worthy of extra attention. By examining developments over the course of twentieth-century American politics, I demonstrate how concerns shifted from figuring out how to incorporate white youths—especially males—to searching for ways to contain the appeals of youth radicals. Finally, I add to scholarship in American political development by focusing on how the state responds when individuals begin rejecting the dominant model of citizenship.<sup>10</sup>

### *State Building*

American political development has used the concept of path dependency to highlight the unintended nature of much of American state building.<sup>11</sup> My analysis provides an opportunity to assess the motivations behind purposeful enlargements of state activity. For example,

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<sup>10</sup> For example see Elmer E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 1975); Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Rogers M. Smith and Philip A. Klinkner, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Anthony S. Chen, *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941-1972* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton, Revised Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998); Smith and Klinkner, *The Unsteady March*; Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth Century America.* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

compulsory education expanded state power over citizens and, as I demonstrate, occurred because elites had specific concerns about the declining capacity for work and citizenship among child laborers, particularly white child laborers. Owing to the difficulty of enforcing child labor laws and the related question of what these children would do if not at work, elites began requiring children to attend school.

### *Fear*

Academics and activists working on contemporary youth issues regularly argue that fear of youth became a part of the American political landscape in the 1970s through the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> Stanley Cohen theorizes that youth become the focus of moral panics which occur when political actors create fears of young people and then criminalize particular behaviors associated with youth.<sup>13</sup> My work adds to this moral panic literature by demonstrating instances when the state responds to young people with actions designed to engender positive attachments to the state.

For example, as I show in chapter three, during the Great Depression elites feared that young people would become bums or revolutionaries and responded with training and education programs that encouraged young men and women to learn the skills of hard work and perseverance; this would supposedly instill in young people faith in the American dream. This government response was inclusive rather than punitive. Elites react not only to their fears but also to their concerns about how citizenship can best be promoted. During the Depression, elites were shocked when white, once middle-class boys began viewing the American state as a false

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<sup>12</sup> William Ayers, Bernadine Dohrn, and Rick Ayers, *Zero Tolerance: Resisting the Drive for Punishment in Our Schools* (New York: The New Press, 2001); Males, Mike A. *Framing Youth: 10 Myths about the Next Generation*. (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. Routledge Classics Edition, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2011).

hope and a system needing replacement. Political leaders responded by designing programs aimed at incorporating these young people into the nation. In the 1970s and beyond, elites feared youth criminality—especially that of black males—and crafted a policy response designed to control rather than incorporate. Placing fear of youth in its historical location adds needed context to these contemporary political discussions.

### *Race*

As should be clear from the preceding sections, studying youth offers an opportunity to engage with race in a number of ways. I argue that various fears of youth must be understood in terms of a persistent racial hierarchy that may at times be explicitly named (as in the racial degeneration discourse of the Progressive Era) or be present implicitly (as in the Civilian Conservation Corps during the New Deal Era). By recognizing the way in which a particular subset of young people—specifically white youth—received benefits that were not provided to youth of color, this work takes up a narrative first presented by Ira Katznelson in *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (2006). Indeed, my analysis demonstrates that the American state identified African Americans and other people of color as legal citizens from whom it demanded obedience but whose civic abilities and loyalty it cared little about developing. Most political elites did not envision youth of color as actively participating in the state. Consequently, these elites did not devote policy measures and resources to training African American youth to have a deep loyalty to the American state.

Americans of color (groups whose boundaries have shifted over time) have routinely been excluded from economic and political participation even after gaining full legal

citizenship.<sup>14</sup> Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith rightly chastise the field of American politics for failing to recognize the central nature of race in structuring political coalitions and institutions of all types.<sup>15</sup> This project takes King and Smith's admonition seriously, examining the implications of racial discourse, such as that present in the debate over child labor and compulsory education laws and absent in the discussion of youth-oriented New Deal policies. In the following section I provide an outline of the specific constructions of youth, the elite fears, and the resulting policy outcomes that occurred in response to major economic and political disruptions in twentieth-century America.

### **III. Constructing Citizenship in Response to Capacity and Ideological Failures of Youth**

In Table 1, I outline the four interrelated concerns for each era. First, I identify those young people who become a focus of concern for the state. The characteristics that place particular groups of people in the category **marginal youth** changes over the course of the twentieth century according to prevailing political, social, and economic conditions. At various times this category includes youth of color, immigrant youth, working and lower-class youth, and young people who embraced supposedly radical political ideologies. These marginal youth are distinguished from two other groups of young people: (1) incorporated youth and (2) the marginal youth that elites are not concerned with reincorporating. **Incorporated youth** refers to

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<sup>14</sup> Smith and Klinkner, *The Unsteady March*; Paul Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Tali Mendelberg, *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Lisa L. Miller, *The Perils of Federalism: Race, Poverty, and the Politics of Crime Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith. "Racial Orders in American Political Development." *American Political Science Review* 99 (2005). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30038920>.

those young people on the time-appropriate (according to the standards of each period) track for reaching the status of full adult citizens. I argue that looking beyond sanction-oriented legislation reveals a series of policies throughout the twentieth century designed with the specific hope of shifting certain youth from the status of ‘marginal’ to that of ‘incorporated.’ At all stages, though at some more than others, the state lacks the intention to fully incorporate youth. The state

| <b>Disruption</b> | <b>Focus of Concern</b> | <b>Ideological or Capacity Failure of Youth</b> | <b>Threat to American State</b> | <b>Elite Policy Response</b> |
|-------------------|-------------------------|---|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
|-------------------|-------------------------|---|---------------------------------|------------------------------|

neglects some groups, predominately youth of color, in its efforts for incorporation. Indeed, the presence of divisions within marginal youth supports my claims regarding the historical and constructed nature of ‘youth’ as a category.

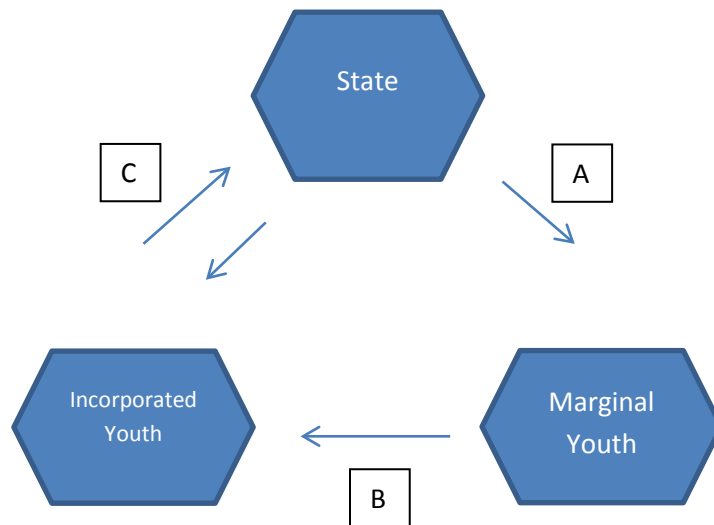
Second, each era features interrelated concerns regarding marginalized young people’s suspected lack of either the ideological commitment or the mental or physical capacity to continue the traditions of American citizenship. Elites offer political solutions specifically designed for the particular threat they perceive.

|  |  |   |  |   |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| Industrialization and High Immigration Rates | White ethnic immigrants; white mill children                         | Loss of mental and physical capacity necessary to fully participate as citizens who embrace and carry on the legacy of capitalism and democracy | Racial degeneration                            | Anti-child labor and compulsory education laws                        |
| Great Depression and World War II            | White youth disconnected from work, school, and/or family structures | Loss of faith in the promise of capitalism; loss of ability to participate in broader social institutions                                       | Apathy or revolution                           | Civilian Conservation Corps; National Youth Administration; G.I. Bill |
| 1960s Youth Riots                            | High school and college youth exposed to radicalism                  | Capacity redirected toward radical forms of democracy, extra-legal political activism, and socialist/communist efforts                          | Radical approaches to politics and the economy | Voting Rights Act of 1970   |

**Table 1: Three Elite Responses to Disruption**

Figure 1 provides a visual model of the relationships among elite actors, marginal youth, and incorporated youth. This figure is particularly useful for understanding state fear of marginal youth, who those youth are, and the actions the government takes.

**Figure 1**



Arrow A represents the state’s construction of marginal youth as an object of fear. I determine the meaning of this arrow by analyzing elite discourse in each period from sources including government documents (Congressional hearings and floor debates, state of the state addresses, commissioned reports, etc.), national media (*Harper’s*, *The Arena*, *Life*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, etc.), and political campaign materials (both partisan and non-partisan). Arrow B represents the legislation and/or programs designed to transform marginal youth into incorporated youth. I analyze the structure of the legislation itself as well the comments made by elites both publically and privately about their intentions for the programs. Arrows C reflects the relationship between incorporated youth and the state. The dual arrows indicate material and non-material support of the state for the activities and goals of the incorporated youth, along with the allegiance of incorporated youth to the state. Throughout this work, I primarily attend to the relationships represented by arrows A and B because the relationship of the state to marginal youth, and of marginal youth to incorporated youth, offers the most information about how elites understood citizenship and sought ways to encourage its enactment among particular categories of youth.

The meaning, and at times the direction, of the arrows change through the twentieth century according to particular constructions of marginal youth and efforts designed to incorporate these individuals into the state. My chronologically organized chapters document shifts in elite understandings and treatments of youth. Chapter two focuses on the advent of industrial production and the subsequent influx of European immigrants as a disruption that raised concerns among elites about the continuation of the American state. Thousands of immigrant and native citizens were spending their formative years on factory floors, leading elites to worry that these young people would fail to develop the mental or physical faculties believed necessary for democratic participation. These concerns deepened in relationship to racial theories holding that racial degeneration would occur if immigrant groups were insufficiently trained and protected. Racial fears thoroughly permeated otherwise progressive discussions about the need to protect young Americans from the dangers of industrialism. The implicit and explicit juxtaposition of white child laborers with children of color reveals that elites only sought to move white youth or those youth who could be white from the position of marginal to incorporated. Thus reformers proposed child labor laws and compulsory education laws in order to ensure that the desired individuals received the desired treatment.

Chapter three demonstrates that despite the rise in primary and secondary education, elites once again came to fear the abilities or lack thereof among youth when the Great Depression severed many young people from the structures of school, work, and even family. Thousands of young people became disillusioned about their potential to succeed or even survive, and by extension capitalism came under fire as a viable economic model. Elites articulated two ways in which these disillusioned youth might threaten the American state: apathy and revolution. To combat both problems, the federal government instituted two youth

oriented programs through the New Deal: the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration. As I demonstrate, these programs went beyond simple relief and attempted to reconnect American youth, particularly males, to their citizen roles as community members and providers.

Chapter four focuses on the period of American history most closely associated with youth activism: the 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement and then the Vietnam War disrupted the supposed post-war calm in America. In this period, marginal youth were defined as those who engaged in extra-legal or illegal activism in support of civil rights, students' rights, and anti-war protests. Students for a Democratic Society and other groups raised serious concerns about the future of American democracy and capitalism. While the number of young people actively espousing radical ideas remained small, elites feared that these marginal youth could recruit other young people, those who were more moderate, to sympathize with the radical positions. Indeed, radical youth actively strategized about ways to expand their base of support. Police crackdowns on campus demonstrations were often counterproductive to elites and instead led non-radical youth to worry about the plight of radical youths. In a more sophisticated response, elites sought to counter the appeal of radical youth and their penchant for extra-legal political activity by increasing youth involvement in the established system. I argue that the need to recruit young people to participate in the established traditions of American democracy, rather than a belief that those old enough to be drafted to fight in Vietnam should be considered old enough to vote, drove the enfranchisement of 18- to 20-year-olds.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Paying close attention to political discourse, I show how elites built the category of American youth during periods of economic and political turmoil. In tracing the state's characterization of those young people on the margins, elite use of racial language in discussions about what young people deserve or need, and the meaning of American citizenship as revealed by each political solution to periods of sociopolitical disruption, I demonstrate that the state has never actively attempted to endear all young people to itself. Instead, policy responses shifted from incorporation to containment, which created dire implications for American democracy.

## **Chapter Two: America's Natural Resource: The Value of Progressive Era Youth**

*“Our water powers, our natural resources, our scenic beauties, and, above all, our boys and girls, offer us opportunities for earnest endeavor and constructive development, which must be undertaken with the idea of constant advancement of our commonwealth.”*

*-Governor John E. Weeks, Vermont Inaugural Address, 1927<sup>16</sup>*

In 1896 Florence Kelley, the Illinois Factory Inspector, visited Alton, Illinois, to determine whether the town's factories were violating the state's child labor law. While there, she learned that the town's largest employer, the Illinois Glass Company, openly employed children. Kelley discovered a complicated set of interests that led employers to flout the state law and impede compliance with the town's own ordinance for compulsory education. She wrote in her annual inspector's report:

“The Mayor of Alton, Mr. J.J. Brenholt, acted as counsel for the glass company throughout my stay in Alton. He has also appointed to the school board Mr. Levis, an active member of the glass company. The school board has never enforced the school attendance law. . . . Wherever we order the discharge of children under 14 years of age, the employer confronts us with tales of the “widows” whose only support these unhappy children are. In the case of the glass works, the entire press of Alton took up this plaint in every issue of the papers.”<sup>17</sup>

Other factory inspectors of this era discovered similarly tight relationships among leaders of industry, politics, and the media. Seeing child labor as a way to keep young people out of trouble while allowing destitute families to earn extra income, local officials looked the other way as employers ignored child labor laws. Yet governors in states such as Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and Wisconsin responded to the social and economic problems accompanying industrialization by creating factory inspectors to enforce the laws.

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<sup>16</sup> Vermont Senate, Inaugural Message. *Journal of the Senate of the State of Vermont*, (Montpelier, VT: Capital City Press, 1927), 450.

<sup>17</sup> Florence Kelly, “Third Annual Report of the Factory Inspectors of Illinois,” 1898, Folder 1 – 4, Florence Kelley Collection. Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, 14-18.

In this chapter I argue that urbanization, industrialization, and immigration in the Progressive Era prompted serious reflection about the future of the American state. The emerging models of work and life departed from those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and activists worried about the divergent experiences of young people who labored in factories and those who followed more traditional paths to adulthood. Looking for a platform from which to pursue their interests, women's groups and unions stressed the threats factory labor posed to American children. Meanwhile, educators provided the solution to where children would be if not at work. As more and more children, particularly white children, engaged in factory, mining, and retail operations, activists and political leaders feared that without proper education and limits on laboring, many white children would lose the mental and physical capacity to participate as citizens. The American project might then collapse as subsequent generations failed to embrace both capitalism and democracy. Ultimately, the debate over child labor during the Progressive Era offers a first look at the rhetorical division between incorporated and marginal youth, the fears surrounding marginal youth, and the political responses of federal, state, and local officials.

## **I. The Changing Nature of Labor in America**

Colonial Americans expected all members of the community, including young children, to work. Indeed, the precarious state of early settlements required this work. In 1917 sociologist Arthur Wallace Calhoun noted that “the rigor of the struggle for existence in early New England made impossible the prolongation of infancy that marks high civilization.”<sup>18</sup> Men hunted and

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<sup>18</sup> Arthur Wallace Calhoun, *A Social History of the American Family from Colonial Times to the Present* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1917), 127.

farmed; women made clothes, candles, and other goods; and children worked alongside their parents performing tasks that would be considered inappropriate by modern standards. Through their long hours of work, children not only supported their families but also gained the skills of farming, cooking, and weaving that they would need as adults.

For the earliest colonists—almost all of them Protestants—the spiritual value of work complemented its physical and practical benefits. In the Protestant worldview, economic success through hard work indicated God’s blessings, while idleness gave Satan a chance to corrupt the soul.<sup>19</sup> One colonist praised the settlers at Rowley for building a mill and ensuring “their little ones to be very diligent in spinning cotton wool.”<sup>20</sup> Reflecting the assumption that children and adults must work side-by-side, laws allowed community leaders to remove children from the homes of parents who endangered their physical and spiritual welfare by exempting them from work.<sup>21</sup>

These early views about the necessity of child labor continued into the 1840s. As Calhoun has noted, “The introduction of children into the earliest factories was a natural sequence of the colonial attitude regarding child labor and of the Puritan belief in the sin of idleness.”<sup>22</sup> Esther Loeb Kohn, a thirty year resident of Chicago’s Hull House Settlement, similarly observed that “the introduction of children into our early factories was a natural

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<sup>19</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Routledge Classics edition (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Calhoun, *A Social History*, 124.

<sup>21</sup> Walter I. Trattner, *Crusade for the Children; a History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970).

<sup>22</sup> Calhoun, *A Social History*, 127.

consequence of the colonial attitude toward child labor.”<sup>23</sup> Small by later standards, these early factories had close ties to their communities, and owners typically knew their employees personally.

However, conditions of labor changed as industrialization led to larger and larger factories. Owners and laborers lost their connection with one another as owners moved off site and the wealth gap between employee and employer expanded.<sup>24</sup> From 1860 to 1900, the percentage of Americans living in urban areas doubled due to immigration as well as migration from the countryside.<sup>25</sup> With populations in flux, workers and owners no longer shared roots in their communities, and workers often spoke a different language. Workplace conditions evolved as shifts became longer, tasks more repetitive, and crowding more common. Work lost its connection to spiritual welfare and became almost exclusively about income.

It should not come as a surprise that as the patterns of adult labor changed, the meaning and substance of child labor also changed. In contrast to earlier generations, for whom labor served as training for future employment, children performed rote and frequently dangerous work in factories that offered no chance for advancement. Significant numbers of children worked simply because their families desperately needed the money. In 1880, Reverend Joseph Cook attracted some of the largest audiences in Boston’s history through his series of lectures on

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<sup>23</sup> Esther Loeb Kohn, “Child Labor – History,” n.d., Box 3 Folder 40, Esther Loeb Kohn Papers. Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections and University Archives. University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>24</sup> Hugh D. Hindman, *Child Labor: An American History* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Robert G. Barrows, “Urbanizing America,” in *The Gilded Age*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun (Wilmington, DE: 1996): 93, 95.

labor.<sup>26</sup> Using data from Massachusetts on average wages and the cost of living, he concluded that child labor kept “the majority of working-men’s families” out of “poverty or debt . . . Children under fifteen years of age supply by their labor from one-eighth to one-sixth of the total family earnings.”<sup>27</sup> The U.S. Census of 1900 found that 1.75 million young people under the age of 16 years were gainfully employed. Because the census numbers were collected from factory owners likely to offer conservative estimates, the *New York Times* estimated the true number at two to three million.<sup>28</sup> Young people also worked illegal jobs (such as beer running) that were unlikely to be included in census data.

Thus, by the turn of the century, child labor looked dramatically different than it did in Puritan America. Labor lost its supposed benefits—virtuous training for the future overseen by family and community members—and gained several disadvantages. Of course, pre-Industrial labor created its own harms to children, who engaged in dangerous activities like tending livestock, cooking over open flames, and working in forges. But, as Progressive Era sociologist and social reformer Arthur Wallace Calhoun observed, “in domestic industries on isolated farms their condition was less conspicuous than when, later, children came to be massed in great factories.”<sup>29</sup> At the same time that the geography of labor made its hardships and dangers more obvious and perhaps more extreme, the incentives to work also changed.

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<sup>26</sup> John T. Cumbler, *A Moral Response to Industrialism: The Lectures of Reverend Cook in Lynn, Massachusetts*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1983).

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Cook, *Labor, with Preludes on Current Events* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Co., 1880), 204.

<sup>28</sup> “National Effort to Solve Child Labor,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1904.

<sup>29</sup> Calhoun, *A Social History*, 126.

Activists like Jane Addams argued that the labor of youth had lost the benefits it once offered. She wrote in *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*: “Perhaps never before have young people been expected to work from motives so detached from direct emotional incentive. Never has the age of marriage been so long delayed; never has the work of youth been so separated from the family life and the public opinion of the community.”<sup>30</sup> In his popular work *Bitter Cry of the Children*, muckraker John Spargo drew a sharp distinction between the context of children’s work during the Progressive Era and the work of prior generations, claiming that “Children have always worked, but it is only since the reign of the machine that their work has been synonymous with slavery.”<sup>31</sup>

#### *Debating the Meaning of Child Labor*

By the mid-to-late 1800s, two competing narratives existed around child labor. The first narrative maintained the Puritan-era understanding of labor and emphasized the danger of idleness along with the appropriateness and even necessity of child labor. One writer lamented that “having all hands employed was a Puritan idea of virtue and this belief is used even today to support the employment of children in the commercialized industry. We often hear the argument ‘Is not early employment desirable to keep children from loafing around and getting into trouble?’”<sup>32</sup> This narrative remained popular in Congressional debates over child labor in the early twentieth century. Sen. Charles S. Thomas (D-CO) remarked during the 1916 floor debate that “to my mind the crowning danger to the child in his years preceding adolescence is the

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<sup>30</sup> Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 190.

<sup>31</sup> John Spargo, *Bitter Cry of the Children* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906), 127.

<sup>32</sup> Kohn, “Child Labor – History,” 4.

absence of that employment which inevitably leads to practices and habits that may result in his ultimate corruption and undoing. There is no saying more true than the old one that Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Rep. Edwin Webb (D-NC) attests, “there is a virtue to be derived from honest toil aside from the money return, that could never be developed through idleness. . . A boy or girl that never acquires the habit of honest toil before they reach the age of 16, enters life under a serious handicap.”<sup>34</sup>

A second narrative arose during the mid-1800s that reflected a new understanding of labor as damaging to the child and the future of the community. In *Industrial Violence and the Legal Origins of Child Labor*, historian James D. Schmidt argues that this new narrative identified the victims and villains in the world of child labor. The villains included the lazy, often drunk father who sends his children to work in his place; the greedy factory owner who exploits children for economic gain; and working mothers, though they were generally treated as sympathetic figures caught in a difficult situation.<sup>35</sup> The new narrative also identified the groups requiring protection through laws limiting child labor. Most obvious, both child and adult workers needed support. Schmidt observes that two concepts—race and the nation—played a role in the language used to fight child labor. “By connecting their cause to such heightened aims, reformers wrote their own legitimacy, giving linguistic attacks on working families a level of

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<sup>33</sup> 53 Cong. Rec. 12136 (1916)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0530012&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crbk624&id=624>.

<sup>34</sup> 53 Cong. Rec. 1571 (1916)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0530002&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crbk519&id=519>.

<sup>35</sup> James D. Schmidt, *Industrial Violence and the Legal Origins of Child Labor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

authority they might otherwise have lacked.”<sup>36</sup> By focusing on race and nation, activists made headway with Southerners who would have rejected outright any interference with the behavior or choices of white working families.

