THE ENDS OF RESISTANCE

MAKING AND UNMAKING DEMOCRACY

Alix Olson and Alex Zamalin

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THE ENDS OF RESISTANCE

Chapter One

THE END OF RESISTANCE

REFORMATION OVER TRANSFORMATION

MANY U.S. PROGRESSIVES were heartened when, shortly after Donald Trump's election in 2016, a new hashtag developed on Twitter: #resist. This simple injunction was printed on black bumper stickers in white block lettering, signaling a direct confrontation with power. Soon the slogan appeared on suburban yard signs on trimmed green lawns across America, often propped next to those proclaiming "Hate Has No Home Here" (below a heart in the colors of the American flag) or "Not My President" (and in smaller letters "Love. Trumps. Hate"). If these lawn signs stressed the power of love as resistance, others embraced liberal inclusion, diversity, and multiculturalism, declaring in English—but also in Spanish and Arabic—"No Matter Where You're From, We're Glad You Are Our Neighbor."

These public displays of resistance against Trump were just the tip of the iceberg. The 2017 Women's March on Washington,

the day after Trump's inauguration, was prompted by feminist umbrage at Trump's egregious behavior toward women, as encapsulated by his infamous brag that "when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab 'em by the pussy." For many of the five hundred thousand people who attended the D.C. Women's March, satellite marches across major U.S. cities and eighty-four countries around the world (five million people in total), a profound sense of dread filled the air. After all, protesters mused grimly, what would happen to individual rights, communities, and the planet with an authoritarian racist xenophobe, blatant misogynist, and climate denier as U.S. president? At the same time, these gatherings facilitated optimism that resistance to Trump would be fierce, that Americans would be vigilant in speaking truth to power and would rally the moral strength to defend democracy against a path of tyranny. That mass action, the largest in U.S. history, swiftly ignited an expansive countermovement to the Trump regime that formalized as "the Resistance." This umbrella term included pro-choice liberal feminists, race-conscious progressives, LGBTQIA activists, citizens taking a stand against climate change, immigration rights advocates, those invested in economic equality, and more.

One of the headliner speakers at the Women's March, the acclaimed documentarian Michael Moore, defiantly ripped up a copy of the *Washington Post* whose front-page headline read "Trump Takes Power," and vowed to "end the Trump carnage."[1] A month later, Moore launched "The Resistance Calendar," which allowed anyone to post what he called "Anti-Trump, pro-democracy" events in the United States. Its stated mission was

to be a "24/7 clearinghouse of the already MASSIVE resistance to Trump, to the Republican Congress, and, yes, to many of the spineless Democratic politicians out there. . . . Our goal is his removal from office—and the defeat of any politician who isn't with us. WE ARE THE MAJORITY."[2] Many of these resisters would go on to support the #MeToo movement, a viral campaign to raise public awareness of sexual violence against women; occupy airports to contest Trump's racist immigration policies, like the Muslim ban; and fight against his attempts to dismantle Barack Obama's signature health care policy (the Affordable Care Act of 2010).

By 2018, headline articles in *Time* magazine would describe "the Resistance" as a "participatory democracy," where "hundreds of thousands of volunteers, allied with thousands of autonomous groups, are doing the grunt work of propelling their neighbors to the polls, using tactics tailored to their communities."[3] The Resistance was credited with helping Democrats take back the House of Representatives in November 2018 and with the massive Black Lives Matter rally turnouts in the summer of 2020, when the murder of George Floyd sparked global protest against police brutality and structural racism. When Democrat Joe Biden was elected as president in fall 2020, many commentators rejoiced at how four years of steady opposition to Trump had led to his downfall and the illiberal menace he represented for U.S. democracy—and the world more broadly. As a headline in *The Atlantic* affirmed, "Joe Biden Is the Candidate of the Resistance. A suburban revolt against Trump helped Democrats win the House in 2018."[4]

No doubt, resistance is a crucial concept for any mode of liberatory, revolutionary, or transformative politics. A majority for "the 99%," a concept itself popularized by the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement, cannot be built without contesting hierarchical forms of authority and unjust (and interlocking) systems of power. Bodies in alliance—congregating and laying claim to space as public space; in motion on the streets; announcing discontent, self-determination, and a commitment to struggle—affirm temporary expressions of the popular will.[5] They can also build more sustained movements that demand vital concessions from political elites. Saying no to disenfranchisement, effacement, and oppression is a way of practicing freedom in the present and inaugurating a horizon of new possibilities. This is why democracy, and the popular rule on which it is based, has long been associated with unruly rebellion, unannounced uprisings, and (as a corollary) elite condemnation of "the mob," "anarchy," and "lawlessness." Democracy is an empty notion without these continuous interruptions and pivotal eruptions as collectives arrive on the stage of history to recognize their rage, grievances, and refusals. Think of the 1886 May Day general railroad strike, which saw 350,000 workers across Chicago, New York, Detroit, and Cincinnati demand an eight-hour workday; the U.S. Communist Party organizing the Unemployed Councils and rent strikes in the 1930s during the Great Depression, when a multiracial coalition of workers refused to pay exorbitant rents to price-gouging landlords, opposed evictions, and agitated for cash relief payments for the unemployed; the Marxist Black Panthers storming the California legislature in 1967 to decry poverty and demand an end to anti-Black police

violence; or the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion, during which the inchoate LGBTQ "community" poured onto New York City's Christopher Street, risking their lives to resist the state's coercive hold on gender/sexuality and catalyzing a radical gay liberation movement.

In these examples, resistance is a transformative praxis because the co-organization of capitalism, so-called representative democracy, and state violence are fundamentally challenged. Those who have been subjugated rise up to identify (often interrelated) injustices, take aim at its underlying causes, contest existing power relations, and insist on remaking the world in their image—or at least on making the subversive claim that "another world is possible." So how did we get to this present moment in which #theresistance is associated with pithy lawn signs in the suburbs; social media profile photos adorned in "I Stand With (fill-in-the-blank)" frames; tepid "get out the vote" campaigns; and champagne toasts in the street celebrating the feat of ushering moderate Democratic politicians into office? As an *NBC News* article put it, "Almost everyone involved in the 'Resistance,' from scrappy new startups to venerable stalwarts like the American Civil Liberties Union, are turning their focus to the midterms, in which Democrats are trying to seize control of Congress from Republicans."[6] Even more striking are the ways resistance has become associated with a patriotic spirit of bipartisanship that would have filled Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush with glee. Conservative groups like the Lincoln Project—with its demands to defeat the "scourge of Trumpism" by recommitting to "order, civility and decency," American exceptionalism, and the Founding Fathers

themselves—have taken shape as what the *New York Times* called "the other resistance: the republican one" or what *Politico* coined "the belle of the resistance ball."[7]

Our arrival at this disconcerting moment, we contend, is not exclusively because widespread loathing of (the antihero archetype that is) Donald Trump managed to unite a loose coalition of oppositional forces against his fascist agenda. While it is patently true that when neofascism looms, any battle against it will resemble resistance, we argue that what we call the current landscape of *restorative resistance* is part of a longer and dangerous political history.

As Wendy Brown has established, insofar as a politics of resistance is animated by a desire to be free from power, it may produce a "tendency to reproach power rather than aspire to it, and to disdain freedom rather than practice it."[8] Our concern, then, is not with the rage directed toward Trump (as a legitimate object) per se but with what we term the restorative posture underpinning this resistance, which persists in a post-Trump era.

Our analysis takes as its point of departure the rebellious spirit of the late 1960s, a moment infused by expanding social movements actively promoting (and cross-fertilizing) visions of a more just world: vibrant antiwar mobilizations confronting U.S. imperialism; feminist and gay liberation activists challenging everyday power relations; socialism enlivened by Students for a Democratic Society, and direct democracy by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; civil rights and Black Power insurgencies countering white supremacist capitalism.

Beginning in the 1970s, neoliberal ideologues—or what Lisa Duggan calls "pro-business activists"[9]—hell-bent on opposing the downward distribution of the world's resources, waged a wide-ranging attack on stirring revolutionary possibilities. They systematically dismantled the (limited) U.S. welfare state, privatizing and deregulating everything in sight, and implemented policies that entrenched economic inequality. Collective labor organizing was crushed by bipartisan legislation and abetted by sympathetic courts. The hegemony of political centrism depressed and disciplined youthful radical activism. Public space became roundly surveilled in the name of national security and law and order. Defunded social institutions of democratic life like public schools and community centers were supplanted by massive prisons and militarized police forces.

We suggest that one of the underexamined strategies of this political, economic, and cultural project that worked to reconstruct "the everyday life of capitalism" was the active reimagining of resistance.[10] If we are to imagine and work toward a different political order, we must attend to how the political and discursive life of democracy—explicitly shaped by nearly five decades of neoliberal rule—has delimited the conditions of possibility for deploying resistance. Equally, we must apprehend the ways in which "anti-restorative," unruly, or otherwise transformative resistances have been annexed, ridiculed, marginalized, or unequivocally criminalized.

Clearly, political concepts do not emerge in a vacuum. How resistance is understood, articulated, and circulated in the popular imagination is fundamentally tethered to knowledges that

are produced and organized by political, economic, and intellectual elites and corporate media. These discourses, policies, and logics circumscribe the ways we imagine belonging—to one another, to a community, and to the world—as well as what it means to be free. If we want to make sense of how power is exercised and how power relations become sustained or fundamentally reshaped, we need to follow resistance as an object of inquiry.

This book engages in a critical analysis of the present by telling a particular story about the political life of "resistance." We undertake this problematization because, as we demonstrate, what is said and done in the name of resistance in this moment has high political stakes. Neither resistance nor democracy are ahistorical abstractions, and we exist at a juncture when the futures of both are at stake. The optimism that we are living through a golden age of resistance in the United States is misplaced, particularly as dominant formulations of resistance are emptied of an indispensable critique of neoliberal capitalist values and experimental visions of another kind of world. The vibrant energy that animates insurgent struggle is also what elites unfailingly aim to capture and mold to fit their ruthless, for-profit agendas. Reactionary and reformist forces are doing this work on a daily basis. Accordingly, rather than rejoice at the modes of resistance we have seen taking shape during and since the Trump years, or raise a champagne toast to any semblance of a "return to normal," this book raises an alarm about the end(s) of resistance and what it relays about the future of our world.

RESISTANCE INSTITUTIONALIZED: MATURITY, CIVILITY, AND RESTORATION

The structure of feeling that rose up around resistance during the Trump presidency was about "saying no" to his odious brand of sovereign power rather than a critical engagement with power relations as a transformative project. Four years of agitated and even gleeful clamors for Trump's impeachment reflected a deep public desire for democratic institutions *to be* the resistance: the cruelly optimistic fantasy that formalized political norms, procedures, and representatives can do the work of resisting in our place. Elites were more than prepared to play this role, eager to usher political grievances safely into the charmed circle of establishment life. After all, neither crushing (public/ized) social movements or allowing radical critiques to percolate is a sound political strategy for preserving legitimacy. Instead, as Chris Hedges puts it, democratic elites have long functioned as a "safety valve" for the status quo, addressing the glaring excesses of oligarchic rule (exposed by social justice movements) without rebuking its basic mechanisms.[11] Once resistance is institutionalized and rendered compatible with existing power relations, its transformative impulse is dulled and the center further legitimized and duly restored.

This institutional enshrinement of resistance is captured by the remarkable photograph of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer kneeling side by side and draped in kende cloth in the wake of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. The press conference was

announced as an opportunity for Democrats to reveal police reform legislation that they would "fight like hell" to pass. At a deeper level, however, it was a moment of *opportunism* as Democrats worked to undermine Black Lives Matter's grassroots viability while coopting a tepid version of its vocabulary—through the promise of reform. In Pelosi's words, "Today this movement of national anguish is being transformed into a movement of national action as Americans from across the country peacefully protest to demand an end to injustice. . . . The martyrdom of George Floyd has made a change in the world."

As resistance is taken up as "constructive critique" of the status quo, the underlying suggestion is that struggles against exploitation and injustice can be achieved within a more diverse, inclusive, and unified neoliberal democracy. Given this recuperation, it is unsurprising that California music producer Robert Ray Barnes would set up the Black Lives Matter Foundation (which collected $4 million in donations in 2020) directed toward bringing together cops and local residents for coffee shop meetings and community dinners.[12] This profound revisioning of a radical agenda, one aimed at exposing and dismantling racial capitalism, is also what eased its ready pairing with market logics. #BLM's early and unabashed calls for a massive redistribution of wealth and resources were quickly supplanted by an antidiscrimination discourse nested in a politics of racial representation and corporate-sponsored calls for greater upward mobility for the Black professional and managerial class. To be an antiracist ally translated into initiatives like "Buy Black" (in support of Black-owned businesses), celebrating Black

mainstream entertainment, and clamoring for racial diversity among political elites.

It was also during the era of the Resistance that the original Black feminist impulse of #MeToo—commenced by civil rights activist Tarana Burke in 2006 to combat intersectional violence and domination—was reworked as the mandate to #BelieveWomen: an acknowledgment of (primarily white) women's (virtuous) standpoints and rectification of individual men's sexist attitudes and behaviors. Rather than a critical analysis of structural power that linked capitalist economic and misogynist predation and how this interplay is racialized, #MeToo was taken up as a mass disclosure—a publicizing of private, if collectively experienced, trauma. Predictably, the corporate media seized the chance to spectacularize this outrage at "toxic masculinity," as well as the firing and criminal prosecution of men from high-profile sectors. *Time* magazine celebrated #MeToo by naming "The Silence Breakers" as its Person of the Year,[13] planting Taylor Swift and Ashley Judd on its cover (Burke was notably absent), while the *New York Times* jubilantly announced that the movement had "brought down 201 powerful men."[14] The punishment of a few toxic apples was heralded as resistance to patriarchy, while the carceral technologies of the white supremacist state were restored as inherent to the practice of resistance itself.[15]

We might also consider how the LGBTQIA+ resistance formation, under the Trump regime, became characterized by a push to turn transgender individuals into the new poster children of the U.S. military. After Trump's executive order banning transgender service members from serving in the U.S.

military, "Rise up and Resist!" rallies rose up around the United States. These protests featured posters with phrases like "I Stand with Trans Troops," "Resist a Gender Fascist America!" and "Heroes Come in All Genders." Importantly, while this effort was led by the advocacy group the Palm Center, it was funded by the world's first out transgender billionaire philanthropist, retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Jennifer Pritzker, a top Republican donor and Trump supporter.[16] This move reveals the material conditions of democratic resistance under neoliberalism—in which private donors increasingly shape political advocacy agendas. As a result, trans resistance becomes understood as a moral fight for visibility and inclusion within a (deadly) institution that defines "responsible" democratic citizenship, and queer politics, more broadly, becomes aligned with an increasingly militarized social order. Sarah Kate Ellis, president and CEO of GLAAD, the world's largest LGBTQ media-advocacy organization, offered an enthusiastic assessment of this strategy: "Colonel Pritzker's voice has been very critical to the debate about transgender military service, not just because she is a veteran who understands what it means to prioritize military readiness, unit cohesion, recruitment, and retention, but also because she reminds us that this is not—and never should be—a partisan political issue. It's simply doing the right thing."[17]

As Dean Spade argues, such resounding endorsement of so-called pragmatic resistance (as just another form of struggle for equality and freedom) is "not actually pragmatic at all, since it strengthens the very systems of harm we need to tear down and further divides us from each other along lines of race,

indigeneity, gender, class, disability, and immigration status." At the same time, these affirmations eclipse and undermine grassroots trans-liberatory, anticolonial, and anti-militarization agendas that threaten the interests of "billionaires of any gender."[18] In the post-Trump era, arguments for lifting the transgender service ban remained rooted in neoliberal democratic logics of individual merit, choice, and patriotic responsibility, as well as bolstering military efficiency, enhancement of national security, and the restoration of an equal opportunity America: "They can shoot as straight as anybody else can shoot," Biden confirmed, and an "inclusive force is a more effective force."

This rebranding of the U.S. military as an evidential site of democratic progress and liberation exemplifies the political elite strategy of folding resistance into the restoration of institutions facing legitimacy crises. As racial and economic justice-centered movements gain ground in exposing the fundamental violence of the state, advocacy for or highlighting the achievement of "inclusion" for marginalized groups escalates. Recently, the Central Intelligence Agency (an organization that has thrived on silencing opposition and a central pillar of U.S. imperialism) rolled out a dozen "Humans of CIA" videos—in an effort to recruit the communities they have worked to decimate. In one, a thirty-six-year-old CIA employee explains that she is a Latinx mother, daughter of immigrants, and cisgender millennial with generalized anxiety disorder. "I am intersectional," she beams proudly as she strolls the CIA halls, "but my existence is not a box-checking exercise." Even the T-shirt under her jacket bears a feminist raised-fist resistance symbol. "I used to struggle with impostor syndrome," she continues with a spoken-word lilt, "but

at thirty-six, I refuse to internalize misguided patriarchal ideas of what a woman can or should be. I am tired of feeling like I'm supposed to apologize for the space I occupy. . . . I am a walking declaration, a woman whose inflection does not rise at the end of her sentences."[19] In another video, a gay, second-generation Asian American man asserts that the CIA has made "a lot of progress toward living out our American values," having warmly embraced his husband as part of the CIA family. "We are all Americans," he concludes. "We are all CIA officers, and we all serve the same mission."[20]

Not only does restorative resistance shore up institutions of the state; as of late, it has become a rallying cry for the struggle against impending ecological catastrophe. Consider, for instance, the 2017 inaugural "March for Science," during which protesters congregated across sixty cities to resist Trump's assault on the reality of climate change. Joined under the slogan "Unite Behind the Science," individual posters declared "Science not Silence," "Fight for Facts," "Stand Up for Science," and "Science: Speaking Truth to Power," while chants like "What do we want? Science! When do we want it? After peer review!" filled the air. These ostensibly neutral slogans claimed unequivocal deference to scientific authority as an oppositional politics, while emphasizing march organizers' key contention that the march was fully nonpartisan. "Science is about getting to the truth," co-organizer Carrie Weinberg said. "It doesn't matter which side of the aisle someone is on, or what they're focused on. All that matters is whether or not they "believe in science." The chief executive officer of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Rush Holt Jr., explained, "It's not a march pro or con

GMOs or pro or con nuclear power. It's about the value of science and the power of evidence."[21]

But defending the capital-T truth of science is not one that can or does provide any political account of power: in whose hands scientific evidence is held, how it is wielded, or which projects it serves (typically, those of the military and transnational corporations). This call is particularly disturbing given the vicious history (and ongoing resonances) of Western scientific racism's supportive role in enslavement, exploitation, eugenics, and colonialism—on the basis of the "evidence" of human hierarchical inferiority. And indeed there are no collective actions capable of disrupting climate devastation that do not entail resisting the neoliberal project responsible for that devastation. Instead, the restorative demand to "Make America Believe in Science Again" touts the false magic of science and technology—as though these are objective, sound, and even progress-oriented forces that can save us from ourselves.

Indeed, this mode of anti-Trump resistance in defense of "Truth" surged throughout Trump's relentless bashing of mainstream media as liberal purveyors of "fake news" and the accompanying dip among Republicans in trusting these news sources. In response, corporate media outlets like the *New York Times*, MSNBC, and CNN, long the object of left and progressive scrutiny, were suddenly defended and resurrected as "real" news, responsible journalism, and impartial sources of "non-alternative" facts.[22] The *Times* ran a new television advertising campaign with the tagline "The truth is hard to find. The truth is hard to know. The truth is more important now than ever." And, tellingly, CNN's CEO (recently acquired by Warner

Discovery under the world's third-largest media conglomerate, AT&T) began enlisting Republican leaders to appear on its broadcasts in service of restoring a "civilized society."

If the resistance formation under the Trump regime took shape as "a return to normal" (of civility, decency, and equality), the Biden administration has catalyzed this formation to restore (attachments to) the social and political order. This push is encapsulated by Biden's insistence on "Redeeming the Soul of the Nation" (carrying eerie resonances with Trump's restorative project) by "Building Back" an even greater neoliberal democracy. The heroic story about resistance over the past four years has already taken shape as a tale of triumph—a feel-good narrative of post-Trump deliverance, in which power was righteously seized back in the name of restoring unity and peace. As Biden put it, "You got voters registered. You got voters to the polls. The rule of law held. Democracy prevailed. We overcame." This is a story in which liberal democracy prevailed through opposing the garish excesses of healthy and functional institutional norms; indecent, rage-filled, bewildering tweet conduct, operating outside of the liberal charmed circle, signifies this aberration. Through this account, democracy becomes naturalized as a procedural object, and resistance is central to the restorative health and preservation of its time-honored practices: "We, the people" resisted Trump's (and his cronies') unorthodox disturbances and came out more resilient in the march toward a more multiracial, multigender capitalist democracy, one signified with a flourish by its first woman vice president of color. Resistance thus entails fending off the continued assault—from the radical right and the radical left alike—of

those who would block this arc of history in its naturalized bend toward justice.

The prospects for regaining the transformative impulse of resistance during the Biden presidency are grim. In the wake of the 2020 campaign, the Democratic Party has clearly telegraphed what their governing platform will consist of: national reconciliation, restoring faith in elected officials, and recalibrating expectations about systematic transformation. Biden's acceptance speech outlined as his mission to "rebuild the backbone of the middle class" while paying homage to all those who resisted Trumpism: "Democrats, Republicans and independents. Progressives, moderates and conservatives. Young and old. Urban, suburban and rural. Gay, straight, transgender. White. Latino. Asian. Native American." But, Biden cautioned, it is now time to "lower the temperature" of that furious resistance and to promote healing among people with wholly different political visions. The "mandate" of the people, he intoned, is to model "cooperation" and to widen opportunity in slow and steady ways.[23] As a result, transformative resistance is targeted as uncivil, while leftist critiques of the Biden administration are cast as disruptive to unity and treated as whiny, impatient, and childlike demands.

Central to this return to the normal—of everyday life under oligarchic rule—is restoring attachment to unquestioned respect for sacred democratic institutions and the rule of law (and order). It is through this quasi-religious rhetoric surrounding procedural democracy that discourses surrounding resistance become steeped in moralistic language about good and bad, mature and immature, and civil and uncivil strategies for

expressing discontent. This reuptake of a Manichean narrative is clear in ubiquitous critiques of resisters from Black Lives Matter rallies and recent mobilizations against Atlanta, Georgia's "Cop City" to the pro-Trump "Stop the Steal" attack on the U.S. Capitol Building. Across these disparate sites of resistance, political elites and the corporate media deploy damning descriptions of anarchists, mobs, rioters, and domestic terrorists, and shore up legitimate dissent as something to be pursued through proper channels and elected officials. As Atlanta police chief Darin Schierbaum characterized the "Stop Cop City" resistance, a broad coalition of racial and environmental justice activists protesting the construction of the nation's largest militarized police training center (on hundreds of acres of protected forestland), "This is not a protest, this is criminal activity."[24] Likewise, Georgia governor Brian Kemp condemned the "Cop City" resisters as "violent activists," asserting that they "chose destruction and vandalism over legitimate protest, yet again demonstrating the radical intent behind their actions."[25]

The commendation of restorative resistance also relies on the cultivation of decent democratic citizens invested in cultivating their individual ethos, acting with moral integrity in order to be on the "right side of history." Whether calling people out (or "in") in a principled way, purchasing fair trade coffee and organic apples, or signing and forwarding petitions, such practices position people self-righteously in their own resistance bubble: to resist is to register a personal choice and publicize a well-formed conscience. In this way, individual expressions of morality are treated as the ultimate political act and moral awakening as an end in itself. One can regularly post on social media decrying

migrant children being separated from their families at the U.S.-Mexico border rather than campaigning for democratic socialist candidates who want to abolish exploitative, racist immigration policies. One can shop on Amazon for "Nevertheless, She Persisted" T-shirts, or give a tax-deductible donation to the Red Cross to address childhood hunger in lieu of discomforting boycotts, inconvenient protests, and tedious horizontal movement making. If this is the meaning of resistance, we never have to leave our computer screens (much less our homes) while feeling smug and effective.

