

Dear all,

Thank you for reading this paper, which is a draft of **the third chapter** of a book on social/political resistance movements and the challenges such movements face. The ‘big picture’ aim of the book is to show that the standards that constrain resistance can be exploited to frame resistance as illegitimate even if it satisfies these standards. I also aim to question the standards themselves, as I worry that they compromise the radical nature of resistance, and force activists to make concessions to the very systems they seek to dismantle.

In chapters 1 and 2, I introduce two problems that resistance seems to face. The first I call “manufactured opposition”, which refers to tactics that seek to disrupt, discredit, misdirect, or otherwise malign resistance and social/political movements. The most prominent of these tactics include repoliticization, misdirection, and whataboutery. These tactics either mischaracterize an act of resistance so that it is not recognized as an act of resistance, or misrepresent resistance as having failed to satisfy the “rules of resistance”, or covertly introduce new rules that resistance must satisfy. The second is “Trojan horse” speech – speech that appears innocuous but makes a part of “common sense” or the common ground, ideologically-informed beliefs.

In the chapter you are reading, “Resisting from the Margins”, I suggest that these maneuvers occur because the powerful exploit the fact that those who resist are speaking from a **“world of sense”** that differs from the “world of sense” occupied by the public to whom they speak. This chapter explores what a “world of sense” is and what role is played by the dominant “world of sense” in our evaluations of resistance.

Within the book, the role of this chapter is to set up the idea that resistance involves an epistemic component. The claim is that the dominant “world of sense” distorts our understanding of resistance, and so resistance must aim to disrupt that world.

Feedback

I’m writing this as a trade publication, and I hope to engage both academic and general audiences. In terms of feedback, it would be helpful to know if/when the writing is too academic (and assumes too much knowledge on the part of the general audience) or when it is overly simplistic.

Please resist the temptation to give spelling/grammar feedback. I know a lot of work needs to be done to get this publication ready, and as you can see, a few sections still need finishing up. At this stage, however, I’d most appreciate feedback on the ideas and arguments!

“Resisting from the Margins” from *By the Roots: How We Reclaim the Radical Power of Resistance*, Briana Toole (she/her), (btoole@cmc.edu)

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Abstract The world as we live in and make sense of it is what we call a “world of sense”. There are multiple “worlds of sense” within *the* world: Russians and Americans, Himba and westerners, the poor and the wealthy. We may share a planet, but we live in very different worlds. The fact that we live in different “worlds of sense” poses a unique challenge for resistance. This is especially so because some “worlds of sense” come to dominate public thinking. Understanding the influence of our “world of sense” on how we interpret and engage with resistance is essential. Those who engage in resistance, and the public they aim to persuade, often occupy different “worlds of sense”. And so the success of resistance may depend on the ability of activists to bring their “world of sense” to the public, to make their world public, visible, and real. In this chapter we’ll think deeply about the epistemic significance of these “worlds”, what they are, why they matter, and how they work to shape who we are, what we value, and how we think.

What in the World

I spy with my little eye, something that is...blue.

It’s probably easy to imagine any number of objects I could be picking out – the sky, maybe, a lake, or perhaps some hipster’s hair. But if you were playing this game with the Himba, a small tribe in Namibia, they’d be stumped to figure out just what you could be referring to.

Residing in an arid region with scarce water and sparse vegetation, the Himba have many words to capture the distinction between various shades of green; however, they have no word for the color blue. To determine how this would affect their color perception, researchers presented the Himba with two different sets of 12 colored tiles. Each set contained one tile of a different color. Set A contained 11 green tiles, with one tile a slightly different shade of green. Set B contained 11 green tiles and one blue-colored tile. When presented with Set A, the Himba were immediately able to determine which tile was shaded a different color of green. However,

when presented with Set B, the Himba took several minutes to determine which tile was the odd one out.¹

What the case of the Himba illustrates is that our language and our concepts play a massive role in determining what, and how, we see in our environment. In the case of the Himba, since they lack the concept for “blue” it appears that they are unable to “see,” or recognize blue, in the same way that someone who possessed the concept would. Of course, this doesn’t mean that they *literally* don’t see the color blue, or blue objects; it’s just that they don’t see those things *as* blue. That might sound odd, but imagine how a bush might look to someone with and without glasses. Without glasses, that person might see a bulging green mass; but, *with* glasses, they see that bulging green mass *as* a bush.