These efforts succeeded in driving forward child labor legislation at the state level. By 1900, almost all northeastern states had enacted laws with some kind of restriction on child labor. In 1848, Connecticut banned children from entering factories until age nine, with the expectation that they would have received a basic primary education by this age. Over the next ten years, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania followed suit by limiting labor to beginning at ages twelve and thirteen, respectively. By 1889, New York had passed a Factory Act making fourteen years the minimum age for work, but this was not readily enforced. As muckraker Jacob Riis noted, “The state, however, employed only two inspectors to monitor the forty-three thousand factories covered by the legislation.”<sup>37</sup> The other states with child labor laws similarly failed to provide sufficient enforcement. With southern states continuing to employ children and driving down the cost of their textiles, northern states feared hurting their employers if they enforced their laws.

In the next section I argue that the shifting narratives of child labor point to a bifurcation in the experiences of American youth. With only some young people working, activists set out to raise concerns about the potential consequences of this work. They did so by creating fear about what these young laborers portended for the future of the country and of the American citizenry. Thus, I argue that an additional category should be added to Schmidt’s listing of the villains. While the present-day villains were fathers, mothers, and factory owners, the truly fearful specter

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<sup>36</sup> Schmidt, *Industrial Violence*, 62.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Authoritative Text, Contexts, and Criticism*, ed. Hasia R. Diner (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 135.

was the generations of child laborers who would ruin America's future because they lacked the physical and mental capacity to engage in the form of citizenship increasingly valued by the turn of the twentieth century. This shift becomes particularly evident by looking first at the two different types of youth experience in America at the turn of the century. I then establish the role of two groups in promoting fear of marginal youth: unions and women's groups. Both of these groups held reasons beyond mere humanitarian concerns to raise the alarm about the deleterious consequences of child labor for the future of the country.

## **II. The Diverging Experiences of Youth in Early Twentieth-Century America**

Historian Paula Fass writes in *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* that "youth is not a simply a physical or biological fact. It is a cultural expression of social relationships and a product of a specific set of historical conditions."<sup>38</sup> The historical conditions of the Progressive Era changed the experiences of young people of different classes and geographies. In the following section I discuss how the growth of an industrial economy drove some young people into factories and some into classrooms, all while predominately rural youth continued to follow the traditional apprentice model. Moreover, as I demonstrate, young women experienced these changes in perhaps more pronounced ways than their male counterparts.

### *High School and College Education*

For young people in the middle and upper classes, particularly in urban areas, the experience of youth came to focus largely on education and new interactions with the opposite sex. In the nineteenth century, education, regardless of wealth, served as a marker of class. As the white collar economy grew and more young people pursued an advanced education, youth as

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<sup>38</sup> Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 2.

a developmental stage was lengthened. Felix Adler recognized this extension in an article published in the *Annals of the American Academy* (1905) in which he argued, “The finer the type the longer the period needed for the maturing of it. In the case of youths dedicated to the professions, the period of preparation at present extends far into the twenties.”<sup>39</sup> And, while just over 27,000 citizens or four percent of the public attended college by 1900, this still represented a considerable increase over 1870, when less than 10,000 individuals studied for a B.A.<sup>40</sup>

While the experience of young men with the financial ability to attend high school and college changed significantly, the experiences of their female counterparts were more revolutionary. While men’s work had previously been based within or near the home, the business associated with any sort of trade had always required that men work cooperatively in the public sphere. Moreover, many men engaged in the public sphere at the very least to cast a ballot in elections. Women, however hard they worked, had largely been confined to working within the home and left the trading of homemade wares to their husbands, fathers, or brothers. As young women increasingly joined their brothers at high schools and colleges, they gained a fundamentally new sense of freedom. The media offered aspirational images of college coeds such as the Vassar Girl who attended class and spent her leisure time playing tennis and riding bicycles—physical activities that would have shamed and appalled young women a generation earlier.<sup>41</sup> After and during college, these privileged young women increasingly took it upon

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<sup>39</sup> Felix Adler, “Child Labor in the United States and Its Great Attendant Evils” in *Selected Articles on Child Labor*, ed. Edna D. Bullock (Minneapolis, MN: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1911), 24. Previously published in *Annals of the American Academy* 25 (1905): 417-29.

<sup>40</sup> Carl N. Degler, *The Age of the Economic Revolution, 1876-1900*, 2nd ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1977), 169.

<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 119.

themselves to venture out into the public sphere seeking both employment and political engagement.

### *Factory Drudges*

The economic boom of industrialization that helped develop a white collar economy simultaneously contributed to worsening the labor conditions of working class men and women. “At a time when increasing numbers of middle-class parents were sacrificing the labor of their children in favor of prolonged education, most working-class parents and children remained caught up in sort of productive-contractual relationship that had once characterized family life in all social classes.”<sup>42</sup> Two works of muckraking journalists, Jacob Riis’ *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (1890) and John Spargo’s *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (1906) revealed the living conditions of America’s urban poor and particularly the conditions of poor children. Riis started his career as a police reporter and was one of the first to take advantage of photography to show the lives of his subjects. While questions have been raised about the accuracy of his statistics, his work has been recognized as “the precursor of the muckraking movement.”<sup>43</sup> Moreover, he has been praised for attracting “the attention of prominent reformers such as Theodore Roosevelt while stimulating a much broader debate over urban poverty.”<sup>44</sup> Spargo’s work was praised for its citations, hard research, and facts. In a book review published in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (1906), William H. Allen writes “we are grateful for the vivid, scholarly way in which this book

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<sup>42</sup> Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977).

<sup>43</sup> Cecelia Tichi, *Exposés and Excess: Muckraking in America, 1900-2000* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Edwards, *New Spirit*, 229.

marshals the experience of two continents in awaking to the physical needs of the children who are compelled to be in school though unfit for schools....It will help man find his brother even though man be an employer of child labor.”<sup>45</sup> The following section draws on the writings of Riis and Spargo along with other turn of the century writers to illustrate the juxtaposition between rich and poor children in Progressive Era America.

The dominant institution laid bare in writing about the urban poor is the tenement. By the turn of the twentieth century, most urban centers housed their working poor in these large apartment complexes. Families crowded into dank, poorly ventilated apartments often with large families living in only one to two rooms. Tenement housing limited the very human nature of youth as “home, the greatest factor of all in the training of the young, means nothing to him but a pigeon-hole in a coop along with so many other human animals.”<sup>46</sup> The crowded, poor conditions of tenement homes were critiqued as contributing to the rise in gangs running alcohol and prostitutes and poor public health.<sup>47</sup>

Education had little resonance in the lives of many working-class young people, particularly those past the age of twelve. In *The Politics of School Reform, 1870-1940*, Paul Peterson demonstrates that children of laborers made up a relatively small component of the school population, particularly high schools which, through the early 1900s, remained highly

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<sup>45</sup> William H. Allen, review of *Bitter Cry of the Children*, by John Spargo, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 28 (1906): 196-197.

<sup>46</sup> Riis, *How the Other Half*, 103.

<sup>47</sup> Riis, *How the Other Half*, 93-94; Spargo, *Bitter Cry*

competitive and focused on a classical curriculum.<sup>48</sup> Peterson further notes that despite the traditional notion that public schools were a means of Americanizing immigrants, in truth, the growth in public education at the primary and secondary level stemmed from competition to keep middle-class students in public rather than private or parochial schools. Institutionally, then, schools were often available in working-class neighborhoods and open to working-class children; however, the ability of young people to take advantage of these institutions was questionable. For the most part, school officials sincerely wanted to get children into schools and offer them a useful education.<sup>49</sup> Yet, as journalist Elinor Stoy noted in her 1906 article, “Everywhere in the competition between the school and employer—the employer wins.”<sup>50</sup>

Men, women, and children all experienced these working and living conditions. And, while both upper- and lower-class women suddenly found themselves in the public sphere, what was an opportunity for many upper-class women was little more than a burden for those in the lower classes. Upper-class women paid others to perform traditional housekeeping tasks allowing them time to engage in politics or social work. Working out of economic necessity, lower-class women had little time to perform housekeeping tasks let alone properly train their daughters to perform them. In some homes, one daughter, often one of the youngest, took on the role of “little mother.” As little mothers, daughters, often as young as six or seven, made decisions about the eating and sleeping habits of infants and addressed health complications on their own. In *The Bitter Cry of the Children*, Spargo noted that while these little mothers

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<sup>48</sup> Paul Peterson, *Politics of School Reform, 1870-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

<sup>49</sup> Carl L Bankston and Stephen J. Caldas, *Public Education, America’s Civil Religion: A Social History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Elinor H. Stoy, “Child-Labor,” *The Arena* 36 (1906): 588.

reasonably received praise for what they did, “in praising these qualities we must not forget that they are still children, necessarily unfitted for the responsibilities thus placed upon them.”<sup>51</sup>

Tasking older children to look after younger siblings was not a new way of structuring family care. However, in pre-industrial America, mothers were often in the home providing a model or, at least, a source of correction for their daughters. Spargo observed that little mothers existed specifically because the actual parent worked outside of the home.

### *Continued Apprentice Model*

During the Progressive Era both investigative journalism and realist literature publicized the highly variable life conditions individuals faced. While society pages and advertisements reflected the aspirational lives of those in the upper social register, investigative journalists capitalized on an increasingly literate public with access to mass media to document the underbelly of urban life. Yet, alongside these two new experiences of youth as particularly wealthy or poor, many American youth continued to participate in the apprenticeship model of youth labor, working in their parents’ shops or on their family farm with the intention of learning the skills they would use to eventually take over a family business or trade. Similarly, young women learned the traditional homemaking and childrearing tasks (though likely with some adjustments with regard to modern advancements) considered necessary to marry well and provide a good home. While these young people were engaged in labor, their work received little attention, perhaps because their labor was directed toward the future in a way that the urban child labor in factories, mills, and retail stores was not.

Activists and politicians perceived young people privileged to receive a high school or college education and those unofficially or officially apprenticed in trades or in family

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<sup>51</sup> Spargo, *Bitter Cry*, 38.

businesses as distinct from those youths laboring in factories and mills: the former were on traditional youth tracks to adulthood through their incorporation in education or family-based work while the latter were marginalized with regard to society at large. Concentrated media attention on the extreme paths of wealth and tenement poverty reduced public discussion about traditional forms of family and community oriented child labor, thereby making the division between the two extreme types of youth appear especially stark. Muckraking journalists succeeded at raising not just pity for but also fear about the life and labor conditions of working tenement youth. These concerns, we will see, conveniently promoted the goals of certain interests in society.

### **III. In Their Interest: The Role of Unions and Women's Groups**

Industrialization, urbanization, and immigration contributed to the creation of these two new paths for American youth. But the value placed on these paths, and particularly the fear constructed around those young people deemed marginal, began with the efforts of labor unions and women's groups. These groups engaged in political and social activities designed to address these changes in the experience of youth in America. Alongside its humanitarian appeal, however, the fight against child labor also provided labor unions and women's group an issue that could further their own interests. In this section I examine the relationship of each group to child labor.

#### *Labor Unions*

As early as 1836, members of the National Trade Unions Convention spoke out about the need to eliminate child labor. The commitment of labor unions to ending child labor is easy to

understand, since the entry of children into factories undermined the unions' labor model. Unions, for the most part, supported the breadwinner model of labor wherein the male head of household was paid a high enough wage to allow him to be his family's lone support –their breadwinner. As Reverend Joseph Cook pointed out in an 1880 lecture entitled “Labor with Preludes on Current Events,” “competition between child-labor and mature labor is a most mischievous cause of the reduction of wages.”<sup>52</sup> This reduction came from two sources. First, automation made it possible for men and boys to perform many of the same jobs. As a result, the supply of workers grew and employers could pay significantly less. Second, many factories began offering a “family wage” or only offering jobs to those men who were able and willing to bring their children to work with them. The relationship of male wages to child labor became cyclical because, as Cook noted, “the unnaturally low remuneration of labor is a direct temptation to the violation of the rights of children.”<sup>53</sup> Low male wages encouraged families to put children to work, and the presence of children in factories further depressed adult male wages.

Proposals to restrict or end child labor drew broad support from organized labor. The platform of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions report on the Labor Congress in Pittsburgh in 1881 included the following plank: “That we are in favor of the passage of laws in the several States forbidding the employment of children under the age of fourteen years, in any capacity, under penalty of fine and imprisonment.”<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the best known labor leader of

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<sup>52</sup> Cook, *Labor with Preludes*, 83.

<sup>53</sup> Cook, *Labor with Preludes*, 202.

<sup>54</sup> “Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions.” *The Journal of United Labor* 1 – 3 (1883): 167-169.  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=V\\_5aAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Knights+of+L](http://books.google.com/books?id=V_5aAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Knights+of+L)

the twentieth century, Samuel Gompers, repeatedly talked about passing child labor laws at the state level as a victory for labor unions.<sup>55</sup>

### *Women's Groups*

While the interest of labor unions in ending child labor is obvious, it may be less evident why women's groups took up the cause. Women's philanthropy and civic groups rose alongside and from many of the same conditions that contributed to the rise of child labor. Relieved of the need to participate in a family economy, relatively privileged women had the time, resources, and education to engage their communities through various women's clubs. Florence Kelley, a key Progressive Era activist and the first Factory Inspector in Illinois, attributed "the very existence of the [General Federation of Women's Clubs] . . . to the fact that the industries have gone out of the homes of the prosperous, leaving to the women in those homes leisure for study, recreation, and philanthropy."<sup>56</sup> Social work and efforts to reform settlement houses were deemed appropriate because they fit into a respectable model of Christian charity. Female organizers also hoped to gain access to the political realm or at least to promote political solutions. As Elizabeth Clemens demonstrates in *The People's Lobby: Organization Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890-1925*, women found that being explicitly political often brought less success than strategies "built on traditionally feminine

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abor+Journal+Vol+1-3+1880&hl=en&sa=X&ei=9GtuU\_7uLoigogSpoIKgCw&ved=0CD8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false, 167.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Gompers, *Labor and the Common Welfare*, ed. Hayes Robbins. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1919).

<sup>56</sup> Florence Kelley. "The Committee of the General Federation of Women's Clubs on the Industrial Problem as It Affects Women and Children," *The American Journal of Nursing* 1 (1901): 813. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3402389>.

forms of organization and sought to link these new models to new public purposes. These initial forays into the public realm served as a forward position from which women could redeploy their organization for political ends.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, women required “feminine” issues that could be used as a platform from which to engage in political work.

Leaders in the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) advocated engaging the issue of child labor in ways that explicitly recognized their ability, as women, to leverage the traditional sphere of motherhood. Formed in 1890 with ratification by 63 women’s clubs from across the country, the GFWC coordinated the work of women’s clubs on a variety of issues including juvenile court reform, child labor, and women’s suffrage. By 1914, the GFWC was the largest political organization in the United States.<sup>58</sup> A *New York Times* article entitled “To Stop Child Labor; Georgia Women Working to Keep Little One’s Out of Factories” published on May 12, 1901, repeatedly quotes a speech made by Mrs. R.D. Lowe, then President of the General Federation. She argued that her organization hoped to find success addressing child labor in her state “by leading the people of the State, especially the women, to study deeply this question of child labor; by showing them that to send the young child into the factory is to stunt it in mind and body.”<sup>59</sup> Asked by an audience member how she responds to those who say a women’s place

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<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Clemens, *The People’s Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890-1925* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 189.

<sup>58</sup> Ida Husted Harper eds., *History of Woman Suffrage: 1900 – 1920*, 6 vols, (New York: J.J. Little & Ives Company, 1922).  
<http://books.google.com/books?id=aX5KAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=History+of+Woman+Suffrage:+1900-1920&hl=en&sa=X&ei=PmpuU5qUEYKGoQTauoGoCw&ved=0CDgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=History%20of%20Woman%20Suffrage%3A%201900-1920&f=false>.

<sup>59</sup> L.G.C., “To Stop Child Labor: Georgia Women Working to Keep Little Ones Out of Factories,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1901.

is not in politics, she replied “Well, men never are weary of telling us that the women’s place is at home with the children, and we are but taking them literally. If the young child is to go into the factory, then the mothers of young children must follow them there. . . . If the matter must be carried into legislative halls, then into these halls we will go.”<sup>60</sup> Lowe indicated the value of child labor as a platform for women. The growing place of the child in the public sphere increased the ability of women to make a case for their presence as well.

Similarly, Florence Kelley sought to use the power of women as the primary purchasers for their families by starting the National Consumers League in 1899. The National Consumers League (NCL) cooperated with labor unions to label products that were made without child labor and encouraged women to look for the label when shopping. In 1893, the Governor of Illinois named Kelley his first Factory Inspector. While the capacity of the inspector was certainly limited by a lack of funding and enforcement powers, her appointment still marked the elevation of a woman into a particularly visible government position. Indeed, a key activist for child labor, Kelley actively praised and cooperated with labor organizations in the fight against child labor. In a speech entitled “The Wage Slavery of Children in America” given in the spring of 1888, she specifically lauded the unions in proclaiming that “[M]ore and more children are leaving the schools at earlier ages to enter some of the great branches of trade. All that has been done to mitigate the evil has been done by the efforts of organized labor.”<sup>61</sup>

Both women’s groups and labor unions had non-humanitarian reasons for becoming engaged in the battle to end child labor. By the beginning of the twentieth century, members of both organizations joined up with other individuals fighting child labor to form the National

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<sup>60</sup>L.G. C., “To Stop Child Labor: Georgia Women Working.”

<sup>61</sup>“Evils of Child Labor,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1888.

Child Labor Committee. Formed in 1904 with Jane Addams and Florence Kelley as members of the governing board, the NCLC became the primary organization fighting to end child labor. In 1907, the organization received a Congressional charter, and it won support from dignitaries such as former President Grover Cleveland, Senator Benjamin Tillman, Jr. of South Carolina, and then-President of Harvard Charles W. Eliot.

#### **IV. Compulsory Education: The Answer to Idle Hands**

In their efforts to end child labor, activists needed to address the narrative claiming work stood between young people and corruption. As a complementary policy to child labor laws, compulsory education answered the question of where young people would go if not to work and further established “the illegitimacy of young workers.”<sup>62</sup> After all, if young people were supposed to be in the classroom they were necessarily not supposed to be on the factory or mill floor. In the words of Felix Adler, Northern Secretary of the NCLC and Professor of Political and Social Ethics at Columbia University, “It is not enough to shut the children out of the factory, we must also bring them into the school and compel parents if necessary to send them to school; the movement for compulsory education everywhere goes hand in hand, and must go hand in hand, with the child labor movement.”<sup>63</sup> Adler’s statement highlights how activists cast their project as accomplishing more than just the removal of children from dangerous situations. Rather, they were engaged in an effort to incorporate youth into the American political project. Schools offered reformers a unique opportunity as they were “more extensively applicable to the whole mass of the children [and]...an instrument, by which the good men in society can send

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<sup>62</sup> Schmidt, *Industrial Violence*, 251.

<sup>63</sup> Adler, “Child Labor in the United States,” 25.

redeeming influences to those children who suffer under the calamity of vicious parentage and evil domestic associations.”<sup>64</sup>

The opening anecdote of this chapter emphasizes the relation between child labor and compulsory education laws. Within Alton, Illinois, a compulsory child labor law existed but failure to enforce it allowed child labor to continue apace. Kelley published Illinois’ compulsory education law in the Third Annual Report of the Factory Inspectors of Illinois and claimed “no report on the child labor found in this State would be complete which did not give full weight to this intimate relationship of the two laws and their enforcement.”<sup>65</sup> Recognizing the critical role of educators in the fight against child labor, the NCLC created materials such as “model forms for recording truants and visits by officers...with descriptions of systems under one, two, or ten attendance officers” to help school districts track attendance.<sup>66</sup>

Child labor activists simultaneously pushed for child labor laws and asserted that early labor ruined children’s minds and bodies. The combination suggested that those young people in school—on the correct path—at least developed the skills of citizenship while those young people who worked not only failed to acquire this knowledge but became threats to their fellow Americans through mental, physical, and moral degradation. In the following section, I briefly review the progress made in state laws for both compulsory education and child labor before examining the discourse surrounding child labor laws and its relationship to citizenship.

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<sup>64</sup> Horace Mann, *First Annual Report of the Board of Education: Covering the Year of 1837* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, State Printers, 1838).

<sup>65</sup> Florence Kelly, “Third Annual Report of the Factory Inspectors of Illinois,” 37.

<sup>66</sup> Elsa Denison, *Helping School Children, Suggestions for Efficient Cooperation with the Public Schools*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1912).

## **V. The Push for Legislation**

Labor unions, women's groups, and other actors fought throughout the nineteenth century to end child labor through state legislation. The interconnected nature of state economies, however, led them to conclude that a true end to child labor required a federal law. The National Child Labor Committee worked with Sen. Albert J. Beveridge (R-IN) to introduce a bill in 1906 though it was handily defeated. The organization and its various allies tried again with the Palmer bill in 1915 before the Keating-Owen Act passed in 1916. The Keating-Owen Act employed Congress' commerce clause powers to declare that products made in a factory or mill employing children could not be shipped across state lines until thirty days after production. Southern Senators claimed the bill was a northern plot to limit the South's industrial capacity and floor debates in the House and Senate included extensive discussion about whether the legislation could withstand a Supreme Court challenge. Intermixed with the discussion of the Act's constitutionality, the floor debates offer insight into how Members of Congress framed the threat posed by child labor.

My objective in the following section is to demonstrate how the language activists, journalists, and political actors employed during these debates constructed specific fears around child laborers and their future offspring as not only separate from the American political project but likely to threaten it through physical and mental incapacity. Moreover, I argue that racial constructions of child laborers as akin to slaves contributes to a vision of child laborers as outside the American citizenry which was, in the public imagination as well as in practice, white.

### *Activists and Journalists*

By the 1880s, those opposed to child labor suggested that working children too much and too early cost young people their mental and physical abilities. Rev. Cook argued that child labor

“fosters the growth of an ignorant class, which is likely to be also an unemployed, explosive, and perhaps criminal class.”<sup>67</sup> The *New York Times* offered readers its impressions of a report from New York’s factory inspectors that concluded, “Investigations showed a frightfully low order of intelligence among factory children. Many of them could not read or write, did not know the State they lived in, and arithmetic was Arabic to them...The children of the factories would be the fathers and mothers of future generations, and what that means for society it was not difficult to imagine.”<sup>68</sup> Fifteen years later, anti-child labor writers continue to emphasize the negative repercussions of child labor on individuals and their offspring. Florence Kelley, this time in her role as the General Secretary of the National Consumers League, asserted:

We must face the fact that we cannot conduct a republic made up of citizens who spend nine, ten, twelve, fourteen or sixteen hours in twenty-four in that way. But the tendency of industry is to that end. Our education will have to be deliberately shaped in recognition of the fact that, if we let little girls turn their backs upon school when they are fourteen years old and go, nominally self-directing citizens of this republic, into industry under the pressure of competition as we have it, we shall not last long as a civilized nation.<sup>69</sup>

Together, Cook, Kelley, and the *New York Times* promoted a view that child labor, but more specifically child laborers and their offspring, posed a threat to the nation.