Even when restorative modes of resistance do take discursive aim at systems, structures, or institutions, they tend to champion reform efforts. The uttering of radical concepts—intended to inspire critical engagement with a system of unfettered capitalist elite rule—are folded into the digestible grammar of policy proposals and technocratic fixes that strengthen the neoliberal democratic infrastructure itself. The notion of white supremacy, for instance, which might elicit a critical analysis of racialized capitalist domination, now signifies a problem to be solved through endless diversity training initiatives. In one of his first executive orders, Biden triumphantly reversed a Trump administration policy that restricted federal government and its contractors (Fortune 500 companies, nonprofits, and educational institutions) from participating in such programs. One lawyer lauded the decision, asserting that the Biden administration "has reaffirmed its commitment to undertake an honest and long overdue reckoning with . . . structural racism in our society."[26] Similarly, abolitionist calls to "Defund the Police," meant to invoke transgressive critique of the carceral

state, securitization, and militarization, get reduced to discussions of overburdened police departments and bloated budgets. Within this tepid discourse, to resist the overreach of the police entails restoring the institution of policing to its primary, honorable, and crucial role of upholding "law and order." As Laurie Robinson, former chair of Barack Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing put it, "The reality is we have turned to police to handle a lot of problems in society that nobody else wanted to do—to handle issues around substance abuse, to handle issues around the homeless, to handle issues around mental health. . . . I think they would be very happy to hand off these responsibilities."[27]

This insistence on pragmatic policy solutions reveals how establishment elites position the work of resistance as facilitating forward movement on the mature, professional, and linear highway of progress while transformative movements are cast(igated) as distracting side streets and unauthorized alleyways. The liberal political establishment worked assiduously to narrow the radical critiques, demands, and visions of Black Lives Matter by portraying abolitionist activists as irrational, immature, and out of touch with how democratic change happens. Much of this strategy came in the form of reinscribing resistance as a mere entry point into the "real" democratic world: one marked by logics of efficiency and personal responsibility, and expert-led processes of "problem-solving" and policy implementation, rather than by agonistic contests over sharply disparate political imaginations. For instance, when former president Barack Obama invited Chicago BLM cofounder Aislinn Pulley to a closed-door meeting at the White House, it was paired with chastisement:

"You can't just keep on yelling at them, and you can't refuse to meet because that might compromise the purity of your position. The value of social movements and activism is to get you at the table, get you in the room, and then start trying to figure out 'how is this problem going to be solved?' You then have a responsibility to prepare an agenda that is achievable, that can institutionalize the changes you seek, and to engage the other side."[28]

More recently, in a leaked Democratic Congressional Caucus call, centrist Abigail Spanberger (D-VA), who was first elected in the 2018 blue wave sponsored by #theresistance, expressed bitter contempt that slogans like "Medicare for All" and "Defund the Police" from the left nearly cost her the race. Less than forty-eight hours after an election that she won by fewer than two percentage points, she complained, "We're in Congress. We are professionals. We are supposed to talk about things in the way where we mean what we're talking about. If we don't mean we should defund the police, we shouldn't say that. . . . We want to talk about funding social services, and ensuring good engagement in community policing, let's talk about what we are for. And we need to not ever use the words 'socialist' or 'socialism' ever again. Because while people think it doesn't matter, it does matter. And we lost good members because of it."[29] Obama concurred, saying, "If you believe, as I do, that we should be able to reform the criminal justice system so that it's not biased and treats everybody fairly, . . . I guess you can use a snappy slogan like 'Defund the Police,' but, you know, you lost a big audience the minute you say it."

Indeed, consistent with what we call the emerging era of resilience thinking, centrists agree that citizens must learn to

cope with limited expectations, that some alchemic combination of acceptance, endurance, and hopeful pragmatism is the only way forward. By resilience thinking, we mean the rising emphasis on peoples' capacity (natural and learned) to endure, adapt to, and even benefit from adversity. We argue that this neoliberal preoccupation with resilience as a commonsense approach to a world of unpredictable shocks and crises works to guide which forms of political action and resistance are considered both possible and desirable. Resilience has become the prized response to the dismaying political effects of neoliberalism. Calls for resilience building are everywhere. It is vaunted as a policy-making mantra in areas as far flung as poverty reduction, humanitarian assistance, migration and refugee planning, climate change strategy, insurance policy, popular wellness, and self-help. A Department of Homeland Security official even named resilience the nation's new "immune system" in a world of viral-like insecurity. There are high stakes in this investment in building resilience in individual people, communities, and infrastructure. These are circulating discourses that cheerlead us to slog through our deteriorating conditions rather than critically assess the structural origins of those conditions. Resilience discourses thus shape and reflect our contemporary relationship to possibility, delimiting desires for a different way of life.

Resilience thinking advances adaption and personal transformation as the rational solution to a complex world of unavoidable crises. As Sheryl Sandberg puts it in her 2018 best-selling screed, *Option B*, "building resilience muscle" is a personal

opportunity and responsibility for us all.[30] Everywhere, resilience is touted as a vital art of existence. It is understood as an immunizing practice of folding the *naturalized* crises of the world into the vulnerable body—individual or collective—in question. In this vexing twist, those most vulnerable to the erupting "shocks" and disasters of our contemporary world are urged to incorporate them—the loss of livelihoods, imposed austerity measures, debt peonage, ecological catastrophe—as the very source of increased resilience. Resilience is thus repurposed under neoliberalism as an empowering quality of our American "grit," of our "can do" mind-set and a national spirit capable of confronting (and even benefiting from) hard things. Under neoliberal governance, crises are not held up as evidence of the failure of the state or the market to protect its population. Instead, these struggles are heralded as crucial for learning how to "bounce forward."

This is the construction of a resilient human infrastructure, prepared to thrive in conditions of perpetual crisis, that sustains liberal capitalist ways of life in and through the precarity it produces. These ethical mandates for resilience building, which take shape as policy-making mantras, self-help titles, memes, and models, redirect a range of reactions to an increasingly malfunctioning world by revitalizing attachments to the contemporary political order. It is in this way that resilience at once promotes a way of thinking based on the naturalized constraints of neoliberal ways of life and defangs resistance as a more insurgent politic. In short, in an age of restorative resistance, transformative protest and dissent is not only the stuff of irrational

pipedreams but also a self-imposed obstacle to developing the "resilience capital" required for enduring the realities of the world.[31]

GENEALOGIES OF RESISTANCE

Taking a cue from Michel Foucault, we argue that what takes place under the sign of "resistance" matters, because it points toward how power is exercised. Thus, a central concern guiding our inquiry is the following: What happens when resistance itself becomes a strategy for (and object of) the neoliberal takeover of our contemporary world? In particular, we are alarmed by exalted discourses of resistance that seem to accompany, and even to be functionally intertwined with, multiple processes of de-democratization, atomization, and sustained efforts to refacilitate a cruelly optimistic attachment to an unjust social and economic order. Throughout this project, we return to the concept of "restoration," in relation to the present landscape of resistance, in three senses of the term: first, the return of something that was lost or taken; second, to bring (something) back into existence or use; and, finally, to return (something) to an earlier or original condition by repairing it or cleaning it up. We draw on each of these uses to make the case that resistance is increasingly consonant with the restoration of elite political and economic power; attachment to failed democratic norms, institutions, and modes of action; and law and order. While this book raises a red flag about this recuperation of resistance, we do not aim for a teleological and tragic telling of "the end of

resistance." Instead, we evaluate the "ends" of contemporary praxes of resistance within an organization of knowledge that includes a genealogy of governing logics, policies, and objects of low culture. In so doing, we attend to what feminist thinker Clare Hemmings calls its "political grammar," how the various resonances of resistance inform particular stories about the world; the logics and assumptions they rely on and sustain; and the political and affective investments they conceal or reveal.[32] In making some historical sense of how resistance gets mobilized in the present, its meaning emerges as an indispensable site for the revaluation of values that might shape our collective future.

For us, a central theoretical frame for understanding the contemporary meaning of resistance is influenced by what Lauren Berlant characterizes as *cruel optimism*.[33] These are the (individual and shared) sustained attachments to conventional (if unachievable) organizing fantasies of "the good life": desires for job security, romantic longevity, class mobility, social/political equality, and the "enduring reciprocity . . . of political systems, institutions, markets," despite all evidence that capitalist democracy has failed to deliver on this "cluster of promises."[34]At once animating and debilitating, these objects or scenes of desire (which we hold on to fervidly) operate as "fantasy bribes,"[35] luring us back through the tease that "*this* time" it is proximity to "*this* thing" that may help a person or the world transform "in just the right way."[36] In this sense, cruel optimism produces a kind of "double bind" in that the familiarity of these attachments anchors a person or a world to obstacles of flourishing in ways that are, at the same time, profoundly confirming.

Berlant's account exposes the structuring contradiction at the heart of contemporary (neo)liberal democratic life: the officially sanctioned democratic discourse (progress, opportunity, equality, and freedom), and the widespread *reality* that is fundamentally incongruous with this discourse—abandonment, precarity, and devaluation, differentially experienced across vectors of gender, race, class, sexuality, and citizenship. What is especially cruel about our emotional investments, then, is that they slog us through this dissonant space (with reenacted cycles of hope and loss), foreclosing critical assessment of our stuckness in relation to our desires. It is this sense of "stuck-ness" that helps elucidate how contemporary modes of liberal resistance are shaped by and shore up the very neoliberal logics and liberal democratic norms of political engagement responsible for our misery and why we return to them again and again. Put differently, the collective labor of resistance-as-restoration rehabilitates attachment to, and is the condition of being worn out by, the (always failed) promises of a destructive social, economic, and political order.

The formulation of voting as resistance, which provides "rule by the people" credibility to neoliberal democracy, is a particularly exuberant scene of cruel optimism. It is also one that relies on and promotes logics of individual accountability, moral imperative, and liberal progress. In September 2018, prior to the midterm elections, former president Barack Obama reentered political life with the declaration: "I am here to deliver a simple message, and that is that you need to vote because our democracy depends on it. . . . The best way to protest is to vote." During election season, social media was awash with beaming "I

voted" photos and stickers ceremoniously deposited on the fronts of shirts, travel mugs, and children's rosy cheeks. These proud markers of responsible electoral participation sat alongside finger-wagging reminders that a vote is not a "love note" but a cherished tool of resisting authoritarianism, a variety of conservative agendas targeting those most marginalized, and the effacement of democracy. No doubt there is pleasure in this scene of attachment: the moral value of fulfilling one's individualized civic duty; the redirection of overwhelming outrage toward a legitimized object; and, perhaps most significantly, in the way that it *feels like* freedom, with its promising whiff of change. Particularly for the "anyone but Trump" camp, anyone who dared challenge this commonsense prescription for moving toward a better world was confronted by accusatory, even enraged rejoinders: "He may be an imperfect candidate but . . ."; "Are you waiting for a unicorn?" "The lesser of two evils is still less evil," and "Perfection is the enemy of the good." To be sure, as Berlant suggests, the threat of losing or abandoning familiar systems of attachment (as immiserating as they are) may make life feel impossible to bear or be experienced as threatening to life itself. It is the endurance of our proximity to these objects, from Amazon purchases to the prospect of voting for "the change just ahead," that fosters continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to be attached to this world and to go on living within it. To break away from this striving for a particular conception of the "good life" requires profoundly new optimistic attachments (to political analyses, scenes of desire, or modes of action), in effect transforming one's relation to the world itself.

In what follows, we trace the arrival of "resistance" toward its contorted mobilization within the present and ask what politics of refusal might demand radical hope in its place. We posit that on-the-ground movement work, particularly work with aims that are not easily legible through a restorative framework of "sensible" or "mature" democratic action, sustains such a transformative orientation. In chapter 2 we briefly sketch a neoliberal project (fifty years in the making) dedicated to restoring economic and political power to the elite—in light of revolutionary movements that threaten that power—through its articulation of (reactionary) resistance waged in the name of freedom. We argue that this incorporation of resistance has had a stultifying effect, particularly in its preoccupation with individual moral conduct and attitudes, personal responsibility, and rights-based agendas, the very neoliberal logics that have derailed radical democratic thought and collective praxis. Our central claim is that the sphere of the political, where collective existence is considered, governed, and contested, has been shaped by neoliberal rationality in ways that have starved its democratic energies. While hostility to democratic political life is evident throughout policies, law, and the generally technocratic management of life, we underscore its disorienting and delimiting effect on the meaning and practices of resistance. Neoliberalism simultaneously reduces (already narrow) democratic channels for change while turning people into human capital who think of resistance against oppression in moral and individualized terms, who fight for diversity and inclusion within the existing pro-corporate infrastructure and who understand liberation as personal choice.

Chapter 3 shows how political elites are deploying the language of progressive politics in order to revive (cruelly optimistic) attachments to democracy as procedural processes, sets of norms, and hallowed institutions—in other words, resistance as a "return to normal." This restorative resistance (and the hope for change, equality, and freedom it carries) has entailed holding ground against Trump-style regressive attacks in the name of the very ground that produced him. In other words, if Trump was the so-called shocking symptom of U.S. democracy turned firm,[37] then what should have been a radical breaking point (from normal) was catalyzed as its point of return.

In chapter 4 we explain how the very (material and ideological) grounds of resistance have been devastated through the racialization and criminalization of resistance. This is a civilizing project in the name of restoring "law and order"—which is always and already the preservation of the social and economic order—that has involved increased surveillance, securitization, and militarized policing. Our argument tracks policies and discourses that work (through bipartisan consensus) to collapse revolutionary movements through marking marginalized populations as deviant, suspect, undisciplined, dangerous, or otherwise potentially "unruly." This chapter extends our argument about the incorporation of resistance into already unequal power relations into a discussion of the future.

While this is not a redemptive text that maps a utopian mode of resistance, we conclude by forwarding a concept of "unruly world building" in our final chapter. There, we demonstrate how the complex neoliberal democratic scaffolding, shored up by a specific set of values and norms and exercising

a stranglehold of power over most of the commanding institutions of national and global life, is being contested by an emerging infrastructure of deeply democratic political struggles. These are largely horizontal movements that abdicate the reproduction of the same cruel patterns of destroy and restore, and reawaken demands for liberation and popular sovereignty. We acknowledge the fear in abandoning a familiar "if imperfect" system, in refusing to shore up the "evil/less-evil" system through the ways we have been trained to do as good, obedient, and intelligible democratic resisters; in particular, the prospect of detaching from the moral self as the epicenter of political action is a painful one. But this detachment is precisely where the collective inventing of alternative ways of being in the world come into play as possible antidotes. The scenes of unruly world building that we conclude with in this project depend on, and thrive within, that very uncertainty as a radical democratic possibility.

Chapter Two

NEOLIBERAL RESISTANCE

PRIVATIZING REBELLION

I'm not looking to overthrow the American government; the corporate state already has.

—John Trudell, Santee Dakota artist and activist

IN THE 1970s the idea of resistance was expropriated by the political right. The social upheavals of the 1960s had advanced a collective notion of political life—the crowd, the march, the disruptive direct action—where ordinary citizens came together across the nation to defy the state and contest domination. By the mid-1960s, radical political protest became translated into liberal public policy through Democrat Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and its extension of social welfare (first advanced by FDR and the New Deal in the 1930s). While laudable, Great Society programs like Medicare, rental subsidies, and environmental safety regulations were not capable of addressing the long legacy of white supremacy, deindustrialization, and the contraction of a tax base wrought by rapid suburbanization in major American cities. Before long, in the late 1960s, a hundred urban uprisings surged in major cities like Detroit, Newark, New York, and Oakland; the free speech student movement

swept across American universities to protest a viciously accelerating capitalism and the Vietnam War; and feminist and gay liberation movements were dismantling the heteronormative patriarchy by publicizing private life and politicizing the domestic domain.

Ironically, it was this high tide of dissatisfaction, mounting countercultural critiques, and tangible longing for a different kind of world that set the stage for the right to enact an ambitious ideological and policy sweep across American life. Witnessing and capitalizing on the effectiveness of collective resistance, as mantra and in practice, the right remade itself as a revolutionary vanguard in U.S. politics, whose purpose was to reinstate freedom. This was done through reimagining resistance as a radical critique of state intervention and in the name of the entrepreneurial spirit of progress. In other words, while it may seem counterintuitive, neoliberals calculatedly yoked the emancipatory force of resistance to a deeply regressive and counter-reactionary politic. By neoliberalism, we mean a central guiding principle and doctrine of deregulation and privatization, singularly directed toward the *restoration* and consolidation of elite economic and political power. These ends have been accomplished through the reassignment of the state from provider of social well-being to supportive role in preserving an institutional infrastructure for maximizing private profit, alongside the maligning and dismantling of the public sphere and a systematic attack on notions of public goods (including democracy itself) and the common good more broadly.[1] The aphorism "a rising tide lifts all boats" encapsulates neoliberalism's commonsense insistence that the trickle-down effects of

economic productivity (underpinned by ungoverned or "free" markets) will produce the most prosperous world for everyone. Through these logics, an "over-reaching" state (supporting people's basic needs, such as access to adequate housing, employment, health care, transportation, and education, instead of profit maximization) is judged inefficient, incompetent, and minacious to individual freedom.

The neoliberal agenda also characterizes the aggregate of pro-corporate foreign policy initiatives imposed on developing countries by Washington-based international financial institutions (like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank) to facilitate the development of "open" capitalist markets, restrict obstacles for capital flow, and forge profitable investment opportunities. This "structural adjustment" has been achieved through economic and social programs emphasizing privatization, deregulation, and cuts to state budgets for the poor and vulnerable as the "only (viable) alternative." In essence, then, neoliberalism is the unapologetic placing of profit over people as a mode of both national and global governance, or as David Harvey puts it, an effort "to remake the world around us in a totally different image."[2]

Political theorist Wendy Brown's analysis of neoliberalism's "stealth revolution" explains how its rapacious logics of self-interest, efficiency, and competition have imprinted themselves on every domain of life—as a homogenizing standard of evaluation.[3] Neoliberal rationality, Brown asserts, economizes all the spheres that it governs, submitting each field of activity to evaluation by market terms, metrics, and logics. In particular, the conversion of democracy into a marketplace literally

"undoes the demos [the idea of 'the people']" itself while equality (of material life conditions and not simply of "opportunity"); racial, gender, and sexual justice; and collective freedom are emptied of substantive meaning. At the heart of neoliberal-governed democracy is a culture of atomization through which ethics, discourses, and mechanisms for promoting interdependence and mutuality, as well as modes of sociality organized around solidarity and the common good are undermined. Instead, collective life is structured by an ethos of privatization and, correspondingly, heightened personal (and nuclear family) responsibility, self-investment and initiative, competition, and unfettered individualism. As former U.K. prime minister and neoliberal orchestrator Margaret Thatcher put it in her (in) famous declaration, there is no such thing as society, "only individuals" (and their families, as she amended later).

In this chapter we center on the neoliberal capture of resistance as one of its most forceful strategies for *restoring* elite economic and political power. From its inception, neoliberalism has been a transformational force, and it strategically incorporated this rebellious spirit into its credo. Positioning itself as the "exclusive guarantor of freedom,"[4] neoliberalism's objects of resistance could include not only the welfare state but also social justice movements struggling against increased public austerity, dispossession, inequality, and "law and order." Instead, in societies under neoliberal rule, power was set to reside with economic, political, and technocratic elite and democracy to become a "one party, corporate state" aimed at the upward redistribution of wealth.[5] The prevailing common sense of neoliberal ideology is TINA (There Is No Alternative)—a cunning

slogan introduced by economist Milton Friedman (1979) and popularized by Margaret Thatcher—such that the logics that guide the conduct of neoliberal subjects and of the social order become seen as inevitable, natural, and necessary. The perilous resonance of TINA has seeped into dominant modes of resistance, reimagined as a virtue and value through logics of personal responsibility, privatized agency, consumerism, and charity, and in the name of individual freedom.

LAW AND ORDER OF THE MARKET: COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY RESISTANCE

The neoliberal capture of resistance began in the late 1960s. Conservative Republican Richard Nixon, running on a "law and order" platform, sought to end Johnson's federal initiatives for funding unequal cities, which had barely begun to be implemented. In his August 8, 1968, acceptance speech for the Republican Party's presidential nomination, Nixon invoked the idea of revolutionary restoration as the battle cry of a renovated Republican Party:

> For the past five years we have been deluged by government programs for the unemployed; programs for the cities; programs for the poor. And we have reaped from these programs an ugly harvest of frustration, violence and failure across the land. . . . I say it is time to quit pouring billions of dollars into programs that have failed in the United States of America. To put it bluntly, we are on the wrong road—and it's

> time to take a new road, to progress. . . . What we need are not more millions on welfare rolls—but more millions on payrolls in the United States of America. Instead of government jobs, and government housing, and government welfare, let government use its tax and credit policies to enlist in this battle the greatest engine of progress ever developed in the history of man—American private enterprise.[6]

Across the political spectrum, neoliberal evangelists pontificated about the danger of too much democracy and worked to demonize forms of common-ness: the common good, common care, and caring for the material and ideological conditions of the commons itself. From the far-right came the apocalyptic 1971 "Powell Memorandum: Attack on American Free Enterprise System," penned by Lewis Powell—general counsel to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and two months later appointed to the Supreme Court. In the privately distributed memo, Powell implored the chamber to recognize that the very survival of the "free enterprise system" was at stake. These vicious assaults on individual freedom, coming from a range of "disquieting voices," were poised to subvert capitalism "and the political system of democracy on which it depends." The American business executive, the memo argued, is truly the "forgotten man." Powell advocated a swift program of counterattacks in order to reestablish the strength of the American corporation against all those "seeking insidiously and constantly to sabotage it."[7] As beacons of resistance to big government, Powell stressed, free marketeers must ultimately seize the public imagination.[8] This crusade required vigorous intervention, producing and circulating

ideological tracts attacking government regulation within all major political and social arenas: populating the courts; flooding money into universities (especially political science and economics departments and business schools); establishing public relations departments and lavishly funded conservative think tanks (like the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute); and infiltration of media through popular television programs like the *Today Show* and *Meet the Press*.

Importantly, the "liberal wing" of the state was also terrified by the ways in which 1960s social movements had generated radical democratic energies in their push for programs to alleviate social inequality and opening up of notions of collective (positive) freedom. The 1975 report, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, reckoned with what it called the past decade's "excesses of democracy." These rising levels of political dissent, flagrant disregard for expertise and hierarchy, and lack of obedience to disciplinary protocol posed vital hazards to existing structures of political authority (particularly the political parties and presidency). As its U.S. coauthor Samuel P. Huntington (former chair of Harvard's Department of Government) observed, democracy's crisis was due to its "unbounded energies and reach." The primary threat, he explained, was "previously passive" marginalized populations such as "blacks, Indians, Chicanos, white ethnic groups, students and women"—all of whom had organized and mobilized in new ways "to achieve what they considered to be their appropriate share of the action and of the rewards."[9] A second source of the breakdown in power relations, Huntington suggested, was the challenge posed by

"value-oriented intellectuals" (as opposed to the "technocratic and policy-oriented," like the commissars themselves) who were intent on the "unmasking and delegitimization of established institutions."[10] Such intellectuals were cast as indoctrinators of the youth and instigators of unruly modes of participation within vital institutions that would "only frustrate the purposes of those institutions."[11] In order to operate an effective capitalist democratic political system, Huntington concluded, the commission should recognize that there are "desirable limits to the indefinite extension of political democracy" and pursue strategies for the "lowering of recently acquired aspirations." The political vision animating the report unabashedly privileged the oligarchic elite and a restoration of the social order through quelling the unruliness of democracy itself.

