

Sovereignty in the City: The Tacticalization of 'Disallowed' Life

Benjamin Taylor

Political Science, Virginia Tech, benbt16@vt.edu

Abstract: In this paper, I perform close readings of several of the narratives included in the *This American Life* podcast in order to rethink sovereignty outside of the framework of the state as it is lived and practiced in everyday circumstances. Drawing on Bonnie Honig's reformulation of sovereignty as a modality of power that is not possessed by a singular authority but instead embodied in the collective activity of a people, I use these narratives to assist in theorizing a politics that seeks not emancipation but rather the enactment of futures that are more egalitarian. Such a politics is best conceived as a struggle against forms of violence enacted at specific sites rather than as expressions of unified forms of domination. To undertake this analysis, I begin by briefly outlining Honig's line of inquiry, after which I turn to the specific narratives documented by *This American Life*, reading them not merely as the chronicles of life in Englewood but as theoretically fecund exemplars of collective and individual sovereignty. Finally, I conclude by exploring what the reading of such narratives as instances of sovereignty can reveal for us regarding politics more generally. Conceiving of the characters in these narratives as sovereign actors seeking to survive rather than as either helpless sufferers (those who experience violence) or criminals (those who act violently) helps to illuminate the complex political dynamics that sustain poverty and produce violence in locales such as Chicago's Englewood neighborhood.

Keywords: Cities, Sovereignty, Bonnie Honig, Urban, Freedom, Situated Resistance, Biopolitics, Biopower, High School, Gangs

Introduction

In February 2013, the National Public Radio show *This American Life* aired a two-part episode entitled "Harper High School" that examined life in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood. The episode is comprised of several short stories, many of which deal with the violent conditions that characterize Englewood and other similar Chicago neighborhoods. The narratives chronicle the lives of, among others, a teenager who accidentally shot and killed his brother, several students who easily obtained guns despite Chicago's strict gun laws, and a student who had witnessed multiple murders throughout his life. The world the members of the Englewood community inhabit is frequently tragic. Children die young, and even walking home from school becomes a coordinated performance designed to signal one's allegiances (or lack thereof) in order to remain safe. Yet in the face of dire social and economic conditions, the Englewood residents find ways to cope. They survive.

In this paper, I perform close readings of several of the narratives included in the *This American Life* podcast in order to rethink sovereignty outside of the framework of the state as it is lived and practiced in everyday circumstances. Drawing on Bonnie Honig's reformulation of sovereignty as a modality of power that is not possessed by a singular authority but instead embodied in the collective activity of a people, I use these narratives to assist in theorizing a politics that seeks not emancipation but rather the enactment of futures that are more egalitarian. Such a politics is best conceived as a struggle against forms of violence enacted at specific sites rather than as

expressions of unified forms of domination. To undertake this analysis, I begin by briefly outlining Honig's line of inquiry, after which I turn to the specific narratives documented by *This American Life*, reading them not merely as the chronicles of life in Englewood but as theoretically fecund exemplars of collective and individual sovereignty. Finally, I conclude by exploring what the reading of such narratives as instances of sovereignty can reveal for us regarding politics more generally. Understanding the characters in these narratives as sovereign actors seeking to survive rather than as either helpless sufferers (those who experience violence) or criminals (those who act violently) helps to illuminate the complex political dynamics that sustain poverty and produce violence in locales such as Chicago's Englewood neighborhood.

Honigian Sovereignty

The narratives I examine all exhibit characteristics of what Bonnie Honig refers to as "mere life" and "more life," by which she signifies the "concept of survival that signals in its doubleness both the needs of life and the call to overlife."ⁱ That is, "mere life" refers to social conditions that are barely inhabitable, while "more life" is an overabundance of the material and social supports that make "life" livable. Mere and more life are not opposed but rather exist in "agonistic tension and mutual indebtedness."ⁱⁱ Within the framework of mere and more life, projects of subsistence simultaneously implicate imaginative futures in which inegalitarian distributions of precarity and livability have been displaced by richer, more broadly fulfilling alternatives; the "everyday" and the "extraordinary" imbricate and intertwine. In Chicago, gangs, those whose lives have been affected by gang violence, and organizations — such as Harper High School — that seek to curb gang violence are all engaged in practices of survival (mere life), some of which concurrently aim toward a future in which life is more livable (more life).