Many reformers viewed the fight against child labor as a “movement to preserve Anglo-Saxon children, and the great countries they stand for, from premature blight and decay.”<sup>70</sup>

Child labor recruited not just “the children of foreign immigrants, but for the most part the

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<sup>67</sup> Cook, *Labor with Preludes*, 202.

<sup>68</sup> “Evils of Child Labor,” *New York Times*, January 10, 1887.

<sup>69</sup> Florence Kelley, “Part Time Schools” in *The Child Labor Bulletin, Volume 1*, ed. The National Child Labor Committee (New York: Press of Clarence S. Nathan, 1913): 110.

<sup>70</sup> Leonora Beck Ellis, “Movement to Restrict Child Labor.” In *Selected Articles on Child Labor*, ed. by Edna D. Bullock, (Minneapolis, MN: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1911), 17. Previously published in *The Arena* 28 (1902): 370-37.

offspring of the purest American stock of this continent; and some of these children as eye witnesses attest, were at their work even more than twelve hours, as much as thirteen and fourteen hours a day.”<sup>71</sup> Particularly in southern communities historically resistant to public education, reformers coupled the concepts of child labor, education, and the degeneration of Anglo-Saxon bloodlines so that “closing the mill door and opening the school door became synonymous with salvaging white southern manhood.”<sup>72</sup>

Some journalists and activists made explicit references to the racial implications of child labor. In an article published in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, A.J. McKelway, Secretary for the Southern States Office of the NCLC, argued that the whiteness of child labor in the South may provide an opportunity to better appeal for reform:

For reasons that have been often stated, only the white native children of the South are employed in the mills. They make a peculiar and effective appeal for protection at the hands of the state. The argument in their behalf has already been stated and is well understood. For if the child labor system, in anything like its present proportions, should continue, as it has for a hundred years in England, with operatives of the same racial stock, we may look for the same consequences as inevitably following, namely, racial degeneracy, perpetuated poverty, the enlargement of illiteracy, the destruction of democracy, the disintegration of the family, the increase of crime, the lowering of the wage-scale and the swelling of the army of the unemployed.<sup>73</sup>

In his appeal, McKelway emphasized the dangers posed not to the children of the South by industry but rather the danger those engaged in child labor would pose to the nation through their racial degeneracy, poverty, and immorality. The state, not children, needed protection.

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<sup>71</sup> Adler, “Child Labor in the United States,” 18.

<sup>72</sup> Shelley Sallee, *Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>73</sup> A.J. McKelway, “Child Labor in the South,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 35 (1910), 163-164. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1011502>.

Elinor Stoy argued slavery would be a favorable alternative to modern child labor. She wrote that for those who worked in glass factories “every vestige of childhood was wiped out...they were stamped with animalism.”<sup>74</sup> This type of factory labor for children is “fraught with far more baleful influences in the life of the nation than any black bondage that ever existed...The black children were never put out to work under such conditions as we find among the white children who toil in these mills, mines and factories.”<sup>75</sup> She concluded, “child-labor is the mortgaging beyond redemption, the health, both in a moral and a physical way, of generations yet unborn.”<sup>76</sup>

Collectively, the rhetoric of activists and journalists indicates the curious position of race in the debate over child labor. African and African American children regularly worked during slavery and they were certainly working during the Progressive Era, though rarely alongside white or immigrant children. Pamphlets produced by the Children’s Bureau focused predominately on the categories of labor done by white children and ignored those fields dominated by children of color. Yet, African American children play a critical role in arguments against child labor as seen in the rhetoric of Stoy and McKelway.

The construction of child labor as an institution that transformed children into a threat to the nation seeped into political debates. While the debate over the Keating-Owen Act focused largely on the constitutionality of the measure, those individuals who engaged the substance of the bill relied heavily on the language of citizenship. Rep. John J. Rogers (R-MA) argued “it tells for the welfare of the child physically and mentally and morally...the mental retardation of

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<sup>74</sup> Stoy, “Child-Labor,” 586.

<sup>75</sup> Stoy, “Child-Labor,” 584.

<sup>76</sup> Stoy, “Child-Labor,” 586.

children who go to work too early necessarily follows.”<sup>77</sup> Sen. James K. Vardaman (D-MS) echoed Elinor Stoy’s claim of animalism when he asserted “excessive work in childhood universally results in mental and physical paralysis—it stunts the physique—empties the heart of passion and drives poetry from the brain. It results in general deterioration, which, in the course of time, will bring its victims on the dead level with the stolid ox.”<sup>78</sup>

Representative Rogers and Senator Vardaman both raised the issue of mental and physical unfitness that accompanies child labor. Rep. Ira C. Copley (Prog-IL) drew on America’s history with slavery to emphasize the illogical nature of child labor, claiming it is odd that slave owners better limited child labor than current factory owners because the slave owners were aware that if slaves “were set to work so early...the total earning of their lifetime would be diminished. In fact, it was left for our free institutions, developed along individual lines and by a large number of different units to violate this physical law when applied to free humans.”<sup>79</sup> Rep. William S. Vare (R-PA) emphasized the positive potential of the Keating-Owen Bill to “go a long ways toward correcting evils at their very root, preserving the health and insuring the

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<sup>77</sup> 53 Cong. Rec. 1585 (1916)

<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0530002&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crbk533&id=533>.

<sup>78</sup> 53 Cong. Rec. 12222 (1916)

<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0530012&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crbk710&id=710>.

<sup>79</sup> 53 Cong. Rec. 1575 (1916)

<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0530002&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crbk523&id=523>.

education of future generations, which by reason of these constructive laws, will give the United States a higher standard of general intelligence, greater national vigor, and greater prosperity.”<sup>80</sup>

Two representatives, Rep. Peter F. Tague (D-MA) and Rep. Percy E. Quin (D-MS), developed the link between the degeneration of individuals through child labor and the threat they posed to the country. Representative Tague juxtaposed the discussions of the Great War with those over child labor as he observed:

“[W]e have been treated to speeches on preparedness. We have been told how to raise armies and build navies for the defense of our Nation; but to-day, sir, we are being treated to speeches on the real preparedness of our Nation—the education, the health, and the upbuilding of our children...Talk about children 12 years of age going into a mill and working 12 and 14 hours a day, and then tell us that they are fit for future citizenship! With their health broken and without education, you opponents know that this is impossible!”<sup>81</sup>

Representative Quin emphasized the danger to the quality of care children will eventually receive: “If these little girls spend 8 or 10 hours every day except Sunday at work in factories, what kind of mothers would they make after they are grown women...They would enter woman’s estate with heavy handicaps. Each succeeding generation would become weaker. Who doubts nature’s law of heredity?”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> 53 Cong. Rec. 1575 (1916)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0530002&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crbk523&id=523>.

<sup>81</sup> 53 Cong. Rec. 1581 (1916)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0530002&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crbk529&id=529>.

<sup>82</sup> 53 Cong. Rec. 1584 (1916)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0530002&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crbk532&id=532>.

## V. Conclusion

Ultimately, through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, activists, journalists, and political officials constructed child laborers and specifically white child laborers working in mills and factories, as a threat to the nation. Alongside that threat came calls to remove young people from mill and factory floors with the intention of insuring them against a slide into animalism that would make them at best a drain on and at worst a threat to the state. And even though the Supreme Court declared the Keating-Owen Act unconstitutional in 1918, state level action nevertheless continued with a number of governors in early twentieth-century America explicitly praising the efforts made to move these young people toward normative citizenship through incorporation in the American education system. President Roosevelt's Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) would eventually establish federal child labor standards.

Yet, as presented here, it is not the passage of a child labor law that matters for the construction of American youth. Rather, the construction of American youth at this juncture is profoundly shaped by a changing understanding of child labor, along with the subsequent construction of child laborers and their future offspring as a threat to the nation (particularly in comparison to wealthier and rural youth). Compulsory education provided an opportunity to draw marginalized young people out of the factories and mines and place them in classrooms where they were expected to learn both the skills and values necessary for American citizenship. In the next chapter, I turn to a discussion of the fears that center on Depression Era youth when elites suddenly grew worried that young people, far from working too much, were losing the capacity to work at all.

### Chapter Three: “The Big Trouble Came”: Youth and Citizenship in the 1930s–1940s

By the time he was 17 years old, Happy Joe was an expert rail jumper. Dressed in ill-fitting, worn clothes, he was part of a surprisingly earnest group to which politicians and parents alike dedicated much handwringing—the boy tramp.<sup>83</sup> The oldest of seven kids, when asked why he left home, Happy Joe avers that his father “did not exactly kick me out, but he gave me plenty of hints...I worked...for a grocer...Then he closed up. I couldn’t get anything....Last fall they cut down on our relief...before the old man could start giving any more hints, I scrams.”<sup>84</sup> Stories like Happy Joe’s abound in the narratives of those unfortunate enough to have been in their teenage years at the start of the Great Depression. Texas, a fellow tramp, delineates his life into before and after the crash. Before the crash, his family did well enough, even though war injuries made it difficult for his father to work steadily. Texas and his six younger brothers and sisters attended school and worked odd jobs while his mother brought in sewing jobs on a piecemeal basis. After the crash, sewing and other odd jobs dried up. Texas reflects that “We did

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<sup>83</sup> While approximately five percent of those who hit the road were girls, quantitative, qualitative, and fictional work focuses primarily on the experiences of boy tramps. For a brief discussion of girls on the road and the source of the estimation that five percent of child tramps were girls, see Thomas Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps of America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1934). To the extent that authors discuss young women, it is to bemoan the fact that the lack of good jobs for their potential suitors forced women to marry and live off some combination of family support, charity, and public relief or to put off marriage to stay at home on their parents’ dime. Their lives were disrupted but this disruption appears to have been understood as a secondary effect. As will be highlighted later in this paper, federal solutions to the issues of alienated youth relied on improving the prospects of young men, thereby improving the future of young women. For more information on the derivative position of female tramps, see Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 125-128. For the lack of attention paid to homeless women and the construction of homelessness as a male problem, see Elaine S. Abelson, “Women Who Have No Men to Work for Them: Gender and Homelessness in the Great Depression,” *Feminist Studies*, 29 (Spring 2003).

<sup>84</sup> Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps*, 37-38.

our best, I guess, but it wasn't good enough, for the big trouble had come and nobody had any money."<sup>85</sup> Unable to afford the meager expenses associated with high school, Texas dropped out and left home, hoping to find work and ensure that his family had one less mouth to feed. The broad outline of Texas' story—a once responsible high school student suddenly disconnected from work and school and keenly aware of his dependency on a family decimated by the crash—reflects the situation of millions of Great Depression era youth.

Texas and the rest of his cohort recognized that their chances for making a living were slim. Many joined Texas and took to the rails; even those lucky enough to stay in school spoke pessimistically about their chances in the world. While young people's views of their prospects dimmed, concerns rose among political and social elites over not just the future of young Americans but what the status of these youth signified for the future of America itself. By the mid-1930s, the writings of journalists, academics, and political actors reveal a fear that young Americans were drifting away from American values. Rather than preparing to take on the identity of American citizens, elites saw young people drifting into one of two possible identities: bums or revolutionaries. Bums, at best, lived on the margins of American society, having lost not only the ability but also the desire to participate in the political, cultural, and economic community. While bums exited the state and survived through criminal activity, revolutionaries' disenchantment with American values turned into an active desire to overthrow the American political and economic structure.

Fearing the prospect of American youth identifying with either group, elite actors created programs to push young people into the desired identity of American citizen. I trace the way in which two New Deal programs—the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and National Youth

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<sup>85</sup> Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps*, 23.

Administration (NYA)—sought to instill a sense of American values and citizenship in participants. Indeed, the civic aspirations that informed the creation of the CCC and NYA compel us to consider them as more than economic relief programs. These programs received considerable praise and eventually many participants were incorporated into the armed forces or other support services for World War II. Yet, the active incorporation of young people into the American state merely pushed fears of bums and revolutionaries underground to resurface in conversations about demobilization. By exploring the passage of the G.I. Bill in the context of this earlier political and social construction of youth, I argue this legislation can be understood as part of an extended effort to connect youth to the American political project and thus avoid the youth revolutions that plagued Europe in the wake of World War I. From this perspective, the G.I. Bill becomes more than legislation designed to ease the entry of veterans into a peacetime economy. It is expansive legislation designed to address a youth problem viewed as having been stalled but not solved by World War II.

I begin by outlining how adults, influenced by academic, government, and journalistic reports, came to view Great Depression youth as alienated from and a potential threat to the American state. I then turn to an examination of two New Deal programs, the CCC and the NYA, designed specifically to address the problems of youth. Against this background, I analyze the language used in public and Congressional discussions about demobilization and the G.I. Bill. The triumph of America's young men on the battlefields of World War II and the success of the G.I. Bill make it easy to forget that before they left for war theaters and before they returned from them, young people were a locus of fear for many elites concerned with America's political and social stability. By emphasizing the construction of youth beginning in the 1930s rather than starting with the World War II era, my analysis places this fear front and center and reveals the

key role it played in the passage of this far-reaching legislation that expanded on the New Deal's mission of incorporating young people into the American citizenry.

## **I. Youth and the Great Depression**

Before the “big trouble,” boys like Happy Joe and Texas reaped the benefits of the Progressive Era's youth-oriented organizing. Compulsory education laws in all 48 states kept those younger than 14 out of work, helping to drive the labor rates for those aged 10-15 down to five percent by 1930.<sup>86</sup> While in 1920 only 2.2 million young people made it to high school, by 1930 that number had doubled.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, throughout the 1920s, young people, even those on the lower end of the class range, felt reasonably optimistic about their chances in life.<sup>88</sup> Many were reaching a higher level of education than their parents had dreamed of, the job market was wide open, and by the age of sixteen many boys were thinking seriously about marriage. These circumstances changed during the last week of October 1929. In the wake of the stock market crash, the conditions of millions of families deteriorated rapidly. Over the next few years, the anxieties about youth would change as the Progressive reformers' concerns that youth would not be fit for participation in the American political project morphed into a fear that young people no longer upheld traditional American values or wanted to participate in American politics and society.

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<sup>86</sup> Kathleen Morgan Downe and Patrick Huber, *The 1920s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 35.

<sup>87</sup> Downe and Huber, *The 1920s*, 31.

<sup>88</sup> These national numbers obscure some regional variation. Particularly in the south, rates of child labor remained high while rates of education remained lower largely as a result of the region's high concentration of subsistence level farming, poorly structured school systems, and a lack of the type of bureaucratic oversight that arose in the north.

Indeed, in the wake of the crash, young people increasingly experienced feelings of alienation from and cynicism about the very values held dear by older generations of Americans. Young people found their development stunted by a country that did not seem to have a place for them. Influential sociologist and demographer Kingsley Davis succinctly describes the problem in a pamphlet entitled *Youth in the Depression* published by the University of Chicago as part of an adult education series. He argues that schools, industries, and armed forces serve as “a series of sieves, by which young people are trained and sorted out for suitable positions in the business, industrial, and professional life of the nation.”<sup>89</sup> The Great Depression blocked the sieve, pushing boys like Texas and Happy Joe into tramping. But, even those lucky enough to find jobs, such as the 23 year-old messenger boy Dick Conway, profiled in journalist Maxine Davis’ *The Lost Generation* (1936), found themselves stuck in the faulty sieve. Hired as a messenger boy at a Western bank at age 18, Conway remained a messenger five years later. Traditionally, the boy serving in this position received promotion within a year or two but “there [had] been no change” in the ranks so Conway remained a messenger boy. His boss admitted to sending messages through his secretary because he was “ashamed to look a twenty-three-year-old messenger boy in the face.”<sup>90</sup> Those lucky enough to find an education similarly found themselves “driving bakery wagons, clearing in stores...[while] getting cynical.”<sup>91</sup>

While left out of Kingsley Davis’ sieve, those in rural America found themselves similarly stunted. By the 1930s, the one-two punch of farm mechanization (which had left

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<sup>89</sup> Kingsley Davis, *Youth in the Depression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 9.

<sup>90</sup> Maxine Davis, *The Lost Generation: A Portrait of American Youth Today* (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1936), 189.

<sup>91</sup> Benjamin Roth, *The Great Depression: A Diary*, eds. James Ledbetter and Daniel B. Roth (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009), 62.

thousands of farmers in debt) and the end of homesteading limited the ability of young people who grew up in rural areas to find work in their communities as farm hands or farm owners. Those few lucky enough to inherit a homestead quickly found their land worthless, ruined by decades of unsustainable farming practices that stripped the soil.<sup>92</sup> In his alarmingly titled work *Youth: Millions Too Many* (1940), Bruce Melvin, the one-time director of the Work Progress Administration's major youth studies, observes that out of sheer necessity rural youth "set out in search of work—to join the increasing army of modern nomads."<sup>93</sup>

### *A Stunted Generation*

Taken together, the decline of education, business, and the farm signaled the downfall of traditionally "American" paths of success. According to census data, by 1937 only six million out of a total of twenty-one million American youth ages 16-24 were employed in either full or part-time work.<sup>94</sup> The virtues that guided American success stories—thrift and industriousness—could not solve young people's problems. Thirty years prior, "the average boy of sixteen was in many respects an adult...He had a job; he was standing on his own feet and paying his own way; and he was already thinking of saving money so that he could get married...all this had

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<sup>92</sup> Timothy Egan, *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived The Great American Dust Bowl* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006).

<sup>93</sup> Bruce Melvin, *Youth: Millions Too Many* (New York: The Association Press, 1940), 41. Melvin offers one of the only accounts I have seen that specifically distinguishes between urban and rural youth in the 1920s-40s.

<sup>94</sup> Betty Lindley and Ernest K. Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth: The Story of the National Youth Administration* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), 6. In contextualizing the severity of the situation for their readers, the Lindleys note that counting just the unemployed boys "outnumbered the entire American expeditionary force to France during 1917-1918" (6).

changed...They are dependents.”<sup>95</sup> The inability to afford to stay in school or find gainful work wore on young citizens who found themselves in “a particularly demoralizing position for a naturally ambitious and energetic group.”<sup>96</sup>

Thus, through no fault of their own, young people found themselves members of a generation adults viewed with pity, dismay, and ultimately fear. Individuals from the worlds of government and academia expressed concern that a lack of engagement would reverberate dangerously through society as this generation developed. Government officials such as Charles Taussig, an assistant to President Roosevelt, raised concerns about the ability of young people to understand what constituted a ‘normal’ American life as they had experienced little more than periods of extreme boom and bust. In other words, young people lacked the memories that allowed older citizens, including many of their parents, to classify the Great Depression as an aberration.<sup>97</sup> Eventually, the direct experiences of young men and women would serve to undermine rather than bolster belief in the American dream. Journalist Maxine Davis puts it more bluntly by writing, “Our young people are products of a psychopathic period.”<sup>98</sup> As the term “psychopathic” suggests, it was not just the lack of positive knowledge but the acquisition of dangerous or destructive views and habits that concerned many. Unlike those who suffered the onslaught of the Great Depression after having established a long work history, “youth who have

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<sup>95</sup> Thatcher Winslow, “Youth in Crisis,” in *American Youth: An Enforced Reconnaissance*, eds. Thatcher Winslow and Frank P. Davidson. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 41.

<sup>96</sup> Winslow, “Youth in Crisis,” 41.

<sup>97</sup> Charles Taussig, foreword to *A New Deal for Youth: The Story of the National Youth Administration* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), vii.; In Taussig’s words, “American youth of today never knew the norms by which we judge the passing show” (vii).

<sup>98</sup> M. Davis, *Lost Generation*, 4.

not learned to work at all, much less how to do any particular kind of work, may be a deadweight on the nation for half a century to come.”<sup>99</sup>

In her interviews with young people, Maxine Davis reveals an undercurrent of complete and utter disillusionment with the American promise that lends credence to Taussig’s fears and her own conclusions. Murat Williams, a senior at the University of Virginia who served as editor of a campus paper and held numerous job offers in hand, has the social standing and emergent success that should foreshadow a belief in the value of effort. Yet speaking on behalf of his classmates, he claims that “We realize that honesty, integrity, and industry don’t get you to the top anymore. Our fathers had a lot of rules for success, we know the world doesn’t play by them now.”<sup>100</sup> A young wife in Akron, Ohio similarly disdains the values of the preceding generation by scoffing about her father’s belief in the Alger myth. Davis ultimately concludes that “our boys and girls have discovered that the American idols are made of clay.”<sup>101</sup> In a diary entry penned on July 12, 1932, Youngstown citizen Benjamin Roth posited that “one of the tragedies of this depression is the fact that young college and professional school graduates are unable to get placed...They are getting cynical.”<sup>102</sup>

The advice of elders about how to succeed in America fell on deaf ears. Years of struggle made it impossible for young people to view their difficulties as a temporary episode. As Melvin

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<sup>99</sup> Ernest K. Lindley and Betty Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth: The Story of the National Youth Administration* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), 12.

<sup>100</sup> M. Davis, *Lost Generation*, 10.

<sup>101</sup> M. Davis, *Lost Generation*, 72.

<sup>102</sup> Roth, *The Great Depression*, 62.

sagely notes, “their experience before the factory doors and on the farm belies it.”<sup>103</sup> Even those who were able to get jobs, asserted Bertrand Russell in the pages of *Harper’s*, had to face that their efforts would not contribute to the betterment of society. Rather, the only work opportunities for intellectuals came from “[g]overnments or rich men whose aims probably seem absurd, if not pernicious, to the intellectuals concerned. But a dash of cynicism enables [youth] to adjust their consciences to the situation.”<sup>104</sup> Ultimately, Davis, Roth, and Russell point to the spread of feelings of alienation and disconnection across class divisions and work status. In other words, those like Murat Williams and Dick Conway who were lucky enough to have found a place in the workforce expressed doubts about their futures that mirrored the fears of tramps like Happy Texas and Joe who were certainly in objectively worse circumstances. Young people’s alienation transcended individual circumstance.

*Bums and Revolutionaries: The Looming Specter of European Youth*

The abnormal situation of youth, beyond creating a sense of discomfort and fear, left citizens and political elites afraid of two possible and frankly opposed outcomes: bums and revolutionaries. The first would result in thousands of young people vacating their rightful place as American citizens in favor of a life of vice and disengagement. The second would result in a significant change in what American citizenship signified. Either outcome threatened the end of the American political project as it was currently understood and valued.

The fear that the young people who had left home on foot and rail to search for work would become part of the despised class known as “bums” and thus permanently exit the American social structure loomed large in the minds of many Americans, particularly those in

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<sup>103</sup> Melvin, *Youth*, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Bertrand Russell, “Why is Modern Youth Cynical?” *Harper’s Magazine*, May 1930, 723.

communities near train stops (known to tramps as “the stem”). While hobos had always been part of the American picture, in the wake of the Great Depression, they became a popular topic of fiction and nonfiction work. This was especially true for young tramps. In 1934, sociologist Thomas Minehan published *Boy and Girl Tramps of America*. Minehan rode the rails as a fellow hobo on and off for nearly two years in order to collect stories from tamps (including Happy Joe and Texas). The book recounts the experiences of cramped evenings on church and jail floors as well as the freedom of nights spent in “hobo jungles”—shantytowns set up in the woods and maintained by tramps and hobos. George E. Outland, also a sociologist, capitalized on records collected by the Transient Service to draw more generalizable conclusions regarding characteristics of boy tramps. Throughout the late 1930s, Outland published a number of articles that offered a quantitative corollary to Minehan’s narrative work.