By the end of the 1970s, Americans had soured on Nixon—largely due to the Watergate scandal. But the neoliberal vision, guided by these warnings about popular unrest and blueprints for corporate dominance, was in full bloom. A 1977 television program that took the nation by storm was *Free to Choose*, adapted from a best-selling book by neoliberal economist Milton Friedman and airing on public television stations across the nation. Featuring Friedman, the ten-part series set out to delineate and espouse essential free market principles and to explain to viewers the successes of capitalism and failures of government centralization. Primarily, this effort required separating freedom from notions of collectivity, equality, justice, or active democratic participation and harnessing its promise to the unrestricted market. In an episode called "Power of the Market,"

Friedman detailed the liberatory effects of deregulation in a trickle-down system. When pressed about the problem of pollution and the right to clean air and water as a "public freedom," Milton passionately counseled the audience that corporations have "one responsibility, to maximize profit!" He brought similar vehemence to a question regarding the inevitable flourishing of social and economic inequality in a world without safeguards. "I'm not in favor of fairness," Friedman scoffed. "I'm in favor of freedom. And freedom is not fairness!"[12]

Free to Choose was indicative of the right's remarkable ability to transform the vibrant defiance of anticapitalist political energies and repurpose it for the consolidation and expansion of corporate economic and political power. Resistance to government was explained not as contesting imperialism, militarism, racism, xenophobia, segregation, and sexism, but as opposing state restrictions on the free market and entrepreneurial liberty. The private self (one unencumbered by social constraints) was pitted against the notion of a monstrous government intent on circumscribing and delimiting individual agency and the right to thrive. As Friedman asked it in his 1962 work, *Capitalism and Freedom*, "How can we keep the government we create from becoming a Frankenstein that will destroy the very freedom we establish it to protect? Freedom is a rare and delicate plant."[13] Through this version of resistance, and even as neoliberalism was spectacularly antidemocratic in its ambitions, democratic social movements of the 1960s became reinscribed as limiters of, rather than fighters for, freedom. At the same time, the notion of democracy itself was converted to yet another marketplace, or as Friedman put it, an efficient way of meeting

individual tastes and preferences: "each man can vote, as it were, for the color of the tie he wants and get it."[14] The political implication of this conceptual capture of freedom (as first and foremost economic) was that any kind of government regulation (for the public good) represented immoral coercion and invasive constraint on individual expression and potentiality.

This demonization of the collective and of the public good as democratic values also anticipated the foregrounding of individual hyper-rationality. The political right's new subject of resistance was a free and self-interested citizen with access to reason and empirical knowledge, whose decisions could be predicted through calculative benefit/risk equations. The late nineteenth century during the Gilded Age had imagined a Horatio Alger–type figure, who, through personal resolve, dedication, and craftiness, managed to overcome long odds and uplift himself from poverty. But in the 1960s, rationality came to be seen as scientific fact, such that ordinary citizens were held responsible for personal choices and their ensuing successes or failures. No one was more influential in advancing this rational choice thesis of human agency—of *homo economicus*—than Friedman's University of Chicago student Gary Becker. In particular, Becker was concerned with mobilizing a unifying economic model for analyzing everyday behavior in the context of major social concerns, as summarized in the title of his Nobel Prize–winning lecture, "An Economic Way of Looking at Life."[15] If the individual were at the center of the universe, Becker instructed, then the predominant challenges to take into consideration operated at the level of the personal, and concerns about structural oppression, state approaches to inequality, and

collective pursuits of justice were rendered irrelevant. Moreover, through robust mathematical formulas and predictive models, all questions regarding human life could be converted into quantifiable cost-benefit analyses, and economic policies for shaping the social and political order could follow suit. For instance, two years after the civil rights movement and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–1956 took America by storm, Becker would describe racism (and, in particular, racist hiring practices) not as a complex system of authoritarianism but as a personal "taste for discrimination."[16] Market penalties, he argued in his classic *The Economics of Discrimination*, would eventually persuade rational employers who held this expensive "taste" to succumb to less prejudicial practices. Put differently, capitalist competition over low-paid workers (impelling better economic choices) would do the gradual work of "resisting" racism, while overreaching government regulation aimed at redressing racialized economic inequality would only blunt this natural individual-led process.[17]

Over a decade later, in 1968, as dispossessed Black citizens rebelled in the streets of Detroit, Oakland, Atlanta, and Boston—following Martin Luther King's assassination and protesting decades of police brutality and segregation—Becker forwarded another provocative economic theory, this time addressing crime and punishment. Applying his rational choice analysis to criminal behavior, he proposed that the real income of "risk preferrers" (versus avoiders) "would be lower, at the margin, than the incomes they could receive in less risky legal activities"; for these potential offenders, then, "crime pays."[18] In order to transform these individual "attitudes," and as a general

theory of incentivizing obedience to law and order, Becker concluded, "optimal" social policy should increase the penalty/expense of committing crime. Once again, with the consistently rational actor at the center, the calculative logics of the marketplace mapped neatly onto yet another sociopolitical domain, both as analytic and as normative prescription. Bracketed out entirely, of course, were complex questions about poverty, racialized criminalization, definitions of crime, and the role of punishment more broadly.

Importantly, this economic rationalization of human life relied on Becker's earlier scholarship on human capital, or the idea that individuals have a responsibility to invest in themselves in ways that enhance their "future monetary and psychic income."[19] Homo economicus amounted to a private entrepreneur of the self, or taking one's own personhood as a basic resource for later return on investment. State interventions to address endemic (racial, class, or gendered) inequality, Becker emphasized, de-incentivize and thus actively impede these private practices of value enhancement. As Foucault describes, through this developing neoliberal *dispositif*, economic behavior became the "grid of intelligibility" through which to apprehend and govern all human behavior.[20] Whether in pursuit of education, knowledge, health, or even choice of marriage partner, this enterprising self would become preoccupied not with developing innate capacities but with utility maximization—for competing with the "market" of (all domains of) life itself.

These early neoliberal postulations about a particular type of governable subject—and how to teach people to govern

themselves and others more effectively—were not accepted universally in this moment. After all, radical ideological transformations require patience, persistence, and in the case of the neoliberal regime, a powerfully networked and multifrontal strategy to engineer its rollout. Neoliberalism's central principles were inaugurated by a small and relatively obscure group of thirty-nine journalists, legal scholars, philosophers, historians, and economists, hand-selected by Austrian philosopher Friedrich von Hayek and including Milton Friedman, both of whom went on to receive the Noble Prize in Economics. In 1947 they founded the Mont Pelerin Society (named after the Swiss spa where they first met) in order to cross-fertilize ideas for confronting what they called the crisis of freedom—Western man's "most precious possession." The group's "Statement of Aims" located the moral and economic origins of this crisis in the "spread of [dangerous] creeds" working to question the "central values of civilization"—namely, the "desirability of the rule of law" and "belief in private property and the competitive market." In response, Mont Pelerin members resolved to redefine the functions of the state, reestablish the rule of law, and combat any and all ideologies "hostile" to a free market society. These emerging tenets challenged existing Marxist theories of centralized state planning and prevailing Keynesianism—economic policies intended to stabilize capitalism while shielding citizens from its catastrophic excesses. Instead, this cadre of neoliberal apostles designed and developed its radical "pro-market" doctrine with a clear-eyed view of mounting a "one-sided class war," one that (intentionally or unintentionally) set the stage for oligarchic tyranny.[21]

In the postwar period and through the 1960s, these theoretical interventions were still considered fringe, and neoliberalism remained a marginal economic movement. Arizona Republican Barry Goldwater, in his 1964 Republican National Convention acceptance speech for the presidential candidacy, echoed Mont Perelin's ideas, declaring that he would "set the tide running again in the cause of freedom . . . freedom—balanced so that liberty lacking order will not become the slavery of the prison cell; balanced so that liberty lacking order will not become the license of the mob and of the jungle."[22] He was crushed by Lyndon Johnson in a landslide, winning only 38 percent of the popular vote and six states.

By the early 1970s, however, Goldwater's position had been mainstreamed, as right-wing public policy think tanks—backed by major corporate financiers—worked assiduously to develop an intellectual infrastructure for packaging and promoting neoliberal policy. Oil tycoons Charles and David Koch established the Cato Institute, with its mission to advance "individual liberty, limited government, free markets, and peace," while British businessman Antony Fisher (with a fortune made from factory-farmed chickens) founded the Manhattan Institute, aimed at "expounding the role of markets in solving economic and social problems."[23] Billionaires like beer baron Joseph Coors and media tycoon Richard Mellon Scaife (who funded Friedman's *Free to Choose* television program) created the Heritage Foundation, dedicated to defending supply-side economics and corporate tax cuts. In 1980 the Heritage Foundation produced *Mandate for Leadership*, a twenty-volume three-thousand-page policy document that provided what United Press International

(UPI) called "a blueprint for grabbing the government by its frayed New Deal lapels and shaking out 48 years of liberal policy." The neoliberal manifesto rapidly became a best seller in Washington, D.C., and, during Ronald Reagan's presidency, two hundred members from radically conservative think tanks were hired to work within his administration. Conservative think tanks appeared before the House and Senate one and a half as many times as liberal organizations and were mentioned four times as much in newspapers. By the end of Reagan's first term in office, the head of Heritage, Edwin Fuelner, declared that 60 percent of the book's two thousand directives had been implemented in policy. As Democratic senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan put it, magnanimously announcing his own party's intellectual bankruptcy in comparison and foreshadowing the decades to come, the GOP had become the "party of ideas."[24]

RESISTANCE PRIVATIZED: FROM CLINTON TO TRUMP

By the end of the 1980s, what had been a decidedly conservative position had consolidated as bipartisan aspiration. Vitally, while the neoliberal consensus concentrated on revolutionizing economic policy, its rollout depended on a particular theory of the subject and the family: a biopolitics of responsibilization. Central to this exercise of biopower was the reinstatement of the normative (patriarchal) nuclear family as the basic unit of market society, or what sociologist Melinda Cooper calls a kind of "natural insurance mechanism" for absorbing the risks and

dependencies created by the withdrawal of the welfare state.[25] According to neoliberal ideology, public services had corrupted private relations of care and the stability of poor families, producing an unnatural dependence on government. State-driven incentives (in the form of penalties, sanctions, and rewards) were thus required to resurrect individual and familial obligation to perform (uncompensated) reproductive and care labor within the domestic sphere. In this way, moral and economic imperative went hand in hand with neoliberal technologies of surveilling, regulating, and governing the (racialized) poor and with reinventing the state to serve these ends.

Moynihan, the iconoclast Democrat and longtime critic of antipoverty programs, was central to these efforts. In his 1965 report on the Black family, Moynihan had proclaimed the disintegration of the Black family structure at the root of Black poverty and the single greatest threat to racial equality. In particular, the report held that the absence of fathers and proliferation of illegitimate children had resulted in lower IQs, delinquency, and crime among Black youth; accelerated matriarchal households on public assistance; and produced a population of effeminized and undisciplined Black men. The primary national "action" to end injustice, he insisted, should be directed toward rehabilitating this pathological feature of Black urban life, teaching these families to "raise and support its members as do other families. After that, how this group of Americans chooses to run its affairs, take advantage of its opportunities, or fail to do so, is none of the nation's business."[26]

In 1992, Moynihan, praised by John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon alike, found a willing student in the young Southern

Democrat Arkansas governor Bill Clinton. Clinton came into the presidency armed with his own playbook, *Mandate for Change* (authored by the Progressive Policy Institute), which outlined his plan to reinvent government through a "Third Way" between liberalism and conservativism. But that Bill Clinton ran on a campaign platform promising to "end welfare as we know it" illustrated the degree to which resistance had been recuperated by a hegemonic neoliberal agenda set on decimating the public sphere. Or, as Heritage Foundation vice president Herb Berkowitz boasted, "To the extent Clinton embraces PPI's idea, he'll be doing what we've been saying for 15 years."[27]

Representing a new brand of neoliberal called the New Democrats, Clinton was deeply impressed with Manhattan Institute fellow Charles Murray's analysis of the poverty cycle as a "way of life" and his corresponding recommendation to emphasize individual responsibility, self-discipline, and empowerment—and to abolish the antipoverty programs of Johnson's Great Society. Such social welfare policies, Murray argued in his 1984 book, *Losing Ground*, actually made it "more profitable" for the poor to engage in "self-destructive" behaviors: "the more vulnerable a population and the fewer its independent resources, the more decisive the effect of the rules imposed from above . . . We tried to provide more for the poor and produced more poor instead."[28] By 1996, on the eve of his reelection campaign and in a bipartisan effort with a right-wing Congress (led by House Speaker Newt Gingrich), Clinton would eviscerate the AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) program and replace it with TANF (Temporary

Assistance for Needy Families). The new "aid" offered by TANF was not only temporary in nature, instituting strict caps on both the duration and amount of benefits, but also introduced work requirements and harsh punishments for those who did not comply. These limitations radically reduced the number of people who qualified for aid. In the name of reestablishing a national principle of "personal responsibility," the legislation aimed at prodding poor and low-income citizens, especially single mothers, into the workforce. This move is exactly what would help boost corporate profits, subjecting poor folks of color to surveillance and domination while requiring them to work multiple low-wage jobs in order to qualify for and maintain federal government aid. In a hand-signed note dated August 20, 1996, Clinton praised "Pat" (Moynihan) for his years invested in "rous[ing] the nation to face its most profound social challenge . . . to overcome illegitimacy and dependency."[29] The underlying neoliberal logic was that forcing able-bodied people into the capitalist labor regime would activate their rational capacity for cost-benefit analysis. Duly incentivized, they would locate the moral desire to exchange public assistance for private family as a social and economic security blanket.

The 1996 welfare reform bill illustrated how deeply neoliberal "common sense" had permeated U.S. discourse and policy and how resisting the imposition of "big government" had become a reigning principle of democratic governance. By eroding collective institutions and destroying social welfare while championing individual freedom, choice, and responsibility as key pursuits of the democratic subject, neoliberals had produced a discursive and material infrastructure that rendered collective

resistance steadily unfathomable. As mass precarity increased, defiance decreased. From 1973 to 1995, U.S. per capita gross domestic product had risen 36 percent, yet hourly wages of workers declined by 14 percent. Corporate profits grew 13 percent per year, while hourly wages increased by only 1.9 percent. Incomes of the top 1 percent of earners grew by 148 percent, while the bottom 90 percent fell by 7 percent. The passage of right-to-work laws throughout many states in the South and Midwest, which made union due payment optional, steadily decelerated union membership; in the 1960s, nearly one in three were members, while today that number is one in ten. Workers, perceiving the full-fledged bipartisan assault on working people, became less militant; work stoppages averaged three hundred per year in the 1960s, declining to a meager eight by 2020.[30]

Over the next several decades, the neoliberal consensus continued to tear through the everyday lives of citizens, systematically displacing public care with privatized solutions to rampant inequality and social crises. Perhaps no example made more explicit this valuing of profit over life than the George W. Bush administration's response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina (2005), which left thousands of (predominantly) poor people of color dead and hundreds of thousands homeless or displaced. At the centerpiece of Bush's profit-driven recovery plan was the creation of a "Gulf Opportunity Zone" that would provide "immediate incentives for job-creating investment . . . It is entrepreneurship that helps break the cycle of poverty, and we will take the side of entrepreneurs as they lead the economic revival of the Gulf region."[31] Through these euphemisms, Bush

signaled to corporate elites that the spectacular systematic failure to protect poor and working-class New Orleanians would not deter a trajectory of deregulation, privatization, and the starvation of public infrastructure, which had itself produced the tragedy; indeed, with the government's support, that tragedy was now open for business.

In 2008 Democrat Barack Obama came into office on a "hope and change" platform that articulated a more progressive direction for the country. Obama emphasized his background as a community organizer; his open commitment to civil rights, climate justice, unions, ending the war in the Middle East; and providing health care for all citizens. But his signature health care legislation, the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), shared many of neoliberalism's underlying assumptions. Abandoning a single-payer system in favor of a health care exchange, in which a voucher system would offset health care costs for the uninsured, Obama couched the decision in a discourse of personal responsibility and free choice. As Obama proudly asserted in a 2010 MSNBC interview, "When you actually look at the bill itself, it incorporates all sorts of Republican ideas . . . A lot of the ideas in terms of the exchange, just being able to pool and improve the purchasing power of individuals in the insurance market, that originated from the Heritage Foundation."[32]

Republican Donald Trump may best be remembered as an aspiring neofascist, whose "Make America Great" platform was a rallying cry for blatant racists, misogynists, and xenophobes who felt ostracized from the mainstream. As a candidate, Trump explicitly distinguished himself from the neoliberal elite

"cesspool," whom he lambasted as being out of touch with working-class peoples' concerns. His speeches were embedded with denouncements of global "free trade" agreements and foreign policy decisions like "endless wars . . . in faraway lands." Indeed, conservative and liberal "Never Trump" pundits alike went to great lengths to argue that Trump was not an authentic Republican—that he had little in common with the great communicator Ronald Reagan or the compassionate conservative George W. Bush. But his signature piece of legislation—the only major one that, in fact, received universal Republican backing, was neoliberal to the core. The 2017 tax cut slashed corporate tax rates by 40 percent, while 60 percent of tax savings went to the top 20 percent of earners.[33] By the end of his first year in office, Trump's administration had embraced sixty-four policies from the Heritage Foundation's updated *Mandate for Leadership* recommendations, including placing more stringent work requirements on TANF, slashing Medicaid, and gutting the Affordable Care Act. "President Trump had an extraordinarily successful first year," Heritage codirector Thomas Binion confirmed approvingly, "as President Reagan did in the 1980s."[34] Trump's "Art of the Deal" approach to governance and commitment to "draining the swamp"—alongside his son-in-law/senior advisor Jared Kushner's promise to "run government like the best of American business" and designation of citizens as government's "customers"[35]—were in plumb alignment with Reagan's earlier insistence that government was the problem, not the solution to social and economic woes.

Meanwhile, even as Trump's tweets accused Silicon Valley start-ups like Facebook or retail giants like Amazon of holding

anti-conservative bias, his pro-corporate policies helped them rake in skyrocketing revenue. Trump's appointment of three right-wing justices remade the U.S. Supreme Court into a rubber stamp for reactionary policies, including its *Janus v. AFSCME* decision, which decimated labor unions' collective negotiating power. His National Labor Relations Board, an independent federal agency tasked with enforcing U.S. labor law, systematically weakened worker protections. These changes made good on the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's objectives to allow employers to circumvent the labor bargaining process and unilaterally impose discretionary discipline.[36] Unsurprisingly, then, when the COVID-19 global pandemic became a full-blown inter/national crisis, the Trump administration was hands-off in enforcing OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) safety standards that could have prevented many "essential" workers from getting sick and dying amid hazardous conditions. He was remarkably hands-on, however, in enforcing the Defense Production Act in order to keep open the $2 trillion meat industry (and its major processors, Smithfield and JBS USA) and render them immune from lawsuits.[37]

#RESIST SOMETHING! INDIVIDUAL VIRTUE AND MORAL CAPITAL IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL LIFE

The striking continuity, indeed the vicious ramping up, of neoliberal ideology over the past fifty years is not surprising in itself. After all, once logics are accepted as common sense and

have wended their way into every domain of existence, they are not easily dismantled. What is more astonishing are the ways in which discourses of liberal resistance—over the past decade but particularly in the age of Trump—have not only failed to systematically attack but have also tragically drawn upon and reified a neoliberal worldview.

For instance, in a political economy that has waged war on everything public, collective resistance has been steadily overlapped by the "philanthropic efforts" of corporate leaders. These new political experts hold increasing decision-making power for organizing the social order, including (in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling) unabashedly shaping elections. This trend has induced an effective and material reliance on corporate superheroes who promise to single-handedly attend to the nation and world's inequities, vulnerable communities, and public crises.[38] Consider Bill Gates, the technocratic savior who claims a "business approach to saving lives"—in areas from COVID-19 and climate change to foreign aid and the crisis of democracy itself. This limiting framework for what constitutes a democratic approach to identifying and responding to political problems exemplifies the neoliberal effort to replace the state's commitment to facilitating democratic relations (under capitalism) with moral individualism and voluntarism.[39]

Economic elites, increasingly drawing the ire and critical scrutiny of movements like Occupy and Bernie Sanders's insurgent supporters, have been quick to remake themselves as bulwarks of resistance to structural oppression. Ironically, these efforts entail putting money into politics in order to get money out of politics. Patriotic Millionaires is a group of "high net

worth Americans" that roots its resistance to economic inequality in a "revolutionary" demand that independent millionaires, billionaires, and corporations should "naturally and gladly" pay a higher share of taxes. Founded in 2010 by Erica Payne, a political strategist who worked on Bill Clinton's inaugural committee, the group advocates for a (gradual) minimum wage raise to fifteen dollars an hour, resisting voter disenfranchisement, and higher taxation of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who earn more than one million dollars per year. But beneath the veneer of progressive policy is a deep commitment to corrosive reactionary myths. Payne, for instance, frames the advocacy of a Patriotic Millionaires as a way to mitigate the possibility of creating a "permanent underclass" and to challenge the idea that "greed is more important to you than another human being."[40] To claim that an "underclass"—a term with racist roots that plays on images of inner-city Black deviance—is created through lower taxation on elites is to willfully ignore that capitalism is a system of labor exploitation. It is a system dedicated to the maintenance of inequality, irrespective of a country's particular tax code.

Moreover, as Payne's focus on individual greed makes clear, Patriotic Millionaires individualizes inequality, diverting critique of systematic exploitation toward condemnation of a few ultra-greedy apples. If anything, the group reinforces self-aggrandizing images of rich people as rational and generous citizens and the poor as requiring capable stewardship from above. As much as equitable political representation is championed in the Patriotic Millionaires' literature, its discourse reveals an underlying hostility toward real participatory democracy and

fear of collective resistance against racial capitalism. Consider the words of technology executive William Battle, who describes the rationale for his participation in almost prophetic terms, as if to stave off a social apocalypse: "'We could have—I don't want to say it, but, riots,' he said. 'Social unrest' may be a better way of putting it. We're making life bad for a lot of people. And it's getting frigging nasty.'"[41] The chair of Patriotic Millionaires, Morris Pearl, a former Wall Street executive at BlackRock who specialized in valuing bonds, echoes this sentiment. Pearl recounts being on vacation at a resort in the Bahamas and noticing that low-wage workers did not seem particularly happy with their station. "'I hadn't thought about it until my kids brought it up,'" Pearl notes. "'I don't want our country to end up like South Africa. If you recall, apartheid did not end well for the rich people or the poor people.'"[42]

Patriotic Millionaires is just one example of the ways in which the economic elite have tried to coopt #resistance to restore political power. Resistance is just as readily exploited by multinational corporations wishing to insist that they too are taking an ethical stand against injustice, that they are indeed bold leaders of transformative movements. For instance, in order to reflect its newfound commitment to resisting "toxic masculinity," the Procter and Gamble–owned razor company Gillette aligned its "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be" campaign with the #MeToo movement. In its 2019 commercial, individual men gently but firmly "call each other out" on sexist behavior in the street, boardroom, and backyard while news about the #MeToo movement plays in the background. "Men need to hold other men accountable," a low baritone voice intones solemnly, "To

say the right thing. To act the right way." Gillette also pledged $1 million per year (until 2022) to nonprofit organizations implementing "awareness programs"—surrounding sexual harassment, bullying, and domestic violence—and "designed to help men of all ages achieve their personal best." As consumers, men are told, they can enhance their moral value by accepting Gillette's mandate to "do better" on an individual level; acquiring moral capital (on the part of consumers) translates into literal capital for corporations.