Mere and more life are central to Honig's theorization of sovereignty outside of a Schmittian tradition that locates the source of sovereignty in the ability of the sovereign to "decide on the exception" to the law, i.e., to suspend the legal order in cases of emergency.ⁱⁱⁱ Instead of conceptualizing sovereignty within a unified, hierarchical, decision-oriented, legal-judicial model, Honig reads decisionist elements in everyday, localized political movements and orientations, writing, "I focus here on the role of decision in democratic action and governance, and not in its exceptionality — as 'the decision' or 'decisionism' — but in its ordinariness, as discretion. Decision as discretion calls attention not to the suspension of the rule of law but to its daily operations."^{iv} For Honig, the law's suspension at the declaration of the sovereign is in no way self-evident. The quotidian rituals of democratic practice orient citizens to sets of rules and processes of rulemaking. Whether the law is suspended depends upon whether the members of the "people" affirm and accept its suspension, not merely on formal legal decisions of an all-powerful sovereign. Because "the law" does not exist independently from how legal dictates are carried out, the law's suspension is a material, not merely a declarative phenomenon, and it depends on whether individuals and groups alter their patterns of interaction, not on whether a single sovereign declares the law no longer to be in effect. Such patterns of interaction must at a minimum be rooted in projects that sustain life, whether of a community or of an individual, but they can also be enacted in ways that expand the possibilities and opportunities of material abundance to either greater or fewer numbers of people.

It is in this latter sense that those affiliated with Harper High School engage in practices of sovereignty. Residents undertake strategies of survival (mere life) on behalf of more egalitarian

and prosperous futures (more life), but these practices are poorly accounted for within legal–juridical accounts of sovereignty. While Honig’s analysis is primarily focused on democratic possibilities *within* contemporary political structures and discourses, her arguments apply just as effectively to each and every site of action in concert, not merely to those spaces that are strictly considered to belong to the “government.” This extends to agents and organizations that have in some sense been “left behind” by the official governmental agencies, as the podcast makes clear the Englewood neighborhood has been. Harper High School lacks the permanent funding required to provide its students with the educational opportunities they need. Some of its students come to school hungry because there is no food at home. Violence or the threat of violence is the daily reality for many attendees. Those who wish to avoid it entirely are faced with an unappealing alternative: stay inside. In a state that operates according to a biopolitical, neoliberal logic — wherein minorities and the poor are not afforded the protections of the legal order, which instead shifts the resources needed to survive away from them — Englewood residents are what Giorgio Agamben refers to as “*homines sacri*”: figures excluded from the law’s substantive protections.^v

By refusing to see the law either as a self-enacting set of propositions or as dependent on the will of a single sovereign, Honig provides the resources for thinking about sovereignty’s exercise even amongst those populations that neoliberal logics “disallow to the point of death.”^{vi} Every day, the administrators at Harper High School undertake a politics of discretion in the promotion of both mere and more life. They enact strategies of survival that aim to provide their students with more egalitarian futures, and these imaginative possibilities drive Harper’s administrators to act. Simultaneously, students must make decisions about how they will act within the conditions of violence that surround them, either responding with external violence against others or internal “violence” against the self. Discretion — socially situated decision-making in the context of one’s daily duties — is the basis of this democratic politics, not decisionism regarding the law’s application.^{vii} The law, while not wholly irrelevant, does not have the exclusive claim to sovereignty that theorists of legal–juridical sovereignty want to credit to it.

In the remainder of this paper, I build on Honig’s claim that “radical founding and everyday maintenance, the people and the multitude, the lawgiver and the charlatan, mere life and more life are undecidably implicated in each other in ways we ignore at our peril” by focusing briefly on four of the vignettes presented in the *This American Life* podcast, performing close readings of the narratives in order to rethink sovereignty outside of the framework of the state.^{viii} The decisions made represent a mixture of orientations toward potential imagined futures, some of which tend toward “more life,” others of which only strive for “mere life.” The practices undertaken are complex and messy, as action in concert always is. They do not provide the surety of universality or rational deducibility, yet they exhibit democratic action’s dangers and potentialities — neither of which is ever separable from the other — and take into serious consideration both material and imaginary elements of sovereignty’s enactment, including the futures for which actors are striving and the steps they are taking to realize them.

