# WHY MORALIZE UPON IT?

## DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION THROUGH AMERICAN LITERATURE AND FILM

BRIAN DANOFF

# Why Moralize upon It?

# Politics, Literature, & Film

Series Editor: Lee Trepanier, Samford University

The Politics, Literature, & Film series is an interdisciplinary examination of the intersection of politics with literaure and/or film. The series is receptive to works that use a variety of methodological approaches, focus on any period from antiquity to the present, and situate their analysis in national, comparative, or global contexts. Politics, Literature, & Film seeks to be truly interdisicplinary by including authors from all the social sciences and humanities, such as political science, sociology, psychology, literature, philosophy, history, religious studies, and law. The series is open to both American and non-American literature and film. By putting forth bold and innovative ideas that appeal to a broad range of interests, the series aims to enrich our conversations about literature, film, and their relationship to politics.



**Recent Titles**

*Why Moralize upon It?: Democratic Education through American Literature and Film,* by Brian Danoff
*The Unknown Satanic Verses Controversy on Race and Religion,* by Üner Daglier
*Theology and Geometry: Essays on John Kennedy Toole's A Confederacy of Dunces,* edited by Leslie Marsh
*Science Fiction and Political Philosophy: From Bacon to Black Mirror,* edited by Steven Michels and Timothy McCranor
*Age of Anxiety: Meaning, Identity, and Politics in 21st Century Film and Literature,* by Anthony M. Wachs and Jon D. Schaff
*Game of Thrones and the Theories of International Relations,* by Ñusta Carranza Ko and Laura D. Young
*Possibility's Parents: Stories at the End of Liberalism,* by Margaret Seyford Hrezo and Nicolas Pappas
*Lights, Camera, Execution!: Cinematic Portrayals of Capital Punishment,* by Helen J. Knowles, Bruce E. Altschuler, and Jaclyn Schildkraut

# Why Moralize upon It?

## *Democratic Education through American Literature and Film*

Brian Danoff

LEXINGTON BOOKS
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Lexington Books
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

6 Tinworth Street, London SE11 5AL, United Kingdom



All quotations by Abraham Lincoln are drawn from *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858* and *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1859–1865*, both edited by Don Fehrencacher and both published by the Library of America in 1989. These quotations originally appeared in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy Basler and published by the Abraham Lincoln Association in 1953. I thank the Abraham Lincoln Association for permission to reprint this material.

A version of chapter 1 and a brief portion of the Introduction appeared in Brian Danoff, "'I'm the Captain Now': Power, Justice, and Tragedy in 'Benito Cereno' and *Captain Phillips*," *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture*, vol. 6 (Winter 2017). © 2017 by The Jack Miller Center. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

A version of chapter 2 appeared in Brian Danoff, "*Invisible Man* and Democratic Leadership," *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture*, vol. 8 (Winter 2019). © 2019 by The Jack Miller Center. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.



British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020934304

ISBN: 978-1-4985-7362-7 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN: 978-1-4985-7363-4 (electronic)

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

# Contents

# Acknowledgments

First, I want to thank both Joseph Parry, my editor at Lexington Books, as well as Lee Trepanier, the editor of Lexington's Politics, Literature, and Film series, for all of their encouragement and assistance. I am also deeply indebted to the anonymous reviewer who carefully read and commented on the initial draft of my book manuscript for Lexington. The suggestions of the reviewer were extremely helpful when I revised the manuscript. For their very valuable comments and suggestions on material that has been incorporated into this book, I would also like to thank Lucas Morel, Ainsley LeSure, Susan Sterett, James Seaton, Anthony Bartl, Joseph Hebert, and Jeremy Fortier. Portions of this book previously appeared (in slightly different form) as two articles that were published in the journal *American Political Thought*. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of the journal for all of their excellent advice. I am also grateful to Miami University for providing me with a one-semester research leave that gave me time to focus my energies on the writing of this book. I also thank Miami's Committee on Faculty Research for a PREP Grant.

In the acknowledgments for my first book, *Educating Democracy: Alexis de Tocqueville and Leadership in America* (2009), I thanked my political theory teachers for all that they had taught me. Since this new book is focused on politics, literature, and film, I want to once again express my gratitude to my undergraduate teachers at the University of California, Santa Cruz, as they were the ones who first demonstrated to me that the vocation of political theory can—and perhaps must—encompass the study of literary texts. In classes taught by the late Peter Euben, I recall reading not only works by Tocqueville and Arendt, but also works by Toni Morrison and Thomas Pynchon. In the late Jack Schaar's course on "American Political Thought," I remember reading not just *The Federalist Papers* and writings by Lincoln, but also Melville's "Benito Cereno." And, in David Thomas's course on modern political theory, I recall reading not only theorists such as Locke, but also a play by Shakespeare as well as Montesquieu's epistolary novel, *Persian Letters*.

Because I had wide interests in the humanities as well as the social sciences, after graduating from UC Santa Cruz I chose to pursue an MA in liberal studies at the New School for Social Research. I was there able to further pursue my interests in politics and literature by studying with James Miller and Robert Boyers, both of whom I would also like to thank. At the New School, my interests in both political theory and literature

culminated in the writing of my MA thesis on the topic of Ardent, Kafka, and totalitarianism.

I then decided to pursue a PhD in political science at Rutgers. While the dissertation that I wrote under the supervision of the late Wilson Carey McWilliams did not explore any works of fiction, I was, no doubt, still influenced by Carey's conviction that some of America's most important political thought has come in the form of imaginative literature. I will always be grateful that I was able to study with Carey as a PhD student. Indeed, looking back again at my experience as an undergraduate, master's, and PhD student, I am astonished by my great fortune in having been able to learn from so many exemplary teacher-scholars.

I also remain very grateful to my parents for having supported me in my studies, and, indeed, for supporting me in so many ways throughout my life. I am also endlessly grateful to my wife, Donna, for all of her support, love, and encouragement as well as for all of the conversations that we have had over the years about books, films, and ideas. Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to our son, Julian, whose boundless intellectual curiosity never ceases to amaze.

# Introduction

Franklin Delano Roosevelt famously declared that "the greatest duty of a statesman is to educate."[1] The central claim of this book is that it is not only statesmen who can (and should) educate a democratic citizenry, but also novelists and filmmakers. This book's title is drawn from Melville's "Benito Cereno." Near the end of this novella, after putting down a rebellion of enslaved Africans at sea, the American captain Amasa Delano suggests that "the past is passed," and thus there is no need to "moralize upon it."[2] Melville suggests, though, that it is crucial for Americans to critically examine American history and American political institutions. Americans *must* "moralize"—they must, that is, lead what Socrates called the examined life; otherwise, they may be blind to the existence of injustices and self-destructive practices which will ultimately undermine democracy.[3] To put it another way, without "moralizing" upon the past and the present, Americans will be blind to the ways in which they have fallen short of their own highest ideals. Novels and films, I argue, can play a crucial role in helping citizens undertake the kind of moral reflection that democratic citizens must engage in if they are to not only preserve their political community, but also render it "forever worthy of the saving," as Lincoln put it.[4]

While novelists and filmmakers can serve as democratic educators, the best of them usually do so not by offering didactic tales with straightforward messages, but rather by providing more ambiguous and tragic stories that encourage readers to think for themselves, just as citizens need to do when they grapple with thorny political questions. Not unlike Socratic dialogues, the works of fiction examined in this book proceed by exploring difficult questions rather than by providing any easy answers. Because these works have an ambiguous, nuanced, and tragic outlook, they can help train the citizen-reader to think through the moral complexities of the political issues on which a democratic citizenry must render judgment.

In addition to arguing that novels and films can help educate citizen-readers by encouraging them to explore—that is, to "moralize upon"—political questions that resist any simple answers, I also argue that some of the most profound American thinking about the nature of democratic leadership has come not through treatises or essays, but rather through novels. The novels that I examine explore important questions about the role of leaders in a democratic regime, including: How can democratic

leaders best promote political freedom, such that their followers are active citizens rather than passive subjects? Can politicians win power and accomplish their goals if they appeal to what Lincoln called "the better angels of our nature" rather than to potentially dangerous passions?[5] Is C. S. Lewis correct that those leaders who have "stepped outside traditional morality" in order to gain "power" are unlikely to wield "that power benevolently"?[6] Or, is it inevitable that even the best democratic leaders will have "dirty hands," insofar as important political ends sometimes cannot be achieved without the use of morally questionable means? While these questions have been raised by political philosophers, I argue that American novelists have also been able to help citizen-readers explore these crucial questions in profound and engaging ways.

Chapter 1 of this book provides a comparative analysis of Melville's "Benito Cereno" and the film *Captain Phillips*. Both the novella and the film were based on true stories in which black Africans seized command of a ship that had been led by a white captain. In both cases, Americans eventually used force to suppress the Africans and to restore (a sort of) order. Both Melville and the makers of *Captain Phillips* used as source material a memoir written by an American captain—respectively, the real Amasa Delano and the real Captain Phillips. Whereas the original memoirs both present the Americans solely as heroes and the Africans as unalloyed villains, both Melville and the makers of *Captain Phillips* reshape the source material into a more multifaceted narrative in order to raise critical questions about race, globalization, and American power. Instead of offering the reader and the viewer a story that simply celebrates the triumph and the virtue of American power, both Melville and the makers of *Captain Phillips* offer a far more tragic and complex tale. Ultimately, both works suggest that if American power is deployed in a way that restores the status quo but ignores underlying injustices, then more trouble will always loom on the horizon.

In chapter 2, I turn to another novel which explores questions about racial justice: namely, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. I argue that the novel explores the questions: What does it mean to be free? Can one be free if one withdraws from the world, or does freedom require political engagement? And, how can democratic leaders best promote freedom? I argue that one can discern in the novel a highly valuable theory of democratic leadership that consists of the following three parts. First, because they are cognizant of the political capacities of ordinary people, democratic leaders try to foster political freedom by helping their followers become visible political actors with an equal voice. Second, rather than pursue their own predetermined goals, democratic leaders seek to advance goals that they share with their fellow citizens. Third, democratic leaders strive to reaffirm and reapply what Ellison called "the principle on which the country was built" in order to move the citizenry further toward "the democratic ideal."[7]

In chapter 3, I discuss in more depth the tripartite theory of democratic leadership that I find in *Invisible Man* by applying it to Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*. I argue that Willie Stark succeeds in upholding one of the three elements of democratic leadership delineated in the previous chapter, but Stark fails to uphold the other two. More specifically, I argue that Willie Stark does seek to advance goals that he holds in common with his followers; to put it in terms used by Nancy Fraser, Willie seeks to provide both "redistribution" and "recognition" to downtrodden people who are often disparaged as "hicks."[8] On the other hand, Willie fails to partake of the other two aspects of democratic leadership which I find in *Invisible Man*, for Willie does little to promote political freedom amongst the citizenry, and he makes little effort to rearticulate and reapply the principles of the American founding. In this chapter, I also discuss how *All the King's Men* explores the question of whether a leader's use of morally troubling means can be justified by noble ends. The novel does not provide a single, definitive answer, but instead provides multiple perspectives on the question. Ultimately, the novel suggests that even though political questions (including questions about ends and means) are often rife with complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty, citizens still have the responsibility to make political judgments and to engage in political life. Hence, just as the Invisible Man decides to leave behind the "hibernation" of his underground apartment in order to become a responsible political actor, so, too, does Jack Burden of *All the King's Men* leave behind what he calls "the Great Sleep" in order to act and to make political judgments in "the convulsion of the world."[9]

In chapter 4, I examine another novel in which the protagonist (in this case, Thomas Fowler) moves from passivity to political commitment: namely, *The Quiet American*. The titular character, Alden Pyle, is "innocent" insofar as he refuses to consider the possibility that American power might be wielded in damaging ways; like Amasa Delano, he refuses to "moralize upon" his actions and thus refuses to acknowledge his complicity in wrongdoing against Vietnamese civilians. When Fowler makes the decision to "eliminate" Pyle, though, the reader is likely to be left unsettled, just as readers of "Benito Cereno" and viewers of *Captain Phillips* are likely to be left unsettled by the deaths of the Africans in the novella and in the film.[10] I argue that *The Quiet American* offers the reader both a defense of Fowler's decision to eliminate Pyle, as well as a critique of Fowler's decision. The defense of Fowler's choice jibes with Max Weber's ideas on the inescapability of violence in political life, whereas the critique of Fowler's choice resonates with Hannah Arendt's ideas on the inability of violence to generate genuine political power. Like *All the King's Men*, Greene's novel insists that even though political questions can be almost dizzyingly complex, political judgments must still be made; as Fowler is told near the end of the novel, "one has to take sides. If one is to remain human."[11]

In the conclusion to this book, I offer some remarks on how my ideas on political judgment are both similar to, but also different from, ideas found in the writings of Milan Kundera and Benjamin Barber. I also suggest that the conception of democratic leadership that was explored in chapters 2 and 3 remains highly relevant in our present political moment.

Notably, most of the works of imaginative fiction that are examined in this book draw on—but in significant ways depart from—real events. As mentioned earlier, both "Benito Cereno" and *Captain Phillips* are inspired by actual memoirs, but both works differ in significant ways from their source material. Similarly, while *All the King's Men* is inspired by the career of Governor Huey Long, "Warren always denied," as John Burt notes, that the governor of his novel "was based in any very exact way upon Long himself."[12] In the same vein, while there are clearly many similarities between the Communist Party of the 1930s and "the Brotherhood" in *Invisible Man*, Ellison denied that "the Brotherhood" was simply identical to the Communists.[13] Finally, while *The Quiet American* makes reference to the actual General Thé and to a number of real events, Greene insists in his dedication to the novel that, "This is a story and not a piece of history."[14] In short, the literary (and cinematic) works discussed in this book may draw on historical events, but in each case the author (or filmmaker) re-envisions and molds the historical data into a story that succeeds in probing fundamental political questions in complex and illuminating ways. To put it another way, by departing from the source material, the authors are able to create what Warren calls "tales . . . shot through with philosophy."[15]

The way in which all of these authors begin with empirical facts but then reshape these facts into profound tales can be linked to Sheldon Wolin's understanding of the "imaginative dimension" of political theory. Wolin notes that "the picture of society given by most political theorists is not a 'real' or literal one." Rather than simply try to describe empirical reality, the canonical theorists "believed that fancy" can "sometimes permit us to see things that are not otherwise apparent." Like Wolin's political theorist, the novelists examined in this book each use "fancy" in an effort "to illuminate, to help us become wiser about political things."[16] As I have suggested, the novels discussed in this book aim "to help us become wiser about political things" not by conveying any simple messages to the reader, but rather by helping the reader explore difficult but crucial questions about political life.

Significantly, the main characters of the novels that I examine cannot simply be labeled "good guys" or "bad guys"; instead, they exhibit a combination of noble and base impulses. This is true, for example, of Babo and Amasa Delano in "Benito Cereno," of Willie Stark and Jack Burden in *All the King's Men*, and of Thomas Fowler and Alden Pyle in *The Quiet American*. In a 2015 empirical study regarding how Hollywood films "affect an audience's perceptions of the government," the political

scientist Michelle Pautz suggests that films in which "the 'good guys' and 'bad guys' are easier to discern" may "have a greater influence" on an audience's political opinions than films in which "good and evil are not as easily distinguishable."[17] I find plausible Pautz's claim that political films which present one-dimensional heroes and villains may have a greater impact on an audience's political attitudes than films which offer a multi-faceted moral understanding of the world—at least in the short-term, and at least as measured in a questionnaire. However, if the goal of a filmmaker (or novelist) is not simply to indoctrinate (or simply to entertain) but rather to *educate* a democratic citizenry, then this can best be accomplished through novels and films which are marked by a great deal of moral complexity.

Moreover, it may very well be especially important in our current age of polarization for readers to encounter novels and movies in which the main characters resist any facile categorization as "good guys" or "bad guys." Writing after the death of President George H. W. Bush, the columnist Frank Bruni argued that

> we do seem to be getting worse at complexity. At nuance. At allowing for the degree to which virtue and vice commingle in most people, including our leaders, and at understanding that it's not a sign of softness to summon some respect for someone with a contrary viewpoint and a history of mistakes. It's a sign of maturity. And it just might be a path back to a better place.[18]

Bruni explains that he was prompted to write his column after the television producer Bryan Behar tweeted that many Twitter users had "unfollowed" Behar after he had tweeted words of praise for Bush. According to Bruni, those who chose to unfollow Behar

> demonstrated the transcendent curse of these tribal times: Americans' diminishing ability to hold two thoughts at once. Bush has indelible stains on his record. He also has points of light. . . . He showed folly and he showed wisdom, cowardice and courage, aloofness and kindness. . . . [T]oo many of us tend to interpret events, political figures and issues in all-or-nothing, allies-or-enemies, black-and-white terms, blind to shades of gray.[19]

Because of their moral complexity, the works of fiction examined in this book can certainly help train citizens to "hold two thoughts at once," and encountering these works can also help to erode the current tendency to view political life in "black-and-white terms" rather than "shades of gray." Thus, in at least some small way, a serious engagement with these works may educate the citizen-reader to be less likely to engage in the demonization of political opponents. Of course, it would be absurd to claim that novels or films can serve as a panacea for all of the political ills of our era. However, it is my claim that works of fiction such as those examined in this book can at least help provide democratic citizens with

the kind of education that is necessary to point us toward what Bruni calls "a path back to a better place"—a place that is less polarized, and thus a place where citizens seek common ground in order to solve common problems.

As another example of how Americans should today resist thinking about politics in "black-and-white terms" and should instead remember the importance of "hold[ing] two thoughts at once," consider the question of how Thomas Jefferson should today be remembered. I would argue that, on the one hand, we must remember that Jefferson's record on slavery and race was often terrible; for example, as Rogers Smith has recently noted, Jefferson offered "repulsive speculations" about alleged natural differences between the races in his *Notes on Virginia*.[20] On issues surrounding race, then, there is much in Jefferson's record that must be condemned. At the same time, though, we must also remember that the Declaration of Independence which Jefferson drafted helped to inspire Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others to fight for the extension of rights and opportunities to groups of Americans who were once excluded from full citizenship. Leaders such as Douglass, Stanton, and King exemplify what I call the third aspect of Ellison's tripartite theory of democratic leadership—namely, the idea that democratic leaders must strive to reaffirm and reapply "the principle on which the country was built"; in other words, democratic leaders must strive to move the nation further toward the embodiment of the ideals found in the Declaration of Independence.[21]

As we have seen, Rogers Smith is, on the one hand, highly critical of the exclusionary aspects of Jefferson's thought; at the same time, Smith insists—correctly, in my view—that "our best American tradition" has as its "core message" the idea that "Americans should see themselves and their political system as dedicated to realizing, over time and in prudent fashion, secure enjoyment of the basic rights of the Declaration of Independence, for all people, of all colors, everywhere."[22] Smith thus fully acknowledges and sharply criticizes the deeply troubling (and sometimes even "repulsive") aspects of Jefferson's thought, but at the same time he suggests that American identity, at its finest, is constituted by a shared "quest to realize the principles of the Declaration in the ways Lincoln stated so powerfully."[23] If Bruni is correct, though, that many Americans today "do seem to be getting worse at complexity," then there is a risk today that some Americans may allow their moral outrage over Jefferson's failings to completely obscure Jefferson's remarkable achievement in expressing ideas that in the past have bonded Americans together and inspired them to further improve their nation. Moreover, if moral outrage over Jefferson's flaws renders us unable to honor Jefferson's accomplishment in drafting the Declaration—or, if we end up viewing the Declaration through a purely cynical lens that finds in its famous words only hypocrisy—then in the future we may be less inspired to continue to

collectively pursue what Smith calls "the historic moral project" of seeking to advance the rights of all people.[24]

In recent years, a number of state Democratic Party organizations have chosen to remove not only Andrew Jackson's name but also Jefferson's name from their annual "Jefferson-Jackson" dinners.[25] Similarly, the city of Charlottesville recently chose to no longer celebrate Jefferson's birthday as an official holiday.[26] To be sure, there are some powerful arguments to be made in favor of these changes. At the same time, these changes could also be seen as a sign that some Americans are indeed viewing "political figures and issues in all-or-nothing, allies-or-enemies, black-and-white terms, blind to shades of gray." The reading of novels can serve as a counterweight to this tendency, for the best novels portray their characters not in cartoonish terms, but rather in nuanced terms which remind us that "virtue and vice commingle in most people."

In my view, novels such as those examined in this book can help to counteract what the authors of a recent report from "The More in Common" initiative called, the "powerful polarization ecosystem" in contemporary America "that thrives off of outrage and division." The authors of the report argue that "[t]raditional media, social media platforms, friend networks, political candidates and consultants benefit from dividing Americans, exaggerating disagreements and inciting conflict."[27] Novels, I believe, can help to counter these dangerous tendencies in a number of ways. First, while partisans in our age of polarization often seem to believe that if the opposing party were to be vanquished then all would finally be well in America, novels serve to remind us that the human condition which we all share is an essentially *tragic* condition, which means that all proposed solutions to political problems come with some cost, and no political platform—and no single leader, whether of the left or of the right—will ever be able to ameliorate all of our social and political problems. Moreover, whereas partisans today are often filled with self-righteousness, novels teach humility and generosity toward others insofar as they remind us that all of us—even the most noble—are inevitably flawed. Finally, whereas partisans are encouraged by the "polarization ecosystem" to think in a one-sided manner and to believe that their own party is in possession of the whole truth about political life, novels remind us of the complexities and the ambiguities inherent in political and moral questions. In short, if the health of democracy in America is today compromised by the prevalence of political "debates"—including those which take place over social media—in which sanctimonious partisans stake out facile positions and demonize and caricature those with opposing views, then the reading of novels such as the ones discussed in this book can serve as a powerful antidote.

The kind of nuanced democratic education that one gleans from great novels, then, may be particularly necessary at a time when the media landscape is often dominated by superficial "viral moments," "sound-

bites," and social media posts. It is, therefore, unfortunate that in recent years there has been a tendency in some American public schools to deemphasize the teaching of novels in order to make more room for the teaching of nonfiction works. In their effort to adhere to "Common Core" standards, some school districts have reportedly decided that sometimes, instead of reading an entire novel, students should simply read excerpts.[28] However, if novels are to succeed in teaching us that political questions are far more rich and multifaceted than one would realize if one only paid attention to, say, social media, then simply reading portions of novels is woefully insufficient. As I have suggested, novels, at their best, help their readers explore the complexities and the nuances involved in moral and political questions, and this cannot be achieved merely through the use of excerpts. Moreover, while nonfiction works often try to advance a specific argument, novels just as often raise questions and then enable the reader to consider a multiplicity of possible answers, allowing readers to choose for themselves. If I am able to demonstrate in this book how great novels can educate democratic citizens by helping them to think through vital political questions—including questions about the proper place of both responsible citizenship and bold leadership in a democracy—then I will consider this book to be a success.

## NOTES

1. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Commonwealth Club Address" (September 23, 1932), Teaching American History, http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/commonwealth-club-address/.

2. Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," in *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1855] 2002), 101.

3. At his trial, Socrates declared that "the unexamined life is not worth living for men." See Plato, "Apology," in *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo, Second Edition*, ed. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 41.

4. Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria, Illinois" (October 16, 1854), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 340.

5. Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address (March 4, 1861), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1859–1865*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 224.

6. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, [1944] 1996), 75.

7. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, [1952] 1995), 574; Ralph Ellison, "Introduction to the Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition of *Invisible Man*," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated,* ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, [1982] 2003), 487.

8. Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age," *New Left Review* 212 (July/August 1995): 68–93; Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, [1946] 1996), 142.

9. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 13; Warren, *All the King's Men*, 284, 661.

10. Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (New York: Penguin, [1955] 2002), 163.

11. Ibid., 174.

12. John Burt, "Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature*, *Volume 4*, ed. Jay Parini (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 305.

13. For example, in an address at West Point in 1969, Ellison said in regard to the Brotherhood: "I did not want to describe an existing Socialist or Communist or Marxist political group." See Ralph Ellison, "On Initiation Rites and Power: A Lecture at West Point" (March 26, 1969), in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, [1982] 2003), 542.

14. Greene, *The Quiet American*, dedication page.

15. Robert Penn Warren, "*All the King's Men*: The Matrix of Experience," in *Robert Penn Warren: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Neil Nakadate (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, [1964] 1981), 57.

16. Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1960] 2016), 18. In an earlier article, I made reference to these passages from *Politics and Vision* while discussing Franz Kafka's influence on Hannah Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism. See Brian Danoff, "Arendt, Kafka, and the Nature of Totalitarianism," *Perspectives on Political Science* 29, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 217. In that article, I argued that, perhaps surprisingly, Arendt does *not* suggest that Kafka's texts are open to a multiplicity of interpretations. In contrast to the way in which Arendt read Kafka, I argue in this book that the novels which I examine are often rife with ambiguity and often proceed by raising questions rather than by supplying answers.

17. Michelle C. Pautz, "*Argo* and *Zero Dark Thirty*: Film, Government, and Audiences," *PS: Political Science* 48 (January 2015): 120, 127.

18. Frank Bruni, "George Bush and the Obituary Wars," *New York Times*, December 4, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/04/opinion/george-hw-bush-obituary.html.

19. Ibid.

20. Rogers Smith, "Lockean Liberalism and American Constitutionalism in the Twenty-First Century: The Declaration of Independence or 'America First'?," *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture* 8, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 287.

21. When Stanton drafted "The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions," which called for the right to vote as well as other rights for women, she used the Declaration of Independence as her model. See Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" (1848), in *American Political Thought*, ed. Isaac Kramnick and Theodore Lowi (New York: Norton, 2008), 529–33. Four years later, Frederick Douglass declared in a now famous speech that "for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival," due to the institution of slavery in America. At the same time, Douglass had nothing but praise for what he called "the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice" found in the Declaration of Independence. Moreover, near the end of the speech, he expressed the "hope" that the "great principles" of the Declaration would help bring about the eradication of slavery. See Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (July 5, 1852), Teaching American History, http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/. Speaking at the Lincoln Memorial one hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation, Martin Luther King Jr. invoked the Declaration of Independence as he called on the nation to strive for racial equality. See Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream" (1963), in *American Political Thought*, ed. Isaac Kramnick and Theodore Lowi (New York: Norton, 2008), 1317–21.

22. Smith, "Lockean Liberalism and American Constitutionalism," 284.

23. Ibid., 288.

24. Ibid., 293.

25. See, for example, Ashley Southall, "Jefferson-Jackson Dinner Will Be Renamed," *New York Times*, August 8, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/09/us/jefferson-jackson-dinner-will-be-renamed.html.

26. See Morgan Gstalter, "Charlottesville Swaps Holiday Celebrating Thomas Jefferson's Birthday for Day Observing Emancipation of Slaves," *The Hill*, July 3, 2019, https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/451469-charlottesville-swaps-holiday-celebrating-thomas-jeffersons-birthday-for.

27. See Daniel Yudkin, Stephen Hawkins, and Tom Dixon, "The Perception Gap: How False Impressions Are Pulling Americans Apart" (New York: More in Common, 2019). The words that I quote are drawn not from the report itself, but from the webpage on "The Perception Gap" that provides an overview of the report. See: https://perceptiongap.us/. (The full report is also available at this website.)

28. See Kate Taylor, "English Class in Common Core Era: 'Tom Sawyer' and Court Opinions," *New York Times*, June 19, 2005, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/20/nyregion/english-class-in-common-core-era-nonfiction-joins-the-classics.html; Ariel Sacks, "Why We Shouldn't Teach Literature with Excerpts," *Education Week*, June 26, 2019, https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2019/06/26/why-we-shouldnt-teach-literature-with-excerpts.html; Peter Greene, "Common Core Testing and the Fracturing of Literature," *Forbes*, November 9, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/petergreene/2018/11/09/common-core-testing-and-the-fracturing-of-literature/#4253c5cf13f1.

# ONE

# "I'm the Captain Now"

## *Power, Justice, and Tragedy in "Benito Cereno" and* Captain Phillips

In this chapter I explore some striking similarities between Melville's novella "Benito Cereno" and the 2013 film *Captain Phillips*. Both works are based on actual events in which black Africans unlawfully seized control of a ship led by whites; in both cases, (a kind of) order was eventually restored after Americans violently suppressed the Africans. Both the novella and the film take what at first glance might seem like a simple tale of American heroism and transform it into a story that is far more tragic and morally complex. Some readers of the novella in Melville's day and some viewers of the film may have been tempted to interpret the respective stories solely as thrilling adventure tales which unambiguously celebrate the triumph and the goodness of American power; at the same time, both Melville and the makers of *Captain Phillips* lead the perceptive reader and the perceptive viewer to ask critical questions about the degree to which American power actually promotes justice.[1]

*Captain Phillips* and "Benito Cereno" thus achieve something similar insofar as they both initially draw in their audience through a commercially appealing adventure story that might be expected to simply celebrate American ingenuity and strength. Once drawn into the absorbing tale, though, the audience is subtly led to examine moral questions about America's role in the world—questions pertaining to slavery and racism, in the case of "Benito Cereno," and questions pertaining to global inequities, in the case of *Captain Phillips.*

Both "Benito Cereno" and *Captain Phillips* were based on previously published memoirs written by real American sea captains. Melville based

his novella on one chapter of Captain Amasa Delano's *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, Comprising Three Voyages Round the World*.[2] Delano there describes how as captain of the *Perseverance* he put down a revolt by African slaves that had occurred on a Spanish ship called the *Tryal* off the coast of Chile in 1805. When Delano first boarded the *Tryal*, he was led, through an elaborate ruse orchestrated by the Africans, to believe that Captain Benito Cereno and the other whites were still in charge of the ship. Delano eventually learns, though, that the blacks are only pretending to be under the thumb of the whites, for the Africans had actually taken over the ship, killing many of the white crewmen as well as the ship's owner, Alejandro Aranda, in the process. By hijacking the *Tryal* and ordering Benito Cereno, under the threat of death, to pilot it for them, the blacks had hoped to find a life of freedom in Senegal. Instead, due to the violent intervention of the American Captain Delano, the mutinous blacks are all either reenslaved or killed.

The film *Captain Phillips* was based on a memoir that the real Captain Phillips wrote (with Stephan Talty), titled *A Captain's Duty: Somali Pirates, Navy SEALs, and Dangerous Days at Sea*.[3] The book describes how in 2009, Captain Phillips's ship, the *Maersk Alabama*, was seized by Somali pirates who hoped to ransom Phillips and the other crewmen of the massive container ship. As a result of his attempts to negotiate with the pirates and to protect his ship and his crew, Phillips ends up on a lifeboat with his four captors. Eventually, Phillips's ordeal ends when three of the pirates are killed in a sudden attack by Navy SEAL sharpshooters, and when the fourth is arrested.

Both *Captain Phillips* and "Benito Cereno" are thus based on original source material in which Americans defy and defeat African hijackers. Notably, neither the real Captain Delano nor the real Captain Phillips suggest in their memoirs that there is anything morally ambiguous or tragic about the stories that they tell. Instead, they each simply present a story of virtuous Americans triumphing over African criminals. In contrast, both the novella "Benito Cereno" and the film *Captain Phillips* use—and sometimes transform—the original source material in order to raise moral questions that are largely ignored in the memoirs of the real captains. In the case of "Benito Cereno," the reader is led to wonder whether the restoration of "order" at the end of the novella is not simply the restoration of unjust relations of domination. Moreover, we are led to wonder whether Babo, the leader of the slave revolt, might actually be a heroic figure—or at least a tragic figure motivated by a just cause—rather than simply a morally depraved one. And, in the case of *Captain Phillips*, the viewer is led to ask questions about the global inequities that might help explain—if not justify—why young Somali men might turn to piracy. Furthermore, the slaying of the young Somalis at the end of the film is

depicted not simply as a triumph of American power to be celebrated, but also as a tragedy.

Like "Benito Cereno," *Captain Phillips* ends with the defeat of the hijackers, and thus the restoration of the status quo. At the end of the novella, Babo has been executed, and at the end of *Captain Phillips*, the leader of the pirates, Muse, has been captured, and his comrades have been killed. Nevertheless, neither the reader of the novella nor the viewer of the film are left with anything approaching the sense that all is now well. Instead, in the case of both the novella and the film (but not in the memoirs on which they are based), we are left with the deeply unsettling feeling that the status quo may not be sustainable, as long as underlying injustices persist.

## "WHY MORALIZE UPON IT?" THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ORIGINAL MEMOIRS

To better understand how the film and the novella succeed in raising moral questions that are left unraised by their source material, it is helpful to look more closely at some of the specific changes that Melville made when he turned Delano's memoir into a novella and that the makers of *Captain Phillips* made when they turned Phillips's memoir into a film. Both of the original memoirs have been criticized in similar terms. In an influential essay on "Benito Cereno," Rosalie Feltenstein described the real Delano's memoir as "a flatly matter-of-fact account, written with as much artistry and emotion as one would find in a weather report."[4] In much the same vein, Manohla Dargis called the real Captain Phillips's memoir "a plodding, straightforward book with [a] telegraphing title."[5]

Beyond the stylistic similarities, though, I would argue that the two memoirs are similar in a more important sense. As Feltenstein notes, in his own memoir Delano "emerges as a brave, shrewd sea captain, who gives his crew plenty of good, wholesome whippings and who is less interested in the nature of evil than in the Spanish captain's efforts to deprive him of salvage rights."[6] In other words, the real Delano is uninterested in the moral questions that Melville would explore in "Benito Cereno." He certainly never asks whether Babo's revolt against slavery might be a courageous struggle against injustice; instead, he helps ensure that the West Africans will be returned to slavery, and he wants to make sure that he gets what he sees as his rightful share of the slave ship's profits.

The Delano of Melville's novella similarly neglects to engage in any critical examination of the situation in which he finds himself. At the end of the novella, the Spanish Captain Benito Cereno, who was forced to pretend that he was still in command of the ship when Delano boarded it, has plainly been shattered by the experience of seeing his crew (as well as

the ship's owner) killed, and by the experience of being utterly dominated by Babo, the erstwhile slave who became master of the ship. In contrast, Delano remains entirely unperturbed and unchanged by what he has witnessed. Hoping to lessen "the Spaniard's melancholy," Delano tells Cereno that "the past is passed; why moralize upon it?"[7] As we have seen, this lack of any desire to "moralize"—to reflect upon the ethical issues raised by his own actions and experience—is also found in the real Delano, as portrayed in his memoir. A key difference between the memoir and the novella, though, is that Delano's inability to "moralize" is presented by Melville as a form of blindness that can lead to disaster.

Like the real Delano, the real Captain Phillips shows little interest in moral issues in his memoir. Like Delano, Phillips presents himself as a "brave, shrewd sea captain" who is tough (but fair) with his crew. And, like Delano, he remains completely unfazed by his experience with African hijackers; the experience certainly does not inspire him to reflect upon the moral questions that the filmmakers of *Captain Phillips* inspire us to explore.[8] An example of the real Phillips's lack of interest in moral questions comes when he is discussing the history of the merchant marine. He writes: "it was at the [Massachusetts Maritime] academy that I started to hear the stories of the merchant marine: . . . How America was really built on the backs of wooden ships sailing out of ports like Salem to the far reaches of the world, from Cadiz to the Antarctic, carrying everything from molasses, gunpowder, gold dust, Chinese silk, to, of course, African slaves."[9] The words "of course" before the words "African slaves" might imply an acknowledgment that this chapter of the merchant marine's history is a troubling one, but Phillips does not make this explicit, nor does he specify that this is an exception to what he calls the "proud tradition" of the merchant marine.[10] By simply mentioning in passing the merchant marine's involvement with the slave trade, Phillips's attitude toward this aspect of the merchant marine's history seems to be that "the past is passed," and so there is no need to dwell on it.