To be sure, for decades there has been talk of sustainability, ethical manufacturing, and so forth—indeed, many of these corporate practices date back to the rise of Clinton's "Third Way" discourse, to allow for capitalism to flourish alongside (some semblance of) democracy. And yet, in the Trump era favored terms of Silicon Valley newly included "disruption," "revolution," and "resistance." As part of a 2017 media campaign to promote one of its television series, *Man in the High Castle*, Amazon created a radio station called "Resistance Radio," which featured music and commentary about an imagined underground collection of democratic movements fighting off the Third Reich and the Nazis. With much of the United States in dread over what form of authoritarianism the Trump presidency would deliver—among Amazon's best sellers after Trump's election were George Orwell's *1984* and Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*—Amazon positioned itself as the face of revolutionary politics. In another egregious example, Pepsi drew upon a generic blend of the (anti-Trump) Resistance and #BLM protests in its 2017 "Live bolder, live louder, live for now" campaign. Aired on the forty-ninth anniversary of the

assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the campaign's key commercial depicts a (gender, ethnically, and racially) diverse group of millennial activists pumping their fists, breakdancing, smiling joyfully, and raising placards that proclaim "peace and love!" and "join the conversation!" Several police (without combat gear or visible weapons) line the streets. While its target is indiscernible, the protest conveys a liberal democratic ethos of pluralism, diversity, and inclusion. It is not only a "civilized" and authorized resistance that carries no threat to neoliberal relations of power, but it also centers the corporation as moral do-gooder. As PepsiCo asserts, "Supporting diversity and engagement is not only the right thing to do, it is the right thing for our business."[43] When (white) celebrity Kendall Jenner (doing a photo shoot nearby) decides to join the demonstration, she casually hands a Pepsi to a police officer—who takes a sip and grins slyly while the crowd cheers. A tagline reads, "Live Bolder."[44] To engage in "bold" forms of resistance is not to enter into collective struggle against systemic injustice but to forge harmony with the very carceral and corporate institutions central to criminalizing resistance.

Similarly, the thirtieth anniversary ad campaign of apparel company Nike featured NFL star Colin Kaepernick, who was blacklisted from the league for taking a knee during the national anthem in protest against police brutality. In the commercial, Nike conjoins its classic slogan "Just Do It" with Kaepernick's voiced conviction that we must "Believe in Something. Even if it means sacrificing everything." The visual backdrop showcases young children with a range of embodiments/abilities and racial

and ethnic backgrounds engaged in physical changes as Kaepernick concludes: "Don't ask if your dreams are crazy. Ask if they're crazy enough." Through the cruelly optimistic American Dream rhetoric of merit, hard work, and sacrifice, dreaming and working toward a better world is effortlessly collapsed with individual goals like winning an Olympic gold medal. Kaepernick's resistance becomes the pursuit of moral integrity, as it is disengaged from Black Lives Matter and its systematic critiques of power.

The blatant contradiction between these mega-corporations' embrace of antiauthoritarian stances and their own authoritarian practices is self-evident. For example, Amazon, which employs roughly 5 percent of the U.S. workforce and relies on an un-unionized, temporary labor pool, is well known for its ruthless practices and obsession with market capitalization at all costs—human and environmental. Nike, often ranked last in the global working conditions and wages in its sprawling collection of factories, is known for its coerced labor from the persecuted Chinese minority, Uighurs.[45] PepsiCo has faced continuous accusation of major human and environmental rights violations in its supply chain companies, including the use of child labor, anti–trade union practices, and land seizures and displacements.

Beyond corporate cooptation, dominant practices of everyday resistance are also individualized, to be enacted through moral reformation and self-care. To resist is to register independent opposition through informed and rational decision making and free speech—Believe in something! Live Bolder! Stay informed! Support the "truth-telling" media! This logic is what

allowed the *Washington Post*, purchased for 250 million by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos in 2013, to adopt as the newspaper's official tagline "Democracy Dies in Darkness." The act of consuming corporate-produced daily news is an individual practice of enlightenment that works to resist democracy's demise. As Bonnie Honig describes, public things are part of democracy's "holding environment," ways in which citizens attach to one another as equals. Public things—which allow people from vast backgrounds to "constellate affectively" around shared objects—put us into democratic relation to one another.[46] A neoliberal economy, based on privatization, seizing state institutions, and decimating spaces for democratic public life, undermines possibilities for this kind of robust democratic engagement.

In this context, it makes sense that corporate-owned social media platforms have become a primary site for ordinary citizens (those without wealth or structural access to power) to exercise political agency. Here, in these intimate (capitalist) publics, collective resistance gets converted into a bloc of self-publicists struggling to enhance their moral reputation. Alongside the circulation of pithy memes, slogans, and links that announce one's resister sensibility, is the swarm of documentation evidencing (personally responsible) practices of resistance. There is no signing of a petition, charitable contribution, trip to the polls, or attendance at a protest that goes un-selfied, un-self-congratulated, or un-moralized.[47] At the same time, the feedback loop of thumbs-ups, hearts, and "shares" affirms one's ethical value and cultivates fantasies of belonging to a community of resisters. Throughout the Trump years (and beyond),

citizens mobilized social media profile pictures in order to (quite literally) frame their personal identities as people with the right analysis, liberal politics, ethical character, and, ultimately, as a counterreactionary gesture of resistance: "I'm so *not Trump*." With a plethora of (Facebook-generated) options, these frames provide a means of accruing "homo resister" capital: "I stand with" or "I stand against" a fill-in-the-blank political cause or marginalized population; the rainbow flag, or the flag of a country under duress; "I Voted"; or even, to black out one's profile as a sign of political dismay.

These intimate publics of capitalist culture, as queer theorist Lauren Berlant puts it, have become "affective magnets" for the "ordinary restlessness" of everyday life under neoliberalism: a place to express disappointment, grief, sympathy, and outrage. This sentimentality joins a grammar of political complaint, she contends, that displace complex analyses of the "fundamental condition of the complaint's production."[48] Instead, these spaces act as a kind of social "safety valve" for diffusing radical energies. As solutions are often framed in individualist and moralized terms, democracy becomes made up of good intentions—a kind of "sandpaper on the surface of the racist monument whose structural and economic solidity endures."[49] One has done their democratic and compassionate part: reposted the petition against sex trafficking; contributed an annual donation to the American Civil Liberties Union (who will do the work of resisting for them); affirmed their personal commitment to trans rights; and acquired their daily dose of good resister salve. "What does it mean for the theory and practice of social

transformation," Berlant inquired, "when feeling good becomes evidence of justice's triumph?"[50]

NEOLIBERAL ORDERS, COMMON SENSE

Neoliberal governance entails the production of responsibilized subjectivities who embody and abide by market values. This is a politically neutralized population, too concerned with evaluating and disciplining themselves (and one another) to press toward alternative visions of the "common good." The neoliberal project of disparaging the social state and ideals of social justice—in the name of free and responsibilized individuals—is at once the project of entrepreneurialization, or the "human capitalization" of subjects. To survive in a neoliberal world is to be configured as a malleable appendage of advanced capitalism, a speck of human capital incited to "conduct" oneself (in Foucault's terms) in particular ways—to self-invest.[51] This homo economicus, as Wendy Brown puts it, is concerned with one's own commodification, or "the production of self-image within a competitive market society," rather than as an active democratic citizen invested in her political power (*homo politicus*). If living under neoliberal rationality means submitting ourselves and others to "unremitting calculations of instrumental worth,"[52] it is unsurprising that "critical thinking," "equity and diversity training," or even "standing up for a cause" have been transmogrified into desirable practices for the enhancement of one's (or a corporation's) exchange value.

In practice, what Henry Giroux calls the "terror of neoliberalism" takes the shape of human and eco-systemic wreckage:[53] Like a pipeline shoved mercilessly through an ancient lake. Like government as another resource to be virulently mined for corporate profit. Like lifetimes of labor extracted from the majority, and prisons and detention centers overflowing with the disposable and (racially) criminalized. Neoliberalism, Naomi Klein avers, "is what loveless-ness looks like as policy . . . greed and carelessness incarnate."[54] Most disturbing, however, are the ways in which neoliberal governmentality shapes our resistance to these systematically loveless practices, promoting a privatized notion of agency that vanquishes political imaginaries and vocabularies directed toward claiming democracy as a public project of/for collective rule (and life more broadly). As we show in the next chapter, notions of agonistic contest (over unity), political transformation (over restoration), the articulation of radical demands and longings (over obedience to democratic procedures in the service of reformist reforms)—all of these, the grounds for radical democratic struggle—over time become viewed as not relevant for the "real world." The commonsense logic that there is "no alternative" to neoliberal democracy is one that must be revealed and resisted—within our own conduct and in the world more broadly—if we are to sustain hope in demanding a different order of things. This is done, as we argue in chapter 5, by paying keen attention to activists already pursuing a different kind of common sense (in opposition to market logics), those building a "counterhegemonic" infrastructure of transformative resistance.

Chapter Three

DEMOCRACY DOMESTICATED

RESISTANCE AS RESTORATION

I don't think people want a new direction. Our values unify us.

—House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi

WHEN NEWLY elected vice president Kamala Harris gave her rousing victory speech on November 7, 2020, she carefully crafted the image of the ballot box as the crown jewel of democratic engagement and the beating heart of collective action. "Democracy is not guaranteed," she warned solemnly, but it "is only as strong as our willingness to fight for it, to guard it and never take it for granted. And protecting our democracy takes struggle. It takes sacrifice." The electoral success of the Biden/Harris ticket was portrayed not only as a resistance-fueled moratorium on four additional years of Trump-induced misery but also as an act of radical salvation for the future of democracy. "When our very democracy was on the ballot in this election," Harris crooned, "with the very soul of America at stake, and the world watching, you ushered in a new day for America."[1]

Indeed, Joe Biden's 2020 presidential campaign had been built on twin mandates of resisting Trump's neofascist tendencies

("Never Trump") and restoring American unity, both incumbent on a "return to normal." According to the Biden campaign, and scores of political commentators, the great danger of the Trump presidency from 2016 onward was not the amplification of neoliberal privatization, decimation of workers' rights and creation of a precarious low-wage labor force, nor a democratic capitalism privileging elite power over "the people." Rather, the danger they emphasized was his incivility, the aberration of breaking with time-honored democratic norms. This critique focused on Trump's flagrant refusal to speak in elite "presidential" modes and his brazen disregard for and subsequent threat to status quo democratic institutions and regulative procedures. Casting Trump as a monstrous anomaly or vulgar breech in the long march toward progress, rather than as the predictable product of an economic-political system corrupted beyond repair by big money, newscasters from conservative Fox News to liberal Rachel Maddow breathlessly exhorted a return to "politics as usual." As Maddow put it, Trump's behavior during the presidential debates was actively destroying U.S. citizens' belief in the "normal work," "regular order," and "fundamental practices" of our democracy. The goal was clear: "the building back better" of a more *resilient* democratic capitalism—in all of its structurally constrained and unjust glory—and in the name of a marginally better present and cruelly optimistic vision of the future.

Biden's victory speech framed this battle to revive the status quo and, in so doing, to "restore the soul of America" through a well-worn neoliberal progressive strategy. Referencing the

great Black writer Langston Hughes's poems "Harlem (A Dream Deferred)" and "Let America Be America Again," Biden announced that "the American story is about the slow, yet steady widening of opportunity" in which "too many dreams have been deferred for too long."[2] Of course, Hughes's reflections on these "deferred dreams" were housed in damning critiques of faux patriotism and the hypocritical rhetoric of freedom and equality under vicious "dog eat dog" racial capitalism. Indeed, the poet conjectures that pervasive economic/social injustice will ultimately "explode" as resistance and a radical demand for a thorough revaluation of values ("America never was America to me"). Indubitably, in Biden's iteration of "letting America be America again," the aberration that is Donald Trump is cast as sole impediment to the natural arc of capitalist-democratic progress: "We've seen a force that would shatter our nation rather than share it, would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy. . . . But while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated." Now that the scourge had been successfully resisted, Biden urged, it was time to cease "harsh rhetoric," "lower the temperature" of political contest, and pursue "bipartisan cooperation."[3]

Through incitation of nostalgia (for pre-Trump unity) paired with utopian aspiration (of the arc of justice), the inauguration worked to restore the nation as a site of fantasy and longing, carrying the liberal democratic promise of a conflict-free and integrated world. The crowning jewel of this progressive neoliberal effort was the decision to have the young Black poet Amanda Gorman deliver her spoken-word poem "The Hill We

Climb," a call to resuscitate unity and equal opportunity on the heels of a successful post-Trumpian resistance: "We, the successors of a country and a time / where a skinny Black girl / descended from slaves and raised by a single mother / can dream of becoming president / only to find herself reciting for one . . . And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us / but what stands before us. / We close the divide because we know, to put our future first, / we must first put our differences aside."[4]

This turn to democratic restoration over the past several years has been notable, especially in light of the transformative possibilities opened up under popular support for Bernie Sanders's leftist call and the rise of new social justice movements like Occupy and Black Lives Matter. But this strategy to obfuscate collective dissatisfaction and redirect crumbling attachments to capitalist democracy is part of a longer history. Under an escalating neoliberalism, the revisioning of the terms of democracy has coincided with the destruction of critical engagement with power relations and radical vision—within the Democratic Party and across the liberal intellectual landscape. Austerity and privatization measures that promote political cynicism and increased vulnerability for the masses have enervated revolutionary dreaming, while the very notion of democratic citizenship has been defanged of its critical potential, narrowly reimagined in provincial ways. Political elites are viewed as the true beacons of popular will, while cultivating the good habits of liberal citizenship has (largely) replaced direct and disruptive engagement. This particular ethos of democracy has championed political stability while feverishly buttressing an unsustainable and destructive version of late-stage capitalism.

In the previous chapter, we gestured toward neoliberalism's stifling of possibilities for radical democratic subjectivity and action—waged in the name of resistance against unruly social justice movements, an inefficient and overweening state, and utopian notions of the common good, more broadly. Here, we demonstrate how these counterrevolutionary discourses and logics have been braided together with the Democratic elite's embrace of progressive neoliberalism and with liberal intellectuals complicit in the ongoing project of projecting democracy as technocratic "method" of rules, institutions, and procedures. We are particularly concerned with the ways in which resistance has been subsumed by, and shaped to be consonant with, the restoration of a (neo)liberal democratic project characterized by unity, civility, and adherence to hallowed norms. This tactic of consolidating and redirecting the anger, shock, and overwhelm of the Trump years, in the name of getting "back to normal," relies on and facilitates the revitalization of cruelly optimistic attachments to an anemic language of diversity, inclusion, freedom, and progress that is distinctly complacent about neoliberal capitalism. It is this combination, we argue, that made possible the bipartisan resistance against Trump while restoring the bipartisan-produced "democracy incorporated" infrastructure that gave rise to him.[5]

DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES, POPULAR DISCONTENT

From the beginning of the Western tradition, democracy—understood as a mode of social organization through which

the people ruled themselves—was deeply associated with resistance: revolution against economic and political tyranny; organizing against racial violence; and uprising against empire to topple elites. This is the way the will of the masses is announced, the collective storming of the streets in the name of discontent, popular demands, and self-determination. In fact, that is precisely why antidemocratic thought was more ubiquitous than democratic thought. Plato's *Republic* famously described democracy as unruly, turbulent, and violent. U.S. Founding Father James Madison—a partisan of representative government who worried about popular uprisings like the 1785 Shays' Rebellion and the 1747 Knowles Riot—argued in *The Federalist Papers* that democracy was as short in its life as it was grisly in its death. It was precisely for this reason that the U.S. republic was constructed to reduce and constrain mass participation even as it espoused principles of equality and freedom.

In many ways, democracy as resistance characterizes the seismic upheavals of twentieth-century radical movements that reverberated throughout the United States. American educator and Columbia University professor John Dewey understood democracy as a local, social activity grounded in people's capacity to control the conditions of their existence. Applauding the 1894 Pullman Strike—in which a quarter of a million railroad workers boycotted the slashing of already low wages and brought "U.S. business as usual" to a (literal) screeching halt—Dewey noted that a "few freight cars burned up is a cheap price to pay."[6] There was the Seattle General Strike of 1919, which showed sixty-five thousand shipyard workers going on strike and the community around them engaging in self-rule in order to

sustain basic services like sanitation, laundry, and firefighting. And there were the efforts of Black communists like Hosea Hudson of Alabama, who organized the Right to Vote League in 1937 in order to mobilize illiterate black sharecroppers against economic and racial domination. This was an organized effort to provide "full economic, political, and social equality to the Negro people and the right of self-determination . . . free government housing . . . unemployed and social insurance for the old people who were too old to work . . . [and] equalization of education."[7] Collective resistance, as democratic praxis and in the name of profound political transformation, was central to these movements.

By the end of World War II, however, democratic theory underwent a dramatic shift, during which democracy was cleansed of its critical edge and resistance was neutralized as an ideal. The triumph of liberal capitalism over neofascism and the emergence of a global human rights regime (represented by 1948's Universal Declaration of Human Rights) created enthusiasm for a conception of representative government that would be suitable for justifying American empire. One of the most influential redefinitions of democracy that permeated American intellectual circles was advanced by the conservative economist Joseph Schumpeter in his book *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942). Schumpeter, a child of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and partisan of aristocratic, traditional rule, had witnessed a growing social democratic council movement of the late 1910s Austrian Social Democratic Party and was terrified of factory workers' attempts to control their labor through directly democratic means.[8] At first Schumpeter advocated for

conservative European parties to gain power through parliamentary means and to garner public support through the dissemination of right-wing newspapers, but soon he came to believe that democracy itself required conceptual revision within the popular imagination. This was the intellectual campaign on which he embarked fiercely within the United States. According to Schumpeter, a populace was easily swayable, nonideological, and desired governance by knowledgeable elites who might clarify and contour public issues. The role of "the people" in Schumpeter's democracy was reduced to determining which elites would be granted access to power, to "accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them" within a distinctly delimited party system.[9]

Conceptualizing democracy as a formal procedure—the notion of choice as and through "free and fair elections"—rather than as a social practice of self-rule by the demos, reinspired a generation of American political scientists preoccupied with domesticating democracy. The logic underpinning Schumpeter's iteration of procedural democracy—that ordinary people had neither the interest, time, nor ability to rule themselves—was animated as a maxim by economist Anthony Downs's *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957). As part of his theory of political behavior, Downs described nonvoters as potentially more rational decision makers than voters themselves. Voting is a costly activity, he noted, requiring information gathering, utility calculation, and strategization efforts, not to mention registering and getting to the polls. Thus, the indifference of those who rationally abstain might indicate "equal satisfaction with" (rather than "equal disgust" by) their electoral options—as

well as a faith that institutionalized democracy would be sustained by other voters' participation.[10]

This move toward formalizing democracy's severance from popular sovereignty was also evident in sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset's 1959 classic definition of democracy as a "political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials."[11] If formal democracy were merely a robust competition to determine who would hold office and shape public policy, this developing body of thought also implied that power was socially diffuse. This contention was at the analytical heart of Robert Dahl's *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961), in which he advanced his "pluralist" theory of power. Studying the politics of New Haven, Connecticut—a city where the wealthy Yale University coexisted alongside one of the poorest populations—Dahl argued that everyday citizens actively involved in the "political stratum" and, regardless of wealth, status, or resources, could "exert a good deal of steady, direct, and active influence on government policy." While those disinterested, apathetic or poorly informed folks residing in the "apolitical stratum" might have less impact on policy, he conceded, they still participate in "governance" through affirming shared democratic values, institutions, and procedures.[12]

In the postwar period and during the first decades of the Cold War, this highly formalistic, interest-focused definition of democracy transformed the idea of resistance in American politics. Resistance came to be understood through specific, state-sanctioned electoral means—registering a vote for or against a preselected political candidate or having an interest group

(mostly based in Washington, D.C.) represent citizens in the legislative process. Within the normative democratic imagination, resistance assumed the form of an enumerated liberty located within and tolerated by the formal system of democracy itself—for instance, freedom of speech or assembly under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. At the same time, since elites were understood as the true stewards of popular sovereignty, disruptive acts of public resistance, such as strikes, boycotts, occupations, riots, rebellions, and (perhaps most especially threatening to capitalism) the destruction of property, came to be viewed as outside the democratic process, in excess of democracy's protective and protected bounds, and thus as extra-political.

The rebellious 1960s social movements were a direct assault on this burgeoning consensus around elite, procedural democracy. Outraged by U.S. imperial ambitions abroad, and confronted by a broad range of domestic injustices, radical activists took to the streets to rewire democracy with the spirit and praxis of transformative resistance. The "Port Huron Statement," authored by Tom Hayden and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), avowed that in order for democracy to be of, by, and for the people, political life must be rooted in public decision making and politics recaptured as "the art of collectively creating an acceptable pattern of social relations."[13] The manifesto also challenged the ways in which capitalist logics stultified human decency, respect, and creativity, arguing that the economic sphere itself, including its resources and means of production, be subject to democratic social regulation. Taking these words as invitation and inspiration, U.S. youth were riotous.

The free speech movement of 1964 at the University of California, Berkeley, led by college student Mario Savio, occupied the university campus to oppose the Vietnam War and to push toward genuine academic freedom. Savio had spent the previous summer working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi to transform conditions for participatory democracy under the racial authoritarianism of Jim Crow laws. SNCC's rhetoric, not entirely dissimilar from the 1966 Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, centered on practicing mutual aid and direct democracy.

By January 1969, radical feminists in New York founded the group Redstockings as an assault on racism, heterosexism, and capitalist imperialism as extensions of "male supremacy." Redstockings' intertwined commitments included achieving internal democracy so that each woman might "develop her political potential" and developing a female-based class consciousness that centered on the "poorest, most brutally exploited women."[14] Only months later, and following the 1969 Stonewall uprisings, queer activists (including gay men, radical feminists, socialists, and former SDS members) formed the powerful if short-lived Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Claiming themselves as an "anti-assimilationist" alternative to the homophile groups that had preceded them, GLF set its sights on the abolition of social institutions like heterosexual marriage and the military and making explicit connections between the bourgeois nuclear family structure and white supremacist capitalism. True gay liberation was not "about reforms," GLF's 1970 manifesto declared, but required "a revolutionary change in our whole society" to be wrought by coalition building within the

United States and transnational solidarity with third world struggles.[15]

These modes of resistance—both prefiguring and in the name of radical democratic praxis—achieved notable political victories. Undoubtedly, without the force of SNCC and the Black Panthers, Lyndon Johnson would not have been compelled to pass the Fair Housing Act of 1968; without pressure from the vibrant free speech movement, the Vietnam War would have gone on for much longer. Beyond these pragmatic effects, however, these movements spawned and circulated radical discourse about immeasurable dissatisfaction with status quo politics, unjust power relations, and the interlocking nature of oppressive institutions and structures.

Predictably, these movements were met with a right-wing backlash. Republican Richard Nixon came to power in 1968 with a promise to stomp out disorder and chaos in U.S. cities. The FBI's counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) infiltrated, surveilled, and aimed to "neutralize" feminist, New Left, environmentalist, anti–Vietnam War, American Indian, socialist, civil rights, and Black Power organizers and activist movements whose activities exposed (and threatened to disseminate popular knowledge about) the cruelties of U.S. "democratic" ways of life. Through psychological warfare, smear campaigns, false imprisonment, violence, and assassination, COINTELPRO set about saving democracy—in intolerably undemocratic ways—from the very people practicing popular sovereignty and resistance. The backlash continued throughout the 1980s, during Ronald Reagan's attack on social welfare and the rise of the bipartisan neoliberal consensus.

DEMOCRATIC DELIBERATION, NEUTRALIZED POWER

One might imagine that this backlash provided a fierce resurgence of radical democratic thought, energies, and organizing. However, by the early 1980s, the idea of democracy was being tamed, domesticated, and, especially within the walls of the academy, theorized in ways suitable for reinforcing the unequal status quo. Public intellectuals retreated into the realm of philosophical abstractions over the historicizing of politics. The production and circulation of ethical theory loomed large over analyses of power relations while tepid evaluations of democratic norms crowded out critical engagement with the increasingly rapacious power of capital and toothless liberalism. Combining the ideas of communitarianism, progressive liberalism, and civic republicanism—which stressed ideas centered on the public good, anti-corruption, and virtue ethics—democracy became reified as a habit, moral virtue, and civic lifestyle to be instilled and cultivated in responsible subjects.