Harper High School

The first narrative I am examining deals with a Chicago school system program that provided schools such as Harper, designated a “turnaround school,” with millions of extra dollars in order to revamp the services that it offers to its students.^{ix} This funding, though, ceases after a span of

five years, and because it is so substantial (\$2 million for 2012 and \$1.6 million for 2013 out of the school's \$9 million overall budget), the positions and services it funds at Harper will have to be cut when it is rescinded. The reporter for the segment, Ben Calhoun, relates an encounter between a staff member, Marcel Smith, whose pay comes from the added funds, and a student who was asked to leave class for taking a second cookie from among those his teacher offered to the class. The teacher had told the student to take only one cookie or to explain why he deserved more, but the student, who had not eaten the night before, was embarrassed to offer justification. Consequently, he was banished from the classroom. Smith runs into the student while both are travelling the hallway, learns of his plight, and provides the student with some cereal from his own office.

Certainly, this action can be read merely as an act of charity in light of the needs of a particular student, but at the same time, the structural underpinnings of the situation make it much more than that. By ceasing, if only temporarily, to cast Harper as *homines sacri* — as members of a population effectively ignored by the law — the City of Chicago diminished the “differential distribution of precarity” amongst inner-city schools in Chicago; for a short time, Harper was on better financial footing, and its students benefited from the presence of an expanded staff.^x Chicago treated the lives of students at Harper as worthy of increased support. But it was not enough that money was infused into the school. The agents who work at Harper, such as Marcel Smith, must be attuned to the opportunities for forms of “decisionism” in the everyday. These are opportunities for exercising the authority granted to them in potentially novel ways on behalf of their students: “discretion.” There is no generalizable norm or juridical code according to which Marcel Smith could have been required to provide a specific student with food so that the student could go about his day without being hungry. This is what Honig means when she writes, “Without interpretation, law is insensitive to particularity and nuance.”^{xi} The application of broad, unfeeling legal dictates is always mediated by human beings who have to make determinations about how those principles apply. While not acting according to a specific dictate, Smith is operating within a type of discretion with respect to how the technical, contractual requirements of his vocation apply to the wide range of real-world phenomena he encounters.

It would be strange if not incomprehensible to understand the discretionary character of Smith's action as “sovereign” in a traditional sense such as that proposed by Carl Schmitt, who, as noted above, argues that sovereignty's signature is rooted in the sovereign's authority to “deci[de] on the exception,” suspending the entirety of the legal–juridical order in the face of emergencies.^{xii} Smith's “decision” does not regard an “exception” in this catastrophic sense. However, it is an “exception” in the sense that providing extra food to a student temporarily suspends the conditions that hamper the student's ability to perform well in school. It is not that the legal order is suspended; it is that a staff member whose job it is to understand when interventions are required to support Harper students has made an everyday, individualized, discretionary choice to provide material aid to a specific student. Scores of students pass Smith daily without requiring the mere necessity of sustenance, yet he must remain attuned to the needs of those students who do. For Honig, such a situation is important for illuminating the doubleness of “survival” as both “mere life and more life.”^{xiii} Surviving entails simple existence, but it also implies “a dividend — that surprise extra, the gift that exceeds rightful expectations, the surplus that exceeds causality.”^{xiv} The cereal was a surprise surplus, enabled by a larger financial scheme

that funded Smith's job, but it was also the bare minimum that the student needed to hope to be successful in school for the day.

But what about when the money runs out? What happens when Harper is once again returned to conditions of "mere life" because funding priorities have changed? How else is the distinction between and mutual constitution of mere life and more life in the paradigm of democratic discretion exhibited at Harper High School? To begin to answer such questions, I now analyze two stories whose participants have radically opposed responses to the forms of violence with which they are confronted. The first is the tale of a student, Thomas, who struggles against his desire to commit violence as a response to the forms of violence that he has experienced, while the second is an account of a group of friends who formed a gang for self-protection, which, in the wake of their leader's death, expanded broadly throughout the city of Chicago.