Taken together, these works alerted the public to what those who encountered tramps in their cities and towns likely suspected—this was a new kind of American transient. First, they were younger. Scholars estimate that by the middle of the Great Depression, 40 percent of all tramps were under the age of 25 with 20 percent under the age of 19 years.<sup>105</sup> Second, the new generation of tramps had significantly more education than any previous transient population. Using the cases of over 9,000 boys registered at the Center Intake Bureau of the Transient Service in Los Angeles between December 12, 1933 and November 21, 1934, Outland reveals that the tramps had, on average, 9.16 years of schooling, with more than a third of young boys

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<sup>105</sup> Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down and Out on the Road: The Homeless in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press), 204. This is a considerably lower estimate than that provided by Kinglsey Davis who claims that youth comprised 70 percent of the tramping population during this time.

having completed a minimum of ten grades.<sup>106</sup> Minehan witnesses young boys putting their academic skills to the test by keeping journals and maps of their travels which allowed them to create an informal network of information to be traded with other tramps. In his work *Men on the Move* (1940), sociologist Nels Anderson compares Outland's data to his studies of the adult population. Anderson finds that while 42 percent of boys in Outland's sample had attended high school, only 27 percent of adult transients had done so.<sup>107</sup> While pre-Great Depression hobos often registered estrangement from community life as a reason for hitting the rails and road, Outland suggests that the boy tramps had generally been well connected to their communities, with over 92.2 percent participating in one or more groups. Granted, Outland's survey is small (just over 300 boys), but his finding that 45 percent of those boys surveyed were members of church clubs suggests that more conservative estimates, such as Melvin's assertion that nine out of ten young people did not belong to any organization other than their church, may downplay the variety of activities included under the label "church."<sup>108</sup> Collectively, then, these young people did not fit the model of who would be expected to become a hobo and then a bum. They were young people working their way through the very institutions thought to keep citizens tied to the broader social structure.

While so many wandering young people is inherently worrisome, concerns specific to the Great Depression—a decimated labor and (as explained later in this chapter) the close of the

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<sup>106</sup> George E. Outland, "The Education of Transient Boys" in *Boy Transiency in America: A Compilation of Articles Dealing with Youth Wandering in the United States*, ed. George E. Outland (Santa Barbara, CA: Santa Barbara State College, 1939). Originally published in *Sierra Educational News* (October 1934).

<sup>107</sup> Nels Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness* ed. Raffaele Rauty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>108</sup> Melvin, *Youth*, 122.

frontier—led many Americans to fear that these tramps would become bums before they could successfully reengage with the standard American way of life. Throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, hobos on the frontier successfully pursued seasonal and intermittent work, particularly helping to clear and build the West.<sup>109</sup> Those who set out on the road around the turn of the century viewed leaving home in their teens as “a matter of proud recollection. They were able to find jobs.”<sup>110</sup> Tramping represented a type of itinerant and transient but acceptable life style.<sup>111</sup> Americans viewed bums, on the other hand, as permanently unemployed and, more importantly, uninterested in ever working again. As described by Kingsley Davis, bums engaged in vice regularly rather than only when necessary and shed all concerns for social standards of cleanliness and hygiene.<sup>112</sup> The bum, in other words, lacked not only the ability but the desire to be an American citizen culturally, economically, or politically. He existed only on the margins. It seems unlikely that a bright-line existed between tramps and bums and likely at least some transitioned between jobs and vice and back again. Yet, in the social imagination, these were two distinct categories, and the criminal bum was a far greater threat to the established social structure than the listless, itinerant hobo.

Given that social critics presented the path to becoming a bum as characterized by a decline in values and habits, and young people were already under the social microscope for

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<sup>109</sup> Kusmer, *Down and Out*.

<sup>110</sup> Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness*, 158.

<sup>111</sup> Perhaps no one offers higher praise of the previous generation of hobos than Minehan who contends that “He was an honest working man. The place he filled in the industrial development of our country was one of high worth and should be honored.” Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps*, 242.

<sup>112</sup> K. Davis, *Youth in the Depression*, 6.

both, it is not surprising that those writing about tramps suggest that very little stood between the boy tramp and a life of depravity as a bum. Kingsley Davis suggests that “the worst thing [about tramping] is that the boys may turn into bums.”<sup>113</sup> Minehan describes the ease of the transition, noting that “too much of the seamy side of life warps a boy’s, as it does a man’s, judgment of values, and on the road the boy tramp sees little else. Inevitably he acquires the outlook of the older transients, men defeated and rejected by life.”<sup>114</sup> Interestingly, boy tramps themselves recognized the distinction between the older hobos and bums, and repeated over and over to themselves as they tried to find work and buy or steal enough food to stay alive: “I don’t want to be a bum...I don’t want to be a bum.”<sup>115</sup>

Clearly, a significant proportion of one generation growing up to exist outside of the American political and social structure would, in and of itself, be a serious problem. However, a second, more frightening outcome was on the horizon and could be found just across the Atlantic. World War I left Russia with a significant youth population that had largely been abandoned and left to raise itself. While there are several sharp distinctions between post-World War I Russia and Great Depression America, the similarities were striking enough for some Americans to stoke fears among the public that, if left unchecked, the tramp population would follow in the footsteps of their Russian counterparts and become anti-social and, eventually, outright criminal.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> K. Davis, *Youth in the Depression*, 6.

<sup>114</sup> Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps*, 120.

<sup>115</sup> Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps*, 120.

<sup>116</sup> K. Davis, *Youth in the Depression*.

Many Americans were confronted by the reality of tramps in their communities, either through direct contact with tramps or the absence of sons and daughters who had left to become tramps themselves. The anxiety this produced was heightened by news of youth revolutions abroad: in Russia, Italy and (most frighteningly) Germany. While later overshadowed by the official Nazi army, the Hitler youth began as a means of harnessing the energy of a disengaged youth population. Popular magazines such as *Saturday Evening Post* and *Harper's* gave fears about these youth populations a thorough airing. In his 1931 article "Youth Turns to War," journalist and social critic George Seldes offers an in-depth outline of the development of youth organizations in Russia, Germany, and Italy after World War I and their transition into military organizations. He argues that "the history of the youth movement is the history of the success of governments, dictators, and political parties – the older men – in taking control and propagating their policies."<sup>117</sup> Two years later, the *Saturday Evening Post* published an extensive article on German youth organizations which were growing at an exponential rate in the early 1930s.<sup>118</sup> By 1934 the Hitler Youth had over 3.5 million members. By 1936 that number had grown to five million.

These articles do not draw direct connections to the plight of American youth, but they raise clear concerns about the potential for disconnected youth to form the base of a dangerous revolution. America lacked the charismatic actor needed to rally youth, but the pre-revolutionary conditions of youth alone were enough to worry Americans who wanted to preserve the status quo. The fear that young people would become bums rested on a view of young people as overwhelmingly apathetic to their own lives; "national discontent was nationwide in 1935, and

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<sup>117</sup> George Seldes, "Youth Turns to War," *Harper's Magazine*, March 1931, 485.

<sup>118</sup> Kenneth Roberts, "Hitler Youth" *Saturday Evening Post*, May 26, 1934, 8.

only required consolidation by some would-be Pied Piper.”<sup>119</sup> And while many young people laughed off the advances of Communists, Minehan observed that regardless of political leanings “practically all boys and girls on the road...believe that America is going to have a revolution soon if things do not improve. They are vague as to who is going to lead it and how it is to be brought about, but almost all agree that trouble is imminent.”<sup>120</sup>

The material and civic condition of white youth in particular—that is to say, their poverty and discontent with the American and political social system—was an indictment of a country that promised (to whites, at any rate) individual success through education and hard work. That promised path to success was no longer a reasonable gamble. For those in both intellectual and government circles, it was rapidly becoming clear that maintaining the American state required more than just supporting poor white youth as dependents through welfare programs or rounding them up through the Transient Service. Instead these young people needed to be actively reintegrated into the American way of life and the broader social fabric of the nation. Surveying the American political landscape during the New Deal era, national security scholar George S. Pettee observed “There is one critical point in the field of the battle and one only: if American youth can continue to feel that the American order is adequate in opportunity and hope, that it is worth working in and for, that its purposes are stimulating and rewarding, we are in no danger from any side.”<sup>121</sup> Pettee’s statement suggests the warlike mentality surrounding the creation of

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<sup>119</sup> Richard A. Reinman, *The New Deal and American Youth: Ideas and Ideals in a Depression Decade* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 124.

<sup>120</sup> Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps*, 170.

<sup>121</sup> George S. Pettee, “The Appeal of Totalitarianism” in *American Youth: An Enforced Reconnaissance*, eds. Thatcher Winslow and Frank P. Davidson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 111.

youth-oriented New Deal policies. Ultimately, President Roosevelt's administration implemented two federal programs with the express intention of bringing youth back into the political and social fold: the CCC and the NYA. I argue that beyond their efforts to free up the labor market for adults and end youth vagrancy, these programs reveal three criteria of mid-century American citizenship: a strong sense of individual worth, a connection to community, and a frontier experience. Through these values, connections, and experiences, the New Deal programs hoped to create young citizens "with a vigorous capacity to work out a snarled situation," not through revolution but through faith in, understanding of, and commitment to the American process.<sup>122</sup>

## **II. Transforming Youth into Citizens through New Deal Programs**

The same knowledge of youth movements abroad that stirred public fear of what youth could become at home simultaneously complicated any efforts to implement federal programs aimed at youth by sparking fears that such programs would create "Roosevelt's Army" – a group of young people allegiant to the President above the nation. Despite initial fears from conservatives, both programs were generally well received, the CCC in particular. President Roosevelt stated that in establishing the CCC, he hoped to help "the nation...graduate a fine group of strong young men, clean living, trained to self-discipline and, above all, willing and proud to work for the joy of working."<sup>123</sup> In order to qualify for the CCC, one had to be from a family that already qualified for relief. The young people participating in the CCC were "for the most part unskilled, lacking in work habit and averaging only a little better than eight grades of

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<sup>122</sup> Pettee, "The Appeal of Totalitarianism," 122.

<sup>123</sup> "Roosevelt Praises Forest Corps Work," *New York Times*, July 18, 1933. The article provides numerous quotations from a radio address delivered on July 17, 1933.

education, though they range from the illiterate to the college graduate.”<sup>124</sup> More than half had no work history while 80 percent had been without work in the four months prior to arriving at a CCC camp.<sup>125</sup> The camps provided not only work experience but also education in basic literacy and arithmetic as well as various vocational skills such as book keeping, woodworking, and farming. Every June, “a large number were granted eighth grade and high school certificates or diplomas.”<sup>126</sup> Once accepted to the program, the young men would report to their assigned CCC camp to work on various outdoor projects such as clearing roads and building the national parks and state recreation centers. In return for this work, men were given three meals a day along with a place to sleep. They also received payment of thirty dollars per month, although twenty-five dollars was automatically passed on to a designated dependent, usually a mother or sister. Participants were understood to be those boys who were “thin, undernourished, sickly” and otherwise living lives of “unemployable idleness or crime.”<sup>127</sup>

Media coverage of the CCC during the 1930s emphasized the way in which these programs sought to connect young people to the American way of life. The construction of an American identity operated along three complementary lines: supporting young men in developing a sense of individual worth through work, building connections between young

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<sup>124</sup> Melvin, *Youth*, 131. The status of CCC youth was well published in newspapers like the *New York Times* which published articles about the low ages and minimum education of participants e.g. “Most CCC Boys 17 to 19: Of 44,671 Listed in January, Only 8% Finished High School,” *New York Times*, Apr. 25, 1937; Robert Fechner, “Gains Through CCC Listed By Fechner: Director of Forest Camps Tells of Work Accomplished and Benefits to Trade,” *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1934.

<sup>125</sup> Melvin, *Youth*, 131.

<sup>126</sup> Perry H. Merrill, *Roosevelt’s Forest Army: A History of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942* (Montpelier, VT: P.H. Merrill, 1981), 19.

<sup>127</sup> Fechner, “Gains Through CCC”

people and their communities, and recapturing a sense of the early American pioneer spirit. The Office of Education handbook for the CCC outlines a clear program of liberal citizenship. Dominant aims for the project were widely publicized and included “To develop an appreciation of nature and of country life”; “To develop in each man his powers of self-expression, self-entertainment, and self-culture”; and, “To develop as far as practicable an understanding of the prevailing social and economic conditions, to the end that each man may cooperate intelligently in improving these conditions.”<sup>128</sup>

The concept of individual worth appears most frequently through references to self-dignity and self-reliance as well as in the sense of pride that CCC men take in their work. In an update on the state of the CCC published in the journal of the *American Association of Political and Social Sciences*, the Corps’ Director Robert Fechner avers that “the camp routine, the emphasis placed upon cleanliness, personal sanitation, regular habits, and self-discipline, as well as the work programs, all have contributed to the improvement of the enrollees.”<sup>129</sup> A review of the program published in the *New York Times* notes that “the work is providing enrolled men with a wholesome, disciplined, self-respecting life...They will be returned to civil pursuits with a fine physique, strong minds, healthy bodies and a self-confidence that will mean much to our agricultural and industrial life in future years.”<sup>130</sup> Men who refused to work toward these new benchmarks for physical and self-discipline earned the derision of their colleagues along with the

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<sup>128</sup> Kenneth Holland, “Study Plan of the CCC: Huge Education Program Helps 145,000 Youths Prepare for Jobs,” *New York Times*, Feb. 24, 1935. Holland served as the Educational Adviser for the First Corps Area of the CCC. It is worth noting that the list provided in this article appears in multiple articles.

<sup>129</sup> Robert Fechner, “The Civilian Conservation Corps Program,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 194 (Nov. 1937): 134.

<sup>130</sup> Fechner, “Gains Through CCC”

title goldbricker. A “goldbricker” is “a natural-born bum. He is a guy who smokes in the woods, likes to be dirty and lets other guys do his work.”<sup>131</sup> Note how the description of the bum as dirty crosses over from the tramping arena. Young men took advantage of the opportunities of the CCC to learn or prove that they already had a work ethic—those who did not were bums. The best evidence of the camps’ focus on worth and dignity exists in what sounds on face like a damning report. Comments from employers regarding CCC youth reveal a general consensus that the CCC fails to provide its graduates with specific job training. Yet, as one employer notes “You can always tell a boy who has been to camp. The training and discipline gives him an ability to walk up to an employment manager and look him in the eye and ask for a job.”<sup>132</sup> Many echo this sentiment indicating that self-worth and self-dignity have been instilled in the CCC graduates.

The second criteria, developing ties to the community, were built into the program’s structure. The work done by the CCC and the way in which men were paid for that work guaranteed ties to broader communities. The CCC completed large-scale projects and by the end of its fourth year, could take credit for “more than a billion trees planted, 80,000 miles of truck trails and minor roads built, more than 40,000 buildings erected 50,000 miles of telephone lines laid, thousands of acres of park and forest lands developed for recreational use and millions of farm lands given new protection from erosion.”<sup>133</sup> While some of the work was completed on private lands, even that work was directed toward the national good through addressing crop

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<sup>131</sup> Leonard Harman Robbins, “Training Youth, the CCC Way,” *The New York Times Magazine*, Aug. 11, 1940.

<sup>132</sup> Fechner, “The Civilian Conservation Corps Program,” 140.

<sup>133</sup> Fechner, “The Civilian Conservation Corps Program,” 129.

failures in the dust bowl and limiting destruction from brush fires. Additionally, the obligation that participants send home the majority of their pay to a dependent reflects another means of helping participants develop and maintain a sense of responsibility for their family and home community. Simply treating CCC workers as individuals would not have facilitated the goal of protecting the broader American community from alienated youth; young people needed to be reattached to family structures. In fact, building family connections into the structure of the program helped the CCC avoid the suspicion of degeneracy that had already attached to the Federal Transient Program's campus for single adult men.<sup>134</sup>

Finally, the camps served to acquaint America's urban youth with nature. Of course, "the sites of the camps, nearly all in untamed parts of the land, almost necessitate" that participants would be exposed to nature.<sup>135</sup> That alone, however, cannot explain the degree of emphasis placed on this facet of the program. The national American identity has always been deeply tied to the existence of the frontier. At the Chicago Exhibition in 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner articulated what came to be known as the frontier thesis of history. He argued that it was the frontier that called out in Americans "that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil and with all that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom."<sup>136</sup> The end of

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<sup>134</sup> Canaday, *The Straight State*, 92-130.

<sup>135</sup> Frank Ernest Hill, "The CCC Marches Toward a New Destiny: A Permanent Role is Seen for America's Youth Army," *New York Times*, Feb. 21, 1937.

<sup>136</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional?*, ed. Richard W. Etulain (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), 40.

homesteading meant more than the loss of one aspect of the youth sieve—it meant the loss of a key symbol and possibly source of American identity.

Media coverage of the CCC highlighted the palliative aspects of nature, both physical and psychological. The *New York Times* claimed that “The majesty of nature is somehow calming young nerves that had been made jumpy by enforced idleness and by knocking about city streets.”<sup>137</sup> Clarence Stephen Marsh, in an article published in the March 1934 edition of *School & Society*, posited that participants would return to their families not only with better health but “more wholesome in spirit for their living in the parks and the forests.”<sup>138</sup> In her analysis of the program, Maxine Davis praises President Roosevelt for turning urban boys into “pioneers building in American frontiers.”<sup>139</sup> Nature itself, the frontier, the pioneer life, would cure America’s youth and ensure America’s future just as it always had.

In a letter published in *School & Society*, a CCC enrollee perfectly encapsulated all three criteria of the development of Depression era youth into fully incorporated American citizens.

He wrote:

The long tramp from coast to coast, looking for a job I never found, hadn’t improved my temper any. But there is something soul satisfying about good hard labor, especially when you’ve ached for something to do for three long years...I have learned to appreciate what Thoreau calls “the beneficence of nature.” In the deepening twilight my eyes stray up until they rest upon the last tall pine on the hills, etched against the afterglow of the sun.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Dorothy D. Bromley, “The Forestry Army That Lives By Work: In the Camps of the Conservation Corps 250,000 Youths Find a New Outlook,” *New York Times*, Jul. 23, 1933.

<sup>138</sup> Clarence Stephen Marsh, “Educational Program of the Civilian Conservation Corps,” *School & Society* 39 (1934), 405.

<sup>139</sup> M. Davis, *Lost Generation*, 235.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Marsh, “Educational Program of the Civilian Conservation Corps,” 405.

The second youth program created under the auspices of the New Deal was the National Youth Administration. The NYA emerged out of a program initially run through the FERA to provide students at the high school and college level with small stipends in return for their work at what are now known as work-study jobs. As the Depression wore on, it had a serious impact on America's education system. By 1934, college enrollments were declining precipitously: "If the drop had meant a weeding out of the least fit, perhaps it could have been considered as not undesirable. But it was not. It meant only the loss of some of those who lacked financial means and could not find the jobs with which to pay for their own education."<sup>141</sup> Even menial costs for transportation and school supplies forced students to drop out of high school and college. The need for young people to drop out of school due to financial hardship created both philosophic and pragmatic problems. On its face, the situation belied the promise of a public education provided to all citizens. On a more pragmatic note, when young people dropped out of school, they immediately became competitors on the job market. A program that kept young people in school would not only support equality in education but also keep thousands of young people out of the labor market.

After two years of success with the CCC and the FERA youth programming, President Roosevelt announced the creation of the National Youth Administration. Through executive order, FDR directed \$50,000,000 toward the expansion of the "educational and vocational opportunities of which the extended depression has threatened to rob them."<sup>142</sup> The program consisted of three components for young people—both boys and girls—between the ages of 16 and 25. First, the program funded training in manual trades in the evenings, afternoons, and

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<sup>141</sup> Lindley and Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth*, 158.

<sup>142</sup> "\$50,000,000 Youth Project Is Established by the President," *New York Times*, Jun. 27, 1935.

weekends at trade schools and shop floors. Second, young people in training were given related jobs funded through NYA support. Third, those 16 and over would receive \$6 per month to stay in high school and \$15 per month to stay in college using the same work-study program rules as under the FERA. The NYA received considerably more criticism than the CCC due in large part to the suspicions that the authorizing executive order was only the first step down the road to nationalizing the education system. Yet the NYA sought to achieve ends quite similar to those sought by the CCC in terms of developing strong democratic citizens through improving self-worth and strengthening ties with communities and families.

The National Advisory Committee of the NYA commissioned a national study of the work being done at various sites. The committee hired Ernest K. Lindley and Betty Lindley to travel across the United States evaluating NYA training programs and interviewing participants and supervisors.<sup>143</sup> The commitment to both individual development and community are evident in the Lindleys' book. The success stories include that of Caleb, now a married man with his own jewelry repair shop, who won praise as "a fine example of the worthwhile help NYA furnishes toward self-sufficiency."<sup>144</sup> The NYA also provided young people, particularly those from the South, with exposure to the broader world. One 23-year-old credited the NYA for her first rides on a train and elevator and teaching her to use the telephone. Shop leaders reported significant changes in the young people with whom they worked. One noted that "You wouldn't

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<sup>143</sup> While the source of the book raises questions about its validity, a book review from the *New York Times* characterizes the text as a "thorough-going, if slightly rosy, analysis of the most provocative social experiments of our time, which should serve as a reference work for the student, the sociologist and the statesman" (From Eunice Fuller Barnard, "The Youngest Third of This Country's Unemployed: A Revealing Survey of The National Youth Administration," *New York Times*, Jul. 24, 1938.).

<sup>144</sup> Lindley and Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth*, 148.

recognize them for the same boys after they've been on the job awhile. Of course, there's a few ornery ones, but maybe you'd be ornery too, if you'd had as little to eat as they've had for a long time."<sup>145</sup> As these stories illustrate, the NYA provided opportunities for individual development by helping youth develop skills for particular trades as well as learning more about the world outside their small communities. Through this development, young men (and women in the NYA) gained a new sense of purpose.