In particular, political theory's preoccupation with a stable democratic order was bolstered by the turn toward what Jurgen Habermas coined "deliberative democracy," in his classic text *The Theory of Communicative Action*.[16] For Habermas, democracy was predicated on a set of conversations between mature autonomous citizens within the public sphere, with various claims scrutinized (within the context of existing laws or constitutional structures) in service of reaching rational consensus. Habermas, trained in the Frankfurt school tradition of examining hegemonic systems of culture, knowledge, and capital,

saw his work as a critique of rational choice and an extension of critical humanism. But his "discourse theory of democracy" was remarkably apposite for justifying U.S.-style liberal democracy, and it lay claim to triumph after the collapse of Soviet communism in the 1990s. Habermas's political theory was widely influential in the academy, inspiring a spate of research considering discourse ethics and deliberative democracy that filled the pages of flagship political science journals like *American Political Science Review*, *Political Theory*, and *American Journal of Political Science*.

Democracy was considered a practice of mastering the rules and basic conditions for policy making in the public sphere. Policy recommendations were centered on political accountability and better representation—for instance, replacing President's Day with Deliberation Day, a federal holiday on which citizens from all walks of life and competing ideologies would come together to discuss political issues through self-reflective listening and respectful dialogue. In 2003, Stanford University established the Center for Deliberative Democracy; its flagship program was "Deliberative Polling," where citizens with opposing views were convened to exchange perspectives on a range of public interest topics and then polled to see if and how their attitudes had changed. The expectation was that democratic deliberation under "favorable conditions" would lead to a more enlightened populace capable of challenging their political representatives in rational and civic-minded ways, with the desired aim of consensus. Deliberative democracy, argue Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, "affirms the need to justify decisions made by citizens and their representatives. . . . Leaders

should therefore give reasons for their decisions, and respond to the reasons that citizens give in turn."[17]

Rather than centering widespread inequality and oppression as analytical lynchpins, deliberative democratic thought made democracy into a rarefied philosophical practice occurring under egalitarian conditions for civic engagement. This individualization and moralization of politics simply did not have space to attend to how the very idea of "politics" was structured by uneven relations of power and, in this way, obfuscated the role that disruptive social movements played in tackling these underlying social and economic systems.

This deliberative democratic turn came closer to the halls of power through the scholarship of Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam. In his classic book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*), Putnam argues that the real crisis of American democracy was the loss of social capital, facilitated by a decades-long decline in civic participation.[18] This loss had led to a fracture in trust, fraying communal bonds, increased polarization and partisanship, and a rapid decline in political participation. A major culprit, for Putnam, was the phenomenon of generational change in media—namely, the rise of television in the post-1950s era—which, he argues, facilitated social alienation. Putnam quickly became a darling of political centrists, who embraced the ways in which his analysis elevated a communitarian language of shared civic responsibility without demands for socioeconomic redistribution. On the heels of a laudatory *People* magazine profile, he was invited by then-president Bill Clinton to Camp David, and in 2013 Barack Obama awarded Putnam the National Humanities Medal.

If domesticated democracy (procedural and deliberative alike) were disentangled from demands for substantive political equality, including resistance against the rampant socioeconomic disparity that impedes such equality, then it could be rendered compatible with neoliberal progressive projects espousing the United States as an emancipatory beacon. At the same time, this framing could be weaponized to characterize transformative political struggle as anti-civil, unpatriotic, and counterproductive to this aim. It was a deliberative democratic discourse—prudent respect for difference, ratiocinative dialogue, and community empowerment—that provided Bill Clinton's rationale for his "One America Initiative," which proposed "best practices" for civic conversations around racial inequality. As "the world's first truly multi-racial democracy," the initiative chastised, we must "move towards solutions rather than continue to express or analyze the problem."[19] These community discussions should place "an emphasis on personal responsibility" in order to move away from "finger-pointing or naming enemies and towards constructive common action." By restoring national unity (over engaging in antiracist resistance) and embracing the "leadership who constantly strive to give meaning to . . . justice, equality, and inclusion," the United States could remain a "worldwide symbol of opportunity and freedom."[20]

Democracy could also become the principled rallying cry for the George W. Bush administration's push to invade Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), through the language of advancing civic liberty and equality worldwide: "In fact, the daily work of democracy itself is the path of progress. It teaches cooperation,

the free exchange of ideas, and the peaceful resolution of differences. . . . It is the practice of democracy that makes a nation ready for democracy, and every nation can start on this path."[21] And as the 2008 financial crisis was raging in the aftermath of the Great Recession, newly elected Democratic president Barack Obama would, on the one hand, support a $350 billion bailout to rescue the financial industry while providing little aid to homeowners facing foreclosure due to predatory lending practices. In justifying the public funding of financial institutions deemed "too big to fail" while neglecting widespread economic desperation, Obama would mobilize democracy as a shared civic language of national redemption: "What has also been lost is our sense of common purpose—our sense of higher purpose. And that's what we have to restore," Obama claimed. "This too is part of America's promise—the promise of a democracy where we can find the strength and grace to bridge divides and unite in common effort."[22]

Nowhere have the terms and practices of democracy been so thoroughly coopted to reinforce a reactionary agenda than in the U.S. courts. In *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010), a conservative majority in the U.S. Supreme Court mobilized democratic pluralism to decide in favor of unlimited corporate spending for political candidates. Overturning prior modest regulations on contributions, the decision held that these were unconstitutional limits on free speech rights to which corporations (as "fictional persons" alongside the "natural" human citizenry) were entitled. As Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote, "Because speech is an essential mechanism of democracy—it is the means to hold officials accountable to the people—political speech must prevail

against laws that would suppress it by design or inadvertence."[23] In other words, not only were corporations rendered people, but the public sphere of debate no longer featured as democracy's foundation. In one foul swoop, Wendy Brown argues, political speech became a capital (rather than democratic) right and electoral politics transformed into unregulated marketplaces.[24] Through this penetration of market values into political life, legislative power became insulated from democratic will and accountability and the voice of "the people" dramatically limited, all in the name of democratic freedom. Similarly, in *Janus v. AFSCME* (2018), the Court overturned precedent that allowed labor unions to collect mandatory dues from members, holding that "[free speech] is essential to our democratic form of government. . . . Whenever the Federal Government or a State prevents individuals from saying what they think on important matters or compels them to voice ideas with which they disagree, it undermines these ends."[25]

LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC #RESISTANCE

Despite the imperative to confront this domestication of democracy over the past half century, contemporary iterations of liberal democratic resistance have failed to do so. Too many Democrats remain enraptured by the "progressive neoliberal" vocabulary—birthed during Bill Clinton's "New Democrat" years—through which liberation became synonymous with "empowering" the rise of a more "diverse" elite within existing hierarchies. In particular, this shift from demands for redistribution/justice to a

truncated politics of recognition transformed the valence of feminist resistance, revamped as "cracking the glass ceiling."[26] Consider the figure of Hillary Clinton in 2016, elite feminism's poster child. As the Trump versus Clinton 2016 presidential contest commenced (with Trump unleashing his characteristically unconcealed misogyny), liberal feminist resistance roared into action. Across Twitter, memes proclaimed #ImwithHer and #theFutureisFemale, while women across the United States donned "Nasty Woman" T-shirts as a badge of loyalty to Clinton and resistance to Trump. Popular feminist writers joined the Hillary worship, even if sometimes tangled with disclaimers about her "complicated" political views—from Rebecca Traister's claim in *Elle* magazine that "I'm a hot mess for Hillary!" to Kate Harding's assertion that "I'm voting with my vagina. Unapologetically. Enthusiastically."[27] The "pantsuit," representing Hillary's signature outfit and, more broadly, women's rise within formal systems of power (from the corporate world to representation within procedural democracy), emerged as the emblem of feminist struggle. The Facebook group calling itself Pantsuit Nation sprung up to encourage women to don a pantsuit on Election Day "as an act of solidarity," garnering three million members and thousands of colorful "pantsuit at the polls" photos.

But as a progressive neoliberal candidate, Clinton was in no position to capture the antiestablishment rage emanating from a failing status quo. While her husband's administration had implemented policies tearing apart the working and middle class (all of which she supported), Hillary's own track record was equally "nasty." She had served as the first woman on the

board of Walmart (infamous for its sweatshop labor practices, poverty-level wages, and systematic discrimination against women employees), bragging in a 1990 speech, "I've always been proud of Walmart and what we do and the way we do it better than anyone else."[28] In a 1996 speech supporting the punitive crime bill (a policy that contributed to mass incarceration), Hillary described Black children in the racially coded language of "superpredators," who lacked conscience and empathy and needed to be "brought to heel."[29] She used similarly destructive language in her support of welfare reform, quipping that women moving off welfare were no longer unproductive "deadbeats."[30] As a New York senator, Hillary was a war hawk, endorsing George W. Bush's unilateral invasion of Iraq, which killed a quarter million Iraqi civilians and cost the United States over a trillion dollars (which might have been directed toward social programs). Later, Hillary's focus as secretary of state (under Obama) was such a financial industry sycophant that the *Wall Street Journal* declared she had "redefined the job in ways that promoted the interests of U.S. business." Shortly after leaving the State House, she embarked on a lucrative career giving six-figure closed-door speeches to big banks and investment houses like Goldman Sachs. While she claimed to regret these "pretty penny" gigs for their "bad optics," Wall Street was the highest contributor to her 2016 presidential campaign. In sum, as Amber A'Lee Frost contends, Hillary's biography "has all the makings of a neoliberal folktale."[31]

Given these ideological (and material) investments, Hillary was incapable of offering an embracive narrative that forged associations between rampant economic despair and under/

unemployment and the emancipatory struggles of popular social movements. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, Clinton's vision excluded any meaningful division (between the neoliberal status quo and the leftist alternative voiced by Bernie Sanders) while pushing the moral division between progressive neoliberalism and the right's populist threat to it—the "basket of deplorables," as she quaintly described Trump supporters. Aside from a range of sexist justifications, Trump voters rejected not only Clinton's neoliberal economic policy but also the way in which progressive neoliberalism's truncated social ideals cast them as "culturally backward."[32]

If anything, however, Hillary's presidential defeat accelerated her supporters' reverence, and immediately following the election, she emerged as feminist-in-chief of the Resistance. To "thunderous applause" at the 2017 Women for Women International annual luncheon in New York, Clinton identified herself as an "activist citizen" who had joined the Resistance. "Women's rights," she announced, "is the great unfinished business of the 21st century."[33] Shortly thereafter, she announced the founding of a nonprofit organization called Onward Together, filled with messages recycling her presidential platform and aimed at "channeling resistance" into establishment Democratic politics (the tagline is "resist. persist. insist. enlist"). Tellingly, the organization's official merchandise features a baby onesie pantsuit with pearls.

Throughout the Trump years, liberal feminist resistance largely followed this "politics of (electoral) representation" trajectory. The 2018 "Year of the Woman" was emblematized by iconic (white) figures like Princess Leia and Wonder Woman

bearing the phrase "a Woman's Place is in The Resistance." In the run-up to the midterm elections, EMILY's List, which describes itself as "the nation's largest resource for women in politics," issued the call, "Resist. Run. Win," urging women to send a "pink wave" through the legislature. EMILY's List representatives made clear that "resisting is only the first step" in achieving the ultimate aims of getting women into political positions. "The women's march released the activism in America," confirmed former Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). "But to every woman who marched, I will say you have marched, now you must run." Ellen Malcolm, founder and chair of EMILY's List, added, "Taking the resistance and showing women how to run [for office] is the future of our democracy, and I couldn't be prouder."[34]

This push to move women into the Democratic Party has relied on corporate feminist discourses popularized by former Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, who implored women to resist patriarchy by "leaning in" to the capitalist economy with all the individual (girl) power they could muster. Likewise, EMILY List's campaign advertisements showcased candidates who had muscled their way up various corporate and military ladders, and directed more women to "lean in" to representative democracy. The most aggressive example was a video for M. J. Hegar, former Air Force combat pilot and author of *Shoot Like a Girl*, who successfully petitioned the U.S. Department of Defense to eliminate the combat exclusion policy limiting women's opportunities for military advancement. The ad features Hegar zooming around on her motorcycle and explaining that her tough military experience, paired with her work to

gender-diversify its hierarchy, qualify her as "the fighter" the Democratic Party needs.[35]

DEMOCRACY RESTORED, DEMOCRACY STIFLED

If democracy is reduced to upholding formal institutions, procedures, and discursive norms—and resistance as defending these—then throughout his presidency, Donald Trump's repellant words and unbiddable actions were, in fact, accurately described as *the* great threat to democracy. His lying, cheating, mocking, belligerence, and hostility to political opponents were characterized as fundamentally undermining the norms of democratic discourse. This was the claim advanced in a widely celebrated and cited anonymous op-ed first published in the *New York Times* in 2018 (later, the author was revealed to be Miles Taylor, chief of staff at the Department of Homeland Security). Taylor describes how, against Trump's "amoral" and "erratic" behavior, mature patriotic Americans on the inside (the "adults in the room," as he put it) worked to "preserve democratic institutions." These efforts were, Taylor reports sagaciously, part of a "quiet resistance within the administration of people choosing to put country first."[36]

Democratic resistance has come to be associated not only with greater political maturity but also as a hallmark of civility. One must develop the capacity to tolerate opposing perspectives, work to bridge political divides, and sympathize with citizens whose ideas one may find repugnant. "Civility and respect for other citizens," explains one contemporary

commentator, "are prerequisites for a healthy democratic society."[37] Resistance includes contacting one's local official, posting on social media, breaking bread and talking to your neighbors, or engaging in a public vigil, demonstration, or march, so long as it is legally permitted by the requisite authorities. Democratic theorists like Ezra Klein, cofounder of the online magazine *Vox* and author of the best-selling *Why We're Polarized* (2020), express deepening concern about the disastrous effects of hyper-polarization (especially through social media like Facebook, Twitter, or TikTok) for inflaming already existing passions. In response, Klein calls for more "mindfulness," greater "attention to local politics," and a better "informational diet."[38] The decade has changed, but Klein is simply rehashing deliberative Democrats' time-worn diagnosis of democratic crisis and normative prescriptions to fix it: less media, more civic life and social capital in common; less combative affect and agonistic exchange, more active listening and cooperation; less vitriol for authority, more respect for democratic norms and procedures.

At the center of this call is a yearning for the restoration of a "more representative" representative democracy. A case in point is the movement Indivisible, a widespread network of local chapters credited with leading the grassroots opposition to Trump, which during the Biden presidency revised its motto from "Resisting the Trump Agenda" to "Restoring Representative Democracy." In its "Practical Guide for Fixing our Democracy," Indivisible insists that the only chance of "stopping them" (the political right) is to use this "precious window of time" to save our democracy through "simple legislation

passed by Congress on a majority vote and signed into law by President Biden." Its website features a new set of protest posters with sayings like "Use all the tools! Call your Senator!" and "Congress! Protect Our Democracy!"[39]

Apprehending resistance as the pursuit of democratic restoration is not just impaired analysis, wishful thinking, willful nescience, or some combination of these, but it has deleterious effects on the formation of popular power capable of winning struggles against authoritarianism. These accounts of resistance maintain an implicit defense of procedural, elite-led democracy and a cruelly optimistic attachment to the fantasy that better elites, more bipartisan consensus, and obedience to rules will eventually cure social ills. What they abandon are precisely those transformative demands for mutual belonging that can create a politics of refusal and initiate radical struggle: conceptions of a fortified social welfare state, collective control over conditions of life and work, and (perhaps most pressingly) critical scrutiny of neoliberal hegemony. If democracy in action is about maintaining the structural conditions necessary for freedom and equality, democratic resistance invites political investment of the demos as demos: battling the right-wing assault on the franchise; mobilization around impending climate catastrophe; struggles against a two-party system dominated by political and economic elites. Democracy, in this sense, is not simply the exercise of personal choice but resisting those very norms aimed at foreclosure of self-rule and of the political imagination.

Under a Biden presidency, no longer is the normal of injustice rammed in our faces by indecorous tweets. Instead, we

return to the normal of a marginally less ignored electorate and weak attempts at addressing corporate cronyism, police militarization, crushing austerity, and ecocide as the everyday life of American democracy.[40] As political theorist Sheldon Wolin reminds us, in classic totalitarianism the masses exist not as a polity but as a means of support available for rally by the dominant powers. It is in this sense, he claims, that U.S. democracy has become "inverted totalitarianism," a political order shaped by subservience to the requirements of profit and wholly unresponsive to the substantive hopes and demands of ordinary people.[41] Moreover, the "democratic" institutions and mechanisms available for organizing and expressing discontent are precisely those that require the kind of capital only dominant groups possess. Thus, institutions that define themselves as democratic, while abandoning the public good, harnessing their power to corporate interest, and perpetuating the militarization of society, serve primarily to enrich a small oligarchic elite. In other words, in an inverted totalitarian system, democratic resources belong to those who fundamentally oppose democracy.

This continued failure of the elite liberal class to protect the interests of ordinary citizens—as corporations dismantle the democratic state and dominate so-called democratic channels of participatory politics—is evident. We need only look at the COVID-19 crisis, which emblematized the "normal" abject failure of a critical infrastructure designed for profit and ill-equipped to care for the public. While Trump was grossly negligent in mitigating the pandemic (including ignoring the Obama administration's "pandemic playbook" guidelines,

circulating lies about the disease, and refusing to create a stay-at-home order), this is not the whole story. In fact, what we saw play out in front of us was the structural effect of bipartisan efforts to denigrate anything that might mitigate the (maldistributed) effects of a pandemic: universal health care, reliance on a low-wage workforce, insufficiency of public resources, and a political project of austerity. The pandemic also exposed the extraordinary (and always racialized) class inequality built into and sustaining this for-profit infrastructure—in particular, the "essential workers" (primarily low-income workers of color) asked to risk their lives to keep "normal life" humming along. At the same time, the requirements of participatory democracy are undermined by the everyday realities of living as "diminished fragments" under capitalism. To engage in contestation, unruly agitation, or the enactment of alternative ways of life is to put oneself in a precarious position in a regime ruled by exhaustive and exhausting human capitalization. Concerns about the problem of democracy and forging collective action in the service of self-rule become cumbersome, a superfluity, or an impossible thought.

Chapter Four

MAKING SUSPICIOUS CITIZENS

RACIALIZING AND CRIMINALIZING RESISTANCE

IN THE wake of the resurgent Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, in which "Defund the Police" became a central slogan, then–Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden clearly delineated which modes of antiracist resistance were acceptable as an "American response." Black rebellion, Biden passionately declared, should never involve "endless destruction. . . . Violence that guts and shatters businesses that serve the community is not [acceptable]." A month later, Biden doubled down, saying, "Peaceful protesters should be protected—but arsonists and anarchists should be prosecuted."[1] Biden's remarks mirrored those of Barack Obama, under whom he served as vice president from 2008 to 2016. Following the 2015 Baltimore rebellion, after police dislocated Freddie Gray's spine on a so-called rough ride that resulted in his death, Obama roundly characterized certain kinds of resistance as "counterproductive," unjustified, and criminal. There was "no excuse for the kind of violence that

we saw [on the streets]," he claimed. "When they burn down a building, they're committing arson. . . . One burning building will be looped on television over and over and over again, and the thousands of demonstrators who did *it the right way* have been lost in the discussion."[2]

These kinds of condemnations of property destruction and other forms of illegal resistance (coded as violence) that respond to actual state-sponsored violence against human beings are not new. In order to preserve the status quo and protect their own positions of power, political elite present themselves as steady forces capable of keeping citizens safe. But the fact that Biden and Obama choose to frame the antiracist protests through the binary lens of nonviolent civil disobedience versus dangerous rebellion is noteworthy. Rather than pushing back against this dichotomy, or raising critical questions about the long-standing structural conditions that give rise to such ferocious discontent, Biden and Obama successfully reproduced a post-1960s discourse in which Black political resistance is preemptively deemed criminal or scrutinized for subterranean levels of violence. This always and already racialized interpretation of dissent centralizes the role of police as custodians of the public good and shifts the responsibility onto resisters to performatively establish their commitment to neoliberal democratic values: unity, civility, responsibility, and respect for authority. The effects of this forty-year discourse have been grim. Transformative political resistance has not only been demonized discursively but also delimited physically. As public space becomes increasingly securitized, surveilled, and policed, the material

terrain for pursuing emancipatory struggle is diminished alongside possibilities for thinking, acting, and resisting otherwise.

In this chapter, we track the literal and ideological policing of the grounds of collective resistance through examining policies, practices, and discourses that link disparate groups of "unassimilated" citizens as always and already suspect. These chains of signification have worked to racialize, pathologize, and criminalize resistance and to justify intensified surveillance (and literal patrolling) of unruly subjects, communities, and streets. As the core problem of (potential and active) rebellion became identified as a problem of disordered subjectivities, social scientists, criminologists, and policy makers collaborated to transform and expand the terrain and scope of the War on Crime—in the name of restoring state authority, law and order, democratic civility, and the neoliberal social order. The police became increasingly equated with American values such as individual security, safety, and freedom and were shaped as custodians of public decency and community control and revitalization while collective resistance became framed as threatening those values.

The racialized criminalization of resistance reveals the disciplinary and punitive nature of neoliberal democracy. As radical movements were infiltrated and violently crushed, the state simultaneously created an ideological front against the racialized poor by casting them as unassimilated and deviant citizens living on the precipice of unruly disruption. This facilitation of preemptive suspicion and contempt toward the very people that might be organizing for structural change worked hand in hand

with the neoliberal production of a self-disciplining public and installed the will of the state into the very fabric of resistance. If virtuous neoliberal democratic citizenship is announced as obedience to "law and ordered" norms (including those of political transformation), then those who confront power—or reveal its operations—in radically disruptive ways are pathologized, surveilled, and punished. At a very concrete level, from the racialized policing of ideas, to bodies, to the streets, the spaces available for collective resistance have been increasingly foreclosed.

LAW AND ORDER

In the early part of the 1960s, transformative resistance movements working to redefine the boundaries of democratic citizenship were pushing power to expand what was practical and effectively changing public opinion. By 1967, due to robust protest against the Vietnam War, opposition jumped from 32 percent to 45 percent.[3] Similarly, a 1961 Gallup Poll showed that 57 percent of respondents viewed civil rights sit-ins as harming the chances of integration, but by 1965 the tide had reversed and 58 percent supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964.[4] Disruptive occupations of public space and uprisings in the street placed pressure on existing electoral coalitions—both Democrats who relied on the white Southern electorate and moderate Republicans who ignored race—to the brink of collapse or reconstitution. But as the level of agitation increased—for example, student campus strikes, draft card burnings, urban uprisings, labor

actions—public opinion began to shift perceptibly in the other direction. By 1967, concerns about crime, riots, and delinquency had become the top issue for 41 percent of respondents, compared to single digits several years earlier.[5]

This shift was not natural but rather the result of a multipronged strategy on the part of political elites to criminalize Black (predominantly poor) citizens and radical resistance in one foul swoop. At the forefront of this effort was the ascendant right, who recognized an opening, amid shifting cultural and social tides, through which to push a reactionary agenda. This approach entailed collapsing the multifarious demands and objectives of the new transformative social movements and deploying racially coded discourse, policy, and programs to articulate them as a threat to a well-ordered society. If all critiques of the state that threatened its legitimacy were simply the effect of unruly citizenship, then the state had a responsibility to reinstate that legitimacy by any means necessary.

