

The London School of Economics and Political Science

*Mobilizing for Social Democracy in the 'Land of Opportunity':
Social Movement Framing and the Limits of the 'American Dream' in
Postwar United States*

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Sociology of the London School of
Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, January 2015

Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the use of ‘American Dream’ language by the U.S. labour and civil rights movements during the first three decades following the Second World War. It examines, in particular, the use of such language by socialists and social democrats in three separate, unsuccessful, attempts to transform postwar American society along social democratic lines. While the limits of social democratic and other leftist efforts in and beyond the postwar period has been the subject of significant scholarly enquiry, the use of ‘American Dream’ language in these efforts has, for the most part, been neglected. The thesis begins by offering a definitional analysis of the ‘American Dream’, and suggests that it is an ideology that is built on the premise that the United States is the land of opportunity because of its capitalist system. Whereas the conventional wisdom emphasizes the flexibility and political capaciousness of the ‘American Dream’, this thesis argues that such capaciousness is overstated in the existing literature, most of which pays insufficient attention to the ideology’s relationship to capitalism. The empirical chapters test this claim through an examination of the meaning and role of ‘American Dream’ language in the three cases. Drawing from archival research, and using the analytical lens of the social movement framing perspective, the thesis explains how movement actors in each case invoked the ‘American Dream’ in hopes of redefining its hegemonic meaning, from one that legitimized, to one that fundamentally challenged, American capitalism. It also considers how and why those efforts were unsuccessful. This is done through an exploration of the decision-making processes leading to the movement actors’ use of ‘American Dream’ language, and by examining the nature of the failed attempts to mobilize around their redefined American Dream. The thesis finds that a common source of constraint on these movements in all three cases was the conflation of ‘Americanism’ and capitalism, and its pervasiveness in American political culture. In addition to casting doubt on the conventional wisdom surrounding the ‘American Dream’, the thesis also has implications for some of the broader debates about the impact of American political culture on the American left.

Acknowledgments

One afternoon, toward the end of my first year of studies at the LSE, I was chatting with a group of staff members and fellow PhD students, and I remember commenting, at one point, on how my PhD experience thus far had gone surprisingly smoothly. I had, of course, spoken far too soon. These last few years of researching and writing have been anything but smooth sailing, and there are a number of people who I want to thank for providing assistance and support along the way.

I want to begin by thanking the staff at the Tamiment Library, the Schomburg Centre, and the Reuther Library for being so helpful and accommodating during my visits. In most instances, my visits were short and therefore rather rushed, and yet I was able to accomplish a great deal of research during every visit, due to the expertise and efficiency of the staff at these libraries. I am also grateful to the LSE for providing financial assistance, which went toward financing my trips to the aforementioned libraries, through the research studentship scheme. I would also like to thank Cyril Ghosh, who was kind enough to send me the manuscript of his book prior to its publication.

Among the many wonderful people I met during my time at the LSE, I am particularly grateful to Liene Ozolina, Angela Filipe, Katherine Robinson, Antonia Dawes, Nabila Munawar and Louise Caffrey for their friendship and support. My supervisor, Robin Archer, provided invaluable insight and advice on the project. I'm quite certain that I never once submitted work to him that was anywhere close to being within the maximum word limit, yet he nonetheless always read and commented on every page with great care and attention to detail. I am especially grateful for his tremendous support and encouragement in the final months leading up to the completion of the thesis.

Some of the main themes underpinning this thesis represent themes that I have stubbornly clung to since I was an undergraduate student at the University of British Columbia. I was incredibly lucky to have been admitted to the honours political science program at UBC, and to have had Laura Janara as a thesis supervisor during this time. Dr. Janara encouraged me to pursue graduate studies, and I am so glad that I followed her advice. Her brilliance as a political theorist and as a teacher continues to inspire me to this day.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank my family and friends back in Vancouver, Toronto and New York, without whose love and support this thesis would not have been possible. I have been fortunate to be surrounded by so many incredible people and although I cannot thank everyone here, there are some who I must mention. My husband, Alfonso, who joined me in London from the beginning of the PhD journey, was a constant source of encouragement and support, and was incredibly patient during the whole process. On most days, when getting home from work, he barely had a chance to get through the door before being bombarded by my daily research rantings and ramblings. Despite the exhaustion brought on by his own demanding job, he was always willing to listen, and to read and offer feedback on my work. My siblings were also a constant source of support, and I'm particularly grateful to my brother Alexander (who also put up with more than his share of rantings and ramblings), and my sister Lorena, who offered advice, encouragement, many laughs, and, whenever necessary, a shoulder to lean (and cry) on. I'm not sure I would have gotten through the rough patches without her. Thanks also to my wonderful parents-in-law, Mario and Elvira Aiello, who have rooted for me every step of the way. I'm also incredibly thankful for the love and support provided by my stepfather Ricardo, my sister Michelle, and the rest of the brilliant Castañeda clan.

I want to end off by acknowledging two amazing women in my life. My grandmother, Shirley Fuentes Knight, has brightened each and every one of my days with her kindness, strength and enthusiasm. And more than anything, I want to thank my mother, Ana Lucia Fuentes, who has inspired me beyond words. This thesis is dedicated to her.

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Abbreviations

AFL	American Federation of Labor
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor—Congress of Industrial Organizations
APRI	A. Philip Randolph Institute
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
DOS	discursive opportunity structure
NAM	National Association of Manufacturers
NECNP	National Educational Committee for a New Party
NRPB	National Resources Planning Board
PAC	Political Action Committee
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Historically there are certain language situations which are repressive.

-Raymond Williams¹

1. Introduction: Bringing the ‘American Dream’ in

In his 1978 essay, “Considerations on Social Democracy in the United States”, Ira Katznelson observed that

the achievements to date of American social democracy have had little to do with the persistent pressures of social democrats. To the extent that it may be said to exist, American social democracy is unlike any other. It is a cluster of ideas, motives, programs, and sensibilities without a coherent organized popular movement or base. (91)

Scholarly endeavours to understand why social democracy had taken this unique form in the United States inevitably became embroiled, Katznelson rightly pointed out, in debates about ‘American Exceptionalism’—that is, about what made the United States distinctive, and why. Katznelson was writing at a time in which the lack of sustained organizational pressure for social democracy in the United States had become a prominent issue; this was especially the case among social scientists who sought to make sense of the “relatively emaciated character” of social welfare programs compared to those in other industrialized democracies where social democracy *did* figure prominently in the political landscape (ibid., 82). Although the notion of ‘American exceptionalism’ was, and remains, the subject of considerable controversy, it nonetheless continues to be invoked to refer to a range of ostensibly ‘distinctive’ American characteristics and phenomena, including the fact that, in the decades following the Second World War, the United States took a different (non- social

¹ *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1979).

democratic) path from many of its counterparts in Europe, as well as Canada (Iton 2005; Kammen 1993; Lipset 1996; Rosenfeld 2012; Schwartz 2014).

If the American postwar experience with social democracy has been ‘exceptional’, it has not been for the absence of any efforts to make it unexceptional in this regard. This study examines three distinct, yet related efforts between the 1940s and the 1960s, to transform the United States along social democratic lines. The first effort emanated from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a labour federation that had been created in the 1930s, and which represented the industrial unionism wing of the American labour movement. The second effort followed closely after the first, and it emanated from the National Educational Committee for a New Party (NECNP), an organization formed by several left-oriented labour and civil rights leaders and intellectuals. The final effort emanated from the labour and civil rights movements (primarily the latter), and although it was less confined to a specific time frame than the other two, it was particularly pronounced in the mid- to late-1960s.

Each of these efforts resulted in failure. Leaders’ and activists’ attempts to shift the policy tide in Washington in a social democratic direction were largely ineffective in all three cases, and few, if any, of the programmatic goals they sought were achieved. Nor were they very successful at sustaining momentum *within* their respective movements, for a social democratic agenda. By the 1970s, the American political landscape had become notable—and ‘exceptional’—for its “absence of a regular vehicle for social democratic reform” (Katznelson 1978, 93). Certainly, the labour and civil rights movements continued (and continue) to exist in the wake of each of the failures, but by the 1970s, those movements had largely shed their social democratic layers.

In addition to representing failed efforts to achieve social democratic transformation, the three cases examined here share another crucial feature in common: movement actors articulated their appeals for social democracy through the language of the ‘American Dream’.

It is this phenomenon that this thesis is primarily concerned with. Postwar American exceptionalism with respect to social democracy was not just about the weakness of social democratic policies, but also about the “distinctive limits” of American political discourse in these years (Katznelson 1986, 308). The cases explored in this study sought to challenge these ‘distinctive limits’ through the use of ‘American Dream’ language, but they met with little success.

The role of ‘American Dream’ language in the labour and civil rights movements has been given insufficient attention in the otherwise rich literature pertaining to the ‘exceptional’ nature of social democracy in the United States. What makes this scholarly gap puzzling is, in the first place, the simple empirical fact that ‘American Dream’ language was common to the aforementioned cases. This neglect becomes all the more curious when one observes the extent to which considerations of related phenomena have been central to some of the most contentious debates about ‘American exceptionalism’. In particular, social scientists have long debated over the relative merits of accounts that look to American political culture for explanations of the (ostensible) weakness and other characteristics that have earned the left the ‘exceptionalist’ label; many of the ideas and concepts that have been the centre of scholarly focus and debate are analogous to the ‘American Dream’, and yet the latter term has been given little serious consideration, despite its prominence in the language of the American left. This thesis, by contrast, takes the ‘American Dream’ seriously. An examination of the nature and implications of the aforementioned failures will shed light on the crucial role of American political culture in bringing about the ‘exceptional’ nature of social democracy in the United States.

Chapter Structure

This introduction chapter will begin with a review of the relevant literature pertaining to three related concepts that are at the centre of this study: ‘American Dream’, ‘American exceptionalism’, and ‘Americanism’. I begin, in section 2, with a brief discussion of the extant literature on the ‘American Dream’, a term that has been invoked much more often than it has been defined. In addition to introducing the main works that have sought to provide definitional analyses of the ‘American Dream’, I present a preliminary critique of these studies, and offer an alternative conceptualization of the ‘American Dream’. I then turn to examine the relevant literature on ‘American exceptionalism’ and ‘Americanism’. In contrast to the literature on the ‘American Dream’, these other literatures often speak directly to one another. I review some of the key debates that have arisen in the literature, focusing in particular on the arguments in, and responses to, Louis Hartz’s (1955) seminal work, *The Liberal Tradition in America*. In section 3, I provide a brief introductory overview of the historical contexts within which the cases explored in this study were situated: the so-called ‘postwar consensus’, and the civil rights era. This is based primarily on a survey of relevant labour and civil rights scholarship, as well as the literatures introduced in section 2. After examining the cases and concepts ‘in context’, I then proceed to discuss the theoretical framework—the ‘framing perspective’—that I use to examine and analyze the use of ‘American Dream’ language in these cases. In this section, I identify some of the limitations of the traditional framing perspective, and I introduce some of the recent scholarship that has emerged in an attempt to address these limitations. Section 5 discusses the sources used to identify and analyze the cases. Finally, section 6 offers a brief overview of the chapters that follow.

2. Core Concepts

'American Dream'

Most scholarly treatments of the 'American Dream' trace its lineage back to James Truslow Adams' (1931) *The Epic of America*. Although the ideas that Adams attributed to the concept were not necessarily novel, this appears to have been the first publication in which the 'American Dream' term was being explicitly used to describe those ideas. Moreover, as scholars have pointed out, it was after *The Epic* was published, that the term became established within the American lexicon (Cullen 2003, Ghosh 2013, 29; Kamp 2009; Korff 2008). Since the mid-twentieth century, especially, the term has been ubiquitous in all types of cultural and political expression, and in the different means of mass communication. Despite its prevalence within American popular and political culture, however, scholarly studies of the 'American Dream' have been relatively limited. A small number of social scientists have commented on this lacuna, including Jennifer Hochschild (1995), who notes that she is "puzzled by why so few political scientists have examined the ideology of the American dream" (xxiv). Jim Cullen (2003), moreover, has observed that despite the fact that there are over 700 book titles containing the term 'American Dream', not one of those he examined "makes anything like a systematic attempt to define the term or trace its origins; its definition is virtually taken for granted" (5). More recently, Cyril Ghosh (2013) has commented on the "inexplicable paucity of scholarly work on the American Dream as an ideological construct in the tradition of analytic political theory" (6). As he rightly observes, "given the prominence of the American Dream in contemporary American political talk, this scholarly vacuum, indeed negligence, is breathtaking" (ibid.).

The authors just quoted are among the few who have taken the 'American Dream' seriously, endeavouring not only to define the term but also to trace its historical origins and to identify its impact on various aspects of American political development. On all these

counts, however, the core literature contains important weaknesses, which will be made clear over the course of this study. For the purposes of this introduction, I will outline the basic features of the arguments underpinning the conventional wisdom surrounding the ‘American Dream’, drawing primarily from the core literature.² I begin with a brief overview of how the term has been defined in this literature. The original definition provided by Adams (1931) often serves as a starting point for authors. According to Adams, the ‘American Dream’ was

that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement....It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable...regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (415)

Central to this definition is the notion of opportunity for success. As the core authors have all pointed out, precisely what constitutes ‘success’ is subject to varying interpretations, but however it is interpreted, ‘success’—and the opportunity for achieving it in America—is ultimately at the heart of the definition of the American Dream.

In her widely cited work, Hochschild (1995, 7) introduces her definition through a quote from a speech given by Bill Clinton in 1993: “The American dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one – if you work hard and play by the rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you.” Clinton’s statement here, she argues, “capture[s] the bundle of shared, even unconsciously presumed, tenets about

² For the purposes of this study, the core ‘American Dream’ literature includes those works that seek to offer comprehensive definitions of the term, and which consider the various historical and contemporary interpretations that have been manifest in American political culture. The core ‘American Dream’ scholarship—particularly the works of Cullen (2003), Ghosh (2013), Hochschild (1995), Jillson (2004) and Schwarz (1997)—can be distinguished from two additional categories of ‘American Dream’ literature that will appear in the thesis. In the first place, there is a wide literature that in various ways engages with the question of whether the ‘American Dream’ is a reality or a ‘myth’ (eg., Chinoy 1955; Johnson 2006; McClelland 2010; McNamee and Miller 2009); many such works present stringent critiques of the ‘American Dream’ and particularly of its impact on the perceptions and behaviour of the working-class and poor in the United States. Although some of these works will be considered in the next chapter, they are not as central as the ‘core’ literature, to this thesis, which focuses on the use of ‘American Dream’ language and on attempts to redefine it. As will become evident, the question of whether those who used the language ‘believed in’ the ‘American Dream’ is not a straightforward one, nor is it always necessarily a relevant one, in the cases examined. The second category of literature on the ‘American Dream’ includes those works that invoke the term, ‘American Dream’, but which do not distinguish it from analogous terms; many works on ‘American exceptionalism’ (discussed below) are included in this category (eg., Davis 1986; Kazin 2011) and are particularly relevant to this thesis.

achieving success that make up the ideology of the American dream” (7). According to Hochschild, there are four such tenets, each of which relates to a particular question: “*Who* may pursue the American dream? In *what* does the pursuit consist? *How* does one successfully pursue the dream? *Why* is the pursuit worthy of our deepest commitment?” (1995, 19). The answers to these four questions underpin her definition of the American Dream: first, it can be pursued by “everyone, regardless of ascriptive traits, family background, or personal history”; second, it brings the promise of opportunity for success, however defined; third, one pursues success “through actions and traits under one’s own control”; and fourth, it both promotes and rewards virtuous action (19-23). Ghosh (2013, 32) provides a more concise definition which nonetheless upholds the basic features of Hochschild’s definition: “*Ceteris paribus*, the American Dream is the belief or hope that in America every individual possesses, or ought to possess, an equal opportunity to succeed in life, regardless of how she defines success for herself”. On the basis of this definition, Ghosh highlights three elements: individualism, equal opportunity, and success. These, according to Ghosh, constitute the three ‘deep structures’ of the ideology; they are the ‘necessary but insufficient’ conditions, that is, for the “instantiation of the American Dream” (34).

Both Hochschild (1995) and Ghosh (2013) call the American Dream an ideology, although they each are careful to emphasize the non-pejorative nature of this designation. The American Dream is an ideology of success, and what makes it an ideology is simply the fact that it is characterized by a “coherent set of beliefs”; thus, their reference to ‘ideology’ here is based on ‘analytical’ rather than ‘judgmental’ treatments of the American Dream (Hochschild 1995, 6; Ghosh 2013, 13-15). Moreover, both authors insist on the flexible, adaptable nature of the ideology. In particular, they emphasize its susceptibility to a wide range of different, and even potentially incompatible, interpretations. Ghosh (2013, 14) explains that the American Dream

is an ideology in the sense that it motivates a particular vision of the ideal life but this vision is not a collective vision, as is typical of a political ideology. Although many Americans share this vision, each individual has a personal and somewhat unique interpretation of what the American Dream is supposed to mean for herself.

Hochschild (1995, 25), similarly, discusses various different ways that one might define success in relation to the American Dream, and then goes on to emphasize that “[w]hat matters most, however, is not any single image but rather the elasticity and range of the ideology of the American dream”.

It is important to point out that, although there is much emphasis within the core literature on the fact that the central tenets of the ‘American Dream’ can vary tremendously in meaning, most scholars also stress that the various potential meanings still fit under a broader umbrella of shared ideas about American society—ideas which stem back to the nation’s founding (Cullen 2003; Ghosh 2013; Hochschild 1995; Jillson 2004)³. Just as crucially, however, because of the multiple meanings that can be attributed to these shared ideas, the language of the ‘American Dream’ can be used to articulate a range of (potentially conflicting) political projects in the name of ‘true’ American traditions. In other words, the elasticity of the ideology’s tenets allows for substantial variation in answers to the question of ‘what needs to be done’ to ensure the realization of the ‘American Dream’. In his discussion of the multiple available meanings of equal opportunity in the ideology, for example, Ghosh (2013) observes that

equal opportunity is sometimes presented by leaders as an attribute of American society and at other times as a national goal that should be an attribute of an ideal(ized) America. Those who are happy with the status quo characterize equal opportunity as a stable and persistent characteristic of American society, while those who want greater social justice and equal civil rights claim that equal opportunity is a work-in-progress. (143)

Essentially, according to this line of analysis, the ‘American Dream’ has a ‘gap’ logic available within it—a logic that is inscribed into each of its tenets and which can therefore be

³ This point will be discussed and developed in more detail in the next chapter.

used to appeal to different projects. That assumption underpins the conventional understandings of the ideology's role and political impact. What is particularly relevant for this study is the widespread assumption that diverse social movements representing diverse interests can adopt American Dream language effectively and in the service of a wide range of political and economic goals (Cullen 2003; Ghosh 2013; Jillson 2004).

The characterization of the American Dream as a capacious ideology is widespread, and indeed it is representative of the conventional wisdom not only within academic circles but also within the broader terrain of popular and political culture. In this thesis, I offer an alternative conceptualization of the American Dream, which I will present in broad strokes here, but which will be developed and substantiated in the remaining chapters. Broadly speaking, the 'American Dream' is an ideology about American society, and it is premised upon the idea that the United States is the 'land of opportunity'—the idea that in American society, anyone can achieve success, however defined, no matter what their background. As will become clear in the next chapter, the centrality of the 'land of opportunity' idea is widely acknowledged in both academic and popular conceptions of the 'American Dream'. Sometimes, the term, 'land of opportunity', appears directly in definitions; but even where it does not—as in the core literature cited above—it nonetheless figures prominently. Where my definition departs from established definitions, however, is in arguing that the American Dream is founded upon a particular *interpretation* of the 'land of opportunity' idea. In this interpretation, capitalism is a necessary (but insufficient) component of the 'land of opportunity' equation. In this interpretation, that is, capitalism is identified as one of the essential features that makes the United States the land of opportunity.

This study challenges the conventional characterizations of the 'American Dream' as a capacious ideology. In the cases examined here, movement actors invoked the language of the American Dream, but their use of this language often represented a challenge to the

‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation, and to the assumptions that it gives rise to. In varying ways (and with varying degrees of consistency), they argued that the realization of the ‘American Dream’ could only be fulfilled through a radical transformation of the nation’s socioeconomic structure; in essence, their interpretations sought to divorce the capitalist component from the ‘land of opportunity’ equation, and thus entailed a radical redefinition of the ‘American Dream’ ideology. Their attempts at such redefinition met with limited success. Since these movement actors took advantage of the ‘gap’ logic, which is ostensibly a crucial source of the American Dream’s political capaciousness, the cases sit uneasily with the expectations of the conventional wisdom.

As I will explain in chapter 2 of the thesis, the limitations of existing scholarship stem at least in part from the widespread neglect of the question of how capitalism—both as an idea and as a form of economic organization—fits into the ‘American Dream’ ideology. Within the bulk of the core ‘American Dream’ literature, the centrality of capitalism is not explicitly denied, but neither is it adequately considered.⁴ Certainly, scholars acknowledge that the ideology is, contextually at least, tied to capitalist institutions. Peter McClelland (2010), for example, explains that in the American Dream “the opportunity in question is the chance to participate in the multiple markets of a capitalist system” (2-3). And Hochschild (1995), to take another example, describes the goal of upward mobility (one common instantiation of the ‘success’ component of the American Dream) as the goal of “climbing the capitalist ladder” (40). Yet in most cases, as will be shown in this study, the implications of

⁴ That neglect may be, at least in part, a reflection of the nature of the particular topics of inquiry in some of these works. Ghosh (2013), for example, who argues that “America’s most urgent political exigency [is] the need to respond to diversity” (79), focuses on the correlation between increased immigration and salience of identity politics, and the increased usage of ‘American Dream’ talk in political speeches. Numerous other works have also focused on specific movements or groups commonly associated with ‘identity politics’. The importance of the ‘American Dream’ to immigrants and ethnic minorities has been an especially popular topic for discussion (eg., McConnell and Marcelli 2007; Kahn and Livingston 2002; Todd 2000). Wyndy Corbin (2005) has examined the ways in which evangelical groups in the U.S. have been affected by what she observes to be a “conflation of the American Dream with American evangelicalism” (340).

their acknowledgments do not quite fit with the definitional analyses provided by these authors.

Another (albeit related) issue with the conventional studies of the ‘American Dream’ is the fact that, despite their emphasis on the capaciousness of the ideology, most scholars do not examine the actual uses of ‘American Dream’ language in any thorough or systematic way. With the exception of Ghosh (2013), we are offered very little in the way of empirical demonstrations of the ideology’s capaciousness. Ghosh, however, focuses predominantly on the use of such language by presidential candidates from the Democratic and Republican parties; despite his claim that these politicians are from “diverse ideological persuasions” (2013, 79), the examples he cites suggest a rather limited range in interpretations on issues of political economy. In the realm of social movement activity, the extant literature is particularly limited in terms of providing evidence of the capaciousness of the ‘American Dream’.⁵

‘American Exceptionalism’

The existing literature on ‘American exceptionalism’ is vast, and this is partly due to the number and range of issues that have been subsumed under the concept. Within the fields of labour, left and working-class history, most discussions of ‘American exceptionalism’ can be traced back in one way or another to the question asked by Werner Sombart over a century ago: ‘Why is there no socialism in the United States’? While Sombart’s name is often attached to that question, however, it is arguably Louis Hartz’s (1955) answer, offered in his *Liberal Tradition in America*, that has provoked the most discussion and debate within the social sciences. According to Hartz, the absence of socialism in the United States was directly attributable to its lack of a feudal past. Building on Toqueville’s ([1835] 2003)

⁵ Scholars do often highlight the use of this language by the civil rights movement, but as will become clear in this study, they rely on a limited examination of such uses; once the lens becomes widened, their claims about the ideology’s capaciousness are undermined.

observations about the social egalitarian origins of American society, Hartz argued that such a unique characteristic—a society that was ‘born equal’, went hand-in-hand with another unique characteristic—a society in which ideological space was monopolized by Lockean liberalism. Moreover, this was a society that not only had been ‘born liberal’ (Stears 2010), but which would inevitably remain so: “for a society which begins with Locke...stays with Locke, by virtue of an absolute and irrational attachment it develops for him, and becomes as indifferent to the challenge of socialism in the later era as it was unfamiliar with the heritage of feudalism in the earlier one” (Hartz 1955, 6). In this formulation, the possibility of socialism—or, in fact, of any other competing philosophy—gaining prominence in the United States, was foreclosed from the moment of the nation’s founding. This is the basic causal argument underlying the ‘no feudalism, no socialism’ formula commonly associated with Hartz (Archer 2007, 145-6).

Hartz’s ‘liberal tradition’ thesis was particularly prominent during the 1950s and 1960s, although there were many others who made similar arguments, and who collectively came to be known as the ‘consensus historians’ (Kammen 1993). In addition to the ‘consensus historians’, several scholars, including most notably Lipset (1996), have more recently built upon Hartz’s ‘liberal tradition’ thesis in an attempt to address a broader range of questions beyond the ‘why no socialism’ question. Among the ‘exceptionalist’ features discussed by Lipset are the absence of a labour-based party, the relatively low proportion of union membership, and the weak welfare state. In attempting to account for these ‘exceptional’ features, Lipset considered a range of factors that Hartz had been silent about (including the role of religion and of political institutions). Nonetheless, in the final analysis, he upheld Hartz’s central thesis in his proclamation that one factor stood out above all: “America has been dominated by pure bourgeois, middle class individualistic values” (1996, 32). This amalgamation of values, which he called the ‘American Creed’, and which included

individualism, antistatism and laissez-faire, was essentially a more specifically defined version of Hartz's 'liberal tradition'.

The critiques that have emerged in response to works on 'American exceptionalism' have been numerous and varied.⁶ However, within the scholarship on the weakness of the American left (but not limited to it), most of the critiques have targeted, either directly or indirectly, the claims forwarded by Hartz in his *Liberal Tradition*, and his characterization of all strands of the American left as nothing but Lockean, free-market liberalism by various other names (Stears 2010).⁷ Hartz's dismissal (and sometimes outright neglect) of the various radical traditions in American history has been widely criticized, and many studies have reached back into American history to reveal stories of leftist thought and activism, particularly at the local and community levels, that do not fit Hartz's consensus picture (eg., Kazin 1995; Gerstle 2002; Haverty-Stacke and Walkowitz 2010; Rodgers 1992; Voss 1993). Drawing upon these 'new labour histories', some prominent scholars have argued that Hartz's work—and indeed the whole theme of 'American exceptionalism' stemming back to Sombart's (1906) original question—is neither valid nor relevant, and thus not worthy of ongoing discussion (e.g., Foner 1984; Kazin 1995; Wilentz 1984a; 1984b).

These critics of 'American exceptionalism' have provided a much richer and more nuanced understanding of American labour and working-class history than the works of writers like Sombart and Hartz had previously acknowledged. With that being said, these new historical accounts do not succeed in undermining altogether the relevance of examining American exceptionalism. A number of scholars (e.g., Archer 2007; Kammen 1993; Katznelson 1986; Kimeldorf 1988; Salvatore 1984; Voss 1993) have agreed that the sweeping claims of the exceptionalism literature—especially the so-called 'consensus

⁶ As Kammen (1993) observes, "[d]isdain for American exceptionalism...has not been monolithic" (11)

⁷ As Archer (2013, 215n7) points out, "Hartz himself does not precisely specify what constitutes these liberal values, relying instead on allegorical associations with John Locke and Horatio Alger".

historians’—need to be substantially qualified, but have also noted that there are nonetheless distinctive historical and contemporary features of American society and politics that are worth exploring. With respect to American labour and working-class history, we need not deny the very real existence of multiple strands of anti-capitalist radicalism (including socialism) in that history to also acknowledge the equally real limitations of those strands. It is worth noting, for example, that many of the radical movements and ideas that are identified in the ‘new labour histories’ were also short-lived or fleeting;⁸ thus, we are still left to ask why they failed, and what the implications of these failures are.

For some scholars of American labour and working-class history, then, the “dearth of durable radicalism in the United States” is indeed a phenomenon that accurately characterizes the American experience, and which requires explanation (Dubofsky 2000, 140). Many of these same scholars, however, have rejected the approach and explanations offered by Hartz (1955), Lipset (1996) and others, and collectively they have identified numerous kinks or flaws in the ‘liberal tradition’ thesis. For example, several question the characterization of American political culture as being dominated by one single ideology—that is, by *laissez-faire*, anti-statist liberalism (e.g., Archer 2007; Ellis 2010; Morone 2005; Smith 1993; Stears 2007; Voss 1993). The rejection of Hartz’s claim about the monolithic status of liberalism has arguably been the most prominent line of argument against the ‘liberal tradition’ thesis since “the Hartzian hegemony came under severe attack” beginning in the 1960s (Abbot 2005, 93; Holland 2005). Indeed, it has become commonplace among social scientists on all sides of the ‘American exceptionalism’ debates to emphasize straightaway that whatever the merits (if any) of Hartz’s analysis of the history and prospects of the American left, his description of American political culture was severely distorted. In addition to exaggerating the scope and influence of liberalism, both historically and in his own day, his work also

⁸ For example, as one reviewer of Wilentz’s (1984b) examination of working class politics in New York City between 1788 and 1850 remarks, “[t]he labor movements at the heart of Wilentz’s story turn out merely to be labor moments” (Wiebe 1985, 1265).

unjustifiably discounted the relevance of labour republicanism (Foner 1984; Wilentz 1984a; 1984b), religion (Morone 2005; Nackenoff 2005) and ascriptive traditions (Smith 1993).⁹

Hartz's description of American political culture as one that was dominated by a single ideology has thus been widely discredited in the literature, including by many who accept the relevance of questions pertaining to the 'exceptionalism' of the American left; however, within the latter corpus of literature, there is disagreement over the explanatory power of Hartz's 'liberal tradition'. Some critics have contended that the liberal tradition identified by Hartz—while not hegemonic, nor even necessarily the most significant tradition in American political culture—is nonetheless capable of accounting for *some* aspects of American political development, including and especially the limits of socialism and of the U.S. left more generally (eg., Morone 2005, Smith 1999). On the other hand, there is a growing literature that suggests that neither political culture in general, nor the liberal tradition in particular, has had the type or degree of impact on leftist politics that Hartz's analysis claims for it. In many cases the alternative explanatory frameworks provided by these authors point away from answers that focus on ideational factors, focusing instead on other, largely institutional, factors in seeking to explain, for example, the conservatism of the U.S. labour movement (Voss 1993), or the weak American welfare state (Skocpol 1992; Steinmo 1994).

Some critics take this rejection of Hartz's explanatory account a step further and suggest that, insofar as the 'liberal tradition' has been prevalent (though not hegemonic) in

⁹ Rogers Smith's (1993; 1999) 'multiple civic traditions' thesis has been especially influential in this regard. Smith identifies three dominant traditions in American political development: Hartzian liberalism, modern republicanism, and ascriptive Americanism. The latter refers to those "conceptions of American identity defined in ascriptive (usually racial, ethnic, and gender) terms" (1999, 22). Thus, whereas Hartz (1955) described racist doctrine in the South as the "alien child in a liberal family" (8), Smith suggests that it represents part of the ascriptive tradition, which has been prevalent alongside the liberal tradition. Notably, there are many scholars who agree with the basic critique of Hartz's 'liberal tradition' thesis, but who take issue with Smith's alternative formulation, insofar as it locates the ideological roots of undemocratic, exclusionary practices outside of liberalism (eg., Iton 2005; Williams 2005). By contrast, the 'Liberalism as Exclusion' thesis "suggest[s] that liberalism itself must shoulder more—perhaps most, possibly all—of the blame for the politics of exclusion" (Stears 2007, 90).

American political culture, it has had effects that are substantially different from those Hartz ascribes to it. In Hartz's account, the American left, from the time of the nation's founding up to the present, had been locked in a perpetual state of contradiction, due to its "submerged and absolute liberal faith" (1955, 10); as Stears (2010) points out, one of the key manifestations of this contradiction, according to Hartz, was that

[r]adical intellectuals were...constantly...attempting to advance their political programs in language that ill-served their underlying purpose. They valorized individual liberty while arguing for a larger state; they celebrated private property while insisting on the need for greater taxation; and they retold Horatio Alger myths of personal achievement while demanding collective bargaining rights for organized labor. (184)

A number of Hartz's critics have questioned this assessment, particularly the claim that the American left has been consistently (and inevitably) hamstrung by its reliance on the language of liberalism (eg., Gerstle 1994, 2002; Nackenoff 1994, 2005; Rorty 1998). According to Archer (2007), for example, the liberal values of individual freedom and social egalitarianism—values which are clearly part of the 'liberal tradition' Hartz was analyzing—were viewed and treated by labour leaders in the United States as helpful ideological tools, rather than as sources of constraint, in their efforts to establish a labour party in the closing decade of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

'Americanism'

'Americanism', like the 'American Dream', is a term that has been invoked far more often than it has been defined in social scientific scholarship. For the purpose of this introduction, 'Americanism' can be understood as a referent for those ideas and actions that are deemed to be genuinely and legitimately 'American'; the meaning of this term in the context of this study, and its relationship to the 'American Dream', will be specified below,

¹⁰ His comparison of these (unsuccessful) efforts with the simultaneous (but, by contrast, successful) efforts of labour leaders in Australia, where the liberal values were also prevalent, leads him to examine alternative factors, but the most important point is his conclusion that some of these "liberal values tended to help rather than hinder the effort to establish a labour party" (2007, 179).

and will be elaborated in the remaining chapters, but in this section I will consider the concept in relation to the aforementioned debates on ‘American exceptionalism’.

The concept of ‘Americanism’ is of central importance to the debates on ‘American exceptionalism’, particularly in the works that engage with Hartz’s claims about American political culture and its impact on the left. Hartz described American political culture as being dominated by liberal values, and while he did not offer a comprehensive definition of the ‘liberal tradition’ that was at the centre of his analysis, he did emphasize that this was a distinctively ‘American’ form of liberalism, stemming from the distinctive American historical experience, as we have seen above. Indeed, as Stears (2010) points out, the constraining effects that Hartz attributed to the ‘liberal tradition’ were not simply about the effects of liberalism and the American left’s attachment to liberalism, but also about the latter’s

relationship to its nation’s political identity and political past. The American Left’s inability to think and argue beyond the conceptual confines of the Lockean tradition, Hartz argued, was not only the result of an intellectual limitation. It was also the product of an unwillingness to contemplate the need for a political future for the United States that was markedly different from the political past. Unlike European lefts, which regularly insisted on the desirability of dramatic, epochal, breaks from their own histories, radicals in the United States enveloped their visions in a language of nostalgic longing. They talked not of overcoming current limitations but of ‘recapturing’ lost glories. (185)

A number of works examining the rise or fall (or both) of radical ideas and movements in American history, have argued (or implied) that ‘Americanism’ has often been a useful ideological resource for, rather than a constraint on, these movements. The critics of ‘American exceptionalism’ who dismiss its relevance altogether tend to fall into this category (eg., Wilentz 1984a; Foner 1984), but so do those who are more willing to acknowledge the weaknesses or limits of American radicalism (eg., Denning 1997; Gerstle 2002; Hudson 2013; Kazin 1995; Kazin and McCartin 2006; Wall 2008). One of the most influential and well-received works in this tradition is Gerstle’s (2002) *Working-Class Americanism: The*

Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960, which examines the use of the language of ‘Americanism’ among Woonsocket workers and organizers, and demonstrates how they were able to fashion radical critiques of American capitalism by drawing on their interpretation of patriotic political ideals. Researched and written in the spirit of the ‘new labor history’, the book—which was first published in 1989—provided a historically grounded and empirically-rich basis for Gerstle’s challenge to the then-prominent assumption that ‘Americanism’ was inherently incompatible with labour (or any other type of) radicalism¹¹. Crucially, Gerstle also identifies distinct limits to the language’s elasticity and to its usefulness to Woonsocket radicals, and the latter part of his book explores the ways in which ‘Americanism’ was re-appropriated for more conservative purposes as the United States prepared for entry into World War II. Nonetheless, *Working-Class Americanism* concludes with a broadly optimistic assessment regarding the potential for future leftist appropriations of ‘Americanism’:

The language of Americanism remains supple and malleable, capable of introducing a variety of experiences and ideas into the nation’s political discourse. To the extent to which liberals and radicals want to attain political power, they must learn, or relearn, how to speak this language. Those who set themselves such a task might begin their education with a conversation of how an earlier generation of political insurgents—those active in Woonsocket and elsewhere in the 1930s—constructed a ‘new, progressive Americanism’ and made it an instrument of their empowerment. (2002, 336)

Gerstle’s work is among the broader corpus of literature that has emerged in recent decades which not only rejects the Hartzian thesis about the inherently and inevitably constraining effects of ‘Americanism’, but which “argu[e] that in fact the language and ideologies of Americanism might—and did—also work to legitimize and strengthen the labor movement in practice” (Hudson 2013, 904). Whereas some scholars (eg., Denning 1997; Rorty 1998; Wilentz 1984a; 1984b) have drawn particularly enthusiastic conclusions about ‘Americanism’ from their studies, Gerstle’s is a more tempered, qualified optimism, rooted in

¹¹ While the wide usage of ‘Americanist’ language among the left, especially in the 1930s, had not gone unnoticed, he pointed out, scholars either “dismissed it as a shallow, rather meaningless political term” or they “treat[ed] it as the carrier of profoundly conservative impulses” (2002, 6).

an understanding of ‘Americanism’ as a complex and dynamic political language that has, at times, served the left well but which at other times has served the left’s opponents. Insofar as Gerstle identifies the 1940s as a period that saw a decline in the “openness of Americanism to anticapitalist sentiments” (2005, 102), his analysis of ‘Americanism’ is broadly compatible with the findings of this thesis, as will become clear. I would argue, however, that where his analysis potentially falls short, is in his account of the reasons for, and implications of, the shifting relationship between ‘Americanism’ and working-class politics. Although he acknowledges that the capaciousness of ‘Americanism’ was significantly diminished during the Second World War and throughout the postwar years, his explanation for this development identifies contingent historical factors that are external to ‘Americanism’ and its role in American political culture.¹² He certainly demonstrates how various forces—including the state-led mobilization of wartime patriotism—were at work in the 1940s which led to ‘Americanism’ slipping out of the grip of working-class organizers and other radicals, but I would suggest that he gives insufficient consideration to the possibility that the limits of ‘Americanism’ in the 1940s may also have something to do with the nature of ‘Americanism’ itself.

Notably, Gerstle does engage more directly with this issue in his *American Crucible* (2001), a work that spans a much longer time period and examines a wider range of movements and political projects than *Working-Class Americanism*. In *American Crucible* Gerstle identifies two dominant variants of ‘Americanism’—the ‘civic tradition’ and the ‘racial tradition’. The first is comprised of the “nation’s core political ideals, in the American belief in the fundamental equality of all human beings, in every individual’s inalienable

¹² For example, the rise of ‘cultural pluralism’ is given central focus in his account of the loss of class-consciousness among Woonsocket workers (2002, 289-302); in this way, the main story here is not so much the limits of ‘Americanism’, but of pluralism. As Gerstle states in his Preface to the 2002 edition, “...pluralism often corroded, rather than re-enforced, the anti-capitalist character of labor protest. [...] In Woonsocket, as *Working-Class Americanism* shows, the labor movement’s embrace of cultural pluralism in the 1940s accompanied the ouster of its socialist leaders and the weakening of its anti-capitalist orientation” (xxiii).

rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and in a democratic government that derives its legitimacy from the people's consent" (2001, 4). The second tradition—a "potent ideological inheritance" with which "civic nationalism has contended"—is the "racial nationalism that conceives of America in ethnoracial terms, as a people held together by common blood and skin color and by an inherited fitness for self-government" (ibid.). Gerstle argues that twentieth-century American politics was "decisively shaped" by the "pursuit of these two powerful and contradictory ideals" (2001, 5), and the chapters of *American Crucible* demonstrate how this influence manifested itself in a range of policy debates and social movements—including the labour and civil rights movements. Gerstle's discussion of organized labour—and especially the CIO—reiterates the argument in *Working-Class Americanism*, regarding the limits of the (civic nationalist variant of) 'Americanism' in the 1940s; but he also considers these limits in the context of the emerging Cold War, arguing that the "anticommunism of the Cold War snapped civic nationalism back into an older, and less flexible, form" in the 1950s and 1960s (2001, 8). Indeed, according to Gerstle, the 'civic tradition', rather than the 'racial tradition', became the source of boundary-making in this period—"a development that revealed how much this tradition, too relied on exclusion—of individuals deemed un-American because of their behaviour and ideas, rather than because of their race or ethnicity" (2001, 246-7). In *American Crucible*, then, Gerstle considers the constraining tendencies of 'Americanism' more thoroughly than his earlier work, and although most of his analysis implicates the 'racial tradition' rather than the 'civic tradition', his discussion of the Cold War represents an important exception to this (Williams 2005).

I have focused on Gerstle's work here because of its influence within the field, and because it offers a more dynamic interpretation of 'Americanism' than that offered by either Hartz (who portrays it as inherently rigid), or by some of Hartz's critics (who have tended to move to the other extreme in presenting it as infinitely elastic). In contrast, Gerstle, along

with certain other critics of Hartz, (eg., Archer 2007; Smith 2005; Stears 2010), recognizes that ‘Americanism’ has a complex and chequered past in terms of its relationship to the left. In some respects, the findings of this thesis point towards this “complicated middle ground” (Gerstle 2005, 101). With that being said, however, the thesis offers a less optimistic overall assessment of ‘Americanism’—of its role in American political culture and of its impact on the left—than that offered by scholars like Gerstle. The use of ‘American Dream’ language in the cases examined here represented attempts from within the labour and civil rights movements to legitimize postwar social democratic transformation through an appeal to ‘Americanism’. As I will attempt to demonstrate over the course of the thesis, the fact that the movement actors failed to do so—and the reasons for these failures—suggests that Hartz’s emphasis on the conflation of ‘Americanism’ and capitalism in American political culture, may have more relevance than his critics, including Gerstle, have given him credit for.

3. The Cases and Concepts in Context

Social Democracy in the Postwar Era

The cases examined in this study span the period between the 1940s and the 1960s, although the key issues and developments are not confinable to this period, as will be made clear below and throughout the thesis. Nonetheless, most of the crucial events and developments we will be exploring in the empirical chapters fall within this timeframe. In terms of the weakness of social democracy in the United States, this is the period during which this variant of ‘American exceptionalism’ seemed to become particularly manifest.¹³

¹³ Of course, the timeframe varies widely across the ‘exceptionalism’ literature, and depends in part on the particular variant of ‘exceptionalism’ being examined. For example, Voss (1993), who focuses on the conservatism of the U.S. labour movement, locates the beginning of this exceptionalist path in the mid-1880s, with the collapse of the Knights of Labor. And Archer (2007), who seeks to explain the absence of a national labour-based party in the United States, focuses on the importance of the latter years of the 19th century, as this

Many observers were struck by the seemingly different trajectory taken by the United States in the postwar decades, as compared to other advanced democracies. As Jackson (2013) observes, referring primarily to the Western European context, “[t]he three decades following the Second World War are often seen as a ‘golden age’ for social democracy”; although Jackson himself questions the accuracy of this characterization, he acknowledges that it “nonetheless captures an important change in the terms of political trade in the industrialized democracies” in the postwar era (353-4). In particular, “the terrain over which political battles were now fought was much more congenial for the democratic left. Basic social democratic aspirations, such as full employment, fair shares, and labour market regulation, had been installed as the lexicon of high political debate” (353). Although the postwar American context was not entirely exempt from the ‘golden age’ of social democracy, it is also true that the experience of the democratic left was far more volatile in the United States, and that ‘basic social democratic aspirations’ stood on far more shaky ground there, than they did in many other industrialized democracies.

By the 1970s, as I observed at the beginning of this chapter, the limited scope of American social democracy had become an established theme within the broader literature on ‘American exceptionalism’. Viewed through a Hartzian lens, the trajectory of American postwar social and economic policy would probably be seen as an inevitability; but as many observers have pointed out, the decade preceding American entry into the Second World War was marked by numerous developments—many of them associated with the New Deal—which seemed to signal the possibility for a strong labour movement, comprehensive welfare state, and other features associated with postwar social democracy elsewhere (Brinkley 1989; Fraser and Gerstle 2002; Katznelson 1989; Lichtenstein 1989). From this perspective, then, the direction actually taken in the 1940s and beyond, marked a break with, rather than a

was when the American Federation of Labor first passed an official resolution declaring its opposition to engaging in party politics.

continuation of, the preceding decade, at least as far as the American left is concerned. As Brinkley (1989) points out,

postwar liberals celebrated the New Deal for having discovered solutions to the problems of capitalism that required no alteration in the structure of capitalism: for having defined a role for the state that did not intrude it too far into the economy. In earlier years, many liberals had considered the absence of significant institutional reform one of the New Deal's failures. (110)

Brinkley's observation points to the fact that the limited possibility for social democratic transformation in the postwar American context was more than just a matter of circumscribed policy; it was also about a circumscribed discourse, which would continue into the 1950s and 1960s. The case studies in this thesis revolve around movement actors who tried, but in various ways failed, to resist these limitations.

The first case study revolves around the CIO and its activities, between the early to mid-1940s, pertaining to its postwar program. I focus particularly on the efforts of the organization's Post-War Planning Committee, its Reconversion Committee, and its Political Action Committee (PAC). The second case study revolves around the short-lived 'National Educational Committee for a New Party' (NECNP), an organization composed primarily of liberal and progressive intellectuals, labour leaders, and individuals belonging to various left (excluding Communist) organizations, including the Socialist Party, the CIO and the AFL. The NECNP grew out of the 'Conference of American Progressives' held in Chicago in 1946, and was chaired by labour and civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph until its demise in 1948. Like the CIO (but to a greater extent), the NECNP presented a postwar program that was built around social democratic principles; unlike the CIO, however, it "stood for a collectivist social democracy which would go *beyond* the New Deal" (Hamby 1973, 139 emphasis added). The final case study falls much later along our timeline—the mid to late 1960s—but it involves some of the same individuals who appear in the first two cases. This third case does not revolve around any one particular program, but rather a series of attempts

between 1963 and 1967 by several leaders and activists who were involved with both the civil rights and the labour movements.

The Postwar 'Consensus'

For labour scholars and historians who accept, (albeit sometimes begrudgingly), the relevance of 'American exceptionalism' to studies of the U.S. labour movement, the 1940s is a decade that tends to receive a lot of attention. This is especially true when the particular exceptionalism being examined is the "subordination of organized labor to the political and economic consensus that [came] to define postwar America" (Fraser 1991). Although one can identify variations in the particular timelines (and of course in the nature of explanations) offered in scholars' accounts of the making of this 'exceptionalism', the majority do tend to concentrate on the 1940s in their accounts. This concentration is primarily because of the developments that took place within the CIO. In the first several years after the CIO emerged in the 1930s, many scholars point out, the organization exhibited a number of features that broke with the conventional image of the U.S. labour movement—including a dedication to industrial unionism, acceptance (and sometimes even encouragement) among leaders of radical tactics and rank-and-file militancy, and the use of class-based language. Indeed, it was the absence, or weakness, of these features up until this point that had earned organized labour in the U.S. the name of being 'exceptional', when compared to its counterparts around the world. Within less than a decade of its emergence, however, the CIO underwent a significant transformation and by the end of the 1940s it had largely come to resemble the American Federation of Labor—the organization whose conservative 'bread-and-butter' approach had been explicitly rejected by many labour leaders and workers belonging to the CIO during the 'turbulent thirties'. By the mid 1950s, when the two federations merged, the CIO was in many ways just a shell of its former self, and its leadership, along with the broader leadership of the newly formed AFL-CIO, embraced an ideological stance that fit

rather neatly within the framework of the postwar ‘consensus’ (Brinkley 1989; Brody 1993; Davis 1986; Dubofsky 2000; Lichtenstein 1989; Zieger 1995).

An important feature of this ‘consensus’, (to the extent that it did exist), was the “peculiarly American system of interclass accommodation” which was marked by “a decentralized system characterized by extremely detailed, firm-centred collective bargaining contracts, a relatively low level of social welfare spending, and a labor market segmented by race, gender, region, and industry” (Lichtenstein 1989, 122; Katznelson 1986). The American ‘postwar consensus’, in other words, was a distinctively non-social democratic consensus; while those countries that were taking social democratic routes in postwar reconstruction were also building around class compromise, the ‘labor-capital’ accord in the United States was of a different sort. As many labour scholars point out, the American adoption of social democracy would have required a labour movement that had sufficient power and desire to push for social democracy (Davis 1986; Lichtenstein 1989; Katznelson 1986; Moody 1988; Schickler and Caughey 2011). In the postwar era, the labour movement appeared to have very little of either. In fact, “[b]y 1948, neither labor nor liberalism appeared to pose much of a challenge to organized business” (Fones-Wolf 1994, 3).

This is where the first two case studies of the thesis come in. Many leaders and activists within the CIO and the NECNP belonged to that segment of the American left who, in the 1940s, sought to stem the “tidal drift of the country away from the social democratic vistas of the mid-1930s” (Fraser 1991, 502). Not only did they try to resist the types of ideas and institutional arrangements that would come to define the postwar ‘consensus’, but they also sought, (to different degrees), to go even further than the vistas of the 1930s. Yet, each of these movements was unable to resist the conservative tide. The CIO was, in fact, swimming with that tide by the end of the 1940s, and the NECNP as an organization ceased to exist within just two years of its creation.

The use of ‘American Dream’ language by the CIO and the NECNP in the 1940s has not been explored within any of the relevant literatures reviewed here; the core studies of the ‘American Dream’ say nothing about these two movements, while studies exploring either of these movements are quite silent about the ubiquity of ‘American Dream’ language. Insofar as it does get mentioned, it is often in passing rather than the subject of any sort of systematic examination.

The Civil Rights Era

In contrast to the CIO and the NECNP, the civil rights movement features prominently in ‘American Dream’ scholarship. Indeed, the civil rights era, particularly the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, is given considerable attention among scholars who trace the historical development of the American Dream (eg., Cullen 2003; Ghosh 2013; Jillson 2004); according to these scholars, this is the period during which the ideology underwent its most significant and far-reaching redefinition, and it was the civil rights movement that was responsible for initiating this development. According to Ghosh (2013, 103), for example, the ‘American Dream’ has become “aggressively concerned with social and political inclusion”—an interpretation that only became prominent in the 1960s, when civil rights leaders, especially Martin Luther King Jr., mastered the ideology’s rhetoric as a “universal logic of inclusion”. Of course, most writers are careful to acknowledge that the promises of the ‘American Dream’ remain out of reach for many groups. Cullen (2003), for example, observes that “the saga of the Dream of the immigrant is far from over. [...] Once the hopes and anxieties surrounded the Irish and the Germans; then it was the Italians and the Japanese. Now it’s the Arabs and Mexicans” (188). He qualifies this point, however, by noting that “it isn’t all a game of ethnic musical chairs; the overall trend has been toward greater acceptance and opportunity”. The reason for this trend, he continues—echoing similar conclusions found across the American Dream literature—stems back to the civil rights movement:

One legacy of that movement has been a heightened awareness of the ways minority experiences have not corresponded to the presumptions or practices of ‘normal’, ‘mainstream’, or ‘traditional’ Americans and of the ways in which a dominant American culture has overshadowed, even repressed, such alternative experiences. And one result of this heightened awareness has been an effort to recover and celebrate these alternatives, an ongoing collective effort that has revitalized American society as a whole in ways that range from more eclectic restaurant cuisine to better legal protections. (188-9)

The civil rights era has also received substantial attention within social movement literature. In fact, “the civil rights movement is one of the most well researched social movements of the twentieth century United States” (Valocchi 1996, 116). While the more prominent earlier works (eg., McAdam 1982) utilized the political opportunities approach, the rising popularity of the ‘framing perspective’ in social movement studies in the past two decades has led to a proliferation of literature that explores the framing activities of civil rights activists (Benford and Snow 2000; Valocchi 1996). Most of this work focuses on activists’ use of the ‘rights’ frame (Morris and Staggenborg 2007); scholars have rarely made reference to—much less analysed in any detail—the role of the ‘American Dream’ in the movement’s framing strategies.¹⁴ Despite this relative silence, much of the work in this area does tend to share at least one important theme in common with the core literature on the ‘American Dream’: it presents a largely positive assessment of the achievements of the civil rights movement, and of the legacy of the civil rights era in general. In most accounts, the “frames and slogans” produced by the civil rights movement are seen as having contributed to a general “climate of empowerment” (Isaac, McDonald and Lukasik 2006, 53). Notably, the civil rights movement’s perceived contribution to a ‘climate of empowerment’ goes beyond social and cultural contributions; according to Isaac and Christiansen (2002), for example, the movement “transformed the political environment, creating a culture dense with

¹⁴ In the social movement framing perspective, collective action ‘frames’ are defined as “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). The concepts of ‘frame’ and ‘framing’ are analytical tools that are of central importance in this study, and they will be introduced and discussed in greater detail in section 4 of this chapter.

movement frames and tactics while altering the political opportunity structure for other challengers” (727).

Not all scholarship presents quite as positive a picture of the civil rights era, however. Among the bodies of literature that complicate the image of successful social movement activity and of a society generally characterized by widening political and discursive opportunities for contentious politics, is the literature employing the concept of the ‘long civil rights movement’ (Arnesen 2009; Boyle 2005; Reich 2009; Sampsell-Willman 2012). Labour scholars have been key contributors to the ‘long civil rights’ literature, and one of the most prominent articulations of the theory is found in Korstad and Lichtenstein’s (1988) article, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement”. These authors take issue with the tendency for scholarly and popular histories of the civil rights movement to confine their attention to the mid-1950s and later. Whereas the mainstream periodization identifies the beginning of the modern civil rights movement with the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, Korstad and Lichtenstein point to the massive drives to unionize black workers (led in large part by Communist organizers), and to various instances of black worker militancy during the 1940s to suggest that “the civil rights era began, dramatically and decisively, in the 1940s” (786). Despite the energy, enthusiasm, and organizing achievements of the “labor-oriented civil rights movement”, however, the movement quickly disintegrated by the end of that decade (Ibid.).

The ‘long’ civil rights literature makes clear that the fight for civil rights was, for many activists, also a fight for economic rights; despite the conventional focus on the movement’s targeting of the legal and political institutions of American society, many individuals and groups—some with connections to organized labour—also targeted the economic structures. Those who have explored the ‘long civil rights movement’ have not

been alone in bringing attention to the neglected elements of the movement. Nor has the focus been only on the years *preceding* the ‘classical phase’ of the civil rights movement; indeed, a whole host of labour and civil rights historians have pointed out that throughout the 1950s and 1960s and even into the 1970s, ideas about the interconnection between class and race, and about the need for economic transformation, were manifest in certain sectors of the civil rights movement (Cowie and Salvatore 2008; Davis 1986; Griffin and Bollen 2009; Hall 2005; Isaac and Christiansen 2002; Jones 2013; Levy 1994; LeBlanc 2013)¹⁵.

The literature briefly outlined above offers an important backdrop for the third and final case study of the thesis. What is particularly crucial, in addition to the points just summarized, is their acknowledgement of the fact that there were activists from both the labour and civil rights movements who were committed to a social democratic agenda, and who felt that a coalition between these two movements was important—indeed, necessary—for advancing that agenda (Garrow 1986; Moody 1988; Korstad and Lichtenstein 1988; Jones 2013). This is where the third case study comes in.

In their 2002 article discussing the impact of the civil rights movement on labour militancy between the 1940s and late 1970s, Isaac and Christiansen point to the important role of ‘bridge activists’—activists, that is, who “had a foot in each movement culture” (727). Among the ‘bridge’ activists who they identify are Martin Luther King, Jr., A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and Cleveland Robinson. These individuals are among the activists who pushed for a more radical agenda than they were able to achieve, and have been remembered for, in the ‘dominant narrative’¹⁶ of the civil rights movement. Their efforts in

¹⁵ In addition, numerous biographies of civil rights leaders have also helped to shed light on the ‘forgotten’ history of civil rights, as will be discussed in chapter 5.

¹⁶ The ‘dominant narrative’, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5, has been criticized for its limited ideological, and also limited temporal, focus; as one critic observes, it “chronicles a short civil rights movement that begins with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, proceeds through public protests, and culminates with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965” (Hall 2005, 1234).

this regard are at the centre of focus in the third case study. There were many important differences between them, yet they all, at certain stages in their careers, adopted a critique of American capitalism, emphasized the linkages between the civil rights struggle and class struggle, and became advocates of social democracy, or ‘democratic socialism’. And in their efforts to achieve their goals, they invoked the language of the ‘American Dream’; in these efforts, as with those of the CIO and the NECNP, they met with little success. In order to understand why this was the case, we have to look beyond the existing accounts of the civil rights movement offered in the various literatures identified above. Scholars in the ‘longer civil rights’ tradition, along with other civil rights scholars who have criticized the ‘dominant narratives’ of the civil rights movement, have helped to shed light on neglected elements of the movement. However, whereas the ‘American Dream’ literature and most of the social movement literature have been silent about the setbacks and failures of the (broader) civil rights movement, the longer civil rights tradition has had little to say about the role of ‘American Dream’ language in this movement. In failing to examine the use of ‘American Dream’ language across the longer, broader civil rights movement, these scholars have missed out on a crucial element of what has been neglected—the social democratic articulation of the ‘American Dream’.

4. Theoretical Framework

Like many of the works that have been cited above, this thesis is motivated by an interest in understanding the ‘exceptionalist’ path taken by the United States in the three decades following the Second World War, and by the desire, in particular, to make greater sense of the ‘lost opportunities’ for social democracy in this period. This thesis is also driven by a belief in the necessity of looking to the labour and civil rights movements for understanding these lost opportunities. In contrast to the extant literature, however, this study

takes the ‘American Dream’ seriously, by examining the meaning and role of ‘American Dream’ language in these movements. In the field of social movement studies, researchers who want to ‘take ideas seriously’ have often turned to the ‘framing perspective’, an approach that underpins the theoretical framework for this study.

Framing Perspective: An Overview

The framing perspective was introduced into the study of social movements in the 1980s, at a time when social movement literature was largely dominated by the ‘political opportunities’ and ‘resource mobilization’ approaches. The latter approaches focused primarily on structural and material factors in examining social movement processes and outcomes, and thus drew accusations from many scholars who argued that the role of ideas, and of ‘culture’ more generally, was neglected in both approaches (Noakes and Johnston 2005; Benford and Snow 2000). The framing perspective stresses the strategic and motivational efforts of social movement leaders and activists, whose mobilization tools often include not only tangible resources, but also ideational resources, including ‘frames’. “Frames are the products and objects of social movement cultural activity and also constitute a key symbolic means by which social movement actors attempt to realize programmatic ends” (Hallgrimsdottir 2006, 523). For social scientific and historical researchers who want to “pursue cultural analyses of movement activity”, frame analysis has quickly become “among the most important theoretical guides to such research” (Clemens and Hughes 2002, 215).

The concept of a frame has its sociological roots in the work of Erving Goffman, who “defined frames as mental constructs that organize perception and interpretation” (Johnston 2005, 238). Movement theorists have adopted and reworked this conception into ‘collective action frames’, defined by Benford and Snow (2000, 614) as “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement

organization”. Frames can be expressed through various discursive tools, including metaphors, slogans and symbols, all of which aim to foster particular interpretations of general ideas. Those ideas are drawn from ‘culture’:

The cultural material most relevant to movement framing processes include the extant stock of meanings, beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths, narratives, and the like, all of which can be construed as part of Swidler’s metaphorical ‘tool kit’ (1986), and thus which constitute the cultural resource base from which new cultural elements are fashioned...as well as the lens through which framings are interpreted and evaluated. (Benford and Snow 2000, 629)

Since frames, “[b]y rendering events or occurrences meaningful,...function to organize experience and guide action”, framing activity is therefore a crucial element of movement activists’ strategies as they attempt to garner support and recruit members (Snow et al cited in Clemens and Hughes 2002, 216).

Benford and Snow (2000) have identified three core (yet related) ‘framing tasks’, which many social movement studies utilizing frame analysis seek to identify: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. Diagnostic framing “presents to potential recruits a new interpretation of events”, whereas prognostic framing “presents a solution to the problem suggested in the diagnosis” (Noakes and Johnston 2005, 5). Finally, motivational framing “attempts to give people a reason to join collective action” (ibid.). Many studies of social movement framing activities have focused primarily on identifying and describing the frames that are constructed through these different tasks (Benford 1997), and on assessing the extent to which these frames succeed in achieving ‘resonance’—that is, the extent to which there is “cognitive alignment between a movement’s ideology and the beliefs of an adherent or constituent” (Kubal 1998, 542). Although traditionally, social movement scholars have focused on how frames are received by movement members, a growing number have adopted a more expansive conception of ‘resonance’ in their examinations of frame effectiveness, to

include, for example, the wider public, policymakers, and the broader cultural context (Kubal 1998; McCammon et al. 2007; Benford and Snow 2000).

The introduction of the framing perspective has had a significant impact on the field of social movement studies in recent decades. The perspective is “widely credited with ‘bringing ideas back in’” (Oliver and Johnston 2005, 185), and its popularity among social movement researchers has led to the production of an impressive body of works examining collective action frames in a wide range of movements and contexts; but it has also given rise to many critiques of the theoretical framework and its empirical applications. The criticisms have emanated from various sources, including those working within the framing perspective, and many movement scholars have sought to modify and refine the approach in response to these criticisms. In the remainder of this section, I introduce some of the key issues and problems that have been raised and which are relevant for this project, and I will discuss some of the recent scholarly contributions that have sought to address these issues and which inform the approach and methods used in this study.

Distinguishing Between ‘Ideology’ and ‘Frame’

One issue that has been highly contested among frame theorists concerns the question of how ‘ideology’ and ‘fram[ing]’ are related (Westby 2005; Oliver and Johnston 2005; Polletta and Ho 2006; Snow and Benford 2005). Although most scholars will agree that ideologies and frames are distinct types of ideas, the more difficult task is to specify what precisely distinguishes them, and what their relationship is to one another. The problem is further compounded by the fact that, while frame theorists tend to share at least some minimal common ground on the definition of ‘frame’, the situation is quite different with ‘ideology’—a concept that remains “essentially contested” within the social sciences (Gerring 1997; Maynard 2013).

In an effort to address the theoretical and empirical cloudiness surrounding the relationship between ideology and frame, Westby (2005) has recently proposed that researchers approach collective action frames as “joint strategic and ideological discourse”; in this formulation, frames are the product of strategic imperatives (informed by society’s ‘cultural stock’) and the ideology of the movement that produces the frames. Viewed in this way, social movement framing is

discourse derived from (1) strategic imperatives created in the course of the shifting and complex historical flow of the cultural stock and (2) the domain of movement ideology...Framing is thereby formulated as a jointly constituted process, as discourse that conjoins the ideological and the strategic. (220)

Surveying existing empirical studies of social movement framing, Westby offers a “provisional inventory of how ideology and strategic discourse work together in framing practices” (221). The first five categories in the inventory represent variation in terms of how the strategic considerations relate to the internal movement ideology; for example, movement ideology may be so salient that the frames produced by that movement are rigid in their interpretative scope, and reflect the broader cultural stock very little (if at all). Westby refers to this category as *strategic discourse suppressed by ideology*. On the other hand, reflecting Snow and Benford’s (2005) caution against the “reifying tendencies of ideologies” Westby’s typology acknowledges the possibility that frames can also be the product of purely strategic considerations (ie., *strategic discourse remote from ideology*). Furthermore, strategic considerations can dominate the framing processes to an extent that those processes lead to “ideological adaptation” (ie., *strategic framing beyond ideological boundaries*).

The final category in Westby’s framework—*Framing that strategically appropriates hegemonic ideology*—is particularly relevant for this study. In this type of framing, the link in question is that between strategic discourse and ideology that is *external* to the movement. The external ideology is ‘hegemonic’ in the sense that it is “promoted by an elite, but shared by at least a sector of the nonelite, and also embedded in widespread cultural practices”

(226). The framing that we will be examining in this project falls under this broad category—the use of ‘American Dream’ language represents strategic appropriation of that hegemonic ideology.

Westby notes that “incorporation of hegemonic ideology in framing appears to be commonplace”, but he also points out that this can be manifest in a variety of ways; in his framework he identifies three variants of strategic appropriation: 1) ‘exposure of contradiction’; 2) ‘inversion of meaning’; and 3) ‘moral cover’ (226). Exposure of contradiction pertains to framing that highlights discrepancies between an ideology’s claims, and the practices of the society in which the ideology is hegemonic. Movement actors present frames that seek to “elevate the sense of contradiction to the status of a causal lever to force change”, but the frames that represent this type of strategic appropriation tend to “affirm rather than deny the basic legitimacy of the system”. The perpetrators identified in the diagnosis (blame attribution) “are not enemies to be overcome, but misguided citizens who need education and persuasion”. As a primary example of this type of framing, Westby cites the “appropriation by the civil rights movement...of liberal democratic rhetoric”, which activists adapted to “frame specific categories of rights (civil and voting rights) and to justify various forms of civil disobedience as appropriate tactics” (226-7). “The premise of this framing”, Westby observes, “was that there was a contradiction between the abstract code and the extent of its reach” (227); the ‘code’ itself, therefore, was not under challenge.

However, there are also cases in which appropriation of hegemonic ideology is geared toward more radical purposes, which brings us to Westby’s second sub-type of strategic appropriation: ‘inversion of meaning’. Framing of this type has a more oppositional relationship to the hegemonic ideology, in that it seeks not just to reveal contradictions, but

instead (or also) to *transform* its (hegemonic) meaning¹⁷. Westby cites Noonan's (1995) study of women activists in Chile who, during the years under Pinochet rule, articulated a 'maternal' frame that drew from hegemonic conceptions of gender, and yet over time this ostensibly apolitical 'maternal' frame became an effective politicized tool of opposition to the Pinochet regime. Insofar as these activists used a traditional and seemingly consensual frame to gradually articulate anti-Pinochet (and pro-democracy) claims, this transformation represents a case of 'inversion of meaning' of state maternal ideology.

In this study, the framing activities we will be examining represent one or both of these sub-types of strategic appropriation.¹⁸ The language of the hegemonic 'American Dream' was appropriated by labour and civil rights activists, in an effort to highlight ongoing gaps between the promises of America—promises associated with its status as a 'land of opportunity'—and the nation's failure to live up to those promises. In every case, this core ideological tenet of the 'American Dream' was the reference point for identifying the sources of promise. Broadly speaking, we can identify three variants of these 'gap' frames being articulated: the 'American political traditions' gap, the 'economic security' gap, and the 'equal opportunity' gap¹⁹. By definition, the 'gap' frames all contained some element of exposing contradiction between promise and practice. But these framing activities were geared toward social democratic transformation, and thus in the majority of instances, the 'gap' frames targeted one of the essential elements of the 'land of opportunity' equation:

¹⁷ Westby (2005, 231n7) points out that framing could, conceivably, represent more than one sub-type of strategic appropriation, and indeed, many of the frames that we will encounter in this study appear to be based on appropriation that is geared towards both 'exposure of contradiction' *and* 'inversion of meaning'. The implications of this will be discussed towards the end of chapter 2, and will be empirically demonstrated in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

¹⁸ 'Moral cover', which is the third type of 'strategic appropriation' described by Westby, is not directly relevant to this study. This type refers to framing that occurs under conditions of extreme repression, and which is primarily motivated by a movement's need to protect itself; once a movement succeeds in creating a 'protective moral shield' through this type of framing, observes Westby, they may then shift their strategy somewhat toward one, or both, of the other types of strategic appropriation.

¹⁹ In some instances, the frames incorporated more than one type of 'gap'. I will discuss the overlap in section 7 of chapter 2, where I provide a brief introductory description of the frames that will be encountered in the empirical chapters.

capitalism. While leaders and activists emphasized the virtues of the other components of the equation, they often pointed to the existing economic system as the component that needed to be substantially changed, if not removed altogether. Such frames represented attempts at ‘inversion of meaning’ of the core ideological tenet of the American Dream²⁰.

Westby’s (2005) ‘provisional typology’ represents a useful tool for identifying variations in the frame-ideology relationship, but it remains undeveloped in the framing literature, and with an important exception (which will be discussed in chapter 3), its usefulness does not extend much further beyond this descriptive purpose. Moreover—(and indeed, a major reason for this limitation)—his framework appears to suffer from two general problems that have been raised in relation to the social movement framing perspective, both of which will be addressed in the remainder of this section.

Beyond the ‘Cultural Toolkit’

To begin with, Westby’s (2005) framework appears to be driven by a rather instrumentalist approach to social movement framing; although he acknowledges that ‘strategic appropriation of hegemonic ideology’ is a common feature of social movement framing, he portrays this strategy largely as a *choice* by social movement entrepreneurs. He gives little consideration, furthermore, to the potential implications of this ‘choice’ on the framing processes and outcomes for social movements; the hegemonic ideology appropriated by movement actors may constrain their framing options in various ways, for example, and/or may favour particular interpretations (or mis-interpretations) that are diffused among target audiences and the wider public. The voluntarist bias in Westby’s framework reflects a broader tendency within the framing perspective—that of treating culture purely as a ‘tool’

²⁰ Westby’s inversion of meaning can be seen as analogous to the concept of ‘*frame transformation*’, which is widely regarded as the most ambitious and difficult of the four ‘frame alignment’ tasks (Snow et al 1986; Tarrow 1998). The reason it is so difficult is that it “requires the changing of the ideas of potential participants” (Walgrave and Manssens 2005, 116).

rather than as a ‘context’, within which framing processes occur (Hallgrimsdottir 2006; Kubal 1998; Williams 2004). Snow and Benford’s (2005) conceptualization of ideology is particularly illustrative of this tendency: ideology, they argue, is a “cultural resource for framing activity”, and one that “can be tapped and exploited for the purpose of constructing collective action frames” (209).

The instrumentalist and voluntarist biases underlying the framing perspective have been acknowledged by a number of social movement scholars attempting to improve on the framing perspective (eg., Ferree 2003; Hallgrimsdottir 2006; Oliver and Johnston 2005). As Koopmans (1999) points out, “[m]uch of the cultural context in which social movements act is beyond their sphere of immediate influence”, and yet by treating framing activity as simply a strategic process of picking-and-choosing from the ‘cultural toolkit’, the framing perspective tends to overlook this (101). Williams (2004) reminds us that “[j]ust as the institutional context can constrain, shape, and channel what directions a movement takes—and just as the structure of political opportunities makes some collective action targets feasible and vulnerable and others less so—so too does the cultural context both constrain and enable collective action” (98).