Similarly to the CCC, much of the NYA work provided young people with an opportunity to contribute to their communities. In Kentucky, the NYA painted and repaired over 1500 schools. "In Morgan County, Mr. Ova Haney, Superintendent of Schools, told us: 'Some of these school buildings that NYA has repaired never have had a coat of paint...Our county is just too poor to do this work, and, if it hadn't been for NYA, it never would have been done.'"<sup>146</sup> While there was no money to send to dependents, NYA youth took advantage of library books and the ability to come into NYA sewing rooms, wood shops, and other work spaces after hours in order to work on projects for themselves and their families.<sup>147</sup>

While the NYA lacked a direct frontier link, its leaders created one. Charles Hubbard Judd, National Director of the NYA Student Work program, published an article in *School & Society* contending that the NYA was the new Homestead Act. In his words, "the Federal Government gave farms, or homesteads as they were called, to hosts of American citizens ... The West was the public domain which was given away to families and individuals... The public

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<sup>145</sup> Lindley and Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth*, 42.

<sup>146</sup> Lindley and Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth*, 31.

<sup>147</sup> Lindley and Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth*, 69.

domain is spent. There is no more homesteading.”<sup>148</sup> Judd argued for considering federal investment in education as the modern homestead essentially transferring sweat equity from the homestead to the school-house and shop floor. As Aubrey Williams wrote in the *New York Times*, students would not receive funds “in the form of a dole. They must work for it – on a part time basis. The tasks they perform will be assigned to them by the head of the institution in which they are enrolled.”<sup>149</sup>

Through the CCC and NYA, the Roosevelt administration assuaged both popular and elite fears of an alienated generation of youth by providing new, if temporary, institutions to reconnect young people with the tenets of American citizenship. Together, these institutions provided young people with meaningful work that made direct contributions to their community. Perhaps more importantly, the work was an opportunity for young people to receive praise from and feel incorporated within the American social fabric. After touring a number of NYA and CCC program sites, Lorena Hickok, Chief Investigator for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, exclaimed, “We’re making honest-to-God citizens out of these kids.”<sup>150</sup> Her phrase, “honest-to-God citizens” highlights the view of both the CCC and NYA as more than simple relief programs. These programs had a broader, even grander national purpose. Through these programs, the federal government reframed young Americans as a reason to hope rather than fear for the country’s future. Yet, as I reveal in the next section, these fears never fully dissipated. Instead, they largely went underground when the same young men who had

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<sup>148</sup> Charles Hubbard Judd, “Federal Government and Youth,” *Education (Chula Vista)*, 61 (1940): 73.

<sup>149</sup> Aubrey Williams, “Aid for Needy Students: The NYA Director Tells How His Agency Helps Youth Continue in the Schools,” *New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1935.

<sup>150</sup> Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 300 – 301.

supposedly threatened American security became its protectors on the Western front. Later, when demobilization became an impending reality, fear of youth resurfaced.

### **III. The G.I. Bill – Legislation for Youth**

Formally titled the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, the G.I. Bill provided those individuals who served at least 90 days during World War II and received anything other than a dishonorable discharge access to a year of unemployment insurance, federally backed housing loans, job training programs, as well as tuition payments and a living stipend for those who chose to further their education. The G.I. Bill remains one of America's most expansive and expensive domestic policies and it has been widely recognized as a dominant influence in twentieth-century America.<sup>151</sup> Prior analyses of the G.I. Bill emphasize the key role of veterans organizations in

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<sup>151</sup> Authors credit the G.I. Bill for the rise of the knowledge economy (Peter F. Drucker, *Post-capitalist Society* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1983); mass consumption and the suburbanization of American (Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); claim it as a form of affirmative action and a necessary precondition for the rise of the Civil Rights movement (Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth Century America*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005); Christopher Parker, *Fighting for Democracy: Black Veterans and the Struggle Against White Supremacy in the Postwar South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); argue it is responsible for the high levels of community activism and commitment of the Greatest Generation (Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); the decline of elitism in higher education (Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The G.I. Bill: A New Deal for Veterans*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Daniel A. Clark, "The Two Joes Meet – Joe College, Joe Veteran" *History of Education Quarterly*, (Summer 1998): 165-189; Harold M. Hyman, *American Singularity: The 1787 Northwest Ordinance, the 1862 Homestead and Morrill Acts, and the 1944 G.I. Bill* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986) and more. Moreover, with its commitment to both equality of treatment and individual choice, the bill has alternately been claimed as a model for the policy work (and appropriate approach toward building strong citizens) of both conservative and progressive movements and particularly as a symbol of upward social mobility (Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: the GI Bill and the Making of Modern America* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1996).; Robert C. Serow, "Policy as Symbol: Title II of the 1944 G.I. Bill" *Review of Higher Education* (Summer 2004): 492, 494. For an understanding of how

leveraging membership and recognition developed in the post-World War I era to secure a veterans benefits package, the negotiations needed to satisfy Southern Democrats, and the desire to reward veterans for their service while simultaneously avoiding the type of economic collapse that followed the close of World War I.<sup>152</sup> In orienting my analysis around youth-focused federal policies and revealing the fears of a youth revolution that underscored the actions of Congress and the President, I complement and enrich prior analyses of the G.I. Bill. I begin by outlining the fears around demobilization and then employ both demographic research and Congressional statements to support my understanding of the G.I. Bill as youth-focused legislation. Then, by focusing on Congressional hearings about and floor debates over the G.I. Bill, I reveal similarities between the fears motivating the passage and form of the CCC and NYA and the G.I. Bill. I conclude by examining heated Congressional debates over age restrictions for the G.I. Bill, demonstrating that the education title within the bill ultimately signals an expansion of youth-focused legislation to target youth across class (though not necessarily racial) differences.

Fears of what would happen to youth, or what youth might do, began circulating within youth oriented literature prior to America's official entry into World War II. In *Youth: Millions Too Many*, written a year prior to America's entrance into combat, Bruce Melvin, director of three major studies of youth commissioned by the Works Progress Administration, avers that "following the close of a war the problems of young people as discussed in this book would be

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our treatment of the G.I. Bill as model legislation has encouraged overlooking the corruption that occurred during its administration, see Kathleen Frydl, *The GI Bill* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>152</sup> For in-depth discussions of the passage of the G.I. Bill, with particular attention to Title II, see Keith W. Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974); Davis R. B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans During World War Two* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), and Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*.

many times more intense than are here portrayed. If indeed war comes to America, multiply several times the conditions shown here and you will have conditions within a short time after the guns cease their firing.”<sup>153</sup> A review of Melvin’s work published in *The American Journal of Sociology* observes that while “some readers may regard the author as unduly pessimistic...he merely insists on facing the present, unpleasant status of youth which, if ignored, will ultimately undermine the stability of society.”<sup>154</sup> Melvin was not unnecessarily ringing the alarm bells. Rather, he had an advanced understanding of the dangers posed by a decision to send American youth to war.

The National Education Association provides a more detailed projection of post-war America in *Education for All Youth* (1944). The document provides insight into the fears and hopes of the education community in the middle of World War II; it also articulates broader popular concerns for what would happen to the American social, educational, and economic structure following demobilization. The text offers a hypothetical report from the vantage point of five years after the end of hostilities to illuminate the disturbing future the authors foresee should the government not take proper political action. The authors bemoan the pre-war experiences of many soldiers, noting that “few of them had enjoyed extensive experience in normal community living or in earning a livelihood by civilian pursuits; all of them needed guidance and training in order that they might find a place in the ongoing life of the nation. They were grown men and women, yet they needed education in the attitudes and activities of civilian

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<sup>153</sup> Melvin, *Youth*, 29.

<sup>154</sup> Howard Y. McClusky, review of *Youth – Millions Too Many?*, by Bruce Melvin, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 46 (May 1941).

life.”<sup>155</sup> The authors foresee a future where returning veterans swamp the labor system and education systems, leading to a collapse of both.

As the work of Melvin and the NEA reveal, Americans were anxious about the demobilization of American forces even before the draft age was lowered to 18 years. Striking parallels exist between these concerns and those of the New Deal Era: specifically, in both periods, adults feared that young people were disconnected from all forms of community and likely to face an overwhelmingly discouraging labor market. As a result, the young generation ran the risk of becoming disillusioned with American economic and political ways of life and thus susceptible to revolutionary ideas. If Americans considered this descent into reckless independence and radicalism both plausible and worrisome when young people were still on school campuses and in hobo jungles, imagine how much more frightening that threat would be when the potential revolutionaries were returning from foreign soil, well-trained in the use of firearms and exposed to revolutionary ideas from continental politics.

Facing pressure from the media and veterans groups as well as their own desires to avoid an economic downturn similar to what followed World War I, a number of political elites became increasingly aware of the need to create and pass some kind of pacifying legislation before demobilization began. This legislation, however, could have taken many forms. Even granting the concerns raised by Melvin and NEA about youth in post-war America, categorizing the G.I. Bill as youth legislation requires linking youth status with veteran status at least during the demobilization period in question. While our current historical vantage point makes it difficult to see World War II veterans as particularly young, the demographic work of Dr.

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<sup>155</sup> Educational Policies Commission. *Education for All American Youth*. (Washington, D.C.: Educational Policies Commission, National Education Association of the United States and the American Association of School Administrators, 1944).

Mapheus Smith in 1947 establishes the overall youthful nature of America's armed forces at the end of the war. Smith conducted a demographic analysis of the United States' Armed Forces in order to provide researchers in a number of fields with a better understanding of the characteristics of those who served. Between the years of 1940 and 1946, 16 million Americans served in the armed forces; among them, 10 million entered the service through the draft.<sup>156</sup> Smith's work, which includes data on 95 percent of those who served, appears to be the most conclusive study done on the broad characteristics of the U.S. armed forces.<sup>157</sup> Smith's research on age demographics reveals that "by individual year of age...servicemen surpassed the general population in proportion in each group in each year of age from nineteen through thirty-one, but were surpassed in all age groups above thirty-one years."<sup>158</sup> Those service members ages 18-26 comprised almost 50 percent of those demobilized at the end of the war, despite the fact that their demographic comprised just over one-quarter of the U.S. population.<sup>159</sup>

The youthful nature of the American armed forces stemmed from a number of choices made throughout the war. The initial round of conscription, which began in 1940 (prior to the United States' official entry into the war), required those aged 21–35 to register for the draft; those inducted were required to serve no longer than twelve months. After Pearl Harbor, the draft age extended to 20–40, with those drafted "made liable to service for the duration of the conflict

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<sup>156</sup> Clyde E. Jacobs and John F. Gallagher, *The Selective Service Act: A Case Study of the Government Process* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1967).

<sup>157</sup> Mapheus Smith, "Populational Characteristics of American Servicemen in World War II", *The Scientific Monthly* 65, No. 3 (September 1947). Smith was unable to secure information for the Coast Guard and was missing information for the Marine Corps. However, this missing data represented only 5% of the total U.S. forces.

<sup>158</sup> Smith, "Populational Characteristics of American Servicemen in World War II," 247.

<sup>159</sup> Smith, "Populational Characteristics of American Servicemen in World War II," 247.

plus six months.”<sup>160</sup> A few months later, the draft age was lowered yet again to 18 years while an executive order capped the age range at 35 years. A significant majority of the American public favored lowering the draft age provided that doing so would protect married men, particularly those with children, from serving.<sup>161</sup>

Looking solely at the permissible age range for the draft and induction, however, would lead one to conclude that the armed forces was comprised of a broader age group than it actually was. After induction, soldiers were put through a series of tests designed to measure their physical health as well as their intelligence and reading levels. By the spring of 1941, “rejections at induction stations and the results of boot camp experiences convinced the army that draftees over the age of 26 were virtually useless. The best soldier was a young man 18 to 21.”<sup>162</sup> In the early years of the war, a number of young people found protection in their status as students, which allowed them to defer. However, policies were amended over the course of the war to transition from a blanket deferment for students, to a limited deferment program in 1943 that required a student to “be majoring in one of twenty special fields useful for defense...and would graduate before July 1945”<sup>163</sup>; the possibility of academic deferment was restricted by an even more stringent standard in 1944 that limited national deferments to just 10,000 students throughout the country, all of whom had to be in one of five fields deemed critical for national

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<sup>160</sup> Jacobs and Gallagher, *The Selective Service Act*, 13.

<sup>161</sup> George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940-1973*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 71-72. Flynn cites a public poll conducted in 1942 showing that 81% of the public was in favor of drafting 18 year olds over those married with children.

<sup>162</sup> Flynn, *The Draft*, 49.

<sup>163</sup> Flynn, *The Draft*, 78.

defense. The preference for younger soldiers combined with the near elimination of student deferments resulted in an armed services that skewed quite young.

Importantly, both President Roosevelt and Congress were acutely aware of the youthful nature of America's armed forces. Roosevelt created a planning committee, known as the Osborn Committee, in the wake of the decision to lower the draft age in hopes of forestalling at least some objections. "He acknowledged that many of the new draftees would have to interrupt their schooling and promised to make amends."<sup>164</sup> Congressional floor debates as well as Committee hearings over the proposed legislation further emphasized the youthful nature of America's veterans. In speaking about the legislation, Rep. Karl M. LeCompte (R-IA) observed that "[t]he majority of the men and women in the armed services range from 18 to 30 years of age...the rank and file of the service men and women are between 18 and 30. That has been the history of the American Army in all wars."<sup>165</sup> Attempting to convince his fellow Representatives of the value of spending millions of dollars on a veterans bill even for those who return able bodied, Rep. John W. McCormack (D-MA) simply asked "What has the American youth done for America in this war?"<sup>166</sup> With this single, provocative question, McCormack echoes LeCompte's observation about the "youthful nature" of the armed services: it was young Americans who fought this war in the interest of America at large. Testifying before the House Committee on Veterans, the National Commander of the American Legion, Warren H. Atherton, emphasized

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<sup>164</sup> Keith W. Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges*, 10.

<sup>165</sup> 90 Cong. Rec. 4452 (1944)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0900004&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crel86&id=86>.

<sup>166</sup> 90 Cong. Rec. 4521 (1944)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0900004&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crel155&id=155>.

that same point, noting that “[m]any, many young men at ages 16 and 17, and all physically fit above 18, who are not deferred, have gone into service in his war. The great bulk of them have been taken right out of school.”<sup>167</sup>

When considered on its own, this supposed obligation to support America’s youth suggests that the G.I. Bill was driven by a sense of gratitude and desire to reward those who sacrificed so much to aid the war effort. And, the G.I. Bill did indeed represent for some members of Congress a chance to give back to the veterans, for others it was a preemptive strike at the specter of a youth revolution the likes of which had wreaked havoc across post-war Europe just thirty years earlier and had, in the estimation of some, nearly visited America’s shores during the Great Depression. As Rep. Marion T. Bennett (R-MO) notes “[t]his war has interrupted the normal development and growth of skills and potential leadership of millions of our finest young citizens. That was true in the last war but as a Nation we had not the experience to recognize the importance of it.”<sup>168</sup> For Rep. John J. Phillips (R-CA), the G.I. Bill provisions for education, unemployment insurance, and job training, were a means of easing the transition. He notes, in language similar to that used to justify the NYA ten years earlier, “it is better to send these men between 20 and 30 back to school than to put them into competition with other men who are out of work.”<sup>169</sup> Some, like Harry Colmery, a past commander of the American Legion,

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<sup>167</sup> *Hearing Before the Committee on World War Veterans’ Legislation, United States House of Representatives*, 78<sup>th</sup> Cong. 15 (1944).

<sup>168</sup> 90 Cong. Rec. 4443 (1944)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0900004&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crel77&id=77>.

<sup>169</sup> 90 Cong. Rec. 4616 (1944)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0900004&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crel250&id=250>.

urged the passage of the G.I. Bill for more reasons than easing the transition back to civilian life: he saw it “as sound national policy and probably necessary to see us through troublous times which are ahead of us; calling your attention to the fact that after the last war, except for England, this is the only country where the men who wore uniforms did not overthrow the government on either side of that conflict.”<sup>170</sup> While the military focused on winning the war, Congress, according to Rep. Fred C. Gilchrist (R-IA), needed to find a way to “win the peace” or risk “the coming of a debacle and the destruction of the lives of our young folks of every coming generation.”<sup>171</sup> Indeed, as Rep. Philip Philbin (D-MA) declared on the floor of the House, “if we fail to make our social and economic organism function in such ways as to maintain steady, gainful, high-standard employment, a generous measure of economic and social security, full and unbridled opportunity for advancement from the ranks, there will be the gravest danger that radical agitators, such as those now operating in the country during the war in every effort to undermine our capitalistic structure.”<sup>172</sup>

The similarities between the impetus for the G.I. Bill and particularly its education provision (Title II) and the fears that drove FDR to push for youth specific programming during the New Deal are striking. More important, however, are the particular veterans to whom many sought to expand the education provisions of the G.I. Bill. While they did much to alleviate youth destitution, neither the NYA nor CCC sought to significantly broaden Americans’

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<sup>170</sup> *Hearing Before the Committee on World War Veterans’ Legislation, United States House of Representatives*, 78<sup>th</sup> Cong. 396 (1944).

<sup>171</sup> 90 Cong. Rec. 4449 (1944)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0900004&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crel83&id=83>.

<sup>172</sup> 90 Cong. Rec. 4666 (1944)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0900004&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crel300&id=300>.

expectations of what young people could do. For those who were already in high school or college, financial support from the NYA made it possible for them to remain in school. For those who were unable to find work, the CCC provided a job and a paycheck as well as basic training in manual trades along with an opportunity to earn a high school diploma. Both programs expanded the educational pursuits of participants, but they did nothing to shift expectations about education. Moreover, these programs sought (with good reason) to deal primarily with those who were largely subsisting. In other words, the programs, particularly the CCC, addressed not youth generally but rather those who were the most vulnerable economically. Due to the efforts of a number of Members of Congress and the combined youth/veteran status, the G.I. Bill broke this trend.

#### *The G.I. Bill and Expansion of Education Services*

As originally conceived within the American Legion as a Bill of Rights for G.I. Joe and G.I. Jane, the World War II veteran legislation would have far surpassed previous veteran bonus bills by assisting veterans in returning to their lives as though they had not been interrupted. In the words of Colmery, “those who serve actively in the armed services in this war not only shall not be penalized as a result of their war service, but that also upon their return to civil life they should be aided in reaching that place, position, or status which they had normally expected to achieve, and probably would have achieved, had their war service not interrupted their careers.”<sup>173</sup> This intention was most clearly reflected in Title II, which would provide financial support in the form of tuition dollars and a living stipend for those veterans under the age of 24 whose education had been interrupted by their joining the war effort. This position, held by many including Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Legislation Rep. John Rankin (D-

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<sup>173</sup> *Hearing Before the Committee on World War Veterans’ Legislation, United States House of Representatives, 78<sup>th</sup> Cong. 396 (1944).*

MS), fell neatly along the lines of the original intentions of the bill—to place individual veterans back into the place they were prior to their enlistment—as well as providing a benefit in return for their service. Moreover, Members of Congress hoped that this limitation would pacify higher education leaders such as James Bryant Conant, President of Harvard University and Robert Maynard Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago who supported giving all veterans interested in taking education funding a test and then allowing a board to select only the most promising to receive funding. Rep. Graham A. Barden (D-NC) offered an amendment designed to remove both the age restriction and the requirement to demonstrate one’s schooling had been interrupted. Floor debates over the amendment as well as statements from within the academic community reveal clear fault lines around class with regard to education.

Perhaps nothing illustrates the fear of some institutions of higher education about the problems that would result from allowing any veteran to enter college than an article by Robert M. Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago, in *Collier’s* in December 1944. The article, “The Threat to American Education,” outlines Hutchins’ objections to what he sees as the proposed use of the education system as a means of addressing mass unemployment. He proposes a national test for those interested in using the educational component of the G.I. Bill and using those scores to determine who is truly fit for a college education. He suggests that only in this way can the interests of both veterans (many of who will not need a college education for their vocations) and the government (who will pay thousands to colleges unable to pass up their chance at free government money even if it means lowering their standards for acceptance and coursework) be met. While couched in a language of concern, his real fears manifest themselves in the midway point of the article where he asserts that “Colleges and universities will find

themselves converted into educational hobo jungles.”<sup>174</sup> The phrase hobo jungles would have been a provocative one for the audience of the time suggesting grime, laziness, and a gateway to vice—the very antithesis of the ivory tower. Hutchins recognizes that class has always played a role in who could achieve a degree but seems to think that absent this barrier chaos will descend on campus. The veteran would move from soldier to prospective bum on the government’s dime.

While some Members of Congress may have been sympathetic to Hutchins’ views, the Congressional Record does not reveal any who were willing to enter such remarks into the record. Those who defended the original version of the bill emphasized the need to restrict the program to returning veterans to their previously held stations in life; it should not, in their view, become a means of social elevation. They emphasized the potentially unmanageable cost of such broad social engineering via legislation. Those in favor of the Barden amendment offered significantly more direct analysis of the situation. Rep. Jensen noted that if the amendment was “defeated many of the boys from poor parents [would] not have an equal opportunity to go to college as will the rich man’s son,” due to the fact that they would not have been able to afford to go prior to the war.<sup>175</sup> Rep. Antonio M. Fernandez (D-NM) is worth quoting in full on this issue:

It would be impossible for many of those millions of men, who had to quit school in order to support their families, to bring themselves within the provisions of this bill; and to cut them off from these benefits, which in my opinion are the most important in this bill, would be unjust and would constitute class discrimination...Those who have had the opportunity for some training, those who had the means to obtain education, have received commissions, have received better assignments, have received better treatment in the service. No one can complain of that, but when we turn around and add benefits to those who have already had the lions' share of privilege, and deny benefits to those who have been so unfortunate as not to be ready for such privileges, the morale of our fighting

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<sup>174</sup> Richard M. Hutchins, “The Threat to American Education,” *Collier’s*, Dec. 30, 1944, 21.

<sup>175</sup> 90 Cong. Rec. 4551 (1944)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0900004&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crel185&id=185>

men will suffer.<sup>176</sup>

Rep. Fernandez' statement reflects an awareness of the relationship between the condition of young people in the decade prior to the war and their experience in war. Moreover, as Rep. Jed Johnson (D-OK) observed, it is shortsighted to assume that there would be no change in the ambitions of veterans from the time they entered the service to demobilization. He claims there are "three or four hundred thousand boys who come from the country who could barely read and write, who never had the opportunity to attend more than 3 or 5 months of school and may have quit school from 10 to 12 or 15 or 16 years of age, since they have gotten into the Army and the Government has been teaching them to read and write...and because of that they have been imbued with an ambition to go to school—does not the gentleman agree that those people will simply be out in the cold and will be deprived of an opportunity to go to school under the terms of the bill?"<sup>177</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion**

While Barden's amendment did not pass, the final version of the bill states "That any such person who was not over 25 years of age at the time he entered the service shall be deemed to have had his education or training impeded, delayed, interrupted, or interfered with."<sup>178</sup> And a

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<sup>176</sup> 90 Cong. Rec. 4608 (1944)

<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0900004&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crel242&id=242>.

<sup>177</sup> 90 Cong. Rec. 4552 (1944)

<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0900004&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crel186&id=186>.