The student movement, for instance, paired staunch critique of the Vietnam War with that of the capitalist system, while the Black Power movement centered on Black self-determination and sovereignty. And yet the right equated the student revolt with the Black revolt precisely in order to vilify both "insurgencies" as violent, impetuous, fueled by illicit drugs, and a legitimate target of state intervention. In a 1966 speech, then–California governor Ronald Reagan bemoaned the morality deficit on college campuses. "Beatniks, radicals and filthy speech advocates," Reagan declared, referencing the free speech movement (which originated with the University of California, Berkeley) and the youth-led counterculture, were at the

forefront of "rioting . . . anarchy." Moreover, Reagan continued, student radicals were implicitly driven by the same pernicious objectives as the Black Power movement: "How far do we go in tolerating these people and this trash under the excuse of academic freedom and freedom of expression? We wouldn't let a [Black activist like] LeRoi Jones in our living room and we wouldn't tolerate this kind of language in front of our families."[6]

Right-wing political strategists knew that criminalizing insurgent resistance through racialized discourse would instill fear in the white suburban electorate and would provide an opportunity for expanding and defining their electoral base around racial and class lines. Reflecting on the late 1960s and early 1970s, John Ehrlichman (senior domestic policy advisor to Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign) was candid in his assessment of this strategy: "The Nixon White House had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. . . . We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be against the war or black [people], but by getting the public to associate hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news."[7]

In 1967 Nixon himself took time off the presidential campaign trail to pen a *Reader's Digest* editorial titled "What Has Happened to America?" in order to pivot national focus from systemic racial inequality (and its resistances) toward crime, lawlessness, and disorderly unrest.[8] Here, Nixon defined recent urban uprisings (in Watts, Detroit, and Newark) not as outraged response to centuries of state-sponsored material and

social violence against Black people but as a deficit of Black civility and an insufficiently policed public sphere. This ideological and material policing of Black resistance was not new. Indeed, conservatives and liberals alike critiqued the civil rights movement's tactics of civil disobedience as disruptive, uncivil, and hostile to the common good. Local police across the Jim Crow South instated protest curfews, jailed nonviolent dissidents, and turned a blind eye—sometime even assisting—as vigilantes beat and terrorized boycotters. The unleashing of attack dogs and fire hoses on Black children marching in Birmingham in 1963 or Alabama state troopers storming the Edmund Pettus Bridge and beating nonviolent protesters in 1965 would symbolize the assault on the Black freedom movement. What distinguished Nixon's strategy was its framing of nationalized policing and hyper-surveillance as a core public policy solution to the problem of (potential or active) unruly citizenship, "to bring the physical presence of the law into those communities where the writ of authority has ceased to run."[9]

Moreover, in braiding Black rebellion together with other antiestablishment protests, Nixon underscored radical resistance more broadly as a virulent symptom of social decay. These were crimes against the social order that demanded draconian measures: "There can be no right to revolt in this society," he espoused. "To tolerate that is to invite anarchy."[10] On May 4, 1970, at an antiwar protest on the campus of Kent State University, the Ohio National Guard killed four and wounded nine student demonstrators who were agitating against Nixon's expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia. A year later, on September 13, 1971, as inmates in Attica Prison in New York

occupied the facility to negotiate better living conditions, New York governor Nelson Rockefeller (who rose to power on a tough-on-crime agenda) sent New York State Police to retake the Attica facility through a brutal display of violence. Bullets poured like rain, and twenty-nine prisoners and nine hostages were dead within an hour. Shortly thereafter, Nixon, in a private conversation with his chief of staff, declared, "They can talk all they want about the radicals. You know what stops them? Kill a few. . . . I think this is going to have a hell of a salutary effect on future prison riots. . . . Remember Kent State? Didn't it have one hell of an effect, the Kent State thing?"[11]

DISORDERED CITIZENS

In an era of Black power and militant student protest, and with "urban guerrilla warfare" and politically motivated "riots" increasingly viewed as a threat, conservative social scientists and criminologists began to identify a new delinquent category of suspicious citizenship: the "lower class." This discourse reinvented the potentially radical language of class to naturalize class behaviors, impulses, and outlooks. The "lower class" was cast as resistant to assimilation, their impulses deemed violent, and their desires insatiable. This body of social science research (influencing policy makers in unprecedented ways) advocated divestment from social welfare programs and more muscularized policing, reinvigorating the shift from the War on Poverty to the War on Crime.

In his influential 1970 book, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of the Urban Crisis*, sociologist Edward C. Banfield, a onetime colleague of Gary Becker and Milton Friedman, advisor to Nixon, and critic of Great Society antipoverty programs, summarily dismissed the idea that urban crime could be solved through greater socioeconomic equality. Even more remarkably, Banfield posited that crime would increase exponentially as inequality was diminished: "Demonstrations, confrontations, protests, dialogues, and so forth, are bound to be more frequent as the middle and upper classes grow."[12] Banfield's argument represented a striking twist on Daniel Patrick Moynihan's infamous 1965 book, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, more commonly known as the Moynihan Report.[13] Moynihan's racist posture was that Black culture and family life (namely, the absence of male breadwinners/father figures) created a self-perpetuating "tangle of pathology" that led to poverty, delinquency, and violence. While for Moynihan, the way to address inequality was through solidifying a patriarchal nuclear family, for Banfield, poverty (and thus crime) was somehow innate to African Americans. Articulating a growing consensus that the poor could not be converted into "productive citizens" and that crime within low-income black urban communities was unlikely to be eradicated, Banfield emphasized exhaustive surveillance over *potential* Black criminals and *anticipated* crime. As Banfield wrote, "Crime . . . relates mainly to class culture and personality . . . and to situational factors (such as the number of policemen on the scene and the size of the payroll)."[14]

Before long, this culture of what would be termed the "underclass" became a stand-in for *the* core problem of Black criminality and marked poor Black urban communities, more broadly, as sites of disorder that posed a looming threat to (White) citizens. As early as 1977, a *Time* magazine article described how "the universe of the underclass is often a junk heap of rotting housing, broken furniture, crummy food, alcohol and drugs. . . . Their bleak environment nurtures values that are often at radical odds with those of the majority—even the majority of the poor."[15] In his seminal 1982 article "The Underclass," *New Yorker* journalist Ken Auletta popularized this discourse of suspicious citizens, which included welfare dependents, juvenile delinquents, street criminals, drug abusers, high school dropouts, and those otherwise engaged in what he termed "antisocial activity." The extent of behavioral and moral deprivation, domestic dysfunction, and social isolation revealed by his study, Auletta concluded, would require serious reform and punitive measures.[16]

Police were soon reconceptualized not simply as custodians of public safety but as figures of neighborhood restoration to be deployed throughout spaces where crime lurked as an omnipresent possibility. No work was more influential in perpetuating this idea than James Q. Wilson and George Kelling's 1982 piece "Broken Windows," a theory that would become the guidebook for major metropolitan police departments throughout the United States. The two political scientists racialized the city as a "rowdy" and chaotic "jungle," contending that the only way to address "serious street crime" (homicide, theft, burglary, sexual assault) was to vigilantly police low-level "disorderly

behavior" (graffiti, panhandling, selling loose cigarettes, and loitering).[17] Mixing popular psychology and rational choice theory, Kelling and Wilson reasoned that insofar as the "bothersome panhandler" could not be stopped, a "thief may reason" that no one could stop them. Social control, through an exponential growth of police forces, would be dispersed throughout the arena of everyday life: low-income Black urban neighborhoods became the literal "scene of the prospective crime," and all low-income Black people and behavior became suspect.[18]

The right mobilized this pathologizing framing of Black inner-city poverty and crime in order to implement innovative (neoliberal) strategies of discipline and control over Black bodies. Ronald Reagan popularized the notion of the "welfare queen," who lived off stolen government benefits (having out-of-wedlock children to generate state-sponsored income) and engaged in petty crime to support her lavish lifestyle. In speeches, Reagan often referred to a "Chicago welfare queen" who had "80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards" and whose "tax-free income alone is over $150,000." Popular media, including the *New York Times*, supported this racialized, gendered discourse, circulating articles with titles like "'Welfare Queen' Loses Her Cadillac Limousine."[19] Conservative pundit Dinesh D'Souza, in his best-selling book *The End of Racism* (1995), wrote, "The prevalence of pathological norms, especially strong in the black underclass . . . mock and resist all efforts at neighborhood restoration."[20] Stating it plainly, Michelle Alexander asserted that "welfare queen" became a not-so-subtle code for "lazy, greedy, black ghetto mother."[21] This idea that Black

women systematically and strategically cheat the system supported the idea that the welfare state was an ineffective way to manage the poor (and in fact exacerbated criminality) justified increasing neoliberal austerity policy and undermined welfare rights movements. The state needed to be robust in exercising paternalistic authority through maximal coercion—eliminating safeguards against destitution to actively reinforce a sense of personal responsibility.

Later, Reagan drew upon similar tropes of Black criminality in relation to the underclass in order to wage his War on Drugs. This rhetorical declaration was significant, militarizing the approach to a social issue and implicitly creating a criminalized "enemy"—inner-city Black Americans—as the purveyors of vice. The Anti–Drug Abuse Act of 1986 funneled billions of dollars into the War on Drugs and created incentives for U.S. attorneys to pursue mandatory minimum jail sentencing for drug possession. At the signing, Reagan described individual drug users as a core threat to American institutions, families, campuses, and neighborhoods and to economic productivity and national values as a whole: "Drug criminals," he announced, were responsible for "pilfering human dignity and pandering despair,"[22] and this depravity demanded an intolerant and ferocious "offense" on the part of the government and individuals alike.

Broken windows theory, "underclass" ideology, and law-and-order rhetoric not only were popular in conservative circles but also became central to the rise of the New Democrats, eager to prove they were not "soft" on crime. In 1994 Democrat Bill Clinton and Congress passed the Violent Crime Control and

Law Enforcement Bill, which gave 8 billion federal dollars for one hundred thousand new police officers, millions in policing technologies, the "three strikes and you're out" provision, and a special provision for increased police presence in Black urban areas. In his remarks, Clinton equated securitization with greater freedom, saying, "Without responsibility, without order, without lawfulness, there is no freedom."[23] Drawing on neoliberal themes like minimal government, personal responsibility, and the disciplining of self and others, Clinton placed on the shoulders of everyday citizens the responsibility to police themselves and their neighborhoods: "It must be implemented by you, and it must be supplemented by you. Even when we put a new police officer on your block, the officer can't make you safe unless you come out of your home and help the officer do his or her job."[24] The bill was a return to the time, Clinton explained, when "punishment was swift and certain for people who didn't follow the rules."[25]

This strategy of pathologizing the racialized poor worked hand in hand with the emerging neoliberal (bipartisan) consensus that attributed social ills to lack of personal responsibility and perpetual dependence on the state (even as social supports evaporated). Recall that neoliberal governance involves the production of responsibilized subjectivities who embody and abide by market values of self-enhancement and competition. It is through these logics, then, that individuals and communities who failed to adapt and thrive under neoliberal rule could be chronically disparaged as lazy, unassimilated, or otherwise antisocial citizens whose (always on the brink of criminal) behavior pose an exigent threat to the rest of well-disciplined society.

Not coincidentally, then, while under neoliberalism the state recedes in its provision of a life-supporting infrastructure, it delivers an intensifying regime of (always and already racialized) hyper-surveillance, securitization, and punishment. What we might ascertain from this equation is evident—that neoliberal ideology has one aim: to protect the economic and political power of the elite, and those (even suspected of) rising to challenge that power will face the monopoly on violence claimed by the state. As Lawrence Mead (public policy professor and former policy advisor to Nixon) claimed, government is central to producing virtue, "by supporting civic behavior when it does not serve self-interest. The role of public authority is precisely to make obligatory the norms that people commonly affirm but do not religiously obey, a gap that is especially wide for the underclass."[26] Economist Thomas Sowell concurred: "You cannot take any people . . . exempt them from the requirements of civilization—including work, behavioral standards, personal responsibility and all the other basic things that the clever intelligentsia disdain—without ruinous consequences to them and to society at large."[27]

SUBJECTS OF SURVEILLANCE

Over the next decade, this escalating strategy of social control in the United States was augmented by the rise of more technically proficient modes of securitization already familiar to populations subjugated by U.S. empire. The targeted surveillance of activists (understood as threats to the political, economic, and

social order) was not in itself new. In the 1970s the federal government had put counterinsurgency strategies (acquired through years of fighting against North Viet Cong guerrillas during the Vietnam War) to work against radical resistance movements. The FBI trained local law enforcement to infiltrate and surveil organizations like the Black Panthers, SDS, CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) Brown Berets, and Young Lords. But after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center, domestic surveillance reached new heights as counterinsurgency practices— putatively born to fight the "War on Terror"—were codified into law under the U.S.A. Patriot Act. Under the guise of public safety, efficiency, and national security, and amid the shock of a "national emergency," the Patriot Act offered the government unchecked power to spy on and access records of U.S. citizens without "reasonable suspicion." It also created a new crime of "domestic terrorism," which it defined as conduct that attempts to "influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion." In effect, the Patriot Act converted all transformative resistance movements into potential terrorists and criminals.

The post-9/11 period also saw a drastic escalation in the militarization of local, state, and federal police departments. This transformation has its own decades-long history related to the quashing of political unrest, including the 1960's rise of SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) units, developed by the Los Angeles Police Department in response to the 1965 antiracist Watts uprisings and first unleashed against the Black Panthers in 1969, and, the "1033 Program" signed into law by Bill Clinton in 1996, which permanently authorized the Department of

Defense to transfer "excess" weapons of war to law enforcement agencies in the name of "counterterrorism." But it was under George W. Bush (and then Barack Obama) that the program's declared mission, "from war-fighter to crime-fighter," went into full effect. Between 2006 and 2014, police around the country amassed an arsenal of $1.5 billion of military-grade weaponry (intended for use in the wars waged in Afghanistan and Iraq). During this time, police were not only trained in using a counterterrorism approach but were also sent on exchange programs with Israeli police forces trained in using a similar approach.[28]

This fusion of sophisticated surveillance strategies and militarized police tactics would be quickly put to work in preempting and overwhelming public acts of defiance. This was evident during the violent state-sponsored crackdown on the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement, protests against rampant economic inequality and transnational corporate power that began in New York City's Zuccotti Park (in the Wall Street district) and surged around the globe. In 2012, FBI documents (obtained by the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund) revealed that an intensely coordinated surveillance campaign of Occupy had begun one month before its establishing encampments. The one-hundred-page report designated the incipient movement a "potential criminal or terrorist threat," even alongside acknowledgments that organizers were explicitly calling for "peaceful protests."[29]As Naomi Wolf writes, this "monstrous" network—including the FBI, Department of Homeland Security, state and local police departments, university administrations, and, perhaps most shockingly, the New York Stock Exchange and banks who had hired private security firms—cooperated under the

name "Domestic Security Alliance Council" in order to "target, arrest, and politically disable" activists.[30] In other words, the state had become the "private intelligence arm" of the very corporate entity the protesters were rising up to protest against.[31] In the final eviction of protesters from encampments across the country, riot police directed cannisters at activists' skulls, beat them with batons, and deployed tear gas at point-blank range. As former Seattle police chief Norm Stamper put it, a paramilitary style of policing ensured that Occupy sites would "resemble a war zone."[32]

On the heels of Occupy, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) rebellions (protesting police brutality and structural racism, more broadly) would represent the apogee of this effort to squash dissent: first in the 2014 Ferguson, Missouri, and 2015 Baltimore uprisings and later during its 2020 nationwide resurgence, sparked by the police murder of George Floyd (and stoked by the maldistributed effects of the COVID-19 crisis along racial/class lines). As an investigation by the *New York Times* eventually revealed, under the auspices of "public safety," Homeland Security used Predator drones, helicopters, and planes to conduct surveillance of the largely peaceful protests, logging 270 hours of footage from fifteen cities and broadcasting it live in a Customs and Border Protection control room. Meanwhile, on the ground, paramilitary police forces were outfitted in combat gear and gas masks and supplied with tanks, M-16 rifles, grenade launchers, and mine-resistant armored cars. In Philadelphia, police doused peaceful protesters trapped on an interstate highway with tear gas; in Los Angeles, police deployed foam-projectile launchers (with only two hours of training) to

subdue the crowd gathered there. In Raleigh, North Carolina, police shot pepper spray into activists' faces indiscriminately; and in Portland, Oregon, over the course of six months, police used force over six thousand times. In 2020 nine people were blinded by police projectiles throughout the country.[33]

This state response to BLM is grounded in racializing discourses that collapse Black resistance with Black criminality and deploy contradictory characterizations of Black deviance in order to do that work. On one hand, BLM has been held under suspicion as a counterinsurgency group who needed to be monitored for highly coordinated terrorist activity. In 2017, deepening and extending Obama-initiated FBI surveillance of BLM, Trump's FBI conjured novel classifications of "Black Identity Extremism" and "Black Supremacist Extremism." These categories justified both prioritizing surveillance of (permitted and unpermitted) BLM-related activities—over and against what the FBI called "lawfully organized white supremacist" activity—as well as military-mode preparation for BLM protests.[34] A widely used guide for small and midsize police departments' training called BLM a "revolutionary movement whose aims are to overthrow the U.S. government" and said it plans "extreme violence."[35] At the same time, BLM's collectively organized uprisings were assigned the depoliticizing language of (irrational and violent) riots or were described as insidious cloaks for (irrational and violent) destruction, both of these shifting responsibility to protesters for any ensuing police brutality. The president of the Police Benevolent Association in New York City, Patrick Lynch, declared, "Heaping blame on police departments while ignoring the criminals who use protests as

cover for planned and coordinated violence almost guarantees a repeat of the chaos we saw last summer."[36] Then-president Trump tweeted, "When the looting starts, the shooting starts," a phrase originally used in 1967 by a white police chief to depict the civil rights movement as mixed up with "young hoodlums" and requiring strict crackdown.

UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLIES

Within the past several years, right-wing legislatures have introduced anti-protest legislation that is underpinned by a deeply racialized/criminalizing discourse reinscribes Black freedom fighters as unruly mobs, irrational rioters, lawless anarchists, and domestic terrorists. Thirty-six states in total have introduced new restrictive measures curbing dissent and include heightened penalties for those accused of "inciting riots" or "unlawful assembly," vague categories that offer law enforcement wide discretion—discretion with a history of being used in racialized ways. Florida's 2021 "Combating Public Disorder Act," frankly declares itself "pro–law enforcement" and situates its "zero-tolerance" policy for "disorderly assemblies . . . in the wake of ongoing violence, rioting, and other forms of civil unrest throughout the United States over the past two years."[37] Creating a new crime called "mob intimidation," and peppering it with legislative endorsements that condemn anarchy, "burning cities," and looting, the act emphasizes the "fine line" between peaceful protest and violence precisely to blur that line.

Meanwhile, the Tennessee legislature made it a felony to camp outside the state capitol, which is precisely what BLM activists did for sixty-two days in 2020, while those with felony convictions lose the right to vote.[38] Also motivated by BLM tactics, in this case the political occupation of roadways, North Carolina's "hit and kill" bill would grant civil legal immunity for anyone who drives through a protester blocking traffic. Notably, legislatures are also stoking fear over Black-led uprisings in order to criminalize present and future ecological and anti-corporate activisms (like those inspired by the Indigenous-led Standing Rock movement). For instance, Oklahoma passed a bill punishing protesters who trespass on "critical infrastructure," pointing specifically to oil refineries and dams, and imposes a $1 million fine on organizations found to be "conspirators" in the activism. At a tactical level, these (at once) disciplining, punitive, and repressive measures are designed to intimidate potential activists; to warehouse in jails (without bail) and prisons; to strip of civil rights (like voting) those activists who persist; and to make public infrastructure concretely inhospitable to, and uninhabitable for, collective assembly. But at the level of the public and political imagination, and in a moment of mass nonviolent protest on the part of (primarily) citizens of color, these bills are part of a long effort to render resistance threatening to life, property, and democracy itself.

Clearly, this newest effort to criminalize resistance is part of a broader and historical ontological attribution to Black bodies as "carriers of terror," as Christina Sharpe puts it.[39] Marked as always and already fugitive, in flight from the law, Black people in the United States are subject to the omnipresent possibility

of being stopped, questioned, frisked, beaten, or murdered—a reality of Black existence that is "the most visceral evidence of the second-class citizenship of poor and working-class African-Americans," with life-shattering consequences.[40] This is everywhere clear as we think about Black people like seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin, walking home from a convenience store through a townhouse community; Walter Scott and Sandra Bland, stopped in their cars for a minor traffic violation; Eric Garner, on the sidewalk selling loose cigarettes; Breonna Taylor, sleeping in her bed and wrongfully presumed to have a connection to drug dealers. All of them, murdered by the de facto and everyday criminalization of Blackness: their resistance to the social order being their mere fact of existence.

A parallel strategy in disciplining Black resistance (and activism more broadly) is at work in the criminalization of antiracist education, precisely that which calls attention to the relationship with a white supremacy and anti-Black violence and that might produce activists. Among the most obvious examples is the concerted effort to ban the teaching of critical race theory (CRT) across public education curriculums. CRT is a technical branch of legal studies that scrutinizes juridical concepts like color-blindness, equal protection, and due process; originating in the 1970s, it has been taught most frequently in law schools. But CRT has come to signify anything related to antiracism—foregrounding the role of slavery in U.S. history, studying the production of racial identity categories, or examining the structural dynamics of racial capitalism. In 2021 legislatures in twenty-four states introduced fifty-four bills aiming to curb the teaching of "divisive" topics."[41] Florida, Arkansas,

Idaho, Iowa, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Tennessee banned it outright. As Governor Ron DeSantis (R-FL) was announcing the bill in late 2021, calling it the "Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (W.O.K.E.) Act," he declared, "We won't allow Florida tax dollars to be spent teaching kids to hate our country or to hate each other."[42]

While the right is the primary offender in this strategy, Democratic elites have been complicit in ceding ground to these logics. Following the 2020 nationwide surge of Black Lives Matter uprisings, Democrats running for elected office opted to push back against activist calls to defund the police and, in many cases, won on platforms to increase police funding and restore security, law, and order. Delivering his State of the Union address on March 1, 2022, Joe Biden announced, "The answer is not to defund the police. It's to fund the police. Fund them. Fund them." Several months later, he not only doubled down on this position but also claimed a democratic consensus: "We've all agreed . . . that the answer is not to defund the police. . . . The answer is to fund the police with the resources and training they need to protect our communities. . . . Investing in crime prevention and accountable community police officers who walk the beat, who know the neighborhood, and who can restore trust and safety."[43] To appeal to affluent white suburbanites, who are increasingly realigning to their party, Democrats tout their endorsements from police unions. And as a rite of passage into an elite-shaped politics of moderation, they denounce the antifascist ANTIFA movement, as the "radical left," collapsing decentralized opposition to neofascism with anticapitalist, antiracist democratic social movements. Radical and

transformative resistance becomes linked to extremism, which becomes linked to racialized violence, while a coolheaded and civil-minded temperateness is restored as the democratic norm. As South Carolina Democratic representative James Clyburn put it, "We have to make sure we do not allow ourselves to play the other person's game. . . . Peaceful protest is our game. Violence is their game. Purposeful protest is our game. This looting and rioting, that's their game. We cannot allow ourselves to play their game."[44]

In place of a platform that vigorously decriminalizes race and resistance, centrists have not only denounced the phantom menace of left-wing violence but have also pushed for milquetoast inclusion strategies that reinstate the conditions of racial capitalism contested by the BLM platform. Greater racial diversity, representation, and multiculturalism have come to be imagined as a necessary starting point for incremental reformism, which is directly linked to subtle changes within the elite structure of existing institutions. Think more executives of color in Fortune 500 companies, representation in Congress, and the push to diversify the Hollywood film industry; Washington, D.C.'s mayor painting "Black Lives Matter" on the street; Nancy Pelosi taking a knee during the national anthem; Joe Biden institutionalizing Juneteenth as a paid holiday—all of these have come to represent direct political action, a legitimate substitute for the calls for prison abolition, economic redistribution, and defunding the police that might source the materials of a (more than) livable life for poor and working-class Black Americans. Calls to teach about the brutal legacy of racial enslavement, including from the much-celebrated *New York Times*' 1619 Project,

have become decidedly severed from these kinds of anticapitalist, decolonizing political demands.