Phillips's discussion of his container ship's role in the global economy is similarly presented in a matter-of-fact way that sets aside ethical questions. Phillips writes in his memoir that the *Maersk Alabama* "was a container ship, one of the workhorses that carry the Toyota you're driving, the plasma TV you're watching, or the Reeboks you're wearing. (Without the merchant marine, there is no Walmart)."[11] Phillips does not dwell on the fact that the "you" to whom he refers obviously does not include impoverished people from war-torn Somalia, few of whom can afford these consumer goods. In contrast, the film *Captain Phillips* does dwell on these economic discrepancies. Whereas Phillips's memoir is, of course, always written from the point of view of Phillips, the film version importantly departs from this point of view so that we can see what life is like for the young Somali men who resort to piracy. Near its beginning, the film pointedly contrasts Phillips's comfortable (although not extravagant)

home in a leafy part of Vermont with the seaside makeshift slum in Somalia where Muse and other young men try to eke out a living by working for warlords who demand that they engage in piracy expeditions. The film thus reminds us that the fruits of global capitalism—an economic system that is symbolized by the container ship—are clearly not shared by all nations.

## "BENITO CERENO," *CAPTAIN PHILLIPS*, AND "THE COMMON CONTINENT OF MEN"

While *Captain Phillips* reveals the enormous inequities between rich and poor nations, the film also resists turning the poor people of the developing world into a distant "other" who have nothing in common with wealthier Americans. Instead, far more than in the memoir, the film tries to emphasize the common humanity that Captain Phillips and his captors share; in other words, the film tries to remind us that for all of our differences, we all inhabit what Melville calls in *Moby-Dick* "the common continent of men."[12] As Dargis notes in her review of the film, *Captain Phillips* is "a movie that insistently closes the distance between *us* and *them*."[13] The film does this in a number of ways, none of which Dargis spells out in her fairly brief review. First, the film emphasizes that whether one lives in the United States or Somalia, one has to somehow make a living in a global economy that is filled with change and uncertainty. In lines that are invented solely for the film, Tom Hanks's Captain Phillips says to his wife early in the film that their children are "going into a different world." Worried about their son, who has not been applying himself in school, Phillips notes that "[c]ompanies want things faster and cheaper. And fifty guys compete for every job. . . . You've got to be strong to survive out there."[14] Shortly thereafter, the film takes us to the beaches of Somalia, where Muse and about fifty other desperate young men are competing—just as Phillips described when discussing his own son's future career—for one of a handful of spots on the pirate skiffs. Similarly, while the line "You've got to be strong to survive out there" was said in reference to Phillips's son, it not only foreshadows the strength that Captain Phillips would himself display versus the pirates, but it also foreshadows the strength and tenacity of Muse, who repeatedly refuses to give up when other people or circumstances throw obstacles in the way of his plans. Indeed, later in the film, Muse essentially paraphrases Phillips when he admonishes his fellow pirate: "You have to be ready for anything. This game isn't for the weak."[15] The parallels that are drawn here clearly suggest that in the global economy, all of us face insecurity, and all of us are scrambling to make a living, although some of us do so under far more privileged circumstances than others.

The film also metaphorically "closes the distance between *us* and *them*" by *literally* erasing the distance between Phillips and his captors when they all end up on the *Maersk Alabama*'s small lifeboat. With a huge American naval battleship trailing them, the film builds suspense by suggesting that something could easily go wrong in this tense hostage situation such that everyone on the lifeboat could at any moment share the same fate of death. With the American Phillips and his four Somali captors confined to close quarters, and "all in the same boat," as the saying goes, one is reminded of the following passage from Melville's *Moby-Dick*, in which the American Ishmael and the South Pacific Islander Queequeg are tied together with a device called a "monkey-rope":

> The monkey-rope was fast at both ends; fast to Queequeg's broad canvas belt, and fast to my narrow leather one. So that for better or for worse, we two, for the time, were wedded. . . . Queequeg was my own inseparable twin brother; nor could I any way get rid of the dangerous liabilities which the hempen bond entailed. So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two; that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death. . . . And yet still further pondering—while I jerked him now and then from between the whale and ship, which would threaten to jam him—still further pondering, I say, I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only, in most cases, he, one way or other, has this Siamese connexion with a plurality of other mortals. If your banker breaks, you snap; if your apothecary by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die.[16]

As Greg Grandin has noted, one of Melville's great themes is that none of us are completely free, insofar as "humans, by sheer dint of being human, are bound to one another."[17] Just as Melville suggested that the human condition—perhaps especially under conditions of modernity—is one of interdependence and interconnectedness, the film *Captain Phillips* suggests that wealthy Americans and poor Somalis are also somehow tied to one another in our globalized world.

Granted, at the end of the film, one could argue that Phillips and his captors do not, in a sense, share the same fate, for the Navy SEAL sharpshooters are able to pick off three of Phillips's captors, leaving Phillips shaken to his core but physically unharmed. But even while three of his captors die and Phillips lives, the film draws attention to the blood of the pirates that is splattered all over Phillips. The Somalis' blood that covers Phillips is another reminder of their common humanity. Moreover, it is a stark reminder that the winners in the global economy cannot simply choose to ignore the losers, nor can they hermetically seal them away. According to Susan McWilliams, American political thought—particular-

ly in its literary forms—often acknowledges and explores the "tragic dimensions" of American politics by focusing on "that which gets beaten, concealed, ignored, sublimated, or forgotten"; moreover, through its depictions of those who are often "marginalized," American literature can help its readers to "see those who usually go unseen."[18] Through a story that puts an American captain in such tight quarters with impoverished and desperate people from a country that he would normally simply sail past, *Captain Phillips* similarly succeeds in enlarging what one might call the tragic perspective of the viewer.

While the shared humanity and the interconnectedness of people in the developed and developing worlds is one of the major themes of *Captain Phillips*, this is not a theme found in the memoir on which it is based. Near the end of the memoir, the real Phillips writes

> I'll be grateful for what the SEALs did for me until the day I die. And these days I can't go to a ball game and listen to the "Star-Spangled Banner" without choking up. When other Americans risk their lives to rescue you, that anthem becomes more than a song. It becomes everything you feel for your country. *The bond we all have with one another* that is so often invisible, so often demeaned. I was lucky enough to experience it in a way that perhaps only soldiers do.[19]

It should be noted that when he here refers to "the bond we all have with one another," Phillips clearly has in mind a bond between all *Americans*, and not a bond between *all* people in our globalized world; it is, so to speak, the bond among *us* rather than the bond between *us* and those whom we too often see only as a distant *them*. To put it another way, the memoir emphasizes the bond between those who inhabit the United States, and not between those who inhabit "the common continent of men." In contrast, it is the latter sort of bond that the film strives to bring into relief.[20]

The film yet again "closes the distance between *us* and *them*" by suggesting that Muse, the destitute young Somali from a seaside shantytown, is in many ways actually a mirror image of Phillips, the middle-aged, white American captain. When Muse and Phillips first see one another, they are both standing on their respective vessels, and each is looking at the other through binoculars. While there is enormous asymmetry in the size of their seacrafts—one is a massive container ship and the other is essentially a motorboat—the reciprocal gaze that they share through their binoculars is clearly intended to establish a certain symmetry between the two characters.

This symmetry is further established when we see both Phillips and Muse silence the grumblings of their respective crews in a similar fashion. After Captain Phillips and his unarmed crew thwart the pirates' first effort to board their ship, Phillips's crew is restive and fearful that the pirates will soon be back. Shane, the first mate, sternly tells them: "you

signed up for the route! . . . What did you expect?" With unconcealed irritation, Captain Phillips then declares, "our job is to move the cargo as fast as possible," and "[i]f anybody doesn't like it," they are free to quit.[21] Similarly, when the youngest pirate is groaning in pain over his injured foot later in the film, Muse admonishes him: "Stop whining. . . . You wanted to come with us. You asked for this!"[22] In this and other scenes, we see Muse display the same kind of toughness that Philips displays in the film. According to John Schaar, one of Melville's teachings in "Benito Cereno" is that we must strive to "recognize our self in the other"; by revealing the similarities between Phillips and Muse, the film also suggests the importance of achieving this recognition.[23]

The parallel between Captain Phillips and Muse is further established by the film's most famous line. After boarding the *Maersk Alabama* with his fellow pirates, Muse stares down Phillips and declares, "Look at me. I'm the captain now."[24] One can easily imagine Melville's Babo delivering the same line to Benito Cereno after seizing control of his ship (which was renamed by Melville the *San Dominick*). In both "Benito Cereno" and *Captain Phillips*, then, we see an African who previously lacked power become commander of a ship, through sheer force of will. In "Benito Cereno," the slave Babo becomes the master of the *San Dominick*, and the ship's usual captain, Benito Cereno, essentially becomes Babo's slave until he is rescued by the American Captain Delano. In *Captain Phillips*, the penurious Muse, who lives at the margins of the global economy, becomes the captain of the *Maersk Alabama*, and the ship's overthrown captain is rendered largely powerless until he is rescued by the US Navy SEALs.

Muse and Babo may both be physically slight, but they clearly both possess unusually strong leadership qualities.[25] What Richard Ray writes of Babo could thus also be said of Muse: "Babo's determined efforts eventually come to nothing, but for a brief moment he is a man with the voice of authority, a leader who speaks through his actions."[26] Both Babo and Muse have great talent, but, tragically, these talents ultimately go to waste. The film and the novella suggest that under different circumstances, each could have made a significant positive contribution to the world; if Babo had not been reduced to slavery by brute force, and if Muse had not been subject to dire economic circumstances, then perhaps they could have each risen to high-level positions of leadership, in line with their natural gifts.

## MORAL COMPLEXITY IN "BENITO CERENO" AND *CAPTAIN PHILLIPS*

Babo ends up executed, and Muse ends up imprisoned; how, though, are we to assess each of these characters? Melville's Babo has been inter-

preted in a great variety of ways. For many years, critics tended to assume that Melville intended Babo to be seen as the epitome of unadulterated evil, and Delano as the embodiment of virtue and innocence.[27] As Grandin notes, "Most early-twentieth-century scholars couldn't see any rational reason for [Babo's] violence."[28] Eventually, though, some critics began to argue that while Babo may indeed do evil things, it is important to note that he is a slave, and thus "evil had . . . originally been done" to him, as F. O. Matthiessen put it in 1941.[29] Later, other critics began to deny that Babo was evil at all, and instead claimed, as Joseph Schiffman put it in 1950, that Babo actually "emerges [as] the moral victor" of the story, for his goal was freedom for himself and the other enslaved persons on the *San Dominick*.[30]

In my own view, *no* character in the novella is simply a virtuous hero or an evil villain. I thus agree with Glenn Altschuler, who writes that Melville's story may be about "the intermingling of good and evil qualities in men of all races."[31] According to Altschuler, "Melville refused to acquiesce to the neat equation of black and white with evil and good."[32] At the same time, he also refused to simply invert the equation by suggesting that blacks were inherently good and whites inherently evil. The "intermingling of good and evil" that Melville finds in "men of all races" is demonstrated both by Delano, the white American captain, and Babo, the black leader of the slave revolt. Delano may have "a singularly undistrustful good nature" and a generally "benevolent heart," but he is also a racist who at one point offers to buy Babo for fifty doubloons.[33] Moreover, without pausing to consider that he might be doing anything wrong, Delano ends up participating in the evils of the slave trade when he chases down the *San Dominick* in order to reenslave the Africans; indeed, he even promises the crew of his own ship that they will profit from the eventual sale of the Africans if they recapture the slave ship.[34] As for Babo, he deploys great ingenuity as he seeks to liberate himself and his fellow Africans from what Lincoln called "the monstrous injustice" of slavery.[35] On the other hand, the means by which Babo pursues his noble ends include dreadful acts of great cruelty, such as the murder of Aranda followed by the stripping and displaying of his bones, and the massacre of many of the Spanish sailors by throwing them overboard.[36] As the characters of Babo and Delano both indicate, the novella "provides substantial evidence," as Altschuler puts it, "that good and evil, generosity and viciousness, make all men miscegenated, make everyone and everything gray."[37]

Similarly, while Hollywood films have often presented a story of "good guys" versus "bad guys," *Captain Phillips* pushes against the impulse to view its story as a one-dimensional tale of virtuous Americans versus malevolent Africans. In an interview, Paul Greengrass, the director of *Captain Phillips*, said that on the one hand, he sought to avoid making an "*Under Siege*–type 'rah-rah' film," by which he likely meant a

film that would have demonized the Somali pirates and mindlessly glorified American military power. On the other hand, it was equally important, he said, to avoid creating a film "full of liberal posturing" that would simply "mak[e] excuses" for the crimes of the pirates. Rejecting these opposing (but equally unnuanced) approaches, Greengrass instead sought to make a film that was more "layered and complex," as he put it.[38]

Does the film want to suggest that it is actually the defeated Somali pirates who are the "the moral victors"? That would be an overstatement, for the pirates are, in the end, engaged in a violent hijacking for monetary profit, and this is simply not morally equivalent to Babo's struggle for liberty. Indeed, the film never goes so far as to suggest that the hijacking of the *Maersk Alabama* can be morally justified. That said, much like "Benito Cereno," *Captain Philips* absolutely does reject the notion that virtue is all on the side of Americans, and that evil is all on the side of the Africans. One way the film does this is by generating a considerable amount of sympathy for Muse and his fellow pirates. As I have noted, the film shows us the poverty-stricken seaside shantytown where the pirates live. In his memoir, the real Captain Phillips claims that economic opportunities exist even in war-torn Somalia, but the film suggests no such thing. Phillips writes in his memoir:

> The pirates claimed they were former fishermen who'd been forced into banditry when their livelihoods disappeared. According to them, foreign trawlers had arrived off their coastline and taken hundreds of millions of dollars of tuna, sardines, mackerel, and swordfish out of the ocean. Other ships dumped hazardous waste in the water to make a quick buck. The local fishermen couldn't hope to compete with the advanced fleets from Spain and Japan and found that the intruders shot at them when they tried to work the same coastline. Soon they were reduced to begging, and even starvation.

But Phillips then completely dismisses the pirates' key claim: "But I'd seen schools of mackerel, tuna, and other fish every time I'd gone down the coast of Somalia. *There was a living to be made out there.* I believed the Somalis had simply found easier work: piracy."[39] Phillips's claim in his memoir that the pirates had other viable options besides piracy makes a stark contrast with another famous line in the movie. At one point in the film, Muse tells Phillips that large boats have depleted the local waters of their fish. Later in the film, Phillips says to Muse that surely there must be opportunities for him besides fishing and piracy. Muse then somberly delivers the now well-known line: "Maybe in America. . . ."[40] The film thus disavows the memoir's claim that "[t]here was a living to be made" by young Somalis outside of piracy.[41]

Moreover, the film generates sympathy for the Somalis by suggesting that there is a large degree of coercion involved in their decision to en-

gage in piracy. In a scene that obviously does not appear in Phillips's memoir, we see armed men in pickup trucks roll into the shantytown; The men order Muse and the other villagers to recommence their hijacking efforts, and they warn them, "The boss wants money today!"[42] The film thus suggests that the young Somalis are driven to piracy not only by a lack of opportunity, but also by the threatening demands of local warlords.[43]

If the film refuses to portray the pirates simply as venal criminals, it also refuses to portray the Americans who rescue Phillips simply as selfless heroes. The film thus follows in the footsteps of "Benito Cereno," for Melville's story suggests that the American Captain Delano's rescue of Benito Cereno might be less than fully praiseworthy, given that the rescue entailed the suppression of a slave rebellion. Noting that "piracy" is a theme that runs throughout "Benito Cereno," H. Bruce Franklin writes:

> When he decides to seize the Spanish ship, reenslave the blacks, and thus add to his profits on the voyage, Delano chooses his chief mate, who was reputed to be "a pirate—to head the party." To incite the greed and battle lust of his crew-men, Delano tells them that if they seize the ship they will share the booty: "Take her, and no small part would be theirs. The sailors replied with a shout." So Delano's projection of the *San Dominick* as a "haunted pirate-ship" seems far more accurate as a vision of the true nature of his own vessel, the reincarnated *Bachelor's Delight*.[44]

According to Franklin, then, "Melville's story about a mutiny by the human cargo of a slave ship and its bloody recapture by an apparently well-intentioned, innocent Yankee obliquely asks, 'Who are the real pirates?'"[45]

Does the film *Captain Phillips*—which of course is even more explicitly concerned with piracy than is "Benito Cereno"—similarly aim to "obliquely ask" whether it is actually the Americans who are "the real pirates"? Perhaps not quite. After all, shipping plasma-screen televisions cannot be seen as piratical in the same way that trafficking human beings can be construed as such, nor can the suppression of a hijacking-for-profit be seen as piratical in the same way that suppressing a slave rebellion (and then profiting from the slaves) can be likened to piracy. That said, in regard to the issue of villainous behavior, the film does emphatically suggest, like "Benito Cereno," that the moral situation which it portrays is much more complex than it might initially appear.

First, there may indeed be something "piratical" about the ways in which large ships from wealthier nations illegally fished in Somali waters, making it harder—and some would say impossible—for the local Somali fishermen to make a living. Second, while the massive *Maersk* cargo ship in the film is unarmed and engaged peacefully in commerce, it also symbolizes a global economic order that is rife with inequities.[46]

Third, while the mission of the Navy SEALs in the film is to rescue an innocent captain, the SEALs, the US naval ships, and the authorities who command them are depicted in a somewhat ominous light. For instance, while the American ships are presented by the film in a way that emphasizes their awesome power—especially in contrast to the puny pirate skiffs—the cinematography and the musical scoring create the impression that the naval ships are both wondrous *and* terrible, as captured by the ancient Greek word *deinon*.[47] Indeed, when Tom Hanks's Captain Phillips looks out the porthole of the lifeboat and sees that the *USS Bainbridge* has been joined by another American battleship as well as an aircraft carrier, rather than relief, his response is a worried, "Oh, God." This expression of anxiety does not appear in the memoir, nor does the real Phillips in his memoir ever say anything like the following line, which Hanks's Phillips delivers to Muse: "The Navy is not going to let you win. . . . *They would rather sink this boat than let you get me back to Somalia.*" Similarly, earlier in the film we hear a US admiral tell the commanding officer of the *USS Bainbridge*: "whatever happens, Captain Phillips does not reach Somalia. . . . If you haven't gotten Phillips back by the time [the SEALs] arrive, the SEALs will take care of it."[48] Invented for the film, these lines serve to ratchet up the dramatic tension, for the lines suggest that Phillips now faces danger not only from the pirates, but also from a possible rescue attempt gone awry. At one level, these lines simply sum up the hardnosed but arguably necessary policy of the United States that ransoms will never be paid to terrorists (and ransom situations will be avoided if at all possible), so as to deter future kidnappings of American citizens.[49] However, given the tone with which these lines are delivered in the film, the makers of *Captain Phillips* seem to also be implying that the US government would rather have Phillips go down along with the pirates if the alternative is the national humiliation that would occur if Phillips were to be held hostage on Somali soil. Thus, the SEALs and the government officials who control them are portrayed in the film as incredibly competent and efficient, but also as ruthless and committed to *raison d'etat*—and to the overarching goal of mastery—in a way that could spell doom for Phillips as well as for the pirates.

I here agree with Ryu Spaeth, who writes that *Captain Phillips* "never suggests that the Navy is wrong in assassinating three of the hijackers to rescue Phillips," but at the same time, the film often "presents the U.S. [government] as a cold, menacing presence." According to Spaeth,

> the avatars of the state in *Captain Phillips* are as robotic as T-1000s, biting off their sentences as if speech itself would betray too much feeling. In a balletic sequence featuring SEAL Team Six . . . the soldiers change clothes to reveal perfectly sculpted bodies the size of tanks, accentuating the notion that these men are not heroes so much as deadly instruments of the U.S. government.[50]

I read the film in a similar way, although in my view, the film actually *does* allow us to see the Navy SEALs as heroic when they rescue Phillips; simultaneously, though, the film encourages us to ponder whether this victory of American power might also be a kind of failure insofar as the global inequities out of which piracy emerges remain largely unacknowledged and unaddressed by the American authorities. (It seems that Phillips comes to understand these inequities by the end of the film, but there is no indication that the American authorities have achieved a similar understanding.) In the same vein, while Melville arguably allows the reader to view Delano's rescue of Benito Cereno and the other white sailors as heroic, Melville at the same time wants us to ponder the moral problems inherent in suppressing a slave revolt. (Delano, of course, remains blind to these moral problems.) American heroism thus can be found in both the novella and the film, but in both cases this heroism coexists with unsettling moral questions such that both narratives are ultimately more tragic than triumphalist.

## "WHAT HAS CAST SUCH A SHADOW UPON YOU?": THE TRAGIC ENDINGS OF "BENITO CERENO" AND *CAPTAIN PHILLIPS* CONTRASTED WITH THE ENDINGS OF THE ORIGINAL MEMOIRS

In his memoir, the real Captain Phillips (perhaps understandably) never expresses one iota of sadness regarding the death of his captors. But in the film, the death of the Somalis is portrayed as a tragic waste of life. Shortly before they are killed by the sharpshooters, Tom Hanks's Phillips (who suspects that the SEALs might soon take action), tries to save the life of the youngest pirate by pleading desperately with him to place his hands in the air. Nothing like this appears in the memoir on which the film is based; moreover, in the film (but not in the memoir), a blood-stained Phillips gasps, "Oh, no!" when he first realizes that his captors have been shot and killed.[51] Phillips's pained reaction to their deaths denies the audience the sense of triumph that they might have been expecting, just as Melville denies the reader a sense of triumph when the mutinous slaves are subdued and Benito Cereno is rescued. According to Jason Frank, Melville is a tragic thinker whose stories suggest that "with every triumph comes a defeat."[52] By having the anguished and blood-stained Captain Phillips yell, "Oh, no!" when he sees that his captors have been killed, the film similarly points to the tragic concurrence of victory and defeat, especially when force is involved.[53] As Manohla Dargis puts it regarding the climax of *Captain Phillips*, "Some viewers may pump their fists but, I think, he [Paul Greengrass, the director] wants this victory to shatter you."[54]

As I have suggested, "shattered" is also a good word to describe Captain Benito Cereno at the end of Melville's novella. As is well known, the

biggest change that Melville made when he adapted his source material involved the fate of the Spanish captain. As Michael Rogin notes, the real Benito Cereno (as described in Delano's memoir) "fought to regain his slave property, and to stop Delano from acquiring a share of the booty."[55] Melville, though, chose to instead describe the rescued Benito Cereno as "broken in body and mind."[56] The historical Benito Cereno actually lived for another twenty-five years after his ordeal at sea and married shortly after it.[57] But in Melville's version of the story, just a few months after his experience of captivity, Benito Cereno dies in the monastery where he had secluded himself. Shortly before he dies, Captain Delano visits Benito Cereno, and Delano is saddened to see that Benito Cereno remains haunted by the slave rebellion: "'You are saved,' cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; 'you are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you?'" Inconsolable, Benito Cereno then replies: "The negro."[58] Don Benito's laconic answer could simply mean that he is haunted by the shocking violence that was perpetrated by Babo; but, more powerfully, one can interpret it to mean that Benito Cereno, who was essentially enslaved by the Africans, is haunted not simply by the evil of Babo, but by the evil of slavery itself. As Rogin notes, "Like Hegel's owl of Minerva, Don Benito has acquired philosophic understanding only in defeat and at dusk."[59] While the execution of Babo and the reenslavement of the Africans might have restored, for now, the status quo, Benito Cereno goes to an early grave seemingly haunted by his newfound awareness that as long as the institution of slavery persists, more trouble is looming on the horizon.

In its astonishing final scene, the film *Captain Phillips* manages to convey something quite similar, and it does so by departing from Phillips's memoir in subtle but important ways. In his memoir, the real-life Captain Phillips suggests that his captivity has not affected him in any fundamental way, just as the real-life Benito Cereno was not transformed by his experience. Indeed, Phillips explicitly states in his memoir, "the experience didn't change me."[60] While Phillips writes in his memoir that he would wake up crying for the first few days after his rescue, he denies that these tears have any deep significance. Instead, he writes that according to the SEAL psychiatrist with whom he consulted, the tears were nothing more than a temporary physiological reaction—the result of "special chemicals" and "hormones" produced by the body in a "life and death" crisis.[61]

In the film version, we are informed in the end titles that Captain Phillips rejoined his family in April of 2009 and started work again as a captain about fifteen months later. Based simply on these end titles alone, one might get the sense that the filmmakers want us to think that all is now well again, and that Captain Phillips has been unfazed by his experience of captivity. However, it must be noted that these end titles are not accompanied by any celebratory, stirring music, nor do we actually get to

see Phillips enjoy a touching reunion with his wife, children, and community. In the memoir, we do get to experience Phillips's reunion with his family, as well as his joyful homecoming to his Vermont town. But in sharp contrast to the memoir, the film's last scene is actually a devastating one in which we see the rescued Phillips, who is in shock, break down and cry as he is examined by a Navy medic onboard the *USS Bainbridge*. So, while the viewer may be told through the end titles that the real-life Phillips was apparently unchanged by his experience, what the viewer sees—and what the viewer is likely to remember when the film ends—is a Phillips who has been deeply affected by his encounter with the Somali pirates. Moreover, when we see Hanks's Phillips crying, we do not get the sense that these tears are merely a physiological reaction without any lasting significance. Instead, one is left with the sense that a shadow has been cast upon Phillips, one which will not easily be shaken off, despite what the end titles convey.

In this deeply disquieting final scene, the female medic who is treating Phillips tells him, "Captain, you're safe now, okay? . . . Everything's going to be okay."[62] One is reminded here of Delano insistently telling the shattered Don Benito, "You are saved." But, just as the death of Benito Cereno at the end of the novella completely belies Delano's optimism, so, too, does the choice to end the film with Phillips in tears seem to belie any optimistic claim that "[e]verything's going to be okay." Rather, as with the ending of "Benito Cereno," one is left with the feeling that while the Americans may have restored order to the high seas—at least for the time being—there will soon be more suffering and conflict, as long as enormous inequities continue to exist.

## CONCLUSION: LITERATURE, FILM, AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

*Captain Phillips* and "Benito Cereno" remind us that the teachers of a democratic citizenry include not only statesmen, but filmmakers and novelists as well. According to Schiffman, with "Benito Cereno," Melville "wanted primarily to write a 'good story,' one that would sell well."[63] Similarly, the Hollywood filmmakers of *Captain Phillips* obviously also sought a box-office hit. Both works, though, exemplify how popular forms of entertainment can also *educate* by inspiring critical examination of social and political phenomena. As Catherine Zuckert notes, "Melville does not merely seek to entertain his readers," but rather aims to teach them "that blacks are neither naturally subservient nor intellectually inferior to whites."[64] Melville found a way to raise questions for his audience about slavery and race in a way that was subtle rather than blatantly didactic, thereby retaining the commercial appeal of the novella. As Schiffman puts it, the story implicitly provides "an indictment of slavery"

without being "an abolitionist tract."[65] As for *Captain Phillips*, Dargis writes that the film illustrates the fact "that big-screen thrills and thought need not be mutually exclusive." As Dargis notes, and as I have sought to elaborate upon in this chapter, the film at first appears to be merely "a jittery thriller," but then it gradually "deepens, brilliantly, unexpectedly, into an unsettling look at global capitalism and American privilege and power."[66]

As we have seen, both the film and the novella depict what at first glance might seem like an unambiguously heroic use of American power; each work, though, ultimately leads its audience to reflect upon the ways that the use of American power can leave underlying injustices (both racial and economic) unaddressed or (especially in the case of "Benito Cereno") even reinforced. And, both works suggest that if these injustices remain unaddressed, then the result may eventually be an eruption of violence and disorder.

As I have suggested, neither the film nor the novella makes these claims in a morally simplistic manner. For example, Melville may want to teach us about the evils of slavery, but the critique of slavery is rendered complex insofar as Babo himself arguably perpetrates this very evil when he dominates Benito Cereno. As Schaar notes, when he becomes master of the *San Dominick* and seeks to control those whites whom he does not kill by terrorizing them, Babo thereby succeeds in having masters and slaves change places, but he fails to transcend the master-slave dynamic altogether.[67] Rather than a story of unalloyed heroism versus pure villainy, then, Melville reminds us that all of us are "gray," as Altschuler put it. Grayness in this sense also emerges in *Captain Phillips*. For on the one hand, the film never denies, as Greengrass put it in an interview, that "Hanks is the innocent guy and the young kid is the punk criminal"; however, as Greengrass went on to note, when the viewer comes to see that the young pirates are "locked out of the global economy," the "landscape of [the film] slowly but surely becomes more ambiguous . . . and as it becomes more ambiguous, it becomes more humane."[68]

Because of the moral ambiguity and moral complexity found in *Captain Phillips*, it is interesting to consider the film in the light of Michelle Pautz's empirical research on the effects that Hollywood films can have on their audience's political views. Pautz found that after watching either the film *Argo* or the film *Zero Dark Thirty*, 20 to 25 percent of her college student test subjects changed their views on government (usually in a more favorable direction), as measured in a questionnaire that was administered both before and after the film screening.[69] For example, 25 percent of the test subjects indicated greater levels of trust in government after viewing one of the two films, both of which were based on real events.[70] Pautz found, though, that the film *Argo*, which portrayed a CIA mission to rescue six hostages in Iran after the 1980 revolution, "elicit[ed] more positive sentiment" toward government than did the film *Zero Dark*

*Thirty*, which portrayed the CIA's hunt for Osama bin Laden after 9/11.[71] Pautz speculates that the reason for this could be that "good and evil are not as easily distinguishable in *Zero Dark Thirty*" as compared to *Argo*.[72] Pautz argues that the moral ambiguity in *Zero Dark Thirty* arises not because the film generates sympathy toward Osama bin Laden, but because the scenes in which detainees are subjected by the CIA to torture (or "enhanced interrogation methods," as some term it) are likely to "leave the audience pondering what is and is not morally acceptable."[73]

Notwithstanding Pautz's findings about which types of movies do the most to shift opinions about government (at least in the short-term), I would argue that from the perspective of democratic education, films such as *Captain Phillips* and *Zero Dark Thirty*, both of which explore complex moral questions, can often be more valuable than films that offer a one-dimensional view of political life. That is, films like *Captain Phillips* (and novellas like "Benito Cereno"), which possess a sense of tragedy and ambiguity, can help train audiences to grapple with the complexities of political life to a greater degree than can works of fiction in which "the 'good guys' and 'bad guys' are eas[y] to discern," as Pautz puts it.[74]

It is important to note that the very possibility of tragedy—at least of a certain sort—is precluded by narratives wherein "the 'good guys' and 'bad guys' are eas[y] to discern." For example, if Antigone's conflict with Creon had been presented by Sophocles simply as a story of good versus evil—that is, if there were absolutely no merit to Creon's moral claims in *Antigone*, or, alternatively, no merit to the moral claims of Antigone—then the play's central conflict would be far less tragic. As Hegel first pointed out, Sophocles's actual play is tragic in large part because it is a story not of right versus wrong, but rather a story in which two different but legitimate moral claims have inexorably come into conflict.[75]

*Captain Phillips* is a tragedy because it involves a conflict not between good and evil, but between two captains who are each trying to survive but from very different positions within the global economy. As Billy Ray, the screenwriter of *Captain Phillips*, put it, "I always saw [the film] as the tale of two captains. . . . It's the story of two men who get up in the morning, who get dressed and go to work. . . . But their work puts them on this terrible collision course."[76] To be sure, Captain Phillips is more "innocent," as Greengrass notes, than the piratical Muse, but the very innocence of Phillips blinds him (at least at the beginning of the film) to the questions about global justice that the film explores. In a similar vein, Amasa Delano's innocence—and, indeed, naïveté—causes him to be blind to the yearning for freedom found within the hearts of the enslaved persons aboard the *San Dominick*.[77] As I have suggested (following Altschuler), "Benito Cereno" is, like *Captain Phillips*, not so much a tale of good versus evil as it is a tragic tale that condemns chattel slavery while also asking us to acknowledge the good and evil that is intertwined in all people. Given, as Michael Rogin has demonstrated, that Americans have

often engaged in the "demonization" of their "political foes" (whether foreign or domestic), and given that we today live in an era of sharp political polarization, it may be particularly valuable for Americans to be exposed to cinematic and literary works of art, like "Benito Cereno" and *Captain Phillips*, which remind us that none of us have a monopoly on virtue, and that all of us inhabit "the common continent of men."[78]

## NOTES

1. By "the makers of *Captain Phillips*," I refer primarily to the director, Paul Greengrass, and the screenwriter, Billy Ray. Prior to *Captain Phillips*, Greengrass, who is from England, was well known for directing the films *United 93* (2006) and *Bloody Sunday* (2002); both of these critically acclaimed films were based on real events (respectively, the events of September 11, 2001, and the "Bloody Sunday" shootings of 1972 in Northern Ireland). Greengrass also directed the action films *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004) and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007). Before *Captain Phillips*, Ray's most well-known screenwriting credit was for *The Hunger Games* (2012). In addition to Greengrass and Ray, I also want to include the film's two lead actors within the phrase "the makers of *Captain Phillips*," for the remarkable performances of both Tom Hanks as Captain Phillips and Barkhad Abdi as the pirate Muse contribute to the emotional and intellectual impact of the film. Moreover, the film's most famous line—"I'm the Captain now"—was actually improvised by Abdi, who had never before acted professionally. See Dana Goodyear, "Contender," *New Yorker*, March 3, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/03/contender. Both a commercial and critical success, *Captain Phillips* was nominated for six Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Adapted Screenplay, and Best Supporting Actor for Abdi's portrayal of Muse.

2. Amasa Delano, *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels, Chapter XVIII*, in *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1817] 2002), 199–228.

3. Richard Phillips, with Stephan Talty, *A Captain's Duty: Somali Pirates, Navy SEALs, and Dangerous Days at Sea* (New York: Hyperion, 2010).

4. Rosalie Feltenstein, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" *American Literature* 19, no. 3 (November 1947): 246.

5. Manohla Dargis, "A Thriller Armed with Thought," *New York Times*, October 10, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/11/movies/captain-phillips-stars-tom-hanks-as-a-high-seas-hostage.html?_r=0 /.

6. Feltenstein, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" 246.

7. Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," in *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1855] 2002), 101.

8. Given what he suffered at the hands of the pirates, it is, of course, completely understandable that Phillips might want to focus on the brutality and the venality of the pirates, as opposed to exploring issues such as the global context that helps to produce piracy. In other words, by saying that Phillips in his memoir is uninterested in moral questions, I do not mean to criticize this plainly courageous man. Instead, I only mean to point out the differences between his memoir and the film, and I want to note that these differences parallel the differences between Delano's memoir and Melville's novella.

9. Phillips, *A Captain's Duty*, 46.

10. Ibid., 17.

11. Ibid. 20.

12. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale* (Berkeley: Arion Press, [1851] 1979), 123.