Scholars such as Kubal (1998) and Williams (2004) have attempted to correct this deficiency by introducing the concept, first developed by Gamson (1995), of ‘cultural resonance’. “In contrast to the cognitive alignment of frame resonance”, Kubal explains, ‘cultural resonance’ “accents the alignment between movement frames and symbols in the cultural environment” (1998, 542). From this perspective, then, social movement actors respond primarily to those aspects of the ‘cultural toolkit’ that prevail in a given context, and their capacity to construct effective collective action frames depends at least in part on how accurately they have captured and responded to those prevalent ideas (including hegemonic ideologies). However, as Hallgrimsdottir and Benoit (2007) rightly point out, the concept of

‘cultural resonance’ is not adequate for addressing the problems with the traditional framing perspective. In the first place, it still implies an instrumentalist and voluntarist understanding of framing, “in that resonance is conceptualized as the outcome of strategic decision-making within historical circumstances” (1395). Moreover, the concept of cultural resonance fails to account for factors that lie outside of the realm of ‘culture’, but which inevitably also influence framing (and other social movement) processes; because

cultural resonance is for the most part concerned with the effects of cultural context... This presents a conceptual and empirical problem in that it necessitates distinguishing between cultural forces and the range of exogenous factors that together impose contingency on the outcomes of social movement activity (Hallgrimsdottir and Benoit 2007, p.1396).

In this study, therefore, I make use of an alternative concept that has gained increasing prominence in movement studies—one that acknowledges the ‘structural face’ of culture (Koopmans 1999), but which also considers the importance of political and economic institutions, and of how these all interact in ways that both enable and constrain movement actors.

In an effort to sensitize framing research to the importance of the broader context within which framing occurs, and to avoid the “‘creeping voluntarism’ characteristic of some of the cultural framing literature”, some frame analysts have adopted the concept of ‘discursive opportunity structure’ (DOS) (Hallgrimsdottir and Benoit 2007, 1396). The concept was first introduced by Koopmans and Statham (1999), who pointed out that “the framing model...has difficulty in explaining why some frames fail while others succeed in convincing the public, and why similar frames have differential impacts in different political contexts” (228). In order to understand differential framing outcomes, they argued, frame analysts must examine the environment’s DOS, “which may be seen as determining which ideas are considered ‘sensible’, which constructions of reality are seen as ‘realistic’, and which claims are held as ‘legitimate’” (ibid.). Although the concept remains a work-in-

progress in the framing literature, the definition provided by Ferree (2003, 309) captures the basic idea:

discursive opportunity structures are *institutionally anchored ways of thinking that provide a gradient of relative political acceptability to specific packages of ideas*. [...] Although anchored in institutionalized texts, the effects of privileging a certain way of framing are expressed in...expert discourses, media presentations, and popular culture, not only in what is recognized as formal politics.

The conceptualization of discursive opportunities represents an effort to incorporate insights from the political opportunity strand in social movement research (Koopmans and Statham 1999; McCammon 2013). Political opportunity theorists argue that “the capacity to mobilize depends on opportunities and constraints offered by the political-institutional setting in which collective action takes place” (Koopmans and Olzak 2004, 201). Although there tends to be disagreement among proponents of political opportunity theory regarding which are the most significant indicators of these structures, works in this tradition “often include measures of elite division, electoral competition, electoral instability, the composition of government, and the state’s capacity for repression” (ibid.). Many proponents also emphasize that movement actors’ *perceptions* of opportunity and constraint must be taken into account (eg., Gamson and Meyer 1996; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1998); in other words, it is not just the structures that matter, but how those structures are viewed and approached by social movements. The interactive relationship presumed in the political opportunity strand—that is, the focus on how social movements interact with the broader context—provides a way of “sidestep[ping] the instrumentalist biases that inhere in the frame literature” (Hallgrimsdottir 2006, 525). At the same time, studies within the political opportunity strand often neglect the cultural dynamics of that broader context, and this is where the concept of DOS becomes helpful. The basic idea is that discursive opportunity structures, like political opportunity structures, are a source of opportunities and constraints on social movement actors.

Discursive opportunities are “structured, both in the sense of having pattern and form and in

the sense of being anchored in key political institutions” (Ferree 2003, 308). The concept of DOS moves us away from frame theory’s tendency to view social movement framing as “autonomous from other kinds of processes, notably political processes” (Hallgrimsdottir 2006, 522).

In this study, the examination of discursive opportunity structures is where ‘Americanism’—and its relationship to the ‘American Dream’—comes into focus. In the three cases examined here, we will see that the construction of ‘American Dream’ frames was an attempt to frame social democracy in ‘American’ terms; the use of American Dream language by social movement actors was, to a degree, a response to the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’. As will become clear when we examine the processes and outcomes of framing in each of the cases, these actors were responding to a discursive opportunity structure that was largely dissonant with their goals. In particular, the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation that the movement actors were challenging was not exclusive to the ‘American Dream’ ideology. Rather, it appears that this interpretation was prevalent, if not hegemonic, within the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’.

Bringing the concept of DOS into frame theory leaves us better equipped to understand the complex interplay between social movement framing and the broader environment, and in particular, it prompts researchers to take into account the structured and institutionalized nature of the so-called ‘cultural tool kit’. Furthermore, it reminds us that culture, just like politics, is a domain of power, and in different settings and in different contexts, certain ways of thinking and doing will be privileged over others, and some ways of thinking and doing may simply be—or, at least perceived to be—outside the boundaries of what is possible or reasonable for social movements. Identifying discursive opportunity

structures in a particular setting is an important step for researchers seeking to delineate those boundaries.

The importance of discursive opportunity structures in relation to Westby's discussion of strategic appropriation in framing activities, is that 'hegemonic ideologies'—insofar as they belong to the hegemonic discursive opportunity structure(s)—should be understood as part of the cultural *context* rather than simply part of the cultural *tool kit* that social movement actors work with in constructing and disseminating frames.²¹ Acknowledging this allows us to avoid the voluntarism implicit in Westby's (2005) analysis; but we must also be careful not to stray toward the other extreme and leave no room for agency. Indeed, this is a key reason why, despite its problems, Westby's typology, and in particular his category of 'strategic appropriation of hegemonic ideology' retains its usefulness; it reminds us that movements are sometimes capable of effectively 'manipulating' even the most dominant ideas, and that empirically, this has played out in various different ways. If, "[f]or the most part, movements must work within the boundaries of the legitimate in expressing their claims" (Williams 2004, 103), we need to appreciate that there are various ways and methods of working within those boundaries, and as some of Westby's (2005) categories indicate, sometimes social movements have succeeded in redefining—indeed, expanding—those boundaries from within. The inversion of meaning sub-type of the 'strategic appropriation of hegemonic ideology' category, is particularly illustrative of this capability. With that said, such instances may be the exception rather than the rule, and the cases explored in this study will attest to just how difficult 'inversion of meaning' can be.

²¹ As McCammon et al point out, "[i]t is possible and, in fact, highly likely that within a single society more than one hegemonic discourse holds sway" (2007, 733). At the same time, they observe that discursive opportunity structures—like political opportunity structures—may be either stable or volatile, and that even hegemonic discourses can fall under the latter category. We will see in the empirical chapters that 'Americanism' was not the only DOS that was hegemonic. It was, however, quite stable—and this has important implications for the debates on 'American exceptionalism'.

And this brings us to the final problem with the traditional framing perspective: its relative inattention to framing failures.

Social Movement Failure

The Centre for the Study of Social Movements at Notre Dame recently published a series of ‘Essay Dialogues on Social Movement Failure’ on its *Mobilizing Ideas* website. The website’s introduction to these Dialogues observed that “[e]very activist and community organizer has examples of success and failure, but social movement researchers and activists are far more likely to focus on movements that succeed” (1). These dialogues provided an important reminder of the fact that the otherwise burgeoning field of social movement research has been relatively slow to advance our understanding of movement ‘failure’. With the exception of some important works, the majority of empirical studies have tended to focus on successful mobilizing efforts. Within the social movement framing perspective, this bias is evident in the fact that countless studies have explored collective action frames that ‘resonated’ whereas “there are very few studies of frames that do not resonate” (Oliver and Johnston 2005, 16). A handful of scholars working within the perspective have commented on this lacuna. Noakes (2005, 91), for example, observes that “[f]rame analysts have recognized that some frames are more successful than others, but they have not expended much analytical effort on frames that fail”. And Hallgrimsdottir (2006) points out that “[g]iven the consensus on the significance of cultural framings to social movement mobilization, activity, and outcome, the relatively little empirical or theoretical literature concerning frame failure is rather surprising” (521).

In his contribution to the above-noted ‘Essay Dialogues’, Marc Giugni (2013) observes that social movement outcomes can rarely be characterized as pure success or pure failure, and that most movements experience both types of outcomes simultaneously. Often, “they obtain some gains on one level (for example, by raising public awareness), but they

lose on another level (for example, by [not] influencing policy)”. In fact, Giugni contends, this type of outcome “is the rule rather than the exception”—that is, even when movements fail to influence policy, they have greater success in the “social and cultural realms” (ibid.). The cases examined in this study, however, represent cases of failure not just in the former respect, but also the latter: movement actors’ social democratic ‘American Dream’ frames did not succeed in raising public awareness about the problems with American capitalism and mobilizing around social democracy. In this study, I will be primarily concerned with identifying and explaining this framing failure; as we shall see, there were different manifestations of such failure in each case, and also different mechanisms at work in bringing about those failures.

The task of identifying the nature of, and potential factors bringing about, the frame failures in this study will be based on the utilization of some of the conceptual tools discussed above, including and especially those offered by Westby’s (2005) typology, and the notion of ‘discursive opportunity structures’. But it also involves, crucially, the examination of the processes of frame construction. The dynamics of frame construction have, traditionally, been another blind spot within the social movement framing perspective. In fact, to the extent that frame theorists have, in examining ‘frame resonance’, acknowledged the importance of cultural context, the focus has been almost exclusively on how context impacts frame reception among target audiences and diffusion among the broader public; “left unspecified in theories of frame resonance is how context intervenes at the site of frame construction” (Hallgrimsdottir 2006, 524; Kubal 1998; Williams 2004). Thus, while Koopmans and Olzak (2004, 202) have defined discursive opportunity structures as “aspects of public discourse that determine a message’s chance of diffusion in the public sphere”, this project also considers discursive opportunities in terms of how they affect the processes behind the *creation* of those messages.

The emphasis, in this study, on examining the dynamics behind the creation and presentation of ‘American Dream’ frames represents an attempt to address a blind spot that, notably, is apparent beyond the framing perspective. In fact it points us to a limitation that can be discerned across many of the literatures examined in Section 2, above. For example, none of the core ‘American Dream’ scholars appear to have examined—whether by conducting interviews, reviewing archives, or looking at any other relevant sources of information—the meaning of the use of ‘American Dream’ language from the perspective of those who have used it. Similarly, although one can find many works by labour scholars claiming the capaciousness of analogous terms, and of ‘Americanism’ more generally, surprisingly few of these scholars appear to have considered whether those who have invoked the language of Americanism actually viewed this language favourably, and whether they invoked that language on their own terms. With some of these works offering little evidence of the processes by which these decisions to use the language came about, we are often left to *assume* that the actors saw opportunity, rather than constraints, arising from its prevalence in American political culture.

5. Sources

The frame analysis in this project is based largely on an examination of primary records collected from labour and civil rights archives located in the United States. The three main sites of research were the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, both of which are situated in New York, and the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, in Detroit. The research materials used for identifying and analyzing the movement frames included flyers, pamphlets, newspaper clippings and other printed ephemera. The material used for examining the processes of frame construction included records of labour convention proceedings, meeting minutes and personal correspondence. Each of the locations listed above also house

collections of the personal papers of a wide range of labour and civil rights leaders, and other important figures who are relevant for the cases examined in this study. Several of these personal collections included earlier drafts of literature, many of which included handwritten annotations and other sources of insight regarding the planning and presentation of the literature; such collections, therefore, proved to be particularly rich in information about the processes and dynamics behind the production of the frames.

The process of gathering and analyzing archival data spanned a three-year period (between 2011 and 2014), and involved a number of separate visits to the archives. These visits ranged from 1 week to 2 months in length. Research during the first two years was largely confined to the Tamiment Library, and was focused primarily on examination of the archives of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. This is due to the fact that the original intention of the research project was to explore the use of ‘American Dream’ language within these organizations. The decision to broaden my scope of focus beyond organized labour was made in response to the findings of these early research trips. Indeed, those findings also led to a shift in the particular research questions underlying this project. The research was initially aimed towards assessing the possible role of ‘American Dream’ language in constraining labour’s capacity for anti-capitalist activism. However, following several visits to the Tamiment Library, in which the main collections of the labour federations (and several national unions) were carefully examined, I was unable to find any significant evidence of the ‘American Dream’ language being invoked for anti-capitalist purposes. In fact, the vast majority of instances of ‘American Dream’ and related terms arose in what can only be described as (often explicitly) ‘pro-capitalist’ material. One important exception to this pattern was found in the papers of the Political Action Committee of the CIO in the 1940s. Some of their materials in the immediate postwar period, in particular, contained language with a discernibly social democratic flavour, and which stood

out in contrast to the material of the AFL, and of the CIO in later periods. Because the CIO's postwar material was the only source of American Dream frames containing any semblance of social democratic messages within the labour records, I decided to expand my focus beyond organized labour. In the process of examining further archival records, as well as researching secondary-source accounts of various movements outside of (but often connected with) the labour federations, I identified further sources of social democratic 'American Dream' frames—first in the papers of some of the 'bridge activists', and then in the files of Daniel Bell, held at the Tamiment Library. From that point, I came to the decision to focus on the three cases introduced at the beginning of this chapter, and the remaining visits to the Tamiment Library (as well as the visits to the Schomburg Center and the Walter P. Reuther Library) were based on the targeted examination of materials pertaining to these cases.

Due to the increasing digitization of archival material in recent years, the web has also been a useful tool for historical research. The 'Presidency Project' website, for example, contains a searchable database of all past U.S. presidential speeches in a variety of contexts; similarly, the *ProQuest Congressional Hearings Digital Collection* (available through the LSE library catalogue) contains full searchable PDFs of transcripts of proceedings dating back to 1824. Extensive word and name searches on these websites allowed me to get a clearer idea of the range of usages, and the historical development, of the 'American Dream' and related terms in American society. Moreover, the ProQuest collection contains full records of various testimonials by U.S. labour leaders and civil rights leaders, some of which are especially relevant for the first and third case studies in this thesis.

Research for the empirical chapters has also been supplemented by the use of various secondary sources including historical analyses of the movements in question and biographical works on key figures in each of the movements. The definitional analysis of the 'American Dream', which is the subject of chapter 2, also relies substantially (and, in contrast

to other chapters, primarily) upon secondary source literature. My examination of the ideology's historical roots makes use of the existing historical analyses of the American Dream; however it also departs from that literature, particularly in its focus on the period of capitalist industrialization in the Northern regions of the United States. For this purpose, I have drawn from the rich body of existing studies of American political development in that context, including a range of examinations of the cultural implications of the economic and political developments during the period in question. In addition, I have supplemented the secondary source material with sample quotes taken from primary source documents that offer examples of the use of the relevant language in the historical context.

6. Organization of the Chapters

In this chapter, I have set out the central themes and purpose of the study, and I have sought to make a case for 'bringing the American Dream in', based on some preliminary empirical observations and a brief review of the relevant literatures and debates. I have also introduced the theoretical framework and key analytical tools that will be employed in this study, and I have explained the research procedures and materials used. The remainder of the thesis is divided into five chapters, and will proceed as follows.

Chapter 2 considers the historical roots and development of the 'American Dream' ideology, focusing in particular on the 'land of opportunity' idea underpinning the ideology. I begin by discussing the extant literature, building on the review provided here in chapter 1, and I explain how the widespread characterization of the 'American Dream' as a capacious ideology is in part based on problematic accounts of the ideology's historical origins. While conventional wisdom holds that the 'American Dream' is rooted in ideas that stem back to the nation's founding, I argue that the 'land of opportunity' idea—an idea that underpins the 'American Dream' tenets—underwent some fundamental shifts during capitalist industrialization in the 19th century and early 20th century. This chapter focuses on the

particular interpretation that arose in this broad period, and highlights the ways in which that interpretation marked a significant break with earlier ‘land of opportunity’ conceptions.

One of the central purposes of chapter 2 is to offer a clear definition and introduction to the ‘American Dream’, one that sets out the key features of the ideology, as I have defined it, and which will be a core reference point as I examine the framing efforts of the social movement actors in the next three chapters. One of the charges often levelled against studies that try to make a case for the explanatory power of ideas, is that they fail to offer a precise (and consistent) definition of the idea(s) that are said to have had a particular impact. The definitional analysis of the ‘American Dream’ and its core ideological foundation—the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation—in this chapter is an important step for avoiding this trap. In addition to highlighting the historical roots of the ‘American Dream’ the chapter also provides examples of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation in literature produced in the years immediately preceding the decades covered in this thesis. The chapter ends by offering a brief introduction to, and description of, the three variants of ‘American Dream’ frames that will be encountered in the empirical chapters.

Chapters three, four and five cover the cases of the CIO, the NECNP, and the civil rights movement, respectively. Each of these empirical chapters is divided into three parts. Part I provides a background discussion, including an introduction to the ‘key players’²² involved in social movement framing, and a discussion of how the movements in each case had a social democratic agenda. Part II examines the relevant framing material. I focus on the uses of ‘American Dream’ and related language, and I consider how the frames offered in the literature and speeches relate to the ideology as it was defined in chapter 2. In particular, I invoke Westby’s (2005) framework, and I identify the relationship of each type of ‘American Dream’ frame to the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. Finally, Part III goes on to

²² Within the social movement framing perspective, these might also be referred to as ‘frame entrepreneurs’ (Noakes and Johnston 2005).

explain how each case represents a ‘framing failure’, and, using the analytical tools and materials described earlier in this chapter, attempts to provide insight into some of the mechanisms bringing about these failures. Although all three cases represent a failure to redefine the ‘American Dream’, the nature and causes of the failures are not uniform across the cases. I will briefly discuss the three cases below, and will highlight some of the similarities and differences with respect to the framing failures.

Chapter 3 examines the CIO’s creation of its postwar program, focusing on the work of its Research and Education Department and Political Action Committee (PAC). These two bodies were responsible for formulating the program, and for producing the literature and writing the speeches in support of the program, and were thus pivotal in the organization’s framing efforts. The chapter covers the period between 1943 and 1955, (although the frame analysis focuses primarily on the literature from the 1940s). Within this period, the CIO abandoned most of its broadly social democratic goals for postwar American society, and by the time of its merger with the AFL, the organization’s vision appeared to align with the more conservative ideas of the AFL. An examination of the CIO’s postwar literature reveals that the framing activities went through a somewhat analogous ideological adjustment. Although the CIO program was consistently framed as essential to ensuring national fulfilment of the promises of the ‘American Dream’, the nature of the organization’s *strategic appropriation of hegemonic ideology* shifted: the earliest material contained a mix of American Dream gap frames, with some representing both ‘exposure of contradiction’ *and* ‘inversion of meaning’, whereas within only a few years, the material and speeches fell almost exclusively under the former category. In Part III of the chapter, I examine the processes of frame construction, in an attempt to make sense of the early framing inconsistencies. Through this examination, I demonstrate that the strategic framing decisions of the CIO were often strongly influenced (and indeed constrained) by the perceived prevalence of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’

interpretation in the DOS provided by ‘Americanism’. I conclude the chapter by explaining how the framing strategies may have contributed to the CIO’s loss of commitment to social democracy.

Chapter 4 examines the case of the National Educational Committee for a New Party. The NECNP was relatively short-lived and has received little attention among scholars examining this period. Yet this little-known committee is relevant for this study because it framed its social democratic goals using the language of the ‘American Dream’. Although the NECNP was established by activists and intellectuals who hoped, in the long-term, to create a national third party along social democratic if not socialist lines, their more immediate aim was to establish alliances with other progressive groups and to “build sentiment for a new party”²³ among the broader public. In this chapter I examine the material distributed by the NECNP in its efforts to achieve these goals. After demonstrating that the NECNP’s literature offered coherent and internally consistent ‘social democratic’ American Dream frames, I go on to consider the outcomes of the NECNP’s framing efforts. To the extent that the committee and its program fell into obscurity (and did so quite rapidly), the NECNP’s framing efforts represent a case of framing failure. In Part III of the chapter, I examine the available evidence pertaining to the processes of frame construction and frame reception, and I explain that while the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ appears to have had less of a constraining influence on NECNP leaders than it did on CIO leaders, the case does provide further support for my analysis of the ‘American Dream’ in chapter 2.²⁴

Chapter 5 examines the framing activities of the ‘bridge activists’ during the 1960s, particularly in the period spanning the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and the 1966-1967 campaign for the ‘Freedom Budget for All Americans’. With respect to the

²³ A Philip Randolph, form letter, 18 April 1946, Daniel Bell Research Files on Communism, Socialism and the Labor Movement, Box 28, Folder 2, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, p.2.

²⁴ Furthermore, insofar as it was led by the bridge activist A. Philip Randolph as well as other civil rights and labour leaders, the NECNP belongs to the ‘longer, broader civil rights movement’ (Sampsell-Willmann 2012), and therefore some of the findings from chapter 4 are directly relevant to, and will be discussed in, chapter 5.

extant ‘American Dream’ literature, this chapter represents a ‘critical case’ (Snow and Trom 2005), insofar as the use of ‘American Dream’ language by the civil rights movement—particularly the nature and impact of King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech at the March on Washington—is widely cited as primary empirical evidence of the capaciousness of the ‘American Dream’. However, in this chapter I point out that the conventional accounts rely on a narrow conceptualization of the civil rights movement, and (perhaps partly as a result of this), they fail to consider the multiple uses of ‘American Dream’ language among civil rights activists. My examination of ‘American Dream’ frames in this chapter reveals, as with the case of the CIO, a variation, initially, in terms of the type of ‘strategic appropriation’ that they represent. In particular, I demonstrate that while Martin Luther King, Jr.’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech contained a message that represented only ‘exposure of contradiction’ with respect to the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation, the other bridge activists in this period were offering American Dream frames that clearly sought ‘inversion of meaning’. However, an examination of King’s framing activities after the March on Washington reveals ‘American Dream’ frames that more consistently represented inversion of meaning.

In this chapter, I find that the repertoire of frames offered by the bridge activists shifted over time, but unlike the case of the CIO, the shift was in the direction of ‘inversion of meaning’. When I examine the framing failures in Part III, I point out that the case of the civil rights movement is somewhat more complicated than the others, due to the fact that in certain respects, some ‘American Dream’ frames were clearly successful. However, I also demonstrate that it was only the frames representing ‘exposure of contradiction’, that achieved this success. In Part III, I also examine the processes of frame construction and frame reception and diffusion, and I suggest that the pattern of failure may be partly explained by the prevalence of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation in the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’. I demonstrate that the impact of

the discursive opportunity structure is discernible at the site of frame reception and diffusion. This contrasts with the case of the CIO, where the impact occurred at the site of frame construction.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by reviewing the findings of the three case studies, and after providing a summary of the main implications of these findings for the conventional wisdom regarding the ‘American Dream’, I then reconsider the literature on ‘Americanism’ and ‘American exceptionalism’. I reflect on how some of the arguments reviewed in chapter 1 stand up to this study’s findings; in particular, I suggest how the examination of the use of ‘American Dream’ language by socialists and social democrats in the postwar decades, lends some support to Hartz’s claim about the effects of ‘Americanism’ on the US left.

Chapter 2: A Capitalist Tradition in America

1. Introduction

On April 1, 1943, a man by the name of Goodwin B. Watson, a chief analyst of the Federal Communications Commission's Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service, sat before the Special Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities. At the time, Watson was on sabbatical leave from Columbia University Teachers College—but it was his activities during his years teaching at the University that had caught the attention of the Committee's chairman, Martin Dies. Among those activities arousing Dies' suspicion was Watson's involvement, between 1934 and 1938, with an organization called 'New America', a group that had advocated "scientific planning", and which had distributed literature acknowledging the "need to eliminate private property and the profit system when they interfered with the success of a planned and socialized economy" (Horowitz 2003, 97). During the hearing, Watson faced extensive questioning about the philosophy and purpose of 'New America'. Midway through the proceedings, in the midst of a tense exchange with committee member Joe Starnes, who had been reading out excerpts from 'New America' literature, Watson asked to be given the opportunity to offer, from his perspective and in his own words, what the organization's purpose had been. "There never was, so far as I know, a shadow of doubt about the desirability of democratic political control and about loyalty—complete loyalty—to our form of democratic government", he remarked.²⁵

The only thing in question was what economic organization should operate within that political control, and the proposition of New America was that if we could study this planning process out and see a way in which goods, raw materials waiting to be produced, men waiting to go to work, and thousands of people in need of what could be produced by their work could be brought

²⁵ *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda activities in the U.S.: Hearings on H. Res. 282 Before a Special Comm. on Un-American Activities, 78th Cong., 1st Sess. 32 (1943) (Statement of Goodwin B. Watson, Chief Analyst, Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service).*

together, we would make a fundamental contribution to realizing the American dream and the American ideal.²⁶

Several days later, Watson was once again seated before a congressional subcommittee, one whose purpose now was to assess his “fitness for continuance in federal employment”.²⁷ During questioning, ‘New America’ was again the subject of intense scrutiny from subcommittee members. Some members read excerpts of ‘New America’ literature aloud during the proceedings, highlighting the parts that sounded particularly suspicious; among those excerpts brought to the floor was the following, read by congressman Frank Keefe:

New America springs from American needs, continues the American Revolutionary tradition and plans to realize the American dream of equalitarian social democracy by utilizing to that end all our present resources and capacities. While it will use and adapt to the American scene whatever is available in the revolutionary experiment, it will express itself in the American idiom....²⁸

The interpretation of the ‘American Dream’ that Watson was describing on the House floor in 1943, and which had been advocated by ‘New America’ in the 1930s, was fundamentally at odds with the interpretation that will be examined in this chapter. Watson and his group had raised questions about the compatibility of American political ideas with its existing economic system, and their literature had offered a vision of American society based on a radically reformed, if not alternative, system. Although these views were expressed through the language of the ‘American Dream’, they represented a challenge to the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation—a challenge, that is, to the claim that capitalism is a fundamental and inextricable factor in that combination of factors giving rise to the country’s status as the ‘land of opportunity’. That claim, it will be argued here, is the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Goodwin B. Watson, William E. Dodd, Jr., and Robert Morss Lovett.: *Hearings on H. Res. 105 Before the Special Subcomm. of the Comm. on appropriations H. of Sen.*, 78th Cong., 1st Sess. 94 (1943).

²⁸ Ibid. (Statement of Frank B. Keefe, Congressman).

foundation of the ‘American Dream’ ideology that became prevalent, if not hegemonic, in 20th century American society.

The cases of social movement framing explored in this thesis, similarly, represented challenges to the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation, and thus like Watson and his group, their ‘American Dream’ interpretations fell outside the boundaries of the ideology. The tasks of demonstrating that these movements exceeded the boundaries of the ‘American Dream’ in their framing efforts, and examining the implications of these ideological transgressions, are the primary focus of the next three chapters; first, however, it is necessary to specify what these boundaries are, and to present an overview of the core ideas that fall inside those boundaries. This is the primary task of the present chapter.

Chapter Structure

The chapter begins by reviewing conventional analyses of the American Dream. Section 2 looks briefly at how the ‘land of opportunity’ idea figures in existing definitions of the ‘American Dream’. Section 3 discusses the conventional treatments of the ideology’s historical origins, and section 4 then shows how those treatments inform the conventional wisdom regarding the flexibility and political capaciousness of the ‘American Dream’. The remainder of the chapter focuses on developing the alternative conceptualization of the ‘American Dream’ offered in this thesis. In order to specify the nature and content of the (alternatively defined) ‘American Dream’, it is necessary to retrace the roots and development of the ‘land of opportunity’ idea, and to examine, in particular, two periods that are crucial formative periods for the interpretation that, I argue, underpins the ideology. Section 5 examines the first (and most important) formative period—the transitions to capitalism in the 19th and early 20th centuries—and identifies the nascent ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation in some of the narratives that arose during this broad period: a period marked by substantial socioeconomic transformations throughout the United States. In

section 6, I examine the second crucial period—the early New Deal era—and I identify an updated ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation in the narratives invoked by groups attempting to return American political economy to the pre-New Deal status quo.

It is important to emphasize at the outset that the examination of narratives and of ideological developments in these two periods will be narrow in focus; that is, the alternative ideas being championed in those periods will be given substantially less consideration than those that fall under the rubric of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. After all, the purpose of the chapter is not to provide a comprehensive description or history of the range of ideas that were being articulated in those periods, but rather to identify those ideas that, I argue, would become the foundation of the ‘American Dream’ ideology. The final substantive section of the chapter (section 7), briefly introduces the variants of ‘American Dream’ frames that the movement actors covered in this study formulated, in their efforts to make their case for social democracy. In the section, I describe three basic variants, or sub-types, of ‘American Dream’ frames that we will encounter in the case study chapters, and I provide some initial observations regarding how these different frames relate to the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation.

2. Conventional Accounts: the American Dream and the ‘Land of Opportunity’ Idea

Most scholarly discussions of the ‘American Dream’ either explicitly or implicitly acknowledge that the ideology is founded on the idea that the United States is the ‘land of opportunity’. “The grand promise of the American Dream”, Jillson (2004) exclaims, “has always been that those willing to learn, work, save, persevere, and play by the rules would have a better chance to grow and prosper in America than virtually anywhere else” (xi). The second tenet in Hochschild’s (1995) definition—the notion that the ‘American Dream’ “brings the promise of opportunity for success”, rests on a similar premise; indeed, she argues, the widespread perception that the United States is the ‘land of opportunity’ has been

a significant factor prompting individuals and families to emigrate to the country (236).

While they do not always refer explicitly to the ‘land of opportunity’ concept, it is nonetheless clear that existing analyses of the ‘American Dream’ ideology place significant weight on the importance of the perception of the United States as a ‘land of opportunity’; in fact, among the core ‘American Dream’ scholars, that perception is what appears to make the American Dream distinctly ‘American’. In Cullen’s (2003) description, for example, “what makes the *American* Dream American is...that we live in a country constituted of dreams, whose very justification continues to rest on it being a place where one can, for better and worse, pursue distant goals” (182).

These observations are applicable well beyond the ‘core’ American Dream literature. For example, studies of public opinion often cite the ‘land of opportunity’ idea as a central theme in public perceptions of the ‘American Dream’ (eg., DiPrete 2005; McClelland 2010; Scott and Leonhardt 2005). Critical accounts of the ‘American Dream’ also emphasize the fundamental importance of the ‘land of opportunity’ idea; in their book devoted to challenging the “meritocracy myth”, for example, McNamee and Miller (2009) begin by observing that “[i]n the image of the American Dream, America is the land of opportunity” (1). Indeed, across the wider range of works that discuss the ‘American Dream’, and which span across several decades of scholarship, the assumption of the centrality of the ‘land of opportunity’ idea is evident (eg., Chinoy 1955, 1; Tebbel 1963, 8; Greene 1983, 179). Nor is this pattern limited strictly to academic work. In a *Vanity Fair* article, for example, Kamp (2009) summarizes James Truslow Adams’ interpretation of the ‘American Dream’ as the idea that “life in the United States offered personal liberties and opportunities to a degree unmatched by any other country in history”. The ‘land of opportunity’ concept also often appears in conjunction with political speeches that invoke the ‘American Dream’, and which are common in speeches by politicians from both the Democratic and Republican Parties, as

Ghosh's (2013) work shows. This pattern extends beyond just speeches, however; some illustrations from relatively recent writings include Senator John Edwards' essay contribution to *Ending Poverty in America: How to Restore the American Dream*, in which he declares that "our nation was founded as the land of opportunity", and President Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, wherein he praises Abraham Lincoln, who believed that "the essence of America was opportunity", and whose policies "not only laid the groundwork for a fully integrated political economy but extended the ladders of opportunity downward to reach more and more people" (2007, 152).

3. Conventional Accounts: Historical Roots of the 'American Dream'

The 'land of opportunity' idea is identifiable across popular and scholarly discussions of the contemporary 'American Dream', and it also features prominently in discussions of the ideology's history. When the task turns to identifying the historical roots of the 'American Dream', most scholarly accounts start with the Puritan settlers. Wyndy Corbin (2005), for example, remarks that "The American Dream is conflated with the religious underpinnings of the new world as a land of opportunity and freedom", and she explains that this conflation stems from the fact that "The early colonizers in the Americas of the seventeenth century were motivated by the promise of freedom, both religious and economic, and were spurred on by a sense of a divine mandate" (para. 9). Several other scholars have also emphasized the religious origins of the 'land of opportunity' imagery; Jim Cullen (2003), who identifies the Puritan 'Dream of the good life' as one of the first versions of the American Dream, begins his book with a discussion of the Puritan settlers who arrived in America motivated by the desire to build a religious community—a 'city upon a hill'—where all Puritans would live without fear of repression. Although the Puritans never described it as the 'American Dream', Cullen suggests that their belief that America was the place where they would succeed in "making the world a better, more holy place" was rooted in the same optimism about the land

of opportunity that has characterized subsequent variations of the American Dream (2003, 34).

While most scholars begin their historical analysis of the ‘American Dream’ with the Puritan settlers, it is the social and political origins of the ideology, rather than the religious origins, that tend to be most heavily emphasized in the literature. In particular, the ostensible absence of feudal structures is said to have fostered a perception that America was a “unique land where past and parentage put no limits on opportunity” (Wessel 2005, para 23). Tocqueville’s ([1835] 2003) observation that in America, “the aristocratic element has always been feeble from the beginning and it has been, if not totally destroyed, at least sufficiently weakened for us not to ascribe to it very much influence in the progress of human affairs” (52), frequently makes an appearance in this narrative. Indeed, it is difficult to find a discussion of the ideology’s origins that does not highlight the importance of this ‘storybook truth’, as Hartz (1955) called it. According to Hochschild (1995, 18), the ideology’s “first tenet, that everyone may always pursue their dream, is the most direct connotation of Locke’s ‘in the beginning....’”; however, “the idea extends beyond the image of a pristine state of nature waiting for whoever ‘discovers’ it. Even in the distinctly nonpristine, nonnatural world of Harlem or Harlan Country, anyone can pursue a dream”.

For Hochschild, as for many other scholars of the ‘American Dream’, the contemporary notion that *anyone* can pursue a dream stems back to the settlers’ and then the founders’ rejection of feudalism and of the social and political rigidities that came with it. But, as these authors emphasize, there is also another component to the story, one that is equally important for understanding the origins of the ideology; in addition to offering opportunity for religious and political freedom, the ‘promised land’ was also perceived to offer opportunities for economic freedom, for those who came willingly to its shores. Whereas the majority of workers in the ‘Old World’ were inevitably trapped not only in their

social and political stations but also in a perpetual state of poverty, the popular belief was that those who went to the ‘New World’ faced no such inevitability; it was the land of opportunity in which to escape destitution and live with a sense of material security that no amount of toil could have brought to workers in Europe. In an 1814 letter to Thomas Cooper, Thomas Jefferson captured the essence of this viewpoint as he offered his “comparison of the conditions of Great Britain and the United States”:

We have no paupers, the old and crippled among us, who possess nothing and have no families to take care of them, being too few to merit notice as a separate section of society, or to affect a general estimate. The great mass of our population is of laborers; our rich, who can live without labour...being few, and of moderate wealth. Most of the labouring class possess property, cultivate their own lands, have families, and from the demand for their labor are enabled to exact from the rich and the competent such prices as enable them to be fed abundantly, clothed above mere decency, to labor moderately and raise their families. ([1814] 2010, 649)

This type of narrative was told and re-told across the continent and across the Atlantic Ocean as well, in part thanks to foreign visitors such as Alexis de Tocqueville, who in his *Democracy in America* famously described his awe regarding the “equality of social conditions” in the United States (2003, 11).²⁹

What was it about America—what did it have to offer—according to those who perceived it as the land of economic opportunity? What were the material groundings of the claim “that man would find, and in this country had largely found, the good life that was denied to the antiquated and corrupt nations of the old world”? (Tipple 1968, 13) The answer, simply put, was land. As Jillson (2004) observes, “[t]he easy availability of land, the presence of a whole continent to conquer and tame, created a powerful and enduring sense that America was the land of opportunity” (13). In particular, there was a sense that the vast

²⁹ This also points to the fact that the conception of ‘American exceptionalism’ with which the ‘American Dream’ is directly associated (Schwartz 2014), is not based exclusively on ‘homegrown’ accounts. As Kammen (1993), in his survey of nineteenth-century accounts of American social and political life, remarks: “[w]hat is especially striking in the literature written about the United States by foreign observers is that the emphasis upon exceptionalism is so persistent and so powerfully felt” (7). The ‘unique’ political origins and distinctive patterns of social mobility were among the more prominent themes highlighted in these accounts (ibid.).

frontier afforded Americans an opportunity to own and live off land (ibid.; Bernstein 1997; Currarino 2001; Feldman and Betzold 1988; Huston 1998; Schwarz 1997). This sense was famously expressed in Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis', which attributed the nation's rapid economic development and success to its capacity for westward expansion. Turner, writing in 1893, was arguing that the frontier was now closed; but, by this time, stress historians of the 'American Dream', the promise of the frontier had left its imprint on American political culture. Certainly, not all citizens were successful in translating their opportunity into material success, but, as Adams (1931) observed in his *Epic of America*, "in the buoyant air of freedom, of youth and of opportunity, it was those who succeeded who gave the tone to the temperament of the frontier everywhere" (124). This was the temperament that underlay the early articulations of the American Dream, and although "[p]recisely what is meant by the American Dream has differed throughout the nation's history", argues Starks (2003), "it has always been closely connected to the notion of access to economic opportunity" (206).

Of course, the claims about economic opportunity that animated the range of early 'land of opportunity' narratives were often highly exaggerated, and the 'American Dream' scholars generally acknowledge this in their portrayals of the ideology as being rooted in ideas that combined elements of historical accuracy with elements of 'myth'. Furthermore, while the availability of land and natural resources may have been an important factor giving rise to 'land of opportunity' conceptions, there were also other (related) factors, including the reliance on slavery and the expropriation of Native American land (Aaron 1994; Beckert 2014; Huston 1998; Post 2009; Schultz 1990). Even the more celebratory treatments of the 'American Dream', therefore, acknowledge the fact that the idea of 'opportunity' in America has, historically, been not only highly exclusionary, but quite often rooted in—indeed,

dependent upon—various practices that have represented the *denial* not just of economic opportunity, but of basic human rights³⁰.

Thus far, I have briefly sketched out a general summary of the historical roots of the ‘American Dream’, as presented in conventional accounts³¹. Schwarz’s (1997) description of the American Dream as “the set of beliefs that links our aspirations today with the precepts of the nation at its birth” (87), captures the general consensus in the existing literature quite well. It is also important to note here that there exists a general consensus regarding the institutionalization of that linkage. Scholars who trace the historical roots of the ideology consistently pinpoint the nation’s founding documents—especially the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights—as the first formal embodiments of the ideology’s central tenets. Cullen (2003), for example, describes the Declaration of Independence as “the charter of the American Dream” (58). And Ghosh (2013), who in contrast to Cullen (2003) and Jillson (2004), views the ‘American Dream’ as a distinctively contemporary ideology and thus prefers a more historically bounded definition, nonetheless acknowledges that “there is an indirect official endorsement of the...American Dream in the famous opening lines of the Declaration of Independence” (50). Indeed, he continues, the line that sets out the ‘self-evident truths’ “implicitly refers to all three constitutive elements of the American Dream: individualism, equal opportunity and the pursuit of happiness” (50). These types of observations are found across the core American Dream literature, and in fact they represent a theme that is commonly found across the broader range of works that do not necessarily (or exclusively) refer to the ‘American Dream’; according to Myrdal (1944, 4), for example,

³⁰ See, for example, Cullen (2003, 111-16) and Jillson (2004).

³¹ In this overview of the origins of the ‘American Dream’ as identified in the existing literature, we have considered the religious, political and economic roots separately, yet as all of the authors acknowledge in some way or another, there is a close interrelation between the different factors that gave rise to the perception of the United States as the ‘land of opportunity’. Even if they focus on one specific facet of the ideology’s roots, these authors generally acknowledge this. Corbin (2005), for example, emphasizes that “The ideology of success prevalent in the American Dream cannot be divorced from the metanarrative rooted in the Puritan vision of a new commonwealth”, but as we saw earlier in this section, she also acknowledges the economic incentive driving many early colonizers.

[t]he tenets of the American Creed were written into the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and into the constitutions of the several states. The ideals of the American Creed have thus become the highest law of the land.³²

In the conventional accounts of the American Dream's historical roots, then, the ideology was expressed in some form or another among the early settler societies, but it was the United States' founding documents that first institutionalized the ideology's basic tenets. This understanding forms an important basis for conventional claims about the ideology's capaciousness.

4. Conventional Accounts: Capaciousness of the 'American Dream'

As I pointed out in chapter 1, the ambiguity of the meaning of 'success' in the American Dream is widely regarded as one of the primary reasons the ideology is so politically capacious; as long as there are different conceptions of what it means to achieve the 'American Dream', either individually or as a nation, there will be variations in interpretations of what needs to be done. This logic can be applied to the ideology's foundational claim: it can be interpreted either as an idea that is representative of existing conditions (the United States *is* the land of opportunity) or one that represents a gap between promise and reality (the United States *was*, *could be*, or *should be* the land of opportunity). In the analysis provided by the existing literature, this capaciousness of the 'American Dream' is partly what makes the ideology such an effective tool for seeking change. Many of the works we have reviewed here emphasize that groups and individuals have often invoked the 'American Dream', not to celebrate the status quo, but rather to highlight the presence of gaps between the promises and realities of American society. And according to the conventional wisdom, the ideology has, historically, proved to be an effective tool for groups

³² Although Myrdal largely uses the term 'American Creed', he invokes the term 'American Dream' a few times in his work, without making any explicit attempt to distinguish the two terms. This reflects a common tendency among scholars who deal with concepts that are analogous to the 'American Dream'.

seeking legislative and other measures for closing these gaps. Jillson (2004), for example, exclaims that despite the fact that the American Dream's tenets of equality, opportunity and justice were denied to many of the country's inhabitants (largely on the basis of 'ascriptive' characteristics) in the 18th and 19th centuries, the "intellectual case for inclusion was always present"; it is because excluded groups have always had "America's best sense of itself on their side" that the "right to dream the American Dream has been opened, at least formally, to new and increasingly diverse groups" (11). Hochschild (1995, 217), similarly observes that the ideology's "commitment to individual autonomy, equality, and rights has pushed our nation far from the slavery and serfdom of a century ago, and its emphasis on hope has deep psychological resonance".

Importantly, the ability for groups to effect change by exerting pressure on the rest of American society to close the gaps between its ideals and its practices, presumes at least some common ground on those ideals. And according to most historians of the American Dream, the symbols, if not sources, of such common ground are once again, the nation's founding documents. Cullen (2003), for example, suggests that the Declaration of Independence

Provides us with (often imperceptibly shifting) standards by which we measure success but simultaneously calls attention to the gap between what is and what we believe should be, a gap that defines our national experience.
(58)

Most scholars emphasize, in particular, the importance of the statement that "All men are created equal", through which the Founding Fathers were formally denying the relevance of feudalism in the United States (eg., Cullen 2003; Jillson 2004; Schwarz 1997). However much its authors failed to live up to the ideals and promises of that document, the importance of the Declaration lay in the fact that it introduced a "revolutionary idea—that all citizens should have the opportunity for a decent life and a decent livelihood" (Schwarz 1997, 97); that idea "has given the nation a sense of moral direction and purpose ever since" (ibid.).

In the conventional wisdom, then, the transformative power of the ‘American Dream’ lies in its capacity to be widely interpreted, while at the same time being grounded in certain shared norms, which are rooted in longstanding American political ideals that have been crystallized in the nation’s founding documents. While most analyses of the ‘American Dream’ identify later periods—especially the New Deal era (eg., Jillson 2004; Kamp 2009; Schwarz 1997) and the (short) civil rights era (eg., Cullen 2003; Ghosh 2013; Hochschild 1995)—as crucial moments of mainstream ideological redefinition, the revolutionary period remains centrally relevant, insofar as those later redefinitions are said to have achieved legitimacy in large part because they drew from the nation’s founding ideals. In this study, I do not wish to challenge the basic importance of the nation’s revolutionary democratic tradition to the ‘American Dream’—indeed, as will become clear in due course, the nation’s founding documents and ideals figure prominently in the various (re-)definitions of the ideology offered by the movements examined in this study. I do argue, however, that the ‘American Dream’ literature often fails to adequately consider the meaning and role, in the ideology’s complex historical trajectory, of a range of ideas linked to capitalist developments in the United States. Most notably, scholars have devoted relatively (and surprisingly) little attention to the ‘land of opportunity’ narratives that developed over the course of capitalist transition, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

5. Re-Tracing the American Dream: The ‘Land of Opportunity’ in Capitalist Transition

In order to be able to adequately grasp the significance of capitalism for the development of the ‘American Dream’, we need to first step back and examine, in more detail, the socioeconomic origins of the ‘land of opportunity’ idea discussed above. We have seen that a popular belief in pre-industrial America was that the United States was the ‘land of opportunity’ because it provided an opportunity for self-sustenance—something that was

not said to be available to workers in the ‘Old World’. We have also seen that one of the central factors that gave rise to this perception, apart from the ostensible absence of feudal traditions and institutions, was the availability of land. According to those who perceived the United States as the ‘land of opportunity’ for escaping or avoiding poverty, this perception was based in part on the understanding that arable land and rich natural resources were sufficiently abundant that all (white male) citizens and their families could live off the ‘fruits of their labour’ (Huston 1998). This optimism was evident in the thinking of the Founding Fathers who, Schwarz (1997, 31) notes, “presumed that the American frontier would provide inexhaustible supplies of opportunity for many decades to come, and later observers continued to find its availability to be characteristic of, and unique to, America”. Indeed, land availability was arguably central to the eighteenth century republicanism of the Founding Fathers. This was a republicanism that saw independence as a fundamental sign of virtue; in this view, “citizens could not be virtuous by definition if they...were economically dependent upon another individual, and thus subject to another’s will” (Schwarz 1997, 25). This republicanism celebrated the direct correlation between work and its rewards for the (white male) citizen, whose “independence and moral self-sufficiency were...guaranteed because he produced what he earned through his own effort” (Currarino 2011, 3). According to Huston (1998), these ideas extended well into the nineteenth century:

Most commentators in the first half of the nineteenth century probably believed a well-structured society and economy (one based on republican principles) permitted every willing worker to obtain a comfortable competence or subsistence. The act of labor ensured a decent, but not ostentatious, livelihood. [...] In a republican society, where each obtained the full value of the fruits of labor, anyone who toiled would rise above poverty... (191)

Broadly speaking, the ideas outlined above represent elements of what we might call the pre-capitalist ‘republican’ land of opportunity interpretation. Now, it is important to acknowledge here that the nature of republicanism in revolutionary America represents a subject that has been widely debated among scholars of American political development

(Gibson 2005; Kammen 1993; Rodgers 1992); the characterization above, which only touches on certain (controversial) features of republicanism, is certainly not meant to be taken as a representation of the vast literature on the subject.³³ Furthermore, Huston's (1998) claim that this republicanism was central to American political economy for over a century is highly (and, I would argue, rightly) contested (eg., Rodgers 1998; Greenberg 1999; Schneirov 2006b).³⁴ Nonetheless, it does seem to be the case that ideals surrounding self-sufficiency and avoidance of wage labour often underpinned the 'land of opportunity' narratives that were prominent in the North in revolutionary America and into the early 19th century, as did (selectively) egalitarian ideas such as the belief that "a viable republic required a balanced distribution of wealth to avoid the rise of a new aristocracy" (Schneirov 2006a, 200). The narratives undoubtedly obscured the extent to which inequalitarian and anti-democratic practices helped to sustain the "equality of social conditions", as de Tocqueville (2003, 11) had described it, among a portion of the population³⁵. Nonetheless, particularly for those whose traits fit the narrow ascriptive criteria, the egalitarian and democratic promises of the republican 'land of opportunity' narratives had significant resonance (Kammen 1993; Rodgers 1993; Wilentz 1984).

³³ In addition to the debates over the precise nature of republicanism in revolutionary America, there is also the question of whether republicanism itself was as central to the political culture in this period as has often been assumed. Breen (2004), for example, has written about the importance of consumer culture in colonial America, and he suggests that the accuracy of conventional understandings of political mobilization leading up to the Revolution has been limited by the fact that "the overly eager colonial consumer [has gone] missing from the pages of history" in favour of the more favourable and "compelling mythology [of] the self-sufficient farmer" (17).

³⁴ As Greenberg (1999) observes in his review of Huston (1998), "Huston's conclusion that the economic values Americans had formed during the Revolution endured virtually unchanged and unchallenged well into the 1880s will likely leave more than a few readers unconvinced." One of the main issues, he points out, is that "Huston's bifurcated model of American economic development (small-scale commercial/agrarian before 1890, large-scale industrial/corporate after) understates the impact that industrialization had in the United States before the 1880s." This point relates to the broader debates on periodizing capitalism, which will be touched on below.

³⁵ As Beckert (2014) observes, for example, during the 19th century, up until the Civil War, "slavery was at the core of the American economy. The South was an economically dynamic part of the nation (for its white citizens); its products not only established the United States' position in the global economy but also created markets for agricultural and industrial goods grown and manufactured in New England and the mid-Atlantic states".

What is most important for our purposes here, however, is the fact that the existing scholarly and popular accounts of the ‘American Dream’ generally assume that the republicanism described above represents an important foundation of the American Dream, and that it is a main source of the ideology’s economically egalitarian potential.³⁶ From this perspective, the symbolic availability of this republican tradition is a crucial aspect of what makes the language of the ‘American Dream’ capable of accommodating politics typically associated with the left, including appeals for redistributive policies and other mechanisms of state intervention in the market, and appeals for protecting or extending workers’ rights. This is one main area where my interpretation of the ‘American Dream’ departs from the conventional wisdom. I argue that that the ideology has a far more complex relationship to republicanism (and to the nation’s founding ideals and institutions more generally) than is assumed in the conventional wisdom, and that such complexity can only begin to be understood by examining ideological developments associated with the American transition to capitalism.

Capitalist Transition(s)

The ‘land of opportunity’ ideas that are explored in this and the next section of the chapter, have contextual and normative ties to various aspects of the American transition to capitalism, and they are important because they represent a critical foundation of the ‘American Dream’ ideology that became prevalent in post-Second World War United States. First, however, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by ‘capitalist transition’.

There is an extensive literature on the origins and development of capitalism in the United States, but it is worth pointing out that the notion of an American *transition* to

³⁶ This is expressed quite explicitly in some works, (eg., Cullen 2003; Kamp 2009; Myrdal 1944; Schwarz 1997), but in others, it is more implicit (eg., Ghosh 2013; Nackenoff 2005). To be sure, I am not including the interpretations of the ‘American Dream’ coming from the right; such interpretations are not directly relevant for us here, insofar as this study is concerned with testing claims about the ideology’s usefulness to the left.

capitalism has not always been considered a legitimate area of enquiry. Of particular interest to us here, is the impact of Louis Hartz and other ‘consensus historians’ of the 1950s, whose influential portrayals of the United States as having been ‘born capitalist’, are widely regarded as the primary reason for the fact that between the 1950s and 1970s, studies in American political development rarely displayed interest in the topic of ‘transition’ (Clark 1994a; Merrill 1995; Post 2009; Schneirov 2006a; Woodruff 1992). As Clark (1994a, 264) observes, the prevailing tendency, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, had been to treat American economic history as a capitalist “continuum”³⁷. This interpretation came under increasing attack from a variety of angles in the 1970s, and in recent decades, the debates among historians and other scholars have centred not so much on whether the United States actually experienced a transition to capitalism, but, rather, on questions about the characteristics, timing, and causes of the transition. My suggestion that the transition to capitalism in America is crucial for understanding the origins of the ‘American Dream’, clearly represents a departure from the Hartzian consensus position, but it also means that some consideration of the debates on the ‘transition’ is unavoidable. Although any kind of substantial engagement with these debates is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will briefly outline some of the key issues, before specifying the aspects of capitalist transition that are the primary focus in this chapter.

Among the factors making the identification and periodization of the origins of capitalism in the United States such a complex task, are the uneven developments across regions of the country. Many of the studies that have focused on local or regional developments have emphasized (what they identify as) the social and economic particularities of those locations—such as, for example, the “household mode of production” in the rural Northeast (Henretta 1991); or the combination of conflicting ideals of a “homestead ethic”

³⁷ “Carl N. Degler summed up this traditional view”, Clark observes, “when he wrote that ‘capitalism arrived in the first ships,’ while Charles S. Grant described the most active freehold farmers of the eighteenth century Connecticut frontier as ‘embryo John D. Rockefellers’.” (1994a, 264).

and “unrestrained acquisitiveness” with respect to land, that prevailed in the trans-Appalachian West (Aaron 1994)³⁸; or the “master-slave social property relation” governing southern agriculture (Post 2009). A basic theme that can be discerned across these and many other historical accounts that examine specific non-capitalist or pre-capitalist aspects of American society, is the notion that “capitalism did not come to every region at the same time nor on the same terms” (Woodruff 1992, 173). From this perspective, it makes more sense to speak of transitions to capitalism in America.

Needless to say, the acknowledgement that the United States experienced a variety of capitalist transitions, while an important starting point, does not offer a method for side-stepping the maze of debates about the origins and development of capitalism. Even if we limit our attention to the Northeast, for example, we can identify a wide range of interpretations in the literature, regarding the nature and timing of the capitalist transition(s). Even though many historians have stressed the importance of this region for identifying the first signs of capitalist society, there is little else holding this vast literature together. Scholars continue to disagree, for example, about whether these first signs of capitalism are to be found in the (Northern) countryside or in the (Northern) cities; different approaches to this question lead, among other things, to conflicting periodization of American capitalism.³⁹

³⁸ Aaron borrows the term ‘homestead ethic’ from Richard Maxwell Brown, who suggests that “it began with the deeply held belief that by possession and labor a man had ‘the right to have and hold...a family-size farm’” (cited in Aaron 1994, 270).

³⁹ As is often pointed out, one of the central issues driving many of the debates is the definition of capitalism itself (eg., Huston 2006; Kulikoff 1989; Merrill 1995; Schneirov 2006a; 2006b; Vickers 1994). For example, while most agree that the prominence of wage labour would be *an* indicator of capitalism, not all would agree that this by itself is a sufficient condition for calling an economy ‘capitalist’. Similarly, one finds much disagreement regarding the role and significance of commercial farming as an indicator of capitalism in the countryside; although many accounts of antebellum farming practices in the Northeast acknowledge the growth of commercial activity during (if not before) this period, historians have offered competing interpretations regarding whether these farmers were ‘capitalists’ or, rather, “a transitional class of yeomen, living in a capitalist world, but not of it” (Kulikoff 1989, 143). Furthermore, even when scholars refer more specifically to a particular type or stage of capitalism—such as ‘industrial capitalism’ or ‘corporate capitalism’, they do not always identify the same characterizing features. I will touch on these and other aspects over the course of this section. At this stage, however, it should be emphasized that I take the position, following many (but not all) of the scholars cited in this section, that capitalism should not be simply reduced to “a series of economic indexes” (Merrill 1995, 322); as Sklar (1991) puts it, “Capitalism’s historical evolution is as much social and political as economic in its dimensions” (204).

Once we expand our consideration beyond the literature that focuses on the North, the picture becomes, not surprisingly, even more nebulous—especially when the subject of slavery is brought into the fold. In the first couple of decades following the resurgence of scholarly interest in capitalist transition, the role of slavery in the South and its relationship to capitalism was relatively neglected in much of the literature (Clark 1994b, 282); more recently, however, the slave system in the U.S. South has become a focal point among historians of capitalism (Beckert 2014). Some of the scholarly debates among those who consider slavery in relation to the ‘transition’ question, focus primarily on internal dynamics. To take just one example, there is disagreement over whether plantation slavery in the antebellum South represented a form of capitalist production, and thus whether the ‘transition’ to capitalism in the South was already underway prior to the Civil War (Post 2009, 454).⁴⁰

Questions surrounding capitalist transitions in the South cannot be adequately addressed, however, through approaches that limit consideration strictly to the political economy of the region; nor, for that matter, is it possible to fully grasp the nature of the transitions in the *North* without considering the political economy of the South. As Beckert (2004; 2014), among others, has emphasized, American slavery was not simply a ‘southern’ phenomenon, for it was a fundamental component of the national—and indeed global—economy, particularly in the 19th century. The linkage is particularly evident with respect to the cotton industry, and research in this area has been especially influential in prompting a

⁴⁰ The work of Eugene D. Genovese was particularly influential in sparking the debates among transition scholars, beginning with his suggestion in his 1962 *The Political Economy of Slavery*, that slave society in the South “in its spirit and fundamental direction, represented the antithesis of capitalism” (quoted in Merrill 1995, 315; Clark 1994a). Some historians have gone even further to suggest that not only was the antebellum South strictly non-capitalist, but that even after the Civil War brought an end to the slave system, it was replaced by a system that was still not yet ‘capitalist’. (See, for example, Marler (2004), who argues that—contrary to the “neo-Beardian view of a ‘new capitalist South’ that has quietly become the consensus among southern historians”—sharecropping in the postbellum South did not represent a wage labour relationship (115). According to Marler, the characterization (in his view, *mis*-characterization) of slavery as having been directly and immediately replaced by capitalism, has prompted historians to overstate the extent of “southern confluence with the broad trajectory of American economic history after the Civil War” (122)).

renewed scholarly interest in examining the relationship between capitalism and slavery.⁴¹ As Beckert (2014) recently observed:

For too long, many historians saw no problem in the opposition between capitalism and slavery. They depicted the history of American capitalism without slavery, and slavery as quintessentially noncapitalist. [...] In the 1930s and 1940s, C.L.R. James and Eric Williams argued for the centrality of slavery to capitalism, though their findings were largely ignored. Now a flurry of books and conferences are building on those often unacknowledged foundations. They emphasize the dynamic nature of New World slavery, its modernity, profitability, expansiveness, and centrality to capitalism in general and to the economic development of the United States in particular.

While there may indeed have been many different transitions to capitalism in America, then, it is also true that they were often fundamentally connected.

There are a variety of other issues and points of contention that occupy the scholarship on the origins and development of capitalism in the United States; while many of these cannot be covered here, suffice it to say that the sheer scope and nature of the debates serves as an important reminder, on top of the vast array of empirical research, of the fact that the American transition to capitalism unfolded in a complex manner, involving various dynamic and (often conflicting), processes. As one historian, summarizing a 1994 panel discussion on “The Transition to Capitalism in America”, observed, “the transition was a long one. It was also multifaceted: there is no single index of change from a non-capitalist to a capitalist system” (Clark 1994b, 281). Keeping these complexities in mind, there are two aspects of the capitalist transition(s) that I nonetheless wish to highlight here, only because they are particularly significant with respect to the ideological developments discussed below. The first is the shift away from an economy based predominantly on self-employed labour, toward one based on “wage labour as the dominant form of employment” (Reich 1989, 37). The second is the shift away from a predominantly agrarian-based economy, toward one based on industrial manufacturing.

⁴¹ Stanley (2002, 313) observes that “While controversy continues over the link between New World slavery and the early modern emergence of capitalism...the link between slave-produced cotton and industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century is not disputed.”

Let us begin with the shift away from an economy based on self-employed labour. Many historical accounts of the antebellum North acknowledge a period in which a majority of male citizens were self-employed, and that the dominant mode of production was “non- or pre-capitalist”—although, as indicated above, much less agreement exists when it comes to specifying the length of this period (Schneirov 2006a, 197). Wright and Rogers (2011) posit that “we can assume that almost all the free labor force employed in agriculture was self-employed in 1800”, and that for some time the United States had a ‘market-oriented’, but not capitalist, economy (14). While there are ongoing debates surrounding periodization of the American transition from a “self-employed labor or producer society” to a capitalist one, what is less controversial is the notion that at one point in time the majority of (white male) citizens worked for themselves, with their own tools, and on their own land (Currarino 2011, 12-13; Dubofsky 2000, 183; Schneirov 2006a, 197; Huston 1998). The opportunity for self-sufficiency was intimately connected with the pre-capitalist republican ‘land of opportunity’ narratives, as we saw earlier, and the shift from a predominantly self-employed to a predominantly wage-earning citizenry has important implications for the development of the ideology of the ‘American Dream’.

A second important shift that I want to highlight in considering the American transition(s) to capitalism is the shift away from a predominantly agrarian based economy, toward an industrial manufacturing-based economy. I emphasize industrial manufacturing because, as with the shift to wage labour as the central social relation, it represents a contextual development that is crucial for understanding the relationship between the republican ‘land of opportunity’ narratives and the capitalist narratives explored below. It is also worth pointing out that quite often, in histories of capitalist transition that focus on labour and the working class, the two shifts are viewed as intricately connected. Many labour historians highlight the role of industrialization in creating a permanent class of wage-

labourers, first in the North and then elsewhere as industrialization spread (e.g., Dubofsky 2000; Currarino 2011; Schultz 1990; Manley 1990). Many also note that in its early capitalist form, agriculture had more social mobility for wage-earners than did industry; as manufacturing gradually replaced agriculture, the emerging capitalist class structure, particularly in the cities, became entrenched and increasingly visible (Schneirov 2006a, 202; Bernstein 1997, 142; Haydu 1999). Additionally, much has been written on the impact of technological advances on the changing nature of work, particularly the “steady transformation of traditional patterns of work in which established skills [were] persistently diluted or erased” (Dubofsky 2000, 181). Bernstein (1997), for example, explains that as “industries moved from the artisanal stage to an industrial level, task simplification, systematization, and mechanization made many craft skills superfluous” resulting in “economic injury [and] declining social approval for manual workers” (151).

One final task before considering the ‘land of opportunity’ ideas in capitalist transition is to point out that I will be focusing here primarily on ideological developments in the 19th and early 20th centuries. As I acknowledged earlier, the periodization of American capitalism is a highly contentious subject. Generally speaking, however, those who focus on the features of capitalist transition that I have just highlighted above, often situate their discussions between or within the span of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is also important to point out, however, that within this very broad period, we can identify not only transition(s) *to* capitalism, but also transitions *between types* of capitalism. For example, many historians situate the shift from competitive capitalism to corporate, industrial capitalism within this period, usually highlighting the last decade of the 19th century as the turning point (eg., Bensel 2000; Chandler 1977; Dubofsky 2000; Currarino 2011; Sklar 1991;

1988; Schneirov 2006a). As always, there are various debates regarding causation⁴², but as Sklar (1991, 201) observes, “historians concerned with this period in the United States history tacitly or explicitly acknowledge some such periodization in terms of industrial capitalism and corporate capitalism as critical to the shape and development of United States society from the 1890s to 1916”.

The ‘land of opportunity’ narratives that I discuss in this section, as I just noted, are discussed primarily in the context of the 19th and early 20th centuries. While I am by no means trying to suggest that this time period is the most significant for understanding the origins of American capitalism, those years are clearly an important part of the story of ‘transitions’; most importantly, however, they represent a period that is crucial to understanding the origins of the ‘American Dream’. This is a period in which the ideological developments that have been largely neglected in the ‘American Dream’ literature, seem to be particularly manifest. The ‘land of opportunity’ narratives that developed over this period represented significant departures from, and also reinterpretations of, earlier narratives—including and especially the republican vision outlined above. The importance of these developments to the politics of the ‘American Dream’ will become evident over the course of this study, and will help to draw attention to the problems with conventional wisdom surrounding the ideology.⁴³

⁴² The role of antitrust laws in fostering corporate consolidation, for example, is given different weight by different historians—see the competing interpretations offered by Chandler (1977) and Sklar (1988).

⁴³ To be sure, the ideological developments examined in this chapter, like all other facets of the capitalist transitions, were part of a complex process, and they did not occur in a unilinear fashion. Furthermore, although I am narrowing my focus here only on the development of a small subset of ideas, as I pointed out in the introduction of this chapter, it must be acknowledged that even these ideas (those associated with the capitalist ‘land of opportunity’ interpretation) were often woven out of complex, contradictory cloths. Nonetheless, the purpose of this chapter is to highlight core themes that have been largely neglected in existing ‘American Dream’ scholarship, and which are critical to understanding the framing processes discussed in the empirical chapters that follow. This task necessarily involves emphasizing certain historical processes and ideas at the expense of others, thus downplaying, somewhat, the ebb and flow of the ideological developments. It is important to reiterate, therefore, that this discussion should not be viewed as an attempt to provide a *comprehensive* account of the unfolding of the ideology in the 19th and early 20th century.

Republicanism in Capitalist Transition

The shifts just identified above contributed to bringing about conditions that were at odds with some important elements of the republicanism underpinning the pre-capitalist ‘land of opportunity’ narratives discussed earlier. “[T]oward the end of the [nineteenth] century”, writes Manley (1990), “most of the best frontier land was taken, more people worked for others than for themselves, large cities and factories radically transformed the country Jefferson knew, studies of poverty began to appear, and huge concentrations of wealth and power caused great popular concern” (93). As the urban cities in the North became the centres of economic activity, the changing nature of work and employment was particularly manifest. Those who had once been independent craftsmen felt these changes particularly strongly, as they encountered a new type of economic organization in which they were separated from the means of production and were “increasingly relegated to semi-skilled factory wage-work” (Bernstein 1997, 142). With the growth of mills and factories in these centres, “managing labor...required a different discipline. Efficiency took precedence over craft” (Porter 2010, 538). It was not just the nature of work but of the rewards for work as well as the prospects for achieving social mobility through work, that seemed to be changing. Bernstein (1997) observes that “as nineteenth-century employment gradually shifted from small establishments run by a master craftsman to larger workshops and mechanized factories under a new managerial class, workers saw relatively few chances to elevate themselves” (142).

For many, the most significant change was not so much the reduction in opportunities for social mobility, but rather the threat to their present socioeconomic status and their existing way of life. In the context of pre-capitalist communities, “self-employed producers, whether yeoman farmers or urban artisans, could claim to be independent property owners” (Carrarino 2011, 13); but with the unfolding of the capitalist transitions, a growing number of

these individuals had to adjust to conditions of market dependency rather than self-sufficiency (ibid.; Schneirov 2006a; 2006b). For a growing number of citizens, neither the rural nor the urban sectors offered much hope for work outside of wage labour. In the rural areas, as the capitalist mode of production gradually replaced what Henretta (1991) calls the ‘household mode of production’, many of the republicans’ championed yeoman farmers became wage-earners (Schneirov 2006a, 197; Huston 1998). The new wage relations “between owners and workers upset the notion of independency in economic undertakings in republicanism” (Huston 1998, 25). In the urban cities, artisans who had previously been self-employed, or who owned their own tools or at least “controlled the actual process of production using tools and machines provided by the boss”, had to contend with the loss of independence that accompanied the growth of modern factories and the rise of large corporations (Dubofsky 2000, 183).

The Capitalist ‘Land of Opportunity’ Narrative

The transition to industrial capitalism in the Northern regions of the United States was not uniform across these regions, nor were the effects of the shifts identified above similarly felt across all sectors of the population. Yet over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, especially, some of the changes became increasingly widespread and noticeable enough to become deemed as national issues—including, most significantly, the ‘labour problem’ (Haydu 1998). As the ‘yeoman’ ideal faded in the countryside and the ‘craftsman’ ideal became increasingly threatened in the cities, many began to question the relevance of the ‘land of opportunity’ narrative, especially one based on republican ideas. While some sought to turn back the tide of industrialization in an effort to reclaim these ideas, others offered a new type of narrative; this new narrative was based not on the pursuit of self-sustenance but rather on unlimited material success, achieved not by the competent yeoman farmer or prideful craftsman, but rather by the inventive, creative, and often risk-

taking, entrepreneur (Sandage 2005). Particularly prominent in this narrative was the image of the ‘self-made man’—epitomized by the leading men of industry who had begun as a wage earner and had climbed from the bottom to the top of the corporate ladder, on his own effort and merit. Wealthy industrialists such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller were among those who became the public faces and voices of such success. As “the new ethic of getting ahead became the anthem of an industrializing society”, these ‘success philosophers’ presented themselves, and were widely perceived, as the symbols of wisdom—of how to make the best of the increasingly unfamiliar world. (Cawelti 1965, 173; Cullen 2003). “Reasserting the traditional maxim ‘where there’s a will there’s a way’, the ‘success philosophers’ insisted that there were more opportunities than ever for a man who was determined to get ahead.” (Cawelti 1965, 173).

The reformulated opportunity narrative was based not on a denial of the significance of capitalist transition, but rather on the insistence that the changes represented a ‘new frontier’; the United States was still the land of opportunity, but the rules for succeeding had simply been adjusted. Those in managerial positions frequently published manuals and gave public speeches proclaiming that “[i]ndustrialism, mechanization, displacement of workers, dependence on wage labor, and the other arrangements that came with the market revolution need not be a fear of the resourceful artisan” (Mullins 2005, 143-44). While “craft unions sought, as best they could, to cope with the twin threats of technological innovation and scientific management” (Dubofsky 2000, 189), employers were presenting these same threats as sources of opportunity. According to Horace G. Burt, President of the Union Pacific Railroad, getting ahead was simply a matter of “combin[ing] ‘application’ and persistent labor” (Bernstein 1997, 156). This type of message was echoed time and again by successful businessmen, who all emphasized that in industrializing America, “[h]ard work was the road

to success and independence, and for all those who were healthy, society offered the ‘prescription’ of industriousness” (ibid.).

Many who espoused this new type of narrative insisted that not only did the United States remain the land of opportunity as it industrialized, but that in fact, the opportunity was even greater and more widespread as a result. “There is now reasonable hope for the hitherto most hopeless”, declared Russell Conwell in 1904, “as the gates to wisdom, to love, to wealth, and to happiness swing open so easily that they turn at the touch of almost any man” (cited in Cawelti 1965, 179). Such optimism was accompanied by particular instructions for succeeding, and as Cawelti observes, “[s]hort biographies, showing how well-known figures in business, politics, and the professions had won their way from poverty to fame and fortune, also became a primary method of the new success teaching” (1965, 176).

Popular fiction also became a medium through which the idea that industrial, capitalist America was the ‘land of opportunity’ spread (Bernstein 1997; Chinoy 1955; Sandage 2005). The most well-known stories were those written by Horatio Alger Jr., whose protagonists were usually boys who started off poor and who, typically via hard work and a “combination of preparation, luck, and pluck”, were able to achieve material success (Jillson 2004, 129). As Geisst (1990) observes, “[t]he popular nineteenth century view of hard work and its subsequent economic success was given widespread popularity in the works of Horatio Alger” (xii). Through his popular fiction, “Alger offered guidebooks to surviving the economic dislocations occasioned by the rise of capitalism” (Nackenoff 1994, 8). The ‘success philosophers’ of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were constantly emphasizing that hard work and bootstrap-pulling had been the key to their successes, but Alger’s stories made this formula appear more accessible to the working classes. If “[i]ndustrialization upset the certainty that hard work would bring economic success” (Rodgers 1974, 28), Alger’s stories could be interpreted in such a way that helped restore that

certainty. Alger's books promised its readers that "there were predictable paths to middle class comfort, and that sometimes more would follow—especially if one had the proper character, which was a kind of skill that didn't go away with changes in the labour market" (Nackenoff 2005, 21).