Radical calls to defund the police are not pointing to problems of inadequate training, implicit bias, and improper procedures, nor are they calling for the weeding out of bad-apple officers and more multiracial, culturally competent, and kinder forces of social control. Instead, these demands recognize the roots of modern policing in early slave patrols (as Angela Davis teaches us) and the ways in which the police have always been a central tool for the propertied classes to control, discipline, and terrorize people of color, the poor, labor unions, social dissidents, and to quell any resistance that might threaten the American project of racial capitalism.

As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor concedes, defunding the police will be a hard conclusion for the majority to swallow after a decades-long crusade to convince them that the primary threat to their lives is not austerity, privatization, and an inverted totalitarian state but "the possibility that they might become a victim of a violent crime."[45] To propose any kind of abolitionary vision is also an uphill battle in a political culture dominated by the swing of reactionary right and (failed) reformative liberal solutions. But through the work of transformative resistance movements like Black Lives Matter, these calls are no longer viewed as utopian impossibilities. Indeed, the value of such movements is that they force deeper engagement with the historical and contemporary reality of our world and that they popularize critiques, questions, and ideas previously unthinkable in the broader political imagination: Why does the state have the sole authority to dispense violence (especially against its own

demos)? What would it look like to abandon this "armed layer of agents" intent on maintaining a violent social and economic order? How might we replace racialized logics of securitization in the name of individual freedom with those of social nurturing and mutual aid in the name of collective emancipation? It is to such transformative visions that we turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

UNRULY WORLD BUILDING

TOWARD A CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF DEMANDING HOPE

IT'S TEMPTING to adopt a depressive political position, to insist that transformative resistance is no longer possible, that history has passed us by. This, however, is a triumph of nostalgic thinking that reifies the history of democratic resistance and puts the present in the straitjacket of pessimism. Yet, hope need not be lost. The intellectual and activist work that has been done to expose the deleterious effects of neoliberal policy and white supremacy, the scientific and tangible warnings that we are on the verge of global ecological catastrophe—these all point to a malfunctioning world. What will fill this aperture in the political imagination, however, is still up for grabs.

But how should we conceptualize this moment? In the ending of her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Lauren Berlant offers neither a pure cynicism nor a wishful prescription for how to confront our current predicament. Instead, she offers a mode of "loose solidarity" that emerges from both "scavenging for

survival" and a collective commitment to "being in the middle of the bedlam of world making."[1] Her own political optimism, she contends, is fostered not by plotting or diagramming the "better good life" but by valuing political resistance as "the action of not being worn out by politics."[2] We join Berlant in this position of not resigning ourselves to the state of the world, fleeing to a nostalgic past or holding fast to a static utopian vision. We embrace a relational ethic rooted in, and with a sustained orientation toward, unsettling the present arrangement of the world through prefiguring radically democratic modes of belonging to one another. We call this praxis *unruly world building*, or the making of a critical infrastructure of radical resistances that demand hope for transformation.

To be sure, while we adopt the term "infrastructure" with a measure of risk, as it may initially portend a certain static quality, we contend that it offers a conceptual lens for examining materially grounded points of entry into unruly world building. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, infrastructures are those undergirding ("infra") systems, networks, and foundations required for organizing and sustaining the social and economic activities of everyday life. The term generally suggests a drab bureaucratic constellation of pipes, power lines, freeways, dams, tunnels, bridges, communication towers, and railways—in other words, the literal *concrete-ness* of life. As the ethnographer of infrastructure Susan Leigh Star puts it, infrastructure "isn't sexy,"[3] but it is deemed *critical* because it is constitutive of the socioeconomic order. Put differently, these "boring things" provide the condition of possibility for the movement and circulation of particular ways of life, sustaining and reproducing

specific relations to one another and the world: it is "the life-world of structure."[4] In this way, infrastructure tells a particular story: about what and who is valued and what or who is available for sacrifice. Given a predatory economy organized around an ethos and praxis of disposability, accumulation, theft, and violence, it is unsurprising that those infrastructures deemed "critical" to neoliberalism are deeply toxic to life.

But the notion of infrastructure exceeds its more evident material forms. Social and affective infrastructures are also built and maintained to sustain particular ways of life. As Lauren Berlant argues, infrastructure is also that which "binds us to the world in movement and keeps the world practically bound to itself," and these underlying conditions of possibility include "patterns, habits, norms and scenes of assemblage and use."[5] Ruth Wilson Gilmore elaborates by explaining that white supremacy is an "infrastructure of feeling" that organizes affect and identification and is itself (infra)structured through access to clean water, mobility, shelter, and "protection" from those whose premature death and abandonment is the condition of possibility for neoliberal futurity.[6] In this sense, neoliberal democratic infrastructures are not in need of our unfailing support for their repair and restoration. Rather, they are working seamlessly to support precisely those people, forms of life, and systems of value they were always intended to support.

The question of contemporary politics, then, becomes identical with the immanentist (re)staging of infrastructure in the face of the violent fungibility of life under neoliberal capitalism. This is why political contestation surrounds critical infrastructure at every scale, whether these are struggles against its

excesses or privatization—as is the case with police and prisons (Movement for Black Lives); oil pipelines, fracking, and dams (Standing Rock); economic development, housing, and public space (Occupy); and border walls (Sanctuary Cities movement)—or rallying against its deficit in domains like public parks, transportation, schools, and housing. Winona LaDuke explains this latter problematic, alleging, "The United States has a D in infrastructure. That's why bridges collapse. That's why Flint, Michigan, has a problem. That's why everything in this country is eroding. . . . I say that most of our Indian reservations don't have adequate infrastructure. . . . What I want is pipelines, I want infrastructure, for people, not for fossil fuels, *not for oil companies*."[7]

In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant argues that the historical present is shaped by a "glitch" within the material, social, and affective infrastructures that have undergirded collective attachment to (and relentless reproduction of) the liberal order. A glitch is an "interruption within a transition, a troubled transmission," and the "revelation of infrastructural failure."[8]As she points out, we live on the precipice of infrastructural collapse—from bridges and public schools to fantasies of political equality, social mobility, economic security, and repair of the natural world. We find ourselves surrounded by escalating crises, including massive threats to the survival of the human species and biospheric life: ecosystems crashing around us and a baking planet, energy depletion, austerity, endless war, poverty, dispossession, and displacement. Amid this breakdown, Berlant suggests, our sense of belonging to the world (as well as the world itself) is deeply threatened. This underlying condition of

the historical present is what she marks as an "impasse," in which projections of hope (which have withal functioned to make life bearable, even as they wear people out) begin to unravel and "futurity splinters as a prop for getting through life."[9] Through this altered temporal framework, we affectively experience the horizonless-ness of the historical present, and the contingency of our inhabited conditions is revealed. In this way, the impasse designates a moment when the intolerable conditions of the present open up possibilities for disrupting the normative order of things (and inducing new freedoms), even it does not carry any promise of a revolutionary pivot. Indeed, Berlant posits, the "post-optimistic response" within an impasse can take any number of forms, filled by impulses from despair to outrage.[10]

It is within this space of the infrastructural glitch—and moment of impasse—that the contest over resistance emerges as crucial. On the one hand, we find the kind of restorative resistance that we have described throughout this book. These are efforts shaped, promoted, and easily subsumed by neoliberal logics and an adherence to liberal democratic principles, and devoid of the articulation of consolidated corporate power, racial capitalism, or radical democracy, that reinitialize attachments to existing (social and material) infrastructures. Put simply, restorative resistance works to reignite a cruel optimism that civility, maturity, and well-behaved citizens and institutions will resurrect an anemic democracy and diversity and inclusion rehumanize a cruel neoliberalism. This is an ahistorical, materially ungrounded mode of what Cornel West calls "deodorized hope,"[11] cleansed of the shattering realities of the present while

paradoxically attaching us to them. But the idea of hope exceeds these significations. In this moment of impasse, what we see across the contemporary landscape of unruly world building is an orientation toward (and praxis of) *demanding hope*. These demands that drive transformative resistance put pressure on the immanent rupture in order to generate alternative, nonreproductive forms of (social and material) infrastructure from within the broken-ness. We might think of this, Winona LaDuke urges us, through the terms of what the United States calls (in an imperial context) "infrastructural adjustment" attuned to radical transformation.[12] That is to say, just as "a pipe can carry fresh water as well as toxic sludge" so can the infrastructures of social and political life be repurposed to create alternative networks of just, reciprocal and accountable relations—between humans, with the nonhuman world, and the planet.[13]

The temporality of demanding hope, we suggest, is driven by the insistent press of the impasse on the present and to open up an unfinished world. As a counter to the crisis that is quotidian life under neoliberalism, demanding hope has a peculiar relationship to pessimism. It is a critical posture that facilitates what Slavoj Žižek counterintuitively names the "courage of hopelessness" or Foucault suggestively terms "a hyper- and pessimistic activism."[14] This is not a fetishizing of despair but recognition of the "zero point of hopelessness" as the political point of departure, the precondition for thinking and resisting against a mandate for restoration. It is a demand that hope for a different way of life be returned to us, even as these take the shape of multiple and competing visions. This kind of demanding hope issues a refusal of adaptability and resilience (as neoliberal

biopolitical strategies of governance). It disavows the patient wistfulness and false nostalgia of unity, inclusion, restoration, and incremental change. Instead, unruly world builders seize hope itself as a radical democratic resource—and in the name of "impossible" demands against overwhelming odds.

Indeed, it is through this notion of "impossibility" that movements of transformative resistance are marked as failures. Scenes of unruly world building come together around visionary demands—to unbuild the infrastructure underpinning a lethal order of global capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchal domination—that the elite will never recognize (much less have any appetite for), because to do so would cue their own dissolution. Clamors for "another kind of world" are illegible within the neoliberal hubris of "no alternative." Under dominant logics of efficiency and "cause and effect" productivity, transformative resistance movements are maligned (by those across the political spectrum) for not forwarding a tangible agenda or clear aims or for wasting attention with unviable pie-in-the-sky longings. People who resist in the name of a different kind of world get charged with being out of touch with "how the world works" and of demonstrating an immature, naïve, utopian, or unreasonable (at best) or mad, illegitimate, dangerous, and unruly (particularly racialized charges) approach to political change. These civilizing logics (of being and doing) aid and abet a biopolitical control that appraises (and often imprisons) particular kinds of activists and resistances, reproducing a "deeply scripted politics" that closes the political universe.[15] Jack Halberstam reminds us that the white bourgeois notion of respectability/civility is upheld by a middle-class

logic of reproductive temporality. Through a process of maturation, the desirable adult emerges from a "dangerous and unruly" adolescent period and turns their sights toward longevity, stability, and reproductive futurity; alternative life cycles are characterized as irresponsible.[16]

We might map Halberstam's analysis of this naturalized Western life cycle onto political struggles, whereby those who advance, prefigure, or act according to principles other than national stability are advised to "grow up" or be written out of the official narrative, discredited, and pushed to the margins. But as Lisa Duggan and José Esteban Muñoz remind us, the very occupation of "infantile intensities and demands" can vitalize transformative resistance and its opposition to the "moribund maturities" of conventional politics, norms, and institutions.[17] The demands of unruly world building, which oppose the domestication of resistance and refuse to cater to the so-called mature center, work within these "stretched out adolescences."

The import of unruly world building may not be registered by those on the left who see resistance only in terms of full seizure of state power by a party, who hold on to the promise of "another world" as a static Paradise lying-in-wait, or who understand resistance as the slow burn of immanent reform. As Rebecca Solnit points out, however, those who are dubious about the merit or "effectiveness" of these movements might reflect on the panic of political elites when they materialize. The massive militarized police presence and violence against "immature" idealists at Occupy encampments, Standing Rock camps, and Black Lives Matter protests confirms the profound

threat that refusal of reformative or restorative modes of resistance poses.[18]

We contend that at the heart of this anxiety is profound recognition of the ways in which scenes of unruly world building irrevocably tangle resistance and transformation through liberatory praxis. Indeed, those engaged in unruly world building pursue it as a dual-pronged project: dismantling life-abusing infrastructure is always and already the work of building life-affirming infrastructure for a present and future beyond domination. "Defund the police" does not mean police accountability but is a call for a world that does not require or authorize police and prisons to manage it. Occupy was not a dreamscape of sloppy desires but a radically democratic infrastructure demanding a world where the people who create wealth in a society determine how it gets distributed. #NoDAPL was not only resistance against pipelines and the destructive greed of oil companies but enacting the demand for sovereignty and right relations with one another, nonhuman animals, ancestors, and the earth.

Transformative resistances do not just demand peoples' power and grassroots autonomy but announce it through counter-hegemonic ways of being and doing. As a corporeal infrastructure, these "bodies in alliance" perform a public declaration: a refusal of disposability and disavowal of the dominant logics of a punishing socioeconomic infrastructure.[19] Transformative resistance defers the sovereignty of self and individualization of resistance, contesting the ways in which the market has debased our vigor for acting as (collectively organized) democratic subjects. Rather than the "freedom from"

constraint that shapes neoliberal democratic autonomy, bodies in alliance practice the freedom of radical democratic belonging: an unlearning of atomism and a retraining in interdependence and reciprocity. It demands hope for populations acclimated to the hopelessness structured into the institutions of temporary labor, demolished social services, and the general attrition of the remnants of social democracy.

During these insurrectionary moments, when assembled bodies articulate a new time and space for the popular will, the space of politics is so evidently more expansive than the voting booth or Twitter. At the same time, these bodies in alliance embody principles and modes of sociality they are struggling to realize in broader political forms. Radical horizontality, messy consensus-based practices, recognition of mutual dignity and corporeal interdependency, the public organization and meeting of basic needs, mutual aid—are all performed as resistance to disregard for the popular will. In particular, Judith Butler emphasizes contests over the "infrastructural conditions of support" required for, as well as demanded by, political assembly. For Butler, this infrastructure signifies the literal grounds (whether the street, park, or bridge) on which such mobilization depends as well as the social and economic supports demanded by and for assembled bodies.[20] As Butler explains, infrastructures support political mobilization while at the same time we are often fighting for those very infrastructural goods that support us. She claims, "When you have all of these people gathered in so many cities, they're testifying in a bodily way, saying, 'We're the ones abandoned. We're the ones left out. And no democratic system can abandon its people when it claims to

represent its people.' [This is] the struggle over what will be public space, but also an equally fundamental struggle over how bodies will be supported in the world—a struggle for employment and education, equitable food distribution, livable shelter, and freedom of movement and expression."[21]

In other words, the assembling of bodies in unruly movement contests naturalized discourses about what counts as vital infrastructure and for whom. Resisting the prison industrial complex takes aim at the story that Black and immigrant lives are fungible. Resistance against expanding fossil fuel infrastructures transforms the story that corporate rights trump those of human and nonhuman life forms, Indigenous sovereignty, and the planet. Resisting a neoliberal-democratic infrastructure of elite-occupied procedures, policies, and institutions contravenes the hegemonic narrative that these norms fulfill the meaning of civic life. To engage in transformative resistance is to enact unruly demands that might conjure a world and keeps alive a political consciousness that can continue to activate those demands.

Unruly world building is vital to liberate marginalized citizens from domination, because it entails public claims that overturn social common sense. On the one hand, unruly world builders occupy commonsense logics by exposing the irrational and immature stories that establishment elites tell about the world. The Extinction Rebellion network, for instance, shows us how the continued reliance on fossil fuels depends on a nonsensical ontology and temporality alike—an earth equipped with endless supply and capable of limitless exploitation: "We know that the concentration of warming greenhouse gas CO_2

in our atmosphere has risen by a meteoric 45% since the Industrial Revolution, mainly as a result of human activities—burning fossil fuels to generate electricity, depriving the earth of a crucial 'carbon sink' by clearing forests for livestock and food production, transportation systems, and industrial byproducts. We must address both climate change and biodiversity simultaneously if we have any chance of averting disaster."[22]

On the other hand, unruly world builders contest established logics. Occupy Wall Street developed the idea of the human megaphone, in which consensus was arrived at through horizontal strategies rather than elite rule. Local chapters of Black Lives Matter consider problems within particular settings and communities, whether the need for more affordable housing, reproductive rights, higher wages, or labor organizing. Even Extinction Rebellion's reliance on the ideal of deliberative democracy, in its call for citizens' assemblies, bears very little resemblance to traditional liberal theory in that even though strategy comes from communication, the ultimate goal—of revolutionary climate action—is nonnegotiable.

Unruly world builders challenge what counts as politically possible, pragmatic, and actionable. Unruly world building has a clear eye toward building—overmodification and technocratic restructuring are the only way to address human suffering. Unruly world builders insist that remaking the unlivable present is a matter of urgency and that patience is the time of the elite. Codirector of SONG, Mary Hooks, says, "We are abolitionists. We believe that we can live in a world that does not have cages, and we can find a way to care for each other and practice beloved community."[23] Critical Resistance, the Oakland-based prison-abolitionist organization founded in

1997, argues, in its abolitionist tool kit, for the importance of new definitions around public safety, the turn to restorative justice, and the practice of an ethics of care to dismantle the divisions between those on the inside and those on the outside. "Only in a caring community," the tool kit says, could "corporate and individual redemption can take place."[24] Black Lives Matter describes itself as a "collective of liberators who believe in an inclusive and spacious movement. We also believe that in order to win and bring as many people with us along the way, we must move beyond the narrow nationalism that is all too prevalent in Black communities. We must ensure we are building a movement that brings all of us to the front."[25]

It should be said at the outset that our account of unruly world building does not promote a utopian vision, nor does it depend on ridding ourselves of all modes of sovereign power. We do not understand liberation as a final state to be achieved or as a place of arrival but as a transformative practice to be undertaken in struggle with others. We reject the moral self as the privileged unit of political resistance and, more broadly, aim to think of resistance beyond the moralism of good and evil. We are critical of a Trump-era resistance discourse dedicated to fending off encroaching neofascism only to deny the neofascism of the liberal state and return us to a more woke version of the (neo)liberal order. Importantly, however, while ours is a call for transformative resistance as a politics of possibilities, it is by no means one that precludes engagement with state power. We argue that a turn to visionary projects concerned with abolition, defunding the police, and mutual aid networking forces a radically democratic rethinking about distribution of wealth and resources.

In what follows, we turn briefly to a few case studies: the 2011 Occupy movement ("We are the 99%"), the 2012 Black Lives Matter (#BLM) protests, the place-based work of Southerners Organizing on New Ground, and the 2016 Standing Rock encampments (#NoDAPL). What distinguishes unruly world building on the front line of struggle, many of which are led by the nation's marginalized youth (Black, Brown, queer, poor) and which have been overlooked for their creative vision, is that they are not bound by a "politics of maturity." Their direct confrontation with racial capitalism and political inequality is not aimed at reforming it but at demonstrating how its exploitative nature is not in fact reformable.

To highlight the activities of these movements is to foreground the role of praxis over detached philosophical debate. Political theory should not be confined to the academy; questions of tactics and strategy can't be theorized from a distance, through close readings of canonical texts that treat politics as an ideal condition, free from the messiness and contradictions of history and action. Movements in action and in struggle produce their own knowledges, which can and should become the basis for intellectual work.

OCCUPYING DEMOCRACY: "WE ARE THE 99%"

So this is / a politics of the public body / the requirements of the body / its movements and its voice / We would not be here / if electoral politics / were representing / the will of the people / We sit and stand and move / as the popular will / the one that / electoral politics / has forgotten and abandoned / but we are

here / time and again / persisting / enacting the phrase / We, the People

–Judith Butler, Occupy Wall Street speech, 2012

The 2011 Occupy movement, which fundamentally transformed discussions of economic (in)justice in the United States and beyond, has been largely sidelined, ridiculed, or forgotten within the public memory. The movement came as an activist surprise for many political thinkers on the left. Only a decade earlier, political theorist William Connolly had claimed despondently, "One way to challenge the [evangelical-capitalist resonance] machine" currently bringing us to a "probable crisis" is to "focus publicity and protest on the economic effects on ordinary people of corporate-government practices. But such an agenda of deep pluralism *is not in the cards today*."[26] But on September 17, 2011, Occupy set up camp in New York City's Zuccotti Park, just outside Wall Street. While Occupy's initial call to action seemed to be to join the action, shortly thereafter it improvised its first general assembly and proposed an initial critical framework and template for its own operations. Posted on September 30, the "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City" proclaimed: "As *one people, united*, we acknowledge the reality: that the future of the human race requires the cooperation of its members; that our system must protect our rights, and upon corruption of that system, it is up to the individuals to protect their own rights, and those of our neighbors. We are the 99%!"[27] This mission statement, recognizing the movement's immediate adversaries as unregulated capitalism and a corrupt two-party system, offered a succinct critique of elite monopoly on political power.

Occupy named this appropriation of political and economic power by seizing neoliberalism's own vocabulary and biopolitical strategy—the counting, measuring, and turning of people into numbers (in the interest of profit). In other words, "We"—the non-unified and disparate 99%—are those who have ceased to (quite literally) *count* under neoliberal democracy. At the same time, the grammatical innovation depended on the intentional construction and expulsion of its enemy—the 1 percent. If the 1 percent was targeted as responsible for the (re)production of the existing violent infrastructure, it was also recast as an excluded entity from the body politic in formation. This newly politicized percentage provided an innovative slogan of (and for) transformative resistance. "We are the 99%" was a rallying cry that prompted a cautiously optimistic response, and a subsequent battery of questions, for activists around the country. The slogan was clearly an implicit socioeconomic critique of capitalist democracy and its operations. But what did it mean to encapsulate this critique in the mere pronouncement that "we are here" as part of a "we are here" movement?

Under pressure from critics and supporters alike, Occupy remained unwilling to "harness" its momentum by translating it into policy directives or a prescription for what should be done—and predictably faced accusations of political immaturity. Nicholas Kristof, for example, channeled his frustration about Occupy's "amorphous" nature by providing "sensible" solutions that the movement might articulate.[28] Still, the Occupy movement persisted in offering broad critiques in place of specific suggestions and promoted enjoinders to participate

"*as* the '99%'" as its primary strategy. As Gayatri Spivak contends, Occupy from its inception "joined the spirit of the General Strike . . . not against an individual or a regime, but against an unregulated capitalist state."[29]

This refusal to issue "pragmatic" demands or instruct people to identify with goals or recommendations (to be pursued by elites) was strategically central to Occupy's radically democratic praxis and anticipatory politics of becoming. At once withholding legitimacy from the neoliberal-democratic infrastructure it was critiquing, this move also held open the site of (and for) the "99%" it was seeking to catalyze and embolden. In other words, Occupy's open-populist slogan named its own prior absence from power while encouraging the self-ascription of a collective identity and claim to political power. Evoking a kind of guerilla identity, and remaining both heterogenous and unified, no official affiliation was required to speak, act, or protest in the name of the 99%. As Occupy's "Statement of Autonomy" claimed, "Occupy Wall Street is a people's movement. It is party-less, leaderless, by the people and for the people. It is not a business, a political party, an advertising campaign or a brand. It is not for sale."[30] Insofar as the individuals invoking the slogan self-identified as a member of the 99%, it vested them with the authority to wage grievances, claims, and resistance in its name.