13. Dargis, "A Thriller Armed with Thought."
14. *Captain Phillips*, directed by Paul Greengrass (2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.
15. Ibid.
16. Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 329.
17. Greg Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014), 55. See also Susan McWilliams, who helpfully notes that, "if Emerson is right in thinking that Americans are wedded to the idea of human independence, Melville worries that Americans are dangerously divorced from the fact of human interdependence" (McWilliams, "Ahab, American," in *A Political Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Jason Frank [Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013], 119).
18. Susan McWilliams, "The Tragedy in American Political Thought," *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 144, 137, 141.
19. Phillips, *A Captain's Duty*, 283 (emphasis added).
20. Phillips's lack of attention to the bonds that tie Americans to people beyond America's national borders resonates with Jason Frank's claim that, for Melville, "America's monomaniacal commitment to the ideal of absolute freedom" serves to "militate against the acknowledgment of the fragile interdependence" that is our true condition. See Frank, "Pathologies of Freedom in Melville's America," in *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Political Theory*, ed. Romand Coles, Mark Reinhardt, and George Shulman (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 447, 454.
21. *Captain Phillips*, directed by Paul Greengrass (2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.
22. Ibid.
23. John H. Schaar, *Legitimacy in the Modern State* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1981), 81.
24. *Captain Phillips*, directed by Paul Greengrass (2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.
25. Melville's Delano notes that Babo is of "small stature." See Melville, "Benito Cereno," 39. Similarly, Muse is of average height but of so slight a frame that another Somali man calls him a "skinny rat." See *Captain Phillips*, directed by Paul Greengrass (2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD. What Babo and Muse lack in physical strength, though, they make up for in courage and intelligence.
26. Richard E. Ray, "'Benito Cereno': Babo as Leader," in *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1975] 2002), 340.
27. For example, Feltenstein argues that Benito Cereno has a "helpless purity," whereas Babo epitomizes "wickedness." See Feltenstein, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" 249.
28. Grandin, *Empire of Necessity*, 92.
29. F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 508.
30. Joseph Schiffman, "Critical Problems in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" in *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno,"* ed. Robert E. Burkholder (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1992), 323.
31. Glenn C. Altschuler, "Whose Foot on Whose Throat? A Re-Examination of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" in *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1975] 2002), 299.
32. Ibid., 303.
33. Melville, "Benito Cereno," 35, 58. Delano's racist views are evident, for example, when he claims that "by nature" the whites are "the shrewder race" and when he tells himself that the blacks are "too stupid" to possibly be conspiring with Benito Cereno. See Melville, "Benito Cereno," 63.

34. Ibid., 87.

35. Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria, Illinois" (October 16, 1854), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 315.

36. Melville, "Benito Cereno," 91–93.

37. Altschuler, "Whose Foot on Whose Throat?," 298.

38. Ryan Lambie, "Paul Greengrass Interview: *Captain Phillips* and Crime Stories," *Den of Geek*, October 16, 2013, http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/paul-greengrass/27655/paul-greengrass-interview-captain-phillips-crime-stories. When he mentions *Under Siege*, Greengrass is referring to the 1992 fictional action film in which Steven Seagal portrays a former Navy SEAL who is trying to thwart the seizure of the *USS Missouri* by hijackers who intend to sell the ship's nuclear missiles. In his review of the film, Vincent Canby wrote that "'Under Siege' is as seriously paranoid and as red-white-and-blue patriotic as 'Rambo.'" See Canby, "Review/Film; Steven Seagal on a Ship in Hot Water," *New York Times*, October 9, 1992, http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/09/movies/review-film-steven-seagal-on-a-ship-in-hot-water.html.

39. Phillips, *A Captain's Duty*, 65 (emphasis added).

40. *Captain Phillips*, directed by Paul Greengrass (2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD. One indicator of this line's fame is that Thomas Friedman used it as the title of one of his columns in the *New York Times*, on the subject of what he called "the big divide in the world these days . . . between the world of order and a growing world of disorder." See Friedman, "'Maybe in America,'" *New York Times*, July 29, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/30/opinion/thomas-friedman-maybe-in-america.html.

41. In an interview, Billy Ray, the screenwriter of *Captain Phillips*, asserted that "Muse cannot just wake up in the morning and . . . apply for work at a Wal-Mart, because there are just two businesses in Somalia—piracy and the sale of *khat*, a plant the pirates are always chewing that gives them feelings of euphoria and invincibility. . . . We're talking about a place with zero economic opportunity, a failed state that has no Navy, no real coast guard and no police. It's a mess, and Muse wakes up every day in the middle of it. I'm not trying to justify piracy, but we needed to open a lens and show viewers what it looks like in Eyl, so that you can understand the pirates as human beings." See Naomi Pfefferman, "Human Condition Guides 'Captain Phillips' Screenwriter's Process," *Jewish Journal*, February 18, 2014, http://www.jewishjournal.com/the_ticket/item/human_condition_guides_captain_phillips_screenwriters_process.

42. *Captain Phillips*, directed by Paul Greengrass (2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.

43. When asked by an interviewer about the motives of the pirates, Paul Greengrass, the director of *Captain Phillips*, responded, "I felt it was absolutely clear; these guys who attack the ships are at the end of a long chain of warlord gangster activity that stretches far away from those beaches. I wanted to explain that this began originally as the response of fishing communities to over-fishing and toxic-waste dumping, but very quickly became a gangster activity. I wanted to show that these were desperate young men with no chance of employment, and that they generally culturally worship America." See "Q&A: Paul Greengrass on Making 'Captain Phillips,'" *The Economist*, October 18, 2013, http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2013/10/qa-paul-greengrass.

44. H. Bruce Franklin, "Slavery and Empire: Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" in *Melville's Evermoving Dawn: Centennial Essays*, ed. John Bryant and Robert Milder (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1997), 153.

45. Ibid. Franklin refers to the "reincarnated" *Bachelor's Delight* because the original *Bachelor's Delight* was the name of a well-known seventeenth-century pirate ship. See Franklin, "Slavery and Empire," 152. By changing the name of Delano's ship from the *Perseverance* to the *Bachelor's Delight*, Melville thus suggests that the Americans may not be as virtuous and innocent as the reader might assume. While Franklin notes that

Delano and his crew can be construed as "the real pirates," one can, of course, also consider Aranda and the Spanish sailors to be included among "the real pirates," insofar as they were engaged in the buying and selling of human beings. Indeed, in his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson used the phrase "piratical warfare" to describe the slave trade. See Jefferson, "Rough Draft of the Declaration of Independence" (July 2, 1776), Teaching American History, http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/rough-draft-of-the-declaration-of-independence/. In contrast to Jefferson, Melville's Delano is only able to see the rebellious slaves—and not those who would enslave them—as pirates. For when at last "the scales dropped from his eyes" and he realized that Babo was actually in control of the *San Dominick*, Delano describes the slave rebellion as a "ferocious piratical revolt." See Melville, "Benito Cereno," 85.

46. The film does not go so far as to suggest that the United States is directly responsible for the poverty of people in the developing world, but the film does suggest that if Americans ignore this poverty, they do so at their own peril.

47. As Paul Woodruff notes in his discussion of the "Ode to Man" in Sophocles's *Antigone*, the ancient Greek "word *deinon* is used of things that are awe-inspiring in both good and bad ways." See Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), 14.

48. *Captain Phillips*, directed by Paul Greengrass (2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.

49. In his second term, President Obama "reaffirm[ed] that the United States government will not make concessions, such as paying ransom, to terrorist groups holding American hostages," because "paying ransom to terrorists risks endangering more Americans and funding the very terrorism that we're trying to stop." See Obama, Statement by the President on the U.S. Government's Hostage Policy Review (June, 24, 2015), https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/06/24/statement-president-us-governments-hostage-policy-review. However, on the same day, in what was described by many as a "softening" of the US policy on ransoms, the Department of Justice issued a statement pointing out that the department had never "prosecute[d] a hostage's family or friends for paying a ransom for the safe return of their loved one," and did not plan to do so in the future. See Department of Justice, "Statement on U.S. Citizens Taken Hostage Abroad" (June 24, 2015), http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/department-justice-statement-us-citizens-taken-hostage-abroad. For a discussion of the Obama administration's adjustments to the US policy on how to deal with hostage-taking and ransoms, see, *inter alia*, Julie Pace and Eric Tucker, "U.S. Softens Policies on Families Paying Ransom and Talking to Captors," *Denver Post*, June 24, 2015, http://www.denverpost.com/nationworld/ci_28369417/u-s-softens-policies-families-paying-ransom-and. Pace and Tucker are among those who summed up these adjustments as a "[s]oftening" of "longstanding policy." In his statement on the government's policy on hostage situations, Obama mentioned the freeing of Captain Phillips as an example of a successful rescue mission.

50. Ryu Spaeth, "*Captain Phillips*, and the Political Evolution of Paul Greengrass," *The Week*, February 6, 2014, http://theweek.com/articles/451506/captain-phillips-political-evolution-paul-greengrass.

51. *Captain Phillips*, directed by Paul Greengrass (2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.

52. Frank, "Pathologies of Freedom," 443.

53. According to Steven B. Smith, Abraham Lincoln "recogni[zed] the old nostrum of 'dirty hands'" insofar as he believed "that the means necessary to achieve his ends" during the Civil War "made him an accessory to the slaughter. . . . Lincoln was unable simply to enjoy the fruits of victory because of the means necessary to achieve it." See Smith, "How to Read Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address," in *The Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 491. In a somewhat similar vein, when the young pirates are killed by the Navy SEALs at the end of *Captain Phillips*, the audience is left with the sense that while this act of violence may,

alas, have been necessary, the violence itself is still something to be bemoaned rather than celebrated.

54. Dargis, "A Thriller Armed with Thought."

55. Michael Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 218.

56. Melville, "Benito Cereno," 100.

57. See Grandin, "Empire of Necessity," 249, 253. The real Benito Cereno actually outlived the real Amasa Delano; the latter died in 1823. See Grandin, "Empire of Necessity," 251.

58. Melville, "Benito Cereno," 101.

59. Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*, 218.

60. Phillips, *A Captain's Duty*, 283.

61. Ibid., 273.

62. *Captain Phillips*, directed by Paul Greengrass (2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.

63. Schiffman, "Critical Problems," 33.

64. Catherine Zuckert, "Leadership—Natural and Conventional—in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" *Interpretation* 26, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 252.

65. Schiffman, "Critical Problems," 34, 33.

66. Dargis, "A Thriller Armed with Thought."

67. Of Babo's seizure of power, Schaar writes: "Turning the world upside down still leaves a world of masters and slaves," for "[r]ebellion does not imply transvaluation." See Schaar, *Legitimacy in the Modern State*, 64, 65.

68. Lambie, "Paul Greengrass Interview."

69. Michelle C. Pautz, "*Argo* and *Zero Dark Thirty*: Film, Government, and Audiences," *PS: Political Science* 48 (January 2015): 120.

70. Ibid., 126.

71. Ibid., 127.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. According to Hegel, "in the *Antigone* the love of family, the holy, the inner . . . comes into collision with the right of the state. Creon is not a tyrant, but rather the champion of something that is also an ethical power. . . . [B]oth [Antigone and Creon] are in the wrong because they are one-sided, but both are also in the right." See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Vol. 2, Determinate Religion*, ed. Peter Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1832] 1987), 665. Unlike Hegel, Martha Nussbaum asserts that Antigone is ultimately "morally superior to Creon." Still, she agrees with Hegel that *Antigone* is by no means a clash between good and evil. She writes, "Both Creon and Antigone are one-sided, narrow, in their pictures of what matters. The concerns of each show us important values that the other has refused to take into account. On this issue Hegel's famous and frequently abused reading is correct." See Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 63, 67.

76. Pfefferman, "'Captain Phillips' Screenwriter's Process."

77. As Benjamin Barber notes, "What is remarkable in Captain Delano's blindness to evil is his incapacity to recognize the moral debacle of slavery itself." See Barber, *Fear's Empire: War, Terrorism, and Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), 71.

78. Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, The Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), xiii.

# TWO

# *Invisible Man* and Democratic Leadership

In the previous chapter, I focused on "Benito Cereno" and *Captain Phillips*, both of which are stories about leadership: the leadership of Amasa Delano, Benito Cereno, and Babo in the case of the novella, and the leadership of Captain Phillips and Muse in the case of the film.[1] I turn now to another novel which is also very much concerned with the nature of leadership, and which used for its epigraph a line from "Benito Cereno"—namely, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.[2] In this chapter, I examine Ellison's understanding of leadership and its relationship to freedom in his landmark novel. My main contention is that *Invisible Man* helps provide us with a valuable conception of democratic leadership. As Bruce Miroff notes, many "committed democrats have been suspicious of the very idea of leadership," since the "claim of leaders to political precedence" arguably "violates the equality of democratic citizens." While acknowledging the tensions between leadership and democracy, Miroff has asked whether there are "types of American leadership that foster democratic political life" rather than "undermine it."[3] In my view, Ellison's novel provides us precisely with an understanding of leadership that can nurture rather than hinder democracy. The theory of democratic leadership that emerges from the novel consists of the following three elements. First, because they recognize that ordinary people are capable of political action, democratic leaders seek to ensure that their fellow citizens can gain political freedom by becoming visible political actors with an equal voice. Second, instead of seeking to advance their own predetermined goals by manipulating their fellow citizens, democratic leaders seek to advance goals which they have in common with their followers. Third, democratic leaders seek to uphold and further realize in practice the principle of equality which undergirds democracy.

The novel points toward this tripartite conception of democratic leadership in part through its portrayal of what one might call negative exemplars.[4] That is, through the novel's description of the leadership of the Brotherhood (and the leadership of other characters), Ellison reveals what democratic leadership *is not*, and thus at the same time gestures toward a conception of what democratic leadership can and should be.

This positive conception of democratic leadership is only partially exemplified by the words and deeds of the novel's title character. In part because the novel intends to convey what Ellison called a "tragicomic attitude toward the universe," the narrator's actions often have unintended and unexpected consequences that are alternately (or sometimes simultaneously) humorous and calamitous.[5] The narrator's efforts to become a successful democratic leader are therefore never fully successful. According to Timothy Parrish, while *Invisible Man* "prophesies and in a sense anticipates the Freedom Movement's victories of the 1960s," its title character "fails his quest to become an effective negro leader."[6] Similarly, William H. Rice claims that "in almost every case in the novel," the Invisible Man "accomplishes nothing" with his speeches, at least in terms of practical effects.[7] While I do not think that the narrator's speeches should be seen as futile, it is certainly the case that when he wrote *Invisible Man*, Ellison was, as he put it, "very much involved with the question of just why our Negro leadership was never able to enforce its will. Just what was there about the structure of American society that prevented Negroes from throwing up effective leaders?"[8] Given his interest in diagnosing the problems with African American leadership in the years preceding the birth of the civil rights movement, Ellison's goal in *Invisible Man* was not necessarily to depict a successful political leader. And yet, even if it is the case that the narrator of *Invisible Man* does not perfectly embody democratic leadership, he is still definitely moving—in fits and starts—in that direction. My task in this chapter is thus to make more explicit what remains somewhat inchoate in the novel. Just as Danielle Allen has tried to flesh out what *Invisible Man* has to say about democratic citizenship, I here attempt to draw out the novel's important lessons regarding the nature of democratic leadership.[9]

Ellison asserted that when he wrote *Invisible Man*, he was "concerned with the nature of leadership."[10] What, though, did Ellison mean by "leadership"? Part of the answer to this question can be gleaned from an interview that Ellison gave to Robert Penn Warren in which Ellison claimed, "I'm not a leader."[11] Ellison's modest claim that he was not a leader is not entirely convincing, though, for just moments before, Ellison described his own goals in such a way that he simultaneously provided what amounted to a very helpful definition of leadership. In response to Warren's query about whether the African American experience entails not just "suffering and deprivation," but also "a challenge and enrichment," Ellison responded:

> Yes, indeed—these complete the circle and make it human. And . . . I have no desire to escape the struggle, because I'm just too interested in how it is going to work out, and I want to impose my will upon the outcome to the extent that I can. I want to help shape events and our general culture, not merely as a semi-outsider but as one who is in a position to have a responsible impact upon the American value system.[12]

Ellison is here describing his own goals as an artist and public intellectual, but, more generally, he offers a useful definition of the leader—whether artist, activist, or elected official—as someone who seeks to "help shape events and our general culture" and who tries to affect "the outcome" of the "struggle[s]" that define the nation.

My claim that Ellison aspired to be a leader even if he did not label himself as such is consistent with Lucas Morel's statement that "Ellison saw his calling as a writer as having a direct impact on American culture and hence political practice."[13] To describe the influence that Ellison hoped to have on his political community, Morel usefully invokes Abraham Lincoln's assertion that "he who moulds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or promotes decisions. He makes statutes or decisions possible or impossible to be executed."[14] Ellison has been criticized by Jerry Watts and other scholars for his alleged "social and political disengagement."[15] However, even if one grants that Ellison often refrained from the kind of direct political action that is typical of activists, by seeking to shape what Lincoln called "public sentiment" through his writings, Ellison still sought to have a major influence on the political landscape and can therefore be seen as an engaged leader in his own right.[16] Thus, as Ross Posnock helpfully notes, the claim that Ellison chose "the artistic freedom of the modernist artist" over "the responsibilities of political engagement" relies on a "simplistic opposition between politics and art" that Ellison sought to transcend.[17]

Given the definition of leadership that emerges in Ellison's interview with Warren, one can see that *Invisible Man* contains a number of characters (including, at times, the Invisible Man himself) who aspire to be effective leaders. But by telling these characters' stories, what is Ellison trying to convey about "the nature of leadership"? The leader's job may be to "shape events," but to what end? The leader may want to have an "impact upon the American value system," but what are the values that the leader should promote?

I argue that for Ellison, a key task of democratic leadership is to help one's fellow citizens achieve and maintain freedom. But what did Ellison mean by "freedom"? I explore this question in part 1 of this chapter. One notion of freedom considered in the book is freedom understood as the absence of restraints, or as being left alone, which is the form of freedom achieved by the Invisible Man when he lives in isolation—"underground"—in his basement apartment.[18] Ellison suggests, though, that

this is not ultimately the most valuable form of freedom, for while he remains in isolation the narrator simply confirms that he will continue to be both invisible and voiceless. A higher form of freedom, the novel suggests, arises when one appears before others, when one is heard by one's fellow citizens, and when one takes a share of responsibility for the welfare of the community—a responsibility that is urged upon him by Mary Rambo, who is perhaps the most laudable character in the entire novel.

Instead of endorsing the idea that freedom is simply being left alone, the novel suggests that freedom involves the development of one's capacities, including one's political capacities. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville expressed the hope that political leaders would not simply "seek to do great things with men," but rather would "try a little more to make men great."[19] In part 2 of this chapter, I discuss how for Ellison, democratic leaders seek to elevate their followers—that is, they seek to "make men great"—by educating and energizing them, thereby rendering them more capable of self-rule. In part 3, I examine several examples in the novel of *un*democratic leaders who simply manipulate their followers in order to achieve allegedly great things that are chosen in advance by the leaders. In contrast, we see in part 4 that the Invisible Man comes to believe that democratic leaders must respect the political capacities of ordinary people, and they should strive to pursue goals that they share with their fellow citizens.

Finally, as I discuss in part 5 of this chapter, the novel suggests that while the ability to define one's own identity and values may be an important component of freedom, Americans ultimately should seek political freedom while acknowledging the authority of America's founding ideals—that is, while "affirm[ing] the principle," as the narrator puts it.[20] To put this metaphorically, Ellison suggests that striving to "Be your own father"—as the character known as the vet urges the narrator to do—may not ultimately be the best path toward freedom; instead, a higher form of freedom arises when one acknowledges and affirms what Lincoln called "the father of all moral principle" in us.[21] Democratic leadership, then, must involve the reaffirmation and the reapplication of our founding ideals, and especially the ideal of equality.

While I will sometimes make reference to the political thought of Lincoln, Tocqueville, and Arendt when discussing Ellison, I do not mean to suggest that Ellison consciously followed any of them in formulating his theory of democratic leadership, nor do I mean to suggest that Ellison's ideas on leadership are simply identical to the ideas of the other three thinkers. I do, though, believe that a comparison of Ellison's ideas with those of Lincoln, Tocqueville, and Arendt can be helpful for achieving an understanding of Ellison's theory of democratic leadership.

## PART I: THE FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUALIST VERSUS POLITICAL FREEDOM

As I have suggested, for Ellison a key task of democratic leadership is to help one's fellow citizens achieve and maintain political freedom. However, *political* freedom is certainly not the sole understanding of freedom considered in *Invisible Man*. Indeed, throughout the novel, Ellison explores different answers to the question of what it means to be free. In the prologue, the Invisible Man envisions himself having a conversation with an elderly enslaved woman, in which he asks her, "Old woman, what is this freedom you love so well?" As part of her response, the old woman states, "First I think it's one thing, then I think it's another. It gits my head to spinning."[22] Consistent with this scene, the novel itself never provides the reader with one simple or unambiguous definition of freedom; just as the elderly woman's mind moves from "one thing, then . . . another," when asked about the meaning of freedom, so, too, does the novel explore multiple understandings of the concept.

At the beginning of the novel, we see that the Invisible Man has attained a kind of freedom insofar as he is not responsible to anyone—not even to the power company, which does not know of his existence. But is freedom conceived as being left alone—the freedom achieved by the Invisible Man when he lives in his secret basement apartment—a highly valuable notion of freedom? Ellison suggests that the answer is no, in a number of ways. In both the prologue and the epilogue, there are clear indications that the Invisible Man is not entirely comfortable with his choice to have removed himself from the public realm, and he expresses the hope that his isolation will be only temporary. Hence, he states, "A hibernation is a covert preparation for a more overt action."[23] At the same time, he worries that his individualistic withdrawal from the world may be permanent: "I might forget to leave my hole when the moment for action presents itself."[24] Hoping to one day reenter the public realm, but unsure at times if he has the strength to do so after all that he has been through, the Invisible Man declares: "But I am an orator, a rabble rouser—Am? I *was*, and perhaps shall be again."[25] This desire to leave behind his isolation and to regain a measure of political freedom is also expressed when the narrator declares that, "I'm coming out. . . . I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play."[26] Whether he is here announcing his intention to become a memoirist, a novelist, or a political activist, it is clear that the Invisible Man now wants to be a leader who will "help shape events," to use Ellison's words from his interview with Warren. If retreating to his basement hole was in one sense an attempt "to escape the struggle," the Invisible Man now seems to be saying, as Ellison said to Warren: "I want to impose my will upon the outcome" and thereby have "a responsible impact upon the American value system."

The Invisible Man thus comes to realize that while "underground" he may be free from the restraints once imposed on him by others, but by isolating himself he has also exacerbated the problem of invisibility that the novel explores. When African Americans are perceived through a lens made up of stereotypical preconceptions, their individuality and their essential humanity remain invisible. However, one only reinforces one's invisibility if one removes oneself from society by living in isolation. By withdrawing from society, the narrator not only ensures that he will remain invisible, but he also renders himself voiceless, for he is no longer speaking out, as he once did, as an orator in the public realm. By ensuring that he will lack a voice, one can argue that the Invisible Man in his basement "hole" is in fact not free at all.[27]

Voiceless and unseen, the Invisible Man when underground is reminiscent of Tocqueville's individualist who "isolate[s] himself from the mass of his fellows" and thereby "leaves the greater society to look after itself."[28] Before going underground, the Invisible Man had sought to become connected to his fellow citizens in a variety of ways. Both as a student at a black college and as a member of the "Brotherhood," he had sought to be like the "people living in an aristocratic age," as Tocqueville put it, who were "almost always closely involved with something outside themselves."[29] In part because of his disillusionment with both the college and the Brotherhood, though, he goes into what he calls "hibernation" in his "hole," and from that vantage point he seems to have "form[ed] the habit of thinking of [himself] in isolation," as Tocqueville put it, and thereby risks being "shut up in the solitude of his own heart."[30] He thus risks losing freedom—in Tocqueville's sense of the term—since for Tocqueville, one is not truly free if one does not help shape public affairs.[31]

While Tocqueville's individualist can be fruitfully compared to the Invisible Man (when he is holed up in his basement apartment), there is, of course, a key difference between the two. Presumably, Tocqueville envisions his archetypal "individualist" as a white man. This means that when Tocqueville's (white) individualist isolates himself from the larger society, he is not withdrawing from a situation in which he has been treated by his fellows as a kind of second-class citizen. In contrast, when the Invisible Man withdraws into his "hole," he is leaving behind a society which continually denies him equal dignity, respect, and recognition. Whether it is the abject humiliation that he suffers in the "battle royal," or the subtler but omnipresent humiliation that comes from the realization that most of his fellow citizens "refuse to see" him, the Invisible Man is not treated as the equal of white citizens.[32] The desire to retreat from such a world—at least temporarily—is far less deserving of criticism than the white individualist's desire to retreat "into the circle of family and friends," as Tocqueville put it.[33] But if the Invisible Man's choice to flee an American society that often seeks to subjugate or exclude him is

understandable, it is still the case that from his underground hole there is no way for him "to help shape events," and thus no way for him to attain political freedom.

Understanding the Invisible Man when he is underground as a sort of Tocquevillian individualist can also help us make sense of the novel's famous final line. The narrator declares: "And it is this which frightens me: Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"[34] Obviously, not all who read the book have been victimized by white supremacy in the various ways depicted in the novel, and not all of the book's readers have been rendered invisible in the specific ways experienced by racial minorities. However, insofar as the Invisible Man (in his basement apartment) is like Tocqueville's individualist, then the Invisible Man *can* be understood to speak for all of the book's American readers, for all Americans, living as they do in a massive nation-state, may at times feel like their voice does not really matter, and all Americans may at times be tempted to withdraw into private life and allow "the greater society to look after itself."

But if *Invisible Man* reveals the temptation of individualism—the temptation, that is, to embrace private freedom and to renounce political freedom—the novel ultimately warns us to resist this temptation. The importance of *political* freedom is alluded to by Ellison when he discusses in his interview with Warren how "America has been terribly damaged by bad art." As evidence, he cites a movie in which Al Jolson, in blackface, sings: "I don't want to make your laws, I just want to sing my songs and be happy!"[35] Ellison notes that in Jolson's era, blacks were, of course, "anxious to change the laws," and elsewhere he refers to "the brief hope that had been encouraged by the presence of black congressmen in Washington during the Reconstruction."[36] For Ellison, then, being left alone might bring a degree of private happiness and private freedom, but if one is to attain political freedom—and public happiness—then one must be allowed to join in the making of the laws that shape the lives of all citizens.

The Invisible Man achieves a measure of "public happiness" not when he is alone in his basement apartment, but when he appears before his fellow citizens and delivers speeches on the political issues which affect all of their lives. Arendt argues that for the American founders, "public happiness" was the joy that one experienced when one gained "access to the public realm" and thus became "a 'participator' in public affairs."[37] The Invisible Man clearly attains some of this joy when he speaks in Harlem at an event organized by the Brotherhood. Near the conclusion of his speech, which is on the "dispossession" faced by African Americans, the Invisible Man tells his audience: "*Something strange and miraculous and transforming is taking place in me right now. . . .* I feel suddenly that I have become *more human*. . . . Not that I have become a man, for I was born a man. But that I am more human."[38] Much like Arendt, the narrator here

suggests that one can still be "a man" if one lives an exclusively private life, but one will in a sense not be "fully human," as Arendt put it.[39] If one is to become more fully human, then one must courageously enter into what Arendt called "the space of appearance" and engage in "the sharing of words and deeds" with one's fellows.[40]

To enter the "space of appearance" is, of course, to no longer be invisible. Speaking in the public realm entails the "disclosure of who somebody is," as Arendt puts it.[41] Does the Invisible Man shed his invisibility and disclose his identity when he speaks at the Harlem rally? On the one hand, one could argue that he does not do so completely, for he is speaking under an assumed name; moreover, because he is still making an effort to operate within the confines of the Brotherhood's ideology, one can argue that he is not yet displaying to the world an autonomous self. Yet, even if the narrator is still largely under the sway of the Brotherhood, he still manages to reveal a part of himself through his powerful speech about the "common disinheritance" experienced by African Americans.[42] While the event was sponsored by the Brotherhood, the narrator does not simply give a rote and sterile party-line speech. Indeed, one indicator that the speech has helped to reveal the narrator's authentic self as opposed to expressing the Brotherhood's fixed ideology is that the leadership of the Brotherhood attacks the speech as "backward and reactionary" and as "the antithesis of the scientific approach."[43] According to Arendt, "In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world." If *Invisible Man* is, in large part, about one man's effort to achieve self-definition and to find an authentic identity, then it is surely in large part through his passionate public speeches that the narrator is able to "disclose," at least to a degree, what Arendt calls "the 'who,' the unique and distinct identity of the agent."[44]

Against my claim that Ellison emphasizes the importance of political freedom, some might argue that the Invisible Man's efforts to achieve freedom in the political realm all end in some sort of "tragicomic" failure, and it is only when he turns to the writing of his memoirs (or a novel) that he finds—or will find—true freedom. In other words, perhaps it is only when he tries "to make music of invisibility"—that is, only when he seeks *artistic* freedom—that he is able to become genuinely free.[45] This is how John Wright, for example, interprets the novel, for he writes that *Invisible Man* ultimately "makes artistic transcendence the one insuppressible means through which human freedom is imagined and achieved and human beings made whole."[46] I would argue, though, that while "artistic transcendence" is certainly one form of freedom that the novel explores, it is not the case that the novel privileges artistic freedom over political freedom. Wright suggests that for Ellison it is only through art that one can be "made whole," but it is through political speechmaking that the Invisible Man comes to feel "more human." Rather than

imply that only through the creation of art can one become "more whole," the novel suggests (especially, as we shall see, through the character of Mary Rambo), that one can become more complete through active engagement with one's community.[47]

To the extent that Ellison *does* suggest that one can find freedom though art, he is referring to politically engaged art which strives to "shape events and our general culture." Thus, artistic freedom can become a form of political freedom. John Callahan argues that while some commentators believe that the Invisible Man at the novel's end is poised "to reenter the fray as a leader, a public speaker," it is more likely that the Invisible Man has "embrace[d] the writer's calling."[48] In my own view, Ellison is deliberately ambiguous regarding whether his narrator has chosen the life of an orator-activist or that of a writer; either way, it is clear that the Invisible Man has chosen a life of political commitment, since he suggests that he is going to play a more "socially responsible role." Moreover, as I have already suggested, in Ellison's view both artists and activists can play a major role in shaping a nation's political culture, and this means that he refuses to see art and politics in what Posnock calls "binary" terms.[49] Ellison's rejection of any overly facile distinction between art and politics can be seen when he said in an interview: "I recognize no dichotomy between art and protest. . . . If social protest is antithetical to art, what then shall we make of Goya, Dickens, and Twain?"[50] In other words, for Ellison, the creation and dissemination of art can itself constitute political action. In this sense, Ellison departs from Arendt, for while Arendt sometimes looked to literary artists such as Melville and Kafka for political insights, she did not claim that the creation of art could *itself* constitute a form of political action.[51] Ellison agrees with Arendt that political freedom can arise through "the sharing of words and deeds" in "the space of appearance"; for Ellison, though, political freedom can *also* be enacted through the creation of politically conscious art which is aimed at shaping the values of one's fellow citizens.

## PART II: DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP AS "MAKING MEN GREAT"

When, at the end of the novel, the Invisible Man decides to reject individualism and to take on "a socially responsible role," he is honoring the "constant talk about leadership and responsibility" that the character Mary Rambo had engaged in when he was renting a room in her apartment. The Invisible Man stated that Mary "reminded me constantly that something was expected of me, some act of leadership. . . . and I was torn between resenting her for it and loving her for the nebulous hope she kept alive."[52] Having become disillusioned with the Brotherhood, the Invisible Man at the novel's end is trying again to live up to the "nebu-

lous hope" of becoming a noteworthy leader that was instilled in him by Mary.[53]

Shortly after meeting Mary, the Invisible Man had sought to conceal that he was not feeling well, and Mary said to him, "I knowed you wasn't well. Why you try to hide it?" The Invisible Man answers that he "didn't want to be trouble to anyone." Mary then responds, "Everybody has to be trouble to *some*body."[54] With these simple but profound words, Mary rejects the belief system of Tocqueville's individualist, who believes that he "owe[s] no man anything and hardly expect[s] anything from anybody."[55] When underground, the Invisible Man sought to be no trouble to anyone, and he also refused to trouble himself about the fate of anyone else. As he puts it, he was "one of the most irresponsible beings that ever lived."[56] But in the epilogue, when he decides to play "a socially responsible role," he is acknowledging that we have commitments and obligations to one another; we must, that is, be "trouble" to one another.

According to Mary's vision of leadership, the leader should not seek self-aggrandizement, but rather should strive to elevate his or her followers. As Mary puts it to the Invisible Man, "It's you young folks what's going to make the changes. . . . You got to lead and you got to fight and move us all on up a little higher. . . . Up here too many forgets. They finds a place for theyselves and forgets the ones on the bottom."[57] By suggesting that the task of leadership is to "move us all on up a little higher," Mary's conception of leadership is reminiscent of Lincoln's understanding of worthwhile ambition. In an unpublished fragment on Senator Stephen Douglas, Lincoln wrote:

> Twenty-two years ago Judge Douglas and I first became acquainted. . . . Even then, we were both ambitious. . . . With *me*, the race of ambition has been . . . a flat failure; with *him* it has been one of splendid success. . . . I affect no contempt for the high eminence he has reached. So reached, that the oppressed of my species, might have shared with me in the elevation, I would rather stand on that eminence, than wear the richest crown that ever pressed a monarch's brow.[58]

Just as Lincoln suggested that Douglas may have gained "eminence" but forfeited the glory that comes through lifting up "the oppressed," Mary denounced those African American leaders who "finds a place for theyselves and forgets the ones on the bottom."

To elevate "the ones on the bottom" the leader must combat the laws, institutions, and cultural practices which hinder the ability of everyone to flourish. But in addition to seeking to remove sources of oppression, the leader must also seek to ensure that the oppressed gain the education needed for self-rule. The importance of democratic education is stressed by Ellison when he states that "the development of conscious, articulate citizens" is "an established goal of this democratic society." Ellison notes that "during the early, more optimistic days of this republic . . . democra-

cy was considered not only a collectivity of individuals . . . but a collectivity of politically astute citizens who, by virtue of our vaunted system of universal education and our freedom of opportunity, would be prepared to govern."[59] According to Lincoln, this preparation for self-government comes not just from the formal schooling provided by "our vaunted system of universal education"; rather, democratic education also must come from the experience of actually engaging in political life. As Lincoln put it in a fragment, if you deny people the experience of self-government on the grounds that they are "too ignorant, and vicious, to share in government," then you will "always keep them ignorant, and vicious." However, if you "give *all* a chance," and allow everyone a voice, then this will enable "the weak to grow stronger, the ignorant, wiser; and all better, and happier together."[60]

## PART III: UNDEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP AS "DOING GREAT THINGS WITH MEN"

If leaders are to "give *all* a chance" to engage in self-government, then leaders must not treat their followers simply as passive subjects who are to be manipulated in the service of goals determined in advance by the leaders. *Invisible Man* contains a number of leaders who use their followers in an instrumental fashion; these leaders ignore the essential humanity of their fellow citizens, and consider them solely as means toward their own ends. To put it in Tocqueville's terms, they seek "to do great things with men" rather than "to make men great" and thus fail to cultivate their followers' capacities for self-government.