Nearly every time reporter Alex Kotlowitz visits the school's social-work office, he sees Thomas. On one occasion, Alex strikes up a conversation with Thomas, attempting to understand why he is in the office so often. Thomas, we learn, has been a witness to a number of shootings, at least two of them fatal. The first occurred when both he and the murder victim were only ten years old. From the discussion, it becomes clear that Thomas is struggling with grief at an existential level. He is fighting against allowing lingering resentment from these incidents to become a part of the fabric of his identity. This is most evident as Thomas engages in conversation with Anita Stewart, his social worker, who is asking him which of the forms of violence he has experienced stand out most strongly:

Thomas: Man, I got older. That stuff is old now.

Anita: It's old? You remember what happened, right? ... Does it really get old, Thomas?

Thomas: It's done now.

Anita: It's done. I know and I understand that it's done. But does it really get old, where you can say, "OK, this is over. I don't think about it anymore?"

Thomas: But if I think about it, I'll do something.

Anita: You'll do something like what?

Thomas: Try to hurt somebody.

Thomas proffers roughly the same answer when Kotlowitz asks on a separate occasion where Thomas sees himself in ten years. According to Kotlowitz, he says, "Might be in jail, because I think I'm going to hurt someone." Thomas then tells Kotlowitz a story from shortly after a fellow student and good friend of his had been murdered in his presence. Some days later, his cousin was pushed to the ground by an older boy, so Thomas punched the boy hard enough that one of the boy's teeth became lodged in Thomas's hand. Whereas Thomas had been unable to sleep since the murder, he was able to sleep after releasing his anger in an act of retaliatory aggression.

Thomas's rage boils up within him, and it would take the hardest of hearts not to be sympathetic to the depth of the anguish caused by the experience of significant loss at such a young age. As opposed to seeing Thomas as (or demanding that he be) someone who resists his proclivity to violence with "nonviolence" understood as passivity, we might instead understand Thomas's constant trips to Anita's office as what Judith Butler calls an "aggressive vigilance over aggression's tendency to emerge as violence."^{xv} Butler describes nonviolence as a struggle

against the self, predicated on the “violence involved in the making and sustaining of the subject.”^{xvi} Yet Thomas’s options are limited. The struggle for nonviolence, he indicates, cannot last forever. What will he do when he leaves high school, when Anita is no longer around? His options seem only to be a turn to the external forms of violence against others that he has so far resisted. The techniques of sovereignty over himself that he is deploying are unstable at best; it is unclear how much longer they will remain effective. Again, there is a form of discretion here that does not correspond adequately with “the decision.” This discretion is embodied in a set of practices situated within an already existing social framework (of which law is but one element) that requires attunement to sites where survival, both as more and mere life, is threatened. For Thomas, the “mere life” of staying alive and refraining from violence against others despite the violence perpetually forced upon him grounds any further possibilities for imaginative self-mastery beyond the demands of the quotidian.

Thomas’s response to violence is not the only one taken by boys his age. Ben Calhoun narrates the formation of a gang known as Terrance Green City (TGC), named for a popular student who was killed by a rival gang in July 2009. Terrance and his friends had no interest in joining a gang. However, as they grew older — they became “hard legs” in the parlance of the neighborhood — members of another gang began to harass and embarrass them on a regular basis. Terrance gathered his friends to found a new group called “Yung Lyfe,” which stood for “young, unique, noble gentlemen living youthful and fulfilled every day.” The idealism of the name, the “overlife” that it posited when confronted with the need to act in order to continue living, quickly faltered in light of the social reality with which its members were faced; it receded into “mere life.” Yung Lyfe’s members acquired guns, and the situation became violent the summer that Terrance died. One of his friends recounts, “I’m not going to lie. We were shooting pretty much every day. It was wolf season.” Terrance’s death sparked a wave of violence that accounted for at least seven ensuing deaths and ten other shootings. One of the deaths was of a Harper student. Additionally, Yung Lyfe transformed into TGC, which expanded significantly within the Englewood neighborhood and abandoned the promise to more life that its original name signified. From the perspective of mere and more life, the promise of creating the conditions for a fulfilled life accompanied the risk not only of individual *lives* but of future conditions of *livability* (in the sense that the conditions of violence that have resulted from Terrance’s death are essentially unlivable).