<sup>178</sup> 90 Cong. Rec. 5753 (1944)

<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr0900004&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crel1387&id=1387>.

year later, amendments to the bill remove the age restriction entirely from the education provision, which opened Title II up to all veterans who meet the length of service and discharge qualifications. This debate reveals the way in which development before the war, particularly with regard to education, remained intimately tied to one's class position (and, while not mentioned in the Congressional debate, one's regional position, as the South continued to lag significantly behind the rest of the country in terms of both primary and particularly secondary education rates).

Debates rage in academic circles over the ultimate impact of the G.I. Bill in terms of how many more individuals received college or high school educations thanks to Title II. My interests lie outside of policy results. World War II created a moment when, through the G.I. Bill, the idea of what youth "deserved" could be expanded because the qualifying characteristic shifted from poverty or a violation of the social contract to service to the nation. As a result, this period offers the first piece of federal legislation that both targets youth and specifically expands opportunities for a cross-class group within the age demographic. In this way, the G.I. Bill stands apart from previous youth-oriented legislation that sought to primarily benefit either the top or bottom economic strata within that age bracket.

## Chapter Four: Thwarting the Radicals: Moderate Youth as Political Targets in the 1960s

*“If they can overturn things using the system, I am all for it. I see no reason why anything is sacred that can be changed within the system which guarantees the individual freedom of all of us.”*

*- Sen. Birch Bayh (D – IN), Chairman of the Subcommittee for Constitutional Amendments, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress<sup>179</sup>*

During the 1966 campaign for the governorship of California, Ronald Reagan’s campaign office received promotional materials for a documentary film entitled “The Berkeley Revolution.” The brochure copy reads:

According to F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover, this plague is sweeping across the campuses of America...America’s future is in the hands of its youth. But in whose hands are our youth? The Berkeley Revolution makes no allegations, it just shows you the on-the-scenes proof that a small hard core of revolutionaries has virtually captured our nation’s largest university in a movement that is spreading across our land...The Berkeley Revolution exposes the Judas goats leading the innocent students. You will see the pied pipers of revolution leading young Americans into a miasma of rebellion, civil disobedience and perversion.<sup>180</sup>

Using florid language, those responsible for the film, a group entitled Constructive Action, highlighted the main players of the 1960s and early 1970s campus movements: “Judas goats” (or student activists and their supposed agitators) and “innocent students” (or non-activist students).

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<sup>179</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Session on Res. 8, S.J. Res. 14, and S.J. Res. 78, Relating to Lowering the Voting Age to 18: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments of the Committee on the Judiciary, 90<sup>th</sup> Con (1969), 12.

<sup>180</sup> “The Berkeley Revolution,” C33, Education, Campus Unrest. Governor’s Papers. Ronald Reagan Library.

Of course, the 1960s have received considerable attention from the academic world particularly to those labeled here as “Judas goats.”

While usually called activists rather than goats, these individuals have been the focus of the vast majority of academic literature on 1960s youth. This work has focused on three dominant stories: the internal politics of youth organizations, the impact of activism on later life, and the ideology of the organizations and main participants.<sup>181</sup> Despite the outsized presence of youth activism in 1960s news and in today’s understanding of the decade, only one major policy shift happened in the political construction of youth during this era: 18- to 20-year-olds became full political citizens endowed with the right to vote. This chapter reveals the important role played by moderate youth in the decision to extend the vote to this age bracket. I argue that, similar to the way in which New Deal legislation and the G.I. Bill connected young people to the

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<sup>181</sup> For a discussion of SDS see Alan Adelson, *SDS* (New York: Scribner, 1972); David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why It Failed* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987); Kevin Mattson, *Intellectuals in Action: The Origins of the New Left and Radical Liberalism, 1945 – 1970* (University Press: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Jim Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). For a discussion of SNCC see Iwan Morgan and Philip Davies, eds., *From Sit-Ins to SNCC: The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998). For a discussion of Prairie Power Movement see Robbie Lieberman, *Prairie Power: Voices of 1960s Midwestern Student Protest* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004); Robert Pardon, *Prairie Radical: Journey Through the Sixties* (Los Gatos, CA: Shire Press, 2001). For a discussion of student organizing in the south and particularly of the Southern Student Organizing Committee see Gregg L. Michael, *Struggle for a Better South: The Southern Student Organizing Committee, 1964-1969* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Jeffrey A. Turner, *Sitting In and Speaking Out: Student Movements in the American South 1960-1970* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010). For a discussion of Young Americans for Freedom see Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, The New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

American political project, Congress passed legislation enfranchising young people in order to persuade moderate youth to work within rather than outside America's democratic system.

This chapter begins by reviewing the history of youth enfranchisement as well as the conventional wisdom about how 18-year-olds secured the vote. I then briefly return to the 1940s and 1950s to compare the post-war discussion of youth enfranchisement to similar debates in the 1960s. This comparison highlights the difference in elite political strategies for the containment of youth politics across these two periods. As I demonstrate, post-war fears that European youth revolutions might reach American shores discouraged politicians from extending the franchise to youth; ironically, however, when youth rebellion blossomed at home in the 1960s, it inspired politicians to give youth the vote. By contextualizing the story of youth enfranchisement within the long view of twentieth-century anxieties about young people and their politics, we see continuity and change in the behavior of political elites: continuity in terms of their fears that youth would challenge American social and political norms, and change in terms of their strategies for responding to the specter of antiestablishment youth. Ultimately, this observation challenges our established narrative about why the franchise was extended to youth.

## **I. Youth Suffrage in American History**

Within the United States, voting serves as a key marker of citizenship and signals an individual's capacity for self-government. Through the course of American history, voting rights have been granted and revoked based on gender, race, literacy, property-ownership, and age. While commonly attributed to the passage of the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment, Congress first granted 18-20-year-olds the right to vote through the 1970 Voting Rights Act—a renewal of the landmark 1965 Voting Rights Act—when Sen. Mike Mansfield (D-MT) added an amendment for youth voting.

In approving the Mansfield amendment and ultimately passing the bill to which it was attached, Congress tested the long held belief that only a Constitutional amendment could alter the voting age. Indeed, many assumed while voting for the bill that the Mansfield amendment would be declared unconstitutional—a belief shared by President Nixon, even as he signed it into law.

In the test case *Oregon v. Mitchell*, a divided Supreme Court held that Congress had the authority to lower the voting age for federal elections while states retained the right to set the voting age in all other cases.<sup>182</sup> In the wake of the Court’s decision, those tasked with coordinating elections suddenly found themselves facing an expensive logistical challenge: maintaining separate voting rolls and providing separate ballots for voters above and below 21-years-old.<sup>183</sup> Seeking to avoid such difficulties, the Senate rapidly and unanimously approved text for a Constitutional amendment to reduce the voting age; the House quickly followed suit. By April 7, 1971, just two weeks after Congress approved the text, thirteen states had ratified the constitutional amendment.<sup>184</sup> On June 30, 1971, the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified. The process of ratification took only nine weeks—“by far the shortest time in which the process has ever been accomplished.”<sup>185</sup>

#### *The Conventional Wisdom: Youth Suffered for Suffrage*

The conventional wisdom regarding the passage of the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment suggests that Congress and President Nixon decided to enfranchise 18- to 20-year-olds because of service in

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<sup>182</sup> *Oregon v. Mitchell*, Attorney General 400 U.S. 112 91 S. Ct. 260 (1970).

<sup>183</sup> The *New York Times* suggested that the cost of maintaining these distinct rolls and ballots could cost as much as \$20-million. John W. Finney, “Senate Approves 18-Year-Old Vote in All Elections,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1971.

<sup>184</sup> “18-Year-Old Vote Speeded Over U.S.,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1971.

<sup>185</sup> R.W. Apple, Jr., “The States Ratify Full Vote at 18,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1971.

the Vietnam War and particularly youth protests of the war. “Old enough to fight, old enough to vote” became a popular slogan and Congress extended suffrage to young people as part of the 1970 Voting Rights Act. Vietnam as the catalyst for the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment has become entrenched in the American consciousness. History and civics textbooks, for example, frequently offer the Vietnam War and specifically the phrase “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” as the rationale for its passage. The popular high school textbook *The Americans* puts a “historical spotlight” on the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment and the teachers’ edition notes that “The impetus for the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment was born out of Vietnam War protests. Students pointed out that they could be drafted and sent to war but that they could not vote.”<sup>186</sup> Boorstin and Kelley’s *A History of the United States* provides a brief explanation of the origin of each amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It states the following for the origin of the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment: “During the war in Vietnam, many Americans began to feel that those who were old enough to be drafted and sent off to fight were old enough to vote.”<sup>187</sup> Similarly, the text *Why We Remember United States History* includes a picture of young people standing at a voting booth and the caption: “The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment passed mainly because many people believed that if 18-year-olds were old enough to fight for their country, they were old enough to vote.”<sup>188</sup>

The references to the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment in these texts are relatively brief. However, longer pedagogical longer pieces on the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment draw similar conclusions. The Annenberg Learner, a group that provides multimedia resources for K-12 teachers, includes a workshop on

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<sup>186</sup> *The Americans: Reconstruction to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (n.p.: McDougal Littell, 2003), 1004.

<sup>187</sup> Daniel Boorstin and Brooks Mather Kelley, *A History of the United States*, 6th ed. (Needham, MA: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 1999), 999.

<sup>188</sup> Herman J. Viola, *Why We Remember United States History* (Needham, MA: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 1998), R73.

the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment as part of a lesson on electoral politics. Wynell Schamel, education specialist at the Education Branch at the National Archives and Records Administration, provides a background essay for instructors. Schamel emphasizes that the idea of 18-year-old voting first began circulating in 1943 and was repeatedly brought up in Congress by Randolph Jennings from West Virginia. He concludes that it was only when “the pressure created by the antiwar movement of the 1960s intensified that Congress finally passed the Jennings proposal in 1971.”<sup>189</sup>

An Internet search for the phrase “26<sup>th</sup> amendment” yields thousands of web results; the first twenty include websites from such sources as Wikipedia, the History Channel, Democracy Day, the Leadership Congress, and the Constitutional Accountability Center. Wikipedia’s entry on the topic provides the following background for the amendment: “Congress and the state legislatures felt increasing pressure to pass the Constitutional amendment because of the Vietnam War, in which many young men who were ineligible to vote were conscripted to fight in the war, thus lacking any means to influence the people sending them off to risk their lives. ‘Old enough to fight, old enough to vote,’ was a common slogan used by proponents of lowering the voting age.”<sup>190</sup> The History Channel’s post includes considerably more background information about the fight for youth suffrage during World War II, yet it still concludes that the youth vote passed because “in the late 1960s, with the United States embroiled in a long, costly war in Vietnam, youth voting rights activists held marches and demonstrations to draw lawmakers’ attention to the hypocrisy of drafting young men and women who lacked the right to

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<sup>189</sup> “The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment and Youth Voting Rights,” Annenberg Learner, accessed March 8, 2014, [www.learner.org/workshops/civics/workshop2/readings/youthvoting.html](http://www.learner.org/workshops/civics/workshop2/readings/youthvoting.html).

<sup>190</sup> “Twenty-sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution,” Wikipedia, accessed March 8, 2014, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-sixth\\_Amendment\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-sixth_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution).

vote.”<sup>191</sup> Democracy Day, a project of Rock the Vote, offers an organizational history approach to the topic. The author emphasizes the role of the National Education Association, YMCA, AFL-CIO and NAACP in organizing the Youth Franchise Coalition.<sup>192</sup> While they focus on the effectiveness of grassroots organizing in winning the vote, the piece still places the campaign within the context of Vietnam and the fairness of allowing 18-year-olds to vote. The Constitutional Accountability Center, a think tank and law firm “dedicated to fulfilling the progressive promise of our Constitution’s text and history,” views the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment as an example of “the progressive arc of our Constitution and of our character as a nation.”<sup>193</sup> The site references the work of Yale Law Professor Akhil Amar to argue that “a combination of the civil rights and voting rights movements, a vibrant new youth culture, and the debate over the war in Vietnam were the ingredients that re-generated the calls of “old enough to fight, old enough to vote.”<sup>194</sup>

The use of Amar’s book, *America’s Constitution: A Biography*, reveals that the conventional wisdom of the passage of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment is also present in academic works.<sup>195</sup> In *Youth’s Battle for the Ballot: A History of Voting Age in America*, Wendell W. Cultice offers a detailed account of youth enfranchisement and traces Congress’s decision to the serving and

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<sup>191</sup> “The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment,” History, accessed March 8, 2014, [www.history.com/topics/the-26th-amendment](http://www.history.com/topics/the-26th-amendment).

<sup>192</sup> “The 26th Amendment,” Democracy Day, accessed March 8, 2014, [democracyday.com/the-26th-amendment.html](http://democracyday.com/the-26th-amendment.html).

<sup>193</sup> “Constitutional Accountability Center,” Constitutional Accountability Center, accessed March 8, 2014, <https://theconstitution.org/about>; “The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the Progressive Constitution,” Constitutional Accountability Center, accessed March 8, 2014, <https://theconstitution.org/text-history/2847>.

<sup>194</sup> “The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the Progressive Constitution”

<sup>195</sup> Akhil Reed Amar, *America’s Constitution: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2005).

suffering of youth in America's wars. He argues that from the 1940s through the 1970s, "young people would virtually shoot their way into the voting booth...[T]he continued frequency and prolongation of U.S. military efforts, seventeen more years of actual combat, would perpetuate the concept of the inseparable combination of suffering-suffrage, sustain the aura of manifest destiny of the issue, and eventually steer the ballot within youth's reach."<sup>196</sup>

The appeal of this conventional wisdom is easy to understand as it tells the story of an American government fairly rewarding young people for their participation, or at least their generation's participation, in an increasingly unpopular war. Indeed, by the time the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment became official, the Vietnam War claimed the lives of thousands of 18- to 20-year-olds. The idea that young men drafted to serve their country were unable to participate in their own democratic government was a point of concern for many citizens, young and old alike, and certainly helped place lowering the voting age on the political agenda. Yet the evidence for this wisdom rests largely on a logical fallacy. That the objective of the slogan "old enough to fight, old enough to vote" came about after the Vietnam War as opposed to World War II does not in and of itself establish a link between Vietnam protests and the passage of the 1970 Voting Rights Act and subsequently the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment. This story became conventional wisdom without being examined because it served a purpose, because it satisfied a need present at the time of its promulgation: it fulfilled a desire to see the U.S. government responding to the widely shared belief that the Vietnam War and draft were unfair. Moreover, its presence in textbooks and general knowledge repositories such as Wikipedia explains how it stays popular.

I argue that a new story comes into focus if we move beyond a snapshot of the passage of the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment and instead consider the overarching conditions of youth activism in the

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<sup>196</sup> Wendell W. Cutler, *Youth's Battle for the Ballot: A History of the Voting Age in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 18.

1960s as well as the Congressional debate over the value of a Congressional amendment to expand suffrage and the inclusion of the Mansfield Amendment on the 1970 VRA. The suffering of young people in Vietnam is, without a doubt, part of this story. But, it is not the whole story. Rather, Congress' decision to enfranchise youth is part of a complex web of political negotiations about the condition of not only radical and veteran youth but moderate youth as well. Student radicals dominate narratives, both positive and negative, of youth in the 1960s. Despite this popular image, most 1960s youth did not qualify as radicals and disapproved of the tactics of many activists. In reality, radicals expended considerable effort staging events designed specifically to pull young moderates into political activism. Consequently, political elites saw themselves as engaged in a game of tug-of-war with radicals for the support and allegiance of currently moderate but potentially persuadable youth. Enfranchisement provided an opportunity for Congress to demonstrate its respect for youth and the validity of American democracy by inviting these young Americans to become full members of the body politic.

## **II. Perceiving Young Voters as a Threat to America's Stability**

As outlined in Chapter two, members of Congress feared the threat to stability posed by unemployed soldiers returning from World War II. Congress subsequently offered veterans unemployment insurance, paid education and training opportunities, and help finding jobs. A number of Democrats also wanted to offer them the vote. Sen. Jennings Randolph (D-WV) and, later, Sen. Mike Mansfield (D-MT), pushed to enfranchise young Americans by arguing that those who were called upon to fight for their country had earned this right. Throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, Randolph and Mansfield along with Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA) regularly introduced resolutions seeking a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age. In

total, 153 congressional resolutions were offered on that topic from 1943 until 1969, with nearly all of them failing to make it out of committee.<sup>197</sup> By the late 1960s, the idea of enfranchising 18-year-olds had, in the words of Rep. James J. Howard (D-NJ), “become one of those comfortable, perennial issues that, like the weather, everybody talks about but no one does anything about.”<sup>198</sup>

Ironically, the example of European youth, which had motivated the passage of youth-oriented New Deal legislation and the G.I. Bill, actually limited support for the youth vote. Rep. Emanuel Celler (D-NY), the most outspoken opponent of youth suffrage in the U.S. Congress, linked “teen-age voting” to Europe’s problem with fascism. He contended that “Many countries that make the most of their youth movements and several of the countries that I have named that have teen-age voting—particularly Italy, the Argentine, Germany and Spain—are the least liberty-loving. Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco, taking advantage of the starry-eyed enthusiasm of their youth movements, ascended to power, using the youth as the fulcrum of their power.”<sup>199</sup>

Similar objections continued through the early 1950s. Representative Celler voiced his fear that youth enfranchisement would lead the U.S. in the same direction as Germany, Spain, Italy, and Russia, arguing that leaders in all four nations “deliberately reduced the voting age to 18. . . and those dictators goose-stepped all those youth into receptivity and acceptance of the

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<sup>197</sup> “Can LUV Conquer All?” *Time Magazine*, January 31, 1969.

<sup>198</sup> 113 Cong. Rec. 11684 (1967)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1130009&collection=congrec&index=congrec/creh534&id=534>.

<sup>199</sup> Emanuel Celler, “Should the Legal Voting Age be Reduced to 18 Years? CON” *Congressional Digest*, 23 (August/September 1944): 203.

ideas of totalitarianism.”<sup>200</sup> The editorial board of the *New York Times* agreed with Celler’s analysis and in early 1954 claimed that “the greatest factor that enabled Lenin, Mussolini, Hitler and Mao Tse-tung to ride to power was their success in capturing and misusing the youth of their countries, especially among the student groups whose book learning had not yet been tempered by practical experience. It is significant that the great majority of the democracies have kept the voting age at 21 or higher.”<sup>201</sup> *The Washington Post* added that “The qualities which, according to the generals, make young men under 21 desirable as soldiers – impressionability, pliability, automatic response to stimuli – are the very reasons that should make them undesirable as voters.”<sup>202</sup>

For those who agreed with Celler, then, keeping the ballot from young people, including young soldiers, was necessary for protecting the country from a fascist revolution. Young people were more susceptible to the appeals of charismatic ideologues than their more sober adult counterparts. Would-be dictators took advantage of young people’s naiveté to reach their own fascist ends. During the 1940s and 1950s, then, political elites provided the CCC, NYA, and G.I. Bill, as covered in Chapter two, to train individuals in the preferred forms of American citizenship through labor and education while simultaneously keeping the vote out of their hands. The political power of the vote, leveraged by inexperienced and impressionable youth, had permitted the rise of various European dictators, and Congress intended to avoid repeating the same mistake.

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<sup>200</sup> Emanuel Celler, “Should the Legal Voting Age be Reduced to 18 Years? CON” *Congressional Digest* 33 (March 1954): 77.

<sup>201</sup> Editorial, *New York Times*, 1/12/54, included in *Congressional Digest* 33 (March 1954): 91.

<sup>202</sup> Editorial, *Washington Post*, 1/11/54 included in *Congressional Digest* 33 (March 1954): 93.

### **III. Youth Riots at the Gates**

During the Great Depression and post-World War II years, ordinary citizens and political elites feared the prospects of youth challenging the political system. Their fears materialized in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM). While Berkeley forbade political work on campus, students were allowed to set up tables, distribute pamphlets, and solicit donations just off campus. Students concentrated their activity at the intersection of Bancroft Way and Telegraph Avenue. When they arrived on campus in the fall of 1964, students learned that the administration had banned tables from the edge of campus by claiming the land actually belonged to the university. A grudge match quickly developed between activists and the administration. Students representing political groups regularly set up tables only to be shut down. On October 1, the issue came to a head when campus police arrested a student representative of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) for tabling at Sproul Plaza. As the police put the student into the back of a car, students at the scene surrounded the car and started an impromptu sit-in. Ultimately, several hundred students participated in what came to be known as the first sit-in of the FSM. A group of student activists spent the remainder of 1964 pushing President Clark Kerr and other administrators to expand the political rights of students on campus.

Just a few years earlier, a group of students at the University of Michigan formed Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). According to the goals outlined in the group's manifesto, the Port Huron Statement (PHS), the organization hoped to spur citizens to become more aware of their country's foreign policy and warfare state while encouraging students to agitate for a new, participatory democracy. SDS sent copies of the Port Huron Statement (PHS) to hundreds of campuses and worked to organize individual chapters across the country. To say

the vision articulated in the PHS challenged the American political status quo would be an understatement.<sup>203</sup> In their “search for truly democratic alternatives to the present” SDS suggests radical shifts to the organizing principles of America’s economic sphere in claiming that “the economy itself is...social regulation.” The document supports new modes of regulation including maintaining public control of any industry where “monopolization seems inevitable” as well as “when a resource has been discovered or developed with public tax revenues;” they also desired “increased work participation in decision-making.” All of this, SDS argued, would “re-balance the economy toward public – and individual -- control.” Beyond calling for increased citizen control of the economy, SDS argues “medical care must become recognized as a lifetime human right” and that America should “progress now toward internationalizing rather than localizing its education system.” In all of these processes, SDS wants to spur a “participatory democracy” where citizen participation moves beyond voting to include active participation in all types of political decision making.

Along with asking for a substantive change in American economic and social policy, the PHS criticized American foreign policy, suggesting that “hatred toward the United States as a democracy is not simply a communist propaganda trick, but an objectively justifiable phenomenon.” The SDS wanted Americans to “agree that public utilities, railroads, mines, and plantations, and other basic economic institutions should be in the control of national, not foreign, agencies.” Taken together then, SDS proposes changes to America’s domestic and foreign policies that would fundamentally challenge the countries liberal and capitalist

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<sup>203</sup> The following quotations all taken from Students for a Democratic Society, *Port Huron Statement*, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference; *A New Insurgency: The Port Huron Statement In Its Time and Ours*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/phs/resources/porthuronstatementfulltext>.

foundations. SDS organized in support of a new model of democracy that necessarily threatened current power structures and the elites heading them.