The role of Horatio's Alger's stories in popularizing the "rags-to-riches" ideal deserves special emphasis here because Alger would become, and in many ways remains, a central symbol of the American Dream (Ghosh 2013; Scott and Leonhardt 2005, 7; Cullen 2003; Johnson 2006; McClelland 2010; Nackenoff 2005). Indeed, "the Horatio Alger stories...became the dominant vision of the hard work ethic in what would become the American dream" (Ghosh 2008, 81). Certainly, Alger was not the only author who wrote popular fiction emphasizing the continued availability of opportunity for those with the right character and work ethic (Bernstein 1997; Sandage 2005).⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the popularity and impact of his books was arguably unmatched within his genre in the nineteenth century—and for decades even after Alger's death (Chinoy 1955).

It should be noted that the way in which the Alger stories have been interpreted by scholars since his death, has sparked significant controversy. Carol Nackenoff (1994, 2005), for example, has written extensively on the impact of Louis Hartz's reading of Alger's stories as simple rags-to-riches fairy tales. According to Nackenoff, this was in fact a misreading, and one that obscured the ambivalence Alger himself felt towards capitalism. She points out, for example, that the path to success for Alger's protagonists rarely involved factory work; this demonstrates that, counter to what conventional accounts might lead one to expect, "Alger did not think the factory offered a very good route of mobility" (1994, 86). Drawing

⁴⁴ Bernstein (1997), for example, points to the McGuffey readers, used as elementary school textbooks throughout the second half of the nineteenth century; "[u]nderlying the entire McGuffey message", Bernstein (161-2) observes, "was the belief in opportunity. Everything seemed possible for those who strived to achieve. Low estate was but a temporary impediment, and all things were possible for people of good character." (161-2). These were hardly obscure textbooks: "With sales that approached 120,000,000, these books reached about half the school children in nineteenth-century America" (162).

from this and similar observations, Nackenoff argues that Alger's stories were and remain available for symbolic appropriation by anti-capitalists (1994, 266-7).

Although there are problems with Nackenoff's argument here, which will be made apparent in this study, her work does serve as an important reminder that Hartz's reading of political culture in American political development was often overly simplified. And just as there were likely multiple interpretations of Alger's texts, there were also multiple interpretations of the various developments associated with capitalist transition, as I have already acknowledged. Although it is not the purpose of this chapter to identify all of these interpretations, it is worth highlighting some of the alternative interpretations arising from the labour movement. Many workers who did not accept the edicts of the 'success philosophers' turned to the labour movement, where other workers and leaders often offered critically different interpretation of the impact of capitalist transition on the 'land of opportunity'. For example, As Voss's (1993) examination of labour republicanism among early 19th century artisans demonstrates, this language was invoked in appeals for alternative forms of economic organization, which artisans argued were necessary in order to "recover the independence, pride, dignity, and well-being their skills had once afforded" (42). Throughout the 19th century, many labour leaders and activists reached for the language of labour republicanism in their challenges to capitalism; one prominent Knights of Labor official, for example, observed in 1877 that there was "an inevitable and irresistible conflict between the wage-system of labor and the republican system of government" (cited in Voss 1993, 80).

Of course, these appeals did not go unchallenged. In their efforts to delegitimize labour leaders' messages about the threats posed by capitalist transition, and to delegitimize the labour movement in general, some opponents invoked the 'land of opportunity' narrative (albeit with varying degrees of success). In particular, they emphasized the notion that unions were both undesirable and unnecessary in this land of opportunity. Voss's (1993) work

indicates that this message underpinned some of the ideological attacks on artisans seeking to organize, as early as the 1830s:

employers' editorials and resolutions...denied that recent economic changes had altered artisans' life chances. They staunchly maintained that all men who worked hard enough could achieve a competence and eventually become rich. (31)

This type of argument came from the mouths and pens of numerous supporters of laissez-faire capitalism over the course of the 19th century, and it continued into the 20th century (Sandage 2005). Now, it is important to acknowledge that opponents' responses to union organizing were varied throughout the course of capitalist transition, and they often involved numerous tactics, above and beyond just rhetorical attacks⁴⁵. Moreover, the ideological challenges to the labour movement were not uniform, nor were they all vehemently anti-union. In fact, Haydu (1999) observes, “[i]n various trades and over most of the nineteenth century, employers’ rhetoric and practices indicate that they construed unions as legitimate, if not welcome, actors in local industry” (317). He also notes that “in some cases, the framework within which employers conceded unions some legitimacy was a republican one, in which workers, like owners, enjoyed rights of association and voice as productive citizens” (317). Just as crucially, however, “[b]y the early 1900s, an uncompromising and belligerent anti-unionism had become a hallmark of American employers” (317). This anti-unionism extended to the rhetoric of business leaders and politicians, many of whom invoked the ‘land of opportunity’ idea to argue against the necessity and desirability of labour movement activity in the United States. “Where no doors are closed by accident of birth or station against those possessed of superior ability or devoted to superior effort”, wrote U.S. Chamber of Commerce president Julius H. Barnes in 1924, “there is no excuse for the formation of political influence on the basis of trade or social position” (quoted in Tipple 1968, 149).

⁴⁵ Perhaps most notable was the use of physical violence and other forms of (often state-backed) repression (Archer 2007; Haydu 1999; Voss 1933).

The 'Fusing Tendency'

The capitalist narrative presented more than just an optimistic outlook and assessment of the socioeconomic changes wrought by capitalist industrialization. It also offered a unique interpretation of American political and philosophical traditions. This is best illustrated when we consider the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation in relation to the republican interpretation commonly attributed to the Founding Fathers, especially Thomas Jefferson. One of the factors giving rise to the republican conception of America as the land of opportunity, we saw earlier, was the presumption that “the American frontier would provide inexhaustible supplies of opportunity” (Schwarz 1997, 31). For those who were not excluded on the basis of ascriptive traits, America ostensibly offered the potential for land ownership, which meant the possibility to be independent and self-sufficient. As Schwarz (1997, 99) explains, with “the existence of the frontier...[t]here was a mythic belief that people facing hard times always had the option of picking up stakes and finding a decent life elsewhere”. As capitalism became the dominant mode of production in the United States, the new land of opportunity interpretation located the primary source of opportunity in capital accumulation and the market, rather than the land. However, in that interpretation, opportunity was said to be abundant not just for those who benefited from the commodification of labour—in that interpretation, the United States was also the ‘land of opportunity’ for the very individuals whose labour was commodified. Through the various mediums noted earlier, workers were being assured that wage labour was only a temporary status, and that the American economy provided opportunity for advancement through hard work (Bernstein 1997). The prevalence of this message produced what W.E.B. Du Bois called the ‘great American Assumption’, that “wealth [was] mainly the result of its owner’s effort and that any average worker [could] by thrift become a capitalist” (cited in Sandage 2005, 18).

The new land of opportunity narrative maintained the longstanding idea that the United States was the most promising place for escaping poverty, but wage labour itself was now presented as a central escape route. The distinction with the republican narrative is clear, for the latter had been based on the conception (however mythical) that America was a place where wage labour could be avoided altogether. These narratives also represented different presumptions about the proper relationship between work and its rewards. Huston (1998) explains that “[a] host of Americans at the time of the Revolution agreed that wage labor was a sign of dependence and of individuals not receiving the fruits of their labor” (26). Yet, the capitalist ‘land of opportunity’ narrative incorporated wage labour into its success formula; in the case of wage labourers who began at the bottom of the ladder, the rewards were not necessarily immediate, but once the top of the ladder was reached, workers would, it was claimed, receive their just due.⁴⁶

The capitalist land of opportunity narrative also carried the eighteenth-century republican conception of ‘virtue’ into the very different nineteenth century context. Eighteenth-century republicanism, which “equated...individual virtue with productive labor”, grew out of “a market economy largely though not exclusively defined by self-employment and simple commodity production” (Currarino 2011, 13). By the latter decades of the nineteenth century, in a society organized around an industrial capitalist economy, the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation still presumed the relationship between virtue and work; but the wage labourer was now being judged by the same moral standard as the yeoman farmer or independent craftsman had been. Writing in his journal in 1842, Ralph Waldo Emerson had observed that

⁴⁶ While those who championed the transition to capitalism offered slogans and stories that obscured the rupture caused by the move towards an industrial capitalist economy, there were many who also tried to challenge these interpretations. And they often did so by using the language of republicanism to draw attention to the degradation of workers caused by the experience of industrial capitalism, and by emphasizing that such degradation represented a betrayal of the republican tradition (Salvatore 1984; Voss 1993). The earlier-cited quote from the Knights of Labor official claiming the fundamental “conflict between the wage-system of labor and the republican system of government” provides one example.

The merchant evidently believes the State street proverb that nobody fails who ought not to fail. There is always a reason, *in the man*, for his good or bad fortune, and so in making money.⁴⁷

According to Sandage (2005), these observations best epitomize the way failure was coming to be interpreted in capitalist America:

Emerson's 'State street proverb' combined market logic and moral creed, both of which always presumed 'a reason, in the man'. This alliance amounted to a powerful ideology, a canon of cultural beliefs and practices that shaped the ordeal and aftermath of economic loss: 'nobody fails who ought not to fail'.
(46)⁴⁸

Examples such as these have been provided to outline a general pattern, evident in various expressions of the capitalist land of opportunity narrative—the pattern of applying long-established, familiar ideas and concepts to an unfamiliar context. This narrative simultaneously celebrated and denied the fact that capitalist industrialization had profoundly changed American society; on the one hand, capitalism created new 'frontiers' and thus new sources of opportunity, but on the other hand, the political and moral underpinnings of the old frontier society ostensibly remained the backbone of American life. Horatio Alger's novels, where "Jeffersonian virtues meet the industrial era and survive" (Nackenoff 1994, 269), epitomized this 'fusing tendency' in the capitalist narrative. Yet that tendency is evident far beyond popular fiction, and it extends across a period that exceeds the years of capitalist industrialization encountered by Alger's protagonists. Indeed, the 'fusing tendency'—that is, the conflation of American political ideals and capitalism resulting from an interpretation of American history that rewrites capitalism into all aspects of that history—has been a target of oppositional framing in all three of the movements seeking a social democratic agenda that

⁴⁷ Quoted in Sandage (2005, 46). The second sentence in this quote also appears in Emerson's *The Conduct of Life* (1860, xliii).

⁴⁸ Importantly, this combination of 'market logic' and 'moral creed' that was expressed so clearly in Emerson's writing, was a theme that persisted well beyond the mid-nineteenth century; according to Sandage (2005, 273) variations of the notion that 'nobody fails who ought not to fail', have been prominent, and remain prominent, in American discourse surrounding wealth and poverty.

will be discussed in this thesis. It also represents a common area of ‘framing failure’ across these movements.⁴⁹

The main purpose of this section has been to outline, in broad strokes, the historical context and initial formulations of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. The capitalist narratives, throughout the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth century, painted optimistic pictures of capitalist American society. In response to the uncertainty and unrest that capitalist industrialization brought to many workers, this narrative offered security through its formula for success: work hard and play by the rules, and eventually rewards would follow. In response to the anxiety and confusion that came with the increasingly widespread signs of failure and poverty in American society, it offered the moral comfort of ‘master plots’, which “wrote contingency out of the story, substituting fables and effigies of reasons ‘in the man’” (Sandage 2005, 59). In response to the ‘labour problem’, it offered a harmonious vision of class relations, based on the idea that America’s class structure, if it existed at all, was more fluid than ever. At the dawn of the twentieth century, “[f]or every critic who puzzled over the census returns there were a dozen writers ready to reaffirm Lincoln’s faith that there was no permanent class of hired laborers in America” (Rodgers 1974, 39). And in 1928, Calvin Coolidge was declaring that the nation was “reaching and maintaining the position where the propertied class and the employed class are not separate, but identical” (quoted in Dubofsky 2000, 206). Indeed, by this time, “business leaders and their spokesmen in Washington such as Secretary of Commerce Herbert C. Hoover [had] pronounced the end of the labor problem” (Zieger 1995, 11).

⁴⁹ That is, the movement actors attempted to articulate visions of the ‘American Dream’ that challenged the fusing tendency of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, and each of these attempts met little success.

In his 1970 autobiography reflecting on the experiences that had led him to become a ‘labour radical’, Len De Caux, the former editor of the *CIO News*, summed up the capitalist land of opportunity narrative (without describing it as such):

The English adage, ‘I’m all right, Jack,’ could have been the American national motto in those years up to 1929, as again in the Fifties and Sixties. Americans put the idea less pithily: This time prosperity’s permanent. We’re going to get more and more affluent. No one need go hungry. Everyone can become rich. Maybe some depressed areas, a sick industry or two, some pockets of unemployment. If Uncle Sam’s pockets are large, it’s because he’s so big and has so much money. Who cares, anyhow? Eat, drink, and be merry; spend, spend, spend, for tomorrow will bring ever more things to buy. [pp] The workers? The labor movement? Don’t make us laugh. We don’t have workers, or classes, any more in the United States of America. The workers are middle class—incipient capitalists. (1970, 139-140)

De Caux’s remarks indicate his perception of the prevalence of the capitalist narrative in American political culture; but they also allude to a significant historical period—marked by the Great Depression—which severely damaged the reputation of that narrative, and left its claims open to a range of political and ideological questions and challenges. The responses that arose to these challenges, however, must not be overlooked, for in many ways, those responses would further contribute to the development of the ‘American Dream’ ideology that the movement actors in our cases sought, with minimal effect, to appropriate and redefine.

6. Re-Tracing the American Dream: The ‘Land of Opportunity’ in the Early New Deal Era

The New Deal

The capitalist transitions that occurred within and across the United States into the early 20th century were accompanied by economic crises and social and political conflicts, which prompted a variety of challenges to the capitalist ‘land of opportunity’ narratives; but it was not until the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed, that the ideological underpinnings of these narratives—and the interests they represented—

became the target of nation-wide criticism and powerful opposition. As many commentators have observed, the Great Depression sparked unprecedented levels of demand, among diverse sectors of the public, for government intervention in the economy (Cohen 1990; Ferguson 1989; Lichtenstein 2006; Schickler and Caughey 2011), and it brought class struggle to the centre of national discourse in a way that had previously been unfathomable to most Americans (Gerstle 2002; Manley 2003; Smith 2002). Indeed, the early 1930s began to see the emergence of organized labour as a major actor onto the national stage, and this one was marked by a commitment to ‘industrial unionism’ to a degree rarely seen in previous waves⁵⁰ of American labour movement activity (Zieger 1995, 13-21). One of the most remarkable developments in this regard was the extent to which workers and labour leaders—fragmented for so long along craft, racial, ethnic, religious and other lines (Archer 2007; Davis 1986; Katznelson 1989)—appeared to defy historical patterns of intra-class division, as they “emerged from their separate enclaves into a coalition that drove the single great breakthrough in collective working-class politics and organization” (Cowie and Salvatore 2008, 7).

At the centre of (and indeed a catalyst for) these developments, was, of course, the New Deal. Introduced by Franklin D. Roosevelt as his and the Democratic Party’s response to the Great Depression, the New Deal ushered in a period of important economic programs and reforms, beginning in 1933. A number of these reforms were geared toward regulating workplace relations, and within the first few years, especially in the mid-1930s, New Deal legislation generally favoured workers and unions. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA or Wagner Act) of 1945 was particularly important, as it established, among other things, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which had “broad powers to oversee the certification of unions and to penalize employers who did not accept the rights of employees

⁵⁰ There were, of course, exceptions, including (and perhaps especially) the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) and the Knights of Labor (Voss 1993).

to organize unions” (Goldfield 1989, 1258). As Cowie and Salvatore (2008, 7), echoing many other labour historians, observe, this legislation represented a significant departure from traditional federal labour policy:

For the first time in American political history, the federal government actively supported the right of working people to organize collectively to achieve their goals. The [NLRA] affirmed the right to organize and provided rules of conduct for, and oversight of, union elections—an unprecedented set of legal protections. The Supreme Court even temporarily abandoned a deep history of opposition to the collective interests of working people and upheld the Wagner Act in 1937.⁵¹

Another particularly significant piece of legislation that was passed in the early years of the New Deal was the Social Security Act of 1935, which included pensions for the elderly. This Act has often been regarded as effectively marking the beginning of the U.S. welfare state, and despite its many limitations, it was undoubtedly a significant departure from previous federal social policy (Ferguson 1989; Fones-Wolf 1994; Wall 2008).

What is most significant about the New Deal for our purposes is that it represented a challenge to the ideological underpinnings of the capitalist ‘land of opportunity’ interpretation. For example, taken together, the two pieces of legislation just identified—the Wagner and Social Security Acts—can be seen as having represented an alternative ‘land of opportunity’ equation; they not only undermined the primacy of capitalism in certain respects, but also symbolized the legitimate (and even crucial) roles of the state and organized labour in the ‘land of opportunity’. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the New Deal, along with the nation’s founding traditions, would figure prominently in the social democratic framing of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in the mid-1940s. However,

⁵¹ Notably, not all labour historians have offered an optimistic assessment of the effects of this legislation on American unions; one of the most significant works representing an opposing viewpoint is that of Christopher Tomlins (1985), who is largely critical of the influence of the NLRA (and the New Deal in general) on organized labour (See Archer (2013b) for a recent discussion and assessment of Tomlins’ work and influence in relation to some of the more recent literature). In the next chapter, I will be discussing various aspects of the New Deal and of its role and significance for organized labour (particularly the CIO) in the early to mid-1940s; however, due to the nature of my enquiry, I will be engaging with a different (albeit related) subset of the New Deal literature.

their framing efforts—and indeed the framing efforts in all three cases explored in this study—would also be greatly influenced (and constrained) by the legacy of earlier capitalist ‘land of opportunity’ narratives, as well as by the ‘updated’ capitalist narratives that were offered by the opponents of the New Deal.

The Capitalist ‘Land of Opportunity’ Narrative in the Early New Deal Era

The future in America is bewildering, yes. But it is bewildering not because there are no new frontiers...but because there are so many.

-National Association of Manufacturers, *The Future in America*

In the late 1930s, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), joined by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and various other business organizations, began a public relations campaign aimed, among other things, to turn back the New Deal tide that had formed in the wake of the Great Depression (Fones-Wolf 1994; Wall 2008). As part of that effort, the NAM produced a series of seven pamphlets, titled the *You and Industry* series. One of those pamphlets, “The Future in America”, was summarized in an NAM advertisement as: “A forecast for America’s ‘tomorrow’; convincing evidence that this is still the land of opportunity”.⁵² The early pages of the pamphlet focused on the accomplishments of American industry in the recent decades, listing examples of the variety of consumer goods and products, which “did not exist fifty or sixty years ago, yet today...are an essential part of American life as we know it.” “American inventiveness, operating under an American system of free enterprise, giving the greatest encouragement to individual initiative”, it continued, “has set up for us the highest standard of living the world has ever known” (NAM 1936a, 4-5).

The ‘land of opportunity’ idea expressed in this pamphlet epitomized the capitalist interpretation of the post-Great Depression era. The centrality of capitalism in the NAM’s

⁵² In: Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor.: *Hearings pursuant to S. Res. 266 (74th Cong.,) Before a Subcomm. of the Comm. on Education and Labor United States Sen, 75th Cong., 3rd Sess. Appendix (1938).*

depiction here is clear; as historians have observed, beginning in the 1930s, the term ‘free enterprise’ became a substitute term for capitalism—one that was pushed especially enthusiastically by supporters of laissez-faire style capitalism (Fones-Wolf 1994; McClosky and Zaller 1984; Wall 2008; Williams 1976).⁵³ In the United States, the NAM represented one of the most active (and organized) efforts in this regard (Tedlow 1976; Wall 2008).

While the statements were not always as explicit as the one above, the presumption that the United States was the land of opportunity because of its capitalist system, was a central theme in the literature of the NAM and other business groups. Also evident from the literature was the NAM’s efforts to push government and organized labour out of the equation. In “The American Way”, another pamphlet of the *Industry* series, the Association emphasized that “Under the American system, the state cannot be the master of its citizens. Until recently, there has been little if any desire on the part of government to assume and perform the actual managerial functions of individual citizens engaged in private enterprise” (NAM 1936b, 1). “The present tendency in that direction”, it warned,

has become so marked as seriously to raise the question of whether and to what extent government shall regulate or actually manage the business of the nation—the employees, the management, the stockholders, whose cooperation is the basis of private enterprise. (ibid., 2)

This statement was clearly targeting the New Deal reforms. But the pamphlet also made more general claims about the problems with government “step[ping] out of [*sic*] its normal role of

⁵³ In his *Key Words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, under the entry ‘capitalism’, Williams (1976, 51) writes that “[i]n [the mid-20th Century], in reaction against socialist argument, the words capitalism and capitalist have often been deliberately replaced by defenders of the system by such phrases as ‘private enterprise’ and ‘free enterprise’.” Scholars who focus specifically on the American context echo this basic observation, but they locate the historical timing of this effort slightly earlier, in the 1930s (eg., Wall 2008, 58; Fones-Wolf 1994). Notably, not all American capitalists were enthusiastic about the reliance on the term ‘free enterprise’ in place of ‘capitalism’. Writing in an editorial that appeared in the February 19, 1943 issue of the *Toledo Blade*, for example, Eric Johnston, who at the time was the president of the United States Chamber of Commerce, wasted no time beating around the bush; “I am for capitalism”, he remarked in the first line of the article, and then went on to lament the fact that the business community was “too mealy-mouthed about the basic principle of our economic system”. “We fear that the word capitalism is unpopular”, he continued, “So we take refuge in a nebulous phrase and talk about the ‘Free Enterprise System’”. As we will see in the next two chapters, however, this rhetorical choice seems to have served business interests quite well, particularly in the early postwar years.

umpire and interven[ing] in the ordinary processes of production and distribution”; such action “either reduces individual incentive, individual ingenuity, and freedom of opportunity to a minimum, or it places brakes upon human freedom. Often it does both.” Moreover, it reminded readers of the nation’s unique status as a ‘classless’ society—a status based on its historical rejection of feudal traditions, and on its system of meritocracy, based on equal opportunity in the marketplace:

In the American system, society is classless. [...] In European society for centuries there has been a tradition that birth determined economic and social status. The American economic system depends upon inventiveness, ingenuity, ability, and hard work, for its successful operation. It cannot limit its personnel to those who are ‘high born’. [...] Carnegie, Schwab, Ford, Chrysler, and thousands of other manufacturers rose from the ranks. It has, therefore, become characteristic of the American way that men should strive to obtain and keep equality of opportunity. The right of the individual to engage in any trade, in the production of any commodity, had to be recognized, if the system of production and distribution was to remain vital under an individualistic system which preserved the liberties of free men. (ibid.)

This message was repeated throughout and beyond the *Industry* pamphlets. In the NAM’s ‘Harmony’ campaign a few years earlier, for example, one leaflet reminded readers that “Nowhere else—under no other flag, and under no other social plan—has the climb from the bottom to the top been made possible to such a degree”.⁵⁴

As for organized labour, the NAM and other groups representing business interests were, in the New Deal era, facing a much more powerful force—both in terms of numbers and in terms of political strength—than their historical counterparts had faced in the years of capitalist industrialization. Although violence and various intimidation tactics used in earlier decades by employers were not abandoned altogether in the 1930s and 1940s, organized business increasingly turned to public relations efforts to delegitimize not just the New Deal in general, but also the gains won by organized labour in particular. (Schickler and Caughey

⁵⁴ “I Knew Him When He Pushed a Wheelbarrow.” In: *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor.: Hearings pursuant to S. Res. 266 (74th Cong.) Before a Subcomm. of the Comm. on Education and Labor United States Sen., 75th Cong., 3rd Sess. Appendix* (1938).

2011; Harris 1982; Tedlow 1976). There were anti-union and anti-strike undertones in the “message of social harmony and consensus at the core of [NAM] campaigns”, although there was plenty of business propaganda being produced that was much more explicit in its targeting of organized labour (Wall 2008, 9; Fones-Wolf 1994). Whether it was implicit or explicit, however, organized labour was frequently pushed out of the equation when the ‘land of opportunity’ idea was invoked. One of the newspaper pages in the NAM ‘Harmony’ campaign, which opened with an appeal to readers to ‘Help protect the name of Labor!’ offers a particularly telling illustration of this.⁵⁵ “The cause of labor and of labouring men has made great strides in America within a few decades”, declared the first lines of the page; “Nowhere else in the world has the workman’s lot been so happy as in this country...the hours so reasonable....the wage scale so high...the opportunities for advancement so favourable.” While there had been “Temporary periods of depression”, followed by recession, the pattern was such that “always when the clouds have blown by, the advance continued onward and upward.” According to the authors of this page,

For this favourable trend we have two things to thank: The enterprise and initiative of American manufacturers and merchants who have no equal in pioneering new inventions and developments. And—quite as important—the co-operation of workmen themselves and their willingness to form a loyal partnership with industry.⁵⁶

In examples like this, it seems clear that the NAM was offering an interpretation of the ‘land of opportunity’ equation that echoed the interpretations offered by opponents of unions during capitalist transition; that is, unions were not a part of the equation.

It is important to point out here that business-led campaigns against unions in the 1930s were met with backlash, and not just from labour circles; in the comparatively pro-labour climate of the early New Deal period, labour leaders had allies in Washington, many

⁵⁵ “Help Protect the Name of Labor!” In: *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor.: Hearings pursuant to S. Res. 266 (74th Cong.) Before a Subcomm. of the Comm. on Education and Labor United States Sen., 75th Cong., 3rd Sess. Appendix (1938).*

⁵⁶ Ibid.

of who sought to curb not only employer violence and intimidation tactics, but also anti-union propaganda. Among those who took special notice and interest in the literature of the NAM and other business groups was Wisconsin Senator Robert M. La Follette Jr., whose special Senate Committee held hearings during the late 1930s examining potential “Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor”. Both the campaigns we have been discussing here—the *You and Industry* series and the ‘Harmony’ campaign—were placed under investigation and scrutiny during these hearings (Tedlow 1976; Wall 2008, 47). This serves to illustrate the fact that those who articulated ideas associated with the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation did not completely monopolize political and ideological space; as will become evident over the next three chapters, however, many of these ideas did become established within American political culture, as evidenced by their prevalence within the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’.

The ‘Fusing Tendency’

The capitalist land of opportunity interpretation of the 19th and early 20th century, expressed by the ‘success philosophers’ and other supporters of capitalist industrialization, often left the state and unions out of the vision (or pushed these to the very edge), and as the material from the NAM illustrates, that interpretation continued to be articulated by some sectors of American society, even in the wake of the Great Depression. Indeed, even at the height of the New Deal era, which saw unprecedented state involvement in economic activity and unprecedented state support for organized labour, the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation prevailed in some circles. This is illustrated by the fact that we can identify clear examples of both aspects of the ‘fusing’ tendency described earlier—the conflation of American political ideals and capitalism, and the re-writing of capitalism into all aspects of American history—in business literature from this period.

Once again, NAM literature proves to be a particularly useful source of examples. On the first point, *The American Way* pamphlet declared that

Socially, [the American system] preserves freedom of opportunity for the individual to strive, to accumulate, and to enjoy the fruits of his accomplishments. Politically, it results in what we call a ‘democracy’ but what really is a rule of limited powers granted by individuals, through written constitutions, to state and federal government. (NAM 1936b, 1)

Wall’s (2008) research of the organization’s archives reveals the extent to which this type of message, which was pervasive in NAM literature, was a conscious, deliberate decision; one staff memo she cites, for example, stated that “Free enterprise [will not] be saved as the result of appeals in the name of free enterprise alone” (cited in Wall 2008, 58). The memo also emphasized that

The public must be convinced that free enterprise is as much an indivisible part of democracy and the source of as many blessings and benefits as are our other freedoms of speech, press and religion. (ibid., 58-9)

Wall also notes that the memo suggested that “[i]f the NAM’s program ‘can emphasize effectively the inseparability of ‘democracy’ and ‘free enterprise,’ it may well be that the wave of enthusiasm and support for the former will carry the latter to unprecedented heights in public esteem.” (ibid., 59). One of the campaigns that represented this effort was the ‘Tripod of Freedom’, a “public relations symbol designed to illustrate graphically that ‘individual freedom in this country rests on a tripartite foundation....One leg of that tripod is representative democracy, the second is civil and religious liberty, and the third is free private enterprise” (Tedlow 1976, 34).

The ‘fusing tendency’ of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation entails an assumption of the inextricability of American capitalism and democracy, not only in the contemporary sense but also historically. The NAM’s leaflet distributed on the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution of the United States alluded to this historical interpretation. “Under the Constitution there has been created better living, more of the

comforts and luxuries of life, for more people than anywhere else in the world”, declared the leaflet.⁵⁷ “Under the Constitution there has grown a land of opportunity, drawing millions of people from other countries to our shores.”⁵⁸ The leaflet went on to identify various indicators that American living standards were the highest on earth, and emphasized that the Constitution had made this possible—“the Constitution of the United States, which today, as 150 years ago, guarantees freedom, liberty, opportunity for all”.⁵⁹ In this particular leaflet, the NAM exhibited the historical fusing tendency not by specifically highlighting the capitalist history, but by emphasizing continuity in the last 150 years; thus, it obscured the potential conflict between some of the ideals expressed in the Constitution and the industrial capitalist system that developed, in large measure, after the document had been signed.

To provide one final illustration of the ‘fusing tendency’ of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation, I want to return to the exchange between Goodwin Watson and representative Joe Starnes during the 1943 congressional hearing cited at the beginning of this chapter. Immediately following Watson’s statement regarding the purpose of ‘New America’, and his contention that the ultimate goal was to contribute to “realizing the American dream and the American ideal”, Starnes responded:

Dr. Watson, at that point you will concede, of course, that when the American Government was set up, when its founding fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States and adopted it and put into operation our system of government, it was put in under a capitalist system of economics, with the profit motive and with the interest motive...All of those things were in there.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ “The Constitution of the United States.” In: *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor.: Hearings pursuant to S. Res. 266 (74th Cong.) Before a Subcomm. of the Comm. on Education and Labor United States Sen., 76th Cong., 1st Sess. Part 35 Supplementary Exhibits* (1939).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda activities in the U.S.: Hearings on H. Res. 282 Before a Special Comm. on Un-American Activities, 78th Cong., 1st Sess. 32* (1943) (Statement of Joe Starnes, Congressman).

“That was our economic set-up, you mean, in the eighteenth century? There are many changes”, was Watson’s reply.⁶¹ Starnes then went on to specify that the right to own and operate private property was a right expressly written into the Constitution, and accused Watson and others in New America of “trying to write a new concept rather than to adhere to the traditional democratic action of government that we had enjoyed from the beginning of this country”.⁶² Watson’s retort was that “to alter one provision of the Constitution does not mean to reject the form of government”.⁶³ And in response to Watson’s observation, Starnes exclaimed that the ‘New America’ article regarding its goals and policies, which he had read “quite carefully”, did indeed represent such a rejection:

I find no single word in there that refers to a change in the Constitution of the United States of America so that by constitutional methods you would adopt the capitalistic system, the profit motive, and the system of economics on which the Government was founded.⁶⁴

Starnes’ accusations of Watson’s ‘Un-Americanism’ during the congressional hearing clearly represented the type of ‘fusing tendency’ evident in the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, and it was also the type of accusation that was frequently made by the Dies Committee. But while the conflation of American political ideals and capitalism was a theme that was central to the discourse of groups like the NAM and members of the Dies committee in the interwar period, it was not exclusive to them; nor was it exclusive to the interwar years. As I will attempt to demonstrate in the empirical chapters that follow, variations of the ‘fusing tendency’ would be prominent in American political culture in the postwar decades as well.

⁶¹ Ibid. (Statement of Goodwin B. Watson, Chief Analyst, Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service).

⁶² Ibid. (Statement of Joe Starnes, Congressman).

⁶³ Ibid. (Statement of Goodwin B. Watson, Chief Analyst, Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service).

⁶⁴ Ibid. (Statement of Joe Starnes, Congressman).

7. Testing the Limits of Ideological Elasticity: American Dream Frames and the ‘Capitalist Land of Opportunity’ Interpretation

In chapter 1, I described the ‘American Dream’ as an ideology that is founded upon the claim that the United States is a land of opportunity, and I noted that while this general statement does not in itself conflict with the conventional wisdom in the extant literature, my conceptualization departs from the latter in identifying a particular *interpretation* of the ‘land of opportunity’ claim at the core of the ideology. In the present chapter, I have sought to delineate the basic features of this interpretation—which I call the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation—through an examination of its historical origins and development. The core features of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation, I have suggested, revolve around the basic assumption that capitalism is a necessary (albeit insufficient) factor contributing to the nation’s ‘land of opportunity’ status. This interpretation also identifies other contributing factors, including democracy, social egalitarianism, and material abundance, but what makes the capitalist interpretation distinctive is the crucial role it ascribes to capitalism. I have also suggested that the capitalist interpretation is based on a narrative that has (re)-written capitalism into the nation’s political history, with the result being that in this interpretation, the American political tradition is inseparable from its capitalist system.

We have seen that the conventional wisdom holds that the power (and appeal) of the ‘American Dream’ lies in part in its definitional elasticity—that is, in the fact that its basic tenets can be interpreted in various different ways, and thus can be invoked to support a range of different political projects. According to the analysis provided in most scholarship on the ‘American Dream’, the power of the ideology also stems from the fact that it is rooted in broadly shared (but also inherently ambiguous) ideals, which are inscribed in the nation’s founding documents. Because of this ambiguity, different groups, with competing visions,

can all legitimately claim that their particular projects for political change represent the road to fulfilment of the ‘American Dream’—as long as they invoke those ideals in some way or another. In this line of analysis, the ‘American Dream’ is as easily described as an ideology about what the United States *should be* as it is an ideology based on assumptions about the United States as it presently exists. In the conventional wisdom, therefore, the *capitalist* ‘land of opportunity’ interpretation that I have identified as the foundation of the ideology, would be viewed as only one among many possible and contested interpretations, and one that is subject to challenges from those who view the ‘land of opportunity’ description as based on an idealized, rather than an existing, America.

In the next three chapters, we will be examining three cases of social movements appropriating the language of the ‘American Dream’ in a manner that represented precisely such a challenge. That is, they all invoked the language of the ‘American Dream’ in a manner that challenged the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. Through the lens of the framing perspective, and using the conceptual framework provided by Westby (2005), I will demonstrate that the framing activities in each of these cases represented *strategic framing that appropriates hegemonic ideology*. In our review of Westby’s framework in chapter 1, we noted that two types of such appropriation are relevant to this study: ‘exposure of contradiction’ and ‘inversion of meaning’. The latter category, recall, applies to frames that draw from hegemonic ideology in ways that represent a fundamental challenge to its legitimacy, whereas ‘exposure of contradiction’ applies to frames that tend to uphold such legitimacy, while nonetheless identifying the ideology’s “lived contradictions”. In the most basic sense, the distinction between these two variants with respect to the ‘American Dream’ ideology (as defined here) boils down to this: American Dream ‘gap’ frames that represent inversion of meaning would contain oppositional elements that either directly or indirectly target the capitalist system as a (or the) cause of the identified gap(s), and offer a prognosis

that transforms the capitalist component of the ‘land of opportunity’ equation (or removes it altogether).⁶⁵ Frames that are based exclusively on the tactic of exposing contradiction, by contrast, would refrain from targeting capitalism in the diagnosis and would either implicitly or explicitly endorse capitalism in the prognosis.

Crucially, however, frames can represent a combination of *both* strategies, in which case the frame also has a more oppositional relationship to the hegemonic ideology than frames that remain within the realm of ‘exposing contradictions’. Indeed, the framing explored in the next chapters most often represented this combination. To different degrees and with varying consistency, movement actors in each case offered American dream ‘gap’ frames that not only exposed contradictions between promise and practice in American society, but which also challenged the very claims underlying the promise. These frames did not altogether reject the image of the United States as a potential ‘land of opportunity’, but they did reject the prevailing (capitalist) interpretation of this image. These challenges were rooted in social democratic principles, including the perception of “states as the guardian of society”, and the belief that ‘economic imperatives’ should “take a back seat to social ones” (Berman 2006, 17). In the case of some of the ‘frame entrepreneurs’, the challenges were rooted in more radical hopes, including the goal of not merely transforming, but eventually transcending, capitalism. But what is most important for us is that the frames constructed in each of these cases included frames that rejected the positive role ascribed to capitalism in the

⁶⁵ It should be pointed out that Westby’s discussion of the ‘inversion of meaning’ category appears to suggest that the category applies primarily (if not exclusively) to frames that offer ‘indirect’ or ‘hidden’ challenges to the hegemonic ideology. Indeed, at one point he states that “Framing that rests on an inverted understanding of hegemonic ideology... does not express the grievance in a straightforward unambiguous statement” (228). In the cases examined here, we will encounter frames that clearly represented attempts at ‘inversion of meaning’ of the ‘American Dream’ but some of these frames were actually quite unambiguous about what they represented. Therefore, the ‘inversion of meaning’ category takes on a broader formulation in this project than the one found in the original typology offered by Westby. It is also worth pointing out that Westby suggests that frames representing inversion of meaning would likely be common primarily in cases where social movements operate under authoritarian regimes. In fact, he proposes that there might be a relationship “between regime types and the different forms of hegemonic appropriation”, and that “democratic polities might facilitate framing featuring *exposure of contradictions* [whereas] authoritarian regimes may encourage *inversion of meaning* appropriations” (230). The cases examined in this thesis suggest that his distinction here may need to be qualified, since we will encounter both types of appropriation within the same (democratic) polity.

prevailing ‘land of opportunity’ image in the ‘American Dream’, and thus entailed attempts at fundamentally redefining the ideology;⁶⁶ in Westby’s framework, these social democratic frames represented attempts at both exposing contradiction and inverting the meaning of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation.

‘American Dream’ Gap Frames

In the chapters that follow, we will encounter three different but related variants of the ‘American Dream’ gap frames that represented attempts at ‘inversion of meaning’: the ‘American political traditions’ gap, the ‘economic security’ gap, and the ‘equal opportunity’ gap. Broadly speaking, the ‘American political traditions’ gap frames emphasized the fact that American society had not yet fully lived up to the political ideals upon which the nation had been founded; the ‘economic security’ gap frames emphasized the fact that American society had the material and productive capacity to provide economic security for all, but that it did not have the proper institutions to do so; and the ‘equal opportunity’ gap frames emphasized the fact that the benefits of the ‘land of opportunity’ had not been extended to all, and therefore the pursuit of the ‘American Dream’ was unjustifiably closed off to parts of the population.⁶⁷

Now, in principle, none of these gap frames are inherently social democratic, nor do they inherently pose a direct challenge to the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation; indeed, in chapters 3 and 5 we shall encounter variants of these gap frames that were clearly *not* social democratic, and which in some instances appeared to reinforce the claims of the

⁶⁶ Insofar as social democracy represents an ideological challenge to capitalism, in that it seeks to “extend the principles of freedom and equality valued by democrats in the political sphere to the organization of the economy and society, chiefly by opposing the inequality and oppression created by laissez-faire capitalism” (Jackson 2013, 1), the efforts to ‘social democratize’ the American Dream clearly entailed an attempt to redefine it.

⁶⁷ The ‘American political traditions’ gap frame is the most general variant, and in fact in some cases the other two variants were subsumed within it—but this was not always the case, and therefore it is important to keep these frames analytically separate.

‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. These variants remained strictly within the realm of ‘exposing contradiction’; the frames emphasized discrepancies between the (land of opportunity) promise of the ‘American Dream’ and the existing practices in American society, but the contradictions identified in the diagnosis left the capitalist system out of the oppositional spotlight, and the solutions proposed in the prognosis either explicitly or implicitly accepted a capitalist route to closing the gap between promise and reality.

The frames we will be examining in the remaining chapters, then, vary not only in terms of which type(s) of ‘American Dream’ gap they represent, but also in terms of their relationship to the ‘American Dream’ ideology. Although each movement sought programmatic goals that were (at least initially) social democratic and which in theory conflicted with the ideological assumptions of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, some of the uses of ‘American Dream’ language actually obscured this conflict, by offering frames that pointed away from systemic factors and strictly represented ‘exposure of contradiction’. One thing that will become apparent in our examination of frame construction processes is that this appears to have been due, at least in part, to movement actors’ perceptions that going beyond ‘exposing contradiction’ was unfeasible and unwise in the given historical context. Another thing that will become apparent, when we examine processes of frame reception and diffusion, is that while most of the framing activities across all three cases produced disappointing results, the few frames that did achieve resonance were those that represented (strictly) ‘exposure of contradiction’.

I hope to demonstrate that the patterns that emerge with respect to the framing processes and outcomes provide empirical support for the definitional analysis of the ‘American Dream’ presented above. In particular, the cases will demonstrate that the ‘American Dream’ is not as capacious an ideology as is commonly presumed, and that a crucial, yet previously unacknowledged, source of its boundaries is its foundational idea—the

‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. Furthermore, I hope to demonstrate that one reason these boundaries have been so difficult to penetrate is because the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation is not exclusive to the American Dream; indeed, its prevalence extends to the broader discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered the historical roots and development of the American Dream’s foundational idea—the idea that the United States is the ‘land of opportunity’. I began with a brief review of the accounts provided in the extant ‘American Dream’ literature, and I pointed out that the conventional wisdom regarding the ideology’s capaciousness is to a certain extent informed by prevailing (but problematic) conceptions of the ideology’s history. In the remainder of the chapter, I focused on highlighting a particular version of the ‘land of opportunity’ idea, which emerged and developed over the course of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. This version—which I have termed the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation—celebrated capitalism as one of the fundamental features making the United States the land of opportunity. This is the version that, I argue in this thesis, underpins the ‘American Dream’. After highlighting the core features and early expressions of this interpretation, I turned to the post-Depression era, taking us to the decade immediately preceding the period that will be covered in the empirical chapters that follow, and I provided examples of the (revised and ‘updated’) capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, drawing primarily from the literature produced by the NAM. Finally, in section 7, I introduced the three basic variants of ‘American Dream’ gap frames that we will encounter in this study, and I explained how, in principle, each of these variants might represent challenges to the ideology as defined here in this chapter. As we turn now to the case studies, we shall see that movement actors in each case attempted such a challenge, and we will consider how and why each of these challenges fell short.

Chapter 3: The CIO's Postwar Program

I. BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

The 'lost alternative' of the 1940s was probably not labor's emergence as an equal partner within the industrial economy. It was, rather, the survival of an independent social and political force capable of raising challenges to existing ideas and institutions from a position of relative weakness.

- Alan Brinkley⁶⁸

During the 1952 U.S. general election campaign, the Political Action Committee of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO-PAC) distributed a booklet entitled *Speakers' Book of Facts*. One section of the booklet, entitled "Facts on twenty years", opened by citing a *New York Times* editorial published earlier that year:

‘The United States,’ report[s] Will Lissner in the *New York Times*, ‘has undergone a social revolution in the last four decades, and particularly since the late Thirties. The marginal worker, once regarded as the forgotten man of American capitalism, has been the greatest beneficiary of recent gains in national output. The American dream of rising in the income pyramid to comfortable levels of living has been realized by millions of families...’⁶⁹

After further discussion of Lissner's article, the pamphlet observed that

The American ‘revolution’ of the past 20 years has been a bloodless and peaceful revolution. There has been no murderous uprising, no desperate revolt of the masses against a wicked ruling class. It has been handled under the regime of Presidents who have led us to a better capitalism—not to socialism or communism—but to what Lissner in the *New York Times* calls a ‘modern’ capitalism.⁷⁰

The CIO's optimistic assessment of the nation's accomplishments of the last twenty years in this pamphlet obscures the extent to which those years had been marked by disappointment

⁶⁸ *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

⁶⁹ Congress of Industrial Organizations, *A Speakers' Book of Facts*, 1952, Congress of Industrial Organizations Printed Ephemera Collection, Box 2, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, 263 (Collection hereafter cited in notes as CIO-PE).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 264-5.

and failures for the organization—in the legislative arena, in the electoral arena, and at the bargaining table. The CIO, and the labour movement more generally, had certainly enjoyed numerous successes—especially under the Roosevelt administration—but from the vantage point of 1952, many of the successes had already begun to be reversed. Nonetheless, the authors of the *Speakers' Book of Facts* chose to focus on the positives; one of those positives was 'modern' capitalism—"That kind of capitalism is the strongest in human history, because it is capitalism that spreads the benefits, that seeks to wipe out poverty and unnecessary distress, because it is socially responsible".⁷¹ That kind of capitalism, according to the CIO-PAC pamphlet, was one of the reasons that "the American dream...has been realized by millions of families".

In some respects, the CIO of 1952 was unrecognizable from the CIO that had first emerged in the 1930s, a product of the industrial union movement that had split from the American Federation of Labor (AFL). This chapter examines some facets of this transformation of the CIO, through an analysis of its framing strategies in the 1940s. The changing identity of the CIO, particularly the decline of radicalism, has been the subject of extensive treatment by social scientists, most of whom identify the 'turbulent thirties' as the heyday of industrial unionism (eg., Davis 1986; Moody 1988; Zieger 1995). However, it is also generally acknowledged that, even in the early to mid-40s, not all signs pointed to the CIO looking like it would by the following decade. The CIO of the early 1940s still retained radical elements, including socialists and communists, and while this would not last for very long, of course, the social democratic influence persisted; the goal of transforming American capitalism in the form of social democracy represented the views of a core group of CIO staff and leaders. For this core, the vision of the 'American Dream' that they held was built around

⁷¹ Ibid., 266.

a very different American political economy than the ‘modern capitalism’ that the CIO would be celebrating in the 1952 *Speaker’s Book of Facts*.

Wartime Postwar Visions

If the 1940’s were not as ‘turbulent’ as the decade that came before, these were still years during which a lot was at stake for the CIO and the labour movement more generally. In the latter years of World War II, especially, the question of what the American political and economic landscape might look like after the war seemed to be an open one (Katznelson 1986; Lichtenstein 1989). The New Deal reforms of the 1930s had brought about the creation of institutions that were unprecedented in American history, not only in terms of government social protection but also in terms of benefiting organized labour. Moreover, the country’s involvement in the War also—albeit to a lesser degree—had prompted institutional experimentation that represented changes to the status quo in American economic policy (Graham 1976). Even as Roosevelt had switched from being ‘Dr. New Deal’ to ‘Dr. Win-the-War’, there were some indications that organized labour might stand to gain from wartime mobilization in some respects (Lichtenstein 1982; 1989). Newly created institutions such as the War Labor Board, gave unions a voice at the decision-making tables, and if nothing else, they offered a symbolic signal of the growing acceptance of the legitimacy of organized labour. “As a result of the wartime mobilization”, Lichtenstein (1989) observes, “the United States seemed to advance toward the kind of labor-backed corporatism that would later characterize social policy in northern Europe and Scandinavia”. (124).

Once the end of hostilities appeared to be drawing near, Americans were asking many questions about the transition to a peacetime economy. Would Dr. Win-the-War go back to being Dr. New Deal, or would he choose to don a new hat altogether? Was Roosevelt’s administration even the right one to lead the nation into peacetime? Would wartime

mobilization arrangements be abandoned at the end of hostilities or would these arrangements form the basis of peacetime production? Different groups held competing views on these and related matters, and well before the war had drawn to a close, they were busy formulating and presenting programs that represented their visions for postwar America.

In many cases, these programs were framed using the language of the ‘American Dream’. One of the most vocal organizations was the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), who we introduced in chapter 2, and who many in the CIO viewed as one of labour’s greatest opponents. As we saw in chapter 2, one of the NAM’s core pieces of literature in its campaigns against the New Deal was the ‘You and Industry Series’, which included the pamphlet entitled ‘The Future in America’—a pamphlet that was advertised by the organization as providing “convincing evidence that this is still the land of opportunity”.⁷² The primary reason for this enduring status according to the pamphlet, was the ‘American system of free enterprise’. This message remained central to the NAM’s publicity into the war years and beyond, as the organization sought not only the reversal of many New Deal reforms, but also of many of the planning-oriented wartime arrangements identified above (Fones-Wolf 1994; Wall 2008). The way forward for the nation, according to the organization, was to return to the three ‘pillars of freedom’ that had made the United States the land of opportunity in the first place—including and especially the pillar of ‘free private enterprise’ (Wall 2008, 23).

The NAM’s postwar vision epitomized the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. It was a vision of “class harmony and consumer prosperity—guaranteed by business, not by government” (Wall 2008, 449). This vision received some support from important segments of the public and the policy community, as will be demonstrated in this chapter. Many of its themes were also echoed by the AFL. While the organizations obviously

⁷² In: Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor.: *Hearings pursuant to S. Res. 266 (74th Cong.,) Before a Subcomm. of the Comm. on Education and Labor United States Sen, 75th Cong., 3rd Sess. Appendix (1938).*

held differing ideas about the role of unions, the AFL tended to espouse a remarkably similar interpretation of the American Dream to that of the NAM, especially in terms of emphasizing the fundamental importance of free enterprise; “*free enterprise is an essential part of the democratic way of life*”, read one line of the AFL’s postwar program.⁷³

In this chapter, I focus on the postwar program and framing strategies of the CIO. Like many other groups, the CIO invoked the language and imagery of the ‘American Dream’ in advocating its postwar vision. That vision, initially, espoused a number of social democratic features—features that stood in tension with the claims embodied in the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation underlying the ‘American Dream’. In what sense could the program, in its early formulation, be called ‘social democratic’? A few important characteristics stand out. Firstly, there was a strong emphasis on the concept of economic planning (Lichtenstein 1989; Graham 1976; Meyer 1944). The justification for planning, from a social democratic standpoint, tends to rest on arguments that directly challenge the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation; whereas the latter interpretation places ultimate moral authority in market-determined outcomes, social democracy seeks “the extension of state planning mechanisms to interject social, *as opposed to* market, priorities in the capitalist accumulation process” (Katznelson 1978, 78). The CIO also stressed that labour should be centrally involved in the planning machinery, advocating such things as tripartite industry governance, and in this way, too, the organization’s program represented a potential challenge to the free market oriented formula for prosperity underlying the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation.

Another ‘social democratic’ feature of the CIO’s initial postwar program was its commitment to the creation of a state-sponsored social safety net. In the early to mid-1940’s,

⁷³ “American Federation of Labor Postwar Program,” in *American Federation of Labor Postwar Forum: Complete Report*, 12-13 April 1944, 1. <http://www.archive.org/details/AmericanFederationOfLaborPostwarForumHotelCommodoreNewYorkCity->.

the organization was actively involved in drafting and lobbying for various bills that would have brought about a welfare state resembling something much closer to the welfare states associated with the European social democracies. The CIO's early efforts in this regard represented efforts to 'push away the market', and thus were in direct conflict with the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, which emphasizes that market allocations are just, and that the type of compensation offered by social democratic welfare states are not necessary.

The social democratic characteristics of the CIO program will be drawn out more clearly in the remainder of this chapter; the basic point to take away here is that initially, the organization espoused a vision for postwar America that was comparable to ideas circulating among social democrats across the Atlantic—that welfare states should guarantee “basic subsistence... ‘as a moral right of membership in a human community’ rather than depending haphazardly on one’s position in the marketplace”, and that “political forces should control economic ones” (Berman 2007, 181)⁷⁴. Despite these features of the CIO's postwar program, however, most of the CIO literature in support of the program obscured its social democratic nature. Indeed, however much its goals differed from groups like the AFL and (much more so) the NAM, the majority of the CIO's framing of its postwar program seemed to echo the latter's emphasis on the centrality of capitalism in the ‘land of opportunity’. The CIO's literature made a case for its program through American Dream gap frames, emphasizing the ‘economic security’ gap in particular; but it was only in some of the earliest literature on its postwar program, (most of which was never published or which was altered before publication) that those frames challenged the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. For the most part, the CIO's frames remained well within the boundaries of that interpretation,

⁷⁴ Berman attributes the inner quote here to Polanyi (1944).

even though this resulted in inconsistencies with the social democratic thrust of the its postwar agenda.

Chapter Structure

The next section will provide an overview of the origins of the CIO's postwar program, and will introduce the key organizational bodies in charge of creating and promoting that program. Part II is dedicated to identifying and examining the gap frames in CIO material pertaining to its postwar program, during the mid 1940s. Section 3 will examine the 'equal opportunity' gap and section 4 will examine the 'economic security' gap. The literature examined in section 4 is of primary importance, for it is with respect to the framing of the 'economic security' gap that we identify variation in terms of how the different frames relate to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. In Part III, the focus turns to examining the framing failures of the CIO's postwar program. Section 5 examines the processes of frame construction. Drawing on evidence from personal correspondence, planning documents and meeting records, I demonstrate that the framing strategies were at least partly a response by leaders to the perceived prominence, in American political culture, of ideas associated with the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. I also attempt to show how these ideas figured prominently in the discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism', and that this discursive opportunity structure therefore constrained leaders' framing decisions in ways that are crucial for understanding the nature of the literature produced during this period. Section 6 considers the role of other discursive opportunity structures in this period, particularly those provided by the wartime context and the New Deal, and I argue that while these may have been sources of opportunity for social democratic framing, they were not as stable as—and indeed may have been weakened by—the discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism'. In section 7, I consider the framing dynamics in relation to the longer-term ideological shift of the CIO, particularly with

respect to its abandonment of most of the social democratic principles that were embodied in the early postwar program. In that section, I explain how the framing processes might have contributed to this shift.

Many existing accounts of the CIO and the CIO-PAC have given some attention to the organization's literature, and have identified certain important implications of the consensual nature of that literature. One could point, for example, to Zieger's (1995) observation that PAC literature "reflected the CIO's general movement away from raw, class-conscious politics toward a more pluralistic conception of labor's goals" (186). Similarly, Fraser (1991) notes that "PAC propaganda...deliberately avoided the class antimonies of the [Non-partisan] League's⁷⁵ 1936 inflammatory prose. Indeed, it was pacific, celebratory, and consensual" (512). My analysis of the CIO material builds on these analyses, although I depart from them in examining the use of 'American Dream' language, and in examining this through the lens of the social movement framing approach. Moreover, this chapter goes further than existing studies by asking *why* the CIO's literature looked the way it did, and whether this phenomenon can help us understand the CIO's shedding of many of its remaining social democratic layers in this period. Most importantly, this chapter seeks answers to these questions by examining the dynamics of frame construction—dynamics that have thus far been given little systematic attention in the existing literature. In the process of addressing these questions, I hope to illuminate the ways in which the ideology of the 'American Dream'—as defined in chapter 2—was prevalent in the discursive opportunity structure provided by Americanism. And I will seek to demonstrate how this discursive opportunity structure might have constrained the CIO, and may have thus contributed to the 'lost opportunity' of the 1940s.

⁷⁵ The short-lived Labor's Non-Partisan League was created by Sidney Hillman and John L. Lewis in 1936 and was, in certain ways, the precursor to the PAC (Fraser 1989).

2. Origins of the Postwar Program: Key People & Strategy

The nascent CIO program represented a broadly social democratic program that had the potential to significantly transform American society in the long run; as was indicated above, however, this program contained some degree of continuity with the social and economic policies of the times. The ideas circulating among CIO leaders and staffers during the early 1940s included calls for building a substantive and far-reaching social safety net—which, essentially, entailed an extension and expansion of New Deal programs; and for tripartite governance structures—which in important ways drew from the model offered by the War Labor Board (Lichtenstein 1982). And, insofar as the CIO sought the creation of a national planning agency, some staff pointed to the National Resources Planning Board, created by President Roosevelt in 1934, as a practical template (though they felt that it would need more muscle than the NRPB, which functioned only as an advisory body).⁷⁶ Even the early flirtations with possible government-owned and government run industries, could be linked to the experience of war production; CIO literature, initially, emphasized that the production facilities created during war represented a “new public domain”, and as one staff member suggested, “In many instances sound public policy may require continued government possession and operation”.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Soon after Congress had passed legislation terminating the NRPB, the CIO Executive Board adopted a resolution stating that “Congress has killed the [NRPB] without holding any committee hearings of its own on post-war problems.” It then went on to state that, “[a] new agency should immediately be established to plan for peace at home”. At that same Executive Board meeting, J. Raymond Walsh, speaking on behalf of the Post-War Planning Committee (which had drafted the aforementioned resolution), explained that “the breakdown of the National Resources Planning Board, unsatisfactory, perhaps, but albeit the only definite agency of the American government set up to concern itself primarily with domestic plans of post-war days—the committee felt that that breakdown necessitated on our part which we might push in any way at our disposal for the putting up by the American government of another agency whose responsibility it would be to carry forward such plans as are stated there” (Minutes of the Executive Board of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, 7-8 July, 1943, Reel 5, 154-5, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Microfilm Collection).

⁷⁷ Katherine Ellickson to J. Raymond Walsh, Memorandum, 7 September, 1943, Katherine Pollak Ellickson Papers, Box 33, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, p.6 (Collection hereafter cited in notes as KPE Papers).

Thus, those who were in charge of formulating the CIO program, and who sought to push American society in the direction of social democracy, were not starting off with an entirely blank slate. At the same time, while the existing New Deal social policies, and elements of the wartime economic coordination structure, represented a starting point, they were just that—a *starting* point. New Deal programs had introduced much-needed social security in the wake of the Great Depression, but the programs were neither sufficient nor widespread enough; what many within the CIO sought was legislation that would create a strong, permanent, social safety net for all citizens. Similarly, the War Labor Board had given labour formal representation in decision-making circles, but the business-dominated nature of this and other planning boards too often resulted in labour's voice being drowned out (Brinkley 1989, 103); what the CIO sought was recognition not only as a participant, but as a strong, if not equal, partner at the table. Furthermore, the existing bodies had been erected as temporary arrangements; what the CIO sought was a more permanent system of tripartism for the postwar era.

On these and various other issues, there was certainly disagreement and debate within the organization right from the onset. Yet, even if the leadership did not necessarily agree on specifics of the program, they shared a common sense, in the midst of the war, of the importance of putting out a general program that represented CIO thinking on postwar issues. CIO leaders and staff also began thinking about strategies for ensuring that the CIO's goals would be met. As one staff member wrote in a memo shortly after the CIO had released its first general statement of goals in its 1943 'Resolution on Post-War Planning',

CIO activities in connection with post war planning should presumably be directed to two main ends: a. Securing types of action that will help achieve these goals. b. Educating and securing support of workers and other groups.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Katherine Ellickson to J. Raymond Walsh, Memorandum, 15 July 1943, KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 7.

The key means through which the CIO would pursue the first end, were lobbying for favourable legislation and political action. Among those at the forefront of these efforts were the Department of Research and Education as well as the Political Action Committee. These two CIO bodies were also the main sources of the national CIO's speeches, pamphlets and other literature pertaining to its postwar program, and therefore they were also directly engaged in activities geared toward the second end identified above. Because the leadership and staff belonging to these two bodies were, along with the CIO Executive Board, ultimately responsible for the decisions not only regarding the content of the postwar program, but also how it was framed, they will be the focus of this chapter.

Department of Research and Education

The CIO Department of Research and Education was primarily responsible for background research and the formulation of the CIO program, and was centrally involved in the creation of literature and speechwriting in support of the program. The Department staff who worked on the program did so primarily under the guidance and direction of CIO leaders belonging to the relevant standing committees. During the latter years of the war, the CIO Executive Board established two separate committees charged with various important duties related to the creation and dissemination of the organization's postwar program. The first, the Post-War Planning Committee, was created in 1943, and was headed by John Brophy, Clinton Golden, and Research Division Director, J. Raymond Walsh. As members of this committee, these men were "entrusted with special responsibility for developing plans and guiding the organization as it confronts the problems of post-war".⁷⁹ Between 1943 and 1944, the Post-War Planning Committee, with the assistance of the Research and Education

⁷⁹ Philip Murray, Report to the Sixth Constitutional Convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, *Sixth Constitutional Convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations*, November 1-5, 1943, 86.

Department staff⁸⁰, prepared a variety of reports and documents related to postwar social and economic issues; most importantly, they prepared a general statement outlining the CIO postwar ‘program’, which would eventually be reproduced in a variety of speeches and pamphlets.⁸¹

A second committee that was directly involved in questions concerning the postwar program was the ‘Reconversion Committee’, which was set up by the Executive Board in June, 1944, and which served as a “staff arm” of CIO President Philip Murray. A committee statement described its function as, “[b]roadly speaking...to include all those matters which affect the employment of CIO members arising from cancellations, cutbacks and changes in war production, and scheduling of civilian production”⁸². Although this committee was not tied directly to the Department of Research and Education, the Department performed “special functions” for the Reconversion Committee, including providing research and other background material.⁸³ Furthermore, there was close collaboration between staff on both committees. Like the Post-War Planning Committee, the Reconversion Committee worked largely ‘behind the scenes’, but its role was not limited to considerations of policy; it was also centrally involved in considering framing strategies for the CIO’s short- and long-term postwar vision.

⁸⁰ Two staff members—Katherine Pollak Ellickson and Ted F. Silvey—worked particularly closely with this committee, and should be introduced here. Ellickson was an economist who began her career in the CIO in 1935 as an assistant to the director at the CIO national office, where she did administrative work as well as research. During the early to mid-1940s, she was Associate Director of Research in the Department of Research and Education. Both she and Silvey served on the Post-War Planning Committee, and were heavily involved in the drafting of CIO literature during the 1940s. The papers of both Ellickson and Silvey, which are held at the Walter P. Reuther Library, were examined as part of the research for this thesis. It is also worth pointing out that Ellickson’s earlier files have been cited in many important works on the CIO (eg., Foster 1975, Fraser 1991, Lichtenstein 1987, Zieger 1995), yet for reasons that are unclear, the files pertaining to her work on the Post-War Planning committee are not discussed.

⁸¹ As we shall see, however, the program that was initially prepared by the Post-War Planning Committee went through some alterations in the course of being edited for distribution, and a number of its initial recommendations were abandoned in later expressions of the CIO’s postwar program.

⁸² Philip Murray, Report to the Seventh Constitutional Convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, *Seventh Constitutional Convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations*, November 20-24, 1944, 54.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 64.

Political Action Committee

Whereas the work of the Department of Research and Education took place, for the most part, ‘behind the scenes’, the Political Action Committee was in the public spotlight right from its inception⁸⁴. The CIO-PAC was officially established in 1943, following the unanimous adoption by national CIO officers of a resolution declaring the necessity of political action. News of the PAC’s formation was met with enthusiasm, excitement, and in some cases, fear, among observers both within and outside of the labour movement (Foster 1975). Despite all the hype surrounding the organization’s foray into politics, however, it is important to recognize that the PAC was formed largely on a defensive basis. Indeed, most commentators emphasize the early attempts by conservative politicians and employers to derail the New Deal, and particularly the passage of the Smith-Connally act, as the catalyst for the PAC’s formation (e.g., Davis 1986; De Caux 1970, 439; Foster 1975; Moody 1988). CIO leaders were “appalled at the reactive backlash from the right, both within and outside of the Democratic Party”, and many felt that political action was a necessary step in its effort to curb the rising anti-New Deal and anti-labour tides (Fraser 1991, 502; Zieger 1995). As one Board Member had exclaimed during an Executive Board meeting prior to the PAC’s formation,

The New Deal is in danger, and God help us in the next couple of years if we don’t organize ourselves properly politically. What is going to happen to the whole gamut of social legislation we have been fortunate to obtain in the last ten years?”⁸⁵

PAC activity in its first two years was focused predominantly on securing Roosevelt’s victory in the 1944 presidential elections. This short-term goal was crucial to the CIO’s postwar program—most leaders felt that having the Roosevelt administration in power during

⁸⁴ During a CIO Executive Board meeting in 1944, President Phil Murray was already calling the PAC “the most widely publicized institution that I have known of since the original institution of the CIO itself” (Minutes of the Executive Board of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, 17 November, 1944, reel 7, 217, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Microfilm Collections [hereafter cited as Minutes, CIO Executive Board]).

⁸⁵ Jacob Potofsky, Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 5-7 February, 1943, reel 4, 112.

transition to peacetime production represented the best chance that CIO ideas on reconversion would be put in effect, or at least be given consideration. But the PAC also was driven by a longer-term aim: realignment. As Davis (1986) explains, “the formation of the PAC was part of a process of realignment that would eventually rally labor, New Dealers, and progressive Republicans into a single liberal party, while forcing Bourbon Democrats and the Republican mainstream to regroup in a second, conservative party” (84). In this respect, as well, the aims of the PAC were intimately connected with the broader CIO’s hopes for its postwar program. For those who did not entertain third-party hopes—which represented the majority of PAC leadership—realignment was seen as necessary for the achievement of the goals of the postwar program, especially since most of those goals required legislative action.

Although the PAC was created as part of “a concerted effort to inject the CIO’s ideological and programmatic agenda directly into the Democratic Party’s bloodstream”, it is also true that in the early 1940s there were still conflicting ideological tendencies within the organization, and therefore the agenda was not fully set in stone (Zieger 1995, 182). On the one hand, many leaders who sat on the CIO Executive Board and who were involved with PAC activity were those who, since the time of the CIO’s founding, were “little attracted to either anti-capitalist politics or fundamental institutional experiments” (Zieger 1995, 71). On the other hand, there were also a number of Executive Board members who had historical or existing ties to socialist groups (including the Socialist Party), and who did entertain hopes for institutional experiments along social democratic lines (Hartford 1996; Seidler 1961). Moreover, many of the staff working within the CIO and the CIO-PAC (including those in the Department of Research and Education) also entertained these hopes. Initially, these hopes were reflected in the CIO’s postwar program and in the PAC’s activity in support of that program; thus, initially, the PAC, as with the broader CIO, looked like it might at least

maintain its existing (if rather loose) commitment to social democratic transformation. As Fraser (1991) has observed, the realignment envisioned by PAC chairman Sidney Hillman “was not necessarily at odds with the perspective and accomplishments of European social democracy or the British Labour Party” (365).

The Postwar Program, Social Democracy, and ‘Strategic Imperatives’

The CIO’s postwar program spelled out policy goals that ranged from issues requiring immediate legislative action, to ones that would need to be addressed more gradually or farther into the future. In its effort to achieve these goals, the CIO’s approach, also, was defined by a combination of short- and long-term strategies. For example, as soon as it was created in 1943, the PAC was busy trying to re-elect Roosevelt for the 1944 elections, but it was also simultaneously working on the longer-term goal of realignment. Similarly, in devising strategies for framing the postwar program, staff in both the Department of Research and Education and the PAC viewed the task through multiple lenses. On the one hand, there was a necessity to frame the program as a concrete response to concrete problems that required urgent, immediate attention—an important element of ‘motivational’ and ‘diagnostic’ framing; on the other hand, the concrete policies were based on ideas, and the importance of selling these ideas was also at the forefront of CIO strategizing.

To a degree, these represented conflicting strategic imperatives. Inasmuch as the policies being considered by CIO staff were outside of mainstream thinking in Washington and represented ideas that would require some work in convincing the majority of the public, these were things that could not be addressed simply overnight; they required framing geared toward a “change in American thinking in certain important particulars”, as one staff member remarked in a meeting of the Reconversion Committee.⁸⁶ On the one hand, then, this was

⁸⁶ Robert Lamb, Report of the twenty-first meeting of the CIO Reconversion Committee, 18 January, 1945, Ted F. Silvey Papers, Box 49, Folder 20 (collection hereafter cited as TFS Papers).

about framing geared toward long-term ideological transformation. Yet, the CIO's insistence that reconversion issues needed to be addressed right away, and its desire to curb the rising institutional and ideological anti-labour tide, called for framing a program for *immediate action*. In fact, to a certain extent, considerations of the latter issue informed decisions concerning the content of the program itself. "What balance do we wish to strike between the ideal and the attainable?" Ellickson had asked Walsh in 1943, ahead of the first meeting of the Post-War Planning Committee.⁸⁷ "Presumably we should aim at a program that would secure the support of non-labor groups and thus be capable of achievement, say within the next five years".⁸⁸ In another preparatory document written later that month, Ellickson warned that, "[i]n drafting a post-war program it seems to me [that] it should not be too theoretical or controversial since acceptance would thereby be complicated."⁸⁹ Similarly, when President Murray created the Reconversion Committee, he viewed its central task as that of putting together a program using language that would have immediate, positive impact on target audiences; "What we want from the Reconversion Committee", he stated during one of its first meetings, "is a simple, comprehensive reconversion program that can be presented to our people".⁹⁰

Considerations about existing public opinion and the opinions of policymakers and other important groups were, understandably, a critical part of deliberations among CIO leaders and staff as they put together their postwar program in the latter years of the war. As indicated above, and as will become clear over the course of this chapter, these issues informed not only the way that the organization framed its vision, but also the nature of the program itself. At the same time, however, the desire to put forward a postwar vision that would be 'capable of achievement', in Ellickson's words, did not *entirely* dictate the way the

⁸⁷ Katherine Ellickson to J. Raymond Walsh, Memorandum, 15 July 1943, KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 7.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "General Considerations", 27 July, 1943, KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 7.

⁹⁰ Report of Meeting of C.I.O. Reconversion Committee with President Murray, 9 August, 1944, TFS Papers, Box 49, Folder 26, p.2.

program was put together—at least not initially. To a certain degree, and among some CIO people, the question of what might be ‘capable of achievement’ was itself an open question, inasmuch as existing opinions—even deep-seated, widespread ones—were thought capable of being changed.

Importantly, this issue of effecting change in public opinion trends most often came up in discussions regarding ideas connected to the ‘social democratic’ elements we identified in section 1. For example, in a February 1943 memo outlining ‘basic considerations’ on social security, Ellickson observed that “a System of allowance for all children after the first, even when the father is employed, as proposed by Beveridge, is probably not acceptable at present to most Americans.” Yet, this was not a reason to rule out the idea altogether; rather, “The CIO may wish to include such an idea in its long-term program even though not pushing for immediate action thereon”.⁹¹

On some matters, the CIO staff did feel that the language should be more direct, and that ‘pushing for immediate action’ was feasible. Writing to Philip Murray in the summer of 1944, Clinton Golden discussed labour’s participation in the WPB, in relation to the larger question of the CIO’s reconversion goals:

Today the issue revolves about planning. [...] How is the fight for planning to be made? It is in the first instance a question of an idea, the emphasis upon a point of view. It is not necessary to work out all of the blue-print details of a reconversion plan. It is enough now to make the necessity for planning a constant and repeated theme in all meetings of top WPB officials. It is a theme for outside speeches and education. The general theory of planning can be stated⁹².

In addition to focusing on the promotion of the idea of ‘planning’, some CIO staff and leadership also focused on portraying the concept of ‘free enterprise’ in a negative light. “Use des[cription]—wilderness of free enterprise” was a point raised during the first Post-War Planning Committee meeting, and that description appeared throughout drafts of the

⁹¹ Ellickson to Walsh, Memorandum, 1 February, 1943, KPE Papers, Box 34, Folder 1, p.2.