Examples like this abound. In an inversion of the Himba, the Russian language has more concepts than the English language to distinguish between shades of blue. Consequently, Russian speakers discriminate more quickly between those colors than do English speakers!²

And speaking of Russia — you’re probably familiar with the old riddle in which a father and son are in a car accident and injured badly. The boy is taken to the hospital and admitted into surgery, when the doctor reports that they cannot operate because the boy is their son. How can this be? This riddle regularly confounds people. How can the boy be the surgeon’s son when the father was in the car accident, as well? This riddle only works because it activates certain assumptions we have about the world: that it is highly unlikely for our doctor to be a woman. People often cannot solve this riddle because they’re unable to imagine that the surgeon is a woman. In Russia, however, where 70% of doctors are women, this question poses no riddle at all and the answer is obvious: the surgeon is the boy’s mother!

Here we see that our concepts not only shape what we notice in and how we see the world, but how we relate to and understand that world, as well. One of my favorite examples of this comes from a fiery text entitled *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. There, historian James Loewen confronts how our language for describing history affects how we relate to and understand our past. To illustrate this, he observes in African societies a distinction that we in the west lack: between the living, the living-dead (sasha), and the dead (zamani). The sasha do not become the zamani until the last person who remembers them has died. These Kiswahili terms point to a difference not only in how these societies relate to their past, but also in how they experience

time.³

It seems that we don't always see the world as it is; rather, we tend to see the world through the lens of who we are. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong about this. As these examples show, we all bring the languages, concepts, schemas, and frameworks of our own communities to bear in how we understand and interpret the world.

So what happens when we don't have the concepts we need?

Philosophers from John Locke to W. E. B. DuBois have argued that we see the world through a veil. What they mean by this is that our experience is always mediated, our access to the world indirect. This "veil" can obstruct from view, much like a bride is hidden from her groom, rendering invisible what is beneath it. But it can also obscure what is seen from within it, creating a gauzy distortion that does not quite match how the world is.

For Du Bois, a Black American writing during the height of Jim Crow, the "veil" is more than a metaphor; it is a literal physical barrier, apparent in the "color line" that segregates Black from white. It is also an epistemic barrier, one that marks him as different and shuts him out from the white world, a world that is filled with "dazzling opportunities". This barrier both distorts how Du Bois sees himself ("darkly as through a veil") as well as how he is seen by white America (with "amused contempt and pity").⁴

The "veil" limits which concepts we have, structures what we notice and ignore, shapes who we are as well as how we think of ourselves and others, and influences what we feel and value. As Du Bois and more recent scholars, like Charles Mills notes, this can have the effect of generating a kind of systematized ignorance. This is especially true when that "veil" is produced (and reproduced) by the operations of domination and oppression.

The aim of social and political resistance is to lift the veil, or, at the very least, to reveal its distortions. Without the right tools, however, we may fail to see what resistance aims to reveal.

A Nation Within a Nation

The year 1967 seems to begin with promise and prosperity. In his State of the Union address to Congress, President Johnson will call for an end to housing and employment

discrimination, offering a preview of the Open Housing Bill, soon to be introduced in the House, which marks a continuation of his commitment to civil rights. He will tout the success of relatively new education initiatives, like Head Start, as well as job training programs, like Job Corps and Neighborhood Youth Corps, in providing a pathway out of poverty and joblessness. He will also announce the successful results of his ongoing “war on poverty”: wages are the highest they have been in history and unemployment is the lowest it has been in 13 years.

But things seem less rosy from the perspective of those who reside in the “other America”. This America differs markedly from the one Johnson describes. As King will characterize it in a speech later that same year, the “other America” is not a “sunlight of opportunity”, but one in which millions “[perish] on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity”.⁵

The plight of those residing in this nation within a nation motivated King’s next step in the Civil Rights Movement. The Poor People’s Campaign sought to remedy the material conditions of America’s poor through the pursuit of basic economic security. Recognizing this as a precondition for the pursuit of civil rights, the campaign put forth an Economic Bill of Rights that sought meaningful jobs and income for all.

But first, they had to make their conditions visible, a feat King believed could be accomplished by bringing the nation’s poor to Washington.⁶ Though King was assassinated before the campaign could come to fruition, his vision was realized with the creation of Resurrection City, a temporary shantytown erected on the National Mall, the heart of the nation’s capital and its symbolic center. This city within a city introduced the nation to the “other America” King had spoken of, exposing the reality and persistence of poverty across regional, racial, and gender lines.