The Vietnam War helped boost what started as relatively limited movements at Berkeley (FSM) and the University of Michigan (SDS). In 1964, the Selective Service began using a combination of a test score and class rank to determine which college students would be eligible for deferring the draft. With this move, military induction became directly tied to the school environment; this inspired protests on hundreds of campuses. “[T]he anti-rank protests heightened students’ awareness of universities’ complicity in the war and convinced many that their schools were vulnerable to ‘direct action’ tactics.”<sup>204</sup> The spread of protests suggested that there was truth in the claim of Seymour Martin Lipset and Paul Seabury, Professors of Psychology and Political Science respectively, that “The Berkeley Revolt is not just another California curiosity. This new style of campus political action may affect other campuses, and eventually our national political life. . . The indifference to legality shown by serious students can threaten the foundations of democratic order if it becomes a model for student political action.”<sup>205</sup> In 1968, Richard E. Peterson, writing for *Daedalus*’ issue on Students and Politics, suggested that young people did indeed seek to threaten these foundations as “while the student left has grown out of an amalgam of shifting civil rights, peace, and anti-poverty sentiments and

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<sup>204</sup> Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 82, 84.

<sup>205</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Paul Seabury. “The Lesson of Berkeley,” in *The Berkeley Student Revolt Facts and Interpretations*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset and Sheldon S. Wolin (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1965), 349.

activities, its ultimate goal is radical reform of American society and the characteristic nature of human roles and relationships on which it rests.”<sup>206</sup>

Media and political elites devoted considerable attention to the SDS chapters, Berkeley’s FSM, and organizing efforts of CORE, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and other radical groups. Many elites were convinced that outside agitators encouraged radical activity on campus. Two publications in particular, *Communist Target–Youth: Communist Infiltration and Agitation Tactics* and *Reds Grow Bolder on Campuses*, revealed the lens through which some had come to view youth.<sup>207</sup> The former document, published by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, lamented that “young Communists could exploit such controversial issues on campuses as civil rights, academic freedom, and other so-called peace issues. . . . Particularly unfortunate is the fact that many youth and student groups in our Nation today are totally unaware of the extent to which they can be victimized and exploited by Communists.” In this instance, the majority of young people, including those who might be considered radicalized, were dupes rather than true instigators. The latter document also suggested that Communist organizations sought to infiltrate youth organizations and explored the parallels with Nazi Germany. During the 1930s and 1940s, elites had feared that young people were susceptible to Communist propaganda from compelling messengers. According to these pamphlets of the 1960s, the messengers had arrived. These publications found a receptive audience among some government actors, though it is unclear how much they circulated among average citizens.

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<sup>206</sup> Richard E. Peterson, “The Student Left in American Higher Education,” *Daedalus* 97(1968): 293.

<sup>207</sup> FBI, *Communist Target – Youth: Communist Infiltration and Agitation Tactics* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960); Robert Betts, *Reds Grow Bolder on Campuses* (San Diego, CA: San Diego Union, 196-?).

The average citizen did see media reports of youth and particularly student riots, which became prevalent from the years of 1967-1970. During 1967 and 1968, leading newspapers featured numerous front-page stories covering the activities of and splits within the youth movement.<sup>208</sup> The *New York Times* in particular emphasized the dangerous nature of students. Front-page headlines from 1967 and 1968 included “The Student Scene: Angry Militants,” “Students and the Election: Anger Gives Way to Hope,” “Students Shifting Tactics in Nation,” and “Student Activists Turning From Campus to Society.”<sup>209</sup> All of these stories emphasized shifts in the tenor of the student movements while commenting on alienation, frustrations, and anger of students. Only one article on the 1968 primary campaign observed a shift in the other direction from anger to hope.<sup>210</sup>

In *Assault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Antiwar Movement* (1997), journalist James Kirkpatrick Davis revealed the extent to which government actors had treated youth as a dangerous force in American politics. Davis documented the efforts of the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover, with the approval of President Johnson, to infiltrate and compromise the efforts of the New Left. SDS’s first Vietnam War teach-in at the University of Michigan in 1965 made President Johnson nervous. At a meeting with Hoover on April 28, 1965, President “Johnson

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<sup>208</sup> Harry Trimborn, “Student Foes of U.S Domestic and Foreign Policies Meet on Strategy,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1965; Steven V. Roberts, “Radicals and Liberals Split at Maryland Student Talks,” *New York Times*, August 14, 1967; Steven V. Roberts, “Students Approve a Militant Stand for Black Power,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1967.

<sup>209</sup> Nan Robertson, “The Student Scene: Angry Militants,” *New York Times*, November 20, 1967; Nan Robertson, “Students and the Election: Anger Gives Way to Hope,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1968; David E. Rosenbaum, “Students Shifting Tactics in Nation,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1969; William K. Stevens, “Student Activists Turning from Campus to Society,” *New York Times*, March 9, 1970.

<sup>210</sup> Nan Robertson, “Students and the Election: Anger Gives Way to Hope,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1968.

expressed extraordinary anxiety over the New Left movement and what it was doing to the country.”<sup>211</sup> Six months later, the FBI, under Hoover’s direction, launched Counter Intelligence Program–New Left (COINTELPRO). Designed “primarily to stem the tide of extreme anti-Vietnam War protest across the nation” the program ran until the end of April 1971. . . . In total, bureau headquarters received 381 New Left proposals from approved field offices. Of this total, 285 actions were implemented.”<sup>212</sup>

Two political campaigns depicted youth activists as criminals: Ronald Reagan’s race for the California governorship in 1966 and 1970 as well as the presidential ticket of Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew in 1968. In his first gubernatorial race, Reagan capitalized on the political opportunity provided by student unrest at Berkeley and other California schools. “The ‘campus war’ allowed Reagan to highlight the populist themes of his campaign: morality, law and order, strong leadership, and traditional values.”<sup>213</sup> Student activists, with their penchants for strikes, profanity, blue jeans, and long hair, left many citizens craving the security of all four of Reagan’s themes, and he rode their anxieties into the governor’s mansion. Campus disturbances were a win-win issue for Governor Reagan: “If he won a skirmish with students, Californians cheered. But if he failed to control the unrest, his failure merely underscored how serious the threat of militancy was and how urgent the need for tough action.”<sup>214</sup>

After winning office as Richard Nixon’s running mate, Vice President Spiro Agnew frequently portrayed youth as totalitarian revolutionaries. At a Pennsylvania Republican Dinner,

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<sup>211</sup> James Kirkpatrick Davis, *Assault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Antiwar Movement*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 31.

<sup>212</sup> Davis, *Assault on the Left*, 8.

<sup>213</sup> Gerard De Groot, “Reagan’s Rise,” *History Today* (September 1995): 31.

<sup>214</sup> De Groot, “Reagan’s Rise,” 36.

he referenced the youth movement as “a home-grown menace, made and manufactured in the U.S.A.”<sup>215</sup> Obliquely referencing Germany and Russia’s youth movements and anti-American postures, he noted that “at this moment totalitarianism’s threat does not necessarily have a foreign accent,” yet it could still force America to “forfeit its integrity, never to be free again.”<sup>216</sup> He made the same point more directly a few months later, telling his audience that “confrontation is not novel to our citizens, only its form is new. We have faced dictators before . . . only they had foreign accents. Now we face an enemy within.”<sup>217</sup> While obviously playing on Cold War fears, his language also reflected old fears from the Great Depression that young Americans, left to their own devices, would readily create the type of youth movement that supported revolutions in Italy, Germany, and Russia.

Amidst these communications from political and media elites about activities on college campuses, it is not surprising that by June 1970, citizens listed “campus unrest” as the “nation’s main problem.”<sup>218</sup> Yet the percentages of college students engaged in activism remained low. Those who sought to quantify the expanse of the 1968 movement concluded that “the student left . . . includes perhaps something on the order of 1 to 2 percent of the total student population. The organized student left—formal affiliates of SDS, SNCC, SSOC, CORE—amounts to fewer than

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<sup>215</sup> Spiro T. Agnew, “Pennsylvania Republican Dinner, October 30, 1969,” *Collected Speeches of Spiro Agnew* (New York: Audubon Books, 1971), 76.

<sup>216</sup> Spiro T. Agnew, “Pennsylvania Republican Dinner, October 30, 1969,” *Collected Speeches of Spiro Agnew* (New York: Audubon Books, 1971), 76.

<sup>217</sup> Spiro T. Agnew, “Trunk and Tusk Club, February 27, 1970,” *Collected Speeches of Spiro Agnew* (New York: Audubon Books, 1971), 110.

<sup>218</sup> Kenneth Keniston, “Prologue: Youth as a Stage of Life” in *Youth: The Seventy-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education Part I*, eds. Robert J. Havighurst and Philip H. Dreyer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 6.

15,000.”<sup>219</sup> Yet this small group made a significant impact on campuses. As the Dean of the Pacific School of Religion at Berkeley observed, a militant minority made itself look bigger through “a series of well-executed maneuvers.”<sup>220</sup> In the war of words between activists and political elites, other youth were caught in the crossfire: the “good” or “moderate” youth who were students, workers, husbands, wives, and parents. While the media disproportionately offered images of youth in rebellion, and this identity of youth often became conflated with the very identity of students, political elites as well as radical students consistently invoked the existence of a separate, larger group of so-called moderate youth (both on campus and off) who were the target of radical action. I argue that these moderates play a critical role in the passage of youth suffrage legislation. In the following section, I focus on California while outlining the way in which moderate students were juxtaposed to radicals throughout the 1960s. I then explore the role these moderate students played as a target of radical organizing and a rallying point for political elites.

#### **IV. The Critical Role of Moderate Youth**

From the beginning many young people sympathized with the FSM’s goals but rejected its methods. In the months after the 1964 sit-in at Berkeley, a new group named University Students for Law and Order (USLO) offered what it called “an alternative course of action to the so-called Free Speech Movement” and argued that “unless we are willing to express ourselves as a responsible body, we have no right to expect the continued financial support of the community

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<sup>219</sup> Peterson, “The Student Left,” 295.

<sup>220</sup> Robert E. Fitch, “Extremism in the Defense of...” in *The Berkeley Student Revolt Facts and Interpretations*, eds. Seymour Martin Lipset and Sheldon S. Wolin (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1965), 399. Originally published in *The Christian Century* (January 6, 1965).

at large.”<sup>221</sup> In a pamphlet titled “Now Time to Think,” the USLO emphasized that they approved of the objective of holding political activities on campus but wanted negotiations instead of strikes and continued protests.<sup>222</sup> Berkeley President Clark Kerr argued that “The Associated Students and other student groups have shown a great sense of responsibility, and many faculty members have contributed much in the way of helpful suggestions and calm good judgment. These efforts of a large majority of students and faculty deserve public recognition and the support of the citizens of California.”<sup>223</sup>

Youth for Reagan, a group created to support Ronald Reagan’s gubernatorial candidacy, proclaimed its desire to create “a better image for responsible youth.”<sup>224</sup> A second Youth for Reagan flier bemoaned the lack of engagement from non-radical students in the campus turmoil: “What is unclear is why the responsible, seriously-minded students interested in higher education ideals have never rallied to suppress the idiotic, mis-guided, confused, radical minority which has degraded the traditional image of all educational institutions as well as destroyed the fundamental confidence once bestowed upon students by the elders of our generation.”<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> University Students for Law and Order, “Five Leaflets Distributed in December 1964,” in *The Berkeley Student Revolt Facts and Interpretations*, eds. Seymour Martin Lipset and Sheldon S. Wolin (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1965), 226.

<sup>222</sup> University Students for Law and Order, “Five Leaflets,” 229.

<sup>223</sup> Clark Kerr, “Statement by President Clark Kerr, December 3, 1964,” in *The Berkeley Student Revolt Facts and Interpretations*, eds. Seymour Martin Lipset and Sheldon S. Wolin (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1965), 247. Originally published in *California Monthly* (February 1965).

<sup>224</sup> *Youth for Reagan*, Box C32, Folder “Ronald Reagan Material (2 of 4),” Campaign Papers. Governor’s Papers. Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>225</sup> *Youth for Reagan*, Box C32, Folder “Ronald Reagan Material (2 of 4),” Campaign Papers. Governor’s Papers. Ronald Reagan Library.

Those writing and speaking about youth movements similarly invoked the image of the moderate student. When writing about the Berkeley events, the weekly *Tocsin*, an anti-communism student newsletter, distinguished “student rebels” from “serious students on restricted budgets and schedules.”<sup>226</sup> While speaking on *Meet the Press* in September 1966, Ronald Reagan cast a positive light on the majority of the Berkeley campus by arguing that “the bulk of the students . . . are fine serious-minded people intent on getting an education.”<sup>227</sup> By implication, those engaged in political activism were not fine, serious, or seeking an education. After the San Jose State riots, Reagan’s office released a statement highlighting what he characterized as his responsibility to “speak for the overwhelming majority of college students who are working hard to obtain an education and who have a right to study, undisturbed by frequent disruptions and disorders.”<sup>228</sup>

Not only were moderate young people the “fine serious-minded people” on campus, they increasingly came to be viewed as the linchpin in protecting America from a full scale rebellion. They could not, however, be counted on to reject the advances of their radical counterparts. These moderates, it was thought, might side with either the establishment or the radicals, with the future of America hanging in the balance. Both radical students and political elites understood this struggle. In *Berkeley at War: The 1960s*, historian W.J. Rorabaugh contends that

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<sup>226</sup> *Tocsin*, “State Campus Safety Imperiled,” in *The Berkeley Student Revolt Facts and Interpretations*, eds. Seymour Martin Lipset and Sheldon S. Wolin (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1965), 237. Originally published in *Tocsin* (October 10, 1964).

<sup>227</sup> “Meet the Press” transcript September 11, 1966, Box 31, Folder “’66 Debate Issues and Answers,” Campus Unrest. Governor’s Papers. Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>228</sup> Press Release, November 20, 1967, Box 30, Folder “Issue Papers, Campus Dissent,” Press Materials. Governor’s Papers. Ronald Reagan Library.

activists recognized the potential of a sit-in to “win converts.”<sup>229</sup> Student radicals, aware that their political cause in and of itself would attract a limited number of supporters, sought to provoke campus officials such as Kerr into waging a crackdown because “the bringing of police onto campus could generate benefits.”<sup>230</sup> This strategy, which succeeded on numerous campuses throughout the late 1960s, became known as the Berkeley Model. Essentially a small, highly dedicated group would begin a protest designed to elicit a response from the administration. While moderate students had little sympathy for radical students who were just protesting, a harsh response from the administration would lead moderates to defend student expression and political rights. Only the moderates could turn the small protests of radicals into a wider conflict.<sup>231</sup>

Political elites understood the special role of moderate students. In the spring of 1969, Robert Brown, Special Assistant to President Nixon, wrote about the causes of and potential solutions to student unrest. Brown argued that “a relatively small group of students (and non-students) across the country are trying to disrupt our Nation’s high school and college campuses. The success of the efforts of such students depends on their ability to bring with them the large majority of students who, though not basically oriented toward disruption, share with the disruptive elements many of the same attitudes and uncertainties.”<sup>232</sup> Later, when suggesting solutions, Brown contended that “if widespread student disruption and violence is to be avoided or at least minimized efforts must be made to attract the large uncommitted majority away from

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<sup>229</sup> W.J. Rorbaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 30.

<sup>230</sup> Rorbaugh, *Berkeley at War*, 31.

<sup>231</sup> *The Report of the President’s Commission on Campus Unrest* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970).

<sup>232</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 318.

the instigators and troublemakers.”<sup>233</sup> Despite receiving considerably less attention from the media and the history books, moderate students were the primary targets of both radical activists and political elites.

At a 1968 hearing before the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, both senators and witnesses considered the divisions between radicals and moderates relevant to the question of lowering the voting age. Senator Jacob K. Javits (R-NY) observed that despite the front-page news about “campus demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience . . . We all realize that only a tiny minority of college students on these campuses engaged in unlawful acts.”<sup>234</sup> Speaking to the same subcommittee, Jack McDonald, Chairman of the Young Republican National Federation, urged Members of Congress to remember that “the real voice of young America is to be heard in the homes of our young families, in the libraries and examination rooms of our colleges and universities, and in the churches and synagogues of our centers of religion.”<sup>235</sup> McDonald raised the stakes by suggesting that those working hard at their various pursuits represented the “real” American youth.

Moreover, Sen. Eugene McCarthy’s presidential primary campaign in 1968 indicated that moderates could also be attracted to active participation with the system. As the one anti-war candidate in the 1968 Democratic primary, Senator McCarthy spoke to young people’s concerns. The *New York Times* credited Senator McCarthy with persuading “great numbers of concerned youth that it is possible to make effective protest against existing American policies and practices by traditional democratic means. . . He has demonstrated to the men who wield political power in

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<sup>233</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 319.

<sup>234</sup> Senate Subcommittee, *Relating to Lowering the Voting Age*, 12.

<sup>235</sup> Senate Subcommittee, *Relating to Lowering the Voting Age*, 44.

America and to some who would like to wield it that it is still possible to close the generation gap and to counter the alienation of America's young people from the American system."<sup>236</sup> In other words, the McCarthyites provided evidence for what could happen if young people were incorporated into the political process. Asked after the campaign about his young volunteers, McCarthy readily admitted that many of them "would have been in the streets if we hadn't had the campaign."<sup>237</sup>

While the 1968 primaries started with such promise for youth engagement, by mid-October, many young people had lost their enthusiasm. The *New York Times* observed of the upcoming election that "the young who seem most to care simply do not believe in it—the election, the choices. They do not believe that Vice President Humphrey, Richard M. Nixon or George C. Wallace care back, want them, need them."<sup>238</sup> Immediately after the election, College Press editor John Zeh reported that among his colleagues "a fair estimation of the mood is alienation. . . The students care, but they didn't have much of a choice. . . If they had candidates they were all turned away or killed."<sup>239</sup> Yet, the political process had appeared to have such promise to pull young people to the traditional political modes of canvassing, phone banking, and voting and away from yelling in the streets and shutting down campus buildings.

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<sup>236</sup> Editorial, "McCarthy's Appeal to Youth," *New York Times*, May 15, 1968.

<sup>237</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 226.

<sup>238</sup> Douglas E. Kneeland, "Politics Hollow for Missouri Students," *New York Times*, October 14, 1968.

<sup>239</sup> John Kifner, "Election Leaves Youths Unhappy: Many Took Little Interest but Now Are Disturbed," *New York Times*, November 10, 1968.

## V. The Logics of Enfranchisement

In the following section I reveal the way in which Congressional, Presidential, and media construction of youth enfranchisement from 1968-1970 moved away from viewing the vote as what young people deserved because of their work in Vietnam or any other conflict to what might sway young moderates to side with the state rather than those seeking to overthrow it. Through enfranchisement, Congress sought to appeal to moderates and bridge the generation gap by demonstrating respect for young people.

I draw on the discourse of politic elites to reveal the presence of three intertwined logics justifying the extension of the franchise. First, franchise extension provided a non-provocative response to the problem of youth alienation. Congress sought a means of influencing young citizens that would not further inflame the radical camps. Suffrage would respond to but not punish youth activists. Second, elites articulated a belief that the vote would offer young people an outlet for their political activism that would make radical activities less appealing as a means of expressing their views. Finally and deeply related to the second logic, elites hoped the act of extending the vote to 18- to 20-year-olds would serve as a tool of recruitment. Elites needed their own Berkeley model that would invite young moderates to view the political establishment, rather than the anti-establishment crowd, as their home. Ultimately, then, Congress would simultaneously demonstrate the legitimacy of America's political system and increase the system's stability by giving young people a new, legal outlet for their frustrations.

The first logic, non-provocation, receives a thorough discussion in *Congress Looks at the Campus: Report of the Brock Campus Tour*. The report detailed the experiences and recommendations of a Congressional delegation that spent part of 1969 on a cross-country tour visiting college campuses to learn what was really happening with young people on the ground.

The authors of the report succinctly explained the needle that any legislative action would have to thread: “It is clear that if violence on our campuses does not end, and if the reaction to it is on the one extreme too lax, or on the extreme too harsh and indiscriminate, the vast moderate student majority may be forced into the arms of revolutionaries, and those few who seek to destroy the fabric of higher education will have succeeded.”<sup>240</sup> Congress needed an action that could appeal to moderates and pull them toward the political establishment, without appearing as a punishment for radicals. Many saw enfranchisement as the solution that fit the bill.

The second logic, voting as an outlet for the passions of youth, appears in the statements of many Members of Congress. Senator Bayh refers to the franchise as a “pressure valve” that can be used to offset the “force” of youthful political energy.<sup>241</sup> Similarly, Sen. James B. Pearson (R-KS) averred that many young people “join demonstrations simply because they feel it is the only way they can be heard. This is not to excuse the violence and complete disrespect for authority that some demonstrators employ. But the fact remains that many of the participants are involved because of their inability to find meaningful political outlets elsewhere to express their concern.”<sup>242</sup> In other words, Pearson hopes that, if provided with a political outlet that has potential to make real change, such as a vote in the political system, many young people currently engaging in demonstrations will move from the street to the voting booth. Limited political access and a lack of respect inform youth actions. Others echoed this sentiment suggesting that being blocked from the voting booth meant that young people could not be

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<sup>240</sup> “Report of the Brock Campus Tour,” 116 Cong. Rec. 6973 (1970)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1160005&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crek1379&id=1379>.

<sup>241</sup> Senate Subcommittee, *Relating to Lowering the Voting Age*, 3.

<sup>242</sup> Senate Subcommittee, *Relating to Lowering the Voting Age*, 36.

blamed for seeking “other channels for expressing their views and influencing decisions of Government . . . Guaranteeing the right to vote for citizens between 18 and 21 may well help to direct the energies and ideals of our young people into more constructive channels.”<sup>243</sup>

Besides wanting to avoid provocation and to provide a legal outlet for youth expression, many Members of Congress hoped that extending the franchise would serve as a tool of recruitment. Senator Javits suggested that even while working for candidates, young people were “outside the existing political framework.” Enfranchisement “would give us the means, sort of the famous carrot and stick concept, to channel this energy into our major political parties on all levels, national, State and local.”<sup>244</sup>

At the most basic level, Members thought this would provide a sign to young people that they were respected, valued members of the republic. Rep. Daniel E. Button (R-NY) held that lowering the voting age “would be especially timely in a day when the Nation’s young people are looking for a ‘signal’ from their elders which will express the Nation’s respect for the judgment and the responsibility of the younger people.”<sup>245</sup> Rep. Wright Patman (D-TX) suggested that votes in favor of lowering the voting age “will demonstrate to our young men and women that their voices and hopes are not going unheeded by public officials.”<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> 114 Cong. Rec. 19081 (1968)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1140015&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crei23&id=23>.

<sup>244</sup> Senate Subcommittee, *Relating to Lowering the Voting Age*, 12.

<sup>245</sup> 113 Cong. Rec. 4186 (1967)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1130003&collection=congrec&index=congrec/creh1310&id=1310>.

<sup>246</sup> 114 Cong. Rec. 22146 (1968)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1140017&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crei492&id=492>.