⁹² Clinton Golden to Philip Murray, Memorandum, 15 June, 1944, TFS Papers, Box 11, Folder 31.

committee's documents.⁹³ A line of a 1943 memorandum, for example, read "the nation cannot afford to return to the wilderness into which business led it in 1929".⁹⁴ Another theme that was circulating among staff was the importance of casting public works in positive light. As Walsh stated to the CIO Executive Board upon presenting the Post-War Planning Committee's first report,

...it was our purpose not only to emphasize the propriety of having what is generally known as a shelf of public works for purposes of keeping the people busy when they cannot otherwise be kept busy, but we also put it in terms positive. Our committee felt it was of the utmost importance not to speak of public works simply as a means to fend off this haunting specter of unemployment, but as a means of stating that we have here in the United States the facilities for a gold standard of living, as I like to call it...⁹⁵

As the foregoing discussion indicates, some of the staff and leadership who were involved in formulating a postwar program, and in devising strategies for achieving it, envisioned this program as both a set of short-term policy goals, *and* as a potential starting point for bringing about a more substantial social democratic shift in American social and economic policy in the long-run. For these individuals, as well as for those with more circumscribed visions, considerable thought went into the details not only of the program itself, but the strategies for 'framing' it effectively. We now turn to examine the literature that resulted from this.

⁹³ Minutes of Post-War Planning Committee, 15 July, 1943, KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 17.

⁹⁴ Ellickson to Walsh, "Major Planks for CIO Post-war Domestic Program", 7 September, 1943, KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 8, p.2. Similarly worded lines appeared in other preparatory documents, as will be shown below in section 5.

⁹⁵ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 28-9 October, 1953, reel 6, 123.

II: AMERICAN DREAM FRAMES IN THE CIO'S POSTWAR PROGRAM

3. 'Equal Opportunity' Gap

From the early days of the CIO, the topic of civil rights was an important element of CIO literature, and the 'equal opportunity' gap was a frequently occurring variant of American Dream framing. The basic idea expressed in this framing was that although the United States was rightly called the 'land of opportunity', it was not yet the 'land of opportunity *for all*'. This variant of the 'American Dream' gap frame appeared in the PAC's highly publicized 1944 pamphlet, *This is Your America*.⁹⁶ During the 1944 presidential campaign, *Your America* was widely distributed across the country, read over local radio stations, and was promoted on the back of other CIO and CIO-PAC publications as "a pamphlet every worker should have and read" (Gaer 1944, 305). Joseph Gaer, PAC publication director and principal author of *Your America* suggested that the pamphlet "present[ed] in the simplest form what one might term the basic philosophy and principal motivation of this entire movement." (Ibid., 11). Even after the presidential campaign had ended, CIO leaders and staff continued to promote and distribute the pamphlet to union members, the policy community, and the broader public (Foster 1975). We begin our analysis of the CIO's 'equal opportunity' gap framing with *Your America* because it is where we first encounter the term 'land of opportunity' in a CIO publication, and because it is representative of CIO—particularly CIO-PAC— literature in this period (Foster 1975; Fraser 1991; Zieger 1995).

Your America begins with the headline 'America Belongs to You', followed by an appeal to the "common people" of America—to the "worker, earning your living honestly", the farmer, the small business man and the housewife—to "help in making this country a land

⁹⁶ [Joseph Gaer], *This is Your America*, 1944, CIO-PE, Box 2 (pamphlet hereafter cited as *Your America*).

of opportunity for all”.⁹⁷ Accompanying these words is a scenic image of rural America, which appears suited to something like a tourism leaflet, rather than a political call to arms (see figure 1). Indeed, peaceful, picturesque scenes like this one appear throughout the pamphlet, and they are notable because of the way in which they contrast with the type of imagery that characterized earlier CIO literature (Zieger 1995). As Fraser observes, the image on the cover of *Your America*—a “bucolic farm tableau” similar to the one shown in figure 1— “signalled the PAC’s determination to slough off the overdeveloped muscular imagery of the embattled ‘Labor Militant’ and to display itself rather in the ever resplendent colors of mythic Middle America” (1991, 512-13). At the same time, the political nature of the pamphlet is not altogether lost on the reader. While the pages celebrate America’s democratic values and material prosperity, they also identify the need for improving American society; indeed, as the opening quote suggests, a central message of this pamphlet is the acknowledgment that the United States is not quite the land of opportunity—certainly not yet the land of *equal* opportunity.

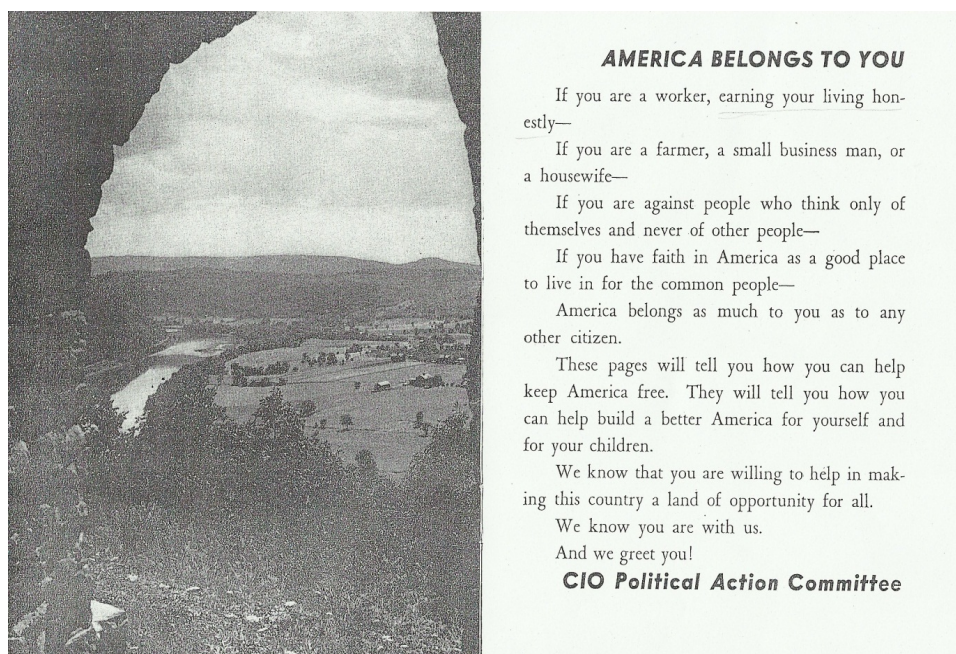


Figure 1. Excerpt from *This is Your America*. Photocopy courtesy of Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives

⁹⁷ Ibid., [p.1].

Towards the end of that pamphlet, the reader is given more details regarding the specific nature of this gap; under the heading ‘A more perfect union’, the pamphlet declared that:

These United States were created less than two centuries ago in the belief that all men are created equal. The Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights were prepared to guarantee equality to all citizens. *The Founders of this Nation tried to create a more perfect union.* Yet many people even today do not live up to the ideals of our Constitution and the Bill of Rights.⁹⁸

The pamphlet then went on to specify more precisely who the perpetrators of this injustice were, and it also identified their victims:

There are people who hate Jews just because they are Jews. They hate Catholics just because they are Catholics. They hate Italians, Poles, Mexicans, and other nationality groups, just because they belong to those nationality groups. The worst sufferers of this un-American feeling are the Negroes.⁹⁹

In these statements, the ‘equal opportunity’ gap is presented as a gap between the egalitarian ideals on which the nation was founded, and the present failure to uphold such ideals; although the particular failure being identified here is the fact that some Americans are formally denied the right to equal opportunity, it is also clear that this diagnosis is subsumed within a broader ‘American political traditions’ gap frame. In terms of blame attribution, the statement above highlights that ‘un-American feeling’ that has permeated American society to such an extent that the nation has collectively turned its back on the egalitarianism embedded in the nation’s founding documents. Thus, a primary cause of this gap is, in a word, ‘prejudice’—as the next page of *Your America* goes on to suggest.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., [p.25].

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Under the heading, “It is Your Duty”, the pamphlet states: “We have a great country. We have a beautiful and rich country. Most of our people are good. We have a good Constitution. But there is still much we can do to make this land richer and better for all the people. [...] Most important of all, we must destroy prejudice against the foreign-born and the hatred of Negroes and other peoples” [p. 27].

A similar frame is discernible in the PAC's pamphlet, *The Negro in 1944*.¹⁰¹ The pamphlet began with the observation that the 'little people'¹⁰² were at a crossroads in the year 1944: "They can see clearly two roads before them. One, they know, may lead them to a complete victory over Fascism wherever it appears, a lasting peace the world over, and the promise of equality of opportunity for *all* Americans". With reference to this last point, the pamphlet went on to explain how this promise had not yet been fulfilled:

Negro Americans have not shared equally in the blessings of this, their native land. They have been denied equal work opportunities. They have been compelled to live in slums. In some areas they have been denied voting rights. [...] Their children have not been given the equal opportunity for education. Yet they have remained loyal to the government because of their faith in America's democratic destiny.¹⁰³

Again, as in *Your America*, the injustice was identified as being rooted in the fact that certain groups had been blocked from the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the nation's 'blessings'. By emphasizing legal barriers to access, and discrimination and prejudice based exclusively on ascriptive traits, the CIO was offering a diagnosis of the 'equal opportunity' gap that did not present a challenge to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. Indeed, its prognosis was quite compatible with that interpretation, for it emphasized granting every citizen access to the present system.

The CIO's efforts to organize black workers in the 1930s and 1940s, and to combat various forms of discrimination based on race, religion and ethnicity, are often portrayed in labour scholarship as being interconnected with other features of CIO radicalism.¹⁰⁴

Certainly, the CIO's active engagement with civil rights issues distinguished it not only from many other sectors in American society at the time, but also from the main labour group, the

¹⁰¹ [Joseph Gaer], *The Negro in 1944*, 1944, CIO-PE, Box 2.

¹⁰² The 'little people' are identified here as "The small farmer, the small businessman, the white collar worker, the professional, the housewife, both white and colored", as well as the "foreign-born", and all the people who live by the sweat of their brows" (Ibid., [p.2]).

¹⁰³ Ibid., [pp.2-3].

¹⁰⁴ Scholars in the 'long civil rights movement' tradition point out that the CIO was one of the organizations that was involved in civil rights campaigns well before the movement captured sustained national attention in the 1950s (eg., Biondi 2003; Hall 2005; Korstad 2003; Korstad and Lichtenstein 1988; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2002).

AFL. However, for all its progressivism on these issues, the CIO's framing of the 'equal opportunity' gap was actually quite conservative. Its tactics resembled what Westby (2005) describes as *exposure of contradiction*. This is the type of framing where the perpetrators identified in the diagnosis "are not enemies to be overcome, but misguided citizens who need education and persuasion. The frame displays the ideology and its lived contradictions in collective actions that affirm rather than deny the basic legitimacy of the system" (227). In contrast to seeking *inversion of meaning*, wherein the target of diagnostic framing would have included the capitalist system itself, the CIO's framing remained within the realm of exposure of contradiction, not only because it failed to target that system in its diagnosis, but also because it advocated solutions that could easily be accommodated within the existing economic structure. In the next two chapters, we shall have the opportunity to examine attempts at inversion of meaning through equal opportunity gap frames, and we will see that some labour leaders were involved in these efforts. The CIO, however, kept the 'American Dream' of a land of equal opportunity safely within the boundaries of the 'capitalist land of opportunity interpretation' throughout the postwar period.

4. 'Economic Security' Gap

The other type of American Dream gap frame that appeared in mid-1940s CIO literature was the 'economic security' gap. Broadly speaking, this was framed as the gap between the nation's promise of widespread comfortable standards of living, and its failure to meet that promise for a substantial proportion of the population¹⁰⁵. The 'economic security' gap was a central theme in CIO literature pertaining to its postwar program, and some of this literature represented an attempt to 'invert' the meaning of the capitalist land of opportunity

¹⁰⁵ The literature identified various sources of this promise, as we will see below—and American values and traditions often were among those sources identified. Although this suggests an overlap with the 'American political traditions' gap, the 'economic security' gap frames also identified material factors (such as the abundance of natural resources) that gave the country its status as the potential 'land of opportunity'. In this sense, it makes sense to speak of a separate 'economic security' gap that is not entirely subsumed under the 'American political traditions' gap.

interpretation. The majority of instantiations of the economic security gap frame, however, not only appeared to uphold that interpretation, but also (and therefore) sat in tension with the social democratic underpinnings of the CIO's postwar program. Before we examine the economic security gap frames, we will consider what features the CIO literature identified as sources of the promise of economic security.

The PAC's *Your America* provides a good place to begin. Although the opening page of the pamphlet urges the reader to join the CIO in its effort to "build a better America", and to make "this country a land of opportunity for all", most of the pamphlet emphasizes what inspires "faith in America as a good place to live in for the common people".¹⁰⁶ Several pages are dedicated to pointing out specifically why, as the pamphlet states on the fifth page, "[w]e love America," and what makes it "differ from any other country or nation". The final page of this section highlights the primary importance of "the people of the Nation with their faith in humanity and their love of freedom". After declaring that "*Americans make up America—the America we love*" the pamphlet turns to a discussion regarding "how you can tell an American", emphasizing first and foremost that "He or she is an American who lives in the United States, or any of its possessions, and who believes in our way of life, which is the Democratic Way". In the pages before the American people and their love of freedom and democracy are given the spotlight, the pamphlet identifies a number of material features that make up the "America we love". One page, with the heading 'America the beautiful', praises the country's lakes, forests, horizons and skylines, and asks, "Where are there fruit trees more beautiful or grain fields richer in grain? Where can one lift his eyes to more beautiful mountains or look down into more fertile valleys?" A few pages later, appears the headline, 'American Industries', accompanied by a small inset of a smiling female, presumably a factory worker [11]. "Have you gone through a great American lumber yard or a ship-

¹⁰⁶ [Joseph Gaer], *This is Your America*, 1944, CIO-PE, Box 2.

building yard or a locomotive factory?” it asks. “Have you seen how food is cooked and baked and packed by the large food industries in America?” The next page goes on to boast of the nearly 234,000 miles of railroad and 7000,000 miles of highways that have been built, followed by the proclamation that, “We have the world’s greatest and most modern industries”. Before that, under the heading, ‘America the Rich’, the pamphlet identifies America’s minerals, water resources, forests and fertile land as some of the sources of America’s ‘great wealth’.¹⁰⁷

Your America identifies both the country’s natural resources and its system of production as key factors making “America...full of promises of worldly goods”.¹⁰⁸ Other CIO literature in the early to mid-1940s echoed the themes in *Your America*, but many pieces also highlighted an additional factor in the ‘land of opportunity’ equation; the so-called ‘miracle of production’, brought on by the requirements of the country’s involvement in World War II. As one PAC pamphlet declared,

The war proved what we can do. The workers, industrialists, and farmers of America, determined to win the war, put their shoulders to the wheel and performed, what is often described as ‘a miracle of production’.¹⁰⁹

Echoing this point, a February 1944 article written by Hillman for the *American* magazine proclaimed, “We have proved, in war, that this nation can produce a Niagara of armaments and materials” (quoted in Gaer 1944, 71). Local PAC literature also credited the war in tapping the nation’s productive potential; an Ohio-PAC pamphlet titled *Common Cause: The Program of Ohio-CIO-PAC*, for example, proclaimed that “The war has demonstrated the capacity of American labor, industry and government to produce in quantities beyond the imagination of but a few years ago”.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., [pp. 2-15].

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., [p.9].

¹⁰⁹ [Joseph Gaer], *Jobs for All After the War*, [1944], CIO-PE, Box 2 p.7 (pamphlet hereafter cited in text as *Jobs*).

¹¹⁰ Ohio CIO Political Action Committee, *Common Cause: The Program of Ohio-CIO-PAC*, [1944], CIO-PE, Box 5, [p.4].

Insofar as the contingencies of the war had helped the United States reach a level of production that it had always been capable of reaching, it was not really a ‘miracle’ at all but the fulfilment of the nation’s productive potential. The war had generated demand for a variety of products, and the will to produce them. And it was those involved in the production—the workers, industrialists, and farmers, according to the *Jobs* pamphlet cited above—who were responsible for bringing about that miracle. Hillman’s speech during the 1944 Full Employment conference, which was re-printed in another PAC pamphlet, echoed this sentiment: “Our amazing record of war production”, he declared there, “was the result of the combined effort of all groups—workers, farmers and businessmen—mobilized and united by the crisis which faced our nation”.¹¹¹

Generally speaking, therefore, CIO literature in the early to mid-1940s identified three major interrelated factors bringing about national prosperity—natural resources, methods of production, and World War II; these factors, in conjunction with the nation’s democratic heritage, were deemed to be the sources of its promise as a land of economic security. In most respects, such a portrayal did not challenge the basic equation underlying the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. Where the CIO’s literature did offer a challenge was in its framing of the ‘economic security’ gap—that is, in its identification of the persistence of economic insecurity in a land whose natural and productive resources, combined with its democratic heritage, rendered such a phenomenon both unnecessary and immoral. However, as will be made clear once we examine variations in the diagnostic and prognostic frames in CIO literature, the frames that represented such a challenge were the exceptions within the broader repertoire of the CIO’s ‘economic security’ gap frames.

¹¹¹ CIO, *Four Men Speak About Jobs for All*, [1944], CIO-PE, Box 2, p.5 (hereafter cited as *Four Men Speak*).

Diagnosis: Economic Insecurity in a Land of Plenty

Let us begin by examining the exceptions. The strongest example of literature that offered a diagnosis of the economic security gap that was consistent with social democratic principles came out of the Department of Research and Education, specifically, the Post-War Planning Committee's, first pamphlet, which was entitled *As We Win*.¹¹² This pamphlet was based on the Committee's 1943 report, "Problems of Reconversion", which had outlined the CIO's early postwar program. A cartoon-strip adaptation of *As We Win* was later created and distributed by the Department of Research and Education. The publication, entitled '*With Victory*' was prepared "with a view to achieving mass interest in CIO policy and recommendation"; it "us[ed] an American industrial worker and his family as characters to dramatize the recommendations of the CIO Post-War Planning Committee", and was designed "to reach many of those who would not ordinarily study a lengthier and more serious presentation".¹¹³ Although the latter piece contained a more subtle social democratic diagnosis than *As We Win*, it too represents an exception among the CIO literature because of its consistency with the program.

"The United Nations at war are conquering tyranny abroad. The United States in peace must conquer unemployment at home."¹¹⁴ So begins the pamphlet, *As We Win*. The same paragraph emphasizes that the present circumstances had made such a goal not only necessary, but also capable of achievement; for "[t]he nation has shown remarkable success in producing materials for war. It is beyond question that we have the knowledge, skills, machines and resources to produce a 'gold standard of living' for every American."¹¹⁵ Under the heading 'Our Goals', on the same page, the pamphlet exclaims that "Farm operators, share croppers, wage earners, business men, professional men and housewives—all can enjoy

¹¹² CIO, *As We Win*, [January 1944], KPE, Box 33, Folder 5.

¹¹³ CIO, *With Victory*, [1944], KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 1; J. Raymond Walsh, "To Our Friends Outside the Labor Movement", form letter, July, 1944, KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 1.

¹¹⁴ CIO, *As We Win*, p.3.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

genuine freedom from want and fear if we, as a nation, are determined to achieve it.”¹¹⁶ In *With Victory*, a cartoon illustration of a family sitting around a picnic table outside of their front yard on a typical ‘postwar Sunday’, offers a glimpse into what the future could look like if such a goal were to be achieved (see figure 2). “Most of our dreams have come true, Dad!” exclaims a middle-aged woman who is standing at the table preparing to serve lemonade. Her husband, sitting at the table with a piece of cake in one hand and a pipe in the other, remarks, “But remember all we had to do first!”. His smiling gaze is directed toward a young couple walking arm-in-arm towards the picnic table, while his son runs to greet them. Also in the background, we see the family’s pleasant-looking, modest sized bungalow, with a car peeking out of the garage. “Joe worker and his family could only have reached this happy state through a national prosperity based on jobs for all”, reads the caption below; “How to accomplish full employment and full production is what this story is about”.

[This image has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organization.]

Figure 2. Excerpt from *With Victory*. Image courtesy of Walter P. Reuther Library.

The opening page of *As We Win* offered a broad statement of the ‘economic security’ gap; the opening page of *With Victory* offered a broad vision of what life might be like for a

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

typical male worker and his family, if that gap were to be closed, and if their dreams were to become reality. Although these pamphlets both presented the gap in an optimistic sense, emphasizing that it could be closed in the near future, the remaining pages offered further detail in their diagnosis—that is, they pointed to the perceived causes of the gap, and warned that the gap would only widen if certain measures were not taken right away. Consider the observation made on page 10 of *As We Win*: “The government owns vast stores of trucks, airplanes, food and a bewildering variety of other goods. Business men worry about these so-called ‘surpluses’ and are alarmed about their effect on business. Some would prefer to see them destroyed altogether”.¹¹⁷ But, the pamphlet continued, “[t]he fact is that most of these things can be used. Deliberate destruction and planned scarcity are the natural brothers of poverty and unemployment”.¹¹⁸ Insofar as ‘business men’ were singled out here for seeking deliberate destruction and planned scarcity, this group was clearly a target of blame attribution. Indeed, throughout that pamphlet, wherever the focus is on diagnosis, business makes an appearance. One of the clearest expressions of blame attribution appears on page 13: “Business asks ‘hands off’ but offers no proof that it has left behind the beliefs and practices that caused the depression of the thirties. Its views are still too narrow to embrace the welfare of all the people.” The diagnosis here is clear: taken alone, the practice and philosophy of business would not only lead to a failure to close the ‘economic security’ gap, but would also inevitably lead to a widening of that gap.

As We Win targeted not simply business, but ‘business-minded people’; “There is a dangerous tendency for business-minded people to take over the administration of our laws”, it declared. “The tremendous concentration of economic and financial power in the hands of a few people puts the wrong kind of pressure on both legislators and administrators.”¹¹⁹ Such concentration of power had led to a situation in which existing arrangements and legislation

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp.10.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.26.

on reconversion favoured business interests at the expense of the broader public welfare.

“The United States needs better houses, roads, airfields, playgrounds, hospitals and schools, and it needs them in greater number”, reads the first line below the heading, “Public works for the public good!”¹²⁰ And yet, “[a]lthough some local, state and federal projects are now being planned, they are far too limited either to meet outstanding needs or to provide an ample cushion against unemployment”.¹²¹ Furthermore, the nation was not prepared to adequately deal with “the transition problems of each key war industry”; the Office of War Mobilization was unsatisfactory, because “there is no clear indication that it will have essential authority and scope. Nor has provision been made for a representative policy board or for industry councils.”¹²² Such provisions must be made, urged the pamphlet, in order to address the skewed balance of power in many existing war agencies, where “Dollar-a-year business men have been put in charge...while labor has tried vainly to secure comparable representation”.¹²³

In addition to targeting the ‘business-minded’ approach to reconversion and its longer-term plans for postwar America, the diagnostic framing in the pamphlets pointed to the country’s weak social safety net, and it explicitly identified the flaws and limitations of existing social security legislation. “[S]ince many workers will undoubtedly be unemployed for some time after the war, they must be fully protected” observed the authors of *As We Win*.¹²⁴ Yet, “[u]nder present compensation laws, millions of workers are not covered at all, while benefit levels and duration are far too low. Older workers, who have contributed their strength to the war effort, will be insufficiently rewarded under the present old age and survivors insurance program.”¹²⁵ In *With Victory*, a conversation between ‘Joe Worker’, his

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp.18-19.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., pp.14-15.

¹²³ Ibid., p.26.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.20.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

mother, and their family doctor highlights the anxiety caused by the inadequacies of that program: “I wish I had enough old-age insurance to keep me from being a burden”, exclaims the mother. “Now Mother...”, replies Joe, while the doctor weighs in: “I’m sure you’re no burden, but I think I know how you feel”.¹²⁶ In assigning blame for the lack of social security, *As We Win* points to a familiar culprit: “indifference or hostility of many business groups to an adequate national insurance program is additional proof of the narrowness of their viewpoint and their inability or unwillingness to understand the people’s needs”.¹²⁷

What is most notable about the diagnostic framing of the economic security gap in these pamphlets—especially in *As We Win*—is that the centre of blame attribution was not simply ‘business’ but business philosophy. The ‘hands off’ philosophy criticized in the pamphlets, and which the authors were distinguishing from the philosophy advocated by labour, sounds very much like the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation of the post-Depression era that was identified in chapter 2. Yet, most other literature put out by the CIO in the mid 1940s and beyond, refrained from challenges of this sort. The business community certainly did remain a common target in the diagnostic frames of the other literature, but the majority of these frames represented *exposure of contradiction*. “To date labor has done the producing and the largest share of the fighting”, Philip Murray stated during the Full Employment Conference,

[B]ut...it is not labor nor the average farmer, nor the small businessman who is getting rich off this war. It is certain of the biggest businesses which have waxed rich and powerful, even richer and more powerful. And this has been at the expense of labor, the average farmer, and the average businessman.¹²⁸

Why were so many losing out? A 1945 PAC pamphlet-of-the-month offered the following explanation:

The war has demonstrated that we can have full employment and give the workers at least a bare standard of living. But the profit-swollen corporations want us to forget the lessons of the war. They want us to forget that we can

¹²⁶ CIO, *With Victory*, [p.5].

¹²⁷ CIO, *As We Win*, p.20.

¹²⁸ CIO, *Four Men Speak*, p.12.

have full employment and a very high national income. They are yearning for 'a pool of unemployed'. They are determined to reduce millions of workers to the starvation level.¹²⁹

Whereas the pages of *As We Win* targeted 'business thinking' and 'business practice' in its blame attribution, most of the literature concerning the 'economic security' gap in postwar America pointed to a more narrowly defined culprit—'certain of the biggest businesses'. This became the predominant form of blame attribution in CIO literature advocating its postwar program. The PAC's *People's Program for 1946*, for example, emphasized that "[w]e have everything it takes for an economy of abundance. [...] But there are *a few* greedy captains of industry and finance who want inflation; who want low wages; who want insecurity for the wage-earners; who want to destroy labor unions, and who want to go back to 'the good old days' that lead right down to depression and war."¹³⁰ Overall, with the exception of *As We Win*, the oppositional elements of the CIO's diagnostic framing were not directed at business philosophy generally speaking, but rather the philosophy and practices of an ostensible minority.

Prognosis

Although providing a 'diagnosis' was clearly an important element of CIO framing activity in the organization's efforts to mobilize support for its postwar program, it was, understandably, the prognostic framing that occupied the most space in speeches and literature. It was one thing to identify gaps between the nation's ideals and its practices, but it was quite another to provide a solution and to convince CIO members, policymakers, and the broader public that the CIO's solution—its postwar program—was the one that should, and could, be adopted.

¹²⁹ [Joseph Gaer], *The Road to Freedom: Higher Basic Wages and Salaries*, 1954, CIO-PE, Box 2, p.2.

¹³⁰ CIO, *People's Program For 1946*, [1946], TFS Papers, Box 13, Folder 31, p.6, emphasis added.

The opening statements of *As We Win* called attention to the ‘economic security’ gap. The same sentences also hinted toward a prognosis, particularly in the remark that “[i]t is beyond question that we have the knowledge, skills, machines and resources to produce a ‘gold standard of living’ for every American”.¹³¹ We have seen that ‘business practice’ and ‘business thinking’ were central targets of blame attribution in the diagnosis offered by the CIO in *As We Win*. This represented one (rare) example of the social democratic effort to establish the ‘primacy of politics’ (Berman 2006), being quite clearly reflected in the CIO’s framing activities. Related to this was the centrality of labour and government in the pamphlet’s prognosis for closing the ‘economic security’ gap. “The CIO Post-War Planning Committee”, the pamphlet explained, “has...been increasingly impressed with the importance of immediate constructive planning by the government with effective labor participation”.¹³² This was a central theme in *As We Win*, and also in *With Victory*—the notion that the economic security gap could only be closed through methods that accepted the primacy of politics.

“Guard for the People the Public Domain!” exclaimed the headline on page 8 of *As We Win*. After reminding the reader that the nation’s increased productive capacity was partly a result of the recent addition of ‘huge’ government-owned plants, which had been “built for war purposes in all parts of the nation”, the pamphlet offered a familiar analogy:

These plants are a new form of public domain, as important as the western lands which the nation owned a century ago. Our forefathers sought to have that earlier domain used for the people rather than the few. We must strive to the same end today—and more successfully.¹³³

Here, the authors were alluding to the ‘frontier ideal’ which, as we saw in Chapter 2, occupies a prominent place in ‘land of opportunity’ narratives, including the capitalist narrative; however, the above statement represents a rather different interpretation from the latter. The pamphlet is emphasizing that it is not the simple existence of the ‘western lands’

¹³¹ CIO, *As We Win*, p.3.

¹³² Ibid., p.5.

¹³³ Ibid., pp.8-9.

that made the United States the land of opportunity, but the efforts to make those lands available to “the people rather than the few”. The emphasis on the public nature of the old and new frontiers clearly stands in tension with the capitalist land of opportunity equation. Inasmuch as the plants representing the ‘new frontier’ were to be sold to private operators, the pamphlet urged that these private operators “must be required to observe national wage standards and to comply with laws on collective bargaining”, and suggested, furthermore, the possibility of “requir[ing them] to utilize all equipment at full capacity and to permit labor participation in setting production goals and prices”.¹³⁴ Therefore, private enterprise was given a role in the prognosis here, but it was certainly a qualified one. Indeed, the pamphlet also suggested on the same page that “Continued government ownership, with private operation, may prove desirable”; moreover, “[t]he government should be prepared to operate plants itself, where business will not do so under proper conditions”. Yet another expression of the ‘primacy of politics’ in the pamphlet’s prognostic framing, is found toward the end of the pamphlet, under the heading, ‘Gumption and Grass Roots!’

We stand for genuine economic freedom, not for monopoly agreements masking as ‘free enterprise,’ nor for do-nothing-for-the-people policies hiding behind ‘states’ rights.’ Over-all national action and controls are essential to full employment and social security.¹³⁵

A similar emphasis on the positive role of state intervention, coupled with skepticism toward business-led reconversion, is evident in the section on ‘Public Works for the Public Good!’. “The government should plan now a vast program to create things of long-time benefit to all Americans ” the pamphlet urged. Also noteworthy is the statement that comes a few paragraphs later:

No campaign of financial economy must be permitted to interfere with the broad program of public works for the public good. Money spent for the nation’s well being is money well spent. Well-planned public projects will

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.10.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp.24-5.

create wealth and protect human values when men and women would otherwise be idle and impoverished.¹³⁶

With Victory echoed these arguments toward the end of the cartoon strip, where the story shifts its focus from ‘Joe Worker’ to his sergeant brother-in-law, Bob, who is away at war. After reading a letter from Joe and conversing with a fellow soldier regarding what things might be like when they return home, Bob goes to sleep, and dreams about his life after the war. In his dream, we are brought back to the ‘typical postwar Sunday’ pictured at the beginning of *With Victory*, this time from Bob’s perspective (see figure 3). In the ‘dream’, Bob clearly has a good job at union wages, and the nation has strong social security; moreover, as they drive to Joe’s house, Bob and his wife are impressed by all the infrastructure surrounding them. “The Government’s done a lot of fine building around here since the war”, Joe remarks. “No ‘made work’ or wasted time or money, but swell public works projects that make life better for everybody”.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp.18-19.

[This image has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organization.]

Figure 3. Excerpt from *With Victory*. Image courtesy of Walter P. Reuther Library.

We have seen that *As We Win* was quite explicit about the central role for government in its postwar program. As one line read, “Post-war plans must be based on a clear-cut recognition of the responsibility of the federal government for securing and maintaining full employment, production, and consumption”.¹³⁷ The pamphlet was equally clear about the central role for organized labour. “Labor groups must participate actively in planning and administration at all levels”, remarked the authors in the ‘Gumption and Grass Roots’ section.¹³⁸ In numerous places in the pamphlet, tripartite arrangements were explicitly advocated. “Labor unions must share in making the plans because labor is deeply affected and because it has shown its ability to help difficulties”, read one line of the pamphlet. The authors also identified a further reason for the necessary role of labour in ‘planning for

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.16.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.25.

plenty'. Recall that one component of the diagnosis was the "dangerous tendency for business-minded people to take over the administration of our laws"; on that same page, the authors insisted that "increased labor participation is essential to offset these influences".¹³⁹ In providing justification for granting labour a place at the decision-making tables, the authors' prognostic framing thus acknowledged a conflict of interest between labour and business—a conflict that tended to be denied or obscured in the 'capitalist land of opportunity' interpretation.

As We Win and *With Victory* were the two main publications directly associated with the Post-War Planning Committee, but before we look at the prognostic framing in other publications, it is important to point out that the committee did prepare additional literature, which also offered American Dream frames representing 'inversion of meaning'. A particularly interesting example is found in the Post-War Planning Committee's Report #2, entitled 'Maintaining Full Employment'.¹⁴⁰ "The program of big business is well known", the authors remarked early on in the report; that program, they observed, included aims such as "scrapping...the new government plants", keeping post-war wage levels low, and ensuring "the end of all government intervention in the economy, except when big business requests for its own purpose".¹⁴¹ The authors then proceeded to offer their assessment:

This whole program of poverty and unemployment in the midst of potential plenty is being sold to the American people in the guise of a restoration of free enterprise and a return to the traditional American way. This is a scandalous falsification of the facts and spirit of our history.¹⁴²

"From the very founding of our constitution", it continued, "the American Way has been for *the government to watch over our economy and to maintain this country as a land of*

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.26.

¹⁴⁰ CIO, "CIO Post-War Planning Committee Report No. II: Maintaining Full Employment", [1943], TFS Papers, Box 11, Folder 31, p.2.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., p.3.

opportunity for all.”¹⁴³ This excerpt, which specifies the ‘economic security’ gap, but also the ‘American political traditions’ gap, represents a clear attempt at ‘inversion of meaning’ of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. Government intervention is advocated in place of ‘free enterprise’; moreover, the authors here are explicitly challenging the ‘fusing’ tendency—the tendency, that is, to equate Americanism with capitalism. Yet, this report was never made into a pamphlet, despite original plans to do so, and these statements did not make their way into any of the contemporaneous CIO literature. The types of frames that did make their way into CIO literature, on the other hand, offered quite a different message.

The Post-War Planning Committee’s early program literature offered prognostic frames that sought to challenge the capitalist route to fulfilling the promise of the ‘American Dream’ in the postwar era; yet as we have just seen, not all of this literature was published. Moreover, the postwar program literature that *was* published by the CIO, with the exceptions of those examined above, was far less oppositional with respect to the solutions offered in the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. Indeed, the broader repertoire of prognostic frames offered by the CIO toward the end of the war included a far greater degree of consensual language that was not only in tension with some of the Post-War Planning Committee’s literature, but with the CIO’s own program.

Apart from the Post-War Planning Committee’s *As We Win* and *With Victory*, the most comprehensive statement of the CIO’s initial postwar program can be found in the PAC publication, *The People’s Program for 1944*.¹⁴⁴ Although the pamphlet was authored and distributed by the PAC, the material in the pamphlet underwent widespread scrutiny and significant revision before being published. Earlier drafts of the pamphlet were discussed and debated among Regional Directors of the PAC, the CIO Executive Board, and representatives of the International Unions (Gaer 1944, 184; Foster 1975). Because of its being

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ CIO, *The People’s Program for 1944*, CIO-PE, Box 2 (pamphlet hereafter referred to in text and cited in notes as *People’s Program*).

representative of the broader CIO leadership, and because of its specificity regarding proposed directions for social and economic policy, *People's Program* is therefore a particularly fruitful document for exploring the CIO's prognostic frames beyond the Post-War Planning Committee's initial reports.

The preparation and distribution of *As We Win* took place just before President Roosevelt delivered his 1944 State of the Union Address, during which Roosevelt introduced his 'second bill of rights', which was notable for its emphasis on economic rights. In the PAC's 1944 *People's Program*, the list of rights that Roosevelt had enumerated in his address was reprinted word-for-word in the section on Domestic Policy. The excerpt appeared under the heading, 'planning for plenty', and was followed by the observation that "Our nation possesses all of the natural, industrial and human resources and the technical skills to make these rights a reality".¹⁴⁵ The implementation of those rights was essential for "develop[ing] a new life of plenty for the people of our own nation"¹⁴⁶—essential, that is, for closing the 'economic security' gap. The PAC's prognosis did not stop here. On the next page of the *People's Program* came the warning that "these rights will not realize themselves. We must plan our economy to achieve them"; such planning should be coordinated, the pamphlet argued, by a National Planning Board, which would be set up by Congress and which would

encourage the establishment for each industry of an industry council, composed of representatives of labor, management (or agriculture where appropriate), and government, to assist in the formulation and administration of plans for full production and full employment within such industry.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.14.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.14.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.15-16. A similar analysis is presented in *Jobs*. After listing the rights enumerated in Roosevelt's Address, the pamphlet suggests that "The 'implementation of these rights' necessitates the establishment of Congress of a National Planning Board, to be appointed by the President, and to include leaders of business, labor, agriculture, and government." (CIO, *Jobs for All*, pp.20-21).

Here we see the corporatist underpinnings of the CIO postwar program being articulated in the pamphlet. The insertion of unions and government into the ‘land of opportunity’ equation is clear; notably, however, not all of the prognostic statements in this pamphlet were as consistent in expressing a social democratic challenge to the capitalist equation.

An interesting example appears in the section on “Full Employment”. Although some of the remarks were perfectly in tune with the specific goals of their program and with what we saw in *As We Win*, one statement stands out:

We recognize that the task of providing full employment is *primarily that of private industry*. We believe that—given adequate planning, with the participation and assistance of government—private industry can do the job. The full employment program must, however, be guaranteed by government with a prepared program of jobs at useful work, with standard wages and working conditions, *if and to the extent that private industry falls short of the goal*.¹⁴⁸

Although the PAC was advocating a substantial government role in the economy, what is interesting about the above quote is that that role is presented as secondary to that of private industry. Furthermore, the expression of belief that ‘private industry can do the job’—even when qualified by the requirement of adequate planning and a role for government—framed private industry not only more prominently, but more optimistically, in the prognosis than what we saw in *As We Win*. Even *With Victory*, which offered a more subtle critique of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation than *As We Win*, nonetheless refrained from offering enthusiastic support of business-led reconversion. Recall the cartoon in figure 3: Bob’s dream about life in postwar America was filled with images of public works, and it was the government that was praised by Bob and his wife as they marvelled at the scenes of national prosperity that surrounded them. The government, along with unions (whose efforts are highlighted earlier in the cartoon where the focus is on ‘Joe Worker’), were the keys to achieving this prosperity and the economic security dreamed of by Bob—whatever the role for private industry, it was not a central one.

¹⁴⁸ CIO, *People’s Program*, p.18, emphasis added.

Rather than emphasizing the ‘primacy of politics’, the prognostic framing in *The People’s Program* signalled an acceptance of the primacy of private enterprise. This move away from the language of *As We Win* and *With Victory* (and the growing tension with the social democratic underpinnings of the initial postwar program) is evident throughout CIO literature during these years. Consider one of Murray’s speeches to CIO workers prior to the 1944 presidential election:

The government owns \$20,000,000,000 worth of factories—a new form of public domain as important as our Western lands were a century ago. These must be used to benefit the people rather than the few. If private enterprise can pay a fair price for them, and can operate them with reasonably full production and employment, well and good. But if business cannot or will not operate these plants under proper conditions, or allows them to fall idle, government must be prepared to operate these plants in the public interest. (quoted in Gaer, 1944, 72)

By the end of the war, the preference for private enterprise over government action was being made even more explicit. One illustration of this is found in a 1945 CIO statement proposing that union leaders conduct ‘Victory Visits’—that they visit employer organizations in local communities to discuss their plans for post-war production and to urge employers that they make every effort to minimize unemployment resulting from the transition to peacetime production. The statement, prepared for President Murray by Ted Silvey, and read to Board Members during a March 1945 meeting, declared that

The CIO is aware that industry and business decries government action in many areas; therefore these ‘Victory Visits’ will enable employers to offer programs which—it is hoped—will make excessive government action unnecessary. At least, we feel employers should have the opportunity to provide the jobs before we go to government.¹⁴⁹

In terms of the CIO’s portrayal of *labour’s* role in closing the ‘economic security’ gap, a similar trend away from the Post-War Planning Committee’s frames challenging the capitalist interpretation is evident. Whereas *As We Win* presented labour as an antidote to the dangerous influence of ‘business thinking’, most of the other literature sought to emphasize

¹⁴⁹ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 10-12 March, 1945, reel 7, 424.

labour and business thinking as harmonious. In fact, what is notable is the extent to which PAC literature, in particular, muted (or even rejected) the radical nature or potential of organized labour in America. Both Hillman and Murray frequently stressed that none of the activities nor ideas espoused by the CIO broke with American tradition; “Our voluntary system has achieved for American goals of production the equal of which has never been closely approached by any other country in the world’s history”, declared Murray during the Full Employment Conference.¹⁵⁰ Five years later he was proclaiming that “We have no classes in this country”, and that

[t]hat is why the Marxist theory of the class struggle has gained so few adherents. We are all workers here. And in the final analysis, the interests of farmers, factory hands, business and professional people, and white collar workers prove to be the same. (Quoted in Mantsios 1977, 217).

These types of statements became commonplace in the CIO literature over the course of the 1940s, and what is perhaps most remarkable is how similar they often were to the basic tune the NAM had been singing since the 1930s: “ ‘One need not think very deeply to understand that the interest of labor and business—that is to say, the employer—are identical’, read one item that the NAM supplied to factory publications in 1938” (quoted in Wall 2008, 55).

Thus, while the CIO’s prognostic framing promoted the role of organized labour into the land of opportunity equation, it was a rather subdued interpretation of its role. With the exception of *As We Win*, most of the framing presented labour and industry as natural allies. We saw earlier that *As We Win* made the case for including unions at the economic decision-making table precisely because it represented opposing interests to those of industry, and it was explicit about this point. Yet the rest of the CIO literature generally refrained from acknowledging such opposing interests. Even when concepts like ‘class’ were invoked, it was often for the purpose of contrasting the United States to other countries. As Leo Perlins,

¹⁵⁰ CIO, *Four Men Speak*, p.15.

national director of the CIO Community Services Committee, remarked during a 1948 address,

Workers Education in Europe, based as it is upon Marxism and class struggle, can be defined more easily than workers education in the United States. Here Karl Marx is less known than Groucho Marx, and class struggle are academic words even on the picket line.¹⁵¹

This type of remark basically affirmed the ‘exceptionalist’ vision regarding class relations in the United States that had long been a keystone of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, and which had been touted by some of the nation’s strongest supporters of laissez-faire capitalism. As Tedlow (1976, 36) points out, and as was shown through examples of NAM literature in chapter 2, “[t]he harmony of all classes was a pillar of [NAM] public relations” during the New Deal era. Rather than challenge the NAM’s message in the postwar years, the CIO’s literature increasingly echoed it, even as organized labour came increasingly under attack by business.

As these various examples demonstrate, CIO literature on its postwar program often framed the role of government and labour participation in closing the ‘economic security’ gap in ways that were in tension with the social democratic underpinnings of the program itself. But perhaps the most telling illustration of this tension, (and also a clear source of contrast between *As We Win* and the rest of the CIO literature), pertains to the use of the term ‘free enterprise’. Recall from the discussion in section 2 above, that in the preparations for the Post-War Planning Committee report, CIO staff sought to emphasize the ‘wilderness of free enterprise’, and deliberately juxtaposed the concept to that of ‘planning for full employment, full production and full consumption’.¹⁵² And a page of *As We Win* emphasized that “We stand for genuine economic freedom, not for monopoly agreements masking as ‘free

¹⁵¹ Leo Perlins, speech, 20 August, 1948, CIO-PE, Box 3.

¹⁵² Minutes of Post-War Planning Committee, 15 July, 1943, KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 17; Ellickson to Walsh, “Major Planks for CIO Post-war Domestic Program”, 7 September, 1943, KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 8, p.2.

enterprise”.¹⁵³ In *People’s Program*, the term “genuine free enterprise” appeared twice, and in both cases, it was framed as a positive element of the CIO’s postwar program. In the Domestic Policy section, for example, the pamphlet declared that “We reject as false the contention that there is a conflict between the planned utilization of our national resources and genuine free enterprise”.¹⁵⁴ Whereas *As We Win* had left room for interpreting ‘free enterprise’ as distinct from ‘genuine economic freedom’, the CIO’s expression of its postwar program in *People’s Program* closed that option off.

It should be noted that the positive use of ‘free enterprise’ in the CIO’s prognostic framing was qualified, to some degree. In an article for the *American*, for example, Murray explained that, “[w]e believe in the free enterprise, initiative, and inventive genius of the American people” (quoted in Gaer 1944, 72). But, he continued, they did *not* “believe in the kind of ‘free enterprise’ which, in recent years, has meant the freedom of big corporations and monopolies to squeeze small business men to the wall, or the freedom to corner and suppress new inventions” (ibid.). Similarly, Hillman made sure to emphasize, during the Full Employment Conference, that

Many [American industrialists] believe with us that post-war plans must be predicated on the full utilization of our men, our machines and our soil—not on an economy of scarcity. We invite them to join with us in developing a program to make ‘free enterprise’ work and to yield real freedom and security for all Americans.¹⁵⁵

In this type of portrayal, ‘free enterprise’ was not the problem, but rather only the version of free enterprise that allowed for ‘world cartelization’ and an economy of scarcity. “Our present economic system can be made to work”, Gaer (1944) stated in *The First Round*, “provided it is made to work *for the benefit of all*. Free Enterprise must therefore be understood as freedom of opportunity, and not freedom to waste the nation’s resources and manpower to satisfy the avarice of a few” (57).

¹⁵³ CIO, *As We Win*, p.27.

¹⁵⁴ CIO, *People’s Program*, p.15.

¹⁵⁵ CIO, *Four Men Speak*, p.5.

Even though the early incorporations of ‘free enterprise’ were often accompanied by certain qualifications, as the above examples demonstrate, the important point is that even before the war had ended, the CIO was increasingly offering prognostic frames that endorsed the role of ‘free enterprise’ in closing the ‘economic security’ gap. Although these were often frames geared at ‘exposing contradictions’ between the promises and practices of free enterprise, they were not targeting the legitimacy of free enterprise itself. By the end of the war, the CIO was officially declaring its support for the idea, and some went so far as to emphasize the Americanism of the concept; during the Full Employment Conference, for example, Hillman remarked that “‘Free Enterprise’ is a fine slogan. Everybody is for it. Nobody is against it. Free enterprise is simply not an issue in America”.¹⁵⁶ Here was a term that had been pushed by one of the C.I.O.’s strongest organizational adversaries—an organization whose philosophy so clearly echoed the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation—and now the C.I.O. was embracing that term as a central element of its own vision. “The C.I.O. is on record as supporting the ‘free enterprise’ economy”, Murray declared in his testimony before a Senate Subcommittee during 1944 hearings concerning Mobilization and Demobilization Problems.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ CIO, *Four Men Speak*, p.4.

¹⁵⁷ *Mobilization and Demobilization Problems.: Hearings Before a Subcomm. of the Comm. on Military Affairs United States Sen., 78th Cong., 2nd Sess. 1823 (1944)* (Statement of Philip E. Murray, president, Congress of Industrial Organizations).

III. FRAMING FAILURES, DISCURSIVE OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES, AND THE LIMITS OF THE ‘AMERICAN DREAM’

In section 2 of this chapter, we saw that the CIO approached the creation of a postwar program as a necessary step for defending labour’s recent gains, particularly those associated with the New Deal; in addition, we saw that many staff and leaders also viewed such a program as a potentially useful mobilizing tool, and one that—if constructed and presented in the right way—might be helpful in prompting a further ‘social democratic’ shift in public opinion on various important issues. Many of these CIO people—including those working in the PAC and the Department of Research and Education—clearly saw the ‘framing’ of their postwar program as a crucial part of their strategy. However, our examination of the postwar literature in Part II revealed many tensions and inconsistencies in the framing within and across the material that the CIO produced in its campaign for its postwar program. The prognostic and diagnostic frames offered in the literature frequently appeared to contradict the social democratic aims (or potential) of the program, and while there were some important exceptions in the Post-War Planning Committee’s literature, these frames quickly—and in fact, permanently—disappeared from the CIO’s repertoire. Even the ‘economic security’ gap frames, which in some of the early literature represented attempts at inversion of meaning of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation, were replaced by much more consensual frames that remained within the realm of ‘exposure of contradiction’. Although the CIO continued to invoke the ‘American Dream’ gap frames throughout the postwar years, it refrained from calling for any significant transformation of capitalism in appealing for these gaps to be closed. In fact, capitalism was being explicitly celebrated as part of the solution, and this pattern would continue into the 1950s, as we saw in the *Speakers Book of Facts* cited at the beginning of the chapter.

This case therefore represents a framing ‘failure’ in two respects: it was a failure because the majority of frames in the literature were (initially) inconsistent with the underpinnings of the (initially) social democratic goals; and it was a failure for those who had viewed the program literature as a potential mobilizing tool for turning public opinion in support of more substantial social democratic goals. The next task in this chapter is to try to make sense of this failure.

5. Prevalence of the ‘Capitalist Land of Opportunity’ Interpretation

We have seen that one of the more curious elements of the CIO’s prognostic framing was the positive use of the term ‘free enterprise’—a term that represented a conflict with many of the principles of the organization’s postwar program. The enthusiastic embrace of the term in the literature, and most leaders’ insistence that the CIO were champions of free enterprise was also in tension with some of the ideas and language in documents circulating among CIO leaders and staff in their initial formulation of the program. Recall, for example, that in the process of putting together the basic framework for a postwar program, one point that was emphasized among Research Department staff was the need to highlight the “wilderness of free enterprise”, and to associate it with the insecurity of the pre-New Deal era: “...business led us into the wilderness of 1932 and there is no proof that it will not do so again”, read one line in the Post-War Planning Committee’s Report No. 1.¹⁵⁸ In addition, drafts circulating among staff show clear efforts to juxtapose that vision to the CIO’s vision of full employment and widespread prosperity. A 1944 draft document by Katherine Ellickson, offered her articulation of this juxtaposition:

¹⁵⁸ “CIO Post-War Planning Committee Report No. I.: Problems of Reconversion”, [1943], TFS Papers, Box 11, Folder 31, p.19.

In planning for reconversion, two major approaches are possible:

1. To return as rapidly as possible to the prewar situation of so-called free enterprise with its inevitable evils of unemployment, poverty, and partial use of resources.
2. To move forward towards full employment, full production and full consumption, with all they would mean in terms of improved levels of living and opportunity for everyone.

Business thinking on reconversion is essentially of the first variety. Business men want to be free once more to run their own concerns as they please, free of restrictions or obligations. But there is no reason to think this system would work out any better in the future than in the twenties.¹⁵⁹

Notably, in contrasting these two positions, Ellickson explicitly attached the term ‘free enterprise’ to the program that was being opposed by the CIO. Furthermore, she did not go on to offer an alternative version of ‘free enterprise’, or to suggest that ‘*genuine* free enterprise’ was part of the program being advocated by the CIO. Similarly, the Post-War Planning Committee Report invoked the term only when referring to the goals of labour’s opponents, including those who espoused ‘business thinking’ as well as reactionary politicians. (On one page, for example, the report authors had stated that “[t]he very business groups which talk most loudly about ‘free enterprise’ usually also oppose such essential institutions as active labor unions and a national social security program”).¹⁶⁰ While the opposition to ‘free enterprise’ in both documents did target a particular version of free enterprise being advocated by the CIO’s adversaries, they did not go on to express support for an ostensibly alternative definition. The language in these documents did not, in other words, take for granted the desirability of ‘free enterprise’; yet, this is precisely what the majority of CIO literature did.

An examination of the Executive Board Meetings during the latter years of the war reveals that initial suspicion towards the concept of ‘free enterprise’ was a sentiment that extended beyond the staff of the Post-War Planning Committee and the Department of Research and Education. During a January 1944 meeting, for example, Board Member (and

¹⁵⁹ “Postwar Planning”, April, 1944, KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 5.

¹⁶⁰ “CIO Post-War Planning Committee Report No. I.: Problems of Reconversion”, [1943], TFS Papers, Box 11, Folder 31, p.29.

once-Socialist) George Baldanzi observed that anti-labour groups were “constantly on the air now, especially on these questions of free enterprise, full employment and turning industry back to them without government regulation”, and he expressed his worry that “nothing is being done from our side to counteract that sort of propaganda”.¹⁶¹ Fellow Board Member Nick Zonarich, a “disciple of Socialist Norman Thomas” (Meyerhuber 1981, 199), was also expressing distaste toward free enterprise as the nation prepared for transition to a peacetime economy. “I personally object to the language of having government property sold to free enterprise”, he remarked during a June 1944 Executive Board meeting, citing his lack of trust toward “how they may utilize these government plants in the post-war era”¹⁶².

Not surprisingly, Baldanzi and Zonarich were among those who, during the June, 1944 Executive Board deliberations over the final draft of the PAC *People's Program* pamphlet, took issue with the inclusion of the positive use of the term ‘free enterprise’ therein. In fact, the version that was read out to Board Members by PAC counsel John Abt during that meeting had contained an additional reference to the term. Specifically, the section on ‘Full Employment’, which was quoted earlier in this chapter (section 4) had initially read as: “The full employment program must, however, be guaranteed by government with a prepared program of jobs at useful work, with standard wages and working conditions, if and to the extent that private industry falls short of the goal, and *thus assure the continuance of free enterprise*.”¹⁶³ What led to the omission of the latter part of the sentence in the pamphlet? After Abt had read the paragraph in question, Baldanzi had interjected, asking for clarification about the definition of ‘free enterprise’, and questioning whether the inclusion of this term in the *People's Program* was a feasible strategy for a platform that was intended to “reflect the aspirations of the labor movement and of progressives”. Although the discussion that followed resulted in agreement by board

¹⁶¹ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 28 January, 1944, reel 6, 259.

¹⁶² Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 16-18 June, 1944, reel 7, 49.

¹⁶³ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 16-18 June, 1944, reel 7, 36.

members to omit the part of the phrase that spoke of “assur[ing] the continuance of free enterprise”, the other two appearances remained.

The decision to remove the third occurrence of ‘free enterprise’ in the *People’s Program* meant very little in the long-run, insofar as the CIO continued to declare its support for the concept throughout the postwar years. However, the exchange that took place leading up to the omission in the 1944 pamphlet is worth examining more carefully, for it helps to shed light on the reasons for its inclusion elsewhere. We can begin by observing Hillman’s response to Baldanzi’s initial interjection asking for “a definition of what was meant by ‘free enterprise’” in the paragraph Abt had just read.¹⁶⁴ Hillman’s answer was that, “We are putting into substance what we believe will give us full employment so as not to be charged with destroying free enterprise. We say it will truly protect free enterprise for *whatever it stands for*”.¹⁶⁵ Hillman’s comments here suggest the popularity of the term ‘free enterprise’ in American society at that time. They also indicate his concern that the PAC (and the CIO more generally) were vulnerable to accusations of being against it—and that such accusations would prove detrimental to their image. We do not necessarily know how Hillman himself felt about ‘free enterprise’ but the fact that he felt it was important to explicitly convey the CIO-PAC’s desire to protect it, “whatever it stands for”, is a testament to its perceived (if not actual) strength in the broader political culture.

Baldanzi’s response to Hillman in this dialogue is also revealing:

I don’t know, I am a little confused, very frankly. I am under the impression that we are writing a platform here for the Political Action Committee that reflects the aspirations of the labor movement and of progressives. I am not ready to subscribe that free enterprise is the acme of perfection, as far as our economy is concerned, and I am also not blinded enough to say we can come out on a socialistic program, but this constant repetition and re-emphasis doesn’t smell very good.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 37.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.; emphasis added.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 37-8.

Baldanzi's remarks reflect a more critical view of 'free enterprise' than Hillman's remarks, yet both men were evincing a sense of being constrained in terms of how the CIO could present their program—and, specifically, they both alluded to the danger of presenting views to the public that appeared to challenge the idea of 'free enterprise'. During that same exchange, another Executive Board member, Joseph Curran, noted that the issue had come up in a New York meeting of the American Labor Party, and that they "dealt with it there by using the term 'genuine free enterprise'."¹⁶⁷ That was the term that was used elsewhere in the 1944 program, as we have seen, and which at the end of the day, even Baldanzi agreed to.

What these deliberations suggest is that whether or not they believed in whatever the term represented, CIO leaders felt that it was important to include 'free enterprise' in their framing of their postwar program. It is important to emphasize here that it is not just that they felt the need to avoid publicly critiquing the idea, but that they also felt it necessary to explicitly express *support* for it. Even J. Raymond Walsh, who during a presentation of the Post-War Planning Committee's Report to the Board, had warned about the term 'free enterprise' being used as a "masquerade costume" for "policies which simply mean do nothing for the people" could be heard during a congressional hearing, only a week later, insisting that "the C.I.O. is very emphatically concerned about the maintenance of what is popularly referred to as free enterprise."¹⁶⁸ Evidently, raising the question of whether or not 'free enterprise' was even right or desirable, was perceived to be off-limits, at least beyond the confines of committee or Executive Board Meetings.

We have just seen that CIO leaders felt it strategically necessary to positively incorporate 'free enterprise' into the framing of their postwar program, due to the concept's perceived popularity within American society. It was something that, as Hillman had

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶⁸ *Post-War Economic Policy and Planning: Hearings Before the Special Comm. on Post-War Economic Policy and Planning. United States Sen., 78th Cong., 1st Sess. 102 (1943)* (Statement of J. Raymond Walsh, Director of Research and Education, Congress of Industrial Organizations).

declared, “everybody is for” and “nobody is against” in America. It appears, then, that ‘free enterprise’—this replacement term for capitalism that had been deliberately pushed onto the American lexicon by its proponents, and which was a central component of the land of opportunity interpretation identified in chapter 2—now belonged to the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’. Some scholars (eg., Fones-Wolf 1994; Wall 2008) who have examined the uses of the language of ‘Americanism’ from the early New Deal period to the postwar years have acknowledged the growing prominence of ‘free enterprise’ in the American lexicon—as Wall (2008, 48) remarks, for example, “[t]he rapidity with which the word ‘free enterprise’ entered general usage in the late 1930s is stunning even by the standards of political speech”. What these and other scholars have not examined in detail is how those who sought to transform American capitalism—including some CIO people—confronted this phenomenon from a strategic standpoint, and how they perceived that phenomenon. While it seems to have become commonplace to portray public relations (‘framing’) battles in the late 1930s through the 1940s as being fought on quite open and highly contested ideological terms, the CIO’s experience with ‘free enterprise’ complicates that claim. If CIO staff and leaders “seized on the language of Americanism and sought to define the nation in ways that furthered their own political and social agendas”, as Wall (2008, 36) contends, they were seizing a language that, at least on the question of ‘free enterprise’, was rooted in an outlook that was incompatible with their social democratic agenda. By examining the dynamics behind the creation and production of the literature that was based on ‘seizing’ this particular language of Americanism, it begins to become apparent that some staff and leaders may have viewed the discursive opportunity structure as a source of constraint, rather than opportunity.

This is not the only manner in which ideas associated with the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation appear to have been prevalent within the discursive opportunity

structure provided by ‘Americanism’, and to have influenced the dynamics of frame construction. In addition to signalling to leaders and staff which terms should be incorporated into CIO gap framing, the discursive opportunity structure provided by Americanism also appeared to signal which terms would need to be approached with caution, or avoided altogether. Inasmuch as those responsible for framing the program were cognizant that some of the concepts or ideas underlying that program would require a “change in American thinking”¹⁶⁹, it is notable that the concepts they were most concerned or cautious about were those which reflected social democratic principles, and which represented a challenge to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. Although we saw in section 2 that there was initial optimism among some CIO people that workers might get on board with the CIO’s post-war program, and that perhaps that program could be a catalyst for shifting broader trends in American political culture, such optimism appears to have dissipated quite rapidly. The CIO’s approach to the concept of ‘planning’ offers one illustration of this phenomenon. Planning was at the centre of the CIO’s postwar program, and its centrality was made very explicit in the early framing efforts by the organization, as we have seen. An examination of frame construction processes shows that as the war drew to a close, CIO leaders exhibited increasing wariness toward the use of ‘planning’ and related terms, for fear that this might prompt public backlash and rejection of its ideas for postwar reconstruction. During one Executive Board Meeting in 1945, for example, Vice President Joseph Curran urged that the CIO advocate a “plan of controlled mass production in the leading industries”, to which Phil Murray responded that, while he thought Curran’s ideas “were very good”, he just “really [didn’t] know whether the nation would be prepared, even at this juncture, to accept any system of controlled production”.¹⁷⁰ During that same year, Ted Silvey of the Reconversion Committee sent an “outline of suggested ideas for text of a booklet about Reconversion” to

¹⁶⁹ Robert Lamb, Report of the twenty-first meeting of the CIO Reconversion Committee, 18 January, 1945, TFS Papers, Box 49, Folder 20, p.7.

¹⁷⁰ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 13-14 July, 1945, reel 8, 76-77.

Joseph Gaer, who was in the midst of preparing a PAC Pamphlet-of-the-Month on the subject: “‘KNOW-HOW’ is just a good America[n] way to say ‘Planning’”, read one line.¹⁷¹

The implication in Silvey’s statement—that ‘planning’ was not quite an ‘American’ word—was not simply a response to the immediate historical context. The term had long been viewed with suspicion in American policy circles, as Graham (1976) documents, and among administrations that generally favoured the idea, there had been a general historical tendency to avoid the term ‘planning’ where possible, due to its apparently un-American connotations. Roosevelt, for example, in a press conference calling for a permanent NRPB, “stressed the word ‘management’, not planning” (quoted in Graham 1976, 59). Indeed, he made sure to emphasize there that “The word ‘management’ is a thoroughly clear American word” (ibid.). If leaders like Roosevelt felt the necessity to be cautious around the language of ‘planning’, then, perhaps we should not be surprised that the term caused significant anxiety for the CIO.

Another source of inconsistency that we have identified in the CIO’s frames (outside of the Post-War Planning Committee’s documents), is the predominantly consensual portrayal of organized labour. One thing that becomes clear from exploring the frame construction processes is that the perception of labour being on the defensive was a quite common and persistent one, especially when it came to issues surrounding the CIO’s public standing. Once again, a closer examination of the dynamics of frame construction helps to shed light on the extent to which the perceived strength of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation in the DOS provided by ‘Americanism’, was a contributing factor.

Minutes of the February, 1943 meetings provide an illustration of the high sense of anxiety among Board Members, concerning labour’s public image—and their inadequate

¹⁷¹ Ted F. Silvey, “A War to Win: Round Two”, draft pamphlet, [May, 1945], TFS Papers, Box 11, Folder 30, p.2.

response to anti-labour propaganda and sentiment—during this period. At one of those meetings, Baldanzi could be heard talking about “the ineffectiveness...in the labor movement in really crystallizing the sentiment of the workers”, and observing that “[w]e have constantly since the inception of this whole national emergency and the war problem been on the defensive all the time”.¹⁷² On that same day, board member B.M. Knight was one of several members who observed that anti-union sentiment appeared to be strong among the armed forces, citing his experience of hearing a Lieutenant-Colonel, who during a joint session of the Texas Legislature

spent...ten minutes blasting labor. That young man made the statement that he would just as soon turn his guns against a striker as he would a Jap. That is the attitude that is being built up in the minds of people in this United States, and we have all fallen down on the job of counteracting that.¹⁷³

Board Member Potofsky followed Knight, remarking, “I don’t think there is any difference here among the Board members, we all agree there is a danger and our public relations job has not been of the very best.”¹⁷⁴

Remarks such as those above serve as a reminder that despite the gains made by labour as a result of New Deal initiatives and of wartime mobilization, the perception of institutional and ideological vulnerability remained quite pervasive among CIO leaders. The sense of fragility clearly influenced the CIO’s decision to engage in political action and to put out a comprehensive postwar program, and it influenced the content of the program itself. In connection with concerns about anti-labour sentiment among the armed forces, for example, the Post-War Planning Committee recommended, in its 1943 Report, that “unions admit former servicemen to membership without payment of initiation fees”; “Such concrete

¹⁷² Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 5-7 February, 1943, reel 4, 96.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 110-11.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 111-12.

evidence of union interest in their problems”, the authors explained, “will help offset propaganda designed to poison their minds against organized labor”.¹⁷⁵

Just as crucially, the perception of vulnerability also influenced the CIO’s strategies for framing their vision of labour’s place and role in postwar America. When Potofsky urged fellow Board Members in the aforementioned meeting “to think in terms of getting the ideas of labor across to all the people in a form that could be accepted”, he was speaking in a context in which the public acceptance of organized labour as a legitimate group in American society, itself remained an ongoing question. In the minds of CIO leaders, it appears that there were many factors to blame for this precarious position that they found themselves in. One issue that frequently came up in Executive Board Meetings was the effectiveness of the publicity campaigns by their opponents, including the conservative coalition in Congress, and groups representing business interests, including and especially the NAM, who, Potofsky complained in the February 1943 meetings, were “manag[ing] [to] get their ideas across”, while those of the CIO were “misunderstood and never presented in the proper light”.¹⁷⁶ Another important factor frequently identified was the bias of the media; “All of us know that the daily press of America is opposed almost unanimously to labor and to the objectives of labor. We cannot expect any sort of a fair break from the daily newspapers”, remarked Board Member Milton Murray during a January 1944 meeting.¹⁷⁷ Expressions of concern and anger about media bias were not confined to private discussions. Gaer (1944, xi), for example, complained in his widely distributed insider’s account of the PAC’s experiences during the 1944 presidential campaign, that “[t]he debate about PAC (outside the labor press and a small number of liberal publications) was almost entirely one-sided”; indeed, he described the media coverage as a “storm over PAC”, which “rose to a crescendo like an approaching

¹⁷⁵ “CIO Post-War Planning Committee Report No. I: Problems of Reconversion”, [1943], TFS Papers, Box 11, Folder 31, p.26.

¹⁷⁶ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 5-7 February, 1943, reel 4, 112.

¹⁷⁷ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 28 January, 1944, reel 6, 315.

hurricane. Day after day and night after night the press and radio howled in fluctuating gusts about PAC and its chairman, Sidney Hillman” (149).

It is not just the sources of dissemination of anti-labour ideas in the early to mid-1940s that is worth noting, but also the content of those ideas. When, amongst themselves, CIO staff and leadership discussed the types of language and ideas that caused them the most grief, certain themes came up which, like the case with ‘free enterprise’, further indicates the perceived prevalence of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. Insofar as they felt that anti-labour propaganda had been effective, the propaganda they identified often had a familiar ring to it; for example, as Board Member Townsend explained during an October 1943 meeting, while the “theory of superiority” had long been used in the South to suppress African Americans, and to prevent the possibility for collaboration among black and white workers,

...up in the North these Horatio Alger stories of ‘Rags to Riches’ affected the poor white workers in the North, because he felt the Union was not of any benefit, because he had an opportunity under that theory to become an industrialist or an employer. So they have all been ill advised...¹⁷⁸

The CIO’s perception of the vulnerability of the labour movement appears to have derived from various sources, but as examples such as the above suggest, the ideas being disseminated were not necessarily new.

The fact that the CIO felt that it was “constantly on the defensive”, as Baldanzi had remarked, may have contributed to the generally consensual nature of the CIO’s gap frames. It certainly may help us understand why the CIO’s literature pertaining to its postwar program tended to downplay the potential strength of organized labour under the corporatist arrangements it was hoping would be adopted. Such arrangements would have potentially put organized labour in a position of strength and power that had traditionally been reserved for industry, particularly in the American context. And the early outlines and drafts of the

¹⁷⁸ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 28 October, 1943, reel 6, 75.

postwar program show that some of the ideas being considered by the staff and leadership charged with preparing it, pointed toward challenging managerial prerogatives¹⁷⁹—a notion that most of the CIO leadership publicly distanced themselves from, and which they would be increasingly emphatic about distancing themselves from, in the postwar era (Davis 1986; Fones-Wolf 1994). Initially, for some CIO leaders, this potential for substantially changing the status quo was something to be optimistic about; “If the program is carried out by CIO, and we believe it will be, in fact we know it will be, it changes the entire economic structure of America”, declared Executive Board Member Van Bittner in early 1944¹⁸⁰. But expressions of this type of optimism grew increasingly rare. Even as staff were busy formulating the ideas and putting together a program to present to policymakers and the public, the CIO were simultaneously fighting a public relations battle with their opponents who were claiming that the PAC was overstepping the bounds of legitimately ‘American’ activity by bringing labour directly into the political arena (Foster 1975; Gaer 1944). Not only did the CIO face several congressional investigations for its PAC activity, but it also faced a barrage of accusations of un-Americanism from various sectors of society, including the labour movement itself; “Our leaders have been called every known kind of vile name”, remarked Phil Murray reflecting on the PAC’s campaign efforts shortly after Roosevelt’s victory in 1944; “We are, according to [newspaper chain owners] Hearst and McCormick and —oh, yes, the [American] Federation of Labor, and others, a diabolical group of subversive persons, hell bent upon the destruction of our American institutions and the overthrow of our Government”.¹⁸¹ Moreover, these accusations were widely disseminated by media outlets, and would continue through the postwar years, with the charges against the PAC remaining

¹⁷⁹ For example, Ellickson’s list of possible planks for the CIO Post-War Domestic Program, which she sent to Walsh in September of 1943, included the suggestion that “Labor should... participate to an increasing extent in the decisions of management which basically affects its welfare as producer and consumer”. (KPE Papers, Box 33, Folder 8, p.3).

¹⁸⁰ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 27-8 January, 1944, reel 6, 74.

¹⁸¹ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 16-25 November, 1944, reel 7, 217-18.

quite consistent. “Is the PAC a Threat or a Contribution to America?” was the subject of an October 15, 1946 radio debate, with the chairman explaining that the PAC’s activities had become “extremely controversial” and that a main charge of its opponents was that it was “swayed and controlled by Communists and radicals”.¹⁸²

As will be discussed later in this chapter, the charges like the one just cited were not only commonplace, but appear to have had a significant influence on public perception of the CIO and organized labour more generally. With such charges being constantly laid out against the organization, and with the perception that their opponents were getting the ‘upper hand’ in the public relations (or ‘framing’) battles it is perhaps not surprising that CIO literature generally emphasized the role of private industry, while muting the radical or transformative potential of their program with respect to the role of labour. In fact, it appears that in this context, the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ left labour leaders feeling that it would be strategically unwise to do otherwise. In their reading of this discursive opportunity structure, being ‘American’ meant championing ‘free enterprise’, avoiding socialist connotations, and, evidently, presenting organized labour in as consensual a light as possible.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Theodore Granik, *American Forum of the Air*, 15 October, 1946, CIO-PAC Records, Box 13, Folder 18, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, 3.