The hidden poor of this “other America” and the privileged elite live in two different worlds. And because they live in two different worlds, they knew different things about the nation that they shared. This asymmetry in knowledge shapes their reactions to resistance movements like the Poor People’s Campaign. To the privileged elite, for whom poverty was largely invisible, the image of the affluent America that Johnson paints is the true one. Viewed from this perspective, poverty seemed anomalous. Poverty was blamed on individual failings rather than being understood as the result of any social or structural problems. Consequently,

Resurrection City looked like little more than an invasion of poor people asking for handouts. The squalor in which the tenants of Resurrection City lived seemed to provide evidence that their poverty was the result of poor personal choices rather than any systemic failure.

The hidden poor of the “other America” knew otherwise. Life in their world made visible what the privileged elite could not see: that poverty was not an aberration but the result of inequality, low wages, and a lack of opportunities. It was this reality, and the harsh living conditions that poverty produced, that Resurrection City was meant to make visible. But the privileged elite they needed to persuade to enact public reform could only see the residents of this makeshift city through the pejorative poverty discourse that shaped popular consciousness at the time.

To see what the residents of Resurrection City were trying to make visible and real through their campaign, to understand poverty as the consequence of discrimination and exploitation rather than laziness and indifference, the privileged elite needed different epistemic tools than the ones they had.

To understand the world, we need certain *epistemic* tools: tools that are required for knowing. *Perception* is one. We learn about our world through touching, tasting, seeing, smelling, and hearing it. To describe the information we gather from our senses we use another epistemic tool, *conceptual resources*. These are resources that allow us to name and attend to features of our environment, like the concept of the color “blue” allows us to pay attention to the blue objects in our surroundings. And then there are tools that help us make sense of and organize those resources, *interpretive and organizational schema*. Collectively, these tools help us determine *how* we see those things that concepts help us attend to.

But there’s a lot of world to know, and there are more tools for knowing than we might need. Think back to the Himba who, given their environment, have little need for concepts that capture the color blue. To avoid cognitive overload, we only develop the epistemic tools we need to make sense of the environment that we live in as *we* (and others like us) live in it. So while these tools help us learn certain things about the world, they blind us to others.

Consider this quirky take on the Himba experiment, this time tested on people from

England. In this version, the English were presented with 12 green tiles with one of a slightly lighter shade. They couldn't spot it! The Himba, by contrast, were able to distinguish the rogue tile almost immediately. It turns out that while they may lack the concept to pick out the color blue, they have many more concepts to distinguish shades of green than we do in the west. In each case, someone is insensitive to some feature of the world because they don't have the concepts needed to attend to it; and, they don't attend to it because, in their world, they don't need to!

The world as we live in and make sense of it is what we call a "world of sense". There are multiple "worlds of sense" within *the* world: Russians and Americans, Himba and westerners, the poor and the wealthy. We may share a planet, but we live in very different "worlds".

The fact that we live in different "worlds of sense" poses a unique challenge for resistance. This is especially so because some "worlds of sense" come to dominate public thinking. The theory of the "culture of poverty" that dominated public consciousness in the late-60s, for instance, prevented the public from seeing the poor as anything but apathetic and lazy. And so the "world of sense" of the wealthy stymied the possibility for economic reform.

This tells us that there is an epistemic front in the battle for social and material justice. Social and political campaigns must not only change what is visible to the public, as Resurrection City aimed to do; they must also add to the epistemic toolkit available to that public. They must show the public that other "worlds of sense" exist and that their world is not the only - or even necessarily the true - one!

Understanding the influence of our "world of sense" on how we interpret and engage with resistance is essential. Those who engage in resistance, and the public they aim to persuade, often occupy different "worlds of sense". The ability of the elite to weaponize this difference that helps to explain the occurrence of manufactured opposition and Trojan horse speech. And so the success of resistance may depend on the ability of activists to bring their "world of sense" to the public, to make their world public, visible, and real, and to provide the toolkit necessary for understanding that world.

In this chapter we'll think deeply about the epistemic significance of these "worlds", what they are, why they matter, and how they work to shape who we are, what we value, and

how we think.

Worlds of Sense — What They Are

When I teach my epistemology students about “worlds of sense”, I find it helpful first to think in terms of fictional worlds. Take the world of the *Harry Potter* series, for instance. Though this world is an imaginary one, it is robustly and richly constructed. It has its own set of language and concepts: we know, for instance, that despite our best hopes otherwise, many of us would be mere *muggles* (i.e., non-magical folk) in such a world. We know that life in this world is dominated by certain kinds of relationships, with a social hierarchy that distinguishes between pureblood wizards and witches, “mudbloods”, and muggles. It constructs wizards and witches based on what “house” they have been sorted into: Slytherins are cunning and Gryffindors brave. The magical world is organized in a certain way, so that the muggle world remains oblivious to the magical one. And, as such, there are things about *