Perhaps the clearest example in *Invisible Man* of this dangerous form of leadership comes from the Brotherhood, an organization that seems modeled (at least in part) after the Communist Party. The leaders of the Brotherhood claim, of course, to be on the side of the people—and on the side of History—but in fact they have little respect for the capacities of the people whom they claim they are trying to liberate. In his own speeches, the Invisible Man often tries, in a spirit of mutuality, to give voice to the aspirations and frustrations that he has in common with his fellow African Americans. In contrast, Brother Jack declares, "We do not shape our policies to the mistaken and infantile notions of the man in the street. Our job is not to *ask* them what they think but to *tell* them."[61] Moreover, Brother Jack calls the crowds who attend the Brotherhood's events the "raw materials" which are "to be shaped to our program."[62] Treating their followers as things rather than as dignified citizens who are capable of independent thought and political action, the Brotherhood's leaders are wholly uninterested in "the development of conscious, articulate citizens." As the Invisible Man points out, it would thus be more appropriate for Jack to be called "Marse Jack" rather than "Brother

Jack," for by not encouraging the people to develop their political capacities, Jack would keep those who are oppressed in a condition of voicelessness and invisibility.[63]

Mr. Norton, the white philanthropist who visits the Invisible Man's college, is another example of a leader who treats people instrumentally—that is, as means toward his own ends. Mr. Norton tells the Invisible Man that, "I had a feeling that your people were somehow connected with my destiny."[64] At first glance, it seems like Mr. Norton might here be expressing something similar to Frederick Douglass's assertion that "the destiny of the colored man is bound up with that of the white people of this country. . . . It is evident that white and black 'must fall or flourish together.'"[65] However, it quickly becomes clear that Mr. Norton's claim that the Invisible Man is "connected" with his own "destiny" does not mean that Mr. Norton sees blacks and whites as equal citizens who are inevitably intertwined and interdependent, as did Douglass. Instead, Mr. Norton sees the black college students solely as charity cases who can bolster his own feelings of self-importance if the money that he donates to the school helps to advance the students' careers. As Mr. Norton puts it, "upon you depends the outcome of the years I have spent in helping your school. . . . If you become a good farmer, a chef, a preacher, doctor, singer, mechanic—whatever you become, and even if you fail, you are my fate."[66] Mr. Norton does not genuinely see the college students as autonomous human beings, each with his or her own distinct personality, hopes and dreams; instead, he sees each of them as objects that can be used to help prove to the world and to himself that he is a virtuous and munificent person. Just as Brother Jack referred to the Brotherhood's followers as "raw materials," Mr. Norton uses similarly dehumanizing language when he tells the Invisible Man, "*You* are important because if you fail *I* have failed by one individual, one defective cog."[67] As the vet at the Golden Day points out, Mr. Norton sees the Invisible Man solely as "a mark on the scorecard of [his] achievement, a thing and not a man."[68] Indeed, while Mr. Norton claims that he shares a mutual destiny with the college students, the Invisible Man thinks to himself, "But you don't even know my name."[69]

A final example in the book of a leader who manipulates people for his own ends is Dr. Bledsoe. At first, the Invisible Man reveres the president of the black college which he attends. "He was a leader," the Invisible Man tells the reader, "a 'statesman' who carried our problems to those above us, even unto the White House."[70] Eventually, though, the Invisible Man learns that in order to maintain his relatively high position in the Jim Crow South, Dr. Bledsoe is perfectly willing to tread on those whom he purports to be leading. As Dr. Bledsoe puts it to the Invisible Man, after the fiasco in which the Invisible Man takes Mr. Norton to the home of Trueblood and then to the Golden Day, "The white folk tell everybody what to think—except men like me. I tell *them*. . . . It's a nasty

deal. . . . *But I've made my place in it and I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am*."[71] Dr. Bledsoe thus shows his willingness to act precisely like those leaders, denounced by Mary, who "finds a place for theyselves and forgets the ones on the bottom." Indeed, in order to protect his powerful position, Dr. Bledsoe is willing to destroy the Invisible Man's reputation by writing supposed letters of recommendation to prominent New Yorkers which actually denounce the young man.

## PART IV: DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP AND MUTUALITY

We have seen that while the Invisible Man for a period of time embraces the freedom that comes from being left alone (a freedom that he achieves while "underground"), the novel suggests that a higher form of freedom arises when one sheds one's invisibility by speaking and acting in the public realm. If to be free is to be a political actor, then leaders should strive to cultivate the political capacities of their followers. If, though, one treats one's followers as "raw materials" to be shaped and manipulated, as does the Brotherhood, or as "cogs" in one's own project of self-fulfillment, as does Mr. Norton, then one is not treating people as dignified political actors who are capable of political freedom.

Whereas the Brotherhood sees the black people of Harlem as "raw materials" to be manipulated, the Invisible Man comes to see them as fully capable of "ruling and being ruled in turn," as Aristotle put it.[72] The Invisible Man expresses his faith in the political capacities of ordinary African Americans when he finds himself struck by the sight of three young men on a subway platform. He realizes that the Brotherhood would no doubt see them as insignificant "[m]en out of time, who would soon be gone and forgotten. . . . But who knew . . . that they were the saviors, the true leaders, the bearers of something precious?"[73] What exactly might their "precious" contribution to the world be? The Invisible Man does not spell this out, but this is precisely because their future contribution cannot be predicted by anyone, not even the theoreticians of the Brotherhood. The leaders of the Brotherhood claim to know the direction of History, but the Invisible Man states that these young African American men are "running and dodging the forces of history." He also states that "they didn't believe in Brotherhood, no doubt had never heard of it; or perhaps . . . would mysteriously have rejected its mysteries."[74] In other words, these young men have the capacity to one day introduce into the world unexpected forms of political action that transcend the stifling confines of the Brotherhood's ideology.[75]

Ellison's conviction that ordinary citizens are capable of valuable political action is also evident in an early piece that he wrote for *New Masses* titled, "A Congress Jim Crow Didn't Attend." In this report on the Third

National Negro Congress, held in Washington, DC in 1940, Ellison briefly discusses the speeches that were given by nationally known figures such as John L. Lewis and A. Philip Randolph. But what Ellison seems most struck by is not the most eminent leaders, but rather the ordinary citizen-leaders—"Negroes from the North, South, East, and West"—who all came to the nation's capital, "seeking affirmation of their will to freedom."[76] For instance, Ellison mentions "a steelworker from Gary, Indiana" who was "well informed," as well as a "preacher-coal miner from Kentucky" who actually survived a lynching attempt and was there to push for anti-lynching legislation. Ellison writes that he was most impressed by those delegates from the Jim Crow South, "whose very presence here means a danger faced and a fear conquered." As an example, he discusses "a tall black woman from Arkansas" who was "president of her local union, an affiliate of the CIO with 260 members."[77] Ellison writes that while she was "not accustomed to speaking through a microphone," she had a "calm dignity" as she explained how African Americans in her community worked for inadequate wages which they received in the form of "scrip" that could only be used at the company store.[78] Clearly moved by all of these leaders who were emerging from the grassroots, Ellison concludes, "What I found among the delegates was a temper of militant indignation. They were people sure of their strength. . . . I suddenly realized that the age of the Negro hero had returned to American life."[79] Ellison, of course, later became disillusioned with the Communist ideas which had appealed to him when he was writing for *New Masses*.[80] Based on his depiction of the Brotherhood in *Invisible Man*, it seems that a key reason for Ellison's disillusionment was that he came to believe that the party was actually treating its followers not as potential heroes who were capable of action, but rather as "raw materials" to be used by party elites.[81]

In contrast to the manipulative models of leadership offered by the Brotherhood, Mr. Norton, and Dr. Bledsoe, the narrator of *Invisible Man* points us toward a model of leadership which acknowledges and honors the essential humanity and the political capacities of one's fellow citizens. This means that instead of simply *telling* the people what to think, as Brother Jack seeks to do, the leader should listen carefully to the concerns of the people. The Invisible Man makes this point when he urges Brother Tobitt to go and "stand in the areaway of a cheap tenement at night and *listen to what is said*. . . . You'll learn that a lot of people are angry because we failed to lead them in action."[82] The Invisible Man here suggests that leaders should seek to hear and to understand the voices that usually go "unrecorded," as he puts it to Brother Tobitt.[83] Then, and only then, the leader can strive "to lead [the people] in action" that advances the goals of the people themselves, and not simply the predetermined goals of the leader. Dr. Bledsoe, Mr. Norton, and the Brotherhood are all uninterested in dialogue; rather than approach followers in a spirit of mutuality, they

approach the people from on high, and seek to use the people in the service of their own ends.

Ellison's belief that democratic leaders should seek to advance goals that they have in common with their followers can also be found throughout his essays.[84] For instance, Ellison wrote that in "the late forties" there was "a sad, chronic division between" the "values" of African American leaders and "the values of those they were supposed to represent."[85] We see this same theme in his essay, "A Congress Jim Crow Didn't Attend," when Ellison writes that whereas A. Phillip Randolph lost his audience by giving a "speech from above" that failed to express the values held by the audience, John P. Davis instead "voiced the things the delegates felt. He spoke out for the program that they wished to support, and, judging from the reception of the speech, the delegates were assured that theirs was a common will."[86] A final example of Ellison's belief in the importance of mutuality between leaders and led can be found when Ellison quotes (with clear approval) Lyndon B. Johnson's claim that "[a] President must have a vision of the America and the world he wants to see. But the President does not put his purely personal stamp upon the future. His vision is compounded of the hopes and anxieties and values of the people he serves."[87]

But if Ellison and Johnson are correct that the democratic leader should fight for a "vision" that "is compounded of the hopes and anxieties and values of the people he serves," then one might wonder if the democratic leader is simply a passive agent who only articulates what his or her followers are already feeling and thinking. In the next section, though, I will demonstrate that for Ellison, the democratic leader's function is *not* simply to mirror the people in a passive way; instead, the leader must also actively strive to be at the forefront of the perennially necessary task of reapplying America's founding ideals to contemporary conditions.

## PART V: LEADERSHIP AND THE REAFFIRMATION AND REAPPLICATION OF FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

The Invisible Man's first speech in New York takes place when he comes across an elderly black couple who are in the process of being evicted. Among many other items from the couple's home that have been haphazardly strewn across a Harlem sidewalk, he sees "a fragile paper" which declared one Primus Provo to be a free man in August of 1859.[88] If this part of the novel takes place in the 1930s, then these are presumably the "free papers" for the elderly man who is now being evicted. Moved and disturbed by seeing the displacement of this couple, the Invisible Man makes an impromptu speech in which he calls for their possessions to be

put back in their home, and in which he also talks about the "dispossession" faced by all African Americans.

During this scene, it is mentioned that Primus Provo is eighty-seven years old. Can it be a coincidence that Ellison here chose the number that can also be expressed as "four-score and seven," as Lincoln put it at Gettysburg when he reaffirmed the principle that "all men are created equal"?[89] By giving Primus Provo the age of eighty-seven years, Ellison points us toward Lincoln's invocation of the nation's founding principles, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence. At Independence Hall, shortly before his inauguration, Lincoln said that the Declaration's ideals "gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that *all* should have an equal chance."[90] Primus Provo, though, was born into slavery, and as a free man he no doubt faced discrimination and a lack of opportunities in both the South and the North. Hence, it would be absurd to say that Provo was given "an equal chance." And yet, Ellison suggests that the founding ideals themselves still remain valuable, for in the epilogue, the Invisible Man decides that his own grandfather's cryptic advice—"I want you to overcome 'em with yeses"—must have actually been a reference to the nation's original principles.[91] As the Invisible Man puts it, his grandfather

> *must* have meant . . . that we were to affirm the principle on which the country was built and not the men, or at least not the men who did the violence. . . . Did he mean to affirm the principle, which they themselves . . . had violated and compromised to the point of absurdity . . . ? Or did he mean that we had to take the responsibility for all of it, for the men as well as the principle, because we were the heirs who must use the principle because no other fitted our needs? . . . "Agree 'em to death and destruction," grandfather had advised. Hell, weren't they their own death and their own destruction except as the principle lived in them and in us?[92]

For Ellison, then, the principle that "all men are created equal" may not be fully realized yet but it remains worth affirming. In his speech on the *Dred Scott* decision, Lincoln similarly said that through the Declaration, the founders "meant to set up a standard maxim for free society which should be familiar to all,—constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even, though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people, of all colors, everywhere."[93] Like Lincoln, Ellison suggests that "politics at its best . . . is a thrust toward a human ideal."[94] For Ellison, it is not only documents such as the Declaration of Independence which can uphold the democratic ideals which must be looked to and approximated, but also novels. As Ellison puts it, "So if the ideal of achieving a true political equality eludes

us in reality—as it continues to do—there is still available that fictional *vision* of an ideal democracy."[95]

While both Lincoln and Ellison insisted that America's founding ideals must be upheld, they both knew that concrete progress toward what Ellison called "an ideal democracy" was by no means inevitable. For example, Lincoln noted that if one compared the situation of African Americans in 1857 to their situation at the time of the Revolution, one would find that, "[i]n some trifling particulars, the condition of that race has been ameliorated; but, as a whole . . . the change between then and now is decidedly the other way; and their ultimate destiny has never appeared so hopeless as in the last three or four years."[96] Especially with the promise of Emancipation and Reconstruction having been followed by the reign of Jim Crow, Ellison, like Lincoln, could not possibly believe in the inevitability of continual progress. However, precisely for such times as when the "destiny" of African Americans seems "hopeless," as Lincoln put it, "the novel could be fashioned as a raft of hope," Ellison writes, providing "perception and entertainment that might help keep us afloat as we . . . negotiate the snags and whirlpools that mark our nation's vacillating course toward and away from the democratic ideal."[97] For both Lincoln and for Ellison it is a key task of leadership—whether that leader is an artist, activist, or elected official—to reaffirm, reapply, and rearticulate the nation's founding principles, in order to help move the nation further toward their realization.

As noted above, the Invisible Man suggests that African Americans are "the heirs who must use the principle" of the founders, "because no other fitted our needs." By suggesting that African Americans are in a sense the "heirs" of the founding fathers, Ellison offers an important qualification to the vet's advice to the Invisible Man: "be your own father." What is valuable about the vet's advice is the idea that the Invisible Man should reject all of the various efforts—by the prominent whites of his hometown, by Dr. Bledsoe, or by the Brotherhood—to prevent the Invisible Man from thinking for himself and from determining his own path in life. These manipulative authority figures are indeed worth throwing off, as the vet suggests. However, to "be your own father" can also mean that there is nothing for you to inherit—that is, nothing bequeathed to you which you must cherish and continue to uphold. Ellison rejects "being your own father" in this latter sense, for he suggests that the founders should be recognized and honored as the fathers of "the principle" that "all men are created equal," and African Americans should see themselves as the proud "heirs" of this inheritance.

It is thus an oversimplification to say that for Ellison, freedom is being left alone to determine your values and your life course for yourself. At first glance, Ellison might seem to be suggesting that freedom is simply self-determination when he states the following about *Invisible Man*: "Each section begins with a sheet of paper; each piece of paper is ex-

changed for another and contains a definition of his identity, or the social role he is to play as defined for him by others. . . . Before he could have some voice in his own identity he had to discard these old identities and illusions."[98] If the problem is that external authorities are trying to define his identity or social role, then perhaps the answer is simply to throw off all authority, and "be your own father." Ellison's understanding of the relationship between authority and freedom, though, is ultimately more nuanced, for the danger of rejecting *all* authoritative values is demonstrated through the character of Rinehart. The Invisible Man never actually meets Rinehart, but he learns that he is a man with no fixed identity; Rinehart is a church pastor, but he is also, among other things, a pimp and a numbers-runner. Clearly, no one is imposing any identity, or imposing any "social role," onto Rinehart, and, perhaps for this reason, at first the Invisible Man finds Rinehart to be an appealing figure: "His world was possibility and he knew it. He was years ahead of me and I was a fool."[99] At the same time, the Invisible Man finds something disorienting about the idea of a life lived without any definition at all: "The world in which we lived was without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world of fluidity, and Rine the rascal was at home. . . . You could actually make yourself anew. The notion was frightening, for now the world seemed to flow before my eyes."[100] Having made himself anew, Rinehart has in a sense become his own father. And yet, in the epilogue of the book, the Invisible Man asks: "But what do *I* really want. . . . Certainly not the freedom of a Rinehart."[101] In rejecting the "freedom of a Rinehart," the Invisible Man suggests that freedom conceived solely as self-determination or solely as the rejection of *all* authoritative values is inadequate.[102] Freedom requires a sense of what freedom is for, and for the Invisible Man this moral guidance can and indeed must be provided by "the principle on which the country was built."

The most valuable form of freedom, then, does not ultimately arise from becoming one's own father, but rather from affirming what Lincoln called "the father of all moral principle." At Chicago, Lincoln suggested that all who affirm the principle of the founding, irrespective of their birthplace, are in a sense descendants, or heirs, of the founding fathers. Noting that many Americans are either immigrants themselves or descend from immigrants who arrived in the United States only after the Revolution, Lincoln said,

> If they look back . . . to trace their connection with those [revolutionary] days by blood, they find they have none . . . but when they look through that old Declaration of Independence they find that those old men say that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," and then they feel that that moral sentiment taught in that day evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though

> they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration, and so they are.[103]

Lincoln's argument that those who affirm the principles of the founders are their true descendants adds resonance to the passage in *Invisible Man* in which Thomas Jefferson is mentioned by name. In the scene at the Golden Day, a veteran named Sylvester declares that Mr. Norton is actually Thomas Jefferson, and he also claims that Jefferson is his grandfather: "I should know my own grandfather! He's Thomas Jefferson and I'm his grandson."[104] At one level, this might be a (semi-comical) reference to the long-standing rumor, now believed to be true by most historians, that Jefferson fathered children with Sally Hemings, one of the enslaved women at Monticello.[105] However, in the light of Lincoln's Chicago speech, the "joke" that Sylvester is the grandson of Jefferson may take on another meaning, for if Lincoln is right, all those who believe that "all men are created equal" are indeed the descendants of the man who drafted the Declaration. And, Ellison himself makes the same point when suggesting that those who "affirm the principle" are the "heirs" of those who first articulated it.

The complex figure of Jefferson, the man who gave voice to the principles that are to be "affirmed" even as he "violated and compromised" those principles himself as a slaveholder, should be kept in mind when reflecting upon the meaning of the imagined conversation that the Invisible Man has with the elderly enslaved woman early in the novel. The woman tells the Invisible Man that she has killed the man who both enslaved her and fathered her children. She states, "I dearly loved my master. . . . He gave me several sons . . . and because I loved my sons I learned to love their father though I hated him too."[106] The Invisible Man refers to the woman's "ambivalence," and Ellison here metaphorically invokes the ambivalence that Americans might feel toward Jefferson and other founders.[107] The Invisible Man says that we should "affirm the principle on which the country was built and not the men, or at least not the men who did the violence." But in the figure of Jefferson (and many other founders), we see that the same man who articulated "the principle" is *simultaneously* a man who perpetrated "the violence" that was inherent in slavery. Hence, the "ambivalence": one might love the founders for giving birth to "a new nation . . . dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," but also hate the violence of slavery, an institution that is, as Lincoln put it, "PRO TANTO, a total violation" of the Declaration's principles.[108] Struck by her ambivalence, the Invisible Man imagines himself telling the old woman that, "Maybe freedom lies in hating." The woman tells him, though, "Naw, son, it's in loving."[109] Perhaps Ellison is here suggesting that real freedom involves not simply liberation, but also an affirmation of—indeed, a love of—the founding principles. To be a free American, then, is to dedicate oneself, as Lincoln

put it at Gettysburg, to the "unfinished work" of further realizing those beloved principles.[110]

According to Barbara Foley, Ellison's invocation of American ideals at the end of *Invisible Man* indicates that Ellison had become a "Cold War liberal" who sought to delegitimate the radical ideas that he had once found appealing but had come to reject by the time he completed his masterwork.[111] Foley thus rebukes Ellison for offering what she takes to be an "unproblematic celebration of American democracy" in the novel's final pages.[112] But in my view, Foley's claim that the conclusion of *Invisible Man* is merely an anodyne expression of "vital center patriotism" which ignores the need for "systemic change" is a strange charge to make against a book which plainly repudiates Booker T. Washington's accommodationist approach, which dwells on the terrible injustice of a police shooting of an unarmed African American man in a way that powerfully resonates with today's headlines, and which decries the economic "dispossession" experienced by African Americans.[113] Ellison may have abandoned the Communist ideas which he had once embraced, but he never abandoned his opposition to white supremacy in its social, political, and economic forms. The Invisible Man's grandparents were "told that they were free" once they were liberated from slavery, but the novel suggests that freedom is hollow if one lacks the "social equality" that Washington was willing to have African Americans defer and which the young Invisible Man dared to reference through a slip of the tongue in front of the prominent whites of his hometown.[114] And, the novel suggests that genuine freedom also requires an equality of economic opportunity that was no doubt denied to the evicted couple in Harlem and that many people still lack today.[115] Ellison wrote that the "sacred principles" of our founding documents "interrogate us endlessly as to who and what we are; they demand that we keep the democratic faith."[116] By calling on us to "affirm the principle" and to "keep the democratic faith," Ellison is not suggesting that we should engage in an uncritical celebration of the status quo. Instead, to "affirm the principle" means that we should continue to challenge the injustices which exist in what Ellison once called "these perpetually troubled United States."[117] For Ellison, democratic leaders must devote their energies to this crucial project.

## CONCLUSION

According to Thomas Engeman, the Invisible Man, "like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, finds freedom from 'the flies of the market-place' only in solitude." For Engeman, Ellison's unfinished novel, *Juneteenth*, represents "a remarkable advance over" *Invisible Man*'s "sterile individualism."[118] But in my view, *Invisible Man* actually offers a critique of individualism and thus a critique of the idea that a fulfilling form of freedom can be found in

isolation. As noted earlier, the Invisible Man asks the elderly enslaved woman, "What is this freedom you love so well?" The novel is far too rich and complex to answer this question about the meaning of freedom in any single, definitive way. However, we have seen that for Ellison, freedom is more than simply being left alone, for two reasons, both of which relate closely to Ellison's understanding of democratic leadership. First, if freedom is simply being left alone, then one might choose a life of isolation, which is what the Invisible Man chooses when living underground. One achieves greater freedom, though, if one has a voice in the making of the decisions that affect the lives of all citizens; at the novel's end, the Invisible Man is poised to pursue this type of *political* freedom by embracing his "social responsibility" and striving to be seen and heard in the public realm. The Invisible Man has learned that the best democratic leaders do not simply manipulate or dominate, but rather try to ensure that the political capacities of their followers are cultivated, so that they, too, can be seen and heard. That is, democratic leaders try "to make men great," as Tocqueville put it, rather than "do great things with men." The second reason it is mistaken to suggest that freedom is simply being left alone is that for Ellison, freeing one's self from all authoritative values leaves one more adrift than it leaves one genuinely free. By rejecting all moral authority, the character of Rinehart may have achieved a sort of liberation from the strictures that others might seek to impose on him, but the novel suggests that a higher form of freedom arises when one affirms and dedicates one's self to certain moral principles, which for Ellison come from the founding. Through rearticulating and reapplying those principles to present day crises, the best democratic leaders can "fashion a raft of hope" to help the citizenry move further toward "the democratic ideal."

## NOTES

1. For an illuminating discussion of some of the various ways in which the theme of leadership appears in "Benito Cereno," see Tracy Strong, "'Follow Your Leader': *Benito Cereno* and the Case of Two Ships," in *A Political Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Jason Frank (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 281–309.

2. As an epigraph to *Invisible Man*, Ellison uses the following quotation from "Benito Cereno": "'You are saved,' cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained, 'you are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you?'" A number of scholars have explored the crucial influence of Melville's novella on *Invisible Man*. Stuart Omans, for example, has argued that the phrase "follow your leader," which appears a number of times in Melville's novella, "became . . . the major theme of *Invisible Man*," for "[n]early every character in the novel claims to be the protagonist's leader." See Omans, "The Variations on a Masked Leader: A Study on the Literary Relationship of Ralph Ellison and Herman Melville," *South Atlantic Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (May 1975): 17. While Omans calls attention to the theme of leadership in *Invisible Man*, he does not explore what the novel teaches us about the specific concept of democratic leadership, as I do in this chapter.

3. Bruce Miroff, *Icons of Democracy: American Leaders as Heroes, Aristocrats, Dissenters, and Democrats* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 1, 2. I also highlight Miroff's contribution to the study of democratic leadership in my book, *Educating Democracy: Alexis de Tocqueville and Leadership in America* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 1–2, 10, 32–33.

4. I here agree with James Seaton that many of the "political lessons of *Invisible Man* are negative." See James Seaton, "Affirming the Principle," in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to Invisible Man*, ed. Lucas Morel (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 32.

5. Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated,* ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, [1964] 2003), 177.

6. Timothy Parrish, *Ralph Ellison and the Genius of America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 179, 175.

7. William H. Rice, *Ralph Ellison and the Politics of the Novel* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), 25.

8. Ralph Ellison, "On Initiation Rites and Power: A Lecture at West Point" (March 26, 1969), in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated,* ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 529.

9. See Danielle Allen, "Ralph Ellison on the Tragi-Comedy of Citizenship," in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to Invisible Man*, ed. Lucas Morel (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 37–57.

10. Ellison, "On Initiation Rites and Power," 528.

11. Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Random House, 1965), 328.

12. Ibid.

13. Lucas Morel, "Ralph Ellison's American Democratic Individualism," in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to Invisible Man*, ed. Morel (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 59.

14. Lucas Morel, "Recovering the Political Artistry of *Invisible Man*," in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to "Invisible Man"*, ed. Morel (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 1, 12n1. The quotation is from Lincoln, "First Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Ottawa, Illinois" (August 21, 1858), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 524–25.

15. Jerry Watts, *Heroism and the Black Intellectual: Ralph Ellison, Politics, and Afro-American Intellectual Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 115.

16. In response to the claim of Watts (and other critics) that Ellison shirked his responsibilities to the African American community by focusing single-mindedly on his art, Robert Butler demonstrates that Ellison was certainly "not politically disengaged in the 1950s and 1960s." Butler concedes that "Ellison never became what might be called an activist," but Butler argues that this was because Ellison "wanted to protect his independence and integrity as a writer. Moreover, he knew he could better serve the movement by fulfilling his role as a writer rather than by taking to the streets as an activist." See Butler, "*Invisible Man* and the Politics of Love," in *The New Territory: Ralph Ellison and the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marc Conner and Lucas Morel (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 45, 44–45.

17. Ross Posnock, "Mourning and Melancholy: Explaining the Ellison Animus," in *The New Territory: Ralph Ellison and the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marc Conner and Lucas Morel (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 286.

18. Ellison wrote that when he conceived of the idea for *Invisible Man,* he "associated" the title character, "ever so distantly, with the narrator of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*." See Ellison, "Introduction to the Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition of *Invisible Man*," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated,* ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, [1982] 2003), 485.

19. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 701.
20. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, [1952] 1995), 574.
21. Ibid., 156; Abraham Lincoln, "Speech at Chicago" (July 10, 1858), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 456.
22. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 11.
23. Ibid., 13.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 14 (emphasis in the original).
26. Ibid., 581.
27. Ibid., 6.
28. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 506.
29. Ibid., 507.
30. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 13; Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 508.
31. The following is just one example of a passage which reveals Tocqueville's belief that freedom entails political participation: "It is possible to imagine an extreme point at which freedom and equality would meet and blend. Let us suppose that all the citizens take a part in the government and that each of them has an equal right to do so." See Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 503.
32. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 3.
33. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 506.
34. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 581.
35. Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, 333–34.
36. Ibid., 333; Ellison, "Introduction to the Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition of *Invisible Man*," 487.
37. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1963), 127, 268.
38. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 343, 345–46 (emphases in the original).
39. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 38.
40. Ibid., 198. I here agree with Posnock, who writes that while they disagreed about the desegregation crisis at Little Rock, there is still an important "affinity" between Arendt and Ellison insofar as both *Invisible Man* and *The Human Condition* reveal "an effort to revitalize politics as creative action in public." However, I disagree with Posnock's suggestion that Ellison (like Arendt) rejects any effort to "domesticate action by binding it to teleological restraints of previously formulated rules and goals." See Ross Posnock, "Ralph Ellison, Hannah Arendt, and the Meaning of Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison*, ed. Posnock (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 203, 213. As we shall see, insofar as Ellison believes that leaders must strive to "affirm the principle on which the country was built," Ellison *does* want action to be guided by a "previously formulated" goal, albeit a broad one—namely, the goal of realizing in practice the ideals of liberty and equality that were articulated in our founding documents. See Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 574. The precise ways in which these ideals should be applied to the present will always remain subject to debate and contestation, but the broad ideals should always remain "binding" on us.
41. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 178.
42. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 345.
43. Ibid., 350.
44. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 179, 180. While I find it helpful to consider the Invisible Man's political activism in the light of Arendt's concepts of "public happiness" and the "space of appearance," it should be noted that Arendt herself might have claimed that at least some of the issues (especially the economic ones) that the Invisible Man raises in his speeches fall into the category of "social" rather than "political" issues. For Arendt's distinction between the social and the political, see, for example, Arendt, *On Revolution*, 90–91. As Danielle Allen notes, Ellison, unlike Arendt, believed

that "the political world cannot be entirely separated from the social world," and it was in part this theoretical disagreement which led Ellison and Arendt to reach such different assessments of the effort to desegregate Little Rock High School in 1957. See Allen, *Talking to Strangers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 30. Arendt discusses the events at Little Rock in Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," *Dissent* 6 (Winter 1959): 45–56. Warren responded to Arendt in Ellison, *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, 343–44.

45. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 14.

46. John S. Wright, "The Conscious Hero and the Rites of Man: Ellison's War," in *Ralph Ellison's* Invisible Man: *A Casebook*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: Oxford University Press, [1988] 2004), 251.

47. As Marc Conner puts it, the scenes in the novel with Mary Rambo make it clear that, "[f]or all its emphasis on Emersonian self-reliance (a value Ellison held quite dear), the novel [also] claims that self-reliance alone is not sufficient. One must depend upon, and contribute to, the good of others. . . . This is the oft-overlooked complement to the Invisible Man's search for self-identity: He must insert that identity into a larger community for it to be whole and healthy." See Conner, "The Litany of Things: Sacrament and History in *Invisible Man*," in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to "Invisible Man,"* ed. Lucas Morel (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 180.

48. John F. Callahan, "The Lingering Question of Personality and Nation in *Invisible Man*: 'And Could Politics Ever Be an Expression of Love?,'" in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to "Invisible Man,"* ed. Lucas Morel (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 224.

49. Posnock, "Mourning and Melancholy," 286.

50. Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Fiction: An Interview," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated,* ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, [1955] 2003), 212.

51. See, for example, Arendt, *On Revolution*, 82–88, and Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 7–13.

52. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 258.

53. The emphasis that I here place on the character of Mary Rambo is consistent with Melvin Dixon's claim that "Mary Rambo, more than any other character, is the pivotal guide in the hero's effort to discover and to articulate the form of his identity and experience." To argue for the "centrality of Mary Rambo," Dixon goes beyond what he calls "the textual borders of the published version" of *Invisible Man* by discussing "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar," a short story containing material on Mary that Ellison chose to excise from the 1952 novel. See Dixon, "O, Mary Rambo, Don't You Weep," *The Carleton Miscellany* 18, no. 3 (Winter 1980): 99, 104. Ellison's "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar" was published in *Soon, One Morning: New Writing by American Negroes, 1940–1962*, ed. Herbert Hill (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 242–90. Building in part on Dixon, Shanna Greene Benjamin argues that the portrayal of Mary in "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar" reveals "Ellison's deep respect for the wisdom imbedded within black folk culture." See Benjamin, "There's Something about Mary: Female Wisdom and the Folk Presence in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*," *Meridians* 12, no. 1 (2014): 124. I would add that Mary plays a crucial role in the development of the Invisible Man's conception of democratic leadership. I seek to show that this is evident even within the confines of the novel as published in 1952.

54. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 254.

55. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 508.

56. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 14.

57. Ibid., 255.

58. Abraham Lincoln, "On Stephen Douglas" (c. December 1856), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 384.

59. Ellison, "Introduction to the Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition of *Invisible Man*," 486, 487.
60. Abraham Lincoln, "Fragments on Slavery" (1854?), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 302.
61. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 473.
62. Ibid., 472.
63. Ibid., 473.
64. Ibid., 41.
65. Frederick Douglass, "The Destiny of Colored Americans," in *What Country Have I? Political Writings by Black Americans*, ed. Herbert Storing (New York: St. Martin's Press, [1849] 1970), 39–40.
66. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 42, 43–44.
67. Ibid., 45.
68. Ibid., 95.
69. Ibid., 45.
70. Ibid., 116.
71. Ibid., 143 (emphasis added).
72. Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 134.
73. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 441. As we have seen, Mary Rambo also suggested that it was the youth who would one day move the nation toward a greater degree of justice. See Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 255.
74. Ibid., 441, 440.
75. Arendt's concept of "natality"—which she associates with the human "capacity of beginning something new"—is here germane. See Arendt, *Human Condition*, 9.
76. Ralph Ellison, "A Congress Jim Crow Didn't Attend," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated,* ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, [1940] 2003), 8.
77. Ibid., 11, 14, 16.
78. Ibid., 15–16.
79. Ibid., 16.
80. For an excellent discussion of how *Invisible Man* reveals Ellison's disillusionment with Communism, see Jesse Wolfe, "'Ambivalent Man': Ellison's Rejection of Communism," *African American Review* 34 (Winter 2000): 621–37. For a far more critical view of Ellison's abandonment of Communism, see Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's* Invisible Man (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
81. The Invisible Man also reflects on the capacities of ordinary people as he observes Dupre and Scofield during the riot scene near the end of the book. See Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 548. It should be noted, though, that the Invisible Man later comes to suspect that the leaders of the Brotherhood actually orchestrated the riot for their own ends (553). For discussions of the riot scene, see Morel, "Ralph Ellison's American Democratic Individualism," 58–59, 78n5, and Posnock, "Ralph Ellison, Hannah Arendt, and the Meaning of Politics," 211–12.
82. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 471–72 (emphasis added).
83. Ibid., 471.
84. Ellison's conviction that leaders should promote goals that they share with their followers jibes with James MacGregor Burns's claim that genuine leaders seek "to realize goals mutually held by *both* leaders and followers." See Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 18 (emphasis in the original).
85. Ralph Ellison, "That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated,* ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, [1961] 2003), 76–77.
86. Ellison, "A Congress Jim Crow Didn't Attend," 16, 13. John P. Davis co-founded the National Negro Congress and also served as its National Secretary. For a history of the National Negro Congress, see Erik Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National*

*Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

87. Ralph Ellison, "The Myth of the Flawed White Southerner," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated,* ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, [1968] 2003), 564.

88. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 272.

89. Abraham Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg" (November 19, 1863), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1859–1865*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 536.

90. Abraham Lincoln, "Speech at Independence Hall" (February 22, 1861), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1859–1865*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 213.

91. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 16.

92. Ibid., 574 –75.

93. Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision" (June 26, 1857), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 398.

94. Ellison, "Introduction to the Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition of *Invisible Man*," 486.

95. Ibid.

96. Lincoln, "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision," 396.

97. Ellison, "Introduction to the Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition of *Invisible Man*," 487.

98. Ellison, "The Art of Fiction," 219.

99. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 498.

100. Ibid., 498 –99.

101. Ibid., 575.

102. I here agree with Christopher Hobson that when he rejects "the freedom of a Rinehart," the Invisible Man is actually eschewing "the individual autonomy that has sometimes been seen as the novel's guiding conception." See Hobson, "*Invisible Man* and African American Radicalism in World War II," in *Ralph Ellison's* Invisible Man: *New Edition*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 73.

103. Lincoln, "Speech at Chicago," 456.

104. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 78.

105. For an expression of the scholarly consensus that Jefferson had indeed fathered children with Sally Hemings, see Daniel Jordan, Statement by Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation President on the Report of the Research Committee on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings (January 26, 2000), https://www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery/statement-report-tjmf-president-daniel-p-jordan.

106. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 10.

107. Ibid.

108. Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg," 536; Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria, Illinois" (October 16, 1854), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 328.

109. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 11.

110. Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg," 536.

111. Foley, *Wrestling with the Left*, 340.

112. Barbara Foley, "The Rhetoric of Anticommunism in *Invisible Man*," *College English* 59, no. 5 (September 1997): 530.

113. Foley, *Wrestling with the Left*, 1, 349. Ellison's rejection of Booker T. Washington's position is evident in a number of places in *Invisible Man*, such as when immediately after the dehumanizing "battle royal," the racist white leaders of the narrator's hometown encourage him to again recite his high school graduation speech. The speech stresses the importance of "humility" for African Americans, and the speech quotes liberally from Washington's famous Atlanta Exposition Address. See Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 17, 29–30. As he tries to deliver his speech, the Invisible Man's audience bristles

angrily when he mistakenly replaces the term "social responsibility" with "social equality" (31). However, the audience would have no doubt welcomed the reference to "social equality" if the Invisible Man had called "agitation" for it "the extremest folly," as Washington did at Atlanta in 1895. See Washington, "Atlanta Exposition Address," in *What Country Have I? Political Writings by Black Americans*, ed. Herbert Storing (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 61.

114. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 15, 31.

115. Robert Putnam has highlighted what he calls "a growing opportunity gap" between children from wealthy and poor families. See Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 41. Focusing more on race than does Putnam, Philip Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith note the persistence of "severe inequalities" between blacks and whites "in economic, educational, and political statuses." See Klinkner, with Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 319.

116. Ralph Ellison, "The Little Man at Chehaw Station," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated,* ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, [1978] 2003), 506.

117. Ellison, "Myth of the Flawed White Southerner," 563.

118. Thomas Engeman, "*Invisible Man* and *Juneteenth*: Ralph Ellison's Literary Pursuit of Racial Justice," in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to Invisible Man*, ed. Lucas Morel (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 93, 103.

# THREE

# "Into the Convulsion of the World"

## All the King's Men, *Democratic Leadership, and Political Action*

In chapter 2, I sought to sketch out a theory of democratic leadership which emerges from a close reading of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. I turn now to another important twentieth-century novel, namely, *All the King's Men*, by Robert Penn Warren. Warren's novel was published in 1946, six years before the publication of *Invisible Man*. I have chosen to present my discussion of these two novels out of chronological order, though, because I think it is illuminating to consider *All the King's Men* in light of the theory of democratic leadership that I discerned in *Invisible Man*. Both Southern-born writers of great distinction, Warren and Ellison were decades-long friends who each wrote an influential novel which explored political themes in a way that was simultaneously timely and timeless.[1] As we shall see, these two post–World War II novels have a number of overlapping themes, and *All the King's Men* helps to confirm the value of the tripartite theory of democratic leadership which I find in *Invisible Man*. I will argue that in *All the King's Men*, Governor Willie Stark embodies one aspect of this theory of democratic leadership, but Willie fails to embody the other two. Specifically, while Willie does pursue goals which he has in common with his followers, he does not do enough to promote political freedom for the citizenry, nor does he do much in the way of rearticulating and reapplying the nation's founding principles. While Willie mostly falls short of the standards for democratic leadership which I elucidated in the previous chapter, Warren's novel still suggests that these standards are of crucial importance. To flesh out my argument about *All the King's Men* and democratic leadership, I make reference not

only to Ellison, but also to the speeches of Malcolm X and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to Nancy Fraser's ideas on redistribution and recognition, and to Hannah Arendt's ideas on action, freedom, and responsibility.

When he is still a novice politician trying to figure out how to communicate most effectively to his audience, Willie Stark is told by his adviser, Jack Burden: "It's up to you to give 'em something to stir 'em up and make 'em feel alive again. . . . But for Sweet Jesus' sake *don't try to improve their minds*."[2] The novel ultimately suggests, though, that a democratic leader must at times try to "improve" the "minds" of the people; in contrast to Jack's advice to Willie, the novel's teaching actually coincides with Franklin Delano Roosevelt's assertion that "the greatest duty of a statesman is to educate."[3] As we shall see, though, Willie Stark ultimately fails to fulfill this duty, for he does little to educate his audience about what Ellison called "the principle on which the country was built."[4]

While *All the King's Men* suggests that the best political leaders seek to educate the citizenry, the novel also exemplifies this book's claim that novelists can provide the citizen-reader with an important form of democratic education—not by providing the reader with any easy answers to the questions raised, but rather by encouraging the reader to explore the kinds of complex moral and political questions that readers must answer for themselves. *All the King's Men* suggests that we must reject political passivity and we must make political judgments; at the same time, the novel suggests that political questions are often rife with ambiguities and complexities that make it difficult to render with confidence the judgments that citizens must make. By insisting that we must seek to answer for ourselves questions which are by their nature multi-faceted, Warren's novel can help prepare its readers for some of the tough tasks of democratic citizenship.

## *ALL THE KING'S MEN* AND POLITICAL FREEDOM

In the previous chapter, I suggested that *Invisible Man* points to a tripartite conception of democratic leadership. The first part of this theory of leadership entails the idea that the democratic leader should encourage his or her followers to be active citizens so that they can achieve political freedom for themselves. Warren also brings our attention to this aspect of democratic leadership in *All the King's Men*, insofar as Willie can be called a "negative exemplar" when it comes to the need for leaders to encourage political freedom. Willie offers himself as a champion *for* the people. Unlike the Bourbon aristocrats who once ruled the state for their own advantage, Willie is striving to achieve goals held by ordinary citizens. However, in fighting *for* the people, Willie renders them passive spectators rather than active citizens. Thus, he largely fails to help the people

achieve *political* freedom, which is the freedom to have an active voice in the shaping of public affairs.

According to Warren, when he first conceived of the character of Willie, he saw him as "a man whose power was based on the fact that somehow he could vicariously fulfill some secret needs of the people about him."[5] As we shall see, Willie fought to fulfill his downtrodden followers' need for "recognition," on the one hand, and their need for "redistribution," on the other, to put it in the terms used by Nancy Fraser.[6] The people, though, are figured by Willie as passive recipients of his aid rather than as political actors with their own voice. Joseph Lane notes that one of Willie's key speeches "is presented as a dialogue between Stark, standing at the top of the capitol steps, and the crowd, spread out across the lawn in front of him." However, "the dialogue seems remarkably one-sided because the crowd" only offers "loud roars of approval" or exclaims "Willie— Willie— we want Willie."[7] Rather than a true dialogue containing multiples views and multiple perspectives, the people simply cheer on their champion as spectators. They offer their votes and their expressions of admiration, but contribute nothing else to a political process that is controlled by Willie Stark.

While Willie himself does little to encourage his followers to achieve political freedom, the novel as a whole suggests that citizens should pursue a life of action and engaged citizenship. In this respect, the novel has a great deal in common with *Invisible Man*. In the previous chapter, we saw that Ellison's novel explores the temptations of an individualistic withdrawal from the world—that is, the temptation to pursue a wholly private form of freedom. Ellison's novel ultimately suggests, though, that a more valuable form of freedom arises when one shares words and deeds with one's fellow citizens. In other words, *Invisible Man* suggests that the pursuit of political freedom is at least as important to pursue as private freedom, for at the novel's end, the Invisible Man leaves behind the isolation of his underground apartment, and moves into the world with the intention of becoming a responsible political actor—either as an orator, or as a politically engaged writer, or as both.

We see this same kind of movement—from the temptation to withdraw from the world to a renewed commitment to a life of action—in *All the King's Men*. The Invisible Man stated that while "underground" he was "one of the most irresponsible beings that ever lived," but by the end of the novel he reemerges into the world and decides to embrace "a socially responsible role."[8] Similarly, Jack Burden, the narrator of *All the King's Men*, states that he once "came to believe that nobody had any responsibility for anything." In the novel's final line, though, he declares that "soon now we shall go out of the house and go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time."[9] Just as the Invisible Man eventually decides that he had "overstayed" his "hibernation," Jack decides that he will no longer succumb to

"the Great Sleep," which was the name he gave to the several periods of time in which he passively drifted through life, refusing to take responsibly for his actions.[10] Much like the Invisible Man, then, Jack decides that he will no longer withdraw from "the convulsion of the world" and will instead embrace "the awful responsibility" of agency and action. At the end of the novel, Jack may not become a leader in the public eye, but he plans to again be politically engaged, for he states that he intends to work for the political campaign of Hugh Miller, an honorable man who had once served as Willie's attorney general. In short, both *Invisible Man* and *All the King's Men* ultimately endorse political commitment and political action, and thus they each point to the importance of political freedom.[11]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Ellison told his friend Warren in a 1964 interview: "I have no desire to escape the struggle. . . . I want to impose my will upon the outcome to the extent that I can. I want to help shape events and our general culture . . . as one who is in a position to have a responsible impact upon the American value system."[12] Just as Ellison suggested he wanted to "impose [his] will upon the outcome" of historical and political events, Jack Burden comes to believe that we all must live "in the agony of will," which means that instead of passively drifting through life (including political life), we must make judgments and take action, even though we cannot know all of the consequences of our actions in advance.[13] Indeed, both Warren and Ellison emphasize that political and private actions almost always have unintended consequences. In the case of the Invisible Man, his words and deeds have "tragicomic" effects that he did not anticipate or intend; similarly, one of the major themes of *All the King's Men* is that because we all inhabit an interconnected "spider web," one's actions may lead to a series of effects that ripple through the world in ways that could never have been imagined.[14] Both Warren and Ellison insist, though, that the awareness that one's actions may have (often terrible) unanticipated consequences must not prevent us from taking on the often agonizing process of making political choices and judgments. Of course, it is not an accident that Jack's last name is "Burden." His name is a reminder that *all* citizens must face the burden of deciding upon what political actions should be taken, along with their fellow citizens.

## *ALL THE KING'S MEN* AND ARENDT'S THEORY OF ACTION

Thus far, I have argued that while Willie Stark does not do enough to foster political freedom among his followers, Warren's novel still suggests that political freedom and political action are of crucial importance for the citizenry. To better understand the novel's ideas on freedom, action, and responsibility, it is useful to compare them to Hannah Arendt's analyses of these concepts.

To my knowledge, previous scholarship on *All the King's Men* has not yet noted the striking similarity between Warren's metaphor of the "spider web" in which all action takes place, on the one hand, and Arendt's discussion of the "web of relationships," on the other.[15] When Jack Burden tells the reader about the tragic life of his great-uncle, Cass Mastern, who was the subject of Jack's aborted dissertation project, Jack states that, "Cass Mastern . . . learned that the world is like an enormous spider web and if you touch it, however lightly, at any point, the vibration ripples to the remotest perimeter." As Cass put it in his journal when reflecting upon all the terrible events that had been caused by his affair with his friend's wife: "it was as though the vibration set up in the whole fabric of the world by my act had spread infinitely and with ever increasing power and no man could know the end."[16]

The ideas expressed here are remarkably consistent with Arendt's ideas about "action" in *The Human Condition* and in other writings.[17] Just as Cass writes of how the consequences of one's actions can "spread infinitely," Arendt writes that our acts always enter into "a medium where every action becomes a chain reaction." And, just as Cass writes that "no man could know" what the future effects of his actions will be, Arendt emphasizes that the "consequences" of an actor's actions are "boundless" and are marked by an "inherent unpredictability."[18]

Cass Mastern learns that his friend from Kentucky did not die by accident but rather by suicide after he learned of his wife's affair with Cass; moreover, Cass finds out that his friend's wife has torn the enslaved woman Phebe away from her husband and home in Lexington and sold her "down the river" because Phebe had also learned of the infidelity.[19] Cass suffers greatly from the horrifying realization that "the death of my friend, the betrayal of Phebe, the suffering and rage and great change of the woman I had loved—all had come from my single act of sin and perfidy."[20] Cass's mournful reflections upon the unexpected and enormous consequences of what he calls his "single act" resonates with Arendt's statement that "the smallest act . . . bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed . . . suffices to change every constellation."[21] On the one hand, the fact that "one deed" can change "every constellation" can give us hope because it means that the problems found in the status quo are always subject to change even when they appear permanent; on the other hand, as Cass Mastern found out, the fact that actions have boundless consequences can just as often—and perhaps more often—lead to lamentation rather than celebration.

Arendt and Warren both help us reflect on how actors must continue to act—and take responsibility for their actions—despite action's boundlessness and unpredictability. Arendt writes, "Although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, nobody is the author or producer of his own life story."[22] Arendt believes, though, that even if we are not the *author* of our stories,

we still must be held accountable for our actions; thus, to take an extreme example, Arendt believes that Adolf Eichmann must hang for his crimes against humanity. Arendt writes that even if it is the case that if he had been born in a different time and place, then he would not have ended up a mass-murderer, even so, Eichmann did choose to engage in genocide when the choice was given to him. As Arendt puts it when describing what she thinks the judges should have told Eichmann:

> You told your story in terms of a hard-luck story, and, knowing the circumstances, we are, up to a point, willing to grant you that under more favorable circumstances it is highly unlikely that you would ever have come before us or before any other criminal court. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that it was nothing more than misfortune that made you a willing instrument in the organization of mass murder; there still remains the fact that you have carried out, and therefore actively supported, a policy of mass murder.[23]

In other words, Eichmann may not have authored all of his life circumstances, but as an actor he did choose how he *responded* to these circumstances. As for Cass Mastern, he did not "author" his story because he did not intend, nor could he have predicted, that his affair with his friend's wife would lead both to his friend's death and to the selling down-the-river of Phebe. Still, Cass takes responsibility for his action and for its terrible effects, and he tries to in some way repent for his sins by taking actions such as emancipating his slaves and refusing to fire his gun as a Confederate soldier.[24]

Horrified by the consequences of his actions, Cass Mastern would certainly agree with Arendt that, "[b]ecause the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a 'doer' but always and at the same a sufferer."[25] But despite all of his suffering, Cass continues to act in the world, just as Jack Burden ultimately decides to reenter "the convulsion of the world" and take action even after suffering so much tragic loss in that world, including the loss of the man who turns out to be his father (Judge Irwin), the loss of Willie Stark, who served at times as a father-figure, and the loss of his longtime friend, Adam Stanton. At the end of the novel, it is clear that Jack has chosen responsible engagement with the world when he mentions that he will be working for the gubernatorial campaign of Hugh Miller, the former attorney general who had resigned when Willie chose to not fire a corrupt official in his administration. Jack mentions that when discussing with Miller "the moral neutrality of history," which entails the idea that it is only the consequences of a leader's actions which ultimately matter, Miller insisted that "[h]istory is blind, but man is not."[26] Miller is suggesting that whereas when we look back at historical events we might be tempted to focus on morally neutral questions surrounding who won

and who lost power, human beings must also remember to ask: who has acted honorably and with integrity, and how can I best do so?

Striving to act honorably in his life after taking responsibility for the damage that his past actions have wrought, Cass emancipates his slaves and seeks to run his plantation with free black laborers. Cass tells his disapproving brother: "Perhaps I shall preach Abolition . . . some day. . . . But not now. I am not worthy to instruct others. . . . But meanwhile there is my example. If it is good, it is not lost. *Nothing is ever lost*."[27] Cass's insistence that when we act with integrity we can set an inspirational example that is never lost is strikingly similar to what Arendt writes about Sargeant Anton Schmid, an Austrian drafted into the German army who made the choice to rescue Jews and aid the Jewish resistance until he was caught and executed in 1942.[28] Regarding the significance of Schmid's actions, Arendt dwells not primarily on the hundreds of lives that he saved in Vilna, but rather on the inspirational quality of the example that he set. She writes that despite the efforts of the Nazis to wipe out the memory of those, like Schmid, who undermined them, the "holes of oblivion do not exist. Nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left alive to tell the story."[29] In the case of Cass Mastern, it is his grand-nephew, Jack Burden, who will tell Cass's story and save it from oblivion, for at the end of the novel Jack states that he will finally finish his book about Cass, thus further vindicating Cass's claim (which corresponds with Arendt's view) that "[n]othing is ever lost."

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt writes that the story of Anton Schmid reminds us that

> nothing can ever be "practically useless," at least, not in the long run. It would be of great practical usefulness for Germany today, not merely for her prestige abroad but for her sadly consumed inner condition, if there were more such stories to be told. For the lesson of such stories is simple and within everybody's grasp. Politically speaking, it is that under conditions of terror most people will comply but *some people will not*, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that "it could happen" in most places but *it did not happen everywhere*. Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation.[30]

Arendt's insistence that the ability to act freely and to resist injustice can never be fully vanquished—not even "under conditions of terror"—resonates with Jack Burden's eventual rejection of his erstwhile belief that the behavior of human beings is predetermined by some sort of mechanical, biological, or historical process, an idea which he sums up as the theory that "there was no god but the Great Twitch."[31] According to Jack's "Great Twitch" theory of human behavior, "life is but the dark heave of

blood and the twitch of the nerve," which means that a human being is simply "a peculiarly complicated piece of mechanism." This materialistic and fatalistic theory promotes the belief that "nothing was your fault or anybody's fault, for things are always as they are," and could not have been otherwise.[32]

Jack's "Great Twitch" theory conforms to the totalitarian conviction, as Arendt describes it in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, that human beings "can be reduced to . . . bundles of reactions" that "can be exchanged at random for any other."[33] Just as the "Great Twitch" theory suggests that human beings are nothing more than "a peculiarly complicated piece of mechanism" that acts in predetermined ways, Arendt writes that the concentration camps of totalitarian regimes were aimed at "eliminating . . . spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior and . . . transforming the human personality into a mere thing."[34] As we have seen, by the time she wrote *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt had come to believe that even "under conditions of terror," it is still possible for (at least some) people to act spontaneously and freely, thus demonstrating that it is impossible to reduce all people to mere machines. Similarly, by the end of *All the King's Men*, Jack Burden has realized that "the Great Twitch" does not fully explain human behavior, and perhaps it explains none of it. For example, he writes of Adam Stanton and Willie Stark that "though doomed they had nothing to do with any doom under the godhead of the Great Twitch."[35] In other words, it was their own decisions and actions that doomed them, not any inexorable force that may have allegedly existed within them or without them. Similarly, Willie's final words to Jack are a rejection of determinism and fatalism: "It might have all been different, Jack. . . . You got to believe that."[36]

As mentioned earlier, Jack states that there were time periods during which he simply drifted through life, and he defines these times of inertia and passivity with the term "the Great Sleep."[37] By succumbing to "the Great Sleep," Jack avoids action and thus human freedom. Arendt's discussion of why people may be tempted to avoid action is here quite relevant. Arendt writes that human beings

> have always known . . . that he who acts never quite knows what he is doing, that he always becomes "guilty" of consequences he never intended or even foresaw, that no matter how disastrous and unexpected the consequences of his deed he can never undo it, that the process he starts is never consummated unequivocally in one single deed or event, that its very meaning never discloses itself to the actor but only to the backward glance of the historian. . . . All this is reason enough to turn away with despair from the realm of human affairs and to hold in contempt the human capacity for freedom.[38]

Arendt here poignantly expresses ideas that resonate with much of what Jack Burden experiences in *All the King's Men*. Jack's investigations into

Judge Irwin's past led to "disastrous and unexpected consequences," including the judge's suicide, after which Jack learned that the judge was his father. Moreover, Jack's decision to persuade Adam Stanton to accept the directorship of Willie's new public hospital also led to a catastrophic chain of events that left both Adam and Willie dead. As we have seen, Arendt's description of the terrible risks of action also jibes with the story of Cass Mastern, whose decision to engage in an affair with his wife's friend led to a host of terrible events. Arendt writes that the "meaning" of one's acts can only be disclosed by "the backward glance of the historian." This, too, fits with the story of Cass, for the "meaning" of his life-story can only be revealed when a historian (Jack Burden) seeks to understand Cass's story. As a graduate student, Jack does not yet have the wisdom to understand Cass's story, but by the end of the novel, after he has himself accepted the "burden" of action, he is finally ready to do so.

According to Arendt, given the potentially terrible consequences of acting in the world, many have been tempted to draw the conclusion that "[t]he only salvation . . . lie[s] in non-acting, in abstention from the whole realm of human affairs as the only means to safeguard one's sovereignty and integrity."[39] It is this belief, which Arendt associates with Stoicism, that (at times) leads Jack to withdraw into "the Great Sleep."[40] Arendt writes that those who reject action often believe that when one tries to act freely, one's actions get caught up in a web of other people's actions such that it seems like one has no real freedom at all! As Arendt puts it, many in "the great tradition of Western thought" have been moved "to accuse freedom of luring man into necessity, to condemn action . . . because its results fall into a predetermined net of relationships, invariably dragging the agent with them, who seems to forfeit his freedom the very moment he makes use of it."[41] What Arendt describes here is again consistent with what Jack calls "the Great Twitch," which, as we have seen, is the theory that everything one does is predetermined and happens out of necessity, such that "nobody had any responsibility for anything," as Jack puts it.

As part of her effort to vindicate action, though, Arendt argues that those who reject action on the grounds that to act is to enter into a world of "necessity" are making a category mistake; namely, they are confusing "freedom" with "sovereignty." As Arendt puts it,

> their basic error seems to lie in that identification of sovereignty with freedom. . . . If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth.[42]

In other words, human beings *do* always have the freedom to spontaneously act in new and unexpected ways; however, they do *not* have the

ability to determine how their free actions will play out in the world, for no one has "sovereignty" over the vast "web of relationships."

Arendt's claim that no person can ever achieve "sovereignty" fits very well with the story of Willie Stark. Willie may be the dominant political figure in his Southern state, and he may be able to intimidate many of his political opponents, but he still lacks what Arendt calls "sovereignty." If Willie did have "sovereignty" in Arendt's sense of the word, then he would not only be able to pressure the state university's football coach to put his son back in a game, but he would also be able to prevent his son from dying from a football injury in that very same game. And, if he did have "sovereignty," he would not only be able to build one of the great public hospitals of the world, but he would also be able to prevent the chain of actions that culminated in his assassination by the hand of the director of the hospital. And, while Willie can do a great deal to improve the schools, roads, and tax system of his Southern state, his lack of "sovereignty" means that he cannot ameliorate all of the state's many problems. The novel thus speaks perfectly to Arendt's point that no one can ever gain total "sovereignty" over the always endlessly complex political landscape.[43]

But if for both Arendt and Warren total "sovereignty" is an impossibility, Arendt and Warren also both endorse the pursuit of political freedom through political action. As we have seen, Jack (and Cass) eventually reject both "the Great Sleep" and "the Great Twitch." The former involves avoiding action altogether, and the latter involves a denial of responsibility for any actions that one does undertake. By the end of the novel, Jack is willing to act *and* to take responsibility for his actions. As John Burt perceptively notes in his discussion of *All the King's Men*, "Like Ellison's narrator [in *Invisible Man*], Warren's does not rest in irony and withdrawal . . . but returns to a chastened version of his earlier commitments."[44] Both *Invisible Man* and *All the King's Men* celebrate political action while acknowledging (as does Arendt) the risks inherent in its pursuit.

## *ALL THE KING'S MEN*, LEADERSHIP, AND MUTUALITY

Thus far, we have seen that *All the King's Men* endorses the idea, which can also be found in *Invisible Man* and in the writings of Hannah Arendt, that political freedom is *at least* as crucial for realizing one's full humanity as is private freedom. We have also seen, though, that Willie Stark himself may not do enough to help ordinary citizens realize an active form of political freedom, for by "vicariously" seeking to fulfill their "needs," and by dominating the political arena, he renders the people passive spectators rather than free political actors. Thus, Willie does not do

enough to promote the first part of the tripartite theory of democratic leadership that I elucidated in the prior chapter.

What, though, of the second part of this tripartite theory? The second part of this theory entails the idea that leaders should not manipulate their followers in order to achieve their own ends, but rather should promote goals and aspirations which they share with their followers. As we shall see, Willie Stark arguably does meet this second standard of democratic leadership. On the one hand, one can argue that Willie sometimes engages in a manipulative form of demagoguery by appealing to the emotions and passions of the people rather than to their reason. On the other hand, the reader does have every reason to believe that the goals that Willie fervently champions truly are the same goals that are held by a majority of the people in his state.

To see how Willie tries to promote goals that are held by his followers, it is useful to examine Willie in the light of Nancy Fraser's concepts of "redistribution" and "recognition." In an influential 1995 essay, Fraser described what she called two different "understandings of injustice." She writes that the first type

> is socioeconomic injustice, which is rooted in the political-economic structure of society. Examples include exploitation (having the fruits of one's labour appropriated for the benefit of others); economic marginalization (being confined to undesirable or poorly paid work or being denied access to income-generating labour altogether); and deprivation (being denied an adequate material standard of living).[45]

Willie's impoverished rural constituents could certainly be described as having experienced "socioeconomic injustice," for as John Burt notes in his discussion of Louisiana (which is, of course, the model for Warren's unnamed state in his novel), when Huey Long was elected governor in 1928, his state's "economy was essentially a colonial one, with out-of-state corporations, principally Standard Oil, extracting tremendous wealth from the local oil fields but returning very little to the people of the state."[46] With a dearth of paved roads and decent schools in the "upland" areas where they lived, the poor farmers were denied the economic opportunities that the "Bourbon aristocracy" of the "lowlands" enjoyed.[47] Willie addresses the economic deprivation of his audience when he says in one of his speeches: "Look at your pants. Have they got holes in the knee? Listen to your belly. Did it ever rumble for emptiness? Look at your crop. Did it ever rot in the field because the road was so bad you couldn't get it to market? Look at your kids. Are they growing up ignorant as you and dirt because there isn't any school for them?"[48] In *All the King's Men*, Willie Stark decries, and seeks to combat, these forms of injustice.

Fraser notes, though, that in addition to "socioeconomic injustice," there is a "second kind of injustice" which "is cultural or symbolic." This

type of injustice often entails "nonrecognition (being rendered invisible via the authoritative representational, communicative, and interpretative practices of one's culture)" as well as "disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions)."[49] Willie Stark clearly recognizes that his followers suffer from this type of "cultural or symbolic" injustice, for he notes that he and his followers are often disparaged as "hicks" or as "rednecks."[50] Moreover, his followers no doubt felt invisible in a political system controlled by the "Bourbon aristocracy." Part of what makes Willie such a formidable leader, then, is that he understood that his followers were subjected to both "socioeconomic injustice" *and* this second type of "cultural or symbolic" injustice.

Hence, Willie pursued not only what Fraser calls "redistribution" in order to challenge socioeconomic injustice, but he also pursued what Fraser calls "recognition" for his impoverished rural followers, in order to help them gain the self-respect that the dominant culture had failed to instill in them. The "redistribution" is pursued through a new tax policy and through greater state funding of schools, bridges, roads, and a new public hospital.[51] The "recognition" is pursued not primarily through policy proposals but rather through speeches in which Willie lets the people know that while they may often be portrayed in the dominant culture as unsophisticated or ignorant, they actually have a great deal of strength and dignity, as long as they are willing to rise up and stand on their "own hind legs."[52]

According to Fraser, while "virtually every struggle against injustice, when properly understood, implies demands for both redistribution and recognition," in the case of the "working class," the "remedies" that are needed mainly involve "redistribution."[53] Willie reminds the reader, though, that the need for "recognition" can be just as compelling for working-class people as is their need for "redistribution." By promoting both the goal of recognition *and* the goal of redistribution, Willie showed himself to be a leader who works to promote goals that he and his followers mutually hold, as opposed to a leader who manipulates people for his own ends.

Regarding the issue of recognition as it relates to injustice, it is illuminating to compare Willie Stark to a real leader who emerged in the 1960s—namely, Malcolm X. Warren actually interviewed Malcolm X in 1964, and in that interview Malcolm X highlighted the crucial importance of recognition when he was asked about the relationship between his ideas and those of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X stated that King's "objective . . . is to gain respect for negroes as human beings, and nonviolence is his method. Well, my objective is the same as King's. We may disagree on methods, but we don't have to argue all day on that. . . . As long as we agree that the thing that the Afro-American wants and needs is recognition and respect as a human being."[54]

At first glance, it may seem odd to compare the fictional Willie Stark (whose followers were mostly rural, white, and from the South) to Malcolm X (whose followers were mostly urban, black, and from the North); however, there are actually some striking similarities between the two leaders' efforts to achieve "recognition and respect" for their respective followers. In his famous "Message to the Grass Roots" speech in 1963, Malcolm X tells his audience: "So we're all black people, so-called Negroes, second-class citizens, ex-slaves. You're nothing but an ex-slave. You don't like to be told that. But what else are you?"[55] Malcolm X here bluntly reminds his audience of how the nation has refused to recognize black people as full citizens with equal dignity, even though they may not "like to be told" this. Willie Stark makes the same rhetorical move in the speeches that he makes after he realizes that he had been encouraged by powerful politicians to enter the governor's race solely in order to split the rural vote. Jack Burden describes the stump-speech as follows: "'Friends, red-necks, suckers, and fellow hicks,' [Willie] would say. . . . And he would pause, letting the words sink in. And in the quiet the crowd would be restless and resentful under these words. . . . 'Yeah,' he would say . . . 'that's what you are. . . . And me—I'm one, too.'"[56] Just as Malcolm X's audience may at first not have liked hearing that they were "ex-slaves," Willie's audience may have not liked hearing, at first, that they are "hicks" and "red-necks." But, just as Malcolm X insisted that he, too, was an ex-slave, Willie insisted that he, too, was a "hick" and "red-neck." Thus, both leaders established a sense of closeness and connection to the people whom they sought to lead. And, both leaders suggested that while their respective groups may have been demeaned and pushed around in the past, if they stayed strong and united, then they could achieve a measure of justice.

Indeed, both Malcolm X and Willie deployed the same metaphor of "standing up" in order to inspire their respective followers to fight to improve their lives and to elevate their self-conception. As Willie puts it:

> Oh, I'm a red-neck, for the sun has beat down on me. Oh, I'm a sucker, for I fell for that sweet-talking fellow in the fine automobile . . . Oh, I'm a hick and I am the hick they were going to try to use and split the hick vote. But I'm standing here on my own hind legs, for even a dog can learn to do that, give him time. . . . Are you . . . on your hind legs? Have you learned that much yet?[57]

Willie here suggests that just as political elites have humiliated Willie by tricking him into a scheme to split the rural vote, so, too, do poor farmers face humiliation in a society that denies them equal dignity. In the future, though, they can stand on their "own hind legs" in order to achieve both cultural recognition and economic redistribution.

Malcolm X uses the very same language of "standing up" when he said in the Detroit version of his 1964 speech "The Ballot or the Bullet":

"It's not so good to refer to what you're going to do as a sit-in. That right there castrates you. . . . An old woman can sit. An old man can sit. A chump can sit, a coward can sit, anything can sit. Well, you and I been sitting long enough, and it's time for us today to start doing some standing and some fighting to back that up."[58]

Just as Willie argued that he had been a "sucker" insofar as he had been used in a scheme to split the rural vote—a scheme which also treated rural voters as "suckers"—Malcolm X warns that black people have all too often allowed themselves to be "chumps." According to Malcolm X, they have been "chumps" insofar as they have often voted for white politicians who do little to improve the lives of African Americans. Speaking at a time when civil rights legislation was being filibustered primarily by Southern Democrats, Malcolm X declared, "The Democrats have been in Washington, D.C., only because of the Negro vote. . . . You put them first and they put you last. Because you're a chump!"[59]

Both Malcolm X and Willie Stark argue that once oppressed people realize that they have foolishly allowed themselves to be manipulated by those in power, they can then choose to wield their own political power in a far more productive way. Both Malcolm X and Willie also claimed that if the members of an oppressed group work together to solve the problems of their own community, then they can achieve greater pride in themselves. Early in his political career, Malcolm X declared in Harlem: "The Honorable Elijah Mohammed teaches us that it is time for you and me to stand up for ourselves. It is time for you and me to see for ourselves. It is time for you and me to hear for ourselves, and it is time for you and me to fight for ourselves. We don't need anybody today speaking for us, seeing for us, or fighting for us. We'll fight our own battles with the help of our God."[60] Remarkably, Willie delivers to his audience of poor farmers precisely the same message—namely, that an oppressed people must practice self-reliance, with the assistance of God. As Willie puts it, "This is the truth; you are a hick and nobody ever helped a hick but the hick himself. Up there in town they won't help you. It is up to you and God, and God helps those who help themselves!"[61] Both leaders suggest that practically speaking, it is crucial for the oppressed group to rely on itself, for outsiders who claim that they want to help usually have their own self-serving agenda; moreover, if oppressed peoples are ever going to gain the pride and self-respect that the larger society denied them, then they will need to rely on themselves rather than continue to render themselves dependent on others.

## WILLIE STARK AND AMERICA'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

We have now seen that Willie Stark's words and deeds do meet the second criterion of democratic leadership described in the previous chap-

ter; specifically, Willie does strive to advance goals—involving the elimination of both socioeconomic and cultural injustices—that he holds in common with his followers. But what of the third criterion for democratic leadership? In the previous chapter, I suggested through my analysis of *Invisible Man* that democratic leaders in America should not always simply mirror the people, but rather should sometimes *educate* the people by "affirm[ing] the principle"—that is, by striving to reapply and to rearticulate the nation's founding principles. On this front, Willie Stark arguably fails as a democratic leader. Granted, Willie's efforts to rectify injustice could potentially be linked to the founding principle that "all men are created equal," and Willie *does* present to his audience some ideas about "rights." Yet, on the whole, Willie does little, if anything, to place his political ideas within the larger context of American political thought, and he generally fails to be an effective democratic educator.

To see how Willie fails to teach his audience about the nation's founding principles, it is again instructive to compare—or, in this case, contrast—Willie's speeches with those of Malcolm X. Earlier, I argued that there were important similarities between Malcolm X and Willie Stark regarding how they appealed to their audience and how they inspired them to fight for shared goals. Malcolm X, though, focused more than Willie Stark did on *educating* his audience. Indeed, as the activist A. Peter Bailey put it, Malcolm X "was a master teacher."[62] Moreover, as we shall see, Malcolm X's efforts to educate his audience often involved a rearticulation and a reapplication of America's founding principles.

In his 1964 speech on "The Ballot or the Bullet," Malcolm X might, at first glance, seem to disavow American principles. In the version of the speech that he delivered in Cleveland, Malcolm X starkly asserted:

> I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver—no, not I. I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. . . . I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.[63]

Given his claim that he is not "an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter," it might seem strange for me to claim that Malcolm X attempted to educate his audience about America's founding principles. And yet, further analysis reveals that this is precisely what Malcolm X did in speeches such as "The Ballot or the Bullet."

In part because of his criticisms of the doctrine of nonviolent resistance, Malcolm X was sometimes perceived to be a more radical thinker than other civil rights leaders of his era. And yet, as Malcolm X himself pointed out, his ideas about resisting injustice were no more—and no

less—radical than the ideas of the founding fathers. As Malcolm X put it in the Detroit version of "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech:

> When this country here was first being founded, there were thirteen colonies. . . . The whites were . . . fed up with this taxation without representation. So some of them stood up and said, "Liberty or death!" . . . The white man made the mistake of letting me read his history books. [laughter] He made the mistake of teaching me that Patrick Henry was a patriot, and George Washington—wasn't nothing nonviolent about ol' Pat or George Washington.[64]

Malcolm X may have asserted, "I'm not a patriot," but he is here clearly suggesting that his own ideas about the liberation of African Americans are similar to the ideas of the great patriots Henry and Washington. Malcolm X continues: "'Liberty or death' was what brought about the freedom of whites in this country from the English. [applause] They didn't care about the odds. Why, they faced the wrath of the entire British Empire. . . . [Y]et these thirteen little scrawny states, tired of taxation without representation, tired of being exploited and oppressed and degraded, told that big British Empire, 'Liberty or death.'"[65] Malcolm X here pays tribute to the founding fathers in a way that is reminiscent of some of Frederick Douglass's arguments in his 1852 speech, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?," Douglass told his audience: "The signers of the Declaration of Independence were brave men. . . . They were peace men; but they preferred revolution to peaceful submission to bondage. . . . With them, justice, liberty and humanity were 'final'; not slavery and oppression."[66]

Like Douglass before him, Malcolm X draws an analogy between the founders' struggle against British tyranny and the struggle of African Americans against oppression. As Malcolm X puts it, "And here you have twenty-two million Afro-Americans . . . today, catching more hell than Patrick Henry ever saw. . . . I'm here to tell, you in case you don't know it, that you got a new generation of black people in this country who don't care anything whatsoever about odds."[67] Despite the rhetorical claim that he is "not an American," then, Malcolm X here appeals to the authority of the founding fathers' arguments as he claims that if blacks are not made full citizens—that is, if, like the founding fathers under colonial rule, they are denied representation by being denied the vote, and if they are also denied the basic right to be free from lynchings and other forms of violence—then blacks would be justified in using force in order to protect their rights. While this may have seemed a "militant" or "extreme" position to some observers, it is essentially the same argument that John Locke made when he stated that the people would have no choice but to "appeal to Heaven" if their rights were systematically abridged.[68] Malcolm X again invoked founding-era arguments when he said in regard to firearms: "The only thing that I've ever said is

that in areas where the government has proven itself either unwilling or unable to defend the lives and the property of Negroes, it's time for Negroes to defend themselves."[69] Malcolm X is here suggesting that if the government fails "to secure," as the Declaration of Independence puts it, the fundamental rights to life and liberty possessed by all people, then blacks may need to resort to other measures to protect these unalienable rights.