¹⁸³ Of course, we have noted here that some leaders resisted (or at least tried to resist) framing the organization’s program on those terms. Moreover, some of the literature examined in Part II reflects this impetus to challenge that version of ‘Americanism’. Crucially, however, most expressions of these challenges remained largely confined to closed-door meetings and confidential planning memos and drafts. The gap frames that went beyond exposing contradiction, that is, rarely made it into their literature. These frames that represented *inversion of meaning* did resemble the kind of appropriation of the language of ‘Americanism’ emphasized by authors like Wall (2008) and Gerstle (2002), insofar as they sought to invert the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation; nonetheless, it is significant that these frames failed to make it into the CIO’s frame repertoire.

6. Stable vs. Volatile Discursive Opportunity Structures

In my review of the framing perspective in chapter 1, I noted the work of McCammon et al (2007), who distinguish between ‘stable’ and ‘volatile’ discursive opportunity structures; stable DOS’s, recall, are characterized by “discourses that are long-lived and deeply embedded in the surrounding culture”, whereas volatile opportunity structures “derive from relatively short-lived or relatively new ideational elements” (731-2). As McCammon and her colleagues remind us, volatile discursive opportunities “can still be critical or highly salient elements, but they are beliefs or values that are culturally significant for a shorter period of time or that are deemed important but are just emerging” (ibid., 732). In this section, I will consider the wider range of discursive opportunity structures that the CIO staff and leadership drew from in constructing their frames, and I will examine the relative impact of these other discursive opportunities as compared to the DOS provided by ‘Americanism’.

Thus far I have argued that there was a strong element of cautiousness in the CIO’s approach to framing its postwar program, and I have suggested that the perceived strength of ideas associated with the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation played a role in prompting the organization to present literature that often conflicted with the ideological underpinnings of its program. However, if in the early 1940s the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation was prevalent, it was not the only source of ideas and language in American political culture. And if the labour movement—particularly the CIO—felt it was under attack ideologically and institutionally, there were also trends that pointed in the opposite direction. We have seen, for example, that certain developments during the latter years of the war also appeared to provide sources of opportunity for the CIO to promote a social democratic program. The so-called ‘miracle of production’ was a theme that the CIO often invoked, and they frequently pointed to the productive successes of wartime arrangements to try to make their case for the continuation and expansion of tripartite

institutions into the postwar years. Furthermore, Roosevelt's articulation of a 'New' Bill of Rights appeared to signal a renewed dedication to the New Deal on the part of the administration, sparking a sense of optimism among liberal and progressive labourites about the potential for a reinvigoration of the New Deal in the postwar years. Insofar as that speech emphasized economic *rights* and recognized government responsibility for securing those rights, it represented a possible expansion of the discursive opportunity structure provided by the New Deal, further into the realm of social democracy.

While these developments seemed to signify opportunities for the CIO to frame its postwar program in a more forceful and consistent way than it did, it is also true that these opportunities were relatively short-lived. The fact that the National Resources Planning Board—which dated back to 1933—was dismantled in the midst of the war, right when the 'miracle of production' was in full swing, provides some possible indication of just how shaky the foundation for planning was. As Graham (1976) remarks, in the 1940s, most liberal policymakers "had decided that liberalism did not lead to Planning after all. The vast majority of them had lost their early faith in Planning, no longer thought hard about it, let it slip out of the progressive heritage" (68). During that decade, those who did hold on to the concept of Planning were the "writers and academics, even socialists"—people who, according to Graham, represented "no one of any practical importance. They talked, but they could not get a hearing where it mattered, in congressional halls or in the Roosevelt or Truman circles" (84). This was the experience faced by labour as well; even where the formal avenues for discussion appeared open, the CIO grew increasingly frustrated by the fact that its voice was not being listened to. As Nate Cowan complained during an Executive Board meeting in 1945, "Murray has appeared time and again on the Hill before the Committees and supplementing that by letters and wires, personal contacts, trying to point out what this

country is headed for unless something is done, some constructive, sensible planning to meet the situation that will arise...after the war is ended".¹⁸⁴

One can discern a similar trend in relation to the question of corporatist inclusion of labour in economic decision-making. Even before the CIO got to work on formulating a post-war program, staff were expressing alarm at what appeared to be a trend in Washington of pushing labour out; "I am increasingly convinced that important decisions are being made in relation to plans for the transition period after the war in which the CIO is scarcely participating", Ellickson observed in a memo to Walsh in June of 1943.¹⁸⁵ There was a growing concern that many of the wartime arrangements were being viewed by business and government officials as temporary arrangements, to be entirely dismantled during transition, despite the productive successes that those arrangements had brought. The concern grew stronger throughout the latter war years, which saw repeated failure of bills that would have represented the continuation or expansion of these arrangements. For example, a CIO resolution adopted at its 1944 convention in response to the passage of the George Bill over the Murray-Kilgore-Truman bill read: "Planning has made the war production program successful. But Congress and government war agencies so far have refused to admit the same cooperative planning for reconversion and postwar prosperity".¹⁸⁶

The relatively rapid reversal of organized labour's institutional fortunes—the partial dismantling of the Wagner act and the short-lived nature of the wartime tripartite institutions—may reflect the enduring strength of a core element of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation: the message that unions are neither necessary nor desirable in American society. CIO leaders and staff were constantly struggling to challenge that idea, as we have already seen, and although the passage of Taft-Hartley has widely been regarded as

¹⁸⁴ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 13-14 July, 1945, reel 8, 174.

¹⁸⁵ Memorandum, 22 June, 1943, KPE, Box 33, Folder 8.

¹⁸⁶ In CIO, *Final Proceedings of the Seventh Constitutional Convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations*, November 20-24, Chicago, Illinois, 215.

a key turning point against labour, there were plenty of other legislative battles that occupied the organization in the years prior. Throughout the 1940s, in fact, every time anti-labour bills were introduced, one of the main concerns expressed in correspondence and meetings was that the CIO might not have the public—the majority of who they felt were ‘ill-advised’, in Townsend’s words—on their side. “Somehow the Manufacturers’ Association managed to get their ideas across”, remarked Board Member Potofsky in 1943, while the ideas of the CIO were “misunderstood and never presented in the proper light”; thus, it was crucial

not only to pay attention to pending bills but also to pay attention to the position of labor with respect to the general public, and put across the idea of the New Deal and labor in general. [...] [We] should...do something about getting labor’s position in their respective communities across. So far it is the other side that has got the edge...¹⁸⁷

Potofsky evinced similar concern in 1945 after the introduction of the 1945 Hatch-Burton-Ball bill, which was itself unsuccessful but which was a “predecessor to the Taft-Hartley Bill” (Jacoby 1997, 200). “There will be no problem of convincing labor of the viciousness of this measure”, he observed; rather, “[t]he problem will be in convincing the public...what is needed is convincing the American public and the press”.¹⁸⁸

Clearly, there was a growing sense within the CIO that not only the political opportunity structure, but also the discursive opportunity structure offered by wartime production, was already closing before the war had even ended. What also becomes increasingly apparent from examining processes of frame construction, is that the ongoing prevalence of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation may have been an ideological factor contributing to such a closure. A similar development is also evident with respect to the discursive opportunity structure provided by the New Deal, and especially the proposed “second Bill of Rights”. As Davis (1986) observes, “[i]n stark contrast to the contemporary

¹⁸⁷ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 5-7 February, 1943, reel 4, 112-13.

¹⁸⁸ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 13-14 July, 1945, reel 8, 161.

accomplishments of Attlee's Labour government in Britain, the first postwar US congress set aside earlier promises of an 'Economic Bill of Rights' in order to concentrate on the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 and the salvation of anti-Communist regimes in Greece and China" (87). In fact, not only was the 'Economic Bill of Rights' abandoned—it also became the subject of increased negative attention, even before the 1946 elections that saw the conservative takeover of congress. Many CIO and other progressives outside the labour movement became increasingly concerned that legislation representing possible progress toward realizing the 'Economic Bill of Rights' faced opposition precisely on that matter; for example, one academic sitting in on a January 1945 meeting of the CIO Reconversion Committee observed that the pending Full Employment Bill "will be attacked because it implies passing a good social security bill; will be attacked because it is an essential part of the economic bill of rights".¹⁸⁹

Arguments against such legislation were frequently couched in language reflecting ideas associated with the 'capitalist land of opportunity' interpretation. During the 1946 radio debate cited earlier, for example, Republican Senator Joseph A. Ball cautioned that the program sought by the CIO-PAC was dangerous and 'authoritarian', remarking that "[t]he emphasis is all on guaranteed security at the expense of individual freedom and opportunity".¹⁹⁰ This was obviously a different interpretation than what Roosevelt had presented in his 1944 address, which had clear social democratic undertones; yet whatever momentum the CIO had thought would be gained from this quickly swung in the opposite direction, causing significant headaches for the organization. At a 1945 Executive Board meeting, for example, Nate Cowan of the Legislative Department described his frustrating

¹⁸⁹ Bertram M. Gross, Report of the twenty-first meeting of the CIO Reconversion Committee, 18 January, 1945, TFS Papers, Box 49, Folder 20, p.7.

¹⁹⁰ *American Forum of the Air*, 15 October, 1946, CIO-PAC Records, Box 13, Folder 18, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, p. 3-4.

experience meeting with the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee regarding the ill-fated Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill:

...I never want to talk to him again because I have been depressed ever since. I found an old man of 83 years of age whose head is calloused. He has no social conscience and these were his words: *[sic]* The said there was absolutely no need of legislation of this type. ‘The workers in the industries of this country’ – and I am quoting his words – ‘have made lots of money. They have plenty of reserves and those who haven’t saved their money were just a lot of bums and loafers anyway, and they laid around and drank it all up. Well, what a compelling impulse to jump down the old buzzard’s throat. It is hard to hold yourself when you are talking to people of that type, but there he is, a powerful old reactionary. [...] But he holds control and he holds the destiny of millions of honest to God labouring people in the palm of his hand...’¹⁹¹

The type of reasoning typified above was frequently used to dismiss legislative efforts to protect and expand New Deal policy in the immediate postwar years. But it was not only on the Hill that the discursive opportunity structure provided by the New Deal appeared to be showing signs of cracking. While the legislative attacks on organized labour in the mid- to late 1940s represent a phenomenon that has been extensively analyzed by social scientists, recent work by Schickler and Caughey (2011) has shown that it was not only Congress that put labour on the defensive: their examination of a dataset of public opinion polls from the 1930s and 1940s suggests that public opinion, even among Northern voters, “evinced a dramatic anti-labor turn” over the period (163). Zieger (1995) also emphasizes the fact that anti-labour sentiment went beyond the “Superpatriotic reactionaries [in] Congress”, pointing out that “public opinion seemed fixated on the unions’ occasional missteps”, and “[e]ven working people expressed far more criticism of ‘union bosses’ than they did of business leaders” (142).

We have seen that the perception of negative public opinion towards labour seems to have influenced the way the CIO framed its role in closing the ‘economic security’ gap in postwar America, and these analyses of public opinion polls suggest that there was validity to

¹⁹¹ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 13-14 July, 1945, reel 8, 174-5.

their concerns. It is particularly noteworthy that Schickler and Caughey identify a strong correlation between this “broad-based anti-labor reaction in the mass public” and a “perceived growth in the power and radicalism of labor unions” (163). “For all of the anger at business in the Depression years”, they observe further on, “movements that seemed to promise a fundamental reordering of authority relations faced considerable skepticism” (172). Similarly, Zieger (1995, 162) points out that Gallup polls from the war years reveal that among union members, there was more concern about the “need to eliminate radicals and gangsters from union ranks” than about the onslaught of anti-labour legislation coming out of Congress.

The developments we have examined here suggest that the discursive opportunities provided by the New Deal and by wartime labour-friendly arrangements were actually quite *volatile*. Just as importantly, they also indicate the *stability* of the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’—and insofar as the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation was prominent within that discursive opportunity structure in this period, it appears that this made ‘seizing’ the language of Americanism for advancing a social democratic agenda quite difficult indeed. If anything, the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation became even further—and more explicitly—entrenched in the discursive opportunity structure during the postwar years. One could point to the Taft-Hartley Act as one example of unions being ‘pushed’ out of the land of opportunity equation; as CIO General Counsel Lee Pressman warned during a 1947 Executive Board meeting following the signing of that Act:

We have seen the following happen: a law, namely the Wagner Act, that created a governmental instrument to protect the rights of workers, has not been weakened or emasculated. ...basically the Wagner Act as such has been repealed...¹⁹²

¹⁹² Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 27 June, 1947, reel 10, 82-3.

The implications of the Taft-Hartley Act have been explored in great detail in many studies of the labour movement in the 1940s, but various other contemporaneous legislative developments can be pointed to, which appear to signal the further entrenchment of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. Consider, for example, the language used in the Employment Act of 1946, which opens with a declaration that affirms the national goal of full employment, but which also explicitly identifies the responsibility of the Federal Government to work towards this goal “in a manner calculated to foster and promote free competitive enterprise”.¹⁹³

Although the prominence of ‘pro-capitalist’ rhetoric in the postwar period is widely acknowledged and has received substantial attention among scholars of this period, it is also true that many of these accounts—including and especially accounts that challenge Hartz’s (1955) analysis of Americanism—portray this phenomenon as marking a historical break with the previous years, (eg., Gerstle 2002; Kloppenberg 2011). There is no question that the latter half of the 1940s was marked by important shifts in policy and rhetoric, particularly in light of the Cold War; but it was not necessarily a sharp break with American political culture, in which the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation appears to have become established. Insofar as the New Deal had offered an alternative discursive opportunity, it is also notable that the stronger social democratic elements—for example, the ‘second bill of rights’—were relatively fleeting.

¹⁹³ *National Labor Relations Act Amendment of 1947*, Public Law 80-101, *U.S Statutes at Large* 136 § 401-531 (1947).

7. ‘American Dream’ Framing and the CIO’s Ideological Shift

Through our exploration of the processes of frame construction, we have seen how the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation was prominent in the discursive opportunity structure provided by Americanism, and we have seen how it was an important source of influence on the CIO’s decisions on how to frame its postwar program. We saw that this discursive opportunity structure imposed constraints on what language to use and what to avoid, and that although it was not the only source of constraint, it was a crucial one. Insofar as these constraints encouraged a framing strategy of playing down the social democratic elements or social democratic potential of the CIO program, ‘Americanism’ contributed to the framing failures of the CIO.

The inconsistency between the CIO’s postwar goals and the manner in which it framed those goals, did not persist very long, and in fact one can discern a growing commensurability between program and frames even before the war had come to an end. Crucially, however, this development is a reflection of changes to the organization’s goals, rather than its framing. It was the CIO’s post-war vision, that is, rather than the CIO’s language, that underwent the most significant shift in the 1940s. During that period, the organization continually scaled back and adjusted its program, and as we have discussed above, these adjustments often entailed a movement away from social democratic goals.

To the extent that this development represented a shift in organizational ideology, this case appears to represent an example of what Westby (2005), in his typology of the ideology-strategic discourse relationship, calls “strategic framing beyond ideological boundaries”. Such are cases where “framing processes dominated by strategic considerations lead to ideological adaptation” (226). Westby points to these processes as a reminder to frame theorists that strategic actions can “become change-initiating in their own right” (ibid.). In the final section of this chapter, I will offer some thoughts on how the strategic considerations

that we identified through the examination of frame construction processes, might have contributed to the ideological adaptation that we have identified in this chapter: the CIO's loss of organizational commitment to social democracy. Insofar as those strategic considerations were informed by the discursive opportunity structure provided by Americanism, this raises the possibility that the DOS might have contributed not only to the CIO's framing failures, but also to its changing identity in the early postwar era.

On the question of 'free enterprise', we saw that some of the original formulations of the postwar program invoked the term in an oppositional sense, and that the positive use of the term in the PAC's *People's Program* was met with some initial protest in Executive Board meetings. Equally interesting, however, is how quickly the early signs of wariness faded, even in confidential documents and in closed door meetings. For example, we saw earlier that Katherine Ellickson was one of the members of the Department of Research and Education whose documents often invoked the term 'free enterprise' in a negative light, associating it with the postwar vision that was being pushed by labour's opponents. And yet, in a 1945 memo to the CIO Legislative Department's Nate Cowan regarding the Murray Full Employment Bill, her analysis made no mention of the fact that the bill's opening statement expressly declared the United States' commitment to "foster[ing] free competitive enterprise"¹⁹⁴. Indeed, her memo quoted the sentence containing that phrase, and while she noted that there were "certain weaknesses in the bill which we might wish to see remedied even for educational purposes", she appeared to take no issue with the emphasis on "free competitive enterprise and the investment of private capital in trade and commerce".¹⁹⁵ In fact, an examination of her research files pertaining to CIO activity beyond 1945 revealed no further examples of critiquing the term. The opposition to 'free enterprise' that was

¹⁹⁴ Memorandum, 17 February, 1945, KPE, Box 33, Folder 16.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

consistently apparent in her earlier brainstorming documents and memos pertaining to the postwar program is all but absent in later years. While there are various possible reasons for this shift in her writing, it does suggest that this was no longer perceived as an issue that could (or should) be taken on by the CIO; whether or not she was in agreement with the CIO's decision to publicly proclaim its support for 'free enterprise', this was the official stance that had been taken by the organization through its postwar framing, and therefore it was no longer a proper target of oppositional framing.

That the battle against the term 'free enterprise' was perceived to no longer be worth fighting by the end of World War II, even for those who initially opposed the concept, is also suggested by the shifting dynamics of the Executive Board meetings. An examination of the minutes of every meeting throughout the second half of the 1940s revealed almost no mention from leaders or staff about the positive use of the term—this, despite the fact that after the war, the term was used with increasing frequency (and in most cases positively) in CIO speeches and literature.¹⁹⁶ Here and there, a lone voice would speak out against the encomiums to free enterprise, but these were voices of those on the far left, many of whom were on their way out.¹⁹⁷

The meaning behind the organization's expressed support for the term appears to have shifted over time. Initially, it reflected a mixture of genuine support and begrudging use of the language for strategic purposes, based on the perception of the discursive opportunity structure offered by 'Americanism'. Yet the lack of signs of opposition to, or even deliberation about, the term by the end of the war may be a reflection of a growing commitment to the basic principles for which it stood. That the positive use of 'free

¹⁹⁶ The centrality of 'free enterprise' to the CIO's prognostic framing did not go unnoticed by socialists and social democrats outside of the CIO, as we shall see in chapter 4.

¹⁹⁷ Harry Bridges, for example, during a January 1948 Executive Board meeting, remarked that "our Union is not overwhelmingly enthusiastic in its belief of the sacredness of the free enterprise system. Our union favors the principles of nationalization and things like that in this country." (Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 22 January, 1948, reel 11, 150).

enterprise' in the CIO literature became more than a commitment to the term solely in order to avoid controversy, is evident beyond just the fact that such usage no longer invoked discussion and debate. There is a discernible shift in the tone of deliberations behind closed doors on a variety of related issues, which indicate that some of the ideas being considered among the postwar planning and reconversion committees, which represented direct challenges to the 'primacy of free enterprise', were no longer deemed worthy of being pursued. In 1943, J.R. Walsh and others on the Post-War Planning Committee had emphasized the importance of putting a positive spin on public works and other things that entailed the active and primary role of government in the management of the economy; yet the leadership sitting in on board meetings a decade later—composed of several of the same individuals who had been there in 1943—appeared to be far less interested in promoting 'public works for the public good!'. Rather, they tended to echo the sentiment expressed in the *People's Program* of 1944, which granted private enterprise the primary role in directing the American economy. Following President Walter Reuther's opening remarks at a 1954 Board Meeting, for example, in which he had stated that "right now our basic problem is not to expand at the top of our economic structure", but rather "the shortage of purchasing power", Board Member David McDonald responded,

Mr. Chairman, so that there will not be any misunderstanding, and I don't think you deliberately omitted this, I am sure that the [CIO] believes in the idea of expanding our productive machinery in America. [...] I am sure that you and the rest of us believe in the idea of private investment.¹⁹⁸

Reuther's response was, "That is right. I think, David, as you know the CIO resolutions all along have urged expansion, and certainly when we talk about expansion of industry, we think essentially in terms of private investment" (35). By this time, McDonald was possibly justified in making the assumption that 'the rest of us' in the room believed in the primacy of private investment, and on that day his remarks met no objections; but ten years earlier, such

¹⁹⁸ Reuther, Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 22 March, 1954, reel 16, 31; McDonald, *Ibid.*, 32-3.

a claim would have likely been met with resistance, and *not* just from the members of the left wing unions that would go on to be expelled in the purges. In 1944, Nick Zonarich, for example, had expressed his distrust toward ‘free enterprise’ and had cautioned against the use of “any language in [*People’s Program*] whereby we endorse the proposition that government-owned plants be submitted to private employers on a basis that they be sold to them”;¹⁹⁹ yet he was also present in the 1954 meeting just cited, and he did not speak up against McDonald’s or Reuther’s emphasis on the primary role of private enterprise.

For all the problems they would face throughout the postwar period, there was also a rather persistent emphasis among the leadership on celebrating what the present American economic system had to offer. “I believe the American economy is freedom’s greatest material asset”, Reuther declared in a 1954 speech delivered to the Economic Club of Detroit²⁰⁰. If this remark was framed in language designed to resonate with the ‘business-minded’ audience before him, it was not in contradiction with what he was saying elsewhere in front of more like-minded audiences. By 1954, this once-socialist now genuinely believed in the superiority of the American economic system, as his biographer has observed:

Reuther...was increasingly convinced that his brand of collective bargaining offered working-class Americans all the hope and progress his generation had once invested in the socialist movement. Publicly, Reuther lost few opportunities to distance himself from a Marxist worldview and celebrate what he called ‘the genius of the American economy.’ He admired the social democracy of northern Europe but thought the productivity of American capitalism so great and the structure of American society in such flux as to make class politics counter-productive in the United States (Lichtenstein 1995, 286).

For Reuther, as for many others in the CIO who had initially sought a postwar America that was built on social democracy, a better option had been found, within a capitalism that was

¹⁹⁹ Minutes, CIO Executive Board, 16-18 June, 1944, reel 7, 49.

²⁰⁰ “How Labor and Management Can Cooperate to Preserve Freedom, Around the World”, 30 November, 1954, Box 545, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, p.3.

far less reformed than even the most conservative CIO people had envisioned the previous decade.

8. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the CIO's framing activities in support of its postwar program, focusing in particular on how it framed the 'equal opportunity' and 'economic security' gaps in its efforts to convince its membership, the broader American public, and public officials of the virtues and benefits—and the 'Americanism'—of its vision. In Part I, I provided a background discussion of the 'key players' involved in the creation and dissemination of literature relating to the postwar program, and I pointed out how many of the ideas circulating among CIO staff and leadership indicated that the postwar vision was initially a social democratic one. In Part II, I examined the speeches, pamphlets, and other literature that was disseminated by the organization, and I identified various inconsistencies within and across the material, and I observed that for the most part, the CIO was framing the 'American Dream' gaps in a manner that appeared to uphold the basic claims underpinning the 'capitalist land of opportunity' interpretation. In Part III, I examined the processes of frame construction, in an effort to make sense of the CIO's framing failures. This examination revealed that the CIO leaders and staff approached their framing strategy largely from a defensive standpoint, and that their perception of vulnerability stemmed in part from their perception that the 'capitalist land of opportunity' interpretation held significant sway among policymakers and the general public. We also saw that they perceived that interpretation as part of the broader discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism'. This perception clearly influenced their framing strategy, and insofar as this strategy led to the use of language that conflicted with their social democratic principles, the discursive opportunity structure therefore appears to have contributed to the CIO's framing failure. In the final section of the chapter, I demonstrated why this case represents an example

of what Westby (2005) calls “strategic framing beyond ideological boundaries”. Insofar as the strategic framing was based on the response to the perceived prevalence of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation in the discursive opportunity structure, it therefore appears to have also contributed to the CIO’s ideological shift.

In the year before the CIO merger with the AFL, the PAC held a national meeting to discuss strategy for the upcoming 1954 election campaign. One of the topics of discussion during that conference was the question, “What influences our members”. One line of the hand-written notes of that meeting read: “Working class psychology doesn’t work. Members are middle class, and think middle class”. In his work, Zieger (1995, 309) references that sentence to illustrate the changing ideological approach of the CIO, and he identifies the shift away from class appeals as the leadership’s logical response to an altered political culture that no longer accommodated such appeals. However, as the foregoing discussion indicates, there are ways in which this hand-written note reflected a certain continuity; CIO staff and leadership had long operated on the understanding that mobilizing workers in the United States was a complex challenge, and that this was in no small part due to the fact that ideas like the ‘Horatio Alger’ ethic of achieving social mobility through the channels of the market, appeared to have left their imprint on American political culture. Perhaps the main difference from earlier years was that those sitting in the PAC meeting in 1954 were less troubled by the strength of that ethic than some CIO people had been in the 1940s. For the CIO of the 1950s, the primacy of capitalism in the land of opportunity was not something to be challenged, but rather the accepted starting point for legitimate political projects seeking to ensure that the promises of the ‘American Dream’ were realized. It would appear that not only did the CIO fail to redefine the ‘American Dream’ for the postwar era but in fact, if anything, it was the ‘American Dream’—particularly, the prevalence of its core ideological tenet—that contributed to redefining the CIO.

Chapter 4: The National Educational Committee for a New Party, 1946-1947

I. BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

The left badly needs to begin a fairly basic re-examination of its ideas and of the problems which face it; and this is the time for it, because I don't think the left is going to have a chance to do much more than think and agitate for the next few years.

-Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (1947)

In the Spring of 1946, while the CIO was in the midst of its ideological reorientation towards the conservatism that would come to define the postwar ‘consensus’, a group of intellectuals and activists gathered together in Chicago to discuss ideas and prospects for a “unified program of action” for the American left.²⁰¹ Among those who attended the Chicago Conference were members of the Socialist Party, the Liberal Party, and leaders of some CIO and AFL unions. At the end of this conference, which took place between April 6 and 7, the creation of the ‘National Educational Committee for a New Party’ (NECNP) was announced. Several months later, the committee’s “Ideas for a New Party: Provisional Declaration of Principles” was published in the *Antioch Review*. The Declaration set out various ideas and goals pertaining to post-war domestic and international policy. Its authors emphasized that neither of the existing national parties were capable of achieving these policy goals—nor, in

²⁰¹ A. Philip Randolph to Daniel Bell, 7 March, 1946, Daniel Bell Research Files on Communism, Socialism and the Labor Movement, Box 28, Folder 2, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives (collection hereafter cited in notes as DB Files).

most instances, did these parties express any desire to work towards them. On the final page, under the heading, *'Party of the American Dream'*, the article declared that

A new people's party will be a party to realize liberal economic democracy as the American Dream in newer and finer fulfilments. For the American liberal tradition never separated economic from political democracy. (NECNP 1946, 472)

The article then went on to argue that economic equality was “imperative for a truly democratic nation”, and emphasized that this idea had distinctly American roots, beginning with Jeffersonian thought, and then expressed in subsequent strands of American political development—most recently the New Deal (ibid.). However, the New Deal, “whose program was an emergency expression of the social-economic crisis, never proposed measures to implement the [economic bill of rights] fully, and it is now history.” Thus, “[t]he American people must go beyond the New Deal”. This would only be possible, according to the authors of the article, through the establishment of a “new people's party [which] will carry the struggle and aspirations of the American Dream to new achievements”. The authors concluded with an appeal to

Men and women of good-will everywhere! You can, if you will, recapture the American Dream in the newer and finer fulfilments of a greater economic, political and social democracy. (ibid.).

Less than two years after this publication, the NECNP was defunct, leaving behind few traces of its existence. Insofar as the committee's goal had been the establishment of a third political party, the case of the NECNP clearly represents a case of failure. But it is not the only failure, nor is it the one that we are primarily concerned with in this chapter. The NECNP was driven also by a more immediate goal, one that was made clear from the very beginning of its establishment; “We wish to start an educational campaign that will unite American progressives behind a democratic program reaching toward a fundamental solution of our economic problems”, declared NECNP Chairman A. Philip Randolph, in a statement

released to the press following the April 1946 conference.²⁰² While NECNP members felt that ultimately, such a solution required the creation of a new party, there was also widespread agreement within the committee that the time was not quite ripe, and that in the meantime the focus should be on establishing alliances with other progressive groups and on “build[ing] sentiment for a new party” among the broader public.²⁰³ This was about more than just the creation of a new party, it was about the creation of new ideas; the NECNP represented, in Randolph’s words, “the beginning of a great political crusade for a new political idea in America”.²⁰⁴ Therefore, a short-term goal of the committee was to convince Americans of the necessity for re-visiting and re-thinking long held assumptions, and to mobilize support for new ideas—ideas which, once they had enough backing and support, would be made into policies implemented through a new political party.

The writing up and publication of the “Provisional Declaration of Principles” was at the centre of this mobilization effort. The “Provisional Declaration” had a clearly social democratic flavour; it included calls for “postwar planning; full employment; corporatist cooperative arrangements between business, labor, and government; a comprehensive national housing program; and ‘social security for everyone from the cradle to the grave’” (Katznelson 1986, 307). While some of the proposals for domestic policy clearly (and in some cases explicitly) drew from policies being implemented by social democratic and labour parties in other countries, there was also a strong emphasis throughout this and other NECNP documents, on highlighting the uniquely ‘American’ quality of its ideas. Indeed, the NECNP had been founded precisely with this emphasis in mind: as one summary report of the April conference had noted, “There was agreement on the need of an American approach

²⁰² “Statement authorized by National Conference April 7”, 1946, DB Files, Box 28, Folder 2.

²⁰³ A Philip Randolph, form letter, 18 April 1946, DB Files, Box 28, Folder 2, p.2.

²⁰⁴ A Philip Randolph to Mr. E. Moyer, 9 August 1946, Papers of A. Philip Randolph, Box 1, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (collection hereafter cited in notes as APR Papers).

and formulation”.²⁰⁵ The committee’s focus on its ‘Americanism’ came through clearly in its “Provisional Declaration”, and many liberal and progressive intellectuals and activists who read the *Antioch* article upon its publication, viewed this emphasis as one of the committee’s greatest strengths. The Editor of *The Progressive*, Morris Rubin, for example, described the declaration as “An intelligent start”, and praised the committee for providing “one of the most authentically American statements of progressive goals to emerge on paper in a long time” (1947, 305).

By the end of the decade, however, most of the ideas laid out in the platform had become part of “the ‘not said’ and the ‘not thought’ of economic and social policy in the United States” (Katznelson 1986, 308). The fact that the committee’s social democratic ideas fell into obscurity, and did so quite rapidly, represents the failure that we will be exploring in this chapter. The failure to mobilize around a social democratic vision of postwar America is one of the points of similarity between the case of the NECNP and the case of the CIO, which we explored in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized from the onset that despite important similarities (and despite the historical-contextual overlap), there are many crucial differences with respect to these two cases. Like many of the activities of the CIO during World War II and in the immediate postwar period, those of the NECNP were driven by a desire to transform American social and economic institutions in the postwar era; unlike the CIO, however, the NECNP was organized around the principle that such a transformation would require working outside of the channels of the existing two-party system. Moreover, its members felt that not only was the Democratic Party a ‘spent force’, but so too was the New Deal, as we saw in the above excerpts from the “Provisional Declaration”.

²⁰⁵ Ben Davidson, report of Chicago conference, 11 April, 1946, <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/purl/purlResolver?id=/lilly/meier/printable/VAB8339-22040>, p.2.

Despite these and other important differences, however, both the NECNP and the CIO represent cases that involve failed attempts at transforming postwar America into a social democratic society. And, more importantly, the NECNP, like the CIO, invoked the language of the ‘American Dream’ in presenting its vision for a social democratic America. As will become clear in this chapter, the nature of ‘American Dream’ framing by the NECNP was different in certain respects from the CIO’s postwar framing; in particular, the NECNP’s framing was more clearly and consistently geared toward ‘inversion of meaning’, and indeed its gap frames were more commensurate with its program. However, the NECNP’s program failed to achieve resonance, and the end result was the same as that identified in the previous chapter: a failed attempt to redefine the ‘American Dream’ beyond the boundaries of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation.

Chapter Structure

This chapter begins by examining the origins of the NECNP, focusing on the lead-up to the 1946 Conference of American Progressives in Chicago, and it identifies the key people involved in organizing the conference. It also discusses the core themes and ideas circulating among the conference organizers, as well as the strategies agreed upon at the conference regarding the newly formed NECNP. Section 3 then proceeds to examine the literature produced by the NECNP, focusing primarily on the American Dream gap frames in the committee’s core document, the “Provisional Declaration”. In that section, I highlight the elements of the committee’s diagnostic and prognostic frames that, I argue, represent attempts to challenge the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation underlying the ‘American Dream’. Focusing in particular on the ‘American political traditions’ gap frames in NECNP literature, I suggest that these frames represented attempts to ‘invert’ the meaning of the capitalist interpretation. The examination of American Dream frames is followed by a discussion, in section 4, of the NECNP’s failure to establish a third political party. As already

noted above, the purpose of this chapter is not to explain this failure; indeed, attempting such an endeavour would be particularly difficult because of the paucity of relevant information that exists on this committee.²⁰⁶ In that section, however, I do suggest that the available evidence points to the perception of a closed political opportunity structure for third-party movements in that historical context. In section 5, I move on to consider the NECNP's framing failures. The committee's attempts to invert the 'American Dream' were largely unsuccessful, and therefore this case, like that of the CIO, sits uneasily with expectations in the conventional wisdom regarding the 'American Dream'.

In section 6, I consider the potential role of discursive opportunity structures in constraining NECNP framing activity and in the committee's framing outcomes. The evidence here suggests that many movement actors viewed the discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism' through a less defensive (and more optimistic) lens than the CIO. Their strategy of constructing American Dream frames, in fact, appears to represent the type of 'seizing of Americanism' that Wall (2008) attributes to the activities of the CIO; however, insofar as this 'seizing of Americanism' involved the (failed) strategy of attempting to mobilize around a redefined 'American Dream', there were also clearly limits to the strategy. I conclude by considering how this failure provides further support for the definitional analysis of the 'American Dream' provided in chapter 2 of the thesis.

²⁰⁶ The majority of primary materials pertaining to the NECNP was found in the Daniel Bell Papers, the microfilm edition of the A. Philip Randolph Collection, and the Socialist Party Papers. The material and information contained therein is sufficient to merit a separate case study, but there are also some limits to the type of conclusions that can be drawn in this case, especially when compared to the materials gathered for the other two cases. The secondary literature on the committee, it should also be noted, is particularly sparse. Despite an extensive search of the relevant literature on the immediate postwar years, I came across only a few works that mention the NECNP. In addition to Katznelson's (1986) brief mention of the committee, cited earlier, the three other works that make reference to the NECNP are: Boyle (1995), Brick (1986) and Hamby (1973). The discussions of the NECNP in these works reflect the different subject matters of the works (Boyle's work is on the United Automobile Workers, Brick's is focused on the shifting ideological trajectory of Daniel Bell, and Hamby examines social and economic policy from the Truman period). Although these authors also offer somewhat conflicting accounts of the particular circumstances surrounding the NECNP's demise, as will be discussed later in this chapter, there is general agreement that this committee represents a failed effort at an 'Americanized' social democracy.

2. Origins of the NECNP: Key People and Strategy

The Conference of American Progressives

The ‘Conference of American Progressives’ that took place in Chicago on April 6 and 7, 1946, and which led to the establishment of the NECNP, was sponsored by a number of labour leaders and intellectuals, including A. Philip Randolph, one of the bridge activists who I introduced in chapter 1. In addition to being a key sponsor and organizer of the Conference, he was also appointed temporary Chairman of the newly created NECNP; he would remain the committee’s chairman for the duration of its existence. Other sponsors included John Dewey (who acted as Honorary Chairman), as well as several other labour leaders—James Patton of the National Farmers Union, Samuel Wolchok of the United Retail, Wholesale & Department Store Employees, and H.L Mitchell of the National Farm Labor Union. Many of the individuals who attended the conference were also from labour, including 23 delegates from the CIO and 7 from the AFL.²⁰⁷

Although the main theme that emerged during the ‘Conference of American Progressives’ concerned the prospects for establishing a third party, the organizers of the conference, in the months leading up to it, advertised its purpose in broader language. The main idea, Randolph explained in a letter to the president of the University of Chicago, was to get labour leaders and intellectuals together in a “discussion conference...to explore the political situation today and the problems of liberal political action in the next few years”.²⁰⁸

The conference call sent out in February, 1946, explained that the conference would be

²⁰⁷ Ben Davidson, report of Chicago conference, 11 April, 1946. Although there was a relatively heavy presence from the labour movement at this conference, however, it should be stressed that many of those who were in attendance were there precisely because of their dissatisfaction with organized labour’s current approaches to political action. Criticism of the AFL’s ‘Gompers-style’ political approach, and of the CIO’s commitment to the Democratic Party, became prominent themes in the writings and speeches of the NECNP. This was especially the case after the disappointing results of the 1946 congressional elections, which saw low voter turnouts and heavy losses for the Democrats, and which the committee’s December newsletter identified as “proof that organized labor clearly wants something better than a choice between a lesser and a greater evil” (NECNP, “Survey Shows Strong New Party Desire”, December 1946, Box 28, APR Papers, 2).

²⁰⁸ Letter to Ernest Colwell, 4 February, 1946, Box 28, Folder 2, DB Files.

“informal and unpublicized unless it decide[d] otherwise”, and that it would “consider whether it wishes to organize a new political movement or adopt other measures to unite all left-of-center democrats and throw their weight in the battle for a better America and a better world”.²⁰⁹ A March 7 letter sent to all those invited to participate in the upcoming conference, offered more specific details about the key issues that would be under discussion, but still refrained from suggesting that third party politics was the only mode of political action that would be considered:

The conference will explore avenues towards a unified program of action for labor, farmers, co-operators, professionals, and genuine liberals. The need for some unified program is evident, unless we are to remain on the defensive while such fundamental problems as these remain unsolved: The wage-price issue...Legislative reaction...racial relations...Imperialism...Political Action.²¹⁰

It is also important to note that despite the emphasis on ‘Americanism’ that would become a central theme in NECNP activity (as will be demonstrated in this chapter), those at the helm of the committee were also looking to Canada and Western Europe for inspiration and guidance. Writing in late 1945, when plans for the Chicago conference were still in a nascent stage, Randolph remarked that he had become “considerably perturbed over the political situation in the United States”, and he observed that

In Western Europe and Canada the parties standing for democratic socialism are making outstanding gains, while in the United States, liberals, labor and progressives are taking it on the chin. It seems to me that now is the time for us to consider seriously what possibilities there are in the United States for building a nation-wide party along the lines of Canada’s Cooperative Commonwealth Federation.²¹¹

Others involved in organizing the conference would echo this sentiment, and once the NECNP was formed, the committee members continued to stress the importance of drawing

²⁰⁹ A. Philip Randolph, Samuel Wolchok, Simeon Martin, H.L. Mitchell and John Dewey, “A Call to American Progressives”, [February 1946], Box 28, Folder 2, DB Files.

²¹⁰ Randolph to Daniel Bell, 7 March, 1946, Box 28, Folder 2, DB Files.

²¹¹ Form letter, [1945], Box 28, APR Papers.

from the experiences in those countries, while maintaining a distinctive ‘American’ approach.²¹²

Among those who attended the April conference and who would offer to lend support in the sponsors’ effort to get the newly created NECNP off the ground, were Daniel Bell, Lewis Corey, and the UAW’s Emil Mazey. With names such as these, the NECNP’s membership “included some powerful forces of native American radicalism and liberalism” (Hamby 1973, 138). While those forces represented divergent interests and viewpoints on certain issues, what brought conference participants together, and what prompted many of them to join the NECNP, was their belief in the necessity of significant transformation in the American political and economic landscape. Many who were present at the Chicago conference were sceptical about the feasibility of third party politics in the foreseeable future, and there were various reasons cited; for example, “the representatives of the [CIO] PAC at the conference argued that a new party was impractical as long as labor forces had not yet learned to vote as a bloc” (Brick 1986, 114-115). However, as Randolph reported, “[t]hose...in Chicago agreed that we need a unifying force to regain the progressive initiative in this country, and that in the long run, the job cannot be done through the Democratic or Republican Parties”.²¹³ In addition, there was agreement among the delegates “that the basic philosophy of such a group should be one of a democratic planned economy”.²¹⁴

At the conference, although “delegates approved Randolph’s call for a decisive repudiation of all the ‘old parties’”, the short-term strategies that were agreed upon with

²¹² The following excerpt from minutes of a November 1946 NECNP meeting offers some insight into the importance that NECNP members attached to social democratic advancements they saw occurring in other countries: “[Lewis] Corey showed a sample of a Newsletter ‘British Labor Today’, to be published soon by the NECNP Research Council. He stated the importance of tying up the activities of the present British government with the aims of NECNP. Mr. Krueger commented that such a publication can do an indirect job for us: Its purpose is not to do direct plugging for NECNP but rather to demonstrate how another government is already accomplishing what we hope our government will some day. Mary Martinson felt that a Newsletter such as this is important because of the feeling of pessimism in the U.S.; news about such progress in Britain can be utilized to guide faith in America.” (NECNP, minutes, 16 November, 1946, Box 28, APR Papers, 2).

²¹³ A Philip Randolph, form letter, 18 April 1946, DB Files, Box 28, Folder 2, p.1.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

respect to the NECNP, reflected the general weariness among conference participants about the feasibility of creating a new party right away (Brick 1986, 114). As Randolph emphasized in correspondence summarizing the event,

The Chicago conference did not create a new political party. It did set up a National Educational Committee for a New Party to act as a clearing house and coordinating center for new party ideas and forces; to stimulate and establish contacts with unions, farm groups, cooperatives and other organizations and key persons; to encourage local and regional conferences; to establish a monthly paper; to issue and distribute pamphlets and leaflets; to issue statements on current events from time to time in accord with our objectives; and to survey the conditions in the country concerning the prospects for the development of a new party.²¹⁵

Randolph's description here makes it clear that 'framing' activities would be at the heart of the NECNP's immediate strategy. As Corey pointed out, the NECNP was a "provisional national council to *promote* the idea of a party, *not* to organize one" (quoted in Brick 1986, 115).

II. AMERICAN DREAM FRAMES IN NECNP LITERATURE

3. The 'American Political Traditions' Gap

The NECNP's framing included variations of both the equal opportunity and economic security gaps that we identified in the CIO's material, but as will be demonstrated below, these were most often subsumed under the more general 'American political traditions' gap frame—the gap between the promises and practices of a society founded on democratic and egalitarian traditions. As we examine the diagnostic and prognostic framing, we shall see that the NECNP literature explicitly identified the American political tradition as a liberal tradition—and that liberal tradition as an 'equalitarian' tradition; and, it emphasized

²¹⁵ Ibid.

that being true to this tradition would require significant changes to the nation's existing political and socio-economic structures. As we turn to examine the diagnostic and prognostic frames, we will focus primarily on the "Provisional Declaration", which was introduced earlier, but we will also consider other sources of NECNP framing where relevant.

Diagnosis

The NECNP's pamphlet, *Why a New Party*, opened with the observation that "The United States is today faced with problems of the greatest urgency which the Republican and Democratic parties, controlled by vested interests, have shown themselves utterly unable to solve".²¹⁶ The early draft of the "Provisional Declaration" identified these problems, which gave rise to "urgent economic, political and social needs", as such:

The American people want economic security with freedom, which calls for an end of depressions and unemployment. [...] The American people want to uproot the racial and religious discriminations that befoul our glorious tradition and practice of democracy. They want greater racial, economic and political equality.²¹⁷

In this statement, we see hints of the two 'gap' frames we identified in CIO material in chapter 3: the 'economic security' gap, and the 'equal opportunity' gap. The published version of the document opened with revised wording, but which elaborated on, rather than shifting, the basic message about the 'urgent' problems of the day:

The American people need a new political alignment and policy to secure satisfaction of their urgent economic, political and social wants, in a world where pressing inescapable problems call for progressive answers. [...] The American people need a new people's movement with a policy of basic economic reconstruction for economic security, human welfare and freedom. They need principles and a program to meet the challenge of our modern age to build, out of the achievements of science and technology and of American equalitarian traditions, a new world of greater equality, liberty and justice. (NECNP 1946, 449)

²¹⁶ NECNP, *Why a New Party*, [May 1946], APR Papers, Box 28.

²¹⁷ NECNP, "Provisional Declaration of Principles: National Educational Committee for a New Party" draft [May 1946], Daniel Bell Files, Box 28, Folder 2, p.1.

As the final sentence of this excerpt suggests, the NECNP's 'gap' framing was not simply about returning to a mythical past, but rather about embracing certain developments and applying the knowledge and resources gained over time in an effort to live up to the older ideals.

Although the NECNP's diagnostic framing was clearly targeting an American audience, the "Provisional Declaration" also made appeals for closing the gap using more cosmopolitan language. For example,

The achievements of science and technology can make humanity's dream of the good life for all come true. It is no longer necessary that any human beings should be ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and overworked; that there should be unemployment and want in the midst of plenty; that people should live in economic dependence and insecurity, ignorance and ugliness. (NECNP 1946, 449)

While the 'American political traditions' gap was in the first instance about fulfilling promises and potential rooted in *American* circumstances, the necessity and motivation for closing the gap extended far beyond the nation's borders. American 'equalitarian traditions' and material advancements represented tools for effecting positive change, but failure to utilize those tools properly thus far meant that the country was failing, unnecessarily, to stop suffering both at home *and* abroad; in the United States, "men and women are tormented by unemployment and insecurity, and by the *fear* of unemployment and insecurity", while "[s]tarvation and misery stalk most of the world's peoples" (NECNP 1946, 450).

The gap framing in the NECNP's "Provisional Declaration", in addition to identifying the basic problems that required attention, also offered an explanation for why those problems remained as yet unsolved. The Democratic and Republican parties were, unsurprisingly, main targets of criticism, as was the country's existing two-party system in general. NECNP literature also accused the 'vested interests' that were said to control these parties, as the earlier quote from *Why a New Party* alluded to. The 'vested interests' that received the most negative attention in the "Provisional Declaration" were the 'American

monopolies’ who were also variously identified as ‘Monopoly oligarchs’, ‘Monopoly reaction’, and ‘Monopoly Big Business’ throughout the pages of the document. In addition to stressing the “strangling power of monopoly Big Business” over government and small enterprise, the “Provisional Declaration” also portrayed monopoly interests as the ‘driving force of reaction’:

....the economic and political forces of reaction are resisting, they will continue to resist, the realization of measures to broaden the life, liberty and happiness of the American people. The driving force of reaction is capitalist monopoly. (NECNP 1946, 458)

A few paragraphs later, it also blamed capitalist monopoly for oppression and economic crisis; “All useful functional groups of the people are oppressed by capitalist monopoly”, including workers who were “oppressed by its opposition to unionism and high wages” (459). Furthermore, monopoly

oppresses the people as a whole by restriction of production, of consumer purchasing power and of consumption. [...] Hence monopoly Big Business is the basic cause of the economic crisis of our age. The crisis manifests itself in the increasing gap between consumption and potential production, and in the depressions and unemployment which create want in the midst of plenty²¹⁸. (450)

Among the central targets of ‘blame attribution’ in the NECNP’s diagnostic framing, therefore, were the existing political parties as well as the vested interests—particularly economic ones—said to be controlling those parties. During the ‘Conference of American Progressives’, Randolph’s speech to the delegates offered similar blame attribution, using even stronger wording: “If the capitalists cannot be trusted to continue in control of the economic life of America, then it logically follows that the political parties that represent these capitalists should not be permitted to represent and control the American state

²¹⁸ The authors offer the following definition of ‘monopoly Big Business’: “...a system in which a small group of giant corporations—form 4 in manufactures to 45 in transportation—control from one-third to nine-tenths of an industry’s output. It is a condition of economic feudalism that mocks free enterprise, economic freedom and welfare” (458-60). The reference to ‘free enterprise’ is one of many found in the “Provisional Declaration”, and I will address this point below.

system”.²¹⁹ In fact, he had continued, “It is a matter of common knowledge that the Republican and Democratic Parties are only different in name. They are financed and controlled and represent the same industrial and financial interests”.²²⁰ This type of blame attribution resembles the framing provided by the CIO’s Post-War Planning Committee in its early literature, but which also changed very quickly as the organization scaled back its oppositional language. It is also worth pointing out that Randolph’s diagnostic framing, and that of the NECNP more generally, also tended to be much more consistent in explicitly denouncing the structural features of capitalism, and in emphasizing that the problems went beyond certain individuals and corporations (the latter of which is common in framing that remains within the realm of ‘exposing contradiction’). “It is not enough to berate the ‘malefactors of great wealth’ with the strenuous Teddy Roosevelt...or ‘economic royalists’ with F.D.R.”, exclaimed Randolph during the above-noted speech. For, “The causal factors of our socio-economic-political debacle, go deeper than that”.²²¹

It was noted above that the NECNP’s framing of the American Dream generally invoked the ‘economic security’ and ‘equal opportunity’ gaps within the larger ‘American political traditions’ gap frame. The discussion thus far has primarily revolved around the first of these gaps, but within the “Provisional Declaration”, we can also identify the articulation of the ‘equal opportunity’ gap being expressed in conjunction with the ‘American political traditions’ gap. For example:

Removal of restrictions on civil liberties and human rights is necessary if liberal democracy is to live and grow. Our race relations, especially the treatment of Negroes, are the ugliest aspect of American civilization and subject our country to attacks throughout the world. All political, economic and social discriminations against racial minority groups must go to insure full equality of opportunity in life and work. (NECNP 1946, 457)

²¹⁹ “Statement to Educational Political Conference in Chicago, Illinois, at the International House”, April 1946, Box 38, APR Papers, 4.

²²⁰ Ibid., 4-5.

²²¹ Ibid., 2.

Notably, this type of diagnosis bears strong resemblance to the type of ‘equal opportunity’ gap frames one finds in CIO literature not only in the 1940s, but also into the 1950s; however, what makes the NECNP’s framing of this variant represent a more direct challenge to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation is precisely that it represents a part of a broader articulation of the ‘American Political Traditions’ gap—which, as we shall see next, was geared toward inversion of meaning of the capitalist interpretation.

Such a challenge can begin to be discerned in the following statement, found early on in the “Provisional Declaration”:

Mankind is caught in a crisis of institutions and ideas because of failure to adjust them to changes wrought by scientific and technical-economic developments. This crisis is the first universal crisis since the breakdown of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism. Social change speeds up while progressive ideas and action lag. (NECNP 1946, 450)

While this statement targeted the universal failure of ‘progressive ideas and action’, the framing of the ‘American Dream’ gap enabled the authors to specify this failure in relation to the United States. The failure there, as the final pages of the “Provisional Declaration” insisted, was about the need for “call[ing] into action again the American people’s idealism, which is neither dead nor a spent force but confused, distracted, frustrated, yet alive and ready to infuse social change with moral values” (NECNP 1946, 471). The American liberal tradition had become lost or misdirected, and in order for the nation to “realize liberal economic democracy as the American Dream in newer and finer fulfilments”, a careful (re)consideration of the true nature of that tradition was necessary (472).

The last page of the “Provisional Declaration” offered some historical food for thought, in an effort to highlight the NECNP’s basic thinking on this subject of American ‘traditions’. It reminded readers that “The colonists who fled from England (and Europe) to the new world came for greater economic freedom as well as for political freedom”, and it observed, moreover, that “the Revolution of 1776 was directed as much against the colonial

aristocracy as against the British Crown” (NECNP 1946, 472). The Founding Fathers, it recalled, were also committed to what one union leader later called the “*economic foundations of democracy*”:

Jeffersonian democrats looked upon widespread ownership of independent small property as the economic bulwark of liberal democracy. The agrarian and labor democrats of the Jacksonian era emphasized the equalitarian ideas of 1776 in new forms. They wanted to use state power to break monopoly and to secure a more equal distribution of wealth, which they considered as important as the distribution of political power. (Ibid.)

Following in these footsteps,

Populism fought monopoly as anti-democratic, because it meant a concentration of economic power and of wealth antagonistic to economic freedom and democracy. The left-wing urged nationalization of the trusts to achieve the economic equality imperative for a truly democratic nation. (Ibid.)

In recalling these earlier movements, the NECNP was reminding prospective members and supporters that the “American liberal tradition never separated economic from political democracy” (ibid.); such a separation, both in theory and in practice, clearly represented the type of gap that the NECNP was hoping to close.

The target here, while more nebulously defined than the other targets of blame attribution, was certain ideas—or certain interpretations of ideas—which had contributed to taking the ‘American people’s idealism’ off track. Inasmuch as the document alludes to the types of interpretations that have contributed to this, the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation looms large. In particular, the ‘fusion tendency’—the assumption about the inextricable link between American capitalism and democracy—appears to be targeted and challenged in the “Provisional Declaration”. The effort to divorce these elements through a re-tracing of American political development is evident in other NECNP writings and speeches as well. In the 1946 speech by Randolph at the Chicago conference, for example, he stressed that

Whether we go from bad to worse, or find a way out of our troubles, depends upon whether the American people can work out a constructive answer to the

question of the relation between democracy expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Federal Constitution, we now have, and the change in our social and economic system we now need.²²²

One other (related) feature of the NECNP's diagnostic framing deserves special consideration here. The "Provisional Declaration" made several references to 'free enterprise', and despite its clear arguments against the existing form of American capitalism, some of these references appear to present 'free enterprise' in a positive light, similar to what we saw in most of the CIO's material in the previous chapter. On several occasions, the document lamented the fact that 'Monopoly Big Business' had ruined the practice of free enterprise, and that in the few instances where 'free enterprise' still existed, "Monopoly...drives toward destruction of [those] surviving elements" (NECNP 1946, 458). However, a careful reading of the "Provisional Declaration" suggests that the diagnostic framing here is not simply about targeting monopoly. It is worth noting how 'free enterprise' is portrayed in terms of its historical development, and its relation to the 'American liberal tradition' as interpreted by the NECNP. At one point, for example, the document declares that for "earlier liberals, among them Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson",

Property...was a means to promote individual liberty, democratic security and human rights. The 'right to property' was a right to individual functional ownership whose justification was, '*What I work I own and what I own I work.*' Where property is no longer functional, as monopoly absentee ownership is not, and no longer serves liberal democratic ends, it must give way to public or co-operative property to serve freedom. [...] [Free enterprise] meant progress for a time, despite great inequality of economic and political freedom. But out of free enterprise monopoly arose to negate the right to property and to limit or destroy free enterprise as economic freedom. (462)

What becomes evident from this statement is that the relationship between free enterprise and monopoly is not simply one in which the latter has destroyed the former. The CIO's framing recall, tended to portray the relationship in this way; by contrast, the NECNP in the above statement appears to be suggesting not that monopoly was a *deviation* from free enterprise,

²²² "Statement to Educational Political Conference in Chicago, Illinois, at the International House", April 1946, Box 38, APR Papers, 2.

but rather, a historical progression arising from it. As will become evident when we examine the NECNP's prognostic framing, the solution to restoring 'economic freedom' was not, therefore, any simple return to the 'free enterprise' of days gone past, nor to the 'genuine free enterprise' CIO leaders had begun championing. In fact, according to the "Provisional Declaration", it made little sense to talk about 'free enterprise' in the given context:

Free enterprise? But free enterprise meant the economic freedom of widespread democratic ownership of the means of livelihood in the form of widespread ownership of small productive property. This economic freedom largely existed in the America of the 1820's, when 80 per cent of the people owned productive property which they worked and from whose working they made a living. *Today, however, upward of 85 per cent of the American people own no productive property but depend upon a wage-or-salary job for the opportunity to work and live.* Capitalism 'for the many' has become 'capitalism for the few'. (459)

What is particularly interesting about excerpts such as this and the one cited before it, is that they appear to represent yet another challenge to the 'fusing' tendency of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. In particular, whereas the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation obscures the impact of capitalist industrialization on the socioeconomic foundations of the 'land of opportunity', the authors here were highlighting its significance.

Prognosis

The most obvious and straightforward component of the NECNP's prognostic framing was the notion that a new political party would be required in order to close the gap between the promises of the American Dream and the prevailing social, economic and political conditions in the United States. "A new people's party will carry the struggle and aspirations of the American Dream to new achievements", declared the authors of the "Provisional Declaration" (1946, 472). But the new party represented the *vehicle* for closing the gap, and thus it did not comprise the whole prognostic frame. What also needed to be specified were the types of measures to be undertaken by the new party, in order to ensure that the full potential and promise of the 'American Dream' in this land of opportunity would

be met. While the committee emphasized the fact that its proposed policies were works-in-progress, and open to discussion and debate (hence the “*Provisional*” in the title of its core document), the proposals all revolved around one clear idea: the present socio-economic system would need to be transformed. Indeed, this was why a new party was necessary in the first place:

An old party may be captured and used for reform. It cannot be captured and used as an instrument for deep-going social changes, for a basic redistribution of economic and political power. Such far-flung objectives can be achieved only by a party new in principles and in organization. (472)

Not even the New Deal had been transformative enough, according to the NECNP, and thus, “The American people must go beyond the New Deal *to more radical ideas*” (472).²²³

Many of the specific policies being proposed in the “Provisional Declaration” were comparable to the proposals circulating among CIO staff and leadership in the late war years and early postwar years. Yet most of those ideas were presented through forthright language in the NECNP’s literature, unlike what we saw in the majority of the CIO’s literature. The “Provisional Declaration” called explicitly for “Social security for everyone from the cradle to the grave”, and for “public planning, spending and taxation to stimulate prosperity” (455).

It also stated that

A new economic policy is needed to promote co-operation for production. We might well experiment with industry councils...bound together in a national economic council...with government participation. (452-3)

The language throughout the “Provisional Declaration” invoked a sense of urgency—for example, on the topic of public planning, the authors declared that

We must press *now* for the organization of research and planning councils for the investigation and survey of America’s economic needs. Public planning on this level would aim constantly at the problem of the gap between consuming power and production potential. (455)

²²³ The italicized part of the line appears only in the pamphlet version of the “Provisional Declaration” (*Ideas for a New Party*), which had been circulated among NECNP members, and was initially intended for distribution at the National NECNP Conference in 1947—a conference that was continuously postponed, and ultimately never took place. A copy of the full pamphlet appears in the Daniel Bell Research Files (Box 28, Folder 2).

In addition to portraying the problems as urgent issues that required immediate attention, the prognostic framing here emphasized the nation's capacity to solve those problems effectively. Like the CIO, the NECNP took advantage of the discursive opportunities provided by World War II, and reminded readers that wartime mobilization had brought "jobs for all", and had proven what the country was capable of when it put all of its material and resources to good use. "But employment for war, however necessary, is barbarism", it declared; "We need full employment for *peace*!" The "Provisional Declaration" also pointed out that "The depression of the 1930's was a collapse of economic institutions that war only temporarily saved" (450). Thus, the material benefits and progress of the wartime years—especially the 'miracle of production'—represented only a starting point in the NECNP's prognostic framing.

With this tremendous and increasing capacity we can easily end poverty. We can do more; we can rebuild cities, towns and villages...remold the American environment into areas of convenience and beauty in which freer people co-operate for nobler living. Increasing leisure, and the means to enjoy that leisure as one desires, is possible for everyone: a life of independence, moral worth and dignity for all men and women. (450)

A key theme in these pages, therefore, was the notion that the economic security gap should and could be closed. But the factors making such action necessary and possible were not strictly material; the prognostic framing clearly contained an ideational component, as when, for example, the authors declared that the "American people...need principles and a program to meet the challenge of our modern age to build, out of the achievements of science and technology *and of American equalitarian traditions*, a new world of greater equality, liberty and justice" (NECNP 1946, 449; emphasis added). The promises of American political traditions were also invoked in prognostic framing pertaining to the equal opportunity gap: for example, on one page, the authors urged that "Democratic equality calls for abolition of discriminatory wage differentials of all kinds and for industry bargaining and

agreements to implement their abolition” (452). Again, we can see that the ‘economic security’ and ‘equal opportunity’ gaps were subsumed within a larger ‘American political traditions’ gap; in the NECNP’s diagnosis, these gaps could not be understood separately from one another, nor could the (social democratic) solutions to those gaps .

The NECNP’s challenge to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation in the “Provisional Declaration” can also be discerned from the way in which ‘free enterprise’ is portrayed in the prognostic frames. Rather than directly oppose either the concept or practice of ‘free enterprise’, the NECNP sought to redefine it in a way that suggests an attempt at inversion of meaning of the capitalist interpretation. At one point, the “Provisional Declaration” declares that, “economic freedom can be restored in the monopoly areas only by a new type of free enterprise—*the democratic public ownership and operation that constitute economic freedom in new institutional forms*” (NECNP 1946, 462). It is important to point out the distinction here from the CIO’s appeal to ensuring ‘genuine free enterprise’; whereas this concept was not defined explicitly in CIO literature, the NECNP was not only defining this “new type of free enterprise”, but was also providing a definition that was quite clearly incompatible with capitalism.

III. FRAMING FAILURES, DISCURSIVE OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES, AND THE LIMITS OF THE ‘AMERICAN DREAM’

4. NECNP’s demise

The exact circumstances behind, and the precise timing of, the NECNP’s disbanding are not entirely clear, and the few scholars who have examined this organization offer differing accounts.²²⁴ What can be stated with certainty is that by 1948 (and perhaps earlier), the NECNP was no longer a functioning organization, and that it had failed in its efforts to ignite the flame of a third-party movement. Although it is not my aim in this chapter to explain the lack of success in establishing a third party, this outcome is inevitably connected to the other outcomes with which the chapter is concerned, so I will consider it briefly before turning to a more direct discussion of the framing failures.

Despite the lack of available official documentation or secondary source analysis relating specifically to the committee’s formal disbandment, some clues about the possible contributing factors can be gleaned from meeting minutes and correspondence between NECNP leaders and members. One theme, in particular, that is prominent throughout these documents, is concern about problematic timing. We have already seen that from the onset of the committee’s establishment, it was widely agreed that the timing was not ripe for the creation of a third party. The immediate goal of the NECNP had been to mobilize liberals and progressives so that when the timing *was* ripe, they would be ready, with an organizational base and a provisional plan of action in hand; unfortunately, many of those liberals and progressives that NECNP leaders tried to recruit felt that the timing was not ripe even for this

²²⁴ None of the works offer a definitive statement regarding the timing of the NECNP’s demise, but insofar as they do offer indirect statements suggesting possible timelines, these differ. Brick (1986) appears to suggest that its demise came in 1947, in his remark that “In the fall of 1947, after the NECNP had died, Bell still thought the Socialist Party could mount an effective independent campaign” (171). Hamby (1973) indicates that it was still somewhat alive and fluttering around until the 1948 election of Truman, which he suggests “aborted the [NECNP’s] plan to establish yet another part—an effort which may never have gotten off the ground but which would have drained important strength from the Democratic party”(274). Boyle’s (1995) discussion of the Committee only takes us up to the end of 1946.

short-term task. From very early on, many of the letters sent to Randolph from individuals who the NECNP had recruited or were seeking to recruit, commended the aims of the committee, but explained that official commitment to such an organization was simply not good strategy (or even a possible strategy) in the current political climate. In some cases, these organizations had already committed themselves to the Democratic Party. For example, Monroe Sweetland, of the Oregon Newspaper, *Moalla Pioneer*, wrote to Randolph asking the NECNP to “discontinue the use of my name as a sponsor”, because

[i]t seems to me the new party is now desirable only if we cannot make the leadership of the Democratic Party, at least in the Columbia Valley region, conform to the heavily-progressive, pro-labor sentiment of the rank-and-file of Northwest Democrats. That is our first battle-line, and we have agreed together to give it everything we’ve got to win that battle in the years just ahead. In this tactical engagement our Oregon progressives cannot split, or fare both ways: either we must make the leadership of the Democratic Party conform to the sentiment of its own ranks, or we should strike out for new party action. After talking about it long and carefully our choice is to fight the battle as Democrats.²²⁵

Others expressed concern that the formation of the NECNP was premature—that the creation of an official organ of third party politics should come *after* support had been established.

“With most of what you will be doing I shall be in hearty accord”, explained the director of the James Mullenbach Industrial Institute in a May, 1946 letter to Randolph explaining why he was asking to be taken off the NECNP executive committee;

But there may be differences in judgment as to timing and an alignment of forces which make it inadvisable for me to go along with you now. [...] It is important to develop connections with other responsible labor leaders like yourself. I had the feeling that you should not crystallize even this committee until you had greater assurance of extensive labor and farm support—support which was not clearly evident at the Chicago conference.²²⁶

The tepid enthusiasm from the liberal, socialist and labour circles being targeted by the NECNP is also evident in the fact that many of those who continued to formally support the committee through the year of 1946 did not back that support with action. Meeting

²²⁵ Sweetland to Randolph, 8 July, 1946, Box 1, APR Papers.

²²⁶ Frank W. McCulloch to Randolph, 14 May, 1946, Box 1, APR Papers.

minutes reveal consistently poor attendance, and a constant matter discussed among those who did attend was the disappointing lack of financial contributions from members. Even after the 1946 elections, where the Democratic Party's disastrous showings left NECNP leaders hopeful that the results would spark a wave of support for third-party politics²²⁷, the committee was not able to gain momentum. The planned nation-wide December 1946 conference was repeatedly postponed (and in the end, it never did take place). At the local level, NECNP leaders continued to report poor attendance at local committee meetings, and overall weak support, leading to branch closures. By mid-1947, even the Chicago branch was being shut down. Upon reporting this closure to Randolph, C.J. McLanahan indicated his "hope that someone or several perhaps, will evaluate this last year and a half in order to discover those factors which prevented us from getting underway with a full head of steam"; his remarks a couple of lines later hinted toward his own thoughts about what one of those factors might be: "While it does not seem that there is a prominent role for the [NECNP] to play at the moment, I feel certain as ever that one day, there will be a mass desire for a new party".²²⁸ One frustrated leader, writing to Sam Jacobs to report about how his "attempt to call the local committee together again was a complete flop", also cited lack of interest, but pointed the blame towards the national NECNP:

Personally, I think it's going to be a close to impossible job to get our committee together again – our members are too disgusted with the monkey wrenches thrown and the lack of any indication that NECNP, nationally, is really an organization with faith in itself and a desire to go places fast. Without such indication, they just aren't interested.²²⁹

²²⁷ "I think that the results of the election gives us our greatest opportunity to build for a new party", Randolph wrote in a letter to Administrative Secretary Mary Martinson on November 8, 1946, two days after the election had taken place (Box 1, APR Papers).

²²⁸ McLanahan to Randolph, 23 July, 1947, Box 1, APR Papers. McLanahan had indicated lack of interest in an earlier letter as well, remarking that "there is no great movement or mass interest in a new party program in this area" (14 May, 1947, Box 1, APR Papers).

²²⁹ Pierson Ostrow to Sam Jacobs (correspondence forwarded by Ostrow to Randolph on 29 May, 1947), Box 28, APR Papers.

Inasmuch as the private correspondence and records of NECNP meetings points to factors contributing to the NECNP's failure with respect to its goal of creating an organ for third party politics, it appears that problematic timing and lack of enthusiasm or commitment from those involved, were important. And these factors appear to be at least in some part due to the fact that many of the liberals and progressives targeted by the NECNP remained committed to the Democratic Party. As Hamby (1973, 140) remarks, with "little political influence and virtually no power", the NECNP was caught in a situation where "it could succeed only if the Democrats continued on the path to disintegration". Moreover, in the eyes of NECNP leaders, the Democrats maintained a stranglehold not just on leaders and intellectuals, but also on potential third-party supporters within the broader public, especially the union membership (*ibid.*). It appears, then, that the NECNP faced a political opportunity structure that was quite closed with respect to their goal of establishing a third political party. This is certainly how both those who were sympathetic but refrained from joining the Committee, and those who headed the Committee, appear to have perceived the situation.

5. NECNP's Framing Failures

The fact that the NECNP failed in its third party efforts would probably not strike many scholars who have examined the nature of third-party politics in the United States, (particularly in the 20th century) as a curious outcome. Given their reading of the political opportunity structure at the time, it appears not to have been much of a surprise to those working within the NECNP, either. Although some NECNP leaders held onto hopes for future third-party endeavours, they appeared to accept the unravelling of the committee as they were witnessing it; even Randolph, when responding to C.J. McLanahan's letter informing him of the shutting down of the Chicago branch of the NECNP, appears to have seen things coming: "While I regret that our efforts have not met with great success", he

wrote, “I am aware that movements of this sort are slow in development and are certain to travel up-hill”.²³⁰

However, if NECNP leaders perceived a closed political opportunity structure for third party politics in the context and climate of the mid to late 1940s, the available evidence indicates that their approach to the *discursive* opportunities was based on a more optimistic outlook. Those at the helm of the committee were hopeful that the “Provisional Declaration” would be the catalyst for getting the NECNP off the ground; in fact, in the eyes of individuals like Lewis Corey and A. Philip Randolph, the very fate of the committee in the early days was riding on its capacity for disseminating this and other literature as soon as possible. “For one reason or another, largely because of being new, we have wasted a lot of time and done little”, Corey had written to Randolph in August 1946; “its time to go ahead now full speed...[...] Until we have a paper, and print the Declaration of Principles in pamphlet form, and get out some other literature, we shall not amount to much, get neither support nor money on any large scale”.²³¹ Corey’s remarks here indicate the importance that was being attached by NECNP leadership to ‘framing’ activities, and their belief that such activities were crucial to getting the movement off the ground.

Interestingly, even among many of those who expressed the most pessimism about the possibility of third-party success in the near future, and even among those who disagreed with the strategic decision of forming an official body like the NECNP, there appears to have been a general sense that the time *was* ripe for discussion and deliberation regarding how to revitalize and unify the (non-communist) left, and for presenting ideas about economic transformation to the public. And many of these same individuals identified the NECNP’s ‘Ideas for a New Party’ as a document that would be a useful tool for such an endeavour. Even Schlesinger, Jr., who had characterized the present context as one that offered little

²³⁰ Randolph to McLanahan, 29 July, 1947, Box 1, APR Papers.

²³¹ Corey to Randolph, 4 April, 1946, Box 1, APR Papers.

opportunity for the American left to do more than “think and agitate”, had also gone on to suggest that the NECNP’s document represented “a good and useful beginning” in that regard (1947, 156).

Indeed, the “Provisional Declaration” appears to have been the main source of optimism also for those who were more closely involved with the committee. Reacting to the *Antioch* publication in December, 1946, Paul Sifton—who had joined the NECNP temporarily to help with the publicity campaign²³²— suggested that the Declaration might provide a “rallying point” for the American left, and emphasized that one of the strengths of the document was that the proposals were “not stated with finality” (1946, 608); the Declaration thus “explicitly leave[s] the door open for the people to come in to change the ideas and their relationships to each other” (ibid.). Horace Fries, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, echoed this point: “The unique quality of the Provisional Declaration”, he observed, “is its tentative character. The thinking which went into the formulation of the Principles has accustomed itself to the ultimate fact of change.” (610).