Other Members of Congress employed the recruitment logic in explicitly juxtaposing voting with what the radicals were offering. Indeed, during the subcommittee hearing, Rep. Ken Hechler (D-WV) specifically invoked this relationship: “Many of those young people who have been alienated, who have become frustrated and disturbed, who are stirring up trouble, are beginning to see and appreciate that change may be obtained through the existing political structure. At this crucial point, if we deny the right to vote to those young people between the ages of 18 and 20, it is entirely possible that they will join the more militant minority of their fellow students and engage in destructive activities of a dangerous nature.”<sup>247</sup> Similarly, Rep. James C. Cleveland (R-NH) emphasized the need to look beyond “the antics of a tiny minority of radical students,” and suggested that “A consequence of not lowering the voting age seems to be that young people who are interested and involved in public issues tend to become frustrated, thus providing a ready audience for the small number of radical disrupters who are always looking for a confrontation.”<sup>248</sup> Opening this avenue of participation provided a way for the establishment to recruit moderates into the political mainstream.

The report from the President’s Commission on the Causes and Presentation of Violence suggested that the “anachronistic voting age-limitation tends to alienate [youth] from systematic political process and to drive them into a search for alternative, sometimes violent means to express their frustrations over the gap between the nation’s ideals and actions. Lowering the voting age will not eliminate protest by the young. But it will provide them with a direct,

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<sup>247</sup> Senate Subcommittee, *Relating to Lowering the Voting Age*, 74.

<sup>248</sup> 116 Cong. Rec. 11931 (1970)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1160009&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crek663&id=663>.

constructive, and democratic channel for making their views felt and for giving them a responsible stake in the future of the nation.”<sup>249</sup>

When invoking these three logics, political elites emphasized that youth voting could stabilize the American political system. As Hechler pointed out, “the 18-year-old vote is needed to harness the energy of young people and direct it into useful and constructive channels, not simply for their benefit, but for the benefit of the entire Nation.”<sup>250</sup> By incorporating young people through the vote, elites hoped to strengthen the stability of the overall political system. Indeed, when President Johnson sent a message to Congress encouraging them to pass a constitutional amendment for youth voting, he noted that: “[t]he essential stability of our system is not served, the moral integrity of our cause is not strengthened, the value we place on the worth of the individual is not honored by denying . . . the right to full participation.”<sup>251</sup> Moreover, he suggested that “the stability of our Republic from the beginning has been served – well and faithfully – by the willingness of Americans to lay aside the constraints of custom and tradition and heed the appeals of reason and reality.”<sup>252</sup> In other words, the next reasonable step for America’s progression was to enfranchise young people and in so doing protect the Republic. While not directly referencing President Johnson’s message, the *New York Times* supported his

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<sup>249</sup> President’s Commission on the Causes and Presentation of Violence, “Commission Statement on Challenging Our Youth” 115 Cong. Rec. 35923 (1969).

<sup>250</sup> Senate Subcommittee, *Relating to Lowering the Voting Age*, 74.

<sup>251</sup> President Lyndon Johnson, “Voting Age – Message from the President (H.Doc. No. 334)” 114 Cong. Rec. 19232 (1969)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1140015&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crei174&id=174>.

<sup>252</sup> President Lyndon Johnson, “Voting Age – Message from the President (H.Doc. No. 334)” 114 Cong. Rec. 19232 (1969)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1140015&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crei174&id=174>.

view by contending that “[N]o society can longer remain stable if those who are disadvantaged are denied the political opportunity to ameliorate their condition.”<sup>253</sup>

As the above quotation suggests, by the middle of 1968, the *New York Times* had reversed its previous editorial position to endorse voting rights for 18-year-olds. On June 30, 1968, the editorial page featured the following claim: “There is already an over-ready disposition on the part of many of these young people to tune out of the society – to decide without any real trial that there is no hope for effecting change through the political process. This escapist trend will be less assertive if more youth have an opportunity to participate directly in the selection of public officials and the shaping of public policies.”<sup>254</sup> Two years later, in the lead-up to the floor vote on youth enfranchisement, the editorial board again endorsed enfranchisement arguing that “Contrary to our original views, we have become concerned that suffrage for this group of Americans is a matter of simple justice. To grant it would give them a sense that they have indeed a stake in their society and a political voice to protect it. To continue to treat them, instead, as children – although many of them have children of their own – can only deepen an already dangerously widespread sense of alienation.”<sup>255</sup>

### *The Mansfield Amendment*

The actual enfranchisement of 18-20-year-olds first occurred through an amendment to the Voting Rights Act of 1970. By the time this piece of legislation made it to the Senate floor in March 1970, numerous subcommittee hearings and conversations had been held in the effort to enact a constitutional amendment. Yet, as Senator Mansfield noted when introducing his

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<sup>253</sup> Andrew Hacker, “If the 18-Year-Olds Get the Vote,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1968.

<sup>254</sup> Editorial, “Harnessing the Youth Tide,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1968.

<sup>255</sup> Editorial, “Youth and Suffrage,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1970.

amendment on the Senate floor, the time had passed to worry about the method used to enfranchise 18-year-olds. Referencing Senator Randolph, he argued that “[t]he distinguished Senator from West Virginia himself has been introducing resolutions since 1942 and where are they? Still in committee. Where are they when Congress adjourns? Dead. This is a chance to put sentiment to the test, and if you believe in giving the vote to the 18-year-olds, this is the time and the way to do it. It is not only appropriate but our last clear chance in this Congress.”<sup>256</sup>

In issuing his amendment, Senator Mansfield made two shrewd political moves. First, he avers that Congress had the ability to change the voting age through federal legislation. The traditional Congressional view had been that a constitutional amendment would be required to lower the voting age, as voting remained in the purview of the state governments. Sen. Ted Kennedy’s staff had recently circulated a white paper that used the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to justify extending the franchise, claiming that state differences in voting ages violated the equal protection clause. Having watched constitutional amendments die in Congressional subcommittees and seen numerous states defeat efforts to lower the voting age, supporters were willing to pursue a new legislative strategy. It is impossible to tell if Mansfield and his colleagues legitimately believed that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment authorized extending the franchise through legislation. However, they certainly were willing to pursue the strategy. Second, he strategically attached the amendment to the Voting Rights Act. While the NAACP had traditionally supported efforts to lower the voting age, the group objected to adding it as an amendment to the renewal of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. NAACP leaders feared that tacking the youth voting amendment onto the bill could doom the renewal. Indeed, Senator Kennedy

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<sup>256</sup>116 Cong. Rec. 6944 (1970)

<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1160005&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crek1350&id=1350>.

opted not to offer the amendment, despite it being proposed by his staff, out of respect for the NAACP's concerns. Senator Mansfield offered the amendment instead. Even Senator Bayh, chair of the subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, had begun by 1970 to argue that "I think the times are so critical. . . and the need to give young people the feeling of belonging, give them a meaningful piece of the action is so great – that we must act quickly in whatever parliamentary manner may be necessary to prevent this matter from being logjammed at any step along the way."<sup>257</sup>

The debate over the amendment featured the logics of non-provocation, outlet, and recruitment. Sen. Ralph W. Yarborough (D-TX) referenced the outlet logic in noting the hypocrisy of "critiz[ing] young people for demonstrating in the streets and for not expressing their dissenting views through proper channels of dissent when we close to them the most widely accepted channel of dissent – the ballot box."<sup>258</sup> Sen. Stephen M. Young (D-OH) made the case for lowering the voting age as a "sensible counter measure" of recruitment to address the concerns about "alienated youth threatening to overthrow the establishment and drop out of

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<sup>257</sup> 116 Cong. Rec. 6961 (1970)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1160005&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crek1367&id=1367>.

<sup>258</sup> 116 Cong. Rec. 6949 (1970)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1160005&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crek1355&id=1355>.

society.”<sup>259</sup> And, Senator Frank Moss (D-UT) emphasized the potential of the vote as a means to address alienation by according “our young people the full responsibilities of citizenship.”<sup>260</sup>

Senator Bayh, long an advocate of lowering the voting age, offered a powerful statement on behalf of the Mansfield amendment:

I should like to close by suggesting that the most vital need for lowering the voting age today is the need to give young people a feeling of belonging and to bring the moral energy of their ideas and the force of their convictions into the system, to help us solve the great problems of our times. We need to let them know that this system can respond to their needs. We need to say to the far out fringe group which is appealing to their contemporaries to join in overthrowing the system, the group arguing that there is no place for them in the system, that this is not right. We must show that this system can purge itself, can do away with its inequities, and can give to the young people the right to vote and to participate in the decision making process . . . We must not raise the expectations of young people that we are going to give them a place in the system and then fail them once more.<sup>261</sup>

In these sentences, Bayh pressured his colleagues to recognize that, despite the traditional reticence to lower the voting age because of what young people might do to the system, the validity and the stability of the system now required such a move. Inviting young people into the system could prove its validity along with providing opportunities for traditional forms of engagement. He also alluded to the damage that might occur from failing to pass such legislation.

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<sup>259</sup> 116 Cong. Rec. 6952 (1970)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1160005&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crek1358&id=1358>.

<sup>260</sup> 116 Cong. Rec. 6963 (1970)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1160005&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crek1369&id=1369>.

<sup>261</sup> 116 Cong. Rec. 6963 (1970)  
<http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1160005&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crek1369&id=1369>.

The amendment and then bill passed the Senate and moved to the House. The House floor debate focused primarily on whether the Senate bill should be enacted with or without the youth voting amendment. During the House floor debates, supporters of the bill echoed the Senate's justifications for lowering the voting age. The House officially approved the Senate version of the Voting Rights Act of 1970 on June 17, 1970.

Despite failing to convince the House to remove the provision for the youth vote, President Nixon signed the bill, repeating the statements of many others that it would soon be declared unconstitutional. In covering the VRA's passage, the *New York Times* observed the paradoxical role of campus riots, noting that "With outbreaks of campus violence this spring, and the onset of adult backlash against the students, it appeared for a while that the proposal to give 18-year-olds the vote might be doomed in the House. But now it appears that the very riots that seemingly endangered the proposal may have actually strengthened the hands of those seeking its passage in the House."<sup>262</sup> Just as interesting and, perhaps, ultimately more surprising was the way in which the vote "turned two minorities into a majority."<sup>263</sup>

#### *Suffering for Suffrage or Thwarting the Radicals?*

To better understand the significance of the desire of political elites to engage moderate youth in the system in contrast to the "old enough to fight, old enough to vote" trope as a reason for passing youth enfranchisement, I compared the prevalence of language related to each rationale in the relevant floor debates in the Senate and House. I chose to code on the sentence level rather than the number of references. Coding at the sentence level allows me to capture the amount of time devoted to each topic during the floor debates. A counting of references would

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<sup>262</sup> Marjorie Hunter, "G.O.P. Liberals in House Press Bill on Voting for 18-Year-Olds" *New York Times*, June 14, 1970.

<sup>263</sup> "History in an Hour," *Time Magazine*, June 29, 1970.

fail to reflect when a Congressperson's floor speech elaborates the reasoning behind their claims. I also count the individual members of Congress whose floor speeches include the two topics. This provides a check on my sentence-level coding as it will show if a high number of sentences reflects just a few individuals spending an extended amount of time covering a topic.

Categories coded include (1) "suffering for suffrage" inclusive of all references to the draft and Vietnam and (2) "moderate youth" used when those young people considered good, serious, sincere, etc. are juxtaposed against radical, activist, or criminal youth, along with encouragement to engage with the system as opposed to protest activities and riots. When coding the various floor speeches, I found 397 sentences referencing moderates and 133 sentences referencing Vietnam. In other words, despite the prevalence of the suffering for suffrage in popular understanding of and support for the youth vote, those speaking within the body that voted on the measure spend almost 300 percent more time discussing the potential of enfranchisement to incorporate young moderates into the political process and draw them away from more problematic activities.

During these days of debate in both the Senate and the House, fifty-five Members of Congress made floor speeches that addressed the subject of youth voting. Thirty-one of the Members made floor speeches that included references to suffering for suffrage and the need to bring youth moderates into the political system. In line with the sentence counts, a reference to suffering for suffrage frequently consisted of only a line or two, but the speakers dedicated much more time to explaining the importance of providing an opportunity for moderate youth to participate in the established political system. Indeed, nineteen Members offered speeches that invoked moderates but did not reference suffering for suffrage, while only five members followed the opposite pattern.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In the national memory, Vietnam and the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment became linked because they happened at the same time. Yet, as I show throughout this chapter, the causal connection of these events has been exaggerated. Instead, supporters of the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment and its preceding legislation gave greater attention to the need to incorporate moderate youth into America's political project. In making this claim, I unsettle the traditional understanding of the role of moderate young people in the political activism of the 1960s. The histories of this era are numerous partly because many activists in the youth movement went on to successful careers in politics and academia. As a result, however, the research and publications on the 1960s have overly emphasized the roles of those most active. An examination of the congressional debates along with statements from other political actors reveals that while the majority of discourse was directed at young radicals, the political response was targeted at young moderates. Incorporating young people into the traditional political activity of voting allowed for an essentially conservative response to a progressive movement.

## **Chapter 5: To Incorporate or Contain? Questioning the Contemporary Approach to Youth**

The previous chapters draw attention to a broader lesson about American citizenship. Elites explicitly and intentionally design programs to endow particular subsets of marginalized youth with the skills and values deemed necessary for citizenship. The rhetoric and decision-making of elites in moments of sociopolitical upheaval reveals that far from viewing America's capitalist and democratic systems as unassailable, they recognize the status quo as fragile and vulnerable. If each subsequent generation does not become anchored to the American state and the American way of life, the project may well collapse.

Over the course of the twentieth century, elites responded to this fear by actively seeking to engender attachments between marginalized youth and the state. During the Progressive Era, this meant fighting to protect young people from early labor that could ruin their physical, mental, and moral abilities. Child labor and compulsory education laws created a new model for the normative childhood. In the wake of the Great Depression, this meant demonstrating to young people that the American Dream still held promise for those willing to stay the course. The CCC and NYA pulled young people out of hobo jungles and placed them back into communities while also ensuring they learned the value of hard work and community spirit. Through the 1970 Voting Rights Act, Congress extended an opportunity for meaningful political participation to young people who might have been willing to turn their backs on representative democracy. In each of these moments, elites chose to invest the material and political resources necessary to build positive relationships between marginalized youth and the state. These investments paid innumerable social, political, and economic dividends.

Modern elites, however, have chosen to make a different type of investment in American youth. In this concluding chapter, I argue that at the close of the twentieth century elites have stopped pursuing policies that incorporate young people by engendering positive, productive relationships between once marginalized youth and the state. Instead, elites pursue a strategy of containment. The CCC camp has been replaced with the school-to-prison pipeline. I begin by reviewing the newest disruption—the supposed rise in juvenile crime rates—and the subsequent responses of zero tolerance laws and school resource officers. I suggest that future research should consider the impact of integration and the loss of America’s manufacturing economy on modern youth policies.

The elite construction and treatment of youth took a new turn as juvenile crime rates rose sharply in the mid-1980s. In the 1990s, various media outlets ran stories proclaiming the America was facing a new breed of juvenile delinquents – so-called super-predators – who would wreak havoc on the country. The *New York Times* ran numerous stories on ‘wildings’ which referred to young people, predominately young people of color, traveling in packs and without provocation or clear intent attacking individuals in parks, subways, and on the streets of New York City. Even after the crime wave failed to materialize and juvenile crime rates decreased, the image of these youth “continued to hold sway over the popular and political imagination.”<sup>264</sup> Federal and state governments adopted new policies to address this threat including zero tolerance laws, the heightened presence of police and armed forces within public schools, lowering the age at which juveniles can be tried as adults, and the creation of blended sentencing structures.

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<sup>264</sup> Gary L. Smith, “Remorseless Young Predators’: The Bottom Line of ‘Caging Children’” In Ronald Strickland, ed., *Growing Up Postmodern: Neoliberalism and the War on the Young* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 81.

Academic literature on these policies consistently presumes that these policies result from a new fear of young people.<sup>265</sup> Yet, as I have shown, elites throughout the twentieth century repeatedly viewed alienated young people as a threat to the state. From the Progressive Era through the 1970s their responses sought to transform marginalized young people into active members of the American citizenry. Modern youth policies seek a different outcome. In this concluding chapter I briefly review two modern policies and their impact on young people. I suggest that, while scholars are right to focus on these new policies, by failing to consider the history of youth-focused policy, they remain unable to fully comprehend the significant changes in the treatment of marginalized youth. I end by arguing that scholarship on late twentieth-century education and juvenile justice policies needs to focus not on the fear of youth – which has existed throughout the twentieth century—but on the context in which that fear exists. I suggest as economic incorporation became more difficult and racial integration began in earnest, elites were no longer able to incorporate white marginal youth while ignoring marginal youth of color. In response, they turned to policies that control rather than incorporate marginalized youth.

In the last twenty years, scholars in the fields of public law, sociology, and education have written extensively about changes within public education and particularly the linkage of school systems, the criminal justice system, and the armed forces. While schools have always exerted control over students in terms of both their behavior and their intellectual development,

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<sup>265</sup> Strickland, *Growing Up Postmodern*; William Ayers, Bernadine Dohrn, and Rick Ayers, *Zero Tolerance: Resisting the Drive for Punishment in Our Schools* (New York: The New Press, 2001); Christopher G. Robbins, *Expelling Hope: The Assault on Youth and the Militarization of Schooling* (New York: SUNY Press, 2008); Joel Westheimer, ed. *Pledging Allegiance: The Politics of Patriotism in American Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007); Kenneth J. Saltman and David A. Gabbard, *Education as Enforcement: The Militarization and Corporation of Schools* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Sofia Bahena et al., Ed, Sofia Bahena, North Cooc, Rachel Currie-Rubin, Paul Kuttner, Monica Ng, *Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review, 2012).

the advent of zero tolerance laws and the increased presence of school resource officers represent significant changes in both the type and extent of control.

Perhaps the most notable and far-reaching of these new policies is zero tolerance (ZT). First passed as part of the Gun Free School Zones Act in 1994 and extended through a variety of state and local statutes, ZT policies mandate that any student who brings a weapon onto school grounds is immediately expelled and referred to the police.<sup>266</sup> Some states expanded the law beyond weapons to include any student behavior considered threatening (leaving what constitutes a threat to the perspective of any given school employee) as well as tobacco and alcohol related incidents.<sup>267</sup> In *Expelling Hope: The Assault on Youth and the Militarization of Schooling* Christopher G. Robbins details how ZT has become a dominant “pedagogical practice that shapes the way students, teachers, and administrators can intervene in school life and produces visions of future social relations.”<sup>268</sup> Robbins as well as other scholars fear that one of the main lessons ZT teaches students of color is that their race increases the likelihood they are targeted for punishment.<sup>269</sup>

Second, many schools now have police officers, often known as school resource officers (SROs), on premises throughout the school day. The presence of these SROs combined with laws to increase information sharing among schools, law enforcement, and social service agencies, significantly change students’ experience of schools. As a result, behavior such as back

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<sup>266</sup> Robert Schwartz and Len Rieser, “Zero Tolerance as Mandatory Sentencing,” in *Zero Tolerance: Resisting the Drive for Punishment in Our Schools; A Handbook*, eds. William Ayers, Bernadine Dohrn, and Rick Ayers (New York: The New Press), 132.

<sup>267</sup> Robbins. *Expelling Hope*, 10.

<sup>268</sup> Robbins, *Expelling Hope*, 2.

<sup>269</sup> Ayers, et al., *Zero Tolerance*; Saltman and Gabbard, *Education as Enforcement*

talking a school official that would previously have been addressed within the four walls of the schools becomes a juvenile record for disorderly conduct when done to an SRO.<sup>270</sup> Along with elevating misbehavior in school to criminal behavior, the presence of SROs makes searches of student property incredibly easy. “If a school police officer directs, participates, or acquiesces in the search, based on reasonable suspicions, rather than probable cause, a police officer is not required to justify the search, if employed by the district School Board.”<sup>271</sup> In other words, by employing SROs, school districts significantly decrease the privacy rights of students and increase the reach of the state within their lives.

Together, ZT and SRO significantly increase the likelihood that young people are pushed out of schools and into the criminal justice system and severely limit their future prospects. These policies create of a school-to-prison pipeline that disproportionately affects youth of color who are more likely to have disruptive behavior interpreted as dangerous and live in districts with SROs.<sup>272</sup> Once captured by the criminal justice system, young people face significantly diminished job and housing prospects making it increasingly unlikely they will ever be fully incorporated members of the American state. This represents a significant break from previous approaches to marginal youth which focused on building the relationship between young people and the state. Much research focuses on fear of youth, particularly youth of color, as the source of these types of policies. But, both fear of youth and communities of color have been in place

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<sup>270</sup> Christopher G. Robbins, “Tased and Confused: From Social Exclusion to Shock in the War on Youth” in *Education as Enforcement: The Militarization and Corporation of Schools*, eds. Kenneth J. Saltman and David A. Gabbard (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>271</sup> Bough 1999 quoted in Frank Brown, Charles J. Russo, and Richard C. Hunter, “The Law and Juvenile Justice for People of Color in Elementary and Secondary Schools” in *Journal of Negro Education* 71 (Summer 2002), 138.

<sup>272</sup> Robbins, *Expelling Hope*, 10.

for an extended period. Alone, a fear of youth of color cannot explain the shift to these punitive policies focused on control. Given the broader context of youth policies in the twentieth century, I argue that future research should consider the impact of two specific conditions for the change in youth policies: the rise of the service economy and the post-Civil Rights Movement integration.

During the Progressive Era as well as the New Deal, political elites were able to target their policies for incorporation to include predominantly white youth. And, only a high school education was required for economic success. By the 1980s the social, political, and economic conditions had changed. Schools were (at least temporarily) integrated, colorblind policies were required, and economic success increasingly required a college degree. Suddenly the descendants of the youth of color that had received limited support from the New Deal and the G.I. Bill could not be ignored when crafting youth policy. But, the threatened defection of young people of color from the state through criminality in the 1980s and 1990s did not fill elites with the same type of fear as the threatened defection of young white males during the 1930s. Thus, rather than developing a policy with the scope of the CCC, NYA, or New Deal to support these youth, political elites opted to protect the rest of the state and economy from these young people by limiting their access to the state's resources. The individual discretion built into both ZT and SRO laws, then, represent a way for elites to control marginalized youth of color without explicitly creating laws that target young of color.

Treating youth as a site of political analysis reveals when, how, and why political elites design and implement policies that redirect young people into traditional means of political and economic activity. Policies ranging from restrictions on child labor (1900s-1920s), the Civilian Conservation Corps (1934) and National Youth Administration (1935) during the New Deal, the G.I. Bill (1944), and youth voting through the 1970 Voting Rights Act (1970) and the Twenty-

Sixth Amendment (1972) reflected fears of youth apathy, radicalism, and criminality and the desire to craft a malleable, disciplined workforce. Ultimately, the repeated, dedicated efforts of elites to ensure marginalized young people become incorporated members of the state over the course of the twentieth century provide a new understanding of how the government actively works to create citizens while also offering a vantage point from which to consider modern youth policies.

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