While Malcolm X may not have explicitly praised the founders to the same degree that Martin Luther King Jr. or Frederick Douglass often did, his implicit argument is still in certain respects similar to theirs. Like these other African American leaders, Malcolm X suggested that the founding principles are invaluable; the problem, though, is that the principles have not been applied to all. As Malcolm X put it, "You and I have never seen democracy—all we've seen is hypocrisy."[70] But if democracy has been "unseen" by African Americans, it remains a valuable ideal. What differentiates Malcolm X from King and Douglass is not that the former rejected America's founding ideals whereas the latter two embraced them; rather, what differentiates Malcolm X is his greater degree of pessimism regarding whether or not the ideals could ever actually be realized for all people in the United States. As Lucas Morel puts it, "At bottom, the logic of Malcolm X's political—as opposed to theological—rhetoric evinced not an affinity for the principles of the United States but a conviction of the white man's inability to practice what he preaches."[71]

Still, Malcolm X did not lose *all* hope for American democracy, as indicated in the following passage from "The Ballot or the Bullet":

> This is why I say it's the ballot or the bullet. It's liberty or it's death. It's freedom for everybody or freedom for nobody. . . . America is in a unique position. She's the only country in history in the position actually to become involved in a bloodless revolution. The Russian Revolution was bloody, Chinese Revolution was bloody. . . . And there was nothing more bloody than the American Revolution. But today, this country can become involved in a revolution that won't take bloodshed. All she's got to do is give the black man in this country everything that's due him, everything.[72]

Malcolm X appears to hold out the hope, then, however slim, that if African Americans in the South gain the vote, and if African Americans throughout the nation are freed from the various forms of oppression to which they are subjected, then African Americans can become equal citizens in a reborn nation which actually provides "freedom for everybody." It should also be noted that while Malcolm X's ideas on self-defense were generally consistent with Locke's and Jefferson's ideas on the "right to revolution" (which is, of course, a right of the people to use force), in the above quote we see Malcolm X's hope that a just order will one day arise in America through *peaceful* means. This would entail a

kind of American exceptionalism, Malcolm X suggests, insofar as the world had not yet seen a just political order emerge from a "bloodless revolution."

Furthermore, despite his assertion that he is "not a patriot," Malcolm X at the same time implies that African Americans are in one sense the greatest patriots of all, if one defines the patriot as someone who makes sacrifices for his or her country. As Malcolm X put it,

> Our mothers and fathers invested sweat and blood. Three hundred and ten years we worked in this country without a dime in return. . . . Your and my mother and father . . . worked for nothing, making the white man rich, making Uncle Sam rich. This is our investment. This is our contribution—our blood. Not only did we give of our free labor, we gave of our blood. Every time he had a call to arms, we were the first ones in uniform. We died on every battlefield the white man had. We have made a greater sacrifice than anybody who's standing up in America today. We have made a greater contribution and have collected less.[73]

Malcolm X's claim that he is "not an American" thus coexists with the implicit claim that African Americans should actually be seen as the greatest of American citizens, for no other group has contributed so much to building up (and also protecting) the nation.

My argument that many of Malcolm X's ideas were rooted in America's founding ideals—even if he did not always explicitly cite them—can be seen again in Malcolm X's claim that those who seek freedom and equality for blacks should "expand the civil-rights struggle to the level of human rights."[74] This was partly a pragmatic move, as it would mean, according to Malcolm X, that one could then "take the case of the black man in this country before the nations in the UN" or "before a world court."[75] At the level of political philosophy, though, Malcolm X's shift to the language of human rights conforms with the Declaration of Independence's claim that the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are *natural* rights, which means that they exist prior to any government. Malcolm X chose to use the term "human rights" rather than the older term, "natural rights," but he speaks of these fundamental rights in terms that the founders would have recognized. For as Malcolm X put it, "Human rights are something you were born with. Human rights are your God-given rights."[76] This is, of course, entirely consistent with the Declaration's claim that all people are "created equal" and "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights."[77]

Malcolm X's arguments, then, entailed an effort to reapply and to rearticulate America's founding ideals, even if he did not explicitly praise the founders to the degree that, say, Frederick Douglass or Martin Luther King Jr. did. Willie Stark, though, made much less of an effort to frame his arguments in terms of the nation's original principles. Perhaps the

closest that Willie gets to engaging with founding principles is during his speech after the impeachment vote against him fails. Willie tells his audience that he plans to build the "biggest and the finest" public hospital in the nation. "It will belong to you," Willie tells the crowd. "Any man or woman or child who is sick or in pain can go in those doors and know that all will be done that man can do. To heal sickness. To ease pain. Free. Not as charity. But as a right." Willie then goes on to detail a number of other "rights" which his state will seek to guarantee:

> And it is your right that every child shall have a complete education. That no person aged and infirm shall want or beg for bread. That the man who produces something shall be able to carry it to market without miring to the hub, without toll. That no poor man's house or land shall be taxed. That the rich and the great companies that draw wealth from this state shall pay this state a fair share. That you shall not be deprived of hope![78]

In his discussion of this passage, Joseph Lane suggests that Stark's ideas on "rights" here are very similar to those of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (and other Progressives) who

> sought to increase the role of government by redefining the purposes for which governments are instituted. They accepted the assertion in the Declaration of Independence that governments exist to protect rights, but they redefined the rights that were to be protected and thus authorized a great expansion in the powers of government to defend and secure those rights.[79]

While Lane's connection of Stark to Roosevelt is insightful, I would argue that Roosevelt, to his credit, did far more than Willie did to educate Americans, insofar as Roosevelt tried to make the case that even if the modern economic rights which he spoke of were not acknowledged as "rights" at the time of the founding, these economic rights are still rooted in our founding ideals. In other words, Roosevelt, unlike Willie Stark, made an effort to demonstrate that his policies and goals involved a rearticulation and a reapplication of America's founding principles, whereas Willie Stark made no attempt to do this; instead, Willie simply asserted that the people of his state have the "right" to such goods as health care and education.[80]

According to Lane, both Willie Stark and Roosevelt believed that rights are "changing things" such that "[d]ifferent rights are recognized at different times."[81] I would argue, though, that Lane downplays the degree to which Roosevelt (in contrast to Willie) carefully sought to connect his discussion of modern rights to the Declaration's rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In his Commonwealth Club Address, Roosevelt asserted that the "right to make a comfortable living" is rooted in the Declaration's "right to life."[82] Moreover, the "right to be assured, to the fullest extent attainable, in the safety of his savings" is

rooted in the "right to his own property," a right that is explicit in Locke's *Second Treatise*, and implicit in the Declaration of Independence.[83] And, in his 1944 "Second Bill of Rights" speech, Roosevelt suggested that "as our industrial economy expanded," it has become clear that "equality in the pursuit of happiness" now requires the government to take increased steps to foster "economic security and independence."[84] Roosevelt's main claim, then, was that we need to acknowledge what he called in his Commonwealth Club Address "the new terms of the old social contract," if that old social contract is to remain viable in the modern world. If we are to stay true to our traditional commitment to the idea that government must secure the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, then the government must take actions that were not needed in the eighteenth century. As Roosevelt put it, in an era of big business, a bigger government must "intervene" more in the economy, "not to destroy individualism, but to protect it."[85] In short, Roosevelt *does* suggest that under modern conditions the old rights to life, liberty, and property have to be understood in new ways, but the Declaration of Independence remains the lodestar of his discussion of rights.

Of course, some critics of Roosevelt suggest that he was less than forthright regarding the degree to which he broke sharply with the principles of the founding; these critics do not accept his argument that his innovations were aimed at preserving the spirit of America's founding principles in modern times.[86] Still, Roosevelt at least made a carefully reasoned argument that this is what he sought to do, whereas Willie Stark made no such effort. On the whole, while Willie's efforts to improve the economic conditions and opportunities of his poor constituents could potentially be related to the Declaration's insistence that "all men are created equal," Willie did little to educate his followers about the principles of the founding, nor did he argue (as Roosevelt did, persuasively or not) that his ideas about modern economic rights were in an important sense continuous with—rather than a sharp break from—the founders' ideas about rights.

In short, Willie took Jack Burden's advice insofar as Willie did not try "to improve" the "minds" of his audience by discussing the connection between the problems and the possibilities of the present moment, on the one hand, and the nation's original principles, on the other. While he may have helped his audience believe that they could and should stand up for themselves against injustice, he did little else to elevate or educate his audience; instead, he mostly inflamed their passions. Granted, Willie did not inflame the racial prejudices of his audience, as John Burt notes.[87] Still, Willie often appealed to the violent and base passions of his audience such as when, for example, he yells, "Gimme that meat ax" so that he can destroy his political opponents in a way that yields "[b]uckets of blood."[88] While not intended to be taken literally, Willie's rhetoric still encourages his audience to see the political opposition not as fellow dem-

ocratic citizens engaged in a common project but as enemies whose very existence poses a danger to the polity.

## *ALL THE KING'S MEN:* TRAGEDY, MORAL COMPLEXITY, AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

As discussed in the introduction, this book makes two main claims. One claim is that some of the most profound insights into the nature of leadership in American political thought can be found not in academic treatises, but rather in American literature. In this chapter, I have sought to further this claim by considering Willie Stark's words and deeds in light of the tripartite theory of democratic leadership that I elucidated in the prior chapter on *Invisible Man*. I have suggested that Willie's practice of leadership is consistent with one of the three aspects of democratic leadership discussed in the previous chapter, but it violates the other two. Specifically, we have seen that Willie does pursue goals which he holds in common with his followers; this includes the goal of economic "redistribution," but it also includes the goal of gaining "recognition" for impoverished people who are often derided within the larger culture. However, while *All the King's Men* ultimately upholds the importance of political freedom, Willie himself does little to encourage his followers to embrace political freedom, for he presents himself as the champion of the people who will vicariously act *for* them. Finally, Willie also does little in the way of rearticulating and reapplying America's founding principles. While Willie does speak of economic "rights," he does not connect this discussion of rights to any larger tradition of American political thinking about rights. On the whole, then, he fails to teach his followers lessons about how they should strive to "affirm the principle," as Ellison put it.

The other main claim of this book is that novels can help train citizen-readers to think through the kinds of moral and political questions that democratic citizens must render judgments upon. In the remainder of the chapter, I will discuss how *All the King's Men* exemplifies my claim that novels can provide this crucial form of democratic education. *All the King's Men* and the other novels discussed in this book educate readers not by providing them with stories that yield any easy answers but rather by offering morally complex stories that allow readers to make up their own minds about the questions that they raise, just as citizens have to make up their own minds when confronted with real-world political problems. Moreover, just as citizens must consider multiple perspectives on political questions before trying to reach a judgment, the novels that I consider in this book offer various perspectives on the questions which they explore, oftentimes through a depiction of characters with widely differing views. In the case of *All the King's Men*, perhaps the most important political question explored—but never answered for the reader in a

single, definitive way—is a question that had previously been raised most famously by Machiavelli, namely: is it inevitable (and acceptable) that leaders will sometimes (or even often) need to use morally troubling means in order to achieve noble ends? While Machiavelli clearly answers this question in the affirmative, Warren's novel yields no single answer, and instead provides to the citizen-reader multiple perspectives on the question.[89]

Warren himself noted how stories can explore profound political-philosophical questions—including the Machiavellian question of whether noble ends can justify morally troubling means—in the following passage from a 1964 essay in which Warren reflected on his time teaching at Louisiana State University in the 1930s, when Huey Long was governor. Warren writes:

> Conversation in Louisiana always came back to the tales, to the myth, to politics; and to talk politics is to talk about power. So conversation turned, by implication at least, on the question of power and ethics, of power and justification, of means and ends, of "historical costs." The big words were not often used, certainly not by the tellers of tales, but the concepts lurked even behind the most ungrammatical folktale. *The tales were shot through with philosophy*.[90]

Warren here explains how even the everyday stories told by laypeople can help citizens critically examine enduring political issues; a literary work of art such as *All the King's Men* can accomplish this educative task to an even greater and more profound degree.

Indeed, I would argue that reading Warren's novel can potentially help ordinary citizens explore questions about means and ends even more effectively than, say, reading *The Prince*, and not simply because an entertaining novel such as Warren's is likely to be more accessible to many readers than a sixteenth-century work of nonfiction. The other reason that reading Warren's novel can in some ways offer an even more powerful form of political education than reading *The Prince* is that Machiavelli, as I stated above, makes clear that he is arguing in favor of the idea that sometimes morally questionable means must be used in order for the prince to stay in power, or for political leaders to maintain the safety and freedom of the state. In contrast to Machiavelli's affirmative answer to the question of whether leaders must sometimes set aside moral standards when deciding upon a course of action, Warren's novel provides the reader with multiple ways to answer this question (including but not limited to Machiavelli's affirmative answer), and then allows the citizen-reader to make his or her own judgments.[91]

While *All the King's Men* imposes onto the reader no single answer to the questions that it raises, this does not mean that *any* interpretation of the novel is valid. Indeed, after his novel became famous, Warren himself wrote that there are two "quite contradictory interpretations" of the nov-

el that both lack merit. Warren noted that, "On one hand, there were those who took the thing to be a not-so-covert biography of, and apologia for, Senator Long, and the author to be not less than a base minion of the great man." According to this interpretation, Willie Stark should be viewed as an unambiguously heroic figure whose extra-legal measures can easily be excused by all the good things that he accomplished for the people of his state. "But on the other hand," writes Warren, "there were those who took the thing to be a rousing declaration of democratic principles and a tract for the assassination of dictators. This view, though somewhat more congenial to my personal political views, was almost as wide of the mark."[92] According to this interpretation, Willie was nothing but an evil tyrant who had to be destroyed for democracy to have any chance at survival.

The problem with each of the above interpretations is that they both oversimplify what is actually a very tragic, ambiguous, and complex story. To put it metaphorically, each of the above interpretations tries to render in black and white what is intended to be a story made up of shades of gray. As we have seen in chapter 1, Glenn Altschuler identifies as a main theme of "Benito Cereno" the idea that "good and evil, generosity and viciousness, make all men miscegenated, make everyone and everything gray."[93] This same theme can certainly be found in *All the King's Men*, for it is a misunderstanding of the novel to suggest that Willie Stark is simply an evil dictator, on the one hand, or a purely heroic champion of the people, on the other.

To put it another way, each of the "quite contradictory interpretations" of the novel is too one-sided, which means that each interpretation lacks a sense of *tragedy*. On the one hand, the claim that the novel is simply an "apologia" for Stark downplays the fact that Warren makes clear the damage that Willie does to the state by subverting the rule of law. On the other hand, the claim that the novel is simply a pro-tyrannicide "tract" downplays the fact that Warren makes clear that Willie genuinely did seek to improve the lives of downtrodden people—both in tangible, material ways, and also, as we have seen, in less tangible ways, such as by bolstering their sense of self-worth. Instead of portraying Willie as either hero or villain, then, the novel suggests that he is a *tragic* figure. As Hegel first argued, and as I discussed in chapter 1, tragedies are not stories of right versus wrong, but rather stories which involve an unavoidable conflict between two equally legitimate moral claims.[94] Hegel's theory sheds light on *All the King's Men*, for in the novel one finds that Willie recognizes that both ameliorating the plight of the poor *and* promoting the rule of law are worthy goals; however, Willie finds that sometimes these goals conflict with one another in an irreconcilable and thus tragic manner. As John Burt puts it, *All the King's Men* is about Willie Stark's efforts to grapple with those "moments when law and justice are at odds with one another."[95]

On the one hand, at certain times in the novel, we see characters argue that Willie's legal transgressions are justifiable because they are in the service of promoting social justice for the oppressed people of his state. Claiming that he could not advance his reformist agenda if he were to also try to stamp out the corruption and graft which top officials of his administration were obviously engaged in, Willie states, "You got to use fellows like Byram, and Tiny Duffy. . . . You can't make bricks without straw, and most of the time all the straw you got is secondhand straw from the cowpen." Similarly, Willie declares that "you have to make the good out of the bad because that is all you have got to make it out of."[96] Willie's defense of himself in these moments is reminiscent of Machiavelli's claim that those who seek to found or reform a republic must consolidate power, and must not shy away from transgressions against law and against morality if these transgressions are necessary to accomplish their ends. Machiavelli makes this argument in the *Discourses on Livy* when discussing how Romulus was said to have killed his brother Remus in order to found the Roman Republic. Machiavelli claims that "Romulus deserved to be pardoned for the death of his brother . . . for his actions were aimed at the public good and not self-advancement."[97] Similarly, we are led to believe in *All the King's Men* that the reason that Willie Stark uses tactics such as bribery and blackmail to maintain power is that he genuinely does desire to improve the lot of the common people from which he himself, against the odds, emerged. Whether all the good he does for the people means that he should be forgiven for his legal transgressions remains an open question in the novel, but what is not in question are Willie's motives, for he does clearly seem to be motivated not by a desire for "self-advancement," but rather by the desire to ameliorate injustice and to advance "the public good."

Moreover, according to Machiavelli, "It rarely (if ever) happens that a republic or a kingdom . . . is completely reformed along lines quite different from those on which it was previously organized unless one person has sole responsibility."[98] Willie Stark took power of a state in which the "Bourbon aristocracy" had for years failed to provide any semblance of equal opportunity for the citizenry. In the following passage, Warren refers to the real-life Huey Long, but the effort to create a more egalitarian state that is highlighted here has clear echoes in Warren's novel. Warren writes, "Among the students" at Louisiana State University in the 1930s,

> there sometimes appeared . . . that awkward boy from the depth of the 'Cajun country or from some scrabble-farm in North Louisiana, with burning ambition and frightening energy and a thirst for learning; and his presence there, you reminded yourself, with whatever complication of irony seemed necessary at the moment, was due to Huey, and to Huey alone. For the "better element" had done next to nothing in fifty years to get that boy out of the grim despair of his ignorance.[99]

In other words, the state in which Huey Long (and the fictional Willie Stark) rose to power desperately needed to "be reformed along lines quite different from those on which it was previously organized," as Machiavelli put it, and so Willie's assumption of near-dictatorial power can be justified *if* one accepts Machiavelli's argument that a republican government can only be radically reformed by a leader who seeks "to ensure that all power lies in his own hands."[100] According to this Machiavellian argument, if Willie Stark's use of intimidation and his tolerance of graft lead to the establishment of a reformed republic, then one can say of Willie what Machiavelli states about Romulus, namely, "if his deed accuses him, its consequences excuse him."[101]

But if *All the King's Men* sometimes highlights all of the positive consequences of Stark's rule for the poor people of his state, the novel also highlights the ways in which Willie's tactics erode the rule of law, and this erosion itself has terrible consequences. At one point in the novel, Jack Burden tries to claim that if Willie uses blackmail and bribes against his opponents, then it is his *opponents* who are morally culpable, for they are apparently the kind of people "who can be bribed or who have done things they can get blackmailed for."[102] However, despite this kind of effort to absolve Willie of blame for his corrupt actions, there is evidence that Willie at times knows full well that he is engaged in behavior which may be inexcusable. After all, Willie first rose to power by opposing a corrupt deal that led to the creation of an unsafe school building. Moreover, when Willie strives to create a great public hospital, he hopes to keep it free of graft, thereby admitting, at least implicitly, that he is hoping to avoid a situation in which "his means defile his ends," as Warren puts it in his 1953 introduction to the novel.[103]

Moreover, Willie's willingness to abuse the power of his office ends up having tragic consequences for Willie himself. Near the end of the novel, Willie pressures the state university's football coach into putting Willie's son Tom—who had been benched by the coach after getting into a fight—back in the game. Once the coach accedes to Willie's demands and puts Tom back on the field, Tom suffers a terrible injury that leaves him paralyzed and vulnerable to infection; not long thereafter, Tom dies from pneumonia. When contrasted with some of Willie's other machinations, such as his use of blackmail and intimidation against state legislators who were considering impeaching him, Willie's interference in the coach's decision-making may seem like a trivial matter; still, if principles such as the rule of law and the separation of powers had been in place, the executive of the state would not abuse his power by pressuring a state employee (the football coach) to put a family member who had broken the team's rules back into a game. In this instance, Willie's autocratic behavior leads to personal disaster; much as Creon's tyrannical transgressions against divine law produce a chain of events that result in the loss of his own son and wife, Willie's tyrannical control over the state's

football team leads to the death of his own son. Moreover, just as Creon finally regrets his tyrannical actions at the end of the play, Willie Stark, on his death bed, is likely expressing remorse about his own corrupt ways when he tells Jack Burden, "It might have been all different."[104]

So where does this leave the reader of *All the King's Men*? If the novel not only shows us all the good that Willie has accomplished for the people of his state, but also shows us the damage he has done to the rule of law, then how should the reader answer the Machiavellian question of whether noble ends can justify the use of morally questionable means? The novel itself provides the reader with more than one possible answer. As we have seen, on the one hand, in a number of passages we find a Machiavellian (and consequentialist) defense of Willie, such as when Jack Burden states: "All change costs something. You have to write off the costs against the gain. Maybe in our state change could only come in the terms in which it was taking place, and it was sure due for some change."[105] At the end of the novel, Jack is going to help Hugh Miller with his campaign for governor; Miller is presented in the novel as a man who shares Willie's goals of helping the poor, but he is also committed to the rule of law. As Jack implies, though, perhaps such a figure as Miller can only emerge *after* the great changes brought about by Willie, a transformational and transgressive figure who sought something close to dictatorial power, in line with Machiavelli's suggestions to those who would seek to found or completely reform a state.

But if Jack often gives voice to a Machiavellian defense of Willie, Jack also recognizes that those who reject Willie's actions have an argument that may be just as legitimate. Late in the novel, Jack states in regard to those who denounce Willie that they "aren't right and they aren't wrong. If it were absolutely either way, you wouldn't have to think about it. . . . But the trouble is, they are half right and half wrong, and in the end that is what paralyzes you. Trying to sort out the one from the other."[106] This passage beautifully describes the way in which *All the King's Men* encourages the reader to explore complex questions that yield no easy answers. As Jack notes, though, an awareness of complexity can potentially lead to paralysis, for there is a danger that in the face of complexity, one might simply throw one's hands up and refrain from making any judgments at all.

This danger that an awareness of moral complexity may lead to paralysis is also expressed well by John Burt, who writes:

> If it is the special vice of good people to imagine themselves as wielding the sword of God, it is the special vice of the perceptive to use their insight into the moral complexity of all acts as an excuse for inaction. It is Lincoln's special greatness that he knew the kinds of thing that put other minds into impasses and yet retained the ability to act, even in the face of moral risk.[107]

To apply Burt's idea to *All the King's Men*, Warren's novel provides great "insight into the moral complexity" of political leadership while demanding that we not use this complexity "as an excuse for inaction." The novel asks the reader to consider whether a corrupt regime can only be reformed through means that would not be tolerated in a healthy democratic regime. Because the novel presents multiple answers to this question, though, the reader might become paralyzed with indecision even as his or her perspective on this question becomes enriched. Yet, as discussed earlier, one of the novel's main points is that democratic citizens must avoid passivity and instead strive to make choices and to take action "in the convulsion of the world." Somewhat paradoxically, then, *All the King's Men* urges us to examine and grapple with the complexities and ambiguities inherent in political life, but at the same time, the novel insists that it is our responsibility to make judgments about political life. In short, the novel reveals to us the grayness of the world, but also insists that we make hard political choices in this world of ambiguity.

To refuse to make any judgment at all would be a renunciation of responsibility; that is, the refusal to judge would be akin to submitting to "the Great Sleep." *All the King's Men*, though, discourages inaction, and calls on us to make judgments about our political leaders. Hence, regarding a key issue raised in *All the King's Men*, it is up to the citizen-reader to decide for him or herself (in conjunction with fellow citizens) when, if ever, we should consider the world of politics to be a realm that is autonomous from the world of everyday morality. In reaching these kinds of political decisions, the citizen-reader who has been educated by novels such as *All the King's Men* will leave behind paralysis, on the one hand, but he or she will also reject fanaticism, on the other, for as Burt alludes to, the fanatic who believes him or herself to be "wielding the sword of God" fails to perceive the complexity inherent in moral and political questions. In our current age of extreme polarization, the danger of a fanaticism which refuses to see any validity to opposing views is quite great; at the same time, the political dysfunctions caused by this polarization may leave some citizens in a state of apathy or even paralysis. Achieving the ability to judge and to act "in the convulsion of the world" such that one avoids both paralysis *and* fanaticism is thus no small achievement, and it is this form of action which may be particularly needed in our own age.

## NOTES

1. Ellison and Warren became good friends in 1956 when they were both at the American Academy in Rome. The friendship lasted until Warren's death in 1989. See Steven Ealy, "'A Friendship That Has Meant So Much': Robert Penn Warren and Ralph Ellison," in *Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man,"* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase, 2009), 127–40.

2. Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, [1946] 1996), 108 (emphasis added). I have chosen to use the version of the novel which was first published in 1946. In 2001, a "restored" version of the text was published by Mariner Books under the editorship of Noel Polk. Among other changes, Polk made the controversial decision to replace the name "Willie Stark" with "Willie Talos." While some of the restorations to the text made by Polk may be of interest to scholars, on balance, I think that Joyce Carol Oates was correct when she suggested that the "restored" version of the novel should not supplant the 1946 edition. Oates writes: "That Robert Penn Warren . . . not only approved the original 1946 edition of his most famous novel but oversaw numerous reprintings through the decades, . . . and did not 'restore' any of the original manuscript, and did not resuscitate 'Willie Talos,' is the irrefutable argument that the 1946 edition is the one Warren would wish us to read." See Oates, Reply to Noel Polk's letter to the editors, *New York Review of Books*, June 27, 2002, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2002/06/27/which-all-the-kings-men/.

3. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Commonwealth Club Address" (September 23, 1932), Teaching American History, http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/commonwealth-club-address/.

4. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, [1952] 1995), 574.

5. Robert Penn Warren, "Introduction," in the Modern Library edition of *All the King's Men* (New York: Random House, 1953), i.

6. Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age," *New Left Review* 212 (July/August 1995): 68–93.

7. Joseph Lane, "The Stark Regime and American Democracy: A Political Interpretation of Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*," *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 4 (December 2001): 816. Lane here quotes from Warren, *All the King's Men*, 392.

8. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 14, 581.

9. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 656, 661.

10. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 581; Warren, *All the King's Men*, 284.

11. Another notable similarity between Ellison and Warren is that they both call into question what they see as overly sharp distinctions between the realm of art and the realm of politics. In Warren's case, this can be seen in his book *Democracy and Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), for Warren there writes that poetry is "an antidote, a sovereign antidote, for passivity" (89). Warren worries that American culture is "characterized by compulsive consumption" and "cynical detachment" (86). He suggests that poetry can counter these cultural trends, insofar as "the basic fact about poetry is that it demands participation" (89). For Warren, then, the best works of art do not provide escapism or a retreat from the world; instead, they inspire their audience to actively engage *with* the world, and this engagement presumably includes *political* engagement.

12. Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Random House, 1965), 328.

13. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 657.

14. In 1964, Ellison wrote that the African American experience generates "a tragicomic attitude toward the universe." See Ellison, "The World and the Jug," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison: Revised and Updated*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: Modern Library, [1964] 2003), 177; Warren, *All the King's Men*, 283.

15. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 181.

16. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 283, 267.

17. While Warren's "spider web" metaphor is remarkably similar to Arendt's metaphor of the "web of relationships," it should be noted that the action taken by Cass Mastern—the decision to have an affair with his friend's wife—would not be considered by Arendt to be a public, or political act, and thus she might not classify it under the category of "action," as this for her entails public action about matters which she would classify as political. Still, the political implications of Warren's "spider web"

metaphor should be recognized, for *All the King's Men* is a novel that moves seamlessly between the personal and the political lives of its characters, in ways that ask us to consider the always complex relationship between them.

18. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 190, 191.
19. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 264.
20. Ibid., 267.
21. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 190.
22. Ibid., 184.
23. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1963), 278–79.
24. While I find it illuminating to compare Arendt's discussion of Eichmann to Warren's discussion of Cass Mastern, one should note that there is obviously an incalculably huge moral chasm between Cass's choice to engage in an affair with his friend's wife, on the one hand, and Eichmann's choice to engage in the evil of genocide, on the other. To put it in the terms that John Burt uses in his discussion of *All the King's Men*, like most people, Cass is a "fallen but not ultimately despicable" person. See Burt, "Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature, Volume 4*, ed. Jay Parini (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 309. Eichmann's participation in the evil of genocide puts him in a very different category. Still, comparing Arendt's discussion of Eichmann with Warren's discussion of Cass Mastern can help us reflect on action, agency, and responsibility.
25. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 190.
26. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 658.
27. Ibid., 274 (emphasis added).
28. Arendt uses the spelling "Schmidt," but the correct spelling was "Schmid." On Anton Schmid's efforts to save Jews and to aid the Jewish underground, see *The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Rozett and Dr. Shmuel Spector (New York: Routledge, 2013), 402.
29. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 232–33.
30. Ibid., 233 (emphasis in the original).
31. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 656.
32. Ibid., 467, 468.
33. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 438.
34. Ibid.
35. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 657.
36. Ibid., 603.
37. Ibid., 284.
38. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 233–34.
39. Ibid., 234.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Joseph Lane's claim about *All the King's Men* is here apt. According to Lane, "This is ultimately a story about what Stark cannot do. Paradoxically, the common reading of the novel holds that Stark accumulates too much power, but my interpretation suggests that he has too little." See Lane, "The Stark Regime," 813.
44. Burt, "Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*," 310.
45. Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition," 70–71.
46. Burt, "Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*," 306.
47. Ibid., 305–6.
48. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 135–36.
49. Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition," 71.
50. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 142.

51. Willie summarizes some of the redistributive measures that he has taken to address the plight of the working class in a conversation with Hugh Miller. See Warren, *All the King's Men*, 203.
52. Ibid., 142.
53. Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition," 70, 78.
54. Malcolm X, Interview with Robert Penn Warren (June 2, 1964), *Who Speaks for the Negro? An Archival Collection*, https://whospeaks.library.vanderbilt.edu/interview/malcolm-x. Portions of the interview (but not the words that I have here quoted) were incorporated into Warren's 1965 book, *Who Speaks for the Negro?*
55. Malcom X, "Message to the Grass Roots" (November 10, 1963), in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 4.
56. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 142.
57. Ibid.
58. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (April 12, 1964 at Detroit, Michigan), in *Say It Loud: Great Speeches on Civil Rights and African American Identity*, ed. Catharine Ellis and Stephen Drury Smith (New York: The New Press, 2010), 9.
59. Ibid., 12.
60. Malcolm X made this statement during a speech that is included in the television documentary series *Eyes on the Prize*. See *Eyes on the Prize*, "The Time Has Come (1964–66)," written and directed by James A. DeVinney and Madison D. Lacy, PBS, January 15, 1990. A transcript containing the quotation can be found here: http://www.shoppbs.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/about/pt_201.html. Unfortunately, the date of this speech by Malcolm X is not provided in the episode.
61. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 143.
62. A. Peter Bailey is quoted in Andrew P. Smallwood, "The Intellectual Creativity and Public Discourse of Malcolm X: A Precursor to the Modern Black Studies Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 36, no. 2 (November 2005): 260.
63. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (April 3, 1964, at Cleveland, Ohio), in *Malcolm X Speaks*: *Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 26.
64. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (April 12, 1964, at Detroit), 10.
65. Ibid., 11.
66. Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (July 5, 1852), Teaching American History, http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/.
67. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (April 12, 1964, at Detroit), 11.
68. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 379–80.
69. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (April 3, 1964, at Cleveland), 43.
70. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (April 12, 1964, at Detroit), 11.
71. Lucas Morel, "Malcolm X: From Apolitical Acolyte to Political Preacher," in *History of American Political Thought*, ed. Bryan-Paul Frost and Jeffrey Sikkenga (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), 690.
72. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (April 12, 1964, at Detroit), 15.
73. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (April 3, 1964, at Cleveland), 32–33.
74. Ibid., 34.
75. Ibid., 34–35.
76. Ibid., 35.
77. My argument here is consistent with that of Morel, who notes that Malcom X's discussion of "human rights" in "The Ballot or the Bullet" was "curiously reminiscent of the Declaration of Independence." See "Malcolm X: From Apolitical Acolyte to Political Preacher," 693.
78. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 392, 392–93.
79. Lane, "The Stark Regime," 816.

80. One significant difference between Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Willie Stark which Lane perhaps should have noted is that Stark held executive power at the state level, whereas Roosevelt held the executive power of the federal government. This means that when Willie Stark asserts that his *state* government would dedicate itself to such tasks as creating a great hospital and better schools, he is arguably adhering to the long-standing notion that state governments had the responsibility and the authority to care for the health, safety, and welfare of their citizens. In contrast, the claim of Franklin Delano Roosevelt that the *federal* government should focus on the health, safety, and economic security of all American citizens (and had the power to do so under the Constitution) was a much more innovative and thus controversial claim. That said, while state governments have long been thought to have the power to act in such areas as health, education, and public safety, Willie's claim that the citizens of his state have a "right" to health care or a "right" to high-quality education is a claim that would not have been made at the time of the founding, and so Lane's argument that Stark departs from the founders' understanding of rights remains a compelling one.

81. Lane, "The Stark Regime," 816.

82. Roosevelt, "Commonwealth Club Address."

83. Ibid.

84. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "A Second Bill of Rights" (1944), in *American Political Thought*, ed. Isaac Kramnick and Theodore Lowi (New York: Norton, 2008), 1190, 1191.

85. Roosevelt, "Commonwealth Club Address."

86. One such critic is Donald R. Brand, who writes that Roosevelt "changed the character of the American regime by changing its ends." For Brand, "[e]xtending the concept of democracy to encompass economic life," as Roosevelt sought to do, "entailed a fundamental transformation in the character of American government." See Brand, "Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Second Bill of Rights," in *History of American Political Thought*, ed. Bryan-Paul Frost and Jeffrey Sikkenga (Lanham: Lexington, 2003), 598, 600.

87. Burt points out that in *All the King's Men*, it is not Willie but "his opponents who play the race card most effectively." Burt also notes that Huey Long, upon whom Willie Stark is, of course, at least partly modeled, "did not depend upon race baiting very much," in contrast to other politicians of the time such as Theodore Bilbo, who served as Governor of Mississippi during the same four years that Huey Long served as Governor of Louisiana (1928–1932). See Burt, "Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*," 306.

88. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 220.

89. Warren has written that in 1939, when he was living in Italy and writing the play that he would later turn into *All the King's Men*, he was "deep in Machiavelli and Dante. Later, in the novel *All the King's Men*, Machiavelli found a place in the musings of Jack Burden." See "Introduction," ii.

90. Robert Penn Warren, "*All the King's Men*: The Matrix of Experience," in *Robert Penn Warren: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Neil Nakadate (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, [1964] 1981), 57 (emphasis added).