Although the NECNP arose in a time that called for ‘new ideas’, and though the context was perceived to be more conducive to framing activities than to other organizational activities, the committee was also unsuccessful in this short-term educational endeavour. A crucial component of this failure was the failed resonance of the NECNP’s articulation of the ‘American Dream’. In what sense can we claim that the NECNP’s American Dream gap frames failed to resonate? One might point to the fact that the committee fell off the map so quickly, and to its lack of success in creating a ‘party of the American Dream’ or even mobilizing a movement for such a party, as indicators of non-resonant frames. But a social movement’s failure to achieve its ultimate goals is not necessarily, by itself, sufficient evidence that that movement’s frames failed to resonate (Noakes and Johnston 2005). In the

²³² Form letter sent to NECNP members, 23 October, 1946, Box 28, Folder 2, DB Files. Paul Sifton had been in charge of national publicity for Walter Reuther during the 1945-1946 General Motors strike (Lichtenstein 1995).

case of the NECNP, however, we can point to the fact that the committee was also unsuccessful in its effort to spark widespread public interest in, and discussion about, the possibility (indeed, necessity) of transforming the existing economic structures. As Katznelson (1986) points out in the essay cited at the beginning of the chapter, the ideas contained in the “Provisional Declaration” included the sort of class-based social democratic ideas that became part of the ‘not said’ and ‘not thought’ of social and economic policy in postwar America. Herein, perhaps, lies the clearest indicator that the committee’s ‘American Dream’ frames failed to resonate; its interpretation of the ‘American Dream’ was presented through a program of policies and ideas that, by the end of the decade, belonged to the “silences of social and economic policy” (Katznelson 1986) in the United States.

Of course, the term itself was not relegated to the status of ‘not said and not thought’, and as I pointed out in the previous chapter, the CIO would continue to offer its own ‘American Dream’ frames into the 1950s. But these frames largely reinforced the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, while the NECNP’s had sought to invert it. The failure of the NECNP’s framing efforts to influence the CIO in this way is perhaps further evidence of failed resonance. After all, one of the primary targets of the NECNP’s framing had been the labour movement, and particularly the CIO.

6. ‘Seizing Americanism’? The Discursive Opportunity Structure as both Enabling and Constraining

The meeting minutes and correspondence pertaining to NECNP activities provide some insight into the dynamics of frame construction, but in terms of identifying how leaders perceived the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’, a particularly illuminating source of information is the collection of articles found in the *Antioch Review* following its printing of the “Provisional Declaration”. Between December of 1946, and June of 1947, the journal published a series of essays written by a number of intellectuals and

labour and civil rights leaders, offering their initial thoughts and reaction to the “Provisional Declaration”.²³³ Notably, a number of the respondents were from the NECNP, including Randolph. Although there were also essays from people who were not involved and who had not yet signed onto the committee, one of the main purposes of these essays was for contributors to offer their ideas and suggestions before the pamphlet was to be more widely distributed; therefore, the *Antioch* symposium provides insight into the dynamics of both frame reception (among immediate targets), and frame construction.

Although the reaction to the Declaration, as expressed in the symposium, was mixed, (even among those who were involved in the committee), one of the strengths that was most often highlighted in these essays was the Declaration’s ‘American’ quality. The example of Morris Rubin, who remarked that “‘Ideas For A New Party’ strikes me as being one of the most authentically American statements of progressive goals to emerge on paper in a long time”, was cited in the introduction of this chapter. In his essay, Rubin also praised the committee’s ideas as “akin to, and a further development of, the best of the indigenous American radicalism in the Progressive movement of Wisconsin, the Farmer-Labor movement in Minnesota, and the Non-Partisan movement in North Dakota...” (1947, 305-6). Many other intellectuals echoed this type of sentiment in their contributions. New York University professor Sidney Hook remarked that “As a whole the Declaration represents an integrated synthesis of the best traditions of democratic socialism and American pragmatism. It takes note of the psychological realities of the American situation” (1947, 305). And Edward Fiess, of Oberlin College, wrote that

I like to think that the Declaration of Principles represents in part the voice of that type that President Conant of Harvard referred to more than three years ago in his provocative *Atlantic Monthly* article entitled ‘Wanted: American Radicals.’ His radical was an as yet imaginary character who drew inspiration

²³³ The Editorial Note in the December 1 issue explained that “[s]ome of the comments for this symposium were solicited, others came in voluntarily” (602). The Symposium was published over three separate issues spanning between December 1946 and June 1947. However, all of the contributions were written prior to the December 1 publication.

from Jefferson rather than Karl Marx and from the events of Jackson's time and place rather than from those of Engels'. (1946, 618)

The emphasis on genuinely American radicalism in Fiess' essay, like many others in the symposium, was at least partly directed against the Communist Party, who according to Fiess, had "demonstrated with consistent inconsistency that it and its fellow-travelers could cease to be American and cease to be radical on one day with as much ease as they wrapped themselves in the flag on another" (ibid.). But it also reflected an optimistic perception of the discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism'.

If NECNP people approached the discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism' as a source of opportunity, however—and if some sympathetic observers viewed this with optimism—it also appears that in certain respects, it was a source of constraint. For example, despite the fact that many involved in the committee frequently used the term 'socialism' to describe their ideas in private deliberations or correspondence, the term was nowhere to be found in their pamphlets, press releases and other official documents. Available evidence pertaining to the dynamics of frame construction demonstrates that the decision to avoid the term was a conscious, deliberate one, and it was made from the very beginning of the NECNP's establishment. At the 'Conference of American Progressives', Randolph emphasized that, if the new committee's work eventually culminated in the creation of a third party, that party should "ha[ve] as its philosophy, democratic socialism", but that it should also "shun the name socialist, because of its psychological stigma of political failure".²³⁴ Yet this was not the only reason that the NECNP avoided the term throughout its literature. It was also part of a more general strategy, one that had been agreed upon at the April 1946 conference. The basic strategy can be discerned from a summary report of the conference written by Ben Davidson, the Executive Director of the Liberal Party

²³⁴ "Statement to Educational Political Conference in Chicago, Illinois, at the International House", April 1946, Box 38, APR Papers, 4.

of New York; summarizing the deliberations that had taken place after a preliminary program had been introduced to the delegates, he observed that

Some strong opinion was expressed that it would be wiser to have a declaration of principles rather than a program at this stage. There was a general agreement with the substance and spirit of the program except that it was necessary not to use such terms as ‘democratic socialism’ or ‘socialist mixed economy’ but to put the substance in American language that would be more understandable to the American people.²³⁵

The “Provisional Declaration” that was published soon after the conference clearly reflected this strategy. It avoided the terms ‘socialist’ and ‘socialism’, and instead, it described the potential future party as a party of the ‘American Dream’. Of course, for many NECNP members, the fulfilment of the American Dream would necessarily involve the new party’s promotion of socialism in some form or another, but this was not to be explicitly acknowledged in popular literature. Here was a committee whose chairman was emphasizing privately its “dedicat[ion] to the cause of democratic socialism for the United States of America”, and yet its leadership generally felt that in order to have a chance at having its message resonate with the American public, it needed to avoid expressing its dedication in those terms. In the minds of these leaders, it appears, the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ could not accommodate socialism.

If we return to the *Antioch* Symposium, it is notable that some of the contributions therein did make explicit reference to ‘socialism’; this may be partly because of the nature of the publication and its readership. In fact, the symposium is a valuable source of insight precisely because of the straightforward manner in which some of the contributors expressed their views and opinions. We have observed, above, a general pattern among contributors of expressing optimism about the Americanism of the “Provisional Declaration”; but what is

²³⁵ Davidson, report of Chicago conference, 11 April, 1946, <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/purl/purlResolver?id=/lilly/meier/printable/VAB8339-22040>, p.4.

equally if not more interesting is that insofar as they expressed concern about sources of constraint, the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation figures prominently.

Some writers expressed concern, for example, that the NECNP was not prepared to address the prevalence of beliefs around the image of the country's fluid class structure, and the apparent lack of need for unions. In one of the more critical contributions to the symposium, Victor Reuther, who at the time was serving as the Educational Director of the United Automobile Workers, argued that the Declaration's focus was misdirected; "I question the urgency of concentration on final goals at this time, when priority must be given to ideas and methods for survival now", he observed (1946, 612). "The pressing problem is not how to behave in the promised land, but how to get out of the wilderness. We know roughly where we want to go; we are not completely sure how to get there, or how to persuade others to come along" (ibid.). Raising concern that the "Provisional Declaration" might be driven by unfounded optimism, Reuther suggested that "We could do with a little more tough-minded scepticism, a scepticism that would regard the American Dream as a shifting, now-you-see-it-now-you-don't proposition that requires the most active kind of day-to-day adjustment for it to be kept in view" (612-613). As part of that tough-minded scepticism, he urged fellow liberals and progressives to "make a practice of asking ourselves embarrassing questions", such as:

If the small businessman believes that with a lucky break he can become a big businessman, and if 85 per cent of the American people believe that they are members of the middle class, how long by our present methods will it take to persuade the small businessman, the white-collar worker and unorganized wage-earners to regard union labor as an ally and not as a menace? (613)

Even the contributions that were more positive about the "Provisional Declaration" indicated the prevalence of ideas associated with the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, albeit in the context of praising the NECNP for its attempt to challenge (or at least its refusal to give into) those ideas. This is particularly evident with respect to the

discussions of the concept of ‘free enterprise’. Socialist Party Chairman Norman Thomas, for example, who opened his essay by observing that “from the time I first read the Provisional Declaration...I have considered it admirable as a common denominator of the convictions of worth-while progressives and as a program for today”, went on to identify a number of “convictions or myths” which had thus far impeded constructive action on “what I should call democratic socialism”; the first item he listed was:

The myth of free enterprise. In this almost every American leader in politics and economics, from Henry Wallace to Wall Street monopolists, from John L. Lewis, Philip Murray and William Green to the NAM, from farmers to the editors of the *New York Times*, professes to believe. Then all of them on occasion call loudly for help from the government for their own cause or their own group. (1946, 618-619)

Similarly, in Harry Laidler’s contribution to the symposium, he identified one of the “positive merits” of the Declaration as such:

Its insistence that, despite the glib talk about our ‘free enterprise system,’ we are today living in an industrial order where competition has, in large areas, given way to monopoly and quasi-monopoly, and that, in field after field, the remedy is not to return to the past but a transfer of industry from private to public and co-operative ownership. (1946, 622)

Both Laidler’s and Thomas’ comments clearly indicate the prevalence of the term ‘free enterprise’ in the political talk of the day; the comments also suggest, moreover, that these two men viewed this prevalence as a source of confusion and misdirection for the American left. Crucially, despite the tones of nostalgia in Laidler’s remarks in particular, neither he nor Thomas were simply suggesting that what was needed was the fulfilment of (or return to) a society based on ‘free enterprise’; rather, the implication of their remarks is that the term itself was problematic, and that the left should move away from it. Indeed, this is the underlying theme that we identified in the NECNP’s diagnostic and prognostic ‘American Dream’ gap frames. And as we noted earlier, this reflects a fundamental difference between the NECNP and the majority of the CIO’s postwar framing; while both were responding to a similar constraining feature of the discursive opportunity structure provided by

‘Americanism’, the CIO gave in to the ‘glib talk’ about free enterprise, whereas to an extent, the NECNP did not.

In fact, when we take the literature into account as a whole, the NECNP’s framing seems to point to a story of frame entrepreneurs ‘giving in’ quite a bit less than their counterparts in the CIO. Both the CIO and the NECNP envisioned a transformation of American society, including (and especially) of its economic institutions, and both were operating within a context in which the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation was perceived to be prevalent in American political culture. Yet the NECNP’s literature was not fraught with the same degree of tensions and inconsistencies that we identified in the CIO’s literature. Indeed, the NECNP offered ‘American Dream’ frames that were consistently commensurate with its social democratic vision for postwar America; although the vision was couched in the language of the ‘American Dream’, it was an ‘American Dream’ that rejected the legitimacy of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation underlying this ideology.

In this regard, then, the case of the NECNP appears to more closely approximate the description of ‘seizing Americanism’ in the postwar era, than does the case of the CIO. And yet, there were limits to this case of ‘seizing’ as well; while its literature offered a more coherent social democratic vision, that vision achieved very little diffusion beyond a small circle of left wing academics and activists, and had little impact on the wider policy community (Katznelson 1986). The NECNP’s American Dream ‘gap’ frames—which represented an ‘inversion of meaning’ of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation—failed. In the final analysis, then, the NECNP was no more effective than its counterparts in its efforts to redefine the ‘American Dream’. Once again, the ostensibly ‘capacious’ ideology appears to have been something quite different, when appropriated by those seeking social democracy.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the framing activities of the NECNP—a committee that, according to Hamby (1973), “represented the last effort of an indigenous American radicalism to change the structure of American politics and thereby open new vistas of reform” (139). In its attempts to “catch the imagination of the American people”²³⁶ and to mobilize interest in establishing a national (social democratic) third party, the NECNP launched an “intensive publicity campaign”²³⁷, and in section 3 of this chapter, I examined the American Dream frames that appeared in the literature that formed the backbone of this campaign. We saw that in this literature, the social democratic goals underpinning the NECNP’s basic vision were expressed through frames that celebrated various aspects of the ‘land of opportunity’ equation, but which also clearly—and, in contrast to the CIO literature examined in chapter 3, consistently—opposed the existing economic institutions in American society. The ‘American Dream’ gaps in NECNP literature each targeted the capitalist component of the equation, and were clearly geared toward *inversion of meaning* of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation.

The NECNP was dissolved within a few years of its formation, and its literature fell into obscurity along with it. In sections 4 and 5 of this chapter, we considered the NECNP’s demise, and despite the relative paucity of information available on this subject, we noted that the evidence that does exist, points to a political opportunity structure that was closed for third party activity; indeed, the correspondence and minutes indicate that the movement actors certainly perceived it as such. In section 5, I moved on to discuss the NECNP’s short-term educational goals, and I argued that their ineffectiveness in this regard represents a case of framing failure. Notably, the ‘framing’ failure in this instance was of a different sort than the failure examined in chapter 3. Unlike the CIO’s postwar literature, the NECNP’s

²³⁶ Form letter sent to NECNP members, 23 October, 1946, Box 28, Folder 2, DB Files.

²³⁷ NECNP minutes, 5 October 1946, Box 28, Folder 2, DB Files, p.3.

repertoire of frames remained true to the social democratic goals being sought—but their literature nonetheless appears to have achieved a minimal degree of resonance beyond a core group of intellectuals, and these frames, much like the committee itself, were quickly forgotten.

In section 6 I considered the potential role of discursive opportunity structures in the NECNP's framing failures, through an examination of materials pertaining to the processes of frame construction and reception. These materials indicate that the NECNP's presentation of 'American Dream' gap frames was rooted in a strategic response to the discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism'. We also observed that the leaders appeared to approach this DOS with a greater degree of enthusiasm and optimism, and also through a less defensive lens, than many CIO leaders and staff had approached it. Such optimism turned out to be unfounded, however, inasmuch as the NECNP was never able to pursue the type of "intensive publicity campaign" that its creators had originally envisioned; and the small amount of publicity it did manage to achieve, produced few tangible results. Although the committee drew from the discursive opportunity structure in a manner that clearly resonated with a small group of sympathetic intellectuals and politicians, with the exception of this small group, the NECNP was ultimately unsuccessful in its attempt to mobilize around an 'Americanized' social democracy.

Chapter 5: The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s

I. BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

What we do with our heroes is freeze them in the time that is least threatening to us.

-Michael Long²³⁸

In chapter 1 of the thesis, I pointed out that the civil rights movement stands out among the three cases examined in this study, for it is the only movement that is given consideration in the extant literature on the ‘American Dream’. In fact, the civil rights movement is often at the very centre of many analyses of the ideology, and the basic arguments found in this literature tend to be reflected in the conventional scholarly and popular wisdom regarding the ‘American Dream’, as will become clear over the course of this chapter. I will begin the chapter, therefore, with a brief literature review.

The Civil Rights Movement in ‘American Dream’ Literature

As we saw in chapter 2, scholars who have examined the historical development of the ‘American Dream’—including and especially Cullen (2003), Ghosh (2013) and Jillson (2004)—acknowledge that when the ideology first entered the American lexicon, it had a narrow and anti-democratic tint; it represented an ideology of success that, in both idea and practice, was only available to individuals defined by certain ascriptive characteristics. The hegemonic interpretation of the ‘American Dream’ was that the United States was (and should remain) the land of opportunity for some—not all—of its inhabitants. However, those who were denied the right to pursue success continuously fought for their inclusion and, over time, the general promise underpinning the American Dream was re-interpreted through a

²³⁸ Book discussion on *I Must Resist*, 21 March, 2012. <http://www.c-span.org/video/?306142-1/book-discussion-must-resist-bayard-rustins-life-letters>.

more expansive lens: today, that promise is widely understood to mean that *anyone* who works hard and plays by the rules has the opportunity to succeed in America, not just white males. For Ghosh, Jillson and Cullen, the significance of the civil rights era is that it represents a period of particularly dramatic and far-reaching cultural and institutional changes, with the promise of the American Dream being extended to many previously excluded groups, as a more democratic interpretation of the ideology became widely accepted, and with discrimination being (formally) addressed through various institutional reforms in American society.

We saw in chapter 2 that the conventional accounts conceptualize the ‘American Dream’ as an ideology that is rooted in democratic and egalitarian ideals, and that despite the ambiguity of these ideals, there is said to be a moral case for inclusion in American society that is basically inherent in the ideology. However, if civil rights activists always had “America’s best sense of itself on their side”, as Jillson (2004, 11) puts it, then we are still left to ask why it took until the 1950s and 1960s for their grievances and claims to be translated to concrete institutional achievements? If the language of the American Dream is inherently democratic and flexible—and if its power and appeal stems from it being a “breathtaking trope of justice and hope” (Ghosh 2013, 172), then why was it only in *these* years, and not earlier, that the language became an effective tool for spurring legal and political reform? According to most accounts, an important part of the answer lies in the effective rhetorical skills of civil rights activists, particularly Martin Luther King, Jr. If justification for change lies in the American Dream, that is, it was partly King’s ability to articulate that justification eloquently, and in a manner that resonated with the broader public, that may have made the ideology so powerful in the civil rights era (Cullen 2003; Hochschild 1995; Kamp 2009). Furthermore, much of this literature emphasizes that King’s interpretation of the American Dream is significant not only because of its impact during his

own lifetime, but also because of its enduring qualities. According to Ghosh (2013), for example, King's definition of the American Dream—articulated in his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech during the 1963 March on Washington—underlies the contemporary 'racial justice' variant of the American Dream, which remains the predominant interpretation in American society today.²³⁹

The 'I Have a Dream' speech is widely cited and celebrated in scholarly and popular accounts of the Civil Rights Movement. But for American Dream scholars, this speech in particular, and the appropriation of 'American Dream' language by the civil rights movement in general, take on an added significance: they serve as a, (possibly the most), crucial source of evidence of the ideology's capaciousness—of its capacity for being remoulded or even redefined. After all, it was in the civil rights era that the 'middle-class abundance' variant of the American Dream was eclipsed by the 'racial justice' variant, according to Ghosh (2013), or that the 'dream of upward mobility' was 'stretched' to become the more democratic 'Dream of Equality', as Cullen (2003) portrays it.²⁴⁰ The importance of these years for illustrating the ambiguous, flexible nature and capaciousness of the 'American Dream' is evident across much of the other, less historically-detailed, literature on the subject as well. "As the recent struggles over civil rights, women's rights, and gay rights illustrates", White and Hanson (2011) comment, "the American Dream is not a static concept. Although Americans have historically associated the American Dream with the values of freedom and equality of opportunity, these values have undergone various iterations over the years" (9).

²³⁹ "The emergent discourse of racial justice", he argues, "perhaps found its most eloquent expression in Reverend...King's 'I have a Dream' speech" (2013, 15-16).

²⁴⁰ Cullen suggests that "[i]t was King's genius to define his struggle in terms of...a series of shared ideals that, like the Declaration of Independence, helped define the American Dream in the popular imagination (and made it difficult for his opponents to resist him. It was also his achievement to define that dream in terms of something more than individual fulfilment" (2003, 8-9).

The Civil Rights Movement in Social Movement Research

As I pointed out in chapter 1, the conventional wisdom in the social movement literature sees the civil rights movement as a case of successful mobilizing. Indeed, within the social movement framing perspective, the civil rights movement is often cited as a prime example of a movement engaging in successful framing strategies (eg., Hewitt and McCammon 2005; Noakes and Johnston 2005, 10; Griffin and Bollen 2009, 597; Isaac, McDonald and Lukasik 2006, 52-4; Schneider 2005, 165). Civil rights activists, in appropriating the language of America's founding political documents and drawing attention to the contradictions between the nation's professed ideals and its treatment of African Americans, not only mobilized large numbers of constituents but also garnered a broad base of support which included powerful political allies. Thus, "if the key to framing is finding evocative cultural symbols that resonate with potential constituents and are capable of motivating to collective action" (Valocchi 2005, 54), the civil rights movement clearly got things right.

The presumed successes of the civil rights movement's framing is further illustrated by the fact that its 'rights' frame is commonly described as a 'master frame'. The concept of 'master frame' is meant to denote a collective action frame that is "broad in interpretive scope, inclusivity, flexibility, and cultural resonance" (Benford and Snow 2000, 619). A master frame is thus a "more general, but especially powerful—in that it evokes powerful cultural symbols—interpretative package" (Noakes and Johnston 2005, 10). Indeed, it is so powerful that other social movements adopt it from the initiator movement, and amend it to fit their own specific goals (Tarrow 1998; Valocchi 2005). In the case of the civil rights movement, the proliferation of social movements that adopted similar language during the 60's and 70's makes the 'rights' frame a particularly clear example of a master frame at work, according to many social movement scholars (eg., Haydu 1999; Oliver and Johnston

2005; Polletta and Ho 2006; Benford and Snow 2000; Tarrow 1998). The ‘rights frame’ “echoes themes from deep in U.S. political culture”, and after seeing how effectively that frame was used by civil rights activists to mobilize against the Jim Crow system, other groups sought to emulate their success by adopting the language for advancing their own goals (Oliver and Johnston 2005, 198). Thus, in the 1960s, “we began to see the heightened politicization of...feminists, environmentalists, the elderly, children, the handicapped, and homosexuals organizing and demanding their rights” (Hamilton 1986 quoted in Tarrow 1998, 118).

It is worth noting that even prominent scholars who are more sceptical about the independent explanatory power of ‘frames’ and ‘framing’ in the study of collective action tend to echo the basic assumption that the civil rights movement was effective in framing its grievances. Tarrow (1998), for example, observes that the civil rights movement was able to transform the conception of ‘rights’ in American political culture, stripping it of some of its consensual layers and replacing it with some contentious meanings. He also argues, however, that the civil rights movement was only able to transform the ‘rights’ frame in the United States because its framing strategy was combined with innovative forms of *action*, and he insists, moreover, that in the final analysis, “[i]t was not the inherited grammar of rights but the action of nonviolent resistance that turned cultural quiescence to action” (118). Yet, the very fact that he points to the civil rights movement as having brought about a “transformation of the rights frame” suggests that, insofar as framing was relevant, he sees the strategies employed by civil rights activists as having been effective.

As with the American Dream literature, studies of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s frequently highlight the role of Martin Luther King, Jr., pointing to his effective use of language and symbolism to mobilize support (Snow and Benford 1992). When Noakes and Johnston (2005) introduce the notion of oppositional framing by social

movement entrepreneurs—a tactic in which “symbols of the dominant group are...used as tools for constructing collective action frames”—they single out King’s framing work as an example of successful oppositional framing in the context of a democratic regime (11). King “frequently framed his appeals for racial integration within the interpretative schema of the status quo, drawing potent mobilizing symbols from the Bible and the United States Constitution to develop the civil rights movement’s oppositional frame” (ibid.). This strategy of ‘oppositional framing’ is basically a different way of describing Westby’s (2005) ‘strategic appropriation of hegemonic ideology’. Indeed, Westby, too, highlights King as exemplary of successful framing in this regard; in his typology, it is the civil rights movement, and especially King, that epitomizes the type of appropriation of hegemonic ideology (which in this instance was liberal democratic-rights ideology) that seeks exposure of contradiction. And Hewitt and McCammon (2005)—who argue that frames must also challenge (rather than simply resonate with) target audiences in order to attract supporters—point to King’s ability to strike the necessary balance between ‘resonant and oppositional elements’ as pivotal to his mobilizing accomplishments. Finally, McAdam (1994; 1996), who cautions against overstating the role of ideational factors in explanations of the civil rights movement’s successes, nonetheless highlights the significance of “King’s appropriation and powerful evocation of highly resonant cultural themes, not only in the Southern Black Baptist tradition, but in American political culture more generally”; “indeed”, he continues, “this was King’s unique genius: to frame civil rights activity in a way that resonated not only with the culture of the oppressed, but with the culture of the oppressor as well” (1994, 38).

Although social movement scholars generally focus on the use of ‘rights’ frames rather than the use of ‘American Dream’ language, there are some important similarities in the arguments and conclusions here to those found in the ‘American Dream’ scholarship. In

particular, social movement scholars emphasize the civil rights movement's appropriation and redefinition of the concept of 'rights' from one that justified institutionalized racism to one that justified the *elimination* of institutionalized racism; American Dream scholars make essentially the same claim, but they focus on the appropriation and redefinition of the 'American Dream'. In both accounts, the story of the civil rights movement is a story of movement actors successfully redefining, and making effective use of, 'hegemonic ideology' (Westby 2005).

Longer, Broader Civil Rights Literature

In chapter 1, I reviewed a third strand of literature pertaining to the civil rights movement—the work that has come to be known as the 'long civil rights' literature. By expanding the historical lens, scholars in this tradition have demonstrated that the timing and composition of 'the movement' are more complex than the conventional wisdom would indicate. Moreover—and most importantly for us here—the very ideas and aims driving civil rights activists were multi-faceted, and in many cases, more radical than those we hear about either in the scholarly accounts reviewed above, or in the popular narratives.

In addition to the 'long civil rights' literature, numerous biographical treatments of key civil rights figures and key events have also helped to shed light on the more radical side of the civil rights movement (eg., Anderson 1972; Bynum 2010; D'Emilio 2003; Garrow 1986; Jackson 2007; Jones 2013; Zeitlin and Weyher 2001). These scholars emphasize that the civil rights struggle was, for many involved, about a struggle for more than ending segregation; it was about a struggle for creating a more just society for all Americans. Although it gets left out of most mainstream narratives, many civil rights activists felt that this ultimately required fundamental changes not only in the country's legal and political structures, but also in its economic structures. Many of these activists advocated policies that were clearly social democratic policies. This is one of the central themes of this chapter, and

it leads to one of my key points of departure from much of the literature outlined above. For, when viewed from the perspective of those seeking to bring about significant economic changes, the civil rights movement may be defined as much by setbacks and failures as it is by success. Among those who sought such change were the ‘bridge activists’, who will be introduced in section 2, and whose efforts will be examined in this chapter.

In a 2012 review essay, Kate Sampsell-Willmann refers to the “longer, *broad*er civil rights movement”, a label that perhaps more accurately captures the implications of the literature that belongs in this sub-section. Scholars in the ‘longer, broader civil rights’ tradition reject the narrow lens through which the movement has often been examined and assessed, and it is the narrowness not only in terms of historical, but also ideological, focus that they reject. As Hall (2005) explains,

By confining the civil rights struggle to the South, to bowdlerized heroes, to a single halcyon decade, and to limited, noneconomic objectives, the master narrative simultaneously elevates and diminishes the movement. It ensures the status of the classical phase as a triumphal moment in a larger American progress narrative, yet it undermines its *gravitas*. It prevents one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history from speaking effectively to the challenges of our time. (1234)

As will become clear in this chapter, however, one thing that most of these authors neglect when they expand their historical and analytical lens is the use of ‘American Dream’ language in the longer, broader civil rights movement. This is one of the central tasks of the present chapter. In the conventional accounts, King’s speech at the March on Washington in 1963 is portrayed as fully representative of his (and, in fact, of the entire civil rights movement’s) interpretation of the meaning of the ‘American Dream’. However, as I will aim to demonstrate below, this is a problematic portrayal, which stems from the widespread neglect of the range of uses of ‘American Dream’ language not only by King, but also by the other bridge activists.

Our examination of ‘American Dream’ framing among the bridge activists, therefore, is where we depart from the literature in the ‘longer, broader civil rights’ tradition. For, although the bridge activists and their social democratic agendas tend to figure prominently in these works, their use of ‘American Dream’ language does not. Most of these accounts are relatively silent about the role of the ‘American Dream’ in King’s broader repertoire of speeches beyond the March on Washington, 1963; moreover, the fact that this term, and related language, also appears in the speeches and writings of the other bridge activists, receives no mention.

Chapter Structure

I begin by providing a brief introduction to the ‘bridge activists’, whose framing activities are the primary focus in this chapter. I will then offer an overview of the key events and developments that these framing efforts were built around. In Part II, I examine the specific ‘American Dream’ frames articulated by the bridge activists. After providing an introductory discussion highlighting Martin Luther King Jr.’s use of ‘American Dream’ language prior to the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, I then turn, in section 3, to an analysis of his speech at the march, and I compare the frames in this speech to those provided by A. Philip Randolph in his (largely neglected) speech at the event. Sections 4 and 5 examine the ‘American Dream’ framing by the bridge activists after the March on Washington, particularly in the so-called ‘New Phase’. In these sections, I highlight the ways in which King’s ‘American Dream’ frames increasingly took on a critical, anti-capitalist tone, and thus came to resemble the type of strategic appropriation of the ‘American Dream’ that the other bridge activists had been attempting in earlier years; that is, King’s ‘American Dream’ framing shifted away from strictly representing ‘exposure of contradiction’, toward ‘inversion of meaning’ of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. In Part III, I begin by reviewing the framing outcomes across the period examined, and I point out that the

‘American Dream’ frames that challenged the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation—those that represented attempts at ‘inversion of meaning’—were those that consistently failed, regardless of who invoked them. In sections 7 and 8 of the chapter I consider the potential role of the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’, in bringing about this pattern of failure. In section 7, I demonstrate how the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation appears to have been prevalent in this discursive opportunity structure, and in section 8, I demonstrate that this prevalence did contribute to the framing failures; in that section, we will see that the influence occurred primarily at the site of frame reception and diffusion (rather than, as was the case in chapter 3, at the site of frame construction). I conclude the chapter by reassessing the literature examined in section 1, focusing especially on how the findings of this chapter cast some doubt on the conventional wisdom surrounding the ‘American Dream’.

2.The Broader Civil Rights Movement: Key People, Events, and Strategies

The ‘Bridge Activists’

Martin Luther King, Jr. is among the most prominent and celebrated civil rights figures in the United States, and yet in most accounts, his legacy is confined to particular ideas and issues; his critical stances on American foreign policy, American culture, and capitalism—increasingly evident in his final years—are rarely, if ever, referred to in most mainstream political discourse. King’s involvement with labour unions, and his move toward embracing a socialist philosophy in the later years of his life, are particularly relevant for us here, and have been well documented by biographers such as David Garrow (1986), Adam Fairclough (1987) and Thomas Jackson (2007).²⁴¹ However, it is his earlier activist years,

²⁴¹ It should be noted that Jackson (2007) contends that most of the existing scholarship exaggerates the extent to which King’s radicalism in the years before his assassination represents a substantial transformation in terms of his philosophy. He acknowledges that King’s rhetoric certainly changed substantially in the latter years of his

particularly those leading up to and including 1963 when he delivered his ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, that tend to be highlighted in many academic and non-academic accounts. Despite numerous activists’, biographers’, and historians’ ongoing efforts to draw attention to the neglected 1964-1968 years, and to encourage more dialogue around the life, ideas, and legacy of King, various distortions continue to persist in most popular and scholarly discourse. He remains the

[dominant] narrative’s defining figure—frozen in 1963, proclaiming ‘I have a dream’ during the march on the Mall. Endlessly reproduced and selectively quoted, his speeches retain their majesty yet lose their political bite [...] Gone is King the democratic socialist who advocated unionization, planned the Poor People’s Campaign, and was assassinated in 1968 while supporting a sanitation workers’ strike. (Hall 2005, 1234)

While less known to the general public, and given little or no mention in the ‘American Dream’ and social movement literatures, A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin are also significant figures, both of whom exerted substantial influence within the labour and civil rights movements. These men, as Isaac and Christiansen (2002) observe, “were important ‘bridge activists’ in a dual sense: They linked rank-and-file black workers to the white union leadership, and they generally connected the civil rights movement’s agenda to the organized labor movement” (727). Randolph’s ideological and activist roots began in socialism and unionism, rather than in the civil rights movement per se; in fact, “he was the only major civil rights leader to emerge out of the labor movement” (Stein 1991, 1320). In chapter 4, we saw that his activities in the 1940s surrounding third-party efforts were unsuccessful, but he did achieve success in a number of other endeavours. In addition to founding the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters—the first African American labour union to be granted an AFL charter—he also created the Negro American Labor Council (NALC) in 1960, which was “designed to press the interests of black workers and to criticize the

life (a point that will be demonstrated in this chapter), but he also suggests that King’s own (radical) thinking about issues around civil rights, class, and international relations had been forming much earlier than is often assumed.

unions and the AFL-CIO” (Zieger 1994, 175; Bynum 2010; Harris 1987). Although he had a tumultuous relationship with the AFL (and later the AFL-CIO), he was a central and influential figure in the labour movement, serving on the AFL-CIO Executive Council between 1955 and 1974. His approach to civil rights issues went through several key shifts over the course of his life—and some of these correspond to shifts in his relationship with organized labour—but he “remained committed to socialism as the path to economic justice for all workers throughout his life” (Sampsell-Willmann 2012, 493).

Bayard Rustin was much less visible than Randolph within the labour movement until 1965, when he became executive director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI), a “kind of social democratic ‘think tank’ created specifically for Rustin” (Fairclough 1987, 201). The organization, whose purpose was to “act as the bridge between the civil rights and the labor movement”, was partly financed by the AFL-CIO (Levine 2000, 175). Thereafter, Rustin would be seen as one of the “official spokespersons of blacks in organized labor” (Mantsios 1977, 25). Well before then, however, he had made a name for himself within the civil rights movement, acting as a political advisor to King in the 1950s and playing a central role in organizing the 1963 March on Washington. In recent years, a number of biographical portraits and studies of the civil rights movement have helped to shed light on his central role as a strategist of the civil rights movement (eg., Carbado and Weise 2003; D’Emilio 2003; Levine 2000). As one book reviewer puts it, “Particularly in the crucial years from the 1940s to the 1960s there was virtually no act or scene of the civil rights drama...in which Rustin did not play a major role” (Drucker 2005, para 1). Rustin’s importance for us stems not just from his role and influence, but also from the fact that his approach to civil rights was very much informed by his radical economic views. Rustin “remained a Socialist...and had the long-term goal of moving blacks into a radicalized labour movement” (Fairclough 1983, 119). In the lead-up to the March on Washington, it was Rustin who, along with Randolph, sought to

keep the economic dimensions of the march in focus, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Both men would also be at the forefront of various (unsuccessful) attempts to translate those demands into concrete legislative achievements in the ensuing years. As shall be discussed throughout this paper, however, the radicalism of Rustin and Randolph's economic vision—like that of King's—has been left out of many scholarly accounts, and out of popular narratives, of the March on Washington (and of the broader civil rights movement).

Perhaps least well-known, (certainly the least written about) among our bridge activists is Cleveland Robinson, a Jamaican-born labour leader who served as secretary-treasurer of District 65, Distributive Workers between 1952 and 1992. He was also a founding member and vice-president of the NALC, and he succeeded Randolph as president upon the latter's retirement in 1966 (Foner 1974). Five years later, he would go on to found the successor organization to the NALC, the Council of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), where he served as vice president. Robinson also served as secretary-treasurer for the March on Washington in 1963 (*ibid.*; Jones 2013). In addition to having various organizational ties to both the labour and civil rights movements, Robinson served as an advisor to King after 1964, and he was among a group of civil rights activists and union organizers—a group that included both King and Rustin—who would meet every few weeks in New York to discuss politics and economics (Fairclough 1986, 170-171). It was Robinson who, “more than any other of King's labor advisors...kept prodding King to move toward union and economic justice issues within King's SCLC”; at the same time, however, despite his own active involvement in the labour movement, Robinson was also particularly critical of the AFL-CIO's moderate if not conservative stance on many of these issues (Honey 2011, 56).

Although there are many things the bridge activists shared in common, there were also key differences. Indeed, despite their direct personal and career ties to one another, each of these men's ideological trajectories was unique, and this is reflected in their different (and

changing) relationships with civil rights and labour organizations. Moreover, these men would come to adopt differing positions on key issues, such as the Vietnam War, and they often disagreed with one another on tactics and strategy. The disagreements between the bridge activists will be considered throughout this essay, and we shall also consider the analyses and debates among scholars regarding the nature and implications of some of these disagreements and divergences in strategies. What will be demonstrated, however—and ultimately, what matters the most for our purposes here—is that each of these activists sought to bring civil rights and labour activists together to illuminate and address the problems *not only* with America’s legal and political institutions, but also with its economic institutions. To different degrees—and, admittedly, with varying consistency—each emphasized the limits of American capitalism and pressed for social democratic policies (whether as ends in themselves or as a step towards bringing about a socialist society). Finally, and most importantly, they all responded to the discursive opportunity structure provided by Americanism in a similar way; that is, they invoked the language of the ‘American Dream’, in the hopes that their (redefined) interpretation would be embraced by civil rights supporters and the broader public, and that this would aid them in their efforts to bring about social democracy in the United States.

March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963

The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom took place on August 28, 1963. However, like the ‘American Dream’ speech given by Martin Luther King Jr. at the event, the March on Washington has roots that stem further back than 1963. Indeed, that march has origins in the longer, broader civil rights movement. The idea of marching on Washington had originally been conceived of in 1941 by Randolph, who at that time was pressing for the establishment of a Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). Randolph eventually called off the planned march, when President Roosevelt established an FEPC, but the March

on Washington Movement remained somewhat active through the 1940s²⁴². In 1948, Randolph once again called for a march, this time demanding desegregation of the armed forces (a demand he had previously made, but which had not been met by Roosevelt). When then-President Truman “ordered the desegregation of the armed forces....Randolph again [*sic*] canceled the march” (Meyerson 2013, para 10). In the early spring of 1963, Randolph once again announced plans for a march; although this one would eventually go ahead, there would be many twists and turns along the way.

In his discussion of the lead-up to the 1963 March on Washington, Jackson (2007) points out that “the march had no single ‘original’ plan; it represented a convergence of several streams of expectation and hope” (171). Although this is certainly an accurate portrayal, it is also true, as Jackson himself emphasizes, that the initiators and lead organizers of the march, Randolph and Rustin, were never unclear about the fact that this was to be a march not only *against segregation* but also *for jobs*. Indeed, when the march was first proposed by Randolph to the national executive board of the NALC, it was called the Jobs Rights’ March and Mobilization (Jackson 2007). The economic goals behind the planned march were not limited to the issue of employment opportunities, moreover. In the planning memo for the march drafted up by Rustin and fellow Socialist Tom Kahn in January, 1963 at the request of Randolph, the authors called for “mobiliz[ing] all workers behind demands for a broad and fundamental program of economic justice” (quoted in Carbado and Weise 2003, 114). That same memo emphasized the fact that the “project should call for action by the President and Congress, listing concrete *demands*” (ibid.). The list of demands first drawn up by Rustin included a federal jobs creation program and a raise in the minimum wage, both of

²⁴² Hamilton and Hamilton (1997, 47) point out that the March on Washington Movement (MOWM), headed by Randolph, did not outright *cancel* the march when Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, but rather ‘postponed’ it. “The postponement”, they observe, “helped maintain MOWM as a useful leverage as the fight against discrimination and segregation continued”.

which made it onto the final program carried by the marchers to Washington. Thus, the march had a “decidedly economic thrust”, which was evident from the early planning days (Pfeffer 1990, 240; Levine 2000; Garrow 1986). Cleveland Robinson also sought to draw attention to the economic goals, and when announcing plans for the march to the New York press, he emphasized that “the purpose of the mass demonstration...would be to draw national attention to the problem of black unemployment and the need for thousands of new jobs, and not simply to lobby for civil rights legislation” (Garrow 1986, 271). Furthermore, as he stated on a T.V. program just over two weeks before the march took place, “We are not just fighting for jobs for Negroes. We’re fighting for jobs for all Americans” (quoted in Foner 1974, 349).

The ‘democratic socialist agenda’ drafted by Rustin and Kahn ultimately represented only one facet of the March on Washington’s agenda (Meyerson 2013). Moreover, the list of economic goals that made it into the final version of the program, represented a significantly watered-down platform. Although the explanations for this watering-down remain the subject of continued debate among civil rights activists and scholars, one contributing factor that is widely acknowledged is the moderating effect of seeking a wider alliance with various civil rights, liberal and labour organizations (eg., Jackson 2007; Jones 2013; Lichtenstein 1995, 384; Pfeffer 1990, 246). Meyerson (2013) points out that when Randolph first announced plans for the 1963 march, he

had the support chiefly of such black union leaders as Cleveland Robinson and such heavily black (and left) unions as the Packinghouse Workers. The more establishment black organizations—the NAACP and the Urban League in particular—responded coolly to his announcement, casting a cold eye on both its social democratic message and the confrontational way that message would be delivered. (para. 15)

Although Randolph and Rustin ultimately succeeded in drawing the latter groups into the coalition, they did often make concessions in order to secure such organizations’ participation, and in many instances these concessions involved the toning down of the

radical economic thrust of the mobilization. As we shall see in this chapter, however, the social democratic vision of the event organizers was not entirely absent from the march platform, and the economic goals were identifiable in many of the signs carried by marchers and the speeches given by presenters. Whether that vision resonated with those listening and watching, however, is another matter.

The 'New Phase' and the Freedom Budget for All Americans

i. The 'New Phase'

Isaac and Christiansen (2002, 738) argue that “[t]he crucial turning point inside the civil rights movement took place between 1965 and 1966. [...] Major legislation for civil rights and voting rights had been accomplished, the focus increasingly turned to economic issues and the war in Vietnam, and the Watts riot exploded signalling a qualitatively new phase of militancy.” On the one hand, the characterization of the post-1965 civil rights movement as having entered a ‘qualitatively new phase’ runs the risk of reinforcing the dominant narratives’ tendency to underestimate the degree to which economic issues *were* emphasized prior to 1965. On the other hand, such a characterization is justified here, for a number of reasons. To begin with, the ‘new phase’, particularly following the passage of the Voting Rights Act, represents the period during which King shifted toward a more public radicalism, and during which his gap framing consistently represented an attempt at inversion of meaning, in contrast to much of his framing prior to 1965. Beginning around this time, we see King invoking his broader ‘American Dream of economic justice and the brotherhood of man’, and he begins to push openly and consistently for economic and social transformation as the means for achieving the ‘dream yet unfulfilled’.

As for the other bridge activists, although they had long advocated a more expansive (and social democratic) vision for the civil rights movement, it is nonetheless reasonable to

highlight the ‘new phase’, for two reasons. Firstly, this is how they *themselves* often framed the movement after 1965; they emphasized that the movement had reached a ‘new’ stage, and that the struggles in this new stage revolved around class and economic issues. In addition, the *strategies* they advocated in the ‘new phase’ were, in certain respects, new. In a 1965 article entitled ‘From Protest to Politics’—an article that would prove to be “his most famous essay” (Levine 2000, 172)—Rustin reflected on the passage of recent civil rights legislation and assessed its implications for the civil rights movement:

The decade spanned by the 1954 Supreme Court decision on school desegregation and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 will undoubtedly be recorded as the period in which the legal foundations of racism in America were destroyed. To be sure, pockets of resistance remain; but it would be hard to quarrel with the assertion that the elaborate legal structure of segregation and discrimination, particularly in relation to public accommodations, has virtually collapsed. On the other hand...we must recognize that in desegregating public accommodations, we affected institutions which are relatively peripheral both to the American socio-economic order and to the fundamental conditions of life of the Negro people. (1965a, 116)

According to Rustin, the struggles against segregation during the past decade represented a particular phase of the civil rights movement—the ‘classical phase’. But with the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the last vestiges of legal segregation had been removed, and thus the ‘classical phase’ of the movement had seemingly come to a close. Now the movement was in a phase of transition, Rustin observed—a transition that entailed moving its sights toward the North, shifting its focus onto socio-economic institutions (in both the South and the North), and expanding its goals: “the civil rights movement is evolving from a protest movement into a full-fledged *social movement*....It is now concerned not merely with removing the barriers to full *opportunity* but with achieving the fact of *equality*” (ibid., 121).

Although Rustin’s *From Protest to Politics* did not represent any significant shift regarding his views on the link between class and civil rights issues, there are ways in which this article did signal a ‘new’ direction in terms of Rustin’s own thinking. In particular, his recommendations on *strategy* for the ‘next phase’ of the civil rights movement reflected a

gradual shift in his approach that had been developing in the last two years.²⁴³ According to Rustin, the nature of the struggle in this next phase—and the nature of the institutions the movement would be targeting—required a strategic move ‘from protest to politics’. This would mean forming closer and institutionalized alliances with groups including, and especially, organized labour. It also meant looking to the established political parties—something that Randolph, especially, had long advocated *against*. However, when Lyndon Johnson became President and defied expectations by pushing for the passage of the Civil Rights Act, Randolph and Rustin began to change their tune. “If we handle things right”, Rustin wrote in a September, 1964 article in *New America*, “we can push [Johnson] very far to the left on economic questions, bearing in mind that to the degree that we push him to the left on economic questions we are essentially answering for the nation the basic civil rights questions—jobs, slums, poverty, etc.”

Rustin and Randolph’s particular vision of moving from ‘protest to politics’ would quickly become controversial among some circles in the civil rights movement, and indeed, the tactics and strategies advocated by these men often put them at odds with the other bridge activists (Le Blanc and Yates 2013). Thus, the ‘new phase’ represents a period marked by both convergence *and* divergence. For, if King increasingly understood the civil rights struggle as a class struggle, and if he joined the other bridge activists in advocating significant economic transformation, he remained more wary than the other bridge activists (especially Randolph and Rustin) of the possibility of achieving those goals by joining hands with the mainstream labour movement. For his part, Cleveland Robinson, despite his own involvement with organized labour, also grew increasingly sceptical and critical of the AFL-CIO (Foner 1974; Jackson 2007). Whereas Rustin and Randolph expended energy on reforming the labour movement from within—via the APRI—Robinson opted for working at

²⁴³ As Levine rightly observes, the article “summed up the ideas he had been expressing in various bits and pieces over the previous couple of years about the direction in which he thought the civil rights movement had to go” (2000, 172).

arms length from the AFL-CIO, serving as President of the NALC after Randolph stepped down. A similar divergence in strategy would be evident with respect to the bridge activists' attitude toward the Johnson administration; although all four bridge activists took a critical stance on the War on Poverty (as we will see below), Randolph and Rustin continuously tried to work with the administration and with the Democratic Party, hoping to achieve favourable legislation. King, on the other hand, became a fierce, outspoken critic of not just the war on Poverty but—in contrast to Randolph and Rustin—also of the Vietnam War. The differing positions on Vietnam put the bridge activists increasingly at odds with each other, and indeed many historians of the civil rights movement have argued that the war not only led to the fracturing of the movement, but that it was the most significant factor causing the limited gains made after 1965 (eg., Foner 1974; Levy 1994; Le Blanc and Yates 2013). Yet, the Vietnam War would not be the only source of constraint on the movement's effectiveness, as will become evident in this chapter.

ii. The Freedom Budget for All Americans, 1967

In his 1964 State of the Union Address, President Johnson declared an “unconditional war on poverty”. Between 1964 and 1966, the administration pushed a wave of antipoverty legislation through, and oversaw the creation of a number of programs, as well as the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity. The initial response to the ‘War on Poverty’ from the bridge activists was mixed, as were the responses from the broader community of civil rights and labour leaders. While King initially expressed admiration for Johnson’s willingness to publicly acknowledge the ongoing problem of poverty, he also “shared a pervasive scepticism within left circles about the meagre resources the government devoted to the antipoverty effort and its failure to fulfil promises of democracy” (Jackson 2007, 195). By 1967, he would become an outspoken critic of the Johnson administration, not only on the

question of ‘guns vs. butter’, but also because of the ideological underpinnings of the Great Society itself. Before King, however, the other bridge activists were already expressing such pessimism, critiquing the whole approach behind these programs. A particularly telling example comes from Robinson’s remarks during the 1965 AFL-CIO convention. “I have heard much talk about the Great Society”, he remarked to the convention;

but we have to face the fact that all of the legislation that has been passed so far...and all the monies that have been allocated for these purposes are but a drop in the bucket. [...] So in essence what has been happening so far is that we have been treating this cancer in our society with aspirin tablets instead of the penicillin doses that it needs. I say something is radically wrong.²⁴⁴

These words probably fell upon mostly deaf ears; the majority of Robinson’s audience at that convention belonged to the mainstream labour movement, which was not very interested in the War on Poverty in the first place (Katznelson 1989, 195), and which Robinson himself felt could not fully be counted on by “negro and other minorities in their fight for justice”.²⁴⁵ Randolph, on the other hand, had both feet firmly planted in the AFL-CIO by this point, and he and Rustin were far more hesitant about critiquing organized labour than Robinson. Yet, both men would join Robinson in expressing dissatisfaction with the way the administration was handling the ‘new phase’ of the civil rights struggle. Even as they moved to the political centre on issues like the Vietnam War, they would continue to criticize Johnson’s seeming lack of commitment to the War on Poverty. “...I think that over and above the values of the war in Vietnam, on which there can be a great and patriotic debate”, Rustin argued before a Senate Subcommittee in 1966,

there does not need to be a patriotic debate about going to the moon while we leave all the unsolved problems in our ghettos. There is a distortion, a fantastic distortion of priorities, when the President of the United States thinks he can get away with that kind of proposition. He cannot get away with it. [...] What

²⁴⁴ AFL-CIO, *Proceedings of the AFL-CIO 6th Constitutional Convention*, 1965, 305.

²⁴⁵ Cleveland Robinson, speech before District 65 members at Madison Square Garden, 23 October, 1963, Cleveland Robinson Papers, Box 10, Folder 14, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives (Collection hereafter cited in notes as CR Papers).

we ought to be doing is pouring more money into the war on poverty. It is only a trickle to begin with.²⁴⁶

Yet, if the bridge activists were well aware of the budgetary and ideological shortcomings of the War on Poverty, the willingness of the Johnson administration to even acknowledge the ‘next phase’ of the civil rights struggle was significant—and not just symbolically. During his Howard University speech, Johnson announced plans for an upcoming White House Conference entitled ‘To Fulfil These Rights’ and invited various civil rights leaders to participate in the planning sessions leading up to the conference. He also asked Randolph to serve as honorary chairman of the conference—a request that Randolph accepted (Pfeffer 1990). Thus, the administration now appeared to be willing to engage civil rights leaders in discussions over issues that had been off the table during the March on Washington campaign. Although some civil rights leaders—including King—were sceptical about whether the conference would produce any tangible results, Randolph viewed this as an opportunity for advocating the type of program he had long been advocating.

Randolph was not alone in his initial optimism about the White House Conference. Rustin—who was now heading the newly formed A. Philip Randolph Institute—joined Randolph at the planning sessions. Such an opportunity would not be passed up by the man who had been urging that the civil rights movement shift from ‘protest to politics’. During one of these planning sessions, Rustin praised Johnson’s 1965 Howard University speech, and acknowledged the President’s willingness to face up to the “grim reality” of the civil rights struggle—that the “problem of discrimination is deeply rooted in the national life, that it is more profound than laws and court decisions”.²⁴⁷ However, he also identified the war on

²⁴⁶*Federal Role in Urban Affairs. Hearings Before the Subcomm. on Executive Reorganization of the Committee on Government Operations United States Sen.*, Part 9, 89th Cong. 2nd Sess. (1966) (Statement of Bayard Rustin, executive director, APRI).

²⁴⁷ Bayard Rustin, “Background Paper” for White House Planning Conference, November 1965, APR Papers, Box 32.

poverty as ‘modest’, and he and Randolph used the planning sessions to introduce their own, less modest, proposal: the Freedom Budget.

The Freedom Budget was a collaborative effort by Rustin, Randolph and a number of influential civil rights and labour leaders and intellectuals; among those most actively involved in its creation were Tom Kahn, who I introduced earlier, and Leon Keyserling, an economist who had been responsible for drafting various pieces of New Deal legislation in the 1930s (Le Blanc and Yates 2013). The Freedom Budget contained several of the same components as the 1963 March on Washington Platform, including calls for a raise in the minimum wage. And, like the March on Washington Platform, the Freedom Budget was based on the belief that the single most important solution to eliminating poverty was full employment—and on the notion that the responsibility for ensuring full employment rested primarily on the Federal Government, “which alone has the resources equal to the task” (Randolph 1966, 9).

Indeed, one of the notable features of the Freedom Budget was its emphasis on the primary role of the federal government—not of private enterprise or voluntary associations—for ending poverty. It was the federal government who would be primarily responsible for ensuring full employment (through a massive public works program), and it was the federal government who would be responsible for ensuring that those unable to work would still have a ‘decent living standard’ (through a guaranteed annual income). And, it demanded a federal expenditure of \$180 billion over ten years; by contrast, Johnson and his aides were looking at a maximum budget of around \$1 billion (Jackson 2007; LeBlanc and Yates 2013). The Freedom Budget thus “made President Johnson’s rhetorically uplifting ‘War on Poverty’ look miserly” (Garrow 2003, para 7). The latter, with its focus being on “education, job training, and other remedial services meant to uplift the poor”, neither committed the government to creating jobs, nor did it address problems of inadequate wages and poor

working conditions for those who did have jobs (Jackson 2007, 194; Cowie and Salvatore 2008). It “trained people, hoping that the economy would absorb them. Its focus was on changing the poor themselves.” (Levine 2000, 188). “The Freedom Budget’s focus”, by contrast, “was on changing the economic system” (ibid.).

As will be shown below, the official literature for the Freedom Budget contained language that was quite consensual, and which seemed to conflict with the social democratic implications of the program. However, we will also examine the bridge activists’ campaigning on behalf of the Freedom Budget, and we shall see that their frames often were more commensurate with the program than were the official documents.²⁴⁸

II. AMERICAN DREAM FRAMES IN THE BROADER CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Un-Freezing King’s Dream: Before the March on Washington, 1963

Contrary to what most of the existing scholarship on the ‘American Dream’ would lead one to expect, the March on Washington speech was not the first time King discussed the ‘American Dream’.²⁴⁹ In 1961, for example, the title of his commencement address to Lincoln University graduates was ‘*The American Dream*’; in this address, he referred to America as “essentially a dream, a dream as yet unfulfilled. It is a dream of a land where men of all races, of all nationalities, and of all creeds can live together as brothers” (King 1961a,

²⁴⁸ The Freedom Budget document, which was printed and distributed under the auspices of the APRI, appeared in two different versions. The full version—cited in the text of this study as (A. Philip Randolph Institute 1966)—was 84-pages long, was distributed beginning in late 1966, in the form of a pamphlet, to various individuals and groups across the country; the Institute “sent copies to every senator and representative and also to economists, university and college presidents, social activists of all varieties” (Levine 2000, 190). A shorter, 20-page ‘popularized’ summary version—cited in the text of this study as (A. Philip Randolph Institute 1967)—was also created for wider distribution. Between 1966 and 1968, 100,000 copies of this version were distributed (Le Blanc and Yates 2013, 97). Both versions contained (different) introductions written by Randolph, but the popularized version also contained a forward written by King. Cleveland Robinson was one of the signatories of the budget. In this chapter, discussion of the ‘official’ Freedom Budget documents refers primarily to the above-noted two documents; the identification of the bridge activists’ framing in support of the program, on the other hand, is drawn from a variety of sources including records of Congressional testimonials and transcripts of speeches at public events.

²⁴⁹ This is something that has been pointed out (but, I would argue, not sufficiently addressed) by numerous scholars (eg., Fairclough 1987; Gerstle 2001; Honey 2011; Jackson 2007).

208). Later that year, during his address to the AFL-CIO fourth constitutional convention, he once again invoked the idea of “a dream yet unfulfilled”, and yet on this occasion he provided a somewhat different definition, describing it as

A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men will not take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few; a dream of a land where men will not argue that the color of a man’s skin determines the content of his character; a dream of a nation where all our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone but as instruments of service for the rest of humanity; the dream of a country where every man will respect the dignity and worth of human personality—that is the dream. (1961b, 43)

What was different about this definition was not just that it was more detailed and specific than that provided during the Lincoln University address, but that it contained references to economic goals. In this speech, the American Dream took on a broader conception, for it was about the “struggle to make racial *and economic* justice a reality” (1961b, 43; emphasis added). In a different speech delivered earlier that year—also before a labour-based audience—King had identified that broader conception more directly, referring to the “American dream of economic justice and of the brotherhood of man” (quoted in Honey 2011, 27). Thus, even before his ‘radical years’ we can find some indication of King linking the struggle for civil rights and the struggle for economic rights—and we see him expressing that link through the language of the ‘American Dream’.

King would express that link more explicitly, consistently, and before a wider range of audiences, in the last few years of his life, but not on August 28, 1963 during his famous ‘I Have a Dream’ speech at the March on Washington. The struggle for economic justice was largely absent from that speech, particularly from the part of the speech that is highlighted in the dominant narratives of the civil rights movement. It is in part because of this absence that some civil rights and labour historians have argued that King’s speech—while unquestionably one of the most powerful speeches in American history—was not representative of the ideas underpinning the March on Washington. As Jones (2013, 197)

explains, “taken out of context and often viewed as the only speech, it was the least representative or attentive to the specific goals and demands of the mobilization”. Equally important, however, is that King’s speech was not representative of the views he would hold and express in the remaining years of his life. This latter point will be demonstrated in later sections of the chapter, but for now we will examine the speeches of King and Randolph at the march, and will consider the nature of the gap frames proffered in each of these speeches.

3. American Dream Frames at the March on Washington

The twin evils of discrimination and economic deprivation plague the nation. They rob all people, Negro and white, of dignity, self-respect, and freedom.

-March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom²⁵⁰

The Speeches

Several hours before King stood at the podium, A. Philip Randolph gave the opening address at the March on Washington. Almost from the moment that Randolph began his speech, it was clear that he was aiming to avoid having the economic goals be relegated to the background; “We are the advanced guard of a massive, moral revolution for jobs and freedom”, he declared early on, and although “this revolution reverberates throughout the land touching every city, every town, every village where black men are segregated, oppressed and exploited...this civil rights revolution is not confined to the Negro, nor is it confined to civil rights”.²⁵¹ Indeed, “the goal of our civil rights revolution [is not] merely the passage of civil rights legislation”, he stressed, for “we want a free, democratic society dedicated to the political, economic and social advancement of man along moral lines”.²⁵² Further along in his speech, Randolph declared that “[t]he sanctity of private property takes

²⁵⁰ Pamphlet, 1963, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/march-washington-jobs-and-freedom-pamphlet#>.

²⁵¹ “Address of A. Philip Randolph at the March on Washington”, 28 August, 1963, APR Papers, Box 36 (speech hereafter cited in notes as “Address of A. Philip Randolph”).

²⁵² Ibid.

second place to the sanctity of the human personality”.²⁵³ Although he was clearly “drawing on decades of experience as a Socialist and union president” here (Jones 2013, 191), he also drew direct links to the civil rights struggle:

It falls to the Negro to reassert this proper priority of values, because our ancestors were transformed from human personalities into private property. It falls to us to demand new forms of social planning, to create full employment, and to put automation at the service of human needs, not at the service of profits—for we are the worst victims of unemployment.²⁵⁴

Randolph was careful throughout his speech to frame the goals of the marchers as representative of the interests of all working and poor Americans, but he also attributed a particular sense of urgency and desire for change to “Negroes...because we know we cannot expect the realization of our aspirations through the same old anti-democratic social institutions and philosophies that have all along frustrated our aspirations”.²⁵⁵

Randolph’s opening address did not make explicit mention of the terms ‘land of opportunity’ or ‘American Dream’, but the gap frames we have identified in previous chapters are clearly identifiable here nonetheless. In fact, all three ‘gap’ variants can be discerned in his short speech²⁵⁶. One of the things worth noting in this regard is that Randolph presented the ‘equal opportunity’ and ‘economic security’ gaps as fundamentally interconnected. That relationship is evident both in Randolph’s diagnostic framing and in his prognostic framing. The blame attribution in his diagnostic frames identified the same factors contributing to both economic and racial injustices: “[t]hose who deplore our militants, who exhort patience in the name of a false peace”, he remarked at one point, “are in fact supporting segregation *and* exploitation. They would have social peace at the expense of social *and* racial justice”.²⁵⁷ Just as importantly, however, Randolph’s diagnosis also went

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ “Address of A. Philip Randolph”.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Here I will limit the discussion to the economic security and equal opportunity gaps. The ‘American political traditions’ gap, under which these were subsumed, will be examined a bit further below.

²⁵⁷ “Address of A. Philip Randolph”; emphasis added.

beyond targeting specific groups or practices as sources of the nation's continuing failure to make real on its promises—he also pointed to the “nation's political and social philosophies and institutions”. Thus, his diagnostic frames, while clearly representing ‘exposure of contradiction’, also went beyond this type of appropriation, and represented ‘inversion of meaning’ of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. This type of strategic appropriation is also evident in Randolph's prognostic frames, which identified the transformation of existing economic institutions as imperative for addressing the (fundamentally interconnected) problems of unequal opportunity and economic insecurity. Particularly illustrative of this, was his explanation for why “the goal of our civil rights revolution [is not] merely the passage of civil rights legislation”; for, he had observed following these remarks, what good would legislation securing universal access to public accommodations do for “those who cannot afford to use them”? “Yes, we want a Fair Employment Practice Act”, he continued, “but what good will it do if profit-gearred automation destroys the jobs of millions of workers black and white?”²⁵⁸

The dual focus on class and race—the ‘twin evils of discrimination and economic deprivation’ that was the theme of the pamphlet distributed ahead of the march—was a theme that was maintained in Randolph's speech from start to finish. And as we have just seen, the ‘equal opportunity’ gap frame entailed the same inversion of meaning that his ‘economic security’ gap frame entailed, and thus it represented a fundamental challenge to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. The equal opportunity gap frame offered by King some hours later, by contrast, would remain within the bounds of that interpretation.

When King—the final scheduled speaker of the day—took to the stage, he spent the first few minutes reading from a script that contained many of the same themes as the other speakers who had preceded him. Like Randolph, King made early reference to the economic

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

dimension of the civil rights struggle. Noting that 100 years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation “the Negro is still not free”, he went on to observe that in addition to facing the “manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination...the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity” (1963a, 217). “In a sense”, he continued,

we have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. (ibid.)

Mid-way through his speech, King cast aside his script and began to improvise, describing his ‘dream’ in what would become some of the most widely quoted and recognized words in the history of American political speeches. Despite the improvised nature of the remainder of his speech, however, the message contained some continuity with the first, scripted part. In particular, he maintained the emphasis on the gap between the promise and reality of America, while expressing optimism that the gap would one day be closed:

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal. (219)

The vision of the ‘American Dream’ that King presented on that day did not include the idea of ‘privilege and property widely distributed’, or any of the other economic or material goals that had been articulated in some of the previous speeches wherein he had invoked the ‘dream’. In his 1961 speech before the UAW, and in his address to the AFL-CIO convention in that same year, he had described the “American dream of economic justice and of the brotherhood of man”; in the speech he gave at the march, however, he described what sounded like only one component of that dream. “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit

down together at a table of brotherhood” (1963a, 219). A few lines later, referring to Alabama, “whose governor’s lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification”, he spoke of his “dream that one day the state...will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers” (ibid.). And toward the end of his speech, as he described “the faith with which I return to the South”, the concept of ‘brotherhood’ made another appearance: “With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood” (ibid.). By the time he neared the end of his speech, declaring “Let freedom ring”, the crowd had become so enthusiastic that King had to speak “forcefully to make himself heard over the growing roar” (Garrow 1986, 284). And of course, with television and radio stations broadcasting the event live across the country, it was not just those standing at the Lincoln Memorial who had heard him. “Although he did not know it” Garrow remarks, “the speech had been the rhetorical achievement of a lifetime, the clarion call that conveyed the moral power of the movement’s cause to the millions who had watched the live national network coverage” (1986, 284).

In a Fall, 1963 *Dissent* article reflecting on the speeches of August 28, Tom Kahn accurately noted that “it was A. Philip Randolph...who gave sharpest expression to the implications of the March” (320). Of course, it was not Randolph’s speech that would, either in the short- or long-term, come to define the march and its legacy, but King’s. The full significance of this will become evident in Part III of this chapter; at this point, it is worth considering the nature of these two speeches—particularly, how they relate to the core ideological tenet of the ‘American Dream’—in more detail. The most straightforward difference between King’s and Randolph’s speeches is that Randolph highlighted the economic security gap much more emphatically and consistently than did King. Both

speeches began with diagnostic frames that incorporated economic themes, but as we observed above, King's speech quickly moved away from focusing on its economic dimensions. The second half of his speech—inspiring and powerfully delivered though it was—offered little in the way of a reminder that this march was about the need for a “broad and fundamental program of economic justice” (Rustin 1963a, 114).²⁵⁹ This is significant in part because of the fact that, although the speech is cited as one of the most famous in American history, it is really only the second half of the speech that occupies this place of prominence—this is why it is so widely known as the ‘I Have a Dream’ speech. And, of course, the American Dream that he defined that day was the dream of the ‘brotherhood of man’; the economic justice component that would become prominent in later speeches, was left out.

The extent and consistency with which economic themes were highlighted is not the only significant difference between the diagnostic framing in these two speeches. We have observed that Randolph's ‘equal opportunity’ gap frame was presented as fundamentally linked with the ‘economic security’ gap frame, and that he identified the existing economic structure as a crucial source of this link; in this regard, then, both ‘gaps’ were framed in a manner that went beyond ‘exposing contradiction’ with respect to the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. Undergirding Randolph's appeal for the nation to close the opportunity gap was the call for significant transformation of the existing legal *and* economic structure. King, by contrast, articulated the ‘equal opportunity’ gap in a manner that was largely unthreatening to the capitalist interpretation, especially in the second half of his speech. Indeed, one of the most widely cited expressions of that gap—“I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of

²⁵⁹ The quote here is from the initial planning document for the March on Washington, which Carbado and Weise (2003) attribute to Rustin, but which other works (eg., Long 2012) attribute to Tom Kahn as well. Because the reprint that was consulted in this study is the version in Carbado and Weise (2003), the citations are in accordance with the latter.

their skin but by the content of their character”—can be, and has been, interpreted as a call for a limited notion of meritocracy, rather than a more expansive notion of equal opportunity (Hall 2005). King’s ‘equal opportunity’ gap represented ‘exposure of contradiction’, and it echoed the frames that appear in the CIO’s postwar material, (some of which was examined in chapter 3), as well as the majority of AFL-CIO literature during the 1960s. In fact, the speech given at the march by Walter Reuther—who was actively involved in civil rights issues both within and beyond the labour movement, and was viewed as one of the voices of progress on these issues²⁶⁰—contains a further example of this more narrow interpretation of equal opportunity. “It is the responsibility of every American”, he declared early in his speech,

to share the impatience of the Negro American and we need to join together, to march together, and to work together until we bridge the moral gap between American democracy’s noble promises and its ugly practices *in the field of civil rights*. American democracy has been too long on pious platitudes, and too short on practical performance *in this important area*.²⁶¹

Earlier, I pointed out that Randolph’s speech contained examples of all three variants of the ‘gap’ frames identified in previous chapters. While we have examined the equal opportunity and economic justice gap frames, we have yet to consider the ‘American political traditions’ gap, under which these two frames were subsumed. Indeed, this gap variant was prominent in the planning documents prepared by the bridge activists in the months leading up to the march. Because it would fall on the 100-year anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, organizers felt that the event offered a unique symbolic opportunity for drawing attention to the gap between America’s historical (and institutionalized) promises, and its failure to live up to those promises. In his initial planning memo for the march, Rustin (1963a, 114) observed that “[t]he one hundred years since the

²⁶⁰ Albeit, not without controversy (Lichtenstein 1995; Mantsios 1977; Moody 1988).

²⁶¹ Walter Reuther, speech at March on Washington, 28 August 1963, <http://www.uaw.org/sites/default/files/Remarks%20of%20W%20Reuther%20March%20on%20Wash%20Speech.pdf>, emphasis added.

signing of the Emancipation Proclamation have witnessed no fundamental government action to terminate the economic subordination of the American Negro”. Rustin also alluded to the interconnection between the ‘equal opportunity’ and ‘economic security’ gaps that would be evident in Randolph’s speech, when he suggested that “[w]e should emphasize the theme that because the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 has failed to bring real freedom for the Negro, no worker is genuinely free” (ibid.). For his part, Randolph, during his speech—as he had done repeatedly in earlier decades, including while he was chair of the NECNP—invoked America’s democratic and egalitarian traditions, and emphasized the nation’s failure to live up to those traditions. Crucially, the intersectional analysis underlying his other gap frames, also came through with respect to the ‘American political traditions’ gap; America was not living up to its democratic ideals, Randolph emphasized, because many of its current institutions were based on segregation and economic exploitation.

In King’s speech, the ‘American political traditions’ gap was prominent, and in fact it was more explicitly expressed than in Randolph’s speech, but the nature of the frame’s relationship to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, once again, differed. King’s admonition about the nation’s failure to live up to the words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence was explicit, and he echoed Rustin’s planning memo early in his speech when he remarked that “Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand signed the Emancipation Proclamation” (1963a, 217). Yet his solemn observation that “one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free” was followed by diagnostic framing that left the nation’s economic institutions largely untouched, as we have seen (ibid.). It is particularly noteworthy that these institutions are completely absent from the second half of his speech, where he made his now-famous declaration about his “dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the

true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal’.

After the March

One of the things that tends to be left out of ‘dominant narratives’ of the March on Washington is the fact that King was not the last person to address the crowd that day. Indeed, immediately following King’s rousing oratory, Rustin took to the podium with Randolph, where he proceeded to read aloud the specific demands outlined in the March on Washington platform, including the \$2 dollar minimum wage and the federal public-works jobs program. Yet, in the days, weeks and months following the march, only a select few of those demands made it onto the public policy agenda in Washington; furthermore, apart from the demand for the passage of the civil rights bill—which itself still met resistance from many politicians and their constituents, especially in the South—most of the demands were all but absent from public discussion (Garrow 1986; Jackson 2007; Jones 2013).