Further, even prior to their establishment of the gang, Yung Lyfe’s members were marked according to two different registers: age/physical maturity and geography. We see here the overlap of the traditional logics of sovereignty, in which the jurisdictional reach of a sovereign is geographically delimited, and the logic of biopolitical governmentality, in which a specific population (males of a certain age in this case) is understood to be an object of regulation. In the specific case of TGC’s formation, identity emerged first, not territorial securitization, though the identity that was produced was constitutively related to the territorial practices of others. Because another group had marked Yung Lyfe’s members as bodies that needed to be monitored, bodies foreign to the territory over which the former group was sovereign, Yung Lyfe’s group identity emerged. Since Yung Lyfe has transformed into TGC, it has claimed territory of its own, and it would be reasonable to think that TGC’s members might be engaging in some of the same practices that led to Yung Lyfe’s original formation.

Calhoun also describes a “mythology” that has developed around Terrance, which includes several students who “use his last name, Green, in place of their own.” Terrance, *homo sacer* from the perspective of the statist orders that permitted his perpetual harassment and bullying, pushing him to alternative channels of self-defense, has served a sacrificial and consecrating function for the students who knew him and who still affiliate with TGC. The spilling of his blood has ordained the emergence of a new political-theological order that rests upon a spatial imaginary perpetually secured and legitimated through violence. The bodies of TGC’s members are performatively identical to Terrance’s mythologized body; they are *homines sacri* in relation to the state, which would seek to eliminate the violent threat they ostensibly pose, and sovereigns in relation to themselves and to those who respect and believe in the mythology of Terrance’s legacy. TGC enacts practices that reflect a conception of sovereignty rooted in territory, wrapped up in the religious and mythical overtones on which traditional conceptions of sovereignty depend. TGC mobilizes practices of sovereignty that oppose and subvert legal orders by committing acts of violence that make life more dangerous for the residents of the neighborhoods where TGC operates. As *homines sacri*, TGC members may be killed by the “sovereigns” of other gangs without penalty, except for the threat of retaliation, as well as by the governmental orders that seek to secure legal sovereignty at the state, municipal, and city levels.

In the opposition of these narratives — Thomas, who doubts his self-sovereignty, and Terrance, whose desire for abundant life imbued his sacrificial body with mythological and sustaining power — it becomes clear that discretion alone is insufficient for the founding of livable orders. Discretion must be mobilized on behalf of “more life” instead of only “mere life.” Political life is shown to be inherently risky; freedom of choice alone clearly lacks emancipatory potential. Subjects seeking life’s surpluses may found orders that imperil the mere life of others on behalf of their own mere life (TGC), while subjects actively warring within themselves to maintain mere life may likewise fall into practices destructive of even that (Thomas). The final outcomes of these political struggles of self-organization cannot be ascertained in advance, and no final end beyond the struggle can ever be reached.

It is in the social context of such forms of violence that the fourth narrative, a decision by Harper High School to hold its Homecoming events despite the occurrence of a shooting mere days before, appears most significant. In this final vignette, the school’s staff puts in a 14-hour workday without extra pay simply to ensure that students can enjoy themselves. Calhoun summarizes the workers’ feelings as the events occur: “For the staff, who have been here at this point for fourteen hours, the significance of this moment is not lost. It’s regular life. They were able to give the kids regular high school for a night — a dance.” The term “regular” takes on a different valence in the context of Harper. Regular for whom? At the expense or thanks to the sacrifice of whom? What are the social conditions or relations that make normalcy difficult to achieve? The determination by the staff to act in the face of the risks of violence in order to preserve a safe environment for the attendees results from the simultaneous pursuit of ensuring “mere life” — it is simply a “regular” high school evening — and “more life” — it is an evening that the social conditions of Harper made all-but impossible. These events could only be achieved through the Harper staff’s democratic discretion in the face of conditions of violence, such as, the staff members’ individual determinations to work overlong hours in the face of the not insignificant risk that violence could occur at the event. Harper’s staff members have embraced and enacted a specific imaginary of sovereignty. It is a sovereignty of survival, with all

the complexity that the term entails, both in terms of mere subsistence and the surfeit of life brought about by enhancing the conditions of livability.