91. By suggesting that Machiavelli clearly provides an affirmative answer to the question of whether or not ignoble means can be justified by noble ends, I do not mean to suggest that Machiavelli's political thought lacked nuance. On the contrary, there are a number of ways in which Machiavelli's teaching is more complicated than it may initially appear. Consider, for example, Machiavelli's discussion in *The Prince* of how "Agathocles of Sicily became King of Syracuse." After gaining control of Syracuse's army, Agathocles "had his soldiers kill all the senators and the richest citizens. With them out of the way, he made himself ruler of the city and held power without any resistance." On the one hand, Machiavelli seems to admire Agathocles's "bold achievements." On the other hand, Machiavelli writes that because of "his inhuman cruelty and brutality, and his innumerable wicked actions . . . it would be wrong to praise him as one of the finest of men." He also writes that, "[b]y such means" as were used by Agathocles, "one can acquire power but not glory." See Niccolo Machiavelli,

*Selected Political Writings*, ed. and trans. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 28, 29. Machiavelli suggests, then, that nefarious means can help one achieve the end of maintaining power, but the use of these means may entail the forfeiture of a goal that might be just as important—namely, glory. In the same vein, when Machiavelli wrote, "I love my native city more than my soul," he suggested that while the use of unethical means may at times secure the freedom of one's city, it can also lead one to lose one's very soul. See Machiavelli, Letter to Francesco Vettori (April 16, 1527), in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, *Vol. 2*, trans. Allan Gilbert (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 1010. In short, Machiavelli's teaching about means and ends is rendered complex and nuanced insofar as he acknowledges that a leader's use of morally questionable means can lead to a loss of glory and to the loss of the leader's very soul. All that said, Machiavelli still endorses the idea that leaders must sometimes use unethical means in order to achieve crucially important ends; Warren's novel, in contrast, offers no outright endorsement for this view, but instead explores multiple perspectives on the issue, in part by presenting the viewpoints of various characters who think differently about questions surrounding power and ethics.

92. Warren, "Introduction," v.

93. Glenn C. Altschuler, "Whose Foot on Whose Throat? A Re-Examination of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" in *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1975] 2002), 298.

94. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Vol. 2, Determinate Religion*, ed. Peter Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1832] 1987), 665.

95. Burt, "Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*," 308.

96. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 205, 391.

97. Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, 108.

98. Ibid.

99. Warren, "The Matrix of Experience," 57.

100. Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, 108.

101. Ibid.

102. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 224.

103. Warren, "Introduction," i.

104. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 603. While I think it is illuminating to compare Creon to Willie Stark, the comparison is not a perfect one, for Creon sees himself as upholding the positive law of his state even if this means his own niece (Antigone) must be executed. In contrast, Willie is willing to disregard or manipulate the positive laws of his state in order to maintain power. That said, both *Antigone* and *All the King's Men* are similar in that they are stories of well-meaning leaders who act in tyrannical and hubristic ways, ultimately with tragic results.

105. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 592–93.

106. Ibid., 607.

107. John Burt, Review of *God and the American Writer*, by Alfred Kazin (March 1, 2002). The author has made the book review available here: http://people.brandeis.edu/~burt/kazinreview.pdf.

# FOUR

# *The Quiet American* and Political Judgment

While this book has thus far focused on American literature (and on the American film *Captain Phillips*), in this chapter I focus on a novel by the English author Graham Greene—namely, *The Quiet American.* Much as Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is a book about the American character written by a non-American, so, too, is *The Quiet American* in large part a commentary on the American character that is written by a perceptive outsider. Moreover, just as *Democracy in America* is not written by an American but is still frequently discussed in the context of scholarship on American political thought, I want to suggest that *The Quiet American* resonates with—and builds on—important themes that are found in the works by Americans that are discussed in this book. It is a key claim of this book that novels and films which are rife with moral complexity and ambiguity can often help educate a democratic citizenry more effectively than novels in which "the 'good guys' and 'bad guys' are eas[y] to discern."[1] *The Quiet American* helps to further illustrate this claim, and it also helps bolster my claim that stories which are tragic rather than triumphalist can help the reader explore key questions about political life. More specifically, *The Quiet American* encourages the reader to examine important questions about the relationship between politics and violence; as we shall see, the novel's ideas regarding violence and politics can be put into a productive conversation with ideas articulated by Max Weber as well as Hannah Arendt. Finally, the novel enables us to explore further some of the issues raised in the previous chapter pertaining to both the difficulty and the necessity of political judgment.

## INNOCENCE AND POLITICS

The previous chapter of this book focused on Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men.* As we shall see, like Warren's novel, *The Quiet American* is concerned with the importance of political commitment, action, and judgment. *The Quiet American* can also be thematically linked to another work by Warren, namely, *Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices.* In his discussion of *Brother to Dragons*, which was first published in 1953, John Burt describes the poem in terms that could easily be applied to *The Quiet American*, which was published in 1955. Burt writes that Warren's long poem, which focuses on the murder of a slave by two nephews of Thomas Jefferson, is in part "a meditation on the ironies of Cold War-era politics: his poem is intended as a critique of the American sense of national innocence, which Warren fears may lead America . . . into a self-righteousness for which there is a high moral price to be paid in unreflecting brutality and in ends-justify-the-means expedience."[2] This description of *Brother to Dragons* perfectly jibes with *The Quiet American*, for Greene's novel is also "a critique of the American sense of national innocence," as embodied in the character of Alden Pyle. An agent of the American government operating in Vietnam during the twilight of French colonial rule, Pyle believes that any use of American power to counter Communism is by definition virtuous. But in his effort to establish a "Third Force" in Vietnam that is separate from both the French colonialists and the Vietnamese Communists, Pyle engages in "unreflecting brutality" insofar as he is involved in the bombing of a Saigon city square, a bombing that kills women and children and which will presumably be blamed on the Communists in an effort to discredit them. Refusing to acknowledge the true horror of the suffering and death that has been inflicted on dozens of civilians, Pyle tells Thomas Fowler, a British journalist whom he has befriended, "They were only war casualties. . . . It was a pity, but you can't always hit your target. Anyway they died in the right cause. . . . In a way you could say they died for democracy."[3]

By attempting to rationalize the slaughter of these innocent people on the grounds that they gave up their lives for the anti-Communist cause, Pyle demonstrates that he (perhaps surprisingly) has something in common with "the Brotherhood" in Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Ideologically, Pyle and the Brotherhood are at opposite poles, for the Brotherhood is clearly modeled on the Communist Party. But if Pyle, the anti-Communist, would be virulently opposed to the Brotherhood, he actually mirrors them insofar as both Pyle and the Brotherhood ruthlessly manipulate people in an effort to achieve their goals. Pyle and the Brotherhood also share a kinship insofar as their goals are always expressed in abstractions—"Brotherhood" and "History" in the case of the Brotherhood, and "Democracy" and "Freedom" in the case of Pyle. Both the Brotherhood and Pyle are willing to have actual lives ruined, or "sacrificed," on the

alleged grounds that this will somehow move the world closer to the realization of their abstract ideals. As Brother Hambro puts it to the narrator of *Invisible Man*: "the interests of one group of brothers must be sacrificed to that of the whole." The Invisible Man then responds: "But shouldn't sacrifice be made willingly by those who know what they are doing?"[4] The Invisible Man's rejoinder to Hambro could with equal justice have been made by Fowler in response to Pyle's claim that the Vietnamese civilians "died for democracy," for the civilians shopping in the city square obviously had no idea that they were to be sacrificed. Indeed, when reflecting on Pyle's actions, Fowler notes that "the sacrifices" called for by Pyle "were all paid by others," at least until "that final night under the bridge to Dakow," when Pyle is himself killed.[5]

Convinced that these "sacrifices" are needed to promote their lofty goals, both Pyle and the Brotherhood are certainly well intentioned. Indeed, Fowler notes of Pyle, "I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused."[6] Convinced of the purity of his motives, Pyle cannot contemplate the possibility that America could ever use its power in a destructive way. On the day he meets Pyle, Fowler notes that Pyle "was absorbed already in the dilemmas of Democracy and the responsibilities of the West; he was determined—I learnt that very soon—to do good, not to any individual person but to a country, a continent, a world."[7] Determined to advance the abstract causes of liberty and democracy, Pyle is blind to the ways in which his actions can harm the real human beings around him. When considered in the light of Pyle's actions, one might find a degree of wisdom in Hannah Arendt's controversial remark, "I have never in my life 'loved' any people or collective—neither the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love 'only' my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons."[8] As Fowler notes, Pyle seeks "to do good" for the country of Vietnam, the continent of Asia, and for the world as a whole, but in devoting himself to these large abstractions he destroys the lives of dozens of the actual individuals who make up the city of Saigon.

Appalled by the concrete harm that Pyle has done to ordinary people, and convinced that he might cause further harm in the future, Fowler decides to help the Communists assassinate Pyle. After Pyle has been murdered by the Communists (with the assistance of Fowler), the police chief Vigot tells Fowler that he is "not altogether sorry" about Pyle's death, as Pyle "was doing a lot of harm." Fowler responds: "God save us always . . . from the innocent and the good."[9] The novel suggests that Pyle—and perhaps America itself—is "innocent" in multiple senses of the word. First, Pyle is innocent in that he has little experience—that is, no concrete, lived experience—of the place that he hopes to transform. Pyle's understanding of Vietnam is derived largely from the books of an American professor named York Harding. As Fowler tells Pyle, the

dream of a Third Force is not rooted in realities on the ground, but rather "comes out of a book, that's all." Later, Fowler tells Vigot that Pyle is the type of person who "gets hold of an idea and then alters every situation to fit the idea. Pyle came out here full of York Harding's idea. Harding had been here once for a week on his way from Bangkok to Tokyo. Pyle made the mistake of putting his idea into practice. Harding wrote about a Third Force. Pyle formed one—a shoddy little bandit with two thousand men and a couple of tame tigers."[10] Just as both Edmund Burke and Tocqueville claimed that in eighteenth-century France there was an attempt to put into practice abstract ideas, drawn from books, which were divorced from concreate realities—with disastrous results—so, too, does Fowler claim that Pyle is naïvely trying to implement ideas which may sound good on paper, and which may be well intentioned, but which have no roots in the actual conditions or history of Vietnam.[11]

Pyle is also innocent in that he has a blind faith in the idea that the use of American power is always virtuous. In this sense, he is similar to Amasa Delano, the American captain who thoughtlessly suppresses the slave rebellion on the *San Dominick.* Near the opening of "Benito Cereno," Melville writes that Delano was a "person of a singularly undistrustful good-nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man."[12] On the surface, one could say that Melville is here simply foreshadowing Delano's inability to recognize that Babo has violently seized control of the *San Dominick*. A deeper reading, though, suggests that Melville is here suggesting that Delano is blind not just to the fact that Babo has taken command of the ship, but he is also blind to the evil of slavery, and to his own complicity in that evil. As Benjamin Barber puts it, "Captain Delano embodies . . . an American innocence so opaque in the face of evil that it seems equally insensible to slavery and the rebellion against slavery."[13]

In the same vein, Pyle seems "insensible" to the terrible nature of the bombing in the Saigon city square. When Pyle's shoes become blood-stained at the site of the bombing, he simply "looked at his stained shoe in perplexity and said, 'I must get a shine before I see the Minister.'"[14] Thus, like Delano, Pyle refuses to critically examine—or "moralize"—upon his actions, and, like Delano, he refuses to consider the possibility that he may be complicit in wrongdoing. Instead, he remains "innocent." As Fowler puts it in regard to Pyle, "What's the good? He'll always be innocent, you can't blame the innocent, they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity."[15]

## POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND TRAGEDY

When he decides to help the Communists "eliminate" Pyle, Fowler finally chooses a form of political commitment over political disengagement. In the previous chapter, we saw that both *Invisible Man* and *All the King's Men* are stories of characters who are tempted to withdraw from the world, by succumbing to "hibernation" (in the case of the Invisible Man) or "the Great Sleep" (in the case of Jack Burden).[16] Eventually, though, both the Invisible Man and Jack Burden leave behind their respective slumbers and decide to embrace what Jack calls "the awful responsibility" of political commitment and political action.[17] We again see a similar trajectory in *The Quiet American*, with the character of Thomas Fowler. At first, Fowler prides himself on his disengagement. Early in the novel, he states that the phrase "I'm not involved" was "an article of my creed. The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder, I would not be involved. My fellow journalists called themselves correspondents; I preferred the title of reporter. I wrote what I saw. I took no action—even an opinion is a kind of action."[18] And yet, by the end of the novel, we see that Fowler comes to agree with Heng, the Communist, that "[s]ooner or later . . . one has to take sides. If one is to remain human."[19] Heng's words here are similar to Hannah Arendt's claim that "If you say to yourself . . . who am I to judge?—you are already lost."[20] Like Jack Burden and the Invisible Man, Fowler moves toward Arendt's position that the burden of judgment and action must not be renounced, even though judgments are sometimes fraught with uncertainty. As Fowler puts it, "I had become as *engagé* as Pyle, and it seemed to me that no decision would ever be simple again."[21]

While readers of *Invisible Man* and *All the King's Men* are likely to simply applaud the choice of the Invisible Man and of Jack Burden to reenter the public realm, in the case of *The Quiet American*, the reader may very well be unsettled by the particular way in which Fowler has chosen to "take sides." On the one hand, the reader may endorse the notion that it is irresponsible to always stay disengaged from political life, and thus the reader is likely to support Fowler's recognition that he needs to move from a position of neutrality to a position of political commitment. Moreover, the reader is likely to share Fowler's moral outrage regarding Pyle's callous and thoughtless involvement in the slaughter of innocent men, women, and children in the city square. On the other hand, the reader may still be disquieted—or even appalled—by the fact that Fowler's decision to "take sides" involves the brutal murder of Pyle, a young man who considered Fowler a friend and who also once acted heroically to save Fowler's life. As Miriam Allott notes, "Fowler's decision to act, which is founded on a sense of moral outrage and the desire to prevent further violence and suffering" itself "result[s] in betrayal [and] murder."[22] Clearly, the novel intends for the reader to reject Pyle's belief that the

goal of battling Communism can justify the tactic of bombing civilians in the town square. However, the novel also leaves the reader wondering whether Fowler's *own* use of violence against Pyle might itself be equally indefensible. This means that in contrast to, say, *Casablanca*, a film in which the viewer is likely to simply celebrate Rick's eventual decision to get involved in political life, in the case of *The Quiet American*, the reader cannot simply and unambiguously celebrate the way in which Fowler decides to become politically engaged.

Furthermore, Fowler's motives in eliminating Pyle might be (at least in part) suspect, for Pyle is also a romantic rival insofar as Phuong, a Vietnamese woman, is torn between marrying Pyle and staying with Fowler. Is Fowler moved to act, then, by moral outrage over the bombing of innocents, or rather by a selfish fear of losing Phuong? The reader cannot know for sure, but we do know that once Pyle is "eliminated," Phuong decides to stay with Fowler. Moreover, we learn at the novel's end that Fowler's wife in England has decided to grant the divorce that Fowler has asked for and which she had previously denied to him. Thus, at the end of the novel, we know that Phuong will marry Fowler. And yet, even though Fowler at one point refers to these events as a "happy ending" when speaking with Phuong, the reader is by no means left with the sense that all is well at the novel's end.[23]

Indeed, in the novel's quietly devastating final line, after he reminisces about the first time that he met Pyle, Fowler tells the reader: "Everything had gone right with me since he had died, but how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry."[24] Susan McWilliams has written that in *All the King's Men* as well as a number of other great American literary works, one finds the tragic theme that "victory is inexorably bound up with defeat."[25] This is certainly a key theme of *The Quiet American*, for Fowler's "victory" over Pyle brings defeat in the form of a guilty conscience that may forever deny Fowler his "chief wish," which was to "be at ease."[26] On the one hand, Fowler at the end of the novel has "won" everything; he has won Phuong, his wife will grant him a divorce, and he has "eliminated" a man involved in a terrible bombing who might otherwise have gone on to commit additional atrocities. Still, there is no sense of triumph at the end of the novel. Instead, the ending is decidedly tragic, as we find Fowler haunted by the choice he made to aid in the assassination of his erstwhile friend. As Allott puts it, "the shadow of Pyle remains" on Fowler's mind such that the book cannot be said to have a "happy ending."[27] Allott's choice of the word "shadow" is apt and helps to reveal an important link between *The Quiet American* and "Benito Cereno." As we have seen, at the conclusion of Melville's novella, Captain Delano says to Benito Cereno: "you are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you?"[28] The way in which the executed Babo shadows Benito Cereno suggests to the reader that while on a superficial level the novella could be seen as having a "happy ending"

(insofar as the mutiny on board the *San Dominick* has been suppressed), at another level the ending is not happy at all, for the reader is left haunted by the sense that Delano's restoration of "order" is simply the restoration of relations of domination. Similarly, at the end of the film *Captain Phillips*, there seems to be a shadow cast upon the titular character by the killing of the pirates, and the viewer is likely to leave the film not exhilarated by the film's surface-level "happy ending," but rather disturbed by the possibility that global inequities may continue to contribute to the growth of more dangers in the future. At the conclusion of *The Quiet American*, the reader is similarly left unsettled, despite the fact that on a surface-level—but, of course, *only* on a surface-level—the novel's various plot-points may seem to be neatly wrapped up.

## GREENE, WEBER, AND ARENDT ON VIOLENCE AND POLITICS

Because Fowler is haunted by the way in which he has used violence to prevent Pyle from inflicting future violence upon the Vietnamese people, *The Quiet American* leads the reader to ponder questions that are also raised in Max Weber's *Politics as a Vocation*. Weber's essay asks: Is violence a permanent and omnipresent feature of political life that cannot be avoided by the political leader? Weber answers in the affirmative: "the specific instrument of politics is power, backed up by *violence*."[29] Weber writes that since ancient times, it has been known that "he who meddles with politics, who in other words makes use of the instruments of power and violence, concludes a pact with the infernal powers. . . . [F]or such a man's actions, it is *not* the case that from good only good, from bad only bad can come, but that often the opposite holds true."[30] From this Weberian perspective, once Fowler left behind his disengagement and chose to "take sides" in the world of politics, perhaps it was inevitable that he would have to use bad—and even quite violent—means. According to Weber, "if the consequence to be drawn from the other-worldly ethics of love is 'Resist not evil with force,' the contrary proposition is true for the politician: 'Thou *shalt* resist evil with force' (otherwise you are *responsible* for the victory of evil)."[31] Weber here perfectly captures what Fowler seems to see as the logic behind his decision to help assassinate Pyle. Fowler becomes convinced that Pyle was engaged in evil acts against the people of Vietnam. If he does not use force against Pyle to stop the atrocities, Fowler comes to believe, then he will himself be, at least in part, responsible for the continuation of these evils. In other words, Fowler becomes convinced that continuing to stay "uninvolved" would not actually entail remaining in a position of neutrality; instead, staying disengaged would, in effect, mean that he is taking the side of Pyle, since staying uninvolved would mean doing nothing to stop the evil that Pyle is committing. Upon this logic, Fowler must take on the burden of using

violent and evil means in order to stop Pyle's evil acts.[32] To put it another way, Fowler can be interpreted as an exemplar of Machiavelli's tragic claim that one who wants to promote the public good must be willing to tarnish one's very soul.[33]

I want to suggest, though, that this Weberian interpretation of the novel is not fully satisfying insofar as it is incomplete. According to a Weberian defense of Fowler's actions, Fowler's involvement in the assassination of Pyle reveals the tragic *necessity* of violence for those who become involved in the struggle for political power. However, after reflecting upon the ending of the book, the reader may feel that what the book actually reveals is not the necessity of violence, but rather the *futility* of violence. As R. H. Miller notes, at "[t]he close of *The Quiet American* . . . the immediate danger of Alden Pyle has been met; but as history has proved, Pyle is only one manifestation of a national obsession with saving people from themselves to satisfy national interests, of tragedies to come."[34] The reader may be left wondering, then, whether Pyle will simply be replaced by another American operative with the same ideology. Just as the killing of Babo ended a violent mutiny but did nothing to address the great evil of slavery, and just as the killing of Muse and his fellow pirates ended a hijacking but did nothing to address underlying global inequities, so, too, the killing of Pyle may have stopped the dangerous meddling of one American, but it did nothing to counteract the underlying foreign policy views that produced Pyle. Real change would require that America change its foreign policy, and the murder of Pyle seems unlikely to advance that goal. In other words, a conspiratorial and secretive act of violence cannot bring about any fundamental political change.

If I am correct that *The Quiet American* is actually in large part about the *futility* of violence, then we should turn not only to Weber in an effort to understand the novel, but also to Hannah Arendt. As we have seen, for Weber, "power is the inescapable instrument of all politics"; moreover, Weber closely associates power with violence and goes so far as to assert that, "[f]or politics, the essential means is violence."[35] In sharp contrast to Weber, Arendt writes that "[p]ower is indeed of the essence of all government, but violence is not." Indeed, for Arendt, "[p]ower and violence are opposites."[36] In Arendt's view, violence cannot generate power; moreover, if for Weber violence is the *sine qua non* of politics, for Arendt violence entails the *negation* of politics. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt stresses that politics involves the transcendence of violence insofar as politics involves equal citizens seeking to persuade one another in a public setting. As Arendt puts it, "To be political . . . meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence. In Greek self-understanding, to force people by violence, to command rather than persuade, were prepolitical ways to deal with people characteristic of life outside the *polis*."[37] For Arendt, it is when people

"act in concert" and engage with one another in public deliberation that they generate power; in contrast, when a regime resorts to violence in order to maintain itself, this is usually a sign that it lacks the power that is generated by citizens acting together.[38]

Keeping Arendt's ideas in mind, one can ask: Did the murder of Pyle generate any power? On the one hand, one could perhaps attempt to argue that Fowler has acted "in concert" with Chen and other Communists, and thus they did, perhaps, generate at least a small degree of power as defined by Arendt. This argument, though, does not hold up to scrutiny. For when Fowler chooses to side with the Communists, he does not engage in any public deliberation, nor does he try to persuade others about the folly of Pyle's ideology. Because he resorts to violence rather than to persuasive speech, Fowler does not ultimately generate any power, by Arendt's definition, when he participates in the assassination of Pyle.

Moreover, at the end of the novel, Fowler still seems isolated and disconnected from others, even though he now has conspired with the Communists, and even though he is going to marry Phuong. Fowler's fundamental loneliness is emphasized in the last line, when he "wish[es] there existed someone to whom" he could apologize for his actions. Arendt notes in *The Human Condition* that "nobody can forgive himself; here, as in action and in speech generally, we are dependent upon others."[39] The fact that Fowler feels like there is no one to whom he can apologize suggests that he is living an atomized existence which rules out not only the possibility of forgiveness, but also the possibility of politics, as Arendt conceives it. Earlier, I suggested that like the Invisible Man and like Jack Burden, Fowler moves from a position of disengagement to a position of political commitment. However, after considering Arendt's ideas, one must ask the question: Is it really the case that at the end of the novel, Fowler is now an engaged political actor? Granted, he has helped the Communists assassinate Pyle, but he is not engaged in public deliberation with his fellows, and he seems in many ways just as isolated as ever. At the end of *Invisible Man*, the title character is ready to take a responsible, public role as either an artist or an activist, or perhaps both; and, at the end of *All the King's Men*, Jack Burden is ready to take on the public role of assisting Hugh Miller in his race for governor. In contrast, there is no suggestion at the end of *The Quiet American* that Fowler is now ready to take a public stance against American interventionism in Vietnam. Instead, it seems like he may very well continue to be the type of reporter who refrains even from expressing his opinion. In short, while it is possible, as we have seen, to read *The Quiet American* as a story of one man's journey from apathy to political commitment, if one views the novel in the light of Arendt's ideas, one can argue that Fowler never truly becomes a political actor.

According to Arendt, whereas genuine politics and genuine power involve speech, deliberation, and persuasion in a public setting, violence is marked by *silence*. As Arendt puts it, "violence itself is incapable of speech" and thus "violence is a marginal phenomenon in the political realm; for man, to the extent that he is a political being, is endowed with speech."[40] In an effort to stop the harm that Pyle was doing, Fowler engaged in a secretive—and silent—act of violence; however, it seems that at the novel's end he is not planning to join in the noisy public debate that would be necessary to bring about lasting and meaningful political change. In short, the fundamentally "quiet" character in *The Quiet American* might very well be Fowler himself. And, following Arendt, one can argue that Fowler remains just as silent when he turns to violence as he was before he decided "to take sides."

In sum, *The Quiet American* is another "tale shot through with philosophy" insofar as it asks the questions: Should violence be considered a tragic necessity in political life, and should violence be seen as the key instrument of political power, as Weber would have it? Or, on the contrary, is there a futility inherent in violence insofar as violence cannot generate genuine political power, as Arendt would have it? The novel helps the reader explore both of these understandings of violence and politics, and encourages the reader to make up his or her own mind about the merits of each. Ultimately, the novel might be suggesting that there is an element of truth both to the Arendtian view of violence as well as to the Weberian view. Perhaps the use of violence is at times an unfortunate necessity for political leaders, as Weber emphasizes, and as Abraham Lincoln, for example, recognized when he used force both to preserve the Union and to help liberate the enslaved. At the same time, perhaps it is also the case that violence does nothing to generate the kind of power that arises when citizens join together to deliberate and to act in public spaces. As for whether or not Fowler's use of violence against Pyle can be defended as an example of how violence is sometimes an unfortunate necessity, this is, again, a question that Greene leaves to the reader to resolve.

It should be noted that in today's context, Arendt's ideas on the *futility* of violence have a great deal of resonance. In recent years, there have been many troubling instances in which leaders or citizens (on both the left and the right sides of the political spectrum) have either engaged in or encouraged the use of violence against their perceived political enemies. For example, at Middlebury College in 2017, violence broke out when the author Charles Murray visited the campus to discuss his 2012 book, *Coming Apart*: *The State of White America, 1960–2010*. As described by the *New York Times*,

> An estimated 100 to 150 students . . . shouted down Mr. Murray, who had been invited by a conservative student group. . . . When Mr. Mur-

> ray moved to another room to deliver his talk, protesters pulled fire alarms in the hallway. When he was done and left the building, several masked protesters, who may have come from off campus, began pushing and shoving Mr. Murray and his faculty interviewer, Allison Stanger, who suffered a concussion. . . . After the two got into a car, protestors rocked it back and forth and jumped on the hood.[41]

To take another example, as John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck have discussed in their book on the 2016 presidential election, there were a number of violent incidents at Donald Trump's campaign rallies. For example, in March of 2016, at a rally for Trump in Arkansas, a protestor named Rakeem Jones was sucker punched by an audience member. After the rally, Trump stated, "The audience hit back and that's what we need a little bit more of." According to Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, "The attack on Rakeem Jones was just one of several violent incidents involving protestors and attendees at Trump rallies. . . . And Trump's reaction to the attack on Jones was just one of many times when he condoned violence against protestors."[42]

Does violence, or the encouragement of violence, or uncivil behavior such as shouting down speakers, generate any power? For Arendt, the answer is clearly no, for in her view, power arises when citizens join together and engage in speech that is designed to persuade. Arendt's argument remains highly compelling. When partisans resort to violence, or if they try to shout down a political opponent, they are no longer engaging in an effort to persuade their fellow citizens, but rather they are trying to silence someone whom they perceive to be an enemy. Rather than generate any power, this effort to silence one's opponents only reveals that citizens are no longer willing to deliberate together about how to solve common problems. In the first speech of his 2020 campaign for president, Joe Biden noted the decline of healthy political debate in America. "Our politics," he said, "has become so mean, so petty, so negative, so partisan, so angry, and so unproductive. . . . Instead of debating our opponents, we demonize them. . . . Instead of listening, we shout. Instead of looking for solutions, we look to score political points."[43] Biden's use of the word "unproductive" is here a reminder that when debate among political opponents is replaced by shouting and the demonization of one's alleged enemies, the result is that the citizenry is rendered powerless insofar as they are unable to collectively tackle public problems. There is thus a futility inherent in the uncivil forms of behavior highlighted by Biden. If democracy in America is to regain some of the health that is has lost in an era of hyper-partisanship and extreme polarization, then citizens must not engage in anti-political efforts to silence—or to simply ignore—their fellow citizens; instead, they must engage in the genuinely political activity of deliberation.

## CONCLUSION

Like the other novels explored in this book, *The Quiet American* offers no easy answers to the questions that it raises. On the one hand, as we have seen, the novel clearly endorses the idea that to live a fully human life one must make political judgments and become engaged in political life; that is, one must "take sides." On the other hand, it is not completely clear that the novel endorses the choice that Fowler makes to help "eliminate" Pyle. As we have seen, the novel provides the reader with a defense of Fowler's choice which resonates with Weber's ideas on the close link between violence and power, but the novel also provides the reader with a critique of Fowler's choice that resonates with Arendt's ideas on how violence and power are actually opposed to one another.

As is the case with the novels discussed in previous chapters, *The Quiet American* is thus marked by a great deal of moral complexity. The moral complexity of *The Quiet American* also manifests itself in the fact that none of the novel's characters are either purely heroic or purely villainous. While the novel suggests that Pyle's ideas about the promotion of democracy are both naïve and destructive, the novel also suggests, as Terry Eagleton notes, "that Pyle is in many ways the 'better' man" when compared to Fowler.[44] Fowler's understanding of Vietnam and its people may be superior to Pyle's understanding, but Fowler is also highly cynical and often dishonest. Like "Benito Cereno," *Captain Phillips*, and *All the King's Men*, *The Quiet American* thus helps to remind the reader of what Glenn Altschuler calls (as mentioned in chapter 1 of this book) "the intermingling of good and evil qualities in men of all races."[45] In the end, the novel reminds us of the complexities and ambiguities involved in political questions, but insists that as citizens we must nevertheless make political judgments, for one must "take sides" in order "to remain human."

## NOTES

1. Michelle C. Pautz, "*Argo* and *Zero Dark Thirty*: Film, Government, and Audiences," *PS: Political Science* 48 (January 2015): 127.
2. John Burt, "After the Southern Renascence," in *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Volume 7, Prose Writing, 1940–1990*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 325.
3. Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (New York: Penguin, [1955] 2002), 179.
4. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, [1952] 1995), 502.
5. Greene, *Quiet American*, 62.
6. Ibid., 60.
7. Ibid., 18.
8. Hannah Arendt, Letter to Gershom Scholem (July 24, 1963), in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin, 2000), 392.
9. Greene, *Quiet American*, 20.
10. Ibid., 167–68.

11. Burke wrote, "The science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every other experimental science, not to be taught *a priori*." See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 53. In the same vein, Tocqueville bemoaned the fact that in eighteenth-century France, "men of letters" who "indulge[d] in abstract theories" and who "had little acquaintance with the realities of public life" were able to become "in practice the leading politicians of the age." See Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Anchor Books, 1955), 139, 140, 139–40.

12. Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," in *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1855] 2002), 35.

13. Benjamin Barber, *Fear's Empire: War, Terrorism, and Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), 71. Barber also briefly connects "Benito Cereno" to *The Quiet American* when he writes of Captain Delano's response to his realization that the enslaved Africans have taken over the *San Dominick*: "How maddening [Delano's] reaction must seem to those who know enough of men to understand both the impulse to bondage and the impulse to be freed from it . . . maddening in the way Alden Pyle in Graham Greene's *Quiet American* is infuriating to the Vietnamese he blithely plans to liberate from both the French and their own culture" (71).

14. Greene, *Quiet American*, 62.

15. Ibid., 163.

16. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 13; Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, [1946] 1996), 284.

17. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 661.

18. Greene, *Quiet American*, 28.

19. Ibid., 174.

20. Arendt is quoted in Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 339. According to Young-Bruehl, the quoted words were part of "a set of rough notes [Arendt] made for a public discussion" of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (339).

21. Greene, *Quiet American*, 183.

22. Miriam Allott, "The Moral Situation in *The Quiet American*," in *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*, ed. Robert O. Evans (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1963), 195.

23. Greene, *Quiet American*, 188.

24. Ibid., 189.

25. Susan McWilliams, "The Tragedy in American Political Thought," *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 141.

26. Greene, *Quiet American*, 114. As Allott puts it, "The possibility of repose recedes even further into the distance once [Fowler] has sent to his death the man who is at once the preserver of his life and his rival in love." See Allott, "The Moral Situation in *The Quiet American*," 202.

27. Allott, "The Moral Situation in *The Quiet American*," 204.

28. Melville, "Benito Cereno," 101.

29. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *Max Weber: Selections in Translation*, ed. W. G. Runciman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 216 (emphasis in the original).

30. Ibid., 220.

31. Ibid., 217 (emphasis in the original).

32. As Allott puts it, Fowler demonstrates a "willingness to take the responsibility of wrong-doing for the sake of diminishing human pain." See Allott, "The Moral Situation in *The Quiet American*," 200.

33. As Machiavelli put it, "I love my native city more than my soul." See Niccolo Machiavelli, Letter to Francesco Vettori (April 16, 1527), in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others, Vol. 2*, trans. Allan Gilbert (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 1010. Weber refers to Machiavelli's idea about prioritizing one's city over one's own soul in Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 223.

34. R. H. Miller, *Understanding Graham Greene* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 112–13.
35. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 213, 218.
36. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), 51, 56.
37. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 26–27.
38. Arendt, *On Violence*, 52, 53.
39. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 243.
40. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1963), 19.
41. Stephanie Saul, "Dozens of Middlebury Students Are Disciplined for Charles Murray Protest," *New York Times*, May 24, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/24/us/middlebury-college-charles-murray-bell-curve.html.
42. John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck, *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 1, 2.
43. See "Joe Biden Presidential Campaign Kick-Off," CSPAN video, 1:37:58, May 18, 2019, https://www.c-span.org/video/?460548-1/joe-biden-launches-presidential-campaign-philadelphia.
44. Terry Eagleton, *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 125.
45. Glenn C. Altschuler, "Whose Foot on Whose Throat? A Re-Examination of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" in *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1975] 2002), 299.

# Conclusion

I have argued in this book that novels can help to educate democratic citizens by helping them explore the kinds of thorny political questions that citizens must together render judgments upon. The novels discussed in this book accomplish this educative task not by offering simple morality tales, but rather by offering stories that are tragic, ambiguous, and complex. Because these novels explore fundamental political issues in a highly nuanced way rather than offer any easy answers, the novels allow readers to make up their own minds about the questions they raise, just as citizens must make up their own minds about "real-world" political questions.

In one respect, my argument has something in common with claims made by Milan Kundera about "the art of the novel"; however, my argument also differs in a crucial way from that of Kundera. According to Kundera, "the novel doesn't answer questions." For Kundera, the novelist instead "wants to . . . say to his reader: do not simplify the world! If you want to understand it you must grasp it in all its complexity, in its essential ambiguity!"[1] Similarly, I have suggested that the novels which I have examined do not provide definitive or final answers to fundamental political questions, but rather help the reader understand the complexities that are inherent within the questions. For example, as we have seen in chapter 4, *The Quiet American* suggests that any attempt to grapple with questions about the place of violence within politics must take into account both the possibility that violence may sometimes be a tragic necessity, *and* the possibility that violence may be futile insofar as violence may not be able to generate genuine political power.

But if I concur with Kundera that the novel can help reveal complexity and ambiguity, I disagree with Kundera's claim that one of the virtues of novels is that they teach the reader to refrain from judgment. For although the novels examined in this book help reveal the complexities and ambiguities involved in fundamental political questions, the novels at the same time encourage the reader to avoid passivity and to make judgments about these political questions. According to Kundera,

> Everyone likes to pass judgment. Even before really getting to know someone, one has already decided whether he is good or bad, even before one hears out an opinion one is generally either a partisan or an adversary. This passion for passing moral judgment, this sluggishness to get to know and understand others defines, alas, man's nature. It is

> the malediction of man. Now, the novel, at least as I imagine it, counters this human tendency. Above all, the novel strives to comprehend. . . . We could even go so far as to define the novel as the art which strives to discover and grasp the ambiguity of things and the ambiguity of the world.[2]

On the one hand, I agree with Kundera that great novels often call on us to combat the urge to pass moral judgment in a dogmatic or facile manner. Is Babo a villainous murderer, or is he a heroic freedom fighter? Is Willie Stark a dangerous tyrant, or is he a noble champion of the common man? Is Fowler a dishonest, selfish, and back-stabbing misanthrope, or is he a compassionate defender of the Vietnamese people? In my view, the novels containing these characters suggest that each of these one-sided descriptions is a gross oversimplification which fails to properly understand the characters and to properly understand the political questions which these characters raise. On the other hand, while the novels that I examine call upon the reader to refrain from oversimplifications, this does not mean that they call on the reader to refrain from making judgments tout court. To refrain from making judgments would be to succumb to what Jack Burden of *All the King's Men* calls "the Great Sleep"; as Fowler eventually realizes in *The Quiet American*, though, one must reject passivity and "take sides" in order "to remain human."[3] In other words, the novels examined in this book suggest that we must judge—not, though, from a position of ignorance, but rather from a position in which we seek to grasp the complexity of political life. Kundera's mistake is to assume that comprehension and judgment are mutually exclusive. The novels that I examine teach that this is not the case.[4] These novels teach that one must choose "if one is to remain human," even as the novels also seek to have us comprehend the ways in which political choices are not nearly as simple as they might at first appear to be.