We will examine the reactions and responses to the March on Washington in more detail in Part III of this chapter, but for now it is important to point out that the bridge activists were well aware, in the immediate aftermath, of the uneven attention and publicity being given to different aspects of the event (and of the goals driving it). Indeed, as a number of historians have documented, several of the march organizers, including Rustin, Randolph and Robinson, were frustrated by the fact that the march was being so narrowly interpreted and portrayed by the media and public officials, and they expressed deep concern that the full meaning of the march was being lost among the wider public (Foner 1974; Garrow 1986; Jackson 2007; Jones 2013). In the immediate days following the event, these men went to various efforts to restore the full meaning of the march, and to remind the public that the civil rights revolution was meaningless without substantial economic change; but their language also appeared to reflect their recognition of the power and effectiveness of King’s words at

the march. In his speech to District 65 members less than two months after the march, Cleveland Robinson reminded his listeners that “racial injustice, which has as its base economic injustice, is as much a problem for the working people of our country today as it was 100 years ago”.²⁶² It was for this reason that “we are in the midst of a revolution of the oppressed and exploited Negro --- to make real the ‘American Dream’”.²⁶³ Thus, Robinson drew from important themes of the march’s broad platform, while also making reference to what had been the most memorable speech of that event; yet, unlike the ‘I have a Dream’ speech delivered by King, Robinson made it clear that economic justice was an essential component of the ‘dream’. Indeed, his argument that racial injustice “has as its base economic injustice” echoed the intersectional framing evident in Randolph’s speech; by expressing the fundamental interconnection between the ‘equal opportunity’ and ‘economic security’ gaps, and by identifying “the economic structure of our nation”²⁶⁴ in his blame attribution, Robinson’s framing represented a challenge to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. Therefore, although it alluded to King’s speech, the message underlying Robinson’s words echoed not King’s, but Randolph’s, March on Washington message.

4. Diagnostic Frames in the ‘New Phase’

After the March: Beyond ‘Brotherhood’

On July 4, 1965, King delivered a sermon titled, ‘The American Dream’. During the sermon, King recalled his speech at the March on Washington, where he had “tried to tell the nation about a dream I had” (1965a, para. 6). However, he continued, “I must confess...that since that sweltering August afternoon in 1963, my dream has often turned into a nightmare”.

²⁶² Cleveland Robinson, speech before District 65 members at Madison Square Garden, 23 October, 1963, CR Papers, Box 10, Folder 14.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. The phrase appears in the following extract: “The cold facts are that slavery was motivated by a political and economic structure whose lust for profit and power was so great that they sank to indescribable depths in their thinking and made slaves of masses of human beings. Despite the emancipation proclamation, this same philosophy prevailed in too many places in the economic structure of our nation, and working people black and white continued to suffer the brutalities of exploitation and misery at their hands.”

As he ran through the various instances in which he had seen his “dream shattered”, he began by recalling specific events, including the murders of a number of civil rights activists, but soon moved on to describe more general phenomena:

I’ve been down to the Delta of Mississippi since then, and I’ve seen my dream shattered as I met hundreds of people who didn’t earn more than six or seven hundred dollars a week. I’ve seen my dream shattered as I’ve walked the streets of Chicago and seen Negroes, young men and women, with a sense of utter hopelessness because they can’t find any jobs. [...] And not only Negroes at this point. I’ve seen my dream shattered because I’ve been through Appalachia, and I’ve seen my white brothers along with Negroes living in poverty. And I’m concerned about white poverty as much as I’m concerned about Negro poverty. (ibid.)

Nonetheless, he continued, “I tell you this morning once more that I haven’t lost the faith. I still have a dream that one day all of God’s children will have food and clothing and material well-being for their bodies, culture and education for their minds, and freedom for their spirits” (para. 27). By this point, it should be evident that a crucial difference between King’s sermon here and his 1963 speech is the heightened emphasis on unemployment and poverty. In his 1965 sermon, he was highlighting both the ‘equal opportunity’ and ‘economic security’ gaps in his diagnostic framing, and his vision of the ‘American Dream’ pointed to the interconnected nature of these gaps. This was, in essence, an articulation of the broader ‘American dream of economic justice and of the brotherhood of man’, which until now King had appeared to reserve for labour-based audiences.

The broader conception of the ‘American Dream’ notwithstanding, King’s 1965 sermon did contain elements of continuity with his ‘I have a Dream’ speech. As he had done in 1963, he invoked the ‘American political traditions’ gap. After identifying the “substance of [the American] dream” as being rooted in the Declaration of Independence, he went on to exclaim that

Never before in the history of the world has a sociopolitical document expressed in such profound, eloquent, and unequivocal language the dignity and the worth of human personality. The American dream reminds us, and we should think about it anew on this Independence Day, that every man is an heir of the legacy of dignity and worth. (1965a, para.4)

Following these remarks, however, he offered a sober assessment of the relationship between this legacy and existing practices:

Now ever since the founding fathers of our nation dreamed this dream in all of its magnificence...America has been something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against herself. On the one hand we have proudly professed the great principles of democracy, but on the other hand we have sadly practiced the very opposite of those principles. (para.5)

King also went on to emphasize, however, that he remained hopeful that this gap between principle and practice would eventually be closed. And, as he had often done and would continue to do until his death, he pointed to religion and America's founding political documents, as the ultimate sources of his optimism: "We have a great dream", he remarked at one point in his sermon; "It started way back in 1776, and God grant that America will be true to her dream" (para. 25).

Even as economic justice became a more explicit and persistent theme in his speeches, then, King continued to invoke America's political traditions, and he continued to point to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as moral compasses on which the civil rights movement should rely. But he would also increasingly come to suggest that the nation was currently on the wrong path—not an incomplete path, but one that was leading in an altogether different direction than the realization of the 'American Dream'. We will see in the next two sections that once his 'American Dream' framing began to consistently identify America's economic and social institutions as a crucial part of this wrong path, his diagnostic and prognostic frames came to resemble the type of 'inversion of meaning' of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation attempted by the other bridge activists.

Diagnosis in the 'New Phase'

In August of 1963, in the days immediately following the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Randolph, Rustin and Robinson attended a conference on civil rights,

which was sponsored by the Socialist Party, in New York. During one of the conference sessions, entitled, “*A Prospectus for Civil Rights: The New Phase*”, panellist Rustin explained that “The civil rights movement cannot make an analysis as to where it goes from here unless it makes the analysis within the framework of an examination of American society as it exist[s]” (1963c). For Rustin, this meant “go[ing] deeper into the economic and social questions”, and addressing problems that were “not generally considered civil rights problems”—including unemployment, automation, and poverty. It meant addressing the ‘equal opportunity’ and ‘economic security’ gaps and recognizing the fundamental interrelation between these. And it meant identifying and targeting the institutional and structural sources of these problems, just as the movement had done in its struggle against segregation in the South. Rustin (1963c) also invoked the ‘American political traditions’ gap; in his closing remarks to the panel, he offered a summary of his analysis, stating that

I am against the present economic and social structure in this country. What I want people to do is accept the fundamental ideals of American society, democracy and equality, and try to work out an economic and social system which fits them.

According to Rustin, in other words, the civil rights movement should continue to identify its goals in accordance with American ideals, while nonetheless recognizing the limitations of existing American institutions for achieving those goals. Because American society ‘as it existed’ was not equipped to meet the requirements for a truly democratic and egalitarian society, it was therefore the task of the civil rights movement to join with other progressive groups and to seek to bring about substantial changes to the ‘present economic and social structure’. The necessity for substantial change thus made the struggle for civil rights a ‘revolutionary movement’, despite the fact that, as Rustin admitted, there were “few revolutionary Negroes in this country”. For, he continued, “It’s the implications of their struggle; it’s when Negroes hit basic economic problems, which touch all men; when they use their dynamic for the changing of the whole society, that it becomes revolutionary”

(ibid.). Two years later, in *From Protest to Politics*, he elaborated on this point: "...the term revolutionary, as I am using it...refers to the qualitative transformation of fundamental institutions, more or less rapidly, to the point where the social and economic structure which they comprised can no longer be said to be the same" (1965a, 124). Absent such revolutionary measures, Rustin explained, "I fail to see how the movement can be victorious" (ibid.).

Rustin's diagnosis of 'where we are now' clearly targeted the American economic system as a (if not *the*) main source of the gap between the existing and the potential America. Such diagnostic framing entailed making explicit the distinction between America's founding political traditions and its existing economic structures, and suggesting that these were incompatible. This is particularly significant because, recall, the capitalist land of opportunity idea is built upon the claim that the ideals inscribed in America's founding documents, and its capitalist system, are inextricably linked; it assumes that they each constitute necessary elements in the 'land of opportunity' equation. Rustin's analysis—especially his suggestion that people "accept the fundamental ideals of American society, democracy and equality, and try to work out an economic and social system which fits them"—represented a clear rejection of that assumption.

A similar diagnostic frame is evident in Cleveland Robinson's speech during the same conference. Not a Party member himself, Robinson spoke as a representative of District 65 of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Workers Union (RWDSU), and during the panel session titled 'Fair Employment-Full Employment', he stressed the central relevance of the labour movement to the civil rights movement. He also stressed the

need [for] social changes; I don't know if they will be called socialism or what, but I do know there must be profound changes to make our political and economic structure more democratic. There have to be changes because the power structure of our nation today is in the hands of people whose stated interests are great profits and power. (Robinson 1963)

According to Robinson, therefore, substantial changes were necessary for the attainment of true democracy and equality in America, and in his diagnosis—just as in Rustin’s—the economic structure was a primary target of critique. Also interesting is what Robinson said toward the end of his speech, as he clarified what it was that made the civil rights movement revolutionary, and necessarily so:

No significant changes will occur unless there is an uprising of the people. [pp] Now I’m not preaching revolution in the sense that many people talk revolution, because the revolution that is taking place in America today is unique. It’s a revolution to make the American dream true. (ibid.)

Just like Rustin, therefore, Robinson was not rejecting American ideals, but rather was arguing that the civil rights movement and its allies must acknowledge that significant change was necessary in order for the nation to reach those ideals; and he was identifying the American social and economic (as well as political) structures as needing to undergo a revolution. This was about a revolution with respect to American structures so that society could be equipped to meet up to American ideals, rather than about a revolution that entailed the uprooting of both. Thus, like Rustin, his diagnostic framing balanced resonant elements (American ideals) with oppositional elements (the need for revolutionary changes in the present economic, social and political structures). A similar diagnosis had been provided by Randolph back in 1946 when he had argued that

[w]hether we go from bad to worse, or find a way out of our troubles, depends on whether the American people can work out a constructive answer to the question of the relation between democracy expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Federal Constitution, we now have, and the change in the social and economic system we now need.²⁶⁵

The strategic appropriation of the ‘American Dream’ in these framing efforts clearly went beyond the ‘exposure of contradiction’ that characterized King’s framing during the March on Washington. The insistence on the need for substantial, even revolutionary,

²⁶⁵ “Statement to Educational Political Conference in Chicago, Illinois, at the International House”, April 1946, Box 38, APR Papers, 2.

changes to the American economic system was based clearly on the *rejection* of the basic legitimacy of the system. Yet, the bridge activists did not reject the entire ‘land of opportunity’ idea underlying the ‘American Dream’ ideology; rather, by distinguishing between American ideals and its economic system, and by suggesting the incompatibility of these elements, their diagnosis of the ‘American political traditions’ gap entailed an *inversion of meaning* of the land of opportunity idea. So too did their diagnosis of the ‘equal opportunity’ gap, which went far beyond exposing contradictions in the way that King had done at the March on Washington. The other bridge activists never opposed the virtues of the concept of equal opportunity, but they consistently rejected the possibility for this ideal to be realized within the present institutions—including the economic ones. “While most Negroes—in their hearts—unquestionably seek only to enjoy the fruits of American society as it now exists”, remarked Rustin in *From Protest to Politics*, “their quest cannot *objectively* be satisfied within the framework of existing political and economic relations” (1965a, 123). In fact, he continued, “[t]he young Negro would demonstrate his way into the labor market may be motivated by a thoroughly bourgeois ambition and thoroughly ‘capitalist’ considerations, but he will end up having to favor a great expansion of the public sector of the economy” (ibid.).

In contrast to King, the other bridge activists had established—well before the so-called ‘new phase’ of the civil rights movement—a repertoire of gap frames that represented a substantial challenge to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation underlying the ‘American Dream’. Nonetheless, as we pointed out in section 2 of this chapter, these men did adapt their language (and strategy) in response to developments associated with the ‘new phase’, especially following the passage of Civil Rights legislation in 1964. In *From Protest to Politics*, for example, Rustin explained that the ‘economic turn’ taken by the civil rights movement was the logical response to recent historical developments:

It was...in this most industrialized of Southern cities [Birmingham] that the single-issue demands of the movement's classical stage gave way to the 'package deal'. No longer were Negroes satisfied with integrating lunch counters. They now sought advances in employment, housing, school integration, police protection, and so forth. Thus, the movement in the South began to attack areas of discrimination which were not so remote from the Northern experience as were Jim Crow lunch counters. At the same time, the interrelationship of these apparently distinct areas became increasingly evident. What is the value of winning access to public accommodations for those who lack money to use them? The minute the movement faced this question, it was compelled to expand its vision beyond race relations to economic relations.... And what also became clear is that all these interrelated problems, by their very nature, are not soluble by private, voluntary efforts but require government action—or politics. (1965a, 117)

It is clear here that Rustin was framing the 'economic security' and 'equal opportunity' gaps as fundamentally interconnected, and that he was suggesting that the necessity to move from 'protest to politics' derived from this fact. What is also interesting is the extent to which he presented the recognition of this interrelation on the part of the civil rights movement as a recent phenomenon; the movement's expansion of "its vision beyond race relations to economic relations" was a critical element of what made the 'new phase' new.

Of course, for Rustin, Randolph and Robinson, there was really nothing new about this acknowledgement. Each of these men had long argued that "racial injustice has at its base economic injustice"—to use Robinson's expression²⁶⁶—and their framing efforts had long been geared toward mobilizing for broader transformation that went beyond the aims of the Civil Rights legislation. It is likely that Rustin presented this diagnosis in this way as a response to the present historical circumstances in which he was writing. Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act the year before, signs of racism, discrimination and poverty were rampant, not only in the South but also in the North. And while these developments were deeply disturbing, they also signalled a new opportunity for highlighting the connection between the various 'American Dream' gaps. For men like Rustin, Randolph and Robinson—

²⁶⁶ Speech before District 65 members at Madison Square Garden, 23 October, 1963, CR Papers, Box 10, Folder 14.

all of whom had hoped that the 1963 March on Washington would prompt a sustained demand for changes in the realm of economic and social policy—these developments provided additional justification for pushing the wider social democratic agenda of the march through in full. As Rustin (1965a, 121) observed in *From Protest to Politics*, “[t]hese are problems which, while conditioned by Jim Crow, do not vanish upon its demise. They are more deeply rooted in our socio-economic order; they are the result of the total society’s failure to meet not only the Negro’s needs, but human needs generally.” Thus, the granting of civil rights within that order would not be enough to improve the condition of the African American population; after all, Randolph (1963) remarked during the Socialist Party Conference following the March on Washington, “all of the white people in this country have civil rights and yet the great masses of white people are poor; they’re exploited”.

As for King, his diagnostic framing shifted somewhat gradually in the first couple of years following the March on Washington. But by 1965, it was clear that his language had taken an ‘economic turn’. In the many cases where he did speak explicitly about the ‘new stage’ of the movement, he emphasized that one of the main things that was new was that the civil rights struggle was now, out of necessity, also a class struggle (Garrow 2007, 176-7; Fairclough 1987, 200-205). He began to consistently highlight the interconnection of issues like unemployment, poverty and economic deprivation more generally with the problems of racism and discrimination, while emphasizing that those issues also affected a much broader spectrum of the population. His rhetorical turn toward economic issues was also reflected in the programmatic shift within the SCLC, particularly after the passage of civil rights legislations in 1964 and 1965, as the organization moved its focus and resources to the North (Fairclough 1987). At the 1966 SCLC Convention, King identified “SCLC’s newest and most urgent programs”, listing first and foremost the goal of “organiz[ing] the poor in a crusade to

reform society in order to realize economic and social justice”.²⁶⁷ He also became increasingly and openly critical of the nation’s existing economic institutions. In his address to the SCLC convention in 1967, King spoke on the theme, ‘where do we go from here’, and started off with the observation that “in order to answer [that] question...we must first honestly recognize where we are now”; when he returned to that question at the end of his speech, he offered the following diagnosis:

The movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society. There are forty million poor people here, and one day we must ask the question, ‘Why are there forty million poor people in America?’ And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy.²⁶⁸

“We are called upon to help the discouraged beggars in life’s marketplace”, he continued, “[b]ut one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring”.²⁶⁹

The ‘economic turn’ in King’s rhetoric after the March on Washington, and his increasingly vocal opposition to the existing American socioeconomic structure, clearly comes through in his American dream framing. King’s use of American Dream language became more consistently tied up with a language of economic justice, and this was the case in front of diverse audiences, not just labour. “The aggression of the forces of poverty must be met with a full scale war”, he declared before members of the SCLC in 1964, “if the victims of this aggression, negro and white alike, representing at least one-fifth of this nation, are to feel they are partners in this land of opportunity”.²⁷⁰ Later during this same speech, he urged his listeners to

²⁶⁷ “Statement”, 14 October, 1966, http://www.crmvet.org/docs/6610_mlk_power-poverty.pdf.

²⁶⁸ “Annual Report of the President”, delivered at 10th anniversary convention of the SCLC, 16 August 1967, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/annual-report-president-dr-martin-luther-king-jr>.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ “Annual Report of the President”, delivered at 8th annual convention of the SCLC, 2 October, 1964, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlks-annual-report-sclc-convention>.

...resolve to continue our triumphant march toward the realization of the American Dream. [...] Let us march on poverty until no American parent has to skip a meal so that their children may eat: march on poverty until no work-starved man walks the streets of our cities and towns in search of jobs that do not exist. Let us march on poverty until wrinkled stomachs in Mississippi are filled and the idled industries of Appalachia are revitalized and broken lives in sweltering ghettos are mended and remolded.²⁷¹

As King's rhetoric took an economic turn, and as his references to the 'American Dream' came to reflect that turn more explicitly and consistently, his diagnostic frames increasingly aligned with the diagnostic frames that had been provided by the other bridge activists in prior years. The importance of this alignment stems beyond the fact that King's broader dream—the dream of brotherhood and economic justice—contained an obvious economic component. It also goes beyond the fact that America's economic institutions increasingly became a core target of blame attribution in King's diagnostic framing. What is most important about these framing shifts is that he was now presenting a diagnosis that represented an *inversion of meaning* of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation underlying the 'American Dream', rather than simply *exposing contradictions* between the ideology's promises "and the extent of its reach" (Westby 2005, 227). We can see this in King's framing of the 'economic security' gap, but also in his framing of the 'equal opportunity gap', particularly as his diagnosis increasingly identified these gaps as inseparable consequences of an "edifice...need[ing] restructuring"²⁷². In one of his last addresses before his death, he suggested that "for the evils of racism, poverty and militarism to die, a new set of values must be born. Our economy must become more person-centered than property and profit-centered" ([1968a] 1972, 11). Here, he was targeting not only the structural features of American capitalism, but also the value system that it helped to produce. "Let us, therefore, not think of our movement as one that seeks to integrate the Negro into all the existing values of American society", he went on to urge a moment later

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² "Annual Report of the President", delivered at 10th anniversary convention of the SCLC, 16 August 1967, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/annual-report-president-dr-martin-luther-king-jr>.

(*ibid.*). These remarks illustrate that however ‘consensual’ King’s ‘American Dream’ might have sounded at the March on Washington, in later years even the most consensual of his gap frames—the ‘equal opportunity’ gap—had been fundamentally altered. His ‘American Dream’ of equal opportunity was no longer safe for capitalism.

The *inversion of meaning* relationship is evident in King’s articulation of the ‘American political traditions’ gap as well. Near the end of his 1967 SCLC address, for example, King had urged his audience to leave the convention with a sense of “divine dissatisfaction. Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anaemia of deeds”.²⁷³ This was certainly a more acerbic sounding gap metaphor than we see in some of King’s earlier speeches—as Garrow (1986, 455) observes, “a sharp edge was increasingly apparent in King’s public rhetoric” after 1965—but it still maintained the basic premise that the civil rights struggle should seek to close that gap. In fact, this phrase, with slight alterations, was used repeatedly by King in the last few years of his life. In a 1968 speech to Local 1199 National Union of Hospital and Healthcare Employees during his Poor People’s campaign, he recited the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence, and after remarking “what a marvellous creed” it was, he once again explained that “the problem is America has had a high blood pressure of creeds and an anaemia of deeds on the question of justice” (1968b, 162). Thus, “We’re going to Washington to say that if a man does not have a job or an income at that moment, you deprive him of life. You deprive him of liberty. And you deprive him of the pursuit of happiness. We’re going to demand that America live up to her promise” (*ibid.*). But if the ultimate destination remained the same for King, the route needed to be changed: “something is wrong with the ship of state. It is not moving toward new and more secure shores, but toward old destructive rocks”, he remarked to his Local 1199 listeners (*ibid.*, 165). And as we

²⁷³ “Annual Report of the President”, delivered at 10th anniversary convention of the SCLC, 16 August 1967, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/annual-report-president-dr-martin-luther-king-jr>.

have seen, King increasingly identified capitalism as a crucial component of what was wrong with the ‘ship of the state’. It was part of the “whole structure [which] must be changed”, as he stated during the 1967 SCLC convention; for

A nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years will ‘thingify’ them and make them things. And therefore, they will exploit them and poor people generally economically. And a nation that will exploit economically will have to have foreign investments and everything else, and it will have to use its military might to protect them. All of these problems are tied together.²⁷⁴

In the ‘new phase’ of the civil rights movement, then, King’s diagnostic framing challenged the presumed compatibility between American ideals and its existing economic system, and like the other bridge activists, his rejection of that fusion was not based on a rejection of the entire ‘land of opportunity’ equation but of its capitalist component. While he rarely targeted capitalism directly in his public speeches, he consistently invoked the ‘American Dream’ gaps in ways that made their interrelation clear, and which targeted the existing economic structure in one way or another. The following excerpt from his posthumously published *A Testament of Hope* provides a particularly telling example of this:

In these trying circumstances, the black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws—racism, poverty, militarism and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. (1969, 315)

A couple of lines later, he continued,

It is time that we stopped our blithe lip service to the guarantees of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. These fine sentiments are embodied in the Declaration of Independence, but that document was always a declaration of intent rather than of reality. There were slaves when it was written; there were still slaves when it was adopted; and to this day, black Americans have not life, liberty nor the privilege of pursuing happiness, and millions of poor white Americans are in economic bondage that is scarcely less oppressive. Americans who genuinely treasure our national ideals, who know they are still elusive dreams for all too many, should welcome the stirring of Negro demands. They are shattering the complacency that allowed a multitude of social evils to accumulate. Negro agitation is requiring America to re-examine its comforting myths and may yet catalyse the drastic reforms that will save us from catastrophe. (ibid.)

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

Although King's assessment of the gaps between promises and reality of the nation are particularly critical in these remarks, and indeed they come close to sounding like an outright critique of the promises themselves, he does not abandon the 'American Dream' altogether. But his appeal to "Americans who genuinely treasure our national ideals, who know they are still elusive dreams for all too many", is clearly based on an appropriation of those ideals that represents inversion of meaning of the 'capitalist land of opportunity' interpretation, insofar as it targets "the whole structure of our society".

5. Prognostic Frames in the 'New Phase'

The War on Poverty

We have seen that after the passage of civil rights legislation, Rustin, Randolph and Robinson embraced the notion that the civil rights movement was entering a 'new phase'—despite the fact that their own analyses, regarding the root causes of the movement's grievances, had changed very little. Such an embrace appears to have been a response to the opportunities to 're-frame' their arguments in a more favourable context; developments since the March on Washington seemed to signal the potential for wider receptivity to their claim that the civil rights revolution could not be completed without a transformation of the country's social and economic institutions. An important difference between the 1963 March on Washington and the post-1965 context was that the bridge activists could point to the problems that remained *despite* the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, as evidence that civil rights without economic rights meant very little. Such legislation had not closed even the 'equal opportunity' gap in any significant way, for it had left a key obstacle to closing the gap intact: America's socio-economic structure. This was a crucial reason, the bridge activists continually argued, that the 'American Dream' had not yet been realized.

There was another way in which the mid-1960s appeared to represent a context in which the bridge activists' gap frames might be not only widely diffused, but more favourably received. For, after the passage of civil rights legislation, the Johnson administration's approach to civil rights took an 'economic turn'. During his Howard University commencement address on June 4, 1965, some of Johnson's remarks concerning civil rights sounded remarkably similar to elements of the bridge activists' diagnostic framing—particularly when he acknowledged that the nation was in the “next and more profound stage for civil rights”, and that this next stage would require attention to jobs, ‘decent homes’, welfare, and social programs, among other things.²⁷⁵ For, “...it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity”, he explained during the address; “All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates”. Only then would civil rights have true meaning. The Great Society program, and the “War on Poverty that nestled within it”, was the means through which the Johnson administration was going “to fulfil these rights”, as went the title of his address (Katznelson 1989, 187). It was, in other words, the administration's proposed solution to closing the American Dream gaps. And it was within the context of the Great Society, and in relation to the War on Poverty, that the bridge activists formulated and framed their own proposals (ie. their ‘prognosis’) for closing the gaps.

Prognostic Frames in (and Beyond) the ‘Freedom Budget’

Paul Le Blanc (2013) has observed that the ‘Freedom Budget’ was “inseparable from the goals projected by the...March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” (43). Indeed, Randolph and Rustin framed the budget in a way that made that connection explicit. At an October 26, 1966 press conference introducing the Freedom Budget, Randolph began his address by thanking those who were present for

²⁷⁵ President Lyndon Johnson, “To Fulfill these Rights”, 4 June, 1965, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650604.asp>.

joining me today in the launching of ‘The Freedom Budget for All Americans’. Many of you have come long distances to be here—and not for the first time. For I see in this audience the faces of many men and women, black and white, who came together three years ago to realize another great dream – the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.²⁷⁶

“In a very real sense”, he continued, “we have gathered today to undertake the redemption and the completion of the goals set forth on that historic day in August of 1963”. Throughout the early months of the Freedom Budget campaign, the bridge activists continually emphasized the connections to the March on Washington. “To the full goals of the 1963 March the ‘Freedom Budget’ is dedicated”, proclaimed Randolph’s introduction to the version that was distributed for hearings of the Subcommittee on Executive Reorganization in December, 1966.

Randolph and Rustin felt that the Freedom Budget represented a realistic blueprint for achieving the March on Washington platform. As Randolph emphasized in his introduction to the summary version, one of the strengths of the Freedom Budget lay in its feasibility:

For the Freedom Budget is...concrete. It is specific. It is quantitative. It talks dollars and cents. It sets goals and priorities. It tells how these can be achieved. And it places responsibility for leadership with the federal government, which alone has the resources equal to the task. (1966, 9)

Randolph and Rustin did not rely merely on facts and figures in their efforts to mobilize support for the Freedom Budget. “[A]lthough our Freedom Budget makes an attempt at the exposition of the economics of poverty and the color bar, it has a basic moral foundation”, Randolph explained during his testimony.²⁷⁷ “That foundation”, he continued, “is the desire for respect for the dignity of the personality of the poor as well as the rich”.²⁷⁸ As Randolph’s comments suggest, he felt that the strength of the Freedom Budget lay not only in the feasibility, but also in the desirability and moral necessity, of the goals it sought to achieve.

²⁷⁶ Randolph, Address at Freedom Budget Press Conference, 26 October, 1966, BR Papers, reel 12, 0818.

²⁷⁷ *Federal Role in Urban Affairs.: Hearings Before the Subcomm. on Executive Reorganization of the Committee on Government Operations United States Sen. 89th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1966) (Statement of A. Philip Randolph, president, APRI).*

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

The Freedom Budget summary document also emphasized this point, and one of its opening pages stressed that “the moral case for the Freedom Budget is compelling” (A. Philip Randolph Institute 1967, 8). This broad theme was evident in all of the bridge activists’ framing of the Freedom Budget. Consider, for example, King’s “Forward” that was included in the summary version. Stressing the urgent need for immediate and full implementation of the Freedom Budget, his statement ended off with the observation that not only was the Freedom budget a “political necessity”—it was also a “moral commitment to the fundamental principles on which this nation was founded (1966b, 2). We saw that Randolph had framed the March on Washington program in strongly moral terms during his speech on August 28, 1963, wherein he emphasized the fundamental link between “meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages” and freedom, and argued that the country had a moral obligation to secure *both* for its citizens; now he was being joined in this effort by the voice that in 1963 had overshadowed his.

Thus, the Freedom Budget was framed by the bridge activists as being both feasible and morally necessary. And, as the quotes from Randolph and King demonstrate, they also framed it as distinctly *American*; the Freedom Budget represented a “challenge to the best traditions and possibilities of America”, and a “plea to men of good will to give tangible substance to long-proclaimed ideals” (Randolph 1966, 7). The nation had the material resources and capacity to ensure that “everyone—white or black; in the city or on the farm; fisherman or mountaineer—may have his share in our national wealth”. The problem was not a matter of a lack of ability or capacity, but a lack of will; it was a matter of “our failure as a nation to distribute democratically the fruits of our abundance”, as Randolph declared in his introduction (*ibid.*). For “those who have grown weary of slogans and gestures”, here was a program “to rededicate themselves to the cause of social reconstruction”, and to “give tangible substance to long-proclaimed ideals” (*ibid.*). Thus, just as the bridge activists had

provided a patriotic diagnosis of the ‘American Traditions’ gap, here was their patriotic solution to closing that gap; this was not about abandoning American ideals but about taking steps to finally meet those ideals, and the ‘Freedom Budget’ represented the first step.

While the prognostic framing examined thus far was quite consistent with the diagnostic frames examined earlier, however, there is some language in the official Freedom Budget literature that gives reason for pause. As we have seen, the bridge activists’ diagnostic framing was generally characterized by its consensual elements pertaining to America’s political traditions and the ideals inscribed in its founding documents, whereas the oppositional elements targeted socio-economic issues, and particularly the country’s economic institutions. Even on the subject of full employment, which itself was not inconsistent with what mainstream liberals and labour had long been advocating (and which had been a rhetorical goal of successive administrations since the Full Employment Act of 1946), the bridge activists had emphasized that achieving that goal would require fundamental changes to the nation’s economic structure. In 1946, for example, Randolph had identified “unnecessary unemployment” as “unmistakable proof that our present political and economic capitalist order is unable to satisfy the needs of modern man or to keep him from disaster”.²⁷⁹ The Freedom Budget similarly emphasized the importance of full employment; “the key is jobs”, the abridged version stated. Note, however, what it said next:

What we must also recognize is that we now have the means of achieving full employment—at no increased cost, with *no radical change in our economic system*, and at no cost to our present national goals—if we are willing to commit ourselves totally to this achievement. (A. Philip Randolph Institute 1967, 10)

In the full version, the document used similar language when discussing the importance of yearly growth in the U.S. economy and of the necessity of such growth for sustaining full employment:

²⁷⁹ “Statement to Educational Political Conference in Chicago, Illinois, at the International House”, April 1946, Box 38, APR Papers, 2.

The 'Freedom Budget' does not contemplate that this 'growth dividend' be achieved by revolutionary nor even drastic changes in the division of responsibility between private enterprise and government under our free institutions." (A. Philip Randolph Institute 1966, 6)

Further down the page, came the remark that "the Freedom Budget will not be regarded as socialistic", although "it is indeed socially-minded" (ibid.).

What is notable about these various quotes from the Freedom Budget documents is the absence of some of the oppositional elements of the bridge activists' diagnostic framing; In particular, the challenge to the present (capitalist) economic structure that was consistently apparent in their diagnoses did not seem to find its way into these documents. In fact, the declaration that the Freedom Budget would "entail no radical change in our economic system" comes close to an outright contradiction with the bridge activists' diagnostic framing. That declaration is difficult to reconcile, for example, with Rustin's remarks in *From Protest to Politics*, where he spoke of the need for "qualitative transformation of fundamental institutions, more or less rapidly, to the point where the social and economic structure which they comprised can no longer be said to be the same" (1965a, 124). In fact, he had continued there,

I fail to see how the movement can be victorious in the absence of radical programs for full employment, abolition of slums, the reconstruction of our education system, new definitions of work and leisure. Adding up the cost of such programs, we can only conclude that we are talking about a refashioning of our political economy. (ibid.)

And despite the fact that all four of the bridge activists had, in various settings, advocated some type of socialist route to fulfilling the 'American Dream', the program that they were promoting was now explicitly using language that distanced itself from socialism.

It appears, therefore, that these documents were cloaked in a "costume of consensus" (Tarrow 1998, 114). There was clearly a disconnect between the program principles, many of which entailed substantial (or potentially substantial) changes to existing economic relations,

and some of the claims made in the Freedom Budget pamphlets. For the most part, however, the bridge activists did not don the consensual costume, and the sections of the official literature that are directly attributable to the bridge activists, did not contain these inconsistencies. This is further illustrated by the nature of the bridge activists' campaigning in favour of the Freedom Budget in other forums and settings. During the White House Planning Conference, for example, Rustin began by identifying the civil rights struggle as the "struggle for the fulfilment of the moral principles of equality and brotherhood which are so basic to the American ideal"; such fulfilment would require, however, "bold, new departures".²⁸⁰ And Randolph, during his testimony in December 1966, declared that "...we believe that the civil rights revolution per se has about run its course, and now we have come to the point where a transformation must be made of the civil rights revolution into a social revolution, whereby we will be able to deal with these social and economic problems, such as jobs, education, housing, and so forth".²⁸¹ During the same testimony, he suggested that "the adoption of the 'Freedom Budget' approach will result in a profound and progressive change in the economics of the United States for all of our citizens".²⁸² The references here to 'bold', 'profound' and revolutionary changes to the economic and social structures, frame the Freedom Budget in a more oppositional way than the popularized Freedom Budget document, which as we saw, emphasized that the program would entail "no radical change in our economic system". Less than two weeks after Randolph and Rustin appeared before the Senate Subcommittee, King also testified, and he too emphasized the urgency of economic issues, using the language of 'revolution' and criticizing the 'piecemeal' approach to poverty and unemployment currently in place. "We need to take quite a different view of the causes

²⁸⁰ Bayard Rustin, "Background Paper" for White House Planning Conference, November 1965, APR Papers, Box 32.

²⁸¹ *Federal Role in Urban Affairs. Hearings Before the Subcomm. on Executive Reorganization of the Committee on Government Operations United States Sen.*, Part 9, 89th Cong. 2nd Sess. (1966) (Statement of A. Philip Randolph, president, APRI).

²⁸² Ibid.

and cures of the economic misfortunes of the Negro and the poor and to aim at establishing income security”, he explained in his statement, and “we need a vast expansion of public services and facilities along the line suggested by the Freedom Budget of A Philip Randolph”.²⁸³

III. FRAMING FAILURES, DISCURSIVE OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES, AND THE LIMITS OF THE ‘AMERICAN DREAM’

6. American Dream Framing in the Longer, Broader Civil Rights Movement: Patterns of Failure

Failure of the Freedom Budget

The ‘Freedom Budget’ was never implemented; in fact, it did not even come close, for it was never “officially introduced as legislation” (Forstater 2007, 63). For Randolph, the fate of the Freedom Budget was a particularly hard pill to swallow. Rustin, writing to A.H. Raskin in 1986, several years after Randolph had passed away, remarked that, “in Randolph’s view, perhaps the most important contribution he attempted to make was a failure. That was his introduction of the Freedom Budget for all Americans” (quoted in Long 2012, 465). The Freedom Budget was a failure not only because it was not passed (nor even seriously considered), but also because it was quickly forgotten; indeed, it “vanished almost without a trace” (Andersen 1972, xiii).

Similar to what we saw with the NECNP, the correspondence among those at the forefront of the Freedom Budget campaign indicates a prevailing sense of frustration and disappointment with their inability to get the project in motion. “Although...I want to

²⁸³ *Federal Role in Urban Affairs. Hearings Before the Subcomm. on Executive Reorganization of the Comm. on Operations United States Sen.*, Part 14, 89th Cong. 2nd Sess. (1966) (Statement of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Southern Christian Leadership Conference).

continue to help with the ‘Freedom Budget’”, Leon Keyserling wrote in an October 1967 letter addressed to Rustin,

I cannot continue to invest so much time in this when it would appear that the army of supporters for [it]...seems to be vanishing in thin air. I cannot afford to continue to be placed in the rather ridiculous position of telling audiences, as we have been telling them since October 1966, that the ‘Freedom Budget’ would be translated into a legislative proposal as a stronger basis for educational action, when this idea, after the initial declaration of support for it, has been dormant for almost a year.²⁸⁴

The bridge activists—especially Rustin and Randolph—would continue to work tirelessly to promote the Freedom Budget in various forums, even as men like Keyserling began to throw in the towel, but the Budget “got nowhere in the forum where it really mattered: the broader electorate and Congress” (Levine 2000, 190). In those few instances where advocates of the Freedom Budget were granted an audience, the feedback they received gave little reason for optimism about the program’s prospects; as one sympathetic Senator put it during a May 1967 hearing before the Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower and Poverty, the Freedom Budget sounded nice in theory, but “I don’t think our constituents are anywhere near ready for [it]”.²⁸⁵

The Freedom Budget, as we have seen, does not represent an isolated attempt at economic transformation on the part of the bridge activists; indeed, it was based on the attempt to revive the March on Washington’s “broad and fundamental program of economic justice” (Rustin 1963a, 114), much of which had been neglected back in 1963. Moreover, throughout the period between the March on Washington and the introduction of the Freedom Budget, the bridge activists spoke in various forums, attempting, without much success, to get the ‘new phase’ of the civil rights movement off the ground. And well before that, as we saw in chapter 4, Randolph and other members of the NECNP had made an attempt to spark

²⁸⁴ Keyserling to Rustin, 19 October, 1967, BR Papers, reel 13, 0091.

²⁸⁵ *Examination of the War on Poverty. Hearings Before the Subcomm on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty of the Comm. on Labor and Public Welfare United States Sen.*, part 6., 90th Cong. 1st Sess. (1967) (Statement of Senator Joseph S. Clark).

public interest and discussion around the need for “deep-going social changes, for a basic redistribution of economic and political power”²⁸⁶, and this also failed to gain traction. Thus, the Freedom Budget represents yet another chapter in the longer, broader (and also less successful) history of the civil rights movement.

Within the ‘American Dream’ and social movement literatures cited in Part I of this chapter, the decline of the civil rights movement receives far less attention than its ascendancy—but in those works that *do* address the subject of decline, the ‘Freedom Budget’ is rarely included in the discussion.²⁸⁷ Among those who have given some thought to the Freedom Budget and the possible reasons for its failure, most explanations focus on the problematic timing of its introduction. Pfeffer (1990), for example, observes that, “[a]lthough the Freedom Budget represented the logical culmination of Randolph’s belief that economics was the key to restructuring society, it was introduced at an inauspicious time and never received serious attention” (290). Levine (2000) makes a similar point, rather less subtly: “The pamphlet said the budget was anything but ‘Pie in the Sky’, but that in fact is what it was, for that place at that time” (189). One might reasonably ask whether the failure boils down entirely to matters of unfortunate timing;²⁸⁸ but it would be difficult to refute the argument that the Freedom Budget was put forward in a context that was unfavourable to the type of fiscal commitment it required, and to the type of politics it represented. As Fairclough (1987) reminds us, in the midst of the Vietnam War, and with the “re-emergence of the conservative coalition in Congress—that informal alliance of Southern Democrats and

²⁸⁶ “Statement to Educational Political Conference in Chicago, Illinois, at the International House”, April 1946, Box 38, APR Papers.

²⁸⁷ McAdam’s (1982) widely cited work, for example, makes no mention of the Freedom Budget.

²⁸⁸ As will be argued below, the *framing* failures of the Freedom Budget—at least with respect to the efforts of the bridge activists—appear to have been, in part, the result of factors that extended well beyond the particular historical context in question.

Northern Republicans...[e]ven the miniscule War on Poverty was being whittled away” (327).

In a more recent study, Le Blanc and Yates (2013) have raised an additional issue in their account of the failure of the Freedom Budget. They accept the basic thesis that the Freedom Budget was untenable in ‘that place at that time’, and that it was a casualty, in particular, of the Vietnam War. But they also point to the “overly conciliatory” language of the document as a potential contributing factor (181). Especially problematic in this regard, they argue, was “the obeisance made in the budget to ‘our free institutions’”, and its failure to identify “the nature of government in capitalist economies” (183). Now, according to Le Blanc and Yates, the choice to use such consensual language in the Freedom Budget represents a missed opportunity; for, “[i]f ever there was a time to be bold, to take a more radical economic position, the 1960s was it” (181). Although they admit that “it may be the case that it would not have been politically possible, given...the context of 1966, for the document to provide discussion of exactly what a capitalist economy and social system is”, they still leave some room for the possibility that even in this ‘wrong place’ and ‘wrong time’, the Freedom Budget might have met with a different outcome:

...[its] silence on the inherent instabilities of capitalism, and on the destructive desire of those who run its commanding heights to be free to make as much money as they could, did not prepare its potential supporters—masses of working people and others—to reach an understanding of the powerful barriers to the Freedom Budget’s actualization. Speaking in a frank and informed way about such realities might have resonated with a substantial number of people. (182)

Le Blanc and Yates are right to draw attention to the language of the Freedom Budget, and to the fact that its ‘overly conciliatory’ message sits uneasily with some of its programmatic goals and potential ideological implications. However, our examination of the bridge activists’ prognostic framing in support of the Freedom Budget may pose some problems for Le Blanc’s and Yates’ claims. For, when we looked beyond the official Freedom Budget documents themselves, and examined the bridge activists’ broader

repertoire of frames, we saw much more explicit oppositional language targeted at the economic system. We saw that in various different settings, including on the House and Senate floor, the bridge activists framed the Freedom Budget in a way that was far less ‘conciliatory’, and which in fact was consistent with their social democratic diagnostic framing. When we bring that broader repertoire into consideration, we see that the hypothetical scenario identified by Le Blanc and Yates is not entirely hypothetical. Yet the more ‘frank and informed’ appeals of the bridge activists were just as ineffective as the consensual language; in every case, the efforts to mobilize support around the ‘Freedom Budget’ ultimately “fell on deaf ears” (Fairclough 1987, 327).

The Freedom Budget, therefore, represents not only a programmatic failure but also a framing failure—in fact, it represents multiple framing failures, since neither the consensual nor the more oppositional frames appear to have been effective. The fact that the Freedom Budget represents a framing failure is a matter that is of crucial relevance for this study; in particular, the fact the bridge activists’ frames were among those that failed, means that we have yet another example of failed ‘social democratic’ American Dream frames. In the remainder of Part III of this chapter, I will seek to clarify the nature of the frame failures, and will then attempt to demonstrate how the prevalence of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation in the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’, may have been a factor that contributed to those failures.

Pattern of Frame Outcomes: Exposure of Contradiction vs. Inversion of Meaning

In certain important respects, the story of the March on Washington is a story of frame success. Clearly, some of the messages articulated at the event resonated with the wider American public. And as we have seen above, no words were more resonant on that

day than those spoken by King during the latter half of his ‘I have a Dream’ speech²⁸⁹.

However, King’s words did not capture the full purpose and meaning of the march. In particular, he articulated ‘gap’ frames that did not target economic structures in any explicit way; nor did these frames distinguish between American ideals and American economic institutions. In planning the event, Randolph and Rustin had viewed the march—which fell on the 100- year anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation—as a symbolic opportunity for highlighting that distinction, and for questioning the capacity of the nation to live up to its ideals unless those institutions were radically transformed (Carbado and Weise 2003; Jones 2013). Yet King’s speech (particularly the second half) had been ambiguous enough about this relationship that many listeners could—and did—interpret his expression of faith in, and celebration of, America’s political traditions as a celebration of America’s existing economic institutions as well (Jackson 2007, 184). Indeed, his speech was widely regarded as a celebration of American society more generally. “It may be that [August 28, 1963] will be marked down as the date when the civil rights movement grew up”, declared *Atlanta Constitution* editor Eugene Patterson (1963a) two days after the march, and the person responsible for this ‘maturing’, according to Patterson, was King, whose speech

preached hope, and not despair; faith in the white man, not bitterness; identification with America, not doubt of its capacity for social justice. In this tremendously positive and upbeat moment, he found 200,000 Negro Americans had that dream too, and responded.

Patterson’s interpretation of King’s speech, and his description of King’s dream as being “wrapped in red, white and blue”, may have been a little over-the-top, but it was not necessarily a gross distortion. Where Patterson *did* fall guilty of distortion was in projecting those phrases onto the meaning of the entire March, and indeed onto the entire civil rights movement (Garrow 1986; Jackson 2007; Jones 2013). And yet, Patterson’s portrayal of the

²⁸⁹ Furthermore, it was King’s speech that achieved the most diffusion across the public sphere (Koopmans and Olzak 2004) not only in the immediate aftermath, but also in the longer term. As Levine (2000, 144) remarks, “Can anyone now remember a word of any speech but Martin Luther King’s, and then only a few choice phrases and cadences?” I will return to this point later on.

March on Washington represents what came to be the ‘dominant narrative’ of the march.²⁹⁰

What was distorted about the ‘dominant narrative’ of the march, as we have seen, is that one of the crucial themes of the march’s agenda—the critique of American economic institutions—was left out altogether.

The March on Washington is interesting because it offers the opportunity for comparison of different versions of ‘strategic appropriation’ of hegemonic ideology, within the same context. Randolph’s speech emphasized the economic goals underpinning the march, and his ‘gap frames’ contained a clearly social democratic message; his call for equal opportunity and economic security entailed a challenge to the capitalist component of the ‘land of opportunity’ equation, and thus represented an inversion of meaning of that equation. On the other hand, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s speech during that event did not. His ‘American Dream’ identified discrepancies between promise and practice in the United States, but the features of the ‘land of opportunity’ that he identified as requiring change did not include the existing economic institutions. In those lines articulating his vision of the ‘American Dream’, King remained within the realm of exposing contradiction.

Although it was Randolph’s speech that “gave sharpest expression to the implications of the March” (Kahn 1963, 320), that speech was, as we have seen, completely overshadowed by King’s. So too was Rustin’s reading aloud of the demands listed in the march platform—particularly the economic demands which, after the event had taken place, were quickly forgotten, despite the efforts by march organizers to keep them at the forefront of public discussion. It appears that what we have here is a case in which social democratic framing (representing *inversion of meaning* of the capitalist land of opportunity equation) did

²⁹⁰ Patterson, it should be emphasized, was very influential, and his work as Editor of the *Constitution* between 1960 and 1968 earned him widespread praise and respect, especially from liberal circles. In 1967, he won a Pulitzer Prize for his editorials. Upon his passing, in January of 2013, his obituary in the *New York Times* praised him as “one of America’s most highly regarded journalists” of the civil rights period (McFadden 2013).

not achieve resonance, whereas framing that only represented *exposure of contradiction*, did. And this is why the march is not only a story of frame success; to the extent that some of the frames offered on that day represented an ‘inversion of meaning’, these did not resonate, and therefore in that regard, the march also represents a case of frame failure.

We have seen that after the March on Washington, King’s frame repertoire more consistently reflected a strategy of going beyond simply ‘exposing contradiction’. When he invoked the language of the ‘American Dream’, the oppositional elements of his ‘gap’ frames—like those of the other bridge activists—increasingly targeted capitalism. His appeal to the nation to live up to the promises of the ‘American Dream’ now represented strategic appropriation that entailed ‘inversion of meaning’. However, the shift in King’s framing was accompanied by a shifting—and for the most part, increasingly negative—reception by various sectors of the public and by policymakers. His advocacy of social welfare programs and redistribution in order to achieve “genuine equality for the poor and for black people” (1968c, 274) in his public speeches, and his suggestion of the need for ‘democratic socialism’ in more private settings, led him to lose clout among significant sectors of the civil rights movement and among his liberal allies, and he also became less popular among the broader American public. It should be emphasized that in many instances, the negative reaction, particularly as expressed in media outlets, was directed toward King’s criticism of the Vietnam War; yet as many of King’s biographers have pointed out, it was not just his vocal opposition to war, but his opposition to racism, capitalism and militarism more generally—and his expressed conviction that these were interrelated problems—that coincided with his decreasing popularity (eg., Garrow 1986; Jackson 2007; Fairclough 1987).²⁹¹ Moreover, King

²⁹¹ Even those who tend to overlook the full extent of King’s radicalism—including, for example, many of the civil rights movement scholars identified earlier—do give some attention to King’s opposition to the Vietnam War, and to the negative response his anti-war stance received among those who had previously supported him. But King also engaged in economic justice campaigns, and here too he met repeated setbacks and defeats; not only did initiatives such as his ‘Poor People’s Campaign’ (and of course the Freedom Budget) receive much less

was losing clout even before his 1967 “Beyond Vietnam” speech, and whether or not the changing nature of his ‘American Dream’ framing directly contributed to this, the very fact of his declining popularity indicates that his attempt to ‘invert’ the hegemonic American Dream was not having the same effects that his more consensual appropriation had had.

But perhaps what is most illustrative of the fact that King’s post-1963 American Dream frames failed to resonate is precisely that these later articulations were not receiving much response at all—whether negative or positive (Sampsell-Willman 2012, 495). Just as the other bridge activists had expressed frustration at the selective attention paid to the March on Washington platform, King, too, began hinting at a sense of frustration that his appeals for fulfilling the ‘American Dream’ were no longer being heard. “Are we really taking this thing seriously?”, he had remarked during his ‘American Dream’ sermon in 1965, referring to the Declaration of Independence (1965a, para.20). Of course, by 1965, King was making it clear that “taking this thing seriously” would require fundamental changes to the nation’s economic institutions²⁹²; thus, although he was still using the language of the American Dream, his message now represented a very different formulation of the ‘land of opportunity’ equation than that expressed in his ‘I Have a Dream’ speech. It was now a call for Americans to recognize and acknowledge—as the other bridge activists previously had done, in the shadow of King’s speech—the necessity for a “radical reconstruction of society” (King 1969, 315). Even in his most radical writings and speeches, King did not abandon the appeal to living up to American ideals expressed in its founding documents, but he joined the other bridge activists in arguing that “systemic rather than superficial flaws” stood in the way of these goals, and that one of those flaws was capitalism. Evidently, however, he was now

media coverage and attract far fewer allies than he hoped, but he also found more resistance to his efforts within mainstream civil rights circles (Fairclough 1983; Garrow 1986; Jackson 2007; Cowie and Salvatore 2008).

²⁹² One particularly clear example comes out of King’s 1966 Frogmore speech: “We must develop programs that will drive the nation to the realization of the need for a guaranteed annual income”, he argued there; “Now this simply means that our Declaration of Independence must be taken seriously.” (SCLC Staff retreat, 14 November 1966, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlk-speech-sclc-staff-retreat>).

having a much more difficult time getting the country to listen to—or take seriously—this ‘American Dream’.

The pattern of ‘American Dream’ framing failures in the 1960s among the bridge activists, then, is that those frames that fundamentally challenged the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, by seeking inversion of meaning, were the variants that did not resonate. This pattern can be further illuminated by considering the long term-legacy of the movement—and especially of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

In an article published by *Liberation* Magazine in October, 1963, Bayard Rustin discussed “The Meaning of the March on Washington”. Midway through his essay, he predicted that, “[h]istorically, the significance of the March will be seen to have less to do with civil rights than with economic rights: the demand for jobs” (1963b, para. 13). Rustin’s prediction, in this case, was profoundly off the mark. Every ten years, Americans commemorate the 1963 March on Washington and Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, holding various celebratory events across the country; and, every ten years, countless scholars and activists write essays, articles, news editorials, and blogs, lamenting how these commemorations ignore the radical economic thrust of the march and thus serve to reinforce the nation’s distorted collective memory of the event and of the ‘movement’ that was behind it. In one such article, written on the 40th anniversary of the march, one of King’s most well-known biographers, David Garrow (2003), reminded readers that “That ‘I have a dream’ day was aimed at economic justice – not simply desegregation”. Under the aptly-titled heading, “Betraying the March”, he cautioned that “this week’s celebratory deluge obscures the real story of the march far more than it illuminates it. ...[I]ts actual legacy is less a happy story than most accounts acknowledge.” “So don’t celebrate August 28 too enthusiastically”, he warned:

Much of what the 1963 March on Washington sought was indeed soon enacted into law in the 1964 Civil Rights Act – but the most fundamental change that the march called for was ignored, bypassed, and then forgotten by Americans, both black and white. Anniversary commemorations encourage national self-congratulation, but the real legacy of the 1963 march merits a far more sober observance.

A recent TIME magazine cover story, in an issue commemorating the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, is illustrative of the distortions that continue to persist today: the title of the cover story reads, “ONE MAN. ONE MARCH. ONE SPEECH. ONE DREAM.” The ‘one dream’ described in the various articles of the magazine is not, of course, the ‘American Dream of economic justice and the brotherhood of man’. It is true that this Issue was focused on commemorating the March on Washington, and therefore the emphasis on King’s ‘I have a Dream’ speech is understandable; but it is also telling that there was not a single mention, in the entire Issue, of King’s many other ‘dream’ speeches (nor did it mention King’s socialist leanings). This ‘Founding Father’, as the magazine’s cover declared him, thus continues to be frozen in 1963, as does his articulation of the ‘American Dream’. What this example demonstrates is that not all cases of failed resonance are characterized as such because of a frame’s “lack of diffusion across the public sphere” (Koopmans and Olzak 2004); in this case, rather, the ‘failure’ is indicated by the fact that some variations of King’s gap frames—those that represented inversion of meaning—have been left out of the dominant narratives of the civil rights movement and even out of most scholarly works on the ‘American Dream’.

Just as the longer civil rights literature has identified various ‘lost opportunities’ which suggest a more complicated story of the civil rights movement than those provided within mainstream popular and scholarly narratives, our widened lens on the use of ‘American Dream’ language points toward a more complicated story of the movement’s framing experiences than what is offered in most of the work cited in section 1 of this

chapter. The bridge activists achieved some success in their appropriation of ‘American Dream’ language, but they also faced a number of limitations and setbacks, especially in the ‘New Phase’. The framing outcomes seem to reveal a pattern in terms of which forms of appropriation were successful in achieving resonance. King’s ‘American Dream’ appears to have resonated only until his framing directly targeted economic institutions and power in American society; as soon as he called for a transformation of the economic structure, people stopped hearing (or listening to) his message. Furthermore, the experiences of the other bridge activists both before and during the ‘New Phase’ have shed light on the fact that similar framings of the ‘American Dream’ across a longer period and a wider range of contexts were met with similar outcomes. Thus, it appears that it was the ideological implications of their frames—the challenge to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, through attempted ‘inversion of meaning’—that was common to these various failures of resonance. Now that we have identified this pattern, the next task is to try to make sense of it.

7. Prevalence of the ‘Capitalist Land of Opportunity’ Interpretation in the 1960s

The ‘Great Society’ and the ‘War on Poverty’

In important respects, American politics under the Johnson administration appeared to represent openings in the political opportunity structure, especially for those who had embraced the economic turn in the ‘new phase’ of the civil rights movement. The *discursive* opportunities provided by the ‘Great Society’ also appeared to be more promising for the bridge activists’ framing strategy in the new phase. We have noted that Johnson’s Howard University speech, in which he acknowledged that there was a link between ‘civil rights’ and ‘economic rights’, was an important symbolic indication, but there were also specific measures taken by the administration which also appeared promising. The White House

Conference, *'To Fulfill These Rights'*, provides one example, as we have seen. Initially, the War on Poverty also appeared promising. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, for example, affirmed that it was "the policy of the United States to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty", thus signalling official recognition of the 'economic security' gap.²⁹³ According to Levy (1994), "[t]he years 1964-65 signified a high water mark in the history of American liberalism", and this was in no small part due to the fact that under the War on Poverty initiative, "[m]edicare, medicaid, and other welfare programs, all long-held liberal goals, were established virtually overnight" (27). Indeed, the War on Poverty was, in many ways, unprecedented; as Katznelson (1989, 192) observes, not even the New Deal had involved such a large number of specific measures to address poverty.

Of course, the Vietnam War would quickly overshadow the War on Poverty, and the fate of the latter was very much influenced by developments in Vietnam. Many critics of that war felt that, apart from the war itself being immoral and unjustified, it also would have serious consequences for the war on poverty at home; despite arguments coming from the White House to the contrary, the United States would have to choose between 'guns and butter', and inevitably it was the former that would be chosen (Levy 1994).²⁹⁴ As many historians have observed, those fears proved to be founded, as the Johnson administration devoted most of its rhetorical energy and financial resources toward the Vietnam War (Cowie and Salvatore 2008; Foner 1974; Gerstle and Fraser 1989; Le Blanc and Yates 2013). Now, it is certainly true that the history of the Great Society cannot be understood separately from the Vietnam War, but it is also important to recognize that there were other (though not unrelated) limitations to Johnson's anti-poverty initiative besides its being pushed aside by other priorities. Some of these limitations stemmed from the ideological underpinnings of the War on Poverty and the Great Society of which it was a part. "The Great Society was not an

²⁹³ Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Pub. L. N° 88-452, 78 Stat 508 (1964).

²⁹⁴ This argument also came from conservative supporters of the war, although in their case, of course, they argued that the choice between 'guns' and 'butter' should be the former (Le Blanc and Yates 2013, 142).

organic part of a larger vision or politics of the Left”, Katznelson (1989, 198) reminds us; “It certainly lacked any of the anticapitalist or even critical content of its European social democratic counterparts”. Thus, the War on Poverty “did not threaten the central features of American capitalism, the distribution of goods and services, or prevailing ideological predispositions” (ibid., 202). The programs’ mechanisms for eliminating poverty were all “grounded in a very high degree of self-satisfaction with the country’s economy and society”, and the architects of the policies and programs were largely convinced that the causes of poverty were rooted primarily in individual and cultural factors (Katznelson 1989; Cowie and Salvatore 2008).

What is also notable is the extent to which the War on Poverty programs represented an effort to close the ‘equal opportunity’ gap through heavily market-based solutions. The “keystone of [Johnson’s] War on Poverty” was the Economic Opportunity Act, and the various job training programs that were part of the act, such as the Jobs Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, were all aimed at “mak[ing] the poor more employable” (Quadagno 1992, 619). They all “fell within the educational, training, and communal rehabilitation framework” (Jackson 2007, 192). Thus, insofar as the War on Poverty reflected an acceptance that the state had a role to play in ensuring that each individual was given a chance to succeed, this was based on an understanding that it was not the labour market that needed to be adjusted in any substantial way, but rather the individuals preparing to enter the market. American capitalism worked well, but “the intervention of the state was required to incorporate all Americans into market mechanisms and into the public programs of collective insurance that went hand in hand with these labor markets.” (Katznelson 1989, 201)

Thus, the same ideological assumptions underlying the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation seem to be clearly reflected in the War on Poverty: that the basic structures of American capitalism work well and fairly, and thus the role of the state is to ensure that all

individuals are properly integrated into those structures. Of course, when the War on Poverty was being rolled out, the major domestic issues centred on civil rights, and the administration had accepted, at least rhetorically, its central role in protecting civil rights; in his Howard University speech, furthermore, Johnson had formally acknowledged that these included certain economic rights. Many of the initiatives in the War on Poverty targeted urban poverty and other issues tied to civil rights. In a sense, then, this represented an acknowledgment that government intervention would be required to address the racial dimensions of economic inequality²⁹⁵. Yet, underlying the administration's approach was an understanding of the 'equal opportunity' gap that, in contrast to what the bridge activists were arguing, accepted the primary role for capitalism in making the United States truly the land of equal opportunity. Consider Johnson's statement at the Swearing in of the Chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC] in 1967:

It was a little over 3 years ago that we met here in the East Room to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964. [...] In signing the bill, I said: 'The purpose of the law is simple. [...] It does not give special treatment to any citizen. It does say the only limit to a man's hope for happiness, and for the future of his children, shall be his own ability.' To say this is merely to reaffirm the original promise of what we call the American system. [...] [The EEOC]—like the Civil Rights Act that created it—exists for one reason, because millions of Americans are still barred from full participation in the American dream. The doors to opportunities most of us take for granted seem to remain closed to them. Some are barred because they are of the 'wrong' religion—or because their parents came from the 'wrong' country—or because they are the 'wrong' sex. But above all, avenues to achievement remain closed to millions of our countrymen, it seems, because they are of the 'wrong' color.²⁹⁶

Evidently Johnson's own 'diagnosis' of the equal opportunity gap was very much in line with the capitalist interpretation; the land of opportunity was still closed to many Americans, but this was due to factors related to religion, gender, and most of all race.

²⁹⁵ Scholars have observed that the racial dimensions of the administration's programs were rarely explicitly advertised—for, Johnson had a very large white working class base to keep content. (eg., Hamilton and Hamilton 1997; Pfeffer 1990).

²⁹⁶ "Remarks at the Swearing In of Clifford L. Alexander as Chairman, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission", 4 August, 1967, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28376>.

In the ‘heyday of American liberalism’, then, the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation prevailed in Washington, and this was reflected not only in the policies, but also in the rhetoric of the administration that accepted a role in closing the gap between the promises of the ‘American Dream’ and the nation’s failure to deliver on those promises. According to the logic behind the War on Poverty, the government’s task of making the land of opportunity the land of *equal* opportunity, (and therefore making the American Dream accessible to all) was understood to be the task of extending the right to pursue the success formula, (‘work hard and play by the capitalist rules’), to every citizen—rather than a task of changing the terms of the formula itself. Thus, if the ‘war on poverty’ was premised on policymakers’ recognition that the civil rights struggle was in a ‘new phase’ to realize America’s promise in full, it was also premised on a denial that such realization would require substantial change to the country’s existing socioeconomic structure. “The broad definition of the Great Society”, wrote Michael Harrington in *New America* in 1965, “is in keeping with the vision which has inspired every utopian movement of the past, and of the socialist movement of the past and the present: ‘Ahead now is a summit where freedom from the wants of the body can help fulfil the needs of the spirit’” (quoted in Leblanc and Yates 2013, 106). “Yet at the same time”, he continued, “the President sees no need to question or challenge any of the present institutions of American society” (ibid.).

The prevalence of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation is evident across the broader spectrum of ‘American Dream’ references in presidential talk in this period, and not just in relation to the civil rights issue. Johnson, for example, invoked the concept in his 1967 ‘Labor Day Statement’, wherein he praised the labour movement as a “historical lesson in responsibility”; “Labor in this country”, he observed, “organized not to destroy, but to demand a part of the American dream. As a result, the American worker today enjoys a

prosperity and a security unknown to any workingman in the history of the world”.²⁹⁷ In other words, ‘responsibility’ here meant not challenging but rather accepting and working within the basic institutions in seeking realization of the ‘American Dream’. This view also prevailed in mainstream labour leadership circles. In a speech that was reproduced into an AFL-CIO pamphlet entitled ‘*Labor Looks at Capitalism*’, for example, the Federation’s president George Meany observed that

The Negro citizens of this country are...demanding their full civil right to enter the mainstream of American society and to share fully in the abundance that the economy can produce. Decades of neglect, prejudice, and discrimination have left a massive problem, particularly when automation is wiping out large numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in farming and industry.²⁹⁸

After acknowledging that the legislative achievements of 1964 and 1965 represented “giant steps in the struggle for true democracy and for the redemption of America from the shame of discrimination and injustice”, Meany pointed out that there was still work to be done, including the “achievements of full employment as well as a better balance in the economy”.²⁹⁹ Yet he also emphasized, a few lines later, that “the successes of the past indicate the continued great potential of the American system”.³⁰⁰ In stressing this point, and in highlighting the “flexibility and strength of this system”, Meany thus portrayed the civil rights struggle as non-revolutionary, and identified the ‘equal opportunity’ gap as one that could be closed through mechanisms available within the current economic system. Just as the “American labor movement had the vision to accept the challenge of America—the opportunity to utilize the constitutional rights of individuals and free institutions to seek and

²⁹⁷ “Statement by the President: Labor Day,” 16 August, 1967, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28399>.

²⁹⁸ AFL-CIO, *Labor Looks at Capitalism*, December 1966, AFL-CIO Printed Ephemera Collection, Box 8, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, 8.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

achieve improvements within the basic structure of society”, so too should the civil rights movement seek to address their grievances within that same basic structure.³⁰¹

If the ‘Great Society’ provided a discursive opportunity structure that appeared to present an opening for appeals to economic justice, this opening was not as wide as the bridge activists had perhaps hoped. What is most important for our purposes is that the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation prevailed within it, and that this seems to reflect the prevalence of this interpretation in American political culture in this period. This latter claim can be further substantiated by considering the public and private speeches and discussions of the bridge activists.

The ‘Economic Turn’ in the New Phase: New Challenges, Old Constraints

In a letter to King in July 1965, Cleveland Robinson urged him to make sure that the upcoming SCLC convention contained “a strong economic flavor”, and asked him to consider “setting aside an entire session for a discussion of a report which I believe you ought to make dealing with the need for greater alliances between labor and civil rights forces, not just in generalities, but with some specific problems and opportunities being placed before the audience for discussion”.³⁰² “In such discussions”, he continued,

we would hope to develop the needs and the opportunities the movement faces, and at the same time the grave dangers, pointing out that the resistance to progress we have seen thus far will be small as compared to the resistance we will be facing when actual blows are being struck at the real heart of the problem, and that is the stranglehold which the economic power structure has on the great masses of the people. This power being based not just in the South, but principally in the North.³⁰³

In stressing that the civil rights movement would face new and greater resistance once it targeted the ‘economic power structure’, Robinson was reflecting a recognition that the ‘new’

³⁰¹ Ibid., 1.

³⁰² Robinson to King, 8 July, 1965, CR Papers, Box 10, Folder 14.

³⁰³ Ibid.

phase entailed distinctive challenges. It was a recognition that would be repeatedly expressed by the bridge activists in both public and private settings. In response to a letter from a friend living in London who had written to congratulate him on the success of the March on Washington, for example, Rustin wrote that “I just hope that the coalition of forces that put on the march can be kept together for the more difficult struggles that lie ahead” (quoted in Long 2012, 272).

The notion that the ‘new phase’ entailed a “more difficult struggle” was certainly a common theme among the bridge activists, but so was the belief that this struggle would ultimately have a greater impact, and prove more beneficial than the struggles in the ‘classical phase’. “[H]owever difficult it is for us to admit this”, King remarked to his SCLC staff during a 1966 retreat at Frogmore, “we must admit it: the changes that came about during [the ‘classical’] period were at best surface changes, they were not really substantive changes”.³⁰⁴ Yet because the new struggles would fundamentally alter American society, the civil rights movement would meet even wider and stronger resistance. In an article written for *Nation* magazine in 1966, King, sounding much like Rustin had in his *From Protest to Politics*, observed that “Negroes have benefited from a limited change that was emotionally satisfying but materially deficient” (1966b, para.8). However, “as they move forward for fundamental alteration of their lives, a more bitter opposition grows even within groups that were hospitable to earlier superficial amelioration. Conflicts are unavoidable because a stage has been reached in which the reality of equality will require extensive adjustments in the way of life of some of the white majority” (ibid.). In a speech at Stanford University a year later, King compared the struggles leading up to the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act with the present struggles, noting that “we must see that the struggle today is much more difficult. It’s more difficult today because we are struggling now for genuine equality” (1967, para.11).

³⁰⁴ SCLC Staff retreat, 14 November 1966, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlk-speech-sclc-staff-retreat>, 6.

And although this struggle was about bringing genuine equality to all Americans—it had become, as King once admitted to a reporter, a ‘class struggle’—it was one that was being met with far more hostility than earlier struggles (Fairclough 1983). This was now about a challenge to the status quo in American economic institutions and to the distribution of power and wealth; it was now about a challenge not only to deeply engrained prejudices, but to economic interests. “Public accommodations did not cost the nation anything; the right to vote did not cost anything”, he pointed out during a speech at Howard University.³⁰⁵ “Now we are grappling with basic class issues between the privileged and the underprivileged. In order to solve this problem, not only will it mean the restructuring of the architecture of American society but it will cost the nation something”.³⁰⁶

The difficulties and constraints faced by the bridge activists in the ‘new phase’ were undoubtedly the result of many factors, including the fact that many of the economic demands represented calls for substantial change that directly opposed certain established interests in a way that demands for segregation had not. The writings and speeches of the bridge activists reflect their recognition of this; but in many cases, they also provide evidence that these activists felt that certain established ideas were standing in their way—ideas that fall under the rubric of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. Certain themes that are recurrent in the speeches indicate that the bridge activists were responding to, and seeking to challenge, the assumption that the various American Dream gaps could (and should) be addressed through the existing socioeconomic structure. King frequently spoke about the prevalence of the ‘bootstrap’ myth, for example, and especially in the last few years of his life, he evinced a growing frustration with this prevalence. “We must honestly admit certain things and get rid of certain myths that have constantly been disseminated all over our

³⁰⁵ “The Seventh Annual Gandhi Memorial Lecture”, 6 November 1966, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/seventh-annual-gandhi-memorial-lecture>, 14.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

nation”, he remarked during a 1968 sermon at the National Cathedral in Washington, for example, pointing out that one of those myths

That still gets around...is a kind of over reliance on the bootstrap philosophy. There are those who still feel that if the Negro is to rise out of poverty, if the Negro is to rise out of the slum conditions, if he is to rise out of discrimination and segregation, he must do it all by himself. And so they say the Negro must lift himself by his bootstraps. (1968c, 270)

Crucially, although King often noted that it was the black population who had to “hear this over and over again” (1967, para.34), he highlighted this myth in the context of making the case for anti-poverty programs like the guaranteed annual income; this was, therefore, a problem that went beyond (albeit also included) prejudice and discrimination, and which needed to be addressed by changing economic institutions. This point (and apparent sense of frustration) was echoed by Randolph at the 1965 AFL-CIO convention:

In this land of affluence...two out of every three Negro families live in poverty and deprivation. In part, this fact reflects the astronomically high unemployment rates in the Negro community. But in most cases, the head of the Negro family is working—forty hard hours a week. He does not need to be lectured about self-help.³⁰⁷

The problematic prevalence of the ‘self-help’ philosophy and ‘bootstrap’ myth was also a common theme in Rustin’s speeches. For example, during the 1963 Socialist Party Conference following the March on Washington, Rustin explained why he viewed black nationalism as a ‘gimmick’:

Take for example, the great number of young Negroes today who are talking about Negroes going into business, by which I presume they mean what Malcolm X has—restaurants and other services to Negroes. The idea that somehow this is going to deal with the economic problem of Negroes is silly. It’s stupid and yet great numbers of [*sic*] Negroes are falling for it. *What we ought to be talking about is the nature of capital in this country, what it does to people, how it should be changed*—and not about Negroes owning hair-straightening parlors, a few minor banks, a few restaurants. (1963c; emphasis added)

³⁰⁷ AFL-CIO, *Proceedings of the AFL-CIO 6th Constitutional Convention*, 1965, 280.