Situated Resistance

These narratives help us to theorize the situated, contextual, all-too human character of democratic politics and enactments of sovereignty. Numerous formations and imaginaries of sovereignty proliferate, varying from territorially imagined gangs rooted in the mythologizing of violence and death to the socially embedded and fractured sovereignty of subjects that struggle against themselves in light of the extreme conditions of violence they have experienced. Sovereignty is not merely signified by the ability to declare a state of exception, as the exception has in some sense already been declared by biopolitical statist practices that deem the “inner cities” to be occupied by “disposable lives.” When the “money runs out,” it is the poorest urban residents who take the hit. They are vulnerable to all forms of state (non)intervention into their lives. In response, Harper High School’s staff members work in pursuit of alternative futures they are trying to bring about on behalf of themselves and their students, enacting new worlds through countless decisions by innumerable agents at myriad junctures in a space where sovereignty as law’s suspension is functionally irrelevant, if not altogether unintelligible. Harper’s staff enacts a politics of “more life” in conditions where “mere life” itself is regularly threatened, employing novel practices of sovereignty in order to do so.

These collective actions are historically and socially situated forms of resistance to localized regimes of violence; they are not part of an attempt to “overthrow” an overarching logic responsible for all forms of domination and repression. All forms of “structural” domination — racial, patriarchal, class-based, religious, etc. — are purely supervenient: they are only made possible through specific forms of violence deployed against specific subjects. The situation of Englewood residents reflects the racialized character of urban poverty in the United States, but the actions of the administrators at Harper High School are not aimed at overthrowing a particular uniform mode of domination, even one that is racist or classist. Rather, subjects are enmeshed in a constant play of relations of force that act upon them — including along racial and class-based lines — and against which they act via a variety of practices aimed toward an imagined and contestable future order in which violence (or certain forms thereof) is diminished and an overfull abundance of the conditions that sustain life is realized.

Acknowledging the situatedness of both resistance *and* domination in the context of Harper High School helps to demonstrate that revolutionary projects do not involve ontologically disjunctive historical developments. In fact, such breaks are impossible. Ordering, crafting, mastering, and remaking the self (put differently, “more life”) likewise do not and cannot involve the absolute abandonment of past forms of thinking or ways of living (that is to say, “false consciousness”) in favor of a *praxis* that is by its very nature liberating; rather, the formation of either one’s own identity or the social context one inhabits involves slow change, out of which emerge new social and identarian formations that are equally — though differently — situated. Subjects are not “freed.” They are only altered. This by definition entails subjects’ enmeshment in new relations of power, which may merely permit subjects to survive or may bring about more egalitarian, abundant realities. The question is not how we can become free but rather what organizations of power we are willing to accept. What do we desire? And who is this “we” that asks such questions?

While there are strands of Left thought, such as those advanced by Honig, that emphasize the perpetually agonistic, contested nature of politics and political concepts, it is imperative that such discourses of tacticalization displace the vestiges of liberal freedom that still inhabit the Left's grammars and concepts. Emancipatory projects are unachievable; tactical negotiations of power are the rule. In the spirit of Honig and Harper High School's administrators, we must instead posit imagined futures for which it is possible to strive. Simultaneously, we can recognize in the strategies of survival enacted by *homines sacri* all across the globe — whether in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood, gang-controlled regions of Central America, or any other space where neoliberal, biopolitical regimes have permitted the lives of some to flourish while constraining the imaginable futures of others — the reclamation of a politics of tactical sovereignty that employs “discretion” rather than “decision” in order to negotiate the travails of the everyday. Such a language allows for a greater proliferation of democratic imaginaries by relocating sovereignty in the quotidian rather than in the purely formal and legal features of politics.

This paper is an argument in favor of pragmatic, situated political action, action that does not acquiesce to the prevailing regimes of power but instead works at specific, concrete sites of domination and subjugation in the simultaneous pursuit of subsistence (mere life) and imaginative futures that may be more abundant (more life). Such futures are not emancipating, and neither are they philosophically justified or justifiable. They are instead the futures available to those who “take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, being practiced in maintaining [themselves] on insubstantial ropes and possibilities and dancing even near abysses. Such a spirit would be a [sovereign subject] par excellence.”^{xvii} It is this form of political imagination that the administrators at Harper High School exhibit and which those of us committed to democratic orders must adopt broadly should we want to have any hope at intervening practically into politics. Our politics are simultaneously aimed at survival and “overlife” (both of which terms are themselves historically and socially situated). Just as the administrators at Harper High School sacrifice on behalf of the students who attend their institutions, so must we who embrace democracy be prepared to sacrifice on behalf of more egalitarian orders, resisting the specific modes of violence through which structural forms of domination are generated and perpetuated. Only such a politics can be considered democratic.

Notes

i. Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), 10.

ii. *Ibid.*, 11.

iii. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.

iv. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, xvi-xvii.

v. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1998). I find Agamben's term provocative, though his though his account of the relationship between the legal order and power's exercise is, in my view, inadequate.

vi. In Foucault's original account of biopolitics in *The Will to Know*, he describes the displacement of the right of the sovereign to kill or let live with the governmental order's ability to “foster life or disallow it to the point of death” with respect to the population “taken as a whole.” Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction [The Will to Know]*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books Edition, March 1990, (New York: Vintage, 1976), 138-139.

vii. For the purposes of this essay, I do not want to over-emphasize individualistic discretion, but it is the case that any democratic politics will be formed out of individuals acting in concert, which means that discretion, while it relies on acceptance and reception by others when externally oriented, also applies to a politics of the self. One of the narratives recounted deals with such a subject.

Moreover, it is important to note that in Honig's account of discretion, she is dealing explicitly with the administrative discretion afforded to those who are in administrative roles within the U.S. government's bureaucracy. Specifically, she focuses on Assistant Secretary of Labor Louis Freeland Post's actions during the First Red Scare of 1919. Post used the power of his office to refuse to deport several thousand immigrants who had been detained under the Sedition Act, in part by applying to each case standards of due process that were not legally required but to which he argued he was bound. Thus, "discretion" takes on a slightly different cast in this context as it deals with a public official's navigation of legal strictures in the pursuit of more egalitarian (and arguably democratic) ends. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 69-86.

However, the politics that Honig is describing does not need to be bound within state structures. Her newest work, *Public Things, Democracy in Disrepair* (New York: Fordham UP, 2017), argues for the role that public objects and practices play in forming democratic groupings of the sort discussed here, and many of her examples involve non-state actors (such as Native American tribes and the Occupy Wall Street movement). Read in conjunction with each other, Honig's works promote just the sort of rethinking of sovereignty discussed here.

viii. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 11.

ix. All of the details for the ensuing narratives are from Ira Glass, "Harper High School, Part Two," *This American Life*, accessed December 12, 2016, <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/488/harper-high-school-part-two>. The first of these two podcasts is invaluable for providing context, though I do not draw specifically from any of its narratives here. Ira Glass, "Harper High School, Part One," *This American Life*, accessed December 12, 2016, <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/487/transcript>.

x. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, Paperback edition (New York: Verso, 2010), 25.

xi. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 77.

xii. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5. As the reviewer for this article noted, Schmitt's theorization of sovereignty can be applied outside of a merely legal context to any situation in which there are intelligible rules or norms that constrain action. However, as I read Schmitt, he is himself concerned with *legal* sovereignty, not with the range of potential applications of his theories regarding sovereignty.

xiii. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 11.

xiv. *Ibid.*, 10.

xv. Butler, *Frames of War*, 170.

xvi. *Ibid.*

xvii. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974 [1882, 1887]), 290.

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1998.

Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Paperback edition. New York: Verso, 2010.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction [The Will to Know]*. Translated by Robert Hurley. Vintage Books Edition, March 1990. New York: Vintage, 1976.

Glass, Ira. *Harper High School, Part One*. This American Life. Accessed December 12, 2016. <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/487/transcript>.

———. *Harper High School, Part Two*. This American Life. Accessed December 12, 2016. <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/488/harper-high-school-part-two>.

Honig, Bonnie. *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

———. *Public Things, Democracy in Disrepair*. New York: Fordham UP, 2017.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974 [1882, 1887].

Schmitt, Carl. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Translated by George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.