My claim that the novels examined in this book call on us to make judgments but also call on us to acknowledge the complexities and ambiguities inherent in political life has something in common with Benjamin Barber's claim, "To be political is to have to judge, to choose, to act when the grounds of choice are not given a priori or by fiat or by unimpeachable cognition. To be political is thus to be free with a vengeance—to have to make judgments without guiding standards or determining norms, yet under an ineluctable pressure to act."[5] Like Barber, I emphasize that the responsibility to make political judgments cannot be dodged, even when reasonable arguments can be made in favor of more than one political choice. I depart, though, from Barber's anti-foundationalist claim that judgments must be made entirely without "guiding standards." In chapter 2, I suggested that for Ellison, a key task of leadership is to reaffirm and reapply "the principle on which the country was built."[6] Drawing on Ellison (as well as Lincoln), I would argue that both

leaders and citizens should look to the principles of the Declaration of Independence as a source of "guiding standards" when they are engaged in the difficult task of political judgment. Of course, by suggesting, pace Barber, that the Declaration can provide "guiding standards" for political judgment, I do not mean to suggest that the Declaration is akin to some sort of instruction manual that can easily provide specific answers to contemporary political questions. The Declaration may not provide rules which can be mechanically applied to contemporary political problems, but the Declaration *does* offer broad principles which can help guide citizens as they engage in the task of forming political judgments. Granted, citizens can and will disagree—often sharply—about how they should reapply these broad principles to contemporary issues; still, even as they disagree about how best to apply the ideas to the present, a shared allegiance to the broad principles themselves—to these "guiding standards"—can help to ensure that Americans have what Tocqueville called the "ideas in common" which are necessary for a "body social" to long endure.[7] As part of the process of reaching political judgments, then, citizens must deliberate about how to apply the nation's founding principles to present conditions.

As I suggested in chapter 2, Abraham Lincoln is the quintessential example of a leader who sought to apply the principles of the founding to the political situation of his own day. In today's political landscape, Joe Biden is one example of a leader who has sought to explicitly invoke the nation's original principles, in a way that seems to be modeled, in certain respects, on the shining example of Lincoln. In a video that he released to announce his 2020 campaign, Biden begins by quoting from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights."[8] Just as Lincoln once said that the Declaration's claim about human equality is the "electric cord . . . that links the hearts" of all Americans together, so, too, did Biden state that it is these words from the Declaration that define "who we are."[9] And, just as Lincoln said that the ideals of the Declaration were intended to be "constantly looked to" and "constantly labored for" even if they were never "perfectly attained," so, too, did Biden suggest said that while "[w]e haven't always lived up to these ideals . . . we have never before walked away from them."[10] Both Lincoln and Biden suggested that they were living through a time of crisis in which there was a risk that Americans just might "walk away from" their founding principles; therefore, they both suggested that their main goal was to try to ensure that the nation would not abandon what Lincoln called "the ancient faith" of the nation and what Biden called the nation's "core values."[11]

In a brief autobiography written in 1860, Lincoln wrote of himself that in 1854, "his profession had almost superseded the thought of politics in his mind, when the repeal of the Missouri compromise aroused him as he

had never been before."[12] According to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, the question of whether or not slavery would be allowed in the territories would be decided through popular vote—or "popular sovereignty," as Senator Stephen Douglas put it—within the territories. Lincoln pointed out, though, that because the act would allow people to vote slavery up, then the act clearly implied that slavery is not necessarily a fundamental wrong.[13] Moreover, if slavery is no longer labeled a fundamental wrong, then the idea that no one has a right to rule over someone else without that person's consent—that is, the idea that "all men are created equal"—is thoroughly undermined. And, if the idea that no one has a right to rule over someone else without that person's consent is undermined, then this threatens to erode republican government itself.[14] Thus, Lincoln warned: "Let no one be deceived. The spirit of seventy-six and the spirit of Nebraska, are utter antagonisms; and the former is being rapidly displaced by the latter."[15]

Lincoln argued, then, that the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which was drafted by Douglas, was so dangerous not only because it could lead to the spread of slavery into the territories, but also because in doing so it could weaken—and perhaps ultimately eliminate—the American people's attachment to their "ancient faith." Similarly, Biden warned that if Donald Trump were to be reelected, this might "forever and fundamentally alter the character of this nation."[16] Just as Lincoln claimed that he was motivated to reenter political life by his shock over the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, so, too, did Biden suggest in his campaign announcement that he was motivated to reenter political life in large part because of his shock over Trump's remarks in the aftermath of the "Unite the Right" rally that was organized by white nationalists.[17] After noting that the author of the Declaration of Independence was from Charlottesville, Biden said:

> Charlottesville is also home to a defining moment for this nation in the last few years. It was there on August of 2017 that we saw Klansmen and white supremacists and neo-Nazis come out in the open. . . . And they were met by a courageous group of Americans, and a violent clash ensued and a brave young woman lost her life. And that's when we heard the words from the president of the United States that stunned the world and shocked the conscience of this nation. He said there were "some very fine people on both sides." . . . With those words, the president of the United States assigned a moral equivalence between those spreading hate and those with the courage to stand against it. And in that moment, I knew the threat to this nation was unlike any I had ever seen in my lifetime. . . . We are in the battle for the soul of this nation.[18]

Biden's rebuke of Trump for having "assigned a moral equivalence between those spreading hate and those with the courage to stand against it" echoes Lincoln's rebuke of Stephen Douglas for trying "to *educate* and

*mould* public opinion . . . to not *care* whether slavery is voted *down* or voted *up*."[19] That is, Lincoln and Biden each accused their respective political opponent of refusing to make a crucial moral distinction between right and wrong; in other words, they each argued that their opponent "was blowing out the moral lights around us," as Lincoln put it, in a way that posed a danger to the nation's founding principles and thus a danger to what Biden called "the soul of this nation."[20]

Both Lincoln and Biden also suggested that if America turned away from its principles, then this would threaten the cause of liberty not only at home, but abroad. Lincoln warned that the Kansas-Nebraska Act "deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world" insofar as it "enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites."[21] Similarly, Biden suggested in a campaign speech that Trump's words and deeds threatened America's long-standing status as "the beacon of hope for the rest of the world."[22]

Some commentators suggested that in 2019, Biden was essentially offering his own version of "make America great again," which was the slogan that Trump had made famous. As the journalist Michael Scherer put it, Biden's "underlying focus on a festering nostalgia for a prior era has been unmistakable in the opening days of his presidential campaign."[23] While it is true that Biden looked back to a time when, he claimed, America's founding principles were more widely embraced across the political spectrum, Lincoln did precisely the same thing. Just as Biden suggested that there was something unprecedented in Trump's remarks about the "Unite the Right" rally, so, too, did Lincoln suggest that those who supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act were making arguments that past American statesmen would never have dared to articulate. For example, in 1859, Lincoln asked at Columbus:

> Did you ever five years ago, hear of anybody in the world saying that the negro had no share in the Declaration of National Independence; that it did not mean negroes at all; and when "all men" were spoken of negroes were not included? I am satisfied that five years ago that proposition was not put upon paper by any living being anywhere. . . . But last year there was not a Douglas popular sovereign in Illinois who did not say it.[24]

Similarly, in his Peoria Address, Lincoln said that in the past, no senator would have asserted, as did Senator Pettit in 1854, that the Declaration of Independence is "a self-evident lie." Whereas previously, Lincoln claimed, such a statement would have been universally derided in America, when Senator Pettit made precisely this assertion during the debate over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, "[o]f the forty odd Nebraska Senators who sat present and heard him, no one rebuked him."[25]

Both Lincoln and Biden, then, claimed that their opponents' ideas had brought about what Biden called "an aberrant moment in time."[26] To

restore the American promise—to "make America great again," if you will—both Biden and Lincoln suggested that what was necessary was to return to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. As Lincoln put it, "Let us re-adopt the Declaration of Independence, and with it, the practices, and policy, which harmonize with it. . . . If we do this, we shall not only have saved the Union; but we shall have so saved it, as to make, and to keep it, forever worthy of the saving."[27] Much like Ellison, then, both Lincoln and Biden suggested that a key task of leadership is to both "affirm the principle on which the country was built" and also to speak out against those whose words or deeds run counter to "the principle."[28]

Earlier, I suggested that while I concur with Benjamin Barber's claim that "[t]o be political is to have to judge," I at the same time depart from Barber's claim that political judgment takes place in the absence of "guiding standards," for in my view these standards can be provided by the Declaration of Independence. I now want to note that Barber makes another point about judgment that is also well worth examining in the context of my own argument. According to Barber, "Solitary individuals may make moral or aesthetic judgments, solitary judges sitting on the bench may render legal judgments, but citizens can produce political judgments only as a body acting corporately."[29] Barber's point is relevant to my book's argument insofar as Barber reminds us that, properly speaking, *political* judgments cannot be formed simply through the solitary process of reading and reflecting upon novels. As Barber puts it,

> The journey from private opinion to political judgment . . . proceeds from solitude to sociability. To travel this road, the citizen must put her private views to a test that is anything but epistemological: she must debate them with her fellow citizens, run them through the courts, offer them as a program for a political party, . . . experiment with them in local, state, and federal forums, and, in every other way possible, subject them to the civic scrutiny and public activity of the community to which she belongs.[30]

As Barber helpfully sums up the matter, "Political judgment is . . . 'we-judgment'. . . . *I* cannot judge politically, only *we* can judge politically; in assuming the mantle of citizenship, the I becomes a We."[31]

Because I agree with Barber that ultimately, *political* judgments can only be fully formed through public deliberation, I do not want to suggest that the activity of reading a novel can *by itself* enable citizens to produce political judgments. However, I do want to argue—and I have sought to reveal throughout this book—that novels (and films) can help educate democratic citizens such that they will be much better prepared to effectively engage in the public deliberation that is necessary to form political judgments.

Educated by the kinds of novels that I have discussed in this book, citizens will be more attuned to the complexities and ambiguities inherent in the political questions that they must render judgments upon. This is particularly crucial in our current era of polarization, for an awareness of complexity can make partisans less likely to succumb to what Aurelian Craiutu calls the "fanaticism and dogmatism" that can arise in an "age of extremes."[32] Running throughout this book has been the implicit argument—which I now want to make explicit—that novels such as the ones discussed in this book can help to inculcate the virtue of moderation, a virtue that is especially necessary today. Craiutu notes that moderates refuse to "see the world in Manichaean terms that divide it into forces of good (or light) and agents of evil (or darkness)."[33] As I have suggested, the rejection of a Manichaean worldview is precisely one of the hallmarks of the novels discussed in this book, for characters such as Babo, Amasa Delano, Thomas Fowler, Alden Pyle, and Willie Stark cannot simply be classified as either an agent of good or an agent of evil. Craiutu also writes that, "Most of us are, in general, unwilling (and unlikely) to fall in love with the nuances of gray which characterize the universe of moderation."[34] Again, it is precisely "the nuances of gray" which works such as "Benito Cereno," *The Quiet American*, and *All the King's Men* so beautifully depict as they explore difficult moral and political questions. As we have seen, the notion that political and moral questions are often marked by "nuances of gray" is perfectly captured in Jack Burden's claim that those who denounce Willie Stark "aren't right and they aren't wrong. If it were absolutely either way, you wouldn't have to think about it."[35] As Jack Burden here suggests, when people "have to think about" an issue in a way that recognizes the complexities, nuances, and ambiguities inherent in that issue, it can be quite a difficult burden, for it is far easier to submit to the temptation to see the world in Manichean terms. The novels explored in this book, though, call on us to resist this temptation. As we have seen, the novels at the same time call on us to reject the temptation to succumb to indecisiveness and inaction in the face of so much complexity; the novels suggest that we must, in fact, make judgments, but the novels urge us to make these judgments with an attitude of humility, and only after a respectful and thorough consideration of multiple viewpoints. As I suggested in chapter 1, because the novels examined in this book explore the different perspectives of multiple characters while simultaneously reminding us of the shared humanity of these characters, the novels can help erase "the distance between us and them."[36] Particularly in an era of hyper-partisanship and polarization, this bridging of the gap between "us and them" is especially important. In short, the novels discussed in this book can help teach the citizen-reader how to "moralize upon" the questions that citizens must together seek to answer, while also reminding them that despite their disagreements, they all "inhabit the common continent of men."[37]

## NOTES

1. Jordan Elgrably and Milan Kundera, "Conversations with Milan Kundera," in *Salmagundi* 73 (Winter 1987): 6, 7.

2. Ibid., 6.

3. Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, [1946] 1996), 284; Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (New York: Penguin, [1955] 2002), 174.

4. The teaching of the novels thus has something in common with one of the lessons of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Specifically, Arendt suggests that an effort to better understand an individual's actions does not necessarily entail a renunciation of the responsibility to engage in judgment. Arendt believes that Eichmann is unambiguously guilty of crimes against humanity for which he should hang; still, she believes that to simply label Eichmann an inhuman monster—as the prosecution in his trial attempted to do—would entail a failure to properly understand him and the issues raised by his evil actions. Arendt thus seeks what she sees as a deeper understanding of Eichmann than the understanding advanced by the prosecution. Once this task of understanding Eichmann in a fuller way is achieved, though, Arendt is still willing to make a judgment—namely, that he should hang for the choices he has made. In other words, Arendt's "report on the banality of evil" suggests that it is *not* always the case that, as the saying goes, "to understand is to forgive." One can strive to understand the ways in which Eichmann is (in Arendt's view) a thoughtless bureaucrat rather than simply a sadistic psychopath, *and* one can still judge him—and condemn him—for the choices that he made.

5. Benjamin Barber, *The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 206.

6. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, [1952] 1995), 574.

7. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 433–34.

8. See Alexander Burns, "Joe Biden's Campaign Announcement Video, Annotated," *New York Times*, April 25, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/25/us/politics/biden-campaign-video-announcement.html.

9. Abraham Lincoln, "Speech at Chicago" (July 10, 1858), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 456; Burns, "Joe Biden's Campaign Announcement Video, Annotated."

10. Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision" (June 26, 1857), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 398; Burns, "Joe Biden's Campaign Announcement Video, Annotated."

11. Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria, Illinois" (October 16, 1854), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 328; Burns, "Joe Biden's Campaign Announcement Video, Annotated."

12. Abraham Lincoln, "Autobiography Written for Campaign" (c. June 1860), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1859–1865*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 167.

13. See Lincoln, "Seventh Lincoln-Douglas Debate" (October 15, 1858), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 810.

14. See Lincoln, "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act," 328.

15. Ibid., 339.

16. Burns, "Joe Biden's Campaign Announcement Video, Annotated."

17. For a description of the events that took place in Charlottesville on August 11 and August 12 of 2017, see Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Brian M. Rosenthal, "Man Charged after White Nationalist Rally in Charlottesville Ends in Deadly Violence," *New York Times*, August 12, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/us/char

lottesville-protest-white-nationalist.html.

18. Burns, "Joe Biden's Campaign Announcement Video, Annotated." The quotation from President Trump that Biden here refers to can be found in: Libby Nelson and Kelly Swanson, "Full Transcript: Donald Trump's Press Conference Defending the Charlottesville Rally," *Vox,* August 15, 2017, https://www.vox.com/2017/8/15/16154028/trump-press-conference-transcript-charlottesville.

19. Abraham Lincoln, "'House Divided' Speech at Springfield, Illinois" (June 16, 1858), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 430 (emphasis in the original).

20. Abraham Lincoln, "Fifth Lincoln-Douglas Debate" (October 7, 1858), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 717.

21. Lincoln, "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act," 315.

22. See "Joe Biden Presidential Campaign Kick-Off," CSPAN video, 1:37:58, May 18, 2019, https://www.c-span.org/video/?460548-1/joe-biden-launches-presidential-campaign-philadelphia.

23. Michael Scherer, "Joe Biden's Pitch: Make America Great Again. Sound Familiar?," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/joe-bidens-pitch-make-america-great-again-sound-familiar/2019/04/27/c7a041a0-6858-11e9-a1b6-b29b90efa879_story.html.

24. Abraham Lincoln, "Speech at Columbus, Ohio" (September 16, 1859), in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1859–1865*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 57.

25. Lincoln, "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act," 339.

26. Burns, "Joe Biden's Campaign Announcement Video, Annotated."

27. Lincoln, "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act," 340.

28. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, [1952] 1995), 574.

29. Barber, *The Conquest of Politics,* 200.

30. Ibid., 199.

31. Ibid., 200–1.

32. Aurelian Craiutu, *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in an Age of Extremes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 5. Craiutu uses the term "age of extremes" in reference to the Cold War, and his book is primarily concerned with certain European thinkers (3). Still, Craiutu's analysis of the role that moderate thinkers can play in an "age of extremes" has great relevance in the contemporary American context.

33. Ibid., 19–20.

34. Ibid., 243.

35. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 607.

36. Manohla Dargis, "A Thriller Armed with Thought," *New York Times*, October 10, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/11/movies/captain-phillips-stars-tom-hanks-as-a-high-seas-hostage.html?_r=0 /.

37. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale* (Berkeley: Arion Press, [1851] 1979), 123.

# Bibliography


Allen, Danielle. "Ralph Ellison on the Tragi-Comedy of Citizenship." In *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to "Invisible Man,"* edited by Lucas Morel, 37–57. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

———. *Talking to Strangers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Allott, Miriam. "The Moral Situation in *The Quiet American*." In *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*, edited by Robert O. Evans, 188–206. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1963.

Altschuler, Glenn C. "Whose Foot on Whose Throat? A Re-Examination of Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" In *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, edited by Dan McCall, 296–303. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1975] 2002.

Arendt, Hannah. *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Penguin, 1968.

———. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.* New York: Penguin, 1963.

———. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

———. *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 1963.

———. *On Violence*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970.

———. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1973.

———. *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, edited by Peter Baehr, New York: Penguin, 2000.

———. "Reflections on Little Rock." *Dissent* 6 (Winter 1959): 45–56.

Aristotle. *The Politics*, translated by Ernest Barker. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Barber, Benjamin. *The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

———. *Fear's Empire: War, Terrorism, and Democracy.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003.

Benjamin, Shanna Greene. "There's Something about Mary: Female Wisdom and the Folk Presence in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*." *Meridians* 12, no. 1 (2014): 121–48.

Brand, Donald R. "Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Second Bill of Rights." In *History of American Political Thought*, edited by Bryan-Paul Frost and Jeffrey Sikkenga, 598–614. Lanham: Lexington, 2003.

Bruni, Frank. "George Bush and the Obituary Wars." *New York Times*, December 4, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/04/opinion/george-hw-bush-obituary.html

Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, edited by J. G. A. Pocock. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987.

Burns, Alexander. "Joe Biden's Campaign Announcement Video, Annotated." *New York Times*, April 25, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/25/us/politics/biden-campaign-video-announcement.html.

Burns, James MacGregor. *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

Burt, John. "After the Southern Renascence." In *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Volume 7, Prose Writing, 1940–1990*, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch, 311–424. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

———. Review of *God and the American Writer*, by Alfred Kazin (March 1, 2002). http://people.brandeis.edu/~burt/kazinreview.pdf.

———. "Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature, Volume 4*, edited by Jay Parini, 305–10. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Butler, Robert. "*Invisible Man* and the Politics of Love." In *The New Territory: Ralph Ellison and the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Marc Conner and Lucas Morel, 39–54. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016.

Callahan, John F. "The Lingering Question of Personality and Nation in *Invisible Man*: 'And Could Politics Ever Be an Expression of Love?'" In *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to "Invisible Man,"* edited by Lucas Morel, 218–29. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

Canby, Vincent. "Review/Film; Steven Seagal on a Ship in Hot Water." *New York Times*, October 9, 1992. http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/09/movies/review-film-steven-seagal-on-a-ship-in-hot-water.html.

Conner, Marc. "The Litany of Things: Sacrament and History in *Invisible Man*." In *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to "Invisible Man,"* edited by Lucas Morel, 171–92. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

Craiutu, Aurelian. *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in an Age of Extremes*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.

Danoff, Brian. "Arendt, Kafka, and the Nature of Totalitarianism." *Perspectives on Political Science* 29, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 211–18.

———. *Educating Democracy: Alexis de Tocqueville and Leadership in America*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2010.

Dargis, Manohla. "A Thriller Armed with Thought." *New York Times*, October 10, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/11/movies/captain-phillips-stars-tom-hanks-as-a-high-seas-hostage.html?_r=0 /.

Delano, Amasa. *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels, Chapter XVIII.* In *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, edited by Dan McCall, 199–228. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1817] 2002.

Department of Justice. "Statement on U.S. Citizens Taken Hostage Abroad" (June 24, 2015). http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/department-justice-statement-us-citizens-taken-hostage-abroad.

Dixon, Melvin. "O, Mary Rambo, Don't You Weep." *The Carleton Miscellany* 18, no. 3 (Winter 1980): 98–104.

Douglass, Frederick. "The Destiny of Colored Americans." In *What Country Have I? Political Writings by Black Americans*, edited by Herbert Storing, 39–41. New York: St. Martin's Press, [1849] 1970.

———. "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (July 5, 1852). Teaching American History. http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/.

Eagleton, Terry. *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature*. New York: Schocken Books, 1970.

Ealy, Steven. "'A Friendship That Has Meant So Much': Robert Penn Warren and Ralph Ellison." In *Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man,"* edited by Harold Bloom, 127–40. New York: Infobase, 2009.

Elgrably, Jordan, and Milan Kundera. "Conversations with Milan Kundera." *Salmagundi* 73 (Winter 1987): 3–24.

Ellison, Ralph. *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*: *Revised and Updated*, edited by John F. Callahan. New York: The Modern Library, 2003.

———. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage, [1952] 1995.

———. "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar." In *Soon, One Morning: New Writing by American Negroes, 1940–1962*, edited by Herbert Hill, 242–90. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963.

Engeman, Thomas. "*Invisible Man* and *Juneteenth*: Ralph Ellison's Literary Pursuit of Racial Justice." In *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to Invisible Man*, edited by Lucas Morel, 91–104. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

*Eyes on the Prize*. "The Time Has Come (1964–66)." Written and directed by James A. DeVinney and Madison D. Lacy. PBS, January 15, 1990. Transcript: http://www.shoppbs.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/about/pt_201.html.

Feltenstein, Rosalie. "Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" *American Literature* 19, no. 3 (November 1947): 245–55.

Foley, Barbara. "The Rhetoric of Anticommunism in *Invisible Man*." *College English* 59, no. 5 (September 1997): 530–47.

———. *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's* Invisible Man. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Frank, Jason. "Pathologies of Freedom in Melville's America." In *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Political Theory*, edited by Romand Coles, Mark Reinhardt, and George Shulman, 435–58. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014.

Franklin, H. Bruce. "Slavery and Empire: Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" In *Melville's Evermoving Dawn: Centennial Essays*, edited by John Bryant and Robert Milder, 147–61. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1997.

Fraser, Nancy. "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age." *New Left Review* 212 (July/August 1995): 68–93.

Friedman, Thomas. "'Maybe in America.'" *New York Times*, July 29, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/30/opinion/thomas-friedman-maybe-in-america.html.

Gellman, Erik. *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Goodyear, Dana. "Contender." *New Yorker*, March 3, 2014. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/03/contender.

Grandin, Greg. *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014.

Greene, Graham. *The Quiet American*. New York: Penguin, [1955] 2002.

Greene, Peter. "Common Core Testing and the Fracturing of Literature." *Forbes*, November 9, 2018. https://www.forbes.com/sites/petergreene/2018/11/09/common-core-testing-and-the-fracturing-of-literature/#145bc98113f1.

Greengrass, Paul, dir. *Captain Phillips*. 2013; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014. DVD.

Gstalter, Morgan. "Charlottesville Swaps Holiday Celebrating Thomas Jefferson's Birthday for Day Observing Emancipation of Slaves." *The Hill*, July 3, 2019. https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/451469-charlottesville-swaps-holiday-celebrating-thomas-jeffersons-birthday-for.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Vol. 2, Determinate Religion*, edited by Peter Hodgson. Berkeley: University of California Press, [1832] 1987.

Hobson, Christopher. "*Invisible Man* and African American Radicalism in World War II." In *Ralph Ellison's* Invisible Man: *New Edition*, edited by Harold Bloom, 55–83. New York: Infobase, 2009.

Jefferson, Thomas. "Rough Draft of the Declaration of Independence" (July 2, 1776). Teaching American History. http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/rough-draft-of-the-declaration-of-independence/

"Joe Biden Presidential Campaign Kick-Off." CSPAN video, 1:37:58. May 18, 2019, https://www.c-span.org/video/?460548-1/joe-biden-launches-presidential-campaign-philadelphia.

Jordan, Daniel. Statement by Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation President on the Report of the Research Committee on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings (January 26, 2000). https://www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery/statement-report-tjmf-president-daniel-p-jordan.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "I Have a Dream" (1963). In *American Political Thought*, edited by Isaac Kramnick and Theodore Lowi, 1317–21. New York: Norton, 2008.

Klinkner, Philip, with Rogers M. Smith. *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Lambie, Ryan. "Paul Greengrass Interview: *Captain Phillips* and Crime Stories." *Den of Geek*, October 16, 2013. http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/paul-greengrass/27655/paul-greengrass-interview-captain-phillips-crime-stories.

Lane, Joseph. "The Stark Regime and American Democracy: A Political Interpretation of Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*." *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 4 (December 2001): 811–28.

Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man*. New York: Simon & Schuster, [1944] 1996.

Lincoln, Abraham. *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1832–1858*, edited by Don Fehrenbacher. New York: Library of America, 1989.

———. *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings: 1859–1865*, edited by Don Fehrenbacher. New York: Library of America, 1989.

Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others, Vol. 2*, translated by Allan Gilbert. Durham: Duke University Press, 1989.

———. *Machiavelli: Selected Political Writings*, edited and translated by David Wootton. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.

Malcolm X. Interview with Robert Penn Warren (June 2, 1964). *Who Speaks for the Negro? An Archival Collection*. https://whospeaks.library.vanderbilt.edu/interview/malcolm-x.

———. *Malcolm X Speaks*: *Selected Speeches and Statements*, edited by George Breitman. New York: Grove Press, 1965.

———. *Say It Loud: Great Speeches on Civil Rights and African American Identity*, edited by Catharine Ellis and Stephen Drury Smith. New York: The New Press, 2010.

Matthiessen, F. O. *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1941.

McWilliams, Susan. "Ahab, American." In *A Political Companion to Herman Melville*, edited by Jason Frank, 109–40. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013.

———. "The Tragedy in American Political Thought." *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 137–45.

Melville, Herman. "Benito Cereno." In *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, edited by Dan McCall, 34–102. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1855] 2002.

———. *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale*. Berkeley: Arion Press, [1851] 1979.

Miller, R. H. *Understanding Graham Greene*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990.

Miroff, Bruce. *Icons of Democracy: American Leaders as Heroes, Aristocrats, Dissenters, and Democrats*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2000.

Morel, Lucas. "Malcolm X: From Apolitical Acolyte to Political Preacher." In *History of American Political Thought*, edited by Bryan-Paul Frost and Jeffrey Sikkenga, 687–96. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003.

———. "Ralph Ellison's American Democratic Individualism." In *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to "Invisible Man,"* edited by Morel, 58–90. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

———. "Recovering the Political Artistry of *Invisible Man*." In *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to "Invisible Man,"* edited by Morel, 1–21. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

Nelson, Libby, and Kelly Swanson. "Full Transcript: Donald Trump's Press Conference Defending the Charlottesville Rally." *Vox*, August 15, 2017. https://www.vox.com/2017/8/15/16154028/trump-press-conference-transcript-charlottesville.

Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Oates, Joyce Carol. Reply to Noel Polk's letter to the editors. *New York Review of Books*, June 27, 2002. https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2002/06/27/which-all-the-kings-men/.

Obama, Barack. Statement by the President on the U.S. Government's Hostage Policy Review (June, 24, 2015). https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/06/24/statement-president-us-governments-hostage-policy-review.

Omans, Stuart. "The Variations on a Masked Leader: A Study on the Literary Relationship of Ralph Ellison and Herman Melville." *South Atlantic Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (May 1975): 15–23.

Pace, Julie, and Eric Tucker. "U.S. Softens Policies on Families Paying Ransom and Talking to Captors." *Denver Post*, June 24, 2015. http://www.denverpost.com/nationworld/ci_28369417/u-s-softens-policies-families-paying-ransom-and.

Parrish, Timothy. *Ralph Ellison and the Genius of America.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012.

Pautz, Michelle C. "*Argo* and *Zero Dark Thirty*: Film, Government, and Audiences." *PS: Political Science* 48 (January 2015): 120–28.

Pfefferman, Naomi. "Human Condition Guides 'Captain Phillips' Screenwriter's Process." *Jewish Journal*, February 18, 2014. http://www.jewishjournal.com/the_ticket/item/human_condition_guides_captain_phillips_screenwriters_process.

Phillips, Richard, with Stephan Talty. *A Captain's Duty: Somali Pirates, Navy SEALs, and Dangerous Days at Sea*. New York: Hyperion, 2010.

Plato. *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo, Second Edition*, edited by G. M. A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.

Posnock, Ross. "Mourning and Melancholy: Explaining the Ellison Animus." In *The New Territory: Ralph Ellison and the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Marc Conner and Lucas Morel, 285–93. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016.

———. "Ralph Ellison, Hannah Arendt, and the Meaning of Politics." In *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison*, edited by Posnock, 201–16. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Putnam, Robert. *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

"Q&A: Paul Greengrass on Making 'Captain Phillips.'" *The Economist*, October 18, 2013. http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2013/10/qa-paul-greengrass.

Ray, Richard E. "'Benito Cereno': Babo as Leader." In *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, edited by Dan McCall, 329–40. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1975] 2002.

Rice, William H. *Ralph Ellison and the Politics of the Novel*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003.

Rogin, Michael. *Ronald Reagan, The Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

———. *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

Roosevelt, Franklin Delano. "Commonwealth Club Address" (September 23, 1932). Teaching American History. http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/commonwealth-club-address/.

———. "A Second Bill of Rights" (1944). In *American Political Thought*, edited by Isaac Kramnick and Theodore Lowi, 1190–91. New York: Norton, 2008.

Rozett, Robert, and Shmuel Spector, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Sacks, Ariel. "Why We Shouldn't Teach Literature with Excerpts." *Education Week*, June 26, 2019. https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2019/06/26/why-we-shouldnt-teach-literature-with-excerpts.html.

Saul, Stephanie. "Dozens of Middlebury Students Are Disciplined for Charles Murray Protest." *New York Times*, May 24, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/24/us/middlebury-college-charles-murray-bell-curve.html.

Schaar, John H. *Legitimacy in the Modern State*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1981.

Scherer, Michael. "Joe Biden's Pitch: Make America Great Again. Sound Familiar?" *Washington Post*, April 27, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/joe-bidens-pitch-make-america-great-again-sound-familiar/2019/04/27/c7a041a0-6858-11e9-a1b6-b29b90efa879_story.html.

Schiffman, Joseph. "Critical Problems in Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" In *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno,"* edited by Robert E. Burkholder, 29–36. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992.

Seaton, James. "Affirming the Principle." In *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to "Invisible Man,"* edited by Lucas Morel, 22–36. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

Sides, John, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck. *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Smallwood, Andrew P. "The Intellectual Creativity and Public Discourse of Malcolm X: A Precursor to the Modern Black Studies Movement." *Journal of Black Studies* 36, no. 2 (November 2005): 248–63.

Smith, Rogers. "Lockean Liberalism and American Constitutionalism in the Twenty-First Century: The Declaration of Independence or 'America First'?" *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture* 8, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 283–95.

Smith, Steven B. "How to Read Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address." In *The Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Smith, 476–92. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

Sophocles. *Antigone*, translated by Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001.

Southall, Ashley. "Jefferson-Jackson Dinner Will Be Renamed." *New York Times*, August 8, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/09/us/jefferson-jackson-dinner-will-be-renamed.html.

Spaeth, Ryu. "*Captain Phillips*, and the Political Evolution of Paul Greengrass." *The Week*, February 6, 2014. http://theweek.com/articles/451506/captain-phillips-political-evolution-paul-greengrass.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. "The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" (1848). In *American Political Thought*, edited by Isaac Kramnick and Theodore Lowi, 529–33. New York: Norton, 2008.

Stolberg, Sheryl Gay and Brian M. Rosenthal. "Man Charged after White Nationalist Rally in Charlottesville Ends in Deadly Violence." *New York Times*, August 12, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/us/charlottesville-protest-white-nationalist.html.

Strong, Tracy. "'Follow Your Leader': *Benito Cereno* and the Case of Two Ships." In *A Political Companion to Herman Melville*, edited by Jason Frank, 281–309. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013.

Taylor, Kate. "English Class in Common Core Era: 'Tom Sawyer' and Court Opinions." *New York Times*, June 19, 2005. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/20/nyregion/english-class-in-common-core-era-nonfiction-joins-the-classics.html.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*, translated by George Lawrence. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

———. *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, translated by Stuart Gilbert. New York: Anchor Books, 1955.

Warren, Robert Penn. *All the King's Men*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, [1946] 1996.

———. "*All the King's Men*: The Matrix of Experience." In *Robert Penn Warren: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Neil Nakadate, 54–59. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, [1964] 1981.

———. *Democracy and Poetry.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

———. "Introduction." In the Modern Library edition of *All the King's Men*, i–vi. New York: Random House, 1953.

———. *Who Speaks for the Negro?* New York: Random House, 1965.

Washington, Booker T. "Atlanta Exposition Address." In *What Country Have I? Political Writings by Black Americans*, edited by Herbert Storing, 58–62. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970.

Watts, Jerry. *Heroism and the Black Intellectual: Ralph Ellison, Politics, and Afro-American Intellectual Life*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Weber, Max. *Max Weber: Selections in Translation*, edited by W. G. Runciman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
Wolfe, Jesse. "'Ambivalent Man': Ellison's Rejection of Communism." *African American Review* 34 (Winter 2000): 621–37.
Wolin, Sheldon. *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1960] 2016.
Wright, John S. "The Conscious Hero and the Rites of Man: Ellison's War." In *Ralph Ellison's* Invisible Man: *A Casebook*, edited by John F. Callahan, 221–52. New York: Oxford University Press, [1988] 2004.
Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth. *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.
Yudkin, Daniel, Stephen Hawkins, and Tom Dixon. "The Perception Gap: How False Impressions Are Pulling Americans Apart" (New York: More in Common, 2019). https://perceptiongap.us/.
Zuckert, Catherine. "Leadership—Natural and Conventional—in Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" *Interpretation* 26, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 239–55.

# Index

# About the Author

**Brian Danoff** is associate professor of political science at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. He holds a BA in politics from the University of California, Santa Cruz, an MA in liberal studies from the New School for Social Research, and a PhD in political science from Rutgers University. He is the author of *Educating Democracy: Alexis de Tocqueville and Leadership in America* (2010) as well as the coeditor (with L. Joseph Hebert Jr.) of *Alexis de Tocqueville and the Art of Democratic Statesmanship* (Lexington Books, 2011). His articles have appeared in journals such as *The Review of Politics, Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *Perspectives on Political Science*, and *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture*.