What is evident in these remarks is that Rustin's critique of 'black nationalism' could also be applied to a critique of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation prevailing in policy circles;³⁰⁸ it represented, that is, a critique of prevailing approaches to closing the 'equal opportunity' gap, wherein the solution was not to restructure economic institutions but to grant broader access to those institutions. For Rustin, the black nationalist approach was a mere 'gimmick' because despite its apparent rejection of 'white America', it represented little more than an effort to create a mirror society for black Americans; without going "deeper into the economic and social questions", this would amount to a reproduction of the basic contradictions in American society (Rustin 1963c). It was for this reason, he explained during the Socialist Party conference, that "loyalty to things as they now stand, or to black nationalism, are both out for me" (ibid).

The bridge activists' critiques of the 'prevailing myths' in American society, and their desire to challenge those myths, were not always expressed in public forums. In the case of King, for example, although his frame repertoire was clearly more radical in the last few years of his life, some of his views remained reserved for more private settings; "something is wrong with capitalism", he remarked during an SCLC staff retreat at Frogmore in 1966, adding that "maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism".³⁰⁹ Notably, early on during the Frogmore speech, he emphasized that it was actually not meant as a speech at all; rather, he wished "to talk very informally about the situation as we face it"³¹⁰. In this relatively private, informal setting, King made a number of interesting points, in addition to the explicit references to 'capitalism' and 'democratic socialism'. At one point, for example, King remarked that "[w]e must honestly face the fact that the Movement must address itself

³⁰⁸ In fact, in his *Protest to Politics* he noted that "there is an ironic similarity between the self-help advocated by many liberals and the doctrines of the Black Muslims" (1965a, 120-21).

³⁰⁹ SCLC Staff retreat, 14 November 1966, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlk-speech-sclc-staff-retreat>, 19.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

to the restructuring of the whole of American society”. Upon making this observation, he acknowledged that

...this is often a difficult point but it is one that we have to deal with. The question I raise tonight is...why do you have 40 million people in our society who are poor? I have to ask that question. And it leaves me to ask the question of whether something is not wrong with the very structure of our society. [...]...I am always amazed when I go [to Sweden], they don't have any poverty. No unemployment, nobody needing health services can't get them. They don't have any slums. The question comes to us, why? It is because Scandinavia has grappled with the problem for more equitable distribution of wealth.³¹¹

What made dealing with this problem so difficult was the fact that addressing it “means we are treading...in very difficult waters, because it really means we are saying that something is wrong with the economic system of our nation”. It was only “in this quiet setting”, however, that King felt comfortable making these statements; only, that is, in this “atmosphere where you can discuss such things [as the capitalistic system], and you are not accused of being a Communist for discussing it”.³¹²

Notably, it was not just the term ‘Communism’ that King was often cautious to distance himself from in public. There are numerous documented instances of King speaking of his socialist leanings in private while expressing fear that using the term ‘socialist’ or ‘socialism’ in public would be detrimental to his public image, and to the civil rights movement in general; on one occasion, he admitted that what he was advocating was nothing short of a socialist transformation, but then went on to warn his peers that if any of them revealed this to the public, he would flatly deny having said it (Garrow 1986, 591-2). Even as he became explicitly anti-war, even as he held little back in expressing his dissatisfaction with the War on Poverty and with the Johnson administration in general, and even as he “regarded most white liberals with barely concealed disdain” (Fairclough 1987, 327), he continued to tread carefully around the term ‘socialism’. As he explained to Stanley Levison

³¹¹ Ibid., 19.

³¹² Ibid.

in an FBI wire-tapped phone conversation in February of 1967, “People have so many hangups to it, and respond so emotionally and irrationally” (quoted in Fairclough 1987, 353).

King’s hesitancy to use the word ‘socialism’ reflects a more general trend that is evident across all of the cases we have examined in this project. It was not just ‘socialism’, but any words that represented a critical position on American capitalism, that he felt he had to tread carefully around. As Garrow (1986) observes, for example, King’s belief that ‘something is wrong with capitalism’ was a “belief he had long held but rarely stated in public because of the obvious political dangers” (537). Notably, when he spoke of the potential backlash for expressing critical views of American capitalism, he often pointed out that this was an issue of ‘Americanism’; in one version of his sermon, “Transformed Nonconformist”, for example, he wrote that “a legion of thoughtful persons recognizes that traditional capitalism must continually undergo change if our great national wealth is to be more equitably distributed, but they are afraid their criticisms will make them seem un-American”.³¹³

This pattern of ‘treading cautiously’ around anti-capitalist (or even just non-capitalist) terminology because such terminology was prone to being perceived as being un-American has been identified in all three case studies in this project. However, similar to what we saw in the case of the NECNP, the movement actors we have examined here appeared to be willing to defy the constraints—certainly more so than the CIO leadership discussed in chapter 3. “In the days ahead we must not consider it unpatriotic to raise basic questions about our national character”, King remarked at the SCLC staff retreat in 1968 shortly before his death; “We must ask why there are forty million poor people in a nation overflowing with such unbelievable affluence. [...] For its very survival’s sake, America must re-examine old presuppositions and release itself from things that for centuries have been held sacred”

³¹³ “Transformed Nonconformist”, [n.d.], <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/transformed-nonconformist>, 4.

([1968a] 1972, 11). The other bridge activists were also directly challenging the boundaries of ‘Americanism’; “we must face up to the fact that this nation has got to plan, not go on acting as if somehow or other planning is un-American”, wrote Rustin following the Watts riot, for example (1965b, 136).

The ‘New Phase’ entailed distinctive challenges for the civil rights movement, but evidently, the ideological constraints faced by the bridge activists in their attempts to make the ‘new phase’ a period of social democratic transformation, were not entirely ‘new’. Indeed, NECNP and CIO staff and leaders had faced similar constraints two decades earlier. As I have attempted to demonstrate in this section, some of these similar constraints appear to have their roots in the prevalent capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. Now, for the most part, the bridge activists’ responses to these constraints resembled the case of the NECNP, rather than the CIO, in that they generally sought to transcend (rather than give into) the boundaries of what was widely accepted to be legitimately ‘American’, and one of the ways they did so was by articulating American Dream gap frames that challenged rather than upheld the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. While this suggests that the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ did not exert as strong of a constraining influence on the bridge activists at the site of frame construction as it did on CIO leaders and activists, the next section will demonstrate that the discursive opportunity structure nonetheless contributed to the framing failures, although its influence is discernible at a different stage of the framing process.

8. Filtering and Selection Effects of the Discursive Opportunity Structure Provided by ‘Americanism’

Williams (2004) observes that one of the challenges faced by any social movement seeking to have its message diffused among the broader public is that of making its claims ‘intelligible’. But this challenge itself involves multiple layers of difficulty; on the one hand, he explains,

we may assume that to some extent social movements have dealt with the issue of intelligibility, at least at a basic level. [...] Movement members write publications, deliver speeches, create websites, and make media statements for various publics. This has to be done in a language that they at least expect some portion of the public to understand. (102)

On the other hand, “[b]eyond this base level...intelligibility becomes more contingent, less reliable, and—when considering public claims calling for social change—more open to ambiguity, multiple interpretations, and indexical disputes” (ibid.). Now, if we think back to the examples of the bridge activists’ ‘failed’ social democratic gap frames, one might be tempted to attribute these outcomes to this issue of intelligibility. Because these gap frames represented an attempt at *inversion of meaning* of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, it could be that the failed resonance (misinterpretation) of the attempted inversions was due to the content of the frames themselves; in other words, perhaps the bridge activists simply did not succeed in making it clear that they were targeting the *capitalist* element of the ‘land of opportunity’ idea. Perhaps, however, the answer lies beyond the framing work of the bridge activists. And this is where discursive opportunity structures with respect to frame *diffusion* need to be considered, for they can often work to limit frame ambiguity and to limit the range of interpretations that are disseminated among targets and the broader public (Koopmans and Olzak 2004). In this final section of the chapter, I will demonstrate how the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ worked as a selecting and filtering mechanism, leaving the bridge activists’ ‘American Dream’ frames,

(those which achieved diffusion in the public sphere), stripped of their social democratic implications.

Let us begin by examining the dynamics of frame diffusion in the case of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. While it was not fully representative of the March platform, it was King's speech that would become a central reference point in many popular and scholarly definitions of the 'American Dream'; although this point has not received much attention in the works that challenge the 'dominant narratives' of the civil rights movement, the narrowing (and distortion) of the march's objectives has been the subject of significant analysis, as was alluded to earlier. In attempting to account for the overshadowing of the economic justice demands of the March on Washington, one thing that has been analyzed in detail by many of the works we have been discussing is the noticeably selective media coverage of the event. According to Pfeffer (1990, 252), the "extensive media involvement played an important role in the shifting of priorities". News reports and editorials "emphasized the pageantry and interracial nature of the march and downplayed its ideology" (ibid.). But it was the economic implications, in particular, that were downplayed: "The news media scarcely registered the economic issues", observes Jackson (2007, 183); "Journalists most consistently reported the violence that did *not* happen".

The narrow (and distorting) nature of the mainstream media coverage did not go unnoticed by march organizers, or by sympathetic observers on the left. "Reading popular accounts of the March", Kahn wrote in *New America* on September 23, 1963, "it is hard to resist the notion that an effort is underway to expropriate a revolution". Randolph and Rustin, in particular, went to great lengths to attempt to restore the full meaning of the march, and to remind the public that the revolution had only just begun (Garrow 1986; Pfeffer 1990; Meyerson 2013). This was a main theme at the Socialist Party's two-day 'Conference on the

Civil Rights Revolution’, as we have seen. But they also reached out to more mainstream publics in their efforts to keep the broader emphasis of the March on Washington alive. Jones (2013) notes that their “[f]rustrat[ion] that news reports of the demonstration had often overlooked the specific demands of the protest, particularly those related to economic reform” prompted Randolph and Rustin to organize smaller, city-wide demonstrations in order to “remind the public of their agenda” (208). In his capacity as labour leader, Cleveland Robinson also went to work immediately to try to ensure that the economic thrust of the March on Washington was not forgotten by members of his union. As we saw above, he invoked the ‘American Dream’ in a speech to District 65 members, but his message clearly echoed not King’s speech at the Lincoln Memorial, but Randolph’s.

We have seen that the media overwhelmingly ignored the economic themes of the march, and that none of the economic demands of the platform were given serious consideration on Capitol Hill. While the media—who Koopmans and Olzak (2004, 203) call the “gatekeepers of public discourse” because of their “ability to select, shape, amplify, or diminish public messages”—produced visibility for the bridge activists’ frames, it was a *selective* visibility which omitted the social democratic components of their overall message. Now, although the media portrayal of the March on Washington, particularly its downplaying of the economic demands of the platform, was heavily criticized by some of the march organizers and their supporters, in some accounts it is the march organizers themselves—especially Rustin and Randolph—who are largely to blame for the way things turned out. In the lead-up to the march, militant sectors of the civil rights movement became increasingly critical of the expanding coalition behind the march, and of the organizers’ willingness to work and cooperate with White House officials (Jackson 2007; Jones 2013). Although the organizers’ ability to get the more moderate organizations such as the NAACP on board, and to secure (tepid) support from the White House, certainly contributed to the march’s peaceful

outcome and to the generally favourable reception it received from those who had been sympathetic but sceptical, this all came at a cost. Many activists and scholars—even those who are generally sympathetic to Rustin and Randolph—have suggested that, in retrospect, the emphasis placed by those men on expanding the coalition to include as broad an alliance as possible, made the ‘watering down’ of the March on Washington agenda somewhat inevitable (Le Blanc and Yates 2013, 77-81; Pfeffer 1990, 266; Lichtenstein 1995, 384). Viewed from this perspective, then, the narrow interpretation of the marcher’s objectives was not so much a distortion, but an accurate reading of the moderate thrust of the march coalition.

It is certainly true that Rustin and Randolph emphasized coalition-building and cooperation with authorities in the lead-up to the march, and that the march itself was, of course, conducted in a largely peaceful manner. However, what is more interesting about the media portrayal for our purposes is not the fact that the march was widely touted as a moderate affair, but that such moderation was generally interpreted (or at least portrayed) as a sign of celebration of American democracy and society. Assessing the march the day after it took place, Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution* observed that, “there was one sure effect. We can be proud of our country. Its people, our flag, and the quality of our Americanism” (1963). Similar interpretations could be found in television, radio, and newspaper reports across the country (Jackson 2007; Jones 2013). Can Rustin and Randolph’s tactical and strategic decisions be entirely blamed for this type of (mis-) interpretation? Perhaps, if actions were *all* that mattered; but as the impact of King’s speech demonstrates, words also clearly mattered on that day (albeit, some words more than others). And in their words, both Randolph and Rustin were clear about critiquing, not celebrating, the present workings of American democracy. We need only to recall Randolph’s speech, as well as the demands of the march, read out by Rustin, to point out that the *content* of the

march's agenda—no matter how disciplined the marchers—was, in fact, built on a critical representation of American political and economic institutions. Furthermore, even in its watered-down form, the agenda nonetheless retained a radical edge; as Kahn observed in his *Dissent* article, the “radical character of the March” was evident in the fact that the demands carried by the marchers on that day combined “demands for civil and political freedom with a far-reaching economic program” (1963, 319). Even a brief purview of some of the economic tenets of the program, he pointed out,

is sufficient to know that it means nothing less, and probably more, than a recrudescence of the New Deal and all the possibilities that would open up for the social planning and imagination. Certainly a political upheaval of some magnitude is implicit in these demands....(319-20)

Finally, the marchers may have walked in an orderly and peaceful manner, but many of the signs they carried expressed discontent in no uncertain terms. The urgency behind their grievances was also clear; all of the signs that had been printed ahead of the march —such as ‘We March for Jobs For All’, ‘We Demand Voting Rights’, ‘We Demand Decent Housing’—ended with the same word, bolded, italicized, and capitalized: “*NOW!*”

There is no doubt that the mainstream media, with its relative silence regarding the march's economic demands, and by its equating of moderate strategies and tactics with a celebration of American politics and society, played a significant role in distorting the message(s) behind the march. But the misinterpretation and misrepresentation emanated from other sources as well. As Garrow (1986) documents, the Kennedy administration was actively involved in efforts to moderate the tone of the march in the months leading up to August 1963; Robert Kennedy and Burke Marshall, in particular, had made persistent “efforts to influence the March toward moderation and away from angry condemnations, toward a legislative focus and away from an economic one” (285). When the event was over, Garrow (1986) notes, the president was “pleased that no disruptive incidents had marred an event that had begun as a protest but had ended as a celebration and public relations bonanza for both

the movement and for Kennedy's civil rights program" (ibid.). That certainly is how it would be remembered in the 'dominant narrative', but, again, such a description obscures some of the organizers' core intentions. Consider, for example, Kennedy's remarks to the civil rights leaders during the meeting in the oval office following the march. As Jackson (2007, 183) points out, "Kennedy immediately lauded the 'fervor and quiet dignity' of marchers who showed 'faith and confidence in our democratic form of government'". While there were certainly some such displays over the course of the day, Kennedy's portrayal is hard to reconcile, for example, with Randolph's insistence during his speech, that "real freedom will require many changes in the nation's political and social philosophies and institutions". A month later, summing up the frustration felt by some of the march organizers, Tom Kahn wrote that "President Kennedy commends the march as an expression of faith in our democratic system, when it is obvious that if the system were democratic, no march would have been necessary" (*New America*, 23 September 1963). Thus, while "liberals packaged the march as an international advertisement for American democracy" (Jackson 2007, 183), examples such as this further suggest that it was not just the peaceful nature of the event, but perhaps also misinterpretation or misrepresentation from diverse sources, that contributed to the obscuring of the march's broad agenda. Mainstream media, politicians, and many others apparently did not hear—or chose not to hear (or focus on)—the full demands laid out by Rustin, or Randolph's acknowledgement that "we cannot expect the realization of our aspirations through the same old anti-democratic social institutions and philosophies that have all along frustrated our aspirations".

Of course, the one speech everyone did hear, and the only speech that most of the media, politicians, and other public officials wanted to talk about, was King's. And although there was a significant disconnect between how the march was portrayed and the words spoken during the march by Rustin and Randolph, the same cannot be said with regard to

King's speech. While it was not his intention to overshadow the specific goals of the march, King's speech, and especially his improvisation which led to him describing his 'dream', offered precisely the type of 'Americanism' that the march would become known and celebrated for. The speech represented a call to conscience, and it appealed to the nation to live up to its ideals, but it also refrained from calling for revolutionary change in order for the nation to meet those ideals. It articulated 'American Dream' gaps that kept the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation intact; it did not challenge the fusion of American capitalism and American ideals underpinning the 'capitalist land of opportunity' interpretation, and it offered a 'safe' interpretation of the 'equal opportunity' gap. Absent the message of opposition to the socioeconomic structure found in Randolph's speech, King's speech could be praised by Patterson as "an oratorical hymn to America, and its promise for the Negro"—a promise that was based, in Patterson's description, on "a vision of brotherhood and plenty" (1963b). While King had not explicitly celebrated American economic institutions in his speech, his profession of faith in the country to realize its promises one day appears to have been enough of an indication, for many listeners, that he believed in the capacity of those institutions to deliver the dream.

Some frame theorists who have adopted the concept of 'discursive opportunity structure' point out that "all discursive opportunity structures are inherently selective" (Ferre 2003, 306). As McCammon et al (2007) explain, this means "that some movement frames resonate with critical elements in the larger discursive field, while others do not, because the resonant frames tap into the vocabulary, underlying principles, and narratives of salient discourses in the broader cultural environment" (732). This 'selective effect' of the discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism' in the case of the March on Washington is clearly visible; although several speakers, including Randolph, appealed to Americanism, it was only King's frames that achieved resonance. Since King's (selected) frames remained

within the realm of ‘exposure of contradiction’ and did not pose a direct challenge to the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, whereas Randolph’s did, this seems to indicate the prevalence of the capitalist interpretation in the discursive opportunity structure provided by Americanism. Perhaps even more indicative of this prevalence is that the ‘selected’ frames that were diffused took on a particularly pro-capitalist form; that is, the celebration of ‘Americanism’ was equated with a celebration of American institutions, including its economic institutions. King’s ‘I have a Dream’ speech certainly did not explicitly celebrate capitalism; yet by embracing ‘Americanism’ *without* challenging capitalism, King’s frames were susceptible to being interpreted as a celebration of the latter precisely because the prevailing assumption in this discursive opportunity structure was that these were interchangeable.

In addition to the ‘selective’ effect, the discursive opportunity structure also appears to have had a ‘filtering’ effect: in some cases, that is, the social democratic frames that were articulated by the bridge activists and which clearly represented attempts at ‘inversion of meaning’, were reproduced by recipients but in a filtered (non-social democratic) form. The filtering effect appears to be especially evident in the ‘new phase’ of the civil rights movement, once King was consistently presenting frames that challenged the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. For instance, we saw above that during the 1966 Subcommittee Hearings on the ‘Federal Role in Urban Affairs’, Randolph, Rustin and King each presented social democratic gap frames in making their case for the Freedom Budget. King’s testimony, in particular, offered a diagnosis and prognosis of the ‘equal opportunity’ and ‘economic security’ gaps that clearly went beyond simply exposing contradiction; it involved a forceful critique of existing economic institutions and an emphasis on the need for “a restructuring of

the architecture of American society”.³¹⁴ At the conclusion of the committee hearings, immediately following King (who was the last to testify), Senator Abraham Ribicoff, chairman of the subcommittee, summarized the key points that had been raised throughout the hearings, giving special emphasis to King’s testimony. Alluding to the latter, he stated that “we learned that regardless of their income or ethnic background [Americans] share the same dreams the rest of us do—they want to be part of the American mainstream”.³¹⁵ What Ribicoff neglected to point out was that some of those speakers, including and especially King, had made a clear case for fundamentally changing the ‘American mainstream’ itself, including its economic system. Since the time of King’s assassination, the ‘selected’ and ‘filtered’ (non-social democratic) interpretations of King’s dream have continuously been reproduced in speeches on the Senate and House floor. Polletta’s (2006) examination of ‘storytelling’ about King and the civil rights movement by public officials in the 1990s provides a good example of the ‘selection’ mechanism at work; through a content analysis of the *Congressional Record* covering the years 1993 to 1997, she identifies a clear pattern in the speeches invoking King:

It was overwhelmingly the early King who appeared on the House and Senate floor. The ‘I have a dream speech’ was the most often quoted of King’s speeches and writings. [...] Only 5...of the 119 quoted excerpts whose source I was able to identify came from speeches delivered between 1965 and King’s death in 1968. [...] In his later speeches King voiced his opposition to American militarism, called for a massive federal financial commitment to the poor, and questioned a capitalist society’s capacity to make that commitment. This was not the King who appeared on the House and Senate floor. (147-8)

The ‘filtered’ reproduction of King’s ‘American Dream’ is also evident within much of the literature produced by organized labour, even while the movement nonetheless acknowledges (indeed often emphasizes) the fact that King was dedicated to economic justice goals. Consider, for example, how the frames are depicted in an 1985 AFL-CIO brochure

³¹⁴ *Federal Role in Urban Affairs.: Hearings Before the Subcomm. on Executive Reorganization of the Comm. on Operations United States Sen.*, Part 14, 89th Cong. 2nd Sess. (1966) (Statement of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Southern Christian Leadership Conference).

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* (Statement of Senator Abraham Ribicoff).

honouring Martin Luther King, Jr. Day; peppered throughout the pages, are various quotes taken from speeches given by King before union audiences.³¹⁶ The purpose of the brochure, as the authors made explicitly clear on the first page, was to “highlight just one facet of Dr. King’s legacy, his unswerving support throughout his life for the trade union movement”.³¹⁷ Clearly, in this case, King’s focus on economic justice was not excluded here; but it was, to a certain extent, filtered. “Trade unionists everywhere are dedicated to extending the benefits of a bountiful society to all Americans and to ‘living the dream’ he so eloquently championed”, it declared.³¹⁸ What was obscured here was the fact that King’s articulation of his ‘dream’, especially in the last few years of his life, had questioned both the will of the people, and the capacity of the existing socioeconomic structure, in this ‘bountiful society’, to provide (much less extend) benefits. Insofar as King still had a ‘dream’, rooted in the ‘American Dream’, it was one that was built upon a recognition that a “radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced” (1969, 315).

The historical reproduction of the ‘distorted’ narratives surrounding the civil rights movement—including and especially the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., —is a phenomenon that has been discussed extensively by numerous scholars, including the civil rights historians we have been citing in this section as well as those working in the ‘long civil rights’ tradition. Many of the same scholars who have brought attention to the radical underpinnings of the civil rights movement have sought to identify the means by which the ‘distorted’ collective memory—that memory that omits the radical underpinnings—is not only reproduced, but continually strengthened in American society. Notably, these accounts often tend to highlight the ‘distorting’ work of

³¹⁶ AFL-CIO, *Martin Luther King Jr.: Living the Dream*, [1985], AFL-CIO Printed Ephemera Collection, Box 8, Folder L, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

³¹⁷ Ibid., [1].

³¹⁸ Ibid.

particular groups or individuals. Hall (2005, 1237), for example, emphasizes the role of “color-blind conservatives” who beginning in the late 60s, reworked the civil rights narrative “for their own purposes...ignor[ing] the complexity and dynamism of the movement, its growing focus on structural inequality, and its ‘radical reconstruction’ goals”. “Instead”, she observes, “they insisted that color blindness—defined as the elimination of racial classifications and the establishment of formal equality before the law—was the movement’s singular objective” (ibid.). In some scholarly accounts the main culprits responsible for the distortions include individuals who worked with the bridge activists themselves. The multi-authored *The Domestication of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Baldwin and Burrow 2011) for example, focuses primarily on the writings of Clarence Jones, who was once an advisor to King, and who has published works offering quite conservative (and what contributors to the aforementioned book view as highly questionable), thoughts on what King’s analysis would be on various contemporary issues.

It is certainly true that many influential voices have offered interpretations of the civil rights movement that appear to reinforce the narrow and often distorted portrayal of that movement. For example, Clarence Jones (2011) recently offered this comparison between the civil rights movement and ‘Occupy Wall Street’:

Some of the post Dr. King Civil Rights leadership want to identify this form of protest as an extension of the Civil Rights Movement. It is not. "Occupy Wall Street" may be the most innovative movement for social and economic justice and opportunity since Dr. King. But, it is qualitatively different. It is raising questions that go to the very foundation and *raison d'être* of our economic system -- Capitalism.” (para. 8)

Remarks like this undoubtedly serve to obscure (if not silence) the nature of many of the movement efforts that we have been examining above. But they also reflect a widespread tendency, which cannot simply be pinned down to the intent (malicious or otherwise) on the part of some individuals to highlight a particular version or image of the civil rights

movement. Indeed, this tendency is particularly evident in the case of the ‘American Dream’. We have seen that the narrow accounts of the use of ‘American Dream’ language in the civil rights movement prevail in both academic and popular literature, and we have seen that the misinterpretation and misrepresentation is manifest in a variety of ways, which continue to persist. We have also seen that even among those groups and individuals (including the labour movement) who were or are sympathetic to the broader economic goals of the civil rights movement, the invocations of the ‘American Dream’ frames offered by the movement are limited to the narrower variants (exposing contradiction). In fact, this is a common trend also among scholars who acknowledge the social democratic and socialist elements of the civil rights movement. Gerstle (2001), for example, offers an analysis of the civil rights movement that highlights the critique of capitalism underpinning King’s later writings and thought, and yet he offers the following account of King’s use of ‘American Dream’ language: “The notion of an American dream, as ‘yet unfulfilled’ but still alluring, appears increasingly frequently in King’s speeches and writings from 1960 on, *culminating, of course, in his famous 1963 oration*” (274; emphasis added).

The patterns of framing failures examined in this chapter, then, appear to be too widespread and persistent to be attributable entirely to the ‘coopting’ work of some groups and individuals. Insofar as misinterpretations and misrepresentations of the ‘American Dream’ repertoire in the civil rights movement have come to represent dominant popular and scholarly narratives, the findings in this chapter seem to point to more systemic factors at work. The aim of this section has been to demonstrate that it is plausible that the prevalence of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation in the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ is one such factor.

9. Conclusion

I began this chapter by pointing out that the civil rights movement figures prominently in the literature on the ‘American Dream’, and I observed that the civil rights era serves as an important empirical reference point for the conventional claims about the ideology’s capaciousness. In this chapter, I examined this ‘critical case’ through an alternative lens from that which is generally employed across—and, indeed, well beyond—the core American Dream literature.³¹⁹ I will conclude here by revisiting and reassessing the conventional wisdom in light of the findings of the chapter. I will also draw from some of the findings of the previous chapter, insofar as these provide insight into the longer, broader history of the ‘American Dream’ in the civil rights movement.

We have seen that Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech at the 1963 March on Washington occupies a prominent place in the majority of studies of the ‘American Dream’. It is perhaps the most widely cited example of the ‘American Dream’ being successfully redefined—successful, in that the articulation he provided on that day became accepted as a standard interpretation in American political culture, and was reflected in legislative and institutional changes in the months and years that followed. In the extant scholarly discussions of the ‘American Dream’, the example serves, therefore, as a crucial source of evidence of the ideology’s capaciousness.³²⁰

³¹⁹ That is, when we focus particularly on the issue of identifying the meaning and role of ‘American Dream’ language in this period, the narrow lens used by ‘American Dream’ scholars seems to be shared by the other relevant literatures—even those that cast a wider lens with respect to other aspects of the civil rights movement.

³²⁰ It was observed in chapter 1 that most of the core American Dream scholarship pays very little attention to the ideology’s relationship to capitalism (or anti-capitalism), and that while the topics of (a narrowly defined) ‘identity politics’ and multiculturalism figure prominently in that literature, the topic of class does not. Therefore, the fact that writers such as Cullen (2003), Ghosh (2013), and Jillson (2004) provide a historical account of the civil rights era that is short, narrow, and in line with the ‘dominant narrative’s’ omission of the radical economic dimensions of the civil rights movement, is not entirely surprising. Yet it is necessary to consider the implications of the findings in this chapter for their analysis of the ‘American Dream’, for as we have pointed out, their analyses represent the scholarly and popular conventional wisdom surrounding the ideology in the civil rights era.

As this chapter has shown, however, any attempt to make sense of the history and role of the ‘American Dream’ in the civil rights era (even if viewed through the ‘short’ lens) must also look well beyond the ‘I have a Dream speech’. In Part II of this chapter, we ‘unfroze’ King and his ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, and in the process we discovered that the definition of the ‘American Dream’ that he provided on August 28, 1963 was actually far less representative than the American Dream literature suggests. Indeed, it differed in crucial respects from the definition he provided on many other occasions. The ‘American Dream’ he articulated at the March on Washington contained no reference to economic goals; it was thus more narrowly defined than the ‘American Dream’ that he repeatedly described before union audiences in the early 1960s, but which also figured prominently across his wider repertoire of speeches and writings in the mid-1960s up until his death. That broader dream—the dream of ‘economic justice and the brotherhood of man’—underscored the emphasis on the intersection of class and race, which in the last few years of King’s life became a central theme in his analysis of the civil rights movement. Like the other bridge activists, King framed his more radical arguments through an appeal to ‘Americanism’, and even in his most critical speeches and writings, he continued to argue that some American ideals could and should be lived up to; however, insofar as he targeted capitalism as a barrier to that possibility, his ‘American Dream’ frames now clearly represented inversion of meaning of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation. Especially after 1965, King’s ‘American Dream’ represented a fundamentally different relationship to the ideology than that which he had expressed on August 28, 1963.

These later years, when King lost clout among the mainstream civil rights movement and the broader American public, are conspicuously absent from the American Dream literature. One exception to this is Cullen (2003), who acknowledges King’s growing emphasis on economic equality, and the defeats of the campaigns built around this emphasis,

in the later years of his life. Furthermore, he acknowledges the changing public perception that accompanied this shifting emphasis, observing for example that “[i]n 1967 King failed to make the Gallup poll list of the ten most admired Americans for the first time in a decade” (127). Unlike most scholars of the American Dream, therefore, Cullen does not entirely ignore the more radical—and less successful—side of King. And yet, this more accurate portrayal is not reflected in Cullen’s analysis of the American Dream. Cullen argues that King was “dismayed at the depth of resistance to change in white America, which belied their—and his—faith in the Creed”. He then goes on to observe that, “[p]erhaps as a result, King seemed to speak less of the American Dream after 1963. What he *didn’t* stop speaking about—indeed, what he spoke *more* about, and what may explain his sagging popularity—was equality”. The problem with Cullen’s assessment here, of course, is that King *did* continue to speak of the American Dream after 1963, and in fact his emphasis on political and economic equality became more consistent and pronounced in his framing. Cullen may be right about why King became less popular, but his failure to recognize or acknowledge that King continued to rely on the language of the American Dream, even as he became more (openly) radical, greatly undermines his argument about the flexibility of that language. King may well have ‘stretched’ the American Dream into a more democratic interpretation in 1963, but he also tried to stretch it even further, especially after 1964, and those efforts faltered. Had Cullen, or any of the other scholars who analyze the American Dream, addressed this fact, they would have been required to acknowledge that the civil rights era serves as evidence of the ideology’s boundaries, as much as it demonstrates its capaciousness; there were clear limits to King’s success in ‘redefining’ the American Dream, and there were clear limits to the extent to which that ideology enabled him to achieve his goals.

Such limits are evident, furthermore, in the experiences of the other bridge activists, who sought to redefine the American Dream in a similar manner. Back in 1946, long before the ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, Randolph and his colleagues had pointed to the need for transforming economic institutions through a party of the ‘American Dream’, with apparently little success; In 1963, Randolph, Rustin and Robinson had emphasized the need for substantial economic changes in addition to civil rights legislation, and they framed these goals through the language of the ‘American Dream’—again these efforts met limited success; after the passage of civil rights legislation, King joined these men in making such an appeal through advocacy of programs such as the Freedom Budget, but now his own (social democratic) ‘dream’ failed to resonate. The failed resonance is not only manifest in the short-term outcomes, but also in the long-term legacy of the bridge activists’ efforts. Every time a frustrated scholar or activist writes a book, journal article, or editorial lamenting the ‘forgotten’ King, the ‘forgotten’ March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and the ‘forgotten’ radical economic elements of the civil rights movement more generally, they are (indirectly) identifying the failure of King’s social democratic ‘American Dream’ to resonate. Moreover, as the experience of the other bridge activists suggests, this failure was not specific just to one individual, or to one particular time or context; in each case where the bridge activists sought to mobilize around this broader American Dream, their efforts were silenced, filtered, or forgotten. Their social democratic ‘American Dreams’ became, and remain, part of the ‘not said’ and the ‘not thought of’ in most narratives of the civil rights movement. Social democracy, it appears, is where the ‘capacious’ American Dream met its limits.

In addition to identifying the nature of these limits, Part III of this chapter also looked for possible explanations for those limits—specifically, I asked whether the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ might have been a contributing factor in

bringing about these framing failures. In section 7, I suggested that the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation—which the bridge activists were unable to ‘invert’ through their American Dream framing efforts—was prevalent in American political culture in this period, and I highlighted the ways in which the programs and political talk surrounding the ‘Great Society’ reflected this prevalence. I also examined correspondence and speeches from the bridge activists, in order to demonstrate that they all perceived the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation to be prevalent, and that like CIO and NECNP leaders before them, they often linked the ideas back to ‘Americanism’.

However, while we did find some evidence that the bridge activists were troubled by the challenges this presented, the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ appears to have had a more decisive influence on the frame outcomes at the point of frame *reception* and *diffusion*, rather than, as was the case in chapter 3, at the point of frame *construction*. Where the bridge activists provided a social democratic interpretation of the ‘American Dream’, these frames received little attention, both in the short- and long- term; and where their frames were granted attention, the versions that achieved ‘diffusion’ were fundamentally altered, in the sense that the social democratic (if not socialist) message underlying these frames were omitted. In other words, crucial oppositional elements of the bridge activists’ frames were transformed into consensual elements with respect to American capitalism, and it was these transformed versions that were reproduced and continue to be reproduced today. This pattern of repeated (mis)interpretation and narrowing of the social democratic ‘American Dream’ frames appears to have resulted, at least in part, from the discursive opportunity structure’s ‘selective’ and ‘filtering’ effects, which in turn can be attributed to the prevalence of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation in that discursive opportunity structure.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In America, the majority has staked out a formidable fence around thought. Inside those limits a writer is free but woe betide him if he dares to stray beyond them.

-Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

1. Introduction

This thesis has examined the use of ‘American Dream’ language in three movements that sought, without success, to transform postwar American society along social democratic lines. While the limits of social democratic projects—and the woes of the American left more generally—is a subject that has attracted the attention of many social scientists, and has resulted in a rich and diverse scholarship, the role of ‘American Dream’ language in these struggles has largely gone unexamined. In chapter 1 of the thesis I suggested that there are both empirical and theoretical reasons for addressing this neglected area of enquiry, especially for those who continue to grapple with questions surrounding the ‘exceptional’ non-social democratic path taken by the United States in the first three decades following the Second World War.

In the preceding chapters, I have demonstrated how the three failed efforts to bring about social democracy represented by the cases of the CIO, the NECNP, and the civil rights movement, also were three failed efforts to redefine the ‘American Dream’, and I have sought to offer an explanatory account of the latter failures, using the tools of the social movement framing perspective. In this concluding chapter, I will consider the implications of this study’s research findings, in relation to some of the debates on ‘American exceptionalism’ that were first introduced in chapter 1. In particular, I will draw out the project’s key findings regarding ‘Americanism’, and will consider these in relation to the conflicting analyses of ‘Americanism’ offered by Louis Hartz (1955) and some of his critics.

I will suggest that while these findings do appear to undermine Hartz's analysis in a number of important respects, it is ultimately *his* conceptualization of 'Americanism', rather than the Americanism[s] of his critics, that comes closest to capturing the nature of the framing failures examined in this thesis. I will also offer some general reflections on the uses and benefits of the 'social movement framing' approach, both with respect to this study and in terms of its potential utility for related studies of 'American exceptionalism.' First, however, I will review the implications of this thesis for the conventional wisdom surrounding the 'American Dream'; these have been specified in various sections over the course of the thesis, therefore I will limit the discussion here to a brief and general summary of the arguments that were presented in more detail in the foregoing chapters.

2. Limits of the 'American Dream'

Given the central role that the 'American Dream' seems to play in American popular and political culture, it is surprising that the ideology has not been taken very seriously among academics; as I pointed out in chapter 1, very few comprehensive studies of the ideology's historical development, or of its content, have been undertaken within the social sciences. In chapter 2, I sought to show how the studies that do exist, nonetheless fall short in their attempts to adequately capture the nature of the ideology—a limitation that, I contended, stems at least in part from the widespread neglect, and absence of analysis, of the relationship between the 'American Dream' and capitalism. This relationship, I proposed, could be discerned by examining the historical roots and development of the ideology's foundational claim: the claim that the United States is the 'land of opportunity'. While this claim can be (and has been) broadly conceived, I suggested that the 'American Dream' ideology is rooted in a particular 'capitalist' interpretation, one that emerged in the industrializing Northern regions in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and which became established within

American political culture thereafter. Although the ‘capitalist’ land of opportunity interpretation has itself taken on different manifestations, particularly across historical periods, its distinguishing feature is that it identifies capitalism as an inextricable factor in the ‘land of opportunity’ equation. It is this inextricability that, I contended, has given shape to the boundaries of the hegemonic ‘American Dream’, and which is an important source of the limits of its ideological capaciousness.

In the empirical chapters of the thesis, I put my definitional analysis to the test through an examination of the use of ‘American Dream’ language among movement actors seeking social democratic transformation in the postwar era. Using the tools of the social movement framing perspective, I identified three basic variants of American Dream frames, each of which drew attention to gaps between the nation’s ‘land of opportunity’ promise and the failure to meet this promise. The three ‘gap’ variants—the ‘American political traditions’ gap, the ‘economic security’ gap, and the ‘equal opportunity’ gap—were sometimes present in combination, but in all cases of ‘American Dream’ framing, at least one of these gap variants was identifiable.

This examination revealed a range of uses of ‘American Dream’ language, including some anti-capitalist interpretations that clearly exceeded the boundaries of the ideology as defined in chapter 2. In all three case studies, that is, I identified ‘American Dream’ frames that were based on attempts to appropriate and transform the core ideological tenet of the ‘American Dream’—the idea that the United States is the ‘land of opportunity’ in part because of its capitalist system. The gap frames that targeted capitalism as a (or the) source of the problem, and which called for transformation of the system in order to realize the ‘American Dream’, represented attempts at *inversion of meaning* (Westby 2005) of the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. While these were based on substantially different understandings of the ‘American Dream’ from the definition set forth in chapter 2,

however, it was the outcomes of these framing efforts that, in each of the case studies, ultimately lent support to my conceptualization of the ‘American Dream’. The movement actors in these cases did indeed construct a variety of ‘American Dream’ frames, and some of these variations represented fundamental challenges to the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation; yet across all cases, these efforts were unsuccessful, as was particularly evidenced by the lack of resonance of the frames that posed such a challenge—the frames representing *inversion of meaning*. The social democratic American Dreams ultimately failed to penetrate beyond the margins of American political culture. The cases thus revealed that there were clear limits to the capaciousness of the ‘American Dream’—limits both in terms of the extent to which its dominant interpretation could be ‘stretched’ and in terms of the extent to which the discourse could be used as a tool for effecting change.

3. Louis Hartz’s ‘Americanism’ and his Critics: Lessons from Bringing the ‘American Dream’ in

If “the American dream is open to more interpretations than there are interpreters” (Hochschild 1995, 250), the findings of this study suggest that American political culture, in the first few decades following the Second World War, was only open to some of these interpretations. I turn now to consider the broader political culture within which the boundaries of the ‘American Dream’ have taken shape, and to consider, specifically, the implications of this study’s findings in relation to debates about ‘Americanism’.

Debates Revisited

In my review in chapter 1 of some of the debates surrounding ‘American exceptionalism’, I noted that Louis Hartz’s contributions, particularly those offered in *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), occupy a prominent yet highly controversial place among the competing accounts of leftist politics and philosophy in the United States. If “Hartz was famously dismissive of the prospects of the American Left” (Stears 2010, 184),

many influential left scholars have, especially of late, been quite dismissive of Hartz in terms of the relevance of his work. “By now, Hartz is mainly a figure of historical interest”, one such scholar wrote on the 50th anniversary of the publication of *The Liberal Tradition* (Wilentz 2005, 117). Many of these critics have targeted Hartz’s claims about the one-dimensional nature of American political culture and of its constraining effects on the American left. As Stears observes, the basic challenge to Hartz on this front tends to rest on two arguments:

First, it is argued that liberal political ideals are far more plastic than Hartz appeared to comprehend. Seen as such, liberal concepts and terminology are more than capable of being used to justify far-reaching political change as well as to demand conservation of a prevailing order. [...] Second, it is contended that just as the language of liberalism might be open to radical, as well as conservative, interpretations, then so too might patriotism and the celebration of the American past be open to rival roles. (2010, 186)

Here, I want to focus primarily on the second of these arguments. The claim that “[n]ational pride in the United States and its historical story...far from being an inevitable limitation on American radicalism, has in fact been an invaluable part of its appeal” (Stears 2010, 187) is, essentially, about the rejection of Hartz’s conceptualization of ‘Americanism’ and its effects on leftist political projects in the United States. It is about the argument that rather than representing a language that is incompatible with radical economic goals, ‘Americanism’ is a “flexible language of politics” (Gerstle 2002, xv) that has, in the past, served movements representing such goals well, and which can do so again in the future. In chapter 1, I highlighted the work of Gerstle (2001, 2002), which is particularly illustrative of this perspective, but there are many others who make comparable claims about ‘Americanism’ in their arguments against Hartz (eg., Foner 1998; Hudson 2013; Kazin 2011; 1995; Kazin and McCartin 2006; Nackenoff 2005; 1994; Rorty 1998; Wilentz 1984a; 2005).

Now, it should be noted that it is often the case that in critical assessments of Hartz, both of the arguments described in the quote by Stears (2010) above are presented together;

that is, critics generally have been concerned with offering alternative analyses of liberalism *and* of Americanism³²¹. Of course, in Hartz's *Liberal Tradition* these two things were presented as virtually one and the same tradition—and the only tradition that matters in America. While most scholars have rejected that characterization of American political culture, many have nonetheless accepted this conflation of liberalism and Americanism, (at least indirectly), in their attempts to rescue both from Hartz's damning assessment.

As noted above, the scope of my engagement with the debates here is narrower. Examining the 'American Dream' through the lens of the social movement framing perspective led me into an examination of 'Americanism' in each of the case studies, whereas 'liberalism' was not as central.³²² I will suggest how some of the findings of the thesis regarding the 'framing failures' seem to lend qualified support to Hartz's analysis of 'Americanism', insofar as he identified the constraining effects of American political culture as stemming from the conflation of 'Americanism' with 'capitalism'. Many of the failed frames I examined in the thesis—those that sought *inversion of meaning* of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation—entailed a rejection of this conflation, and so these strategic appropriations represented challenges not only to the ideology of the 'American Dream' specifically but to (a Hartzian conception of) 'Americanism' more generally. Of course, the fact that there *were* such challenges in the first place, points to a problem with Hartz's dismissal of the American left on the grounds of its "pathetic clinging to 'Americanism'" (1955, 233); as will be discussed below, this is not the only problem with Hartz's analysis.

Yet, the fact that these efforts to challenge and fundamentally redefine 'Americanism'

³²¹ As Stears (2010) points out, citing many of the same scholars I have identified here, "these scholars often insist that the liberal elements of American political identity and the American political past represent the best means of forwarding a radical political agenda" (185).

³²² When I examined the goals and strategies associated with the use of 'American Dream' language, in every case it became evident that the decision to frame their goals in this language was at least partly a response to the discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism'. The movement actors were attempting, it seems, to 'Americanize' social democracy. Although there are various ways in which one can identify overlap between liberal values and the 'American Dream', then, the focus and findings of the thesis were really much more about the *American* in the American liberal tradition. Thus, any attempt to stretch the tentative conclusions regarding 'Americanism' to the subject of liberalism, would be unfounded.

ultimately failed, and some of the factors that brought about these failures, indicate that Hartz's analysis may have more relevance to these cases than his critics would give him credit for.

Frame Construction Processes

Scholars who have incorporated examinations of 'discursive opportunity structures' into the study of social movement framing point out that DOS's are both enabling and constraining—a point that is clearly applicable to this study's findings with respect to the impact of 'Americanism'. On the one hand, the discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism' presented movement actors with opportunities to highlight the gaps between the promise and realities of American society—and in all three cases examined here, movement actors responded to this by offering 'American Dream' gap frames. On the other hand, when I explored the dynamics behind the construction of these frames, quite often I found that this same discursive opportunity structure was also imposing constraints on the language through which these frames could be expressed. This was particularly evident in chapter 3, when I examined the frame construction processes among CIO staff and leaders, who felt compelled to use terms such as 'free enterprise' positively, who perceived terms such as 'socialism' to be strictly off limits, and who approached terms like 'planning' as terms that needed to be used with caution if not avoided altogether. These language constraints resulted in the production of literature in which the diagnostic and prognostic 'American Dream' frames were in many cases inconsistent with the organization's (initially) social democratic postwar vision. My examination of frame construction dynamics in the early stages of the CIO's production of postwar literature also revealed that the nature of the language in this literature was contested by some staff and leadership; but even among those who initially protested, there was a general sense that ultimately, these framing decisions

were necessary measures for an organization seeking not to stray beyond (or leave itself vulnerable to accusations of straying beyond) the boundaries of what was ‘American’ and therefore ‘acceptable’.³²³

The ideas and language that were perceived to be ‘acceptable’ coincided quite clearly with the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation, thus signifying the prevalence of that interpretation in the discursive opportunity structure; at the same time, there were some CIO people who initially viewed the postwar program as a potential tool for pushing these boundaries, and who were the influence behind the few cases of social democratic ‘American Dream’ frames that made their way into program literature. Of course, within a few years, those exceptions disappeared from the CIO’s repertoire altogether, but what was particularly interesting was the fact that the (now even more) consensual literature was no longer the source of tension and debate among CIO staff and leadership that it had been earlier; by the time the CIO was preparing to merge with the AFL, it appears that the boundaries of the ‘acceptable’ had now become conflated with what CIO staff and leaders viewed as ‘desirable’.³²⁴

³²³ The case also appears to lend support to the arguments made by social movement scholars who, as I noted in chapter 1, have recently called for researchers of framing processes to pay more attention to the cultural context within which those framing processes occur; in particular, the findings lend credence to the argument that the ‘tool kit’ metaphor, which has traditionally been central to the social movement framing perspective, is inadequate for understanding how the processes of frame construction can lead to frame failures. As Hallgrimsdottir (2006, 524) observes, the ‘tool kit’ approach to framing tends to portray social movement actors as “exist[ing] in a primarily purposive relationship vis-à-vis frame construction processes”; this is difficult to reconcile, however, with the fact that “frame failures are unintended outcomes of social movement symbolic activity; as such, it is unlikely that the precipitates of failure lie exclusively within the instrumental, or purposive, decision-making capacity of social movement actors. Assuming that social movement actors self-consciously occupy sites of meaning making, however, makes the construction of dissonant meaning look to be the result of unsound symbolic strategy—that is, deficiencies in cultural performance.” (ibid.). In the case of the CIO-PAC’s postwar program frames, the tensions and inconsistencies evident therein were not simply the result of ill-conceived or otherwise inadequate framing strategies; quite the contrary, in fact, for it appears that the literature that the organization produced resulted from careful consideration and clear awareness of the nature of the dominant discursive (as well as political) opportunity structure in the postwar setting. In other words, the framing outcomes in chapter 3 were not so much the result of improper use of the cultural ‘toolkit’, but rather of the constraints imposed by the cultural context—constraints which left CIO leaders and staff feeling that they had few options besides speaking a language that was in tension with their goals.

³²⁴ As I observed toward the end of chapter 3, the frame construction dynamics in the late 1940s seemed to suggest that the CIO had undergone the sort of ideological adaptation that Westby (2005) proposes is likely to occur when “framing processes [are] dominated by strategic considerations” (226). Insofar as these strategic

The repertoires of ‘American Dream’ frames produced by the NECNP in the mid-1940s and the bridge activists in the 1960s were different in important respects from the frames we examined in chapter 3, and yet in these other two case studies, I nonetheless came across signs of similar language constraints being imposed on movement actors at the site of frame construction. For example, NECNP leaders, like their counterparts in the CIO, expressed concerns about using terms like ‘socialist’ to depict their ideas in public—even though many of those ideas were, by chairman A. Philip Randolph’s own admission, ‘socialist’. As I revealed in chapter 4, the omission of such terms was part of a deliberate strategy of framing their program in “American language”—it was the committee’s response, that is, to the discursive opportunity structure provided by Americanism. In the eyes of both NECNP and CIO leaders, then, it appears that the language of ‘Americanism’ was not capacious enough to accommodate ‘socialism’ in the 1940s.

Twenty years later, as I demonstrated in chapter 5, Randolph and the other bridge activists appeared to be reading the discursive opportunity structure in a similar way. Even Martin Luther King Jr., whose framing activities underwent a general shift in terms of the type of ‘strategic appropriation’ his frames represented, nonetheless refrained from incorporating this ostensibly ‘un-American’ term. In the final years of his life, he was consistently offering ‘American Dream’ frames that, like those of his fellow bridge activists and like those found in the NECNP’s “Provisional Declaration”, fundamentally challenged the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation; and yet even at the height of his (public) radicalism, he refrained from incorporating ‘socialism’ into his frames, indicating in more

considerations were themselves informed by the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’, this suggests that the latter contributed not only the CIO’s framing failures (that is, its failure to frame its program in a manner consistent with the its social democratic underpinnings), but also, by extension, to its longer-term abandonment of a social democratic agenda.

private settings that he did so because he feared that this term was off-limits in the United States.

The trepidation around ‘socialism’ was one particularly clear example of the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ being a source of constraint on framing activities across multiple cases, but it was not the only one. Indeed, my examination of frame construction dynamics revealed a number of interesting patterns, including a prevailing sense of frustration about the perceived popularity of the term ‘free enterprise’ (especially among CIO and NECNP leaders), and concern about (indeed, exasperation with,) the pervasiveness and persistence of ‘self-help’, ‘rags-to-riches’, and similar ‘Algeresque’ myths in both academic and popular discourses about American society.³²⁵

Now, as I have emphasized already, the effects of ‘Americanism’ on the frame construction processes were not uniform across the three cases. Even though the examination of these processes reveals that the NECNP and the civil rights movement in the 1960s faced similar language constraints to those faced by the CIO, and even though these appear to have derived from the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’, it is also true that movement actors in the former two cases produced a variety of frames that defied those constraints. However, insofar as the DOS was perceived by movement actors as a source of

³²⁵ The fact that movement actors felt that these types of myths represented formidable ideological obstacles to their goal of convincing potential constituents and the broader public of the need for social democratic transformation may be particularly problematic for Nackenoff’s (1994) critique of Hartz. As I explained in chapter 2, her critique focuses primarily on Hartz’s narrow interpretation of Alger’s stories, and on the fact that he projects that narrow interpretation onto the whole of American political culture. According to Nackenoff, Hartz failed to recognize and account for the fact that Alger himself never meant for his tales to be understood as guidebooks for accepting and participating in—rather than rejecting and challenging—the emerging capitalist order. While it may be true, however, that Alger’s stories were written with more ambiguous intentions, and that they are in principle open to a variety of interpretations that differ from the meaning Hartz ascribed to them, the cases here seem to indicate that, in the eyes of many of the movement actors, it was the Hartzian interpretation that was prevalent in the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’. Whatever the range of other interpretations that may have been produced in the postwar decades, it was the Hartzian-style interpretation that caused anxiety for socialists and social democrats; thus when it comes to discerning the political impact of Alger’s stories, Hartz may have been onto something. Sandage (1995, 1236-7), in his review of Nackenoff’s (1994) book, makes a more general point that captures the basic lesson learned in these case studies: “The hegemonic (mis)-reading of Alger is surely insupportable, but that is not the point. No doubt thousands of individual readers produced oppositional interpretations of Alger’s stories, but most readers lacked the means to translate their readings into power. [...] We need not endorse consensus to recognize hegemony.”

constraint, in that it imposed limits on the language they could employ in their framing efforts, it is significant that the language rules that ‘Americanism’ appeared to be imposing, in many ways aligned with the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation described in chapter 2.

In all three cases, then, my examination of materials pertaining to frame construction processes revealed that the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation was perceived by movement actors to be prevalent in the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’. This seems to provide some support for Hartz’s conceptualization of ‘Americanism’ and its incompatibility with radical discourse because of its conflation with capitalism. Granted, Hartz’s claims about the mechanisms of constraint on the left are shown to be problematic in these cases, (the movement actors were not “irrationally attached” nor “pathetically clinging” to Americanism but were in fact trying to fundamentally redefine it); but that ‘Americanism’—as defined by Hartz, rather than by his critics—imposed constraints nonetheless. And in the case of the CIO it also appears that these constraints were particularly significant at the site of frame construction, having contributed directly to the organization’s framing failures.

Frame Reception and Diffusion

As the chapters on the NECNP and the civil rights movement make clear, the constraints on frame construction processes that were imposed by the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ were not insurmountable. Yet, even when those constraints were surmounted, these cases also ended in the failure to redefine the ‘American Dream’. The chapters revealed repeated instances of social democratic ‘American Dream’ frames failing to resonate; they were either left out of the public arena altogether (for example, the NECNP’s “Provisional Declaration”), or if they were diffused into the public

arena, the versions that achieved such diffusion had been altered in a way that left them stripped of their opposition to the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation. The latter phenomenon was clearly evident in the case of Martin Luther King Jr.’s framing activities. The frames that originally represented attempts to *invert* the meaning of the foundational claim of the ‘American Dream’ were reworked—if and when they were reproduced among the media, public officials, and the wider public—into frames that upheld the legitimacy of that claim.

What are the implications of the framing failures examined in chapters 4 and 5, in relation to debates about Hartz’s ‘Americanism’? As I have already acknowledged, the nature of the frames that were constructed in these cases points to a significant difference in how these actors—as opposed to many within the CIO—responded to the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’. The NECNP and the bridge activists were able to construct American Dream frames that challenged not only the hegemonic understanding of that ideology, but also ‘Americanism’, insofar as the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation was also prevalent in this discursive opportunity structure. The challenge was perhaps most pronounced when the movement actors invoked the ‘American political traditions’ gap in a way that challenged the ‘fusing tendency’ of the capitalist land of opportunity interpretation; their diagnostic frames rejected the presumed inextricability of capitalism and American political ideals, and indeed their prognostic frames often explicitly called for divorcing these elements as the first step to fulfilling those ideals.

In this regard, then, Hartz’s critics can point to these cases as examples of the type of radical discourse that can be fashioned, *contra* Hartz, from ‘Americanism’. In the case of the NECNP, moreover, it is worth noting that the committee’s ‘American political traditions’ gap frames drew attention to the American *Liberal* tradition, and of course this tradition as defined by the NECNP was quite different from Hartz’s description. Nevertheless, the

NECNP's attempts to (re-)define the liberal tradition as an 'equalitarian' tradition, and the committee's emphasis on the need for radical political and economic changes in order to live up to this tradition met with results that do more closely accord with Hartz's analysis. Yes, the 'liberal tradition' underpinning the NECNP's frames was a different liberalism and indeed a different 'Americanism' from that described by Hartz, but these frames had little impact; "[b]y the end of the decade...virtually all the ideas in [the NECNP's] founding document were no longer considered seriously" (Katznelson 1986, 307).

The neglect among Hartz's critics of the NECNP's use of 'American Dream' language is easier to understand than their neglect of 'American Dream' language in the civil rights movement. The majority of 'American Dream' frames I found over the course of my research were not tucked away in obscure archives, and indeed many of them were found in material that is widely accessible to researchers (such as newspapers and online sites). Most importantly, the majority of these frames represented precisely the type of language that scholars who are insistent about the openness and usefulness of 'Americanism' to the left would likely point to. Of course, as was noted in chapter 5, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s use of 'American Dream' language is mentioned by scholars like Gerstle (2001), who emphasizes that "[b]ecause the American civic nationalist tradition was...a capacious creed, capable of accommodating a variety of ideological positions, King had little difficulty weaving into it his religiously based universalism and anticapitalism" (274). But the broader repertoire of social democratic American Dream frames—as offered by King after 1963 and by the other bridge activists throughout the 1960s and beyond—is often left out of consideration. Now, on the one hand, as I alluded to above, the frames identified in chapter 5 appear to lend support to those who reject Hartz's claims about the incompatibility of 'Americanism' and anticapitalism. Crucially, however, the *outcomes* of these framing activities, and the role of the discursive opportunity structure provided by 'Americanism' in bringing about those

outcomes—which I discussed in Part III of chapter 5—seem to provide qualified support for Hartz’s analysis. As I showed there, the only ‘American Dream’ frames that achieved resonance were those that remained within the realm of *exposure of contradiction*; in those instances where the bridge activists were appealing to Americanism by offering ‘American Dream’ frames that fundamentally challenged the ‘capitalist land of opportunity’ interpretation, these efforts consistently faltered. Upon examining this pattern of outcomes more closely, I found that the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ appeared to have had ‘selective’ and ‘filtering’ effects on the frame reception and diffusion processes, virtually erasing the ‘American Dream’ frames that represented *inversion of meaning* from collective popular and scholarly memory. The bridge activists were certainly at times able to fashion radical critiques of capitalism out of the language of ‘Americanism’, then, but even when they did, this type of ‘Americanism’—particularly the interpretation offered in King’s later ‘American Dream’ frames—was reinterpreted and ‘de-radicalized’ once it reached the public. Thus, one way or the other, the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’ appears to have had the type of effects that Hartz’s analysis, rather than those of his critics, would lead us to expect.

Hartz’s ‘Liberal Tradition’: A Broader Assessment

In the essay cited at the beginning of this section, Stears (2010, 201) suggests that “Louis Hartz was wrong to think that American radicals have always been locked into a Lockean liberal frame”; he also contends, however, that

his latter-day critics are also misguided when they suggest that the liberal tradition has always been easily manipulated by radical intellectuals and activists. The truth is rather that although liberalism has sometimes come to the aid of American radicals, it has also on occasion provided an obstacle. (ibid.)

In a sense, the findings of this thesis point to a similarly mixed assessment of the debates with respect to ‘Americanism’. My examination of ‘American Dream’ framing in the postwar era pointed toward an ‘Americanism’ that was in some respects helpful, and in other respects,

quite constraining. Arguably, however, Hartz's analysis is better suited to capturing the constraining nature and effects of Americanism on the failed social democratic American Dream frames. The hegemonic 'Americanism' that I identified in my examination of framing processes, and which contributed to the framing failures in question, was an Americanism in which the 'capitalist land of opportunity' interpretation was clearly prevalent. It was an Americanism that was conflated with capitalism, and in this way it fits more closely with the Hartzian description than that offered by many of his critics.

This is not to suggest that Hartz's analysis of 'Americanism' is without its problems, and indeed as I have pointed out in several places above, the three cases in this thesis offer clear empirical evidence of some of these problems. In important respects, these limitations appear to be rooted in Hartz's method and approach to explaining the role of ideas. It is notable, for example, that despite placing so much weight on the importance of the American 'liberal tradition' for understanding the historical trajectory of leftist movements and leftist thought, Hartz devoted very little time to demonstrating, empirically, *how* that tradition constrained the left (Kloppenber 2001; Lieberman 2002; Nackenoff 2010; Stears 2010). Hartz argued that the United States had been 'born liberal', and had consequently developed an "absolute and irrational attachment" to Lockean, free-market liberalism, and for him, this meant that American society therefore "has within it...a kind of self-completing mechanism, which insures the universality of the liberal idea" (1955, 6). The *Liberal Tradition* offered little in the way of empirical evidence of this 'self-completing mechanism' at work; what it did offer, was a sweeping generalization about the nature and history of American political culture, which, among other things, wrote contingency, complexity (and, indeed, history) out of the story of the American left. As I first noted in chapter 1, many 'exceptionalism' scholars have focused their critiques of Hartz on this aspect of his argument, for it portrays all of the left's failures in the United States as inevitable. Like the works of these critics, my

study has taken a more historicized approach to understanding the limits of the left—in this case, the limits of their social democratic redefinitions of the ‘American Dream’ in postwar United States—and I have rejected the basic Hartzian claim that this outcome, like all other failures of the left, can be explained away by reference to the nation’s ‘exceptionalist’ origins.

It is also important to emphasize that while I do think that Hartz was onto something regarding the power and pervasiveness of ‘pro-capitalist’ ideas in American political culture, there is no question that he took his observations too far, and his tendency to make generalizations left his thesis full of holes and discrepancies—which probably helps to explain why so many scholars have been exasperated by, and urged for a dismissal of, his work. Though I have argued against such a dismissal, the results of my own research have certainly led me to a greater appreciation of the problems with Hartz’s reliance on his ‘liberal tradition’ thesis. The findings of this study add to the already substantial body of existing work that shows that Hartz’s depiction of an entire society being ‘irrationally attached’ to free-market liberalism simply does not hold up empirically. Moreover, as the discussion above and in the case study chapters make clear, where Hartz’s claims about the constraining effects of ‘Americanism’ do hold up to empirical scrutiny, the evidence points to mechanisms quite different from those that Hartz saw at work. That is, while I have argued that the movement actors in the case studies were indeed constrained by the strength of pro-capitalist ideas in American political culture, there was nothing ‘self-completing’ about the mechanisms of constraint. Rather, my examination of the various stages of the ‘framing’ struggles revealed that the discursive opportunity structure (DOS) provided by ‘Americanism’ intervened at different points, and constrained the movement actors in different ways and to different degrees. In every case, the movement actors were ineffective in their efforts to redefine the ‘American Dream’ from its hegemonic capitalist interpretation,

but these outcomes were not inevitable. They were, instead, the result of complex and highly contested ideological and institutional battles.

It is significant, then, that while I found some evidence in support of Hartz's claims regarding the constraining effects of American political culture on the left, I did so using approaches that were far different from those which Hartz himself employed, and for which he has been rightly criticized. I will revisit this point in the next section, but first, I want to reiterate what was first acknowledged in chapter 1—namely, that there is a range of other problems with Hartz's *Liberal Tradition*, in addition to those addressed here. In fact, if there are some elements of Hartz's analysis that may be valid, or at least open to debate or re-examination through the use of alternative approaches, there are also many aspects that appear to be more fundamentally flawed. There is no question, for example, that Hartz missed out on significant aspects of American political culture including and especially struggles around 'race' and religion; as many scholars have pointed out, such struggles have often been central themes in the history not only of the American left, but of the nation as a whole (eg., Ellis 2010; Gerstle 2001; Kloppenberg 2001; Morone 2005; Nackenoff 2005; Smith 1993; 1999). These and other scholars who reject Hartz's claims about American liberal hegemony also correctly emphasize that some of the most significant and persistently divisive issues in contemporary American politics revolve around matters on which Hartz was silent. As a result of his blindspots, therefore, Hartz's interpretation of American political culture is, in some important respects, ill-equipped for offering insights into present-day American society and politics. As James Morone, writing in 2005, observed, for example:

What most distinguishes the United States from other industrial nations is not only liberal economics but a rich, often feverish, religious life. [...] The United States is not just the home of Wal-Mart and McDonalds, short vacations and weak unions. It is also the land of the megachurch, the

evangelical talk shows, the Congressional prayer breakfast and the born-again President with an open mind about creationism (225).

The scholars cited above offer important reminders that Hartz's interpretation of American political culture was, really, an interpretation of certain aspects of it. It is clear, then, that critics have made a good case for "analyz[ing] America as the ongoing product of often conflicting multiple traditions" (Smith 1993, 563); yet, when it comes to understanding why a 'social democratic' tradition has not been among these, the findings of this thesis suggest that perhaps Hartz's analysis of 'Americanism' retains some relevance.

4. Reflections on the 'Framing Perspective'

In this study, I have sought to demonstrate that Hartz's interpretation of American political culture, while flawed in crucial respects, retains some relevance—but I have done so by drawing from different sources than those relied on by Hartz, and through the use of a theoretical framework that is distinctively different from that employed by Hartz. The 'framing perspective', in particular, offered a variety of conceptual and analytical tools for examining the meaning and role of 'American Dream' language in the case studies, and—as should be clear from this chapter's summary of the study's key findings—these tools were central to providing an explanatory account of the failed efforts to redefine the 'American Dream'. It is important to recall, however, that my use of the framing perspective was oriented around relatively recent developments to the approach. In this section I will offer some general concluding thoughts about the benefits of moving beyond the traditional framing perspective, and I will briefly consider why social scientists who remain intrigued by 'American Exceptionalism', might consider employing the (revised) framing approach.

In chapter 1, I suggested that the framing perspective represents a useful starting point for social movement researchers who want to 'take ideas seriously', and I highlighted a number of developments to the approach emerging from some of the more recent framing

literature, including: Westby's (2005) framework for empirically identifying the relationship between 'frames' and 'ideologies'; Hallgrimsdottir (2006) and others' insistence on the importance of examining the sites of frame *construction* (rather than just sites of frame *reception*); and the efforts to incorporate the insights of the political opportunity model through the introduction of the concept of 'discursive opportunity structure' (Koopmans and Statham 1999). This thesis has relied on—and greatly benefited from—the tools and insights offered by these amendments to the framing perspective. Westby's (2005) typology, for example, provided a basic guideline for systematically identifying and categorizing 'American Dream' frames based on their relationship to the 'capitalist land of opportunity' interpretation; by differentiating between frames that represented attempts to *expose contradiction* and those that represented attempts to *invert* the meaning of this tenet of the 'American Dream', I was able to identify patterns in the framing outcomes within and across the three cases. These patterns lent empirical support for my definitional analysis of the American Dream, and for my contention that the ideology's political capaciousness has been overstated in the existing literature. The concept of 'discursive opportunity structure' was another helpful tool, prompting me to adopt a wider analytical lens that went beyond strictly focusing on the 'American Dream' and the frames that drew from it. This approach facilitated an identification of the crucial role of the broader cultural context—including and especially the DOS provided by 'Americanism'—in motivating movement actors to use 'American Dream' language, and in influencing which 'American Dream' frames succeeded, and which ones failed.

It is, however, the focus on researching frame construction processes that marks this study's most significant departure from the traditional framing perspective. In fact, the benefits of the other conceptual tools under discussion here would have been far less, had my research relied strictly on an analysis of materials pertaining to frame reception and diffusion.

Without exploring the dynamics behind the creation and presentation of ‘American Dream’ frames, it would have been difficult, for example, to assert with some confidence, which frames represented the movements’ attempts at ‘exposing contradiction’, and which represented attempts at ‘inversion of meaning’. And it would have been difficult to identify and demonstrate how the movement actors perceived (and were often constrained by) the discursive opportunity structure provided by ‘Americanism’.

The Framing Perspective and American Exceptionalism

Although most scholars will agree that “the comparative weakness of the US left and welfare state is ‘overdetermined’ by a myriad of factors” (Schwartz 2014, 61), the role of ideas—especially those associated (rightly or wrongly) with American political culture—has represented one of the most divisive issues within the field, especially following the publication of Hartz’s *Liberal Tradition*. To what extent might the framing perspective, particularly the approach highlighted in this study, offer a way of moving the debates forward? On the basis of the findings here, I would suggest that the perspective could indeed represent a way of revisiting some of these old debates through a new lens. For example, a central theme that underpins Hartz’s *Liberal Tradition*—and one that has continued to animate discussion within the exceptionalism literature—is the question of “why Americans have failed to consider certain options as either feasible or desirable when those same ideas were widely accepted in other places” (Glenn 2005, 236). This theme also underscored one of the central starting points of this thesis: the observation that, despite the efforts of some labour and civil rights leaders, many social democratic ideas remained beyond the “distinctive limits” of American political discourse in the decades following the Second World War (Katznelson 1986, 308). When Katznelson made this general observation back in 1986, he suggested that social scientists did not yet “possess the analytical tools to make

sense of these silences” (310). In this study, it was through the deployment of the framing perspective—a perspective that has largely been neglected in the exceptionalism literature—that I was able to offer some insight into those silences. The examination of ‘American Dream’ frame construction dynamics among socialists and social democrats revealed how much of “the ‘not said’ and the ‘not thought’ of economic and social policy in the United States” (ibid., 308) between the 1940s and 1960s *was* indeed ‘said’ and ‘thought’ of, but often only behind closed door meetings, or within private planning documents and correspondence. The use of this approach also offered a framework for understanding and elucidating how things that *were* said in the public arena were susceptible to being reinterpreted; that is, frame ‘reception’ and ‘diffusion’ were also important processes in the story of how the ‘distinctive silences’ of postwar American discourse came about.

As a result of examining social movement framing processes, then, I was able to shed light not only on the limits of the ‘American Dream’ ideology in postwar United States, but also on some of the mechanisms through which American political culture may have constrained the American left. There were undoubtedly a mix of complex factors involved in bringing about these failed social democratic projects, but insofar as American political culture may have contributed, it was the (revised) framing perspective that offered the tools for empirically demonstrating some of the constraining influences at work. Perhaps then, for researchers who continue to find merit in exploring the nature of American political culture—including those interested in discerning the meaning of the language(s) of ‘Americanism’, and its relationship to the history of the American left—the framing perspective might offer a way of moving forward.

5. Conclusion

Nearly twenty years ago, Michael Kazin (1995, 1511) observed that, “a history that does not grapple with the reasons for and consequences of failure will not take the current Left very far”. A decade later, he and Joseph McCartin offered the following thoughts on ‘Americanism’ and the American left:

In our opinion, the ideals of Americanism deserve not just to endure but to be revived and practiced as the foundation of a new kind of progressive politics. [...] The national ideology will continue to flourish, whether or not it is embraced by the left. (2006, 16)

“Progressive intellectuals”, they continued several lines later, “must do more than rail against patriotic ideals and symbols. For to do so is to wage a losing battle—one that marginalizes us and sets us against the overwhelming majority of Americans for no worthwhile intellectual or political purpose” (ibid.). In this study, however, I have demonstrated that not all of the left’s ‘lost battles’ have been those fought by “rail[ing] against patriotic ideals and symbols” (ibid., 16). The failed efforts to bring about social democratic transformation were, ultimately, also failed efforts to appropriate and transform not just the ‘American Dream’ but ‘Americanism’ more generally; the use of ‘American Dream’ language in the CIO’s early postwar program, in the NECNP’s ‘Ideas for a New Party’, and in the broader civil rights movement of the 1960s all represented precisely the type of efforts that Kazin and McCartin, and many other left intellectuals have called for in recent years. On the basis of Kazin’s own observation made back in 1995, then, perhaps the findings of this study provide a cautionary tale against the kind of optimistic embrace of ‘Americanism’ that many of Hartz’s critics have called for.

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