Political theorist Wendy Brown argued toward the beginning of the New York City occupation, "It is a sign of our profoundly depoliticized vernacular of citizenship today that the stock interview question of OWS [Occupy Wall Street]

participants, 'what brings you here?' is always intended to solicit a story of *personal* hardship or calamity. From CNN to NPR to the *New York Times*, the interviewers never know what to do with OWS answers that reference a decent, equitable and sustainable way of collective life, a sense of right and wrong, and an account of what we political theorists quaintly call The Good for the polity."[31] Similarly, as Jodi Dean aptly summarized, "To emphasize individuality is to disavow the common at the heart of the movement."[32] But the dystopic tales of ordinary life within the infrastructural glitch, along with the identification of impasse as a time for action, are also what worked to cultivate a collective subject of radical democratic struggle. In a Tumblr post called, "We Are The 99 Percent," grainy pictures of people holding handwritten signs told a story (e.g., "I am 20K in debt and am paying out of pocket for my current tuition while I start paying back loans with two part time jobs"). Each ended with a distinct identification: "And I am the 99%." The plural "we" became a first-person claim. Forged by bringing together the (at once) accumulated and particularized effects of life under neoliberalism, the Occupy movement prefigured a radical democratic paradigm. Beyond enumerating injustice, its succinct socioeconomic critique entered the political and cultural lexicon as a plural, open, and contentious identity in which to ground claims for the democratic occupation of all domains of (neoliberalized) life.

When physical Occupy encampments were eradicated by the state, U.S. political commentators and progressives alike roundly condemned the Occupy movement as a failure. It is clear in

hindsight that a limited evaluative framework for seeing resistance through the eyes of the state (and a logic of maturity) obscured what Occupy was busy producing—namely, a now indispensable vocabulary around neoliberal capitalism ("We are the 99%") and a revitalized interest in progressive populism and in activist strategies of occupying private/public infrastructure, including parks, streets, bridges, housing, and student/consumer debt. In place of the image of the nation on the model of the firm, Occupy revived the image of the nation as a public thing—and of "the people" as a living political body. Indeed, Occupy was a space and a practice of transformative resistance that fundamentally changed the ground of political action and countered the resignation of neoliberalism's mandate that "no alternative" socioeconomic infrastructure is available to us.

Ironically, Occupy and the notion of the 99% emerged in part from the broken solidarities of neoliberalism. As Chris Hedges points out, movement participants were not specific "associations of workers, students, consumers, welfare clients, or debtors."[33] Instead, Occupy was a public coalescing and uprising against a version of democratic citizenship—and resistance—rooted in fragmented rights-based and self-interested agendas. Rather than a "thanking" of sacrificial workers (as resistance), these were workers declaring an end to human sacrifice for profit, a rejection of neoliberalism as a life-sustaining sacred power, and an expression of faithlessness in a corrupt and calcified political system. In short, as Hedges concludes, while the ruling elites and their mainstream press mouthpieces continued to puzzle over the aims of Occupy, to its participants the goal could be "articulated in one word—REBELLION."[34]

BLACK LIVES MATTER: "CHOKING" RACIAL CAPITALISM

Unfolding in the years following the Occupy movement, #BlackLivesMatter surged into U.S. and global consciousness by way of the Ferguson uprising, a response to the police lynching of Michael Brown.[35] The Ferguson rebellion was, as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor explains, "democracy come alive," young Black people refusing to succumb to liberal chastisements to be less disruptive: public meetings, workshops, and discussions by day; marches, occupations, and demonstrations at night.[36] As police violence against Black bodies continued to be publicized, unprecedented numbers of protesters (many for the first time) poured into the streets, and die-ins, bridge blockades, highway shutdowns, and marches escalated across the nation and worldwide. Organizers around the country built on the hashtag, forming the Black Lives Matter Network and the Movement for Black Lives, which calls itself a "global infrastructure of radical Black activism" and includes over fifty racial justice organizations. These efforts have been sustained through a cohort of activist organizing that has been decentralized and non-hierarchical but coordinated and collaborative.

Importantly, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor situates Black Lives Matter within the context of a crumbling cruel optimism surrounding Obama's "hope and change" presidency. As state violence against Black people and mass deportation of immigrants (which escalated under Obama) continued to go unaccounted for, she argues, BLM pierced romantic illusions of "racial

progress" (through the symbolic value of a Black president), empty promises of a post-racial United States, and exposed the limits of reform in a society where racial domination is structurally constitutive of its political economy. Cathy Cohen contends that young adults of color "who have seen up close the limits of electoral politics" have lost faith in traditional institutions understood as the central levers of democracy.[37] Or, as Taylor remarks succinctly, "The Obama generation became the Ferguson generation."[38]

The movement's primary slogan (that "Black Lives Matter") declares the reality of Black fungibility under a racist regime and utters a self-reflexive truth: the raw matter[ing] of Black personhood. Later, the final words uttered by Eric Garner and George Floyd (as they were murdered by police) became a rallying cry—"We can't breathe!"—reverberating throughout protests. This furious enlistment of Garner's last words interwove the most fundamental of requirements for existence (inhalation) with abstract concepts like "racial capitalism" and "environmental racism" (even preceding the police attack, Garner's breathing had been restricted by asthma). Put differently, these bodies in alliance dramatized a corporeal opposition to a social order that promotes the material and symbolic systematic chokehold on Black bodies. And reversing this stranglehold as a term of transformative resistance, people carried placards that read, "Choke the system."

In summer 2016, the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL)'s released a policy platform, "A Vision for Black Lives" that foregrounds a historical/political analysis—and abject rejection—of

a "racial capitalist" infrastructure.[39] This is to say that if race and capitalism cannot be disaggregated, reforming individualized attitudes or prejudicial practices are no longer "pragmatic" approaches to the problem. Instead, the platform's six demands—(1) end the war on Black people, (2) reparations, (3) invest-divest, (4) economic justice, (5) community control, and (6) political power—attest to historical and ongoing logics of dispossession/colonization, exploitation, and (extra)economic expropriation that underpin the systematic "chokehold" on people of color in the United States and globally.

While M4BL's epistemological framework underscores the unexceptional nature of the violent present, its platform also clarifies the differential effects of state/extra-state anti-Black oppression on racialized populations. This is unsurprising because the movement's originators—three Black (queer) feminists, Patrice Cullors, Opal Tometti, and Alicia Garza—have emphasized, since its inception, a Black (queer) feminist intellectual-activist genealogy, including intersectional political analysis, radical identity politics (as articulated by the Combahee River Collective), coalition building, and the centering and amplification of those living at the intersections of interlocking structures of oppression:

> women, femmes, queer, trans, gender nonconforming, intersex, Muslim, disabled, D/deaf, and autistic people, people living with HIV, people who are criminalized, formerly and currently incarcerated, detained or institutionalized, migrants, including undocumented migrants, low and no-income, cash

> poor, and working class, homeless and precariously housed people, people who are dependent on criminalized substances, youth, and elders.[40]

Far exceeding a singular focus on police violence (as taken up by normative progressive and liberal discourses), BLM has consistently condemned sexual/gender-based violence and disposability of Black queer/trans folks, Black poverty, excise from the formal economy, environmental racism, prison warehousing, the undocumented "relegated to the shadows," and the normalizing boxes produced by White supremacy.[41] As the Ferguson uprising organizers stress in "About This Movement," "We do not cast any one of ours to the side in order to gain proximity to perceived power. Because that is the only way we will win."[42]

At the same time, BLM's analysis of the historical present is driven by a demanding hope, which refuses to comport with cruelly optimistic attachments to incremental progress or reformist resistance, declaring, "We reject false solutions and believe we can achieve a complete transformation of the current systems, which place profit over people and rely on surveillance, policing, punishment, and exile to address every form of harm, need, and conflict."[43] Instead, the movement ushers in renewed orientation toward what Angela Davis calls abolition democracy—the pursuit of alternative institutions and modes of sociality in face of a failed liberalism reigned by corporate elites. M4BL's "visionary agenda" concludes with an "impossible" demand: the "*complete abolition and reimagination of current systems. We are already dreaming and practicing the world we want to live in.*"[44]

SOUTHERNERS ORGANIZING ON NEW GROUND: BUILDING MUTUAL AID INFRASTRUCTURES

Angela Davis suggests that BLM's popularization of (previously subordinated) abolitionist democracy/abolition feminism and mutual aid has helped activists and organizers to begin practicing the concrete details of anti-carceral alternatives in ways "many of us [longtime abolition activists] never expected."[45] As longtime abolitionist organizer Mariame Kaba reminds us, it is impossible to envision a world without policing "unless we examine and transform our relationships with each other. . . . You cannot have safety without strong, empathic relationships with others."[46] Mutual aid organizer and trans liberation activist Dean Spade explains mutual aid as radical "survival work"—taking responsibility for one another's survival in material ways—done in conjunction with social movement demands for transformative change.[47] As a praxis, this tangible, mundane care work rebuilds social bonds ruptured by neoliberalism and builds "solidarity muscle" through the routine disasters of everyday life under capitalism. These projects might include community crisis response and rapid response programs (to avoid calling 911), child care collectives, jail/court support networks, community bail funds, and revolving funds that can pay peoples' bail so that they can prepare for their defense. In opposition to the philanthropist model, Spade explains, mutual aid challenges the existing distribution of wealth and life chances and the discourse of "deserving" and "undeserving" people. Mutual aid is also distinct from "sanctioned" modes of resistance easily absorbed by neoliberal democratic institutions, as

its praxis explicitly entails "starving the infrastructures that are devouring us."[48] Summarized succinctly, Spade's central message is: "The government is fucked. You can't rely on it" "the system is the problem, not the people being targeted by it"; and we must "take matters into our own hands."[49] In other words, it is past time for transmogrification from unrelenting belief in authority to faith in collective self-determination, courage, and imaginativeness.

This approach toward long-term, embedded, and relational organizing informs the work of an emerging coalition of place-based movements like Southerners Organizing on New Ground (SONG) in Atlanta, Georgia. SONG is home to a queer people of color liberation movement working to "build, resource, and sustain a *Southern LGBTQ infrastructure*" of grassroots organizers, visionaries, and mutual aid networks. SONG was conceived in 1993 when a multiracial group of six Southern lesbians met at the Durham, North Carolina, Creating Change conference and "dared to talk about LGBTQ people and economics in the same breath."[50] Confronted by accusations that discussing poverty, racism, and solidarity between oppressed people was a "waste of time," the cohort insisted that these conversations were vital for queer liberation, particularly in under-resourced small towns and rural areas in the South.

While not horizontally structured, SONG characterizes itself as a "kindred network" with leadership from communities at once historically marginalized and the "backbone of resistance and liberation work in the South."[51] Codirector Wendi Moore-O'Neale summarizes this commitment to calling upon a political ancestry of unruly struggle while apprehending

themselves as unruly (future) ancestors of those who might inherit a better world: "My people are a way out of no way . . . educators and drunkards, . . . my people are 'displaced people' who notice displacement; who know longing for belonging; who are always seeking and making home and remaking it. . . . My people are trouble makers and history makers . . . and song-talkers and freedom singers, especially the ones who can't carry a tune."[52]

SONG's approach to building movement power is animated by what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls "non-reformist reforms," or collective "life-giving" work that sustains peoples' survival under racial capitalism, unravels social control through discipline and criminalization, and builds grassroots power within and toward an abolitionist horizon.[53] While SONG eschews a concrete "platform" (centering adaptability as a key tenet), its strategic campaigns braid together decisive abolitionist demands with experimental community-based alternatives to the punitive status quo. For instance, in Nashville's "Free from Fear Campaign," SONG mobilized "defund the police" protests alongside the building of a "Peoples' Budget" and "Peoples' Assembly"; Nashville's "solutions" for supplanting the police became a radically democratic project up for investigation and contestation. In another place-based initiative, "Black Mama's Bail Out," SONG works in cities across the South to coordinate the release of Black mothers and caregivers awaiting trial from the cages of a "criminal legal system" and to mobilize support for job placement, housing, health/wellness, and legal counsel. SONG situates these contemporary state-sanctioned "kidnappings" within a historical legacy of tearing apart families

of color and pairs each regional intervention with direct actions aimed at eliminating pretrial detention and an anti-poor, racist cash bail system.[54]

Because SONG's aim is to build "people power" within harmed communities, they tend to those "just coming into political consciousness" carefully by facilitating direct action and community-building skills (like the "Squad up, Skill up, Slay!" series) and political education groups surrounding the nonprofit industrial complex. SONG meetings emphasize the role of deep trust in building movement, particularly given the (often) hostile environments they face in their praxis; organizers are encouraged to bring their "whole selves" into movement space in order to promote healing from the forced compartmentalization that is life under a racial capitalist regime. For SONG, transformative resistance (in movement) insists that each move toward liberation prefigures the compassionate, joyful, and transparent ethos and relations we desire in the world, while subjectivities are radically transformed in the very service of that unruly world building.

CONFRONTING THE BLACK SNAKE: RESISTING REGULATORY CAPTURE AT STANDING ROCK

Winona LaDuke describes critical infrastructure within the United States and beyond as supporting a "Wiindigoo Economics." According to Anishinaabe legend, she writes, the Wiindigoo is a ravenous monster who ran through the woods, propelled by avarice hunger for human flesh. Neoliberal capitalism is the

Wiindigoo, the destructive and irrational "economics of a cannibal."[55] Wiindigo infrastructure, LaDuke says, has worked to calcify settler socioeconomic logics into material structures, like pipelines. An old Lakota prophecy predicts this pipeline, in the form of a huge black snake, bringing toxicity and violence to Lakota and Dakota communities and to all Mother Earth.[56] Whether the people will come together to defeat the black snake remains an open question. Here, LaDuke invokes the concept of the impasse as the "time of the Seventh Fire" or a choice between two paths: one "well-worn but scorched" and other "not well-worn but green." Following the latter course, she affirms, means electing to be a people *without* ecological and historical amnesia and requires the "revolutionary but also profoundly practical work of infrastructure."[57]

This political contest over the politics of pipelines entered the broader public imagination during the 2016 Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), a 1,168-mile conduit for transporting 570,000 barrels of fracked crude oil a day from North Dakota to Illinois. Proposed by Energy Transfer Partners and Enbridge (the largest energy infrastructure company in North America), DAPL was set to run through the majority-white city of Bismarck but was rerouted due to concerns about water contamination. That risk was outsourced to the downriver Native nation of Standing Rock, whose protected ancestral lands had been excluded from Army Corps of Engineers maps and environmental impact assessment. Beyond the threat of water contamination, the pipeline would endanger historic, sacred, and ancestral sites directly in its path.

According to LaDuke, most people assumed the pipeline to be a fait accompli. But in April 2016 a small group of Indigenous young people, calling themselves the One Mind Youth movement, sprang into action. They launched a two-thousand-mile relay-style run to the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers headquarters to deliver a petition (with 157,000 signatures) asking them to deny the DAPL permission to cross the Missouri River. The public action sparked national attention, and within weeks the first "prayer camps" in the name of #NODAPL resistance were founded just south of the pipeline construction sites. Thousands of people from across the continent flocked to the camps, "prepared to sacrifice everything to keep that pipe out of the ground. A people had been awakened. A historic siege had begun."[58]

The movement's slogan, "Water is Life,"[59] signaled both an ethos of sacred interdependence between humanity and fragile ecologies and direct confrontation with the corporate "right" to override this relational vitality in the service of profit. In the battle for water (as life), activists understood themselves not as "protesters out to make trouble" but as "Water Protectors" who were "determined to stop a whole other order of trouble."[60] Many Indigenous people, LaDuke contends, have cultivated intimacy with the natural world, understanding themselves as unextractable from it; this is an ontological sensibility that moves one to the front lines of anti-extractivist resistance. Water Protectors maintained human blockades and locked their bodies to heavy machinery in order to arrest pipeline construction and to draw attention to state trespass, treaty violation, environmentally

racist water contamination, and the existential crime of species destruction.

For over a year, Water Protectors endured an escalating militarized response by the state and a private defense contractor called Tigerswan, who had run counterinsurgency attacks against civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan). Water Protectors were attacked by dogs, armored tanks, snipers, pepper spray, tasers, rubber bullets, and blasted with water cannons in freezing temperatures. As the brutal response from the state escalated, more people—American Indian tribes across North America, non-Native allies from liberation movements like Black Lives Matter, the Palestine Youth Movement, environmental justice activists, faith communities, thousands of U.S. military veterans, and conservative farmers—showed up to join the resistance. Led by Indigenous peoples and rooted in Indigenous teachings, Standing Rock offered "a home to anyone, of any race or culture, willing to fight for the water. Water Protectors are everywhere."[61] In an attempt to delegitimize the camps, a local law enforcement agency policing the camps circulated a map on social media showing home states of arrested Water Protectors. Instead of inspiring disdain, the image demonstrated the deep infrastructure of solidarity that extended beyond the physical space of the Standing Rock reservation.

While the police treated Standing Rock participants as unruly insurgents, for Water Protectors Standing Rock was a site of unruly world building. In stark contrast to the police and oil companies that surrounded them, activists designed an infrastructure to support a sociality and praxis of mutual aid and radical relationality outside the colonizer money economy. As

new protesters arrived, they received maps indicating where to find free kitchens, health clinics, child care, legal aid, security, and camp supplies. There was also a day school called the Defenders of the Water School (a name chosen by the students) with a curriculum focusing on Indigenous treaties, languages, culture, and land and water defense. As Indigenous educator Sandy Grande remarks, this was an anticolonial education for liberation: how to be in good relation with others and the nonhuman world and to learn the creation of "spaces, places, and histories of freedom" as revolutionary inheritance.[62] LaDuke describes drums echoing out into the plains and young singers "crying out to the future generations that we were all there to protect."[63] It was a rare moment in which a perverse environmentally racist economic infrastructure (represented by large multinational corporations backed by state violence) was confronted by an infrastructure of bodies saying no to colonization.[64] At the same time, LaDuke contends, the Water Protectors' greatest threat to the state came not from resisting the pipeline per se but from the omnipresent sense that people were remembering "what it feels like to be free."[65]

In February 2017 the camp was raided by SWAT teams, riot cops, helicopters, and tanks, and like "thousands of ancestors before," the Water Protectors were forcibly removed.[66] By the time Standing Rock was extinguished and the camps cleared out, over eight hundred people had been arrested and faced charges ranging from trespassing to felony rioting. While President Obama had initially halted the construction, the pipeline was approved by Trump less than a week after taking office. But while the Water Protectors failed in this specific aim, the story

of Standing Rock cannot be evaluated by neoliberal measures of (short-term and short-sighted) success/failure nor its constrained notion of intelligible "effectiveness."

First, Standing Rock transformed conversations surrounding fossil fuels, humanizing abstract debates around carbon emissions and toxic water. It served as a clarion call to resist the brutal economic infrastructures that facilitate fossil fuel dependence and to center front-line communities and Indigenous nations doing that work. Inspired by Standing Rock, the fight against the "black snake" of current and proposed pipeline infrastructures, including Kinder Morgan, Keystone XL, Enbridge Line 9, and TransCanada Energy East, spread across North America. These flashpoints of struggle represent a growing infrastructure of transformative resistance, led by Indigenous peoples, against settler colonialism, extractive capitalism, and the regulatory (corporate) capture of economic, political, and ecosystemic infrastructure more broadly. As Water Protector LaDonna Bravebull Allard reminds us, it is past time for everyone to be a "Wiindigoo Slayer."[67] In the face of the evisceration of democracy and the economic power of transnational oil companies, Standing Rock represented a battle for who gets to interpret the world, decide the future, and what form resistance should take. As ninety-eight-year-old Frances Crowe explained in court, "I care a lot about my grandchildren, and all grandchildren in the world. I had exhausted my administrative remedies when I went to the pipeline to put my body there to say 'no.'"[68]

Just as importantly, the movement prefigured infrastructures based on sustainable relations among human beings and the

biosphere, and these projects continue. In late July 2019, the first solar farm in North Dakota (Indigenized Energy Solar Farm) went up only three miles from the historic resistance to DAPL. The farm will generate enough energy to power surrounding homes, the local Indigenous Youth Center, and the Veterans Memorial Building, where thousands of veterans who came as Water Protectors stayed during NoDAPL. Founder Cody Two Bears talks about their vision for building the capacity of Native communities to transform their energy system: "It's one thing to protest about it, to talk about it, but now we got to be about it."[69]

TOWARD A CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF TRANSFORMATIVE RESISTANCE

We conclude by citing poet Audre Lorde's famous words, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," which offer a praxis oriented toward unruly world building. Rather than "recognition" or "inclusion," Lorde urges us toward disordering and disorienting movement beyond the suffocating state apparatuses and institutional forms of power designed to contain that movement. In our contemporary landscape of resistance, this work requires abandoning possessive investment in the neoliberal-democratic infrastructure currently on offer (and widely accepted) as the terrain of reformative resistance. It entails the painful relinquishment of cruelly optimistic attachment to beliefs that mature Democratic presidents, benevolent corporate philanthropists, reformed police, more liberal courts,

less disingenuous profit-driven media, socially aware marketing campaigns, or knowledgeable scientists armed with statistics, can realize our political visions for us, or deliver justice and freedom from on high.

A critical infrastructure of transformative resistance is sustained through emancipatory struggles that push up and against centers of power that appear impossible to dislodge. Occupy protesters camped outside of Wall Street to confront corporate domination of political rule. Black Lives Matter activists take up space on the streets where they are brutally beaten and murdered by police. Standing Rock Water Protectors draped their bodies as barricades to protect their land and water from maleficent oil companies. If the neoliberal terms of success are premised on efficiency, practicality, and short-term effectiveness, then we must acknowledge the likelihood of failure—on these terms. After all, the pipeline went in, rising class inequality and unjust distribution of life chances persist, and Black people continue to be assaulted and assassinated by the police. But transformative resistance requires not being bound by the so-called measurability of results, such that we forfeit our commitment to claiming authority about how we want to live. A loss is not a loss when it holds open the impasse of the present as a sign of the world's unfinished-ness, sustains the unraveling of the social order, and rekindles attachment to radically democratic demands.

In this regard, the temporality of demanding hope is driven by the insistent press of the oppressive present. This demanding of hope is neither utopian nor nostalgic but finds historical grounding and political kinship in unruly world builders—past,

present, and to come. This is what the feminist abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls an "infrastructure of [revolutionary] feeling," the building of an intergenerational memory that links radical places, histories, and moments to political praxes working under the sign of abolition in the present. This capacious process entails, Gilmore insists, a deliberate "selection and reselection of ancestors."[70] Recall that on the eve of Trump's inauguration in January 2021, BLM cofounder Alicia Garza declared, "Whether it be Occupy Wall Street, whether it be the DREAMers or Black Lives Matter, there's a particular hope I have that all of those movements will join together to become the powerful force that we can be, that will actually govern this country."[71]

Collectively, social movements committed to a different kind of world are not simply engaging in disruptive activity but are revealing and overturning the hegemonic political grammar, vocabulary, and orthodoxy of what liberation might mean and what resistance looks like. These are not pie-in-the-sky projects but rather pragmatic analyses that take the state seriously, holding state power and state violence in tension. Instead of saying "no" to power, they show the modes of authoritarian and racist power currently exercised by the liberal state. And they insist that if democracy is intended to be enacted by the people, then the state itself is ours to reimagine and those desires are to be collectively acted upon. Activists working toward a world without police, prisons, fossil fuels, global hunger, and borders know that these visions may look different as they take shape on the ground. And at the same time, they understand that what is thought to be unachievable in one moment can be taken

very seriously in the next. Unruly world building exemplifies what it means to live and think beyond the goals of profit maximization and personal freedom and instead to demand hope for something better—collectively, creatively, and in solidarity with one another and the planet. Learning from, teaching about, and nourishing these movements is the only way we can even begin to talk seriously about the future.

NOTES

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that the government is working to end police brutality and the institutional racism that fuels it. For the increasing number of families fighting for justice and dignity for their kin slain by police, I refuse to give its perpetrators and enablers political cover by making an appearance among them." She continues, "We assert that true revolutionary and systemic change will ultimately only be brought forth by ordinary working people, students and youth—organizing, marching and taking power from the corrupt elites. No proponent of this system—Democrat or Republican—will upend the oppressive structures that maintain it. To hold the powerful accountable for their harmful and oppressive actions, we must continue to build power in the streets. We must act in concert and in coalition within our communities, because together, we have the power to uproot all oppression and systemic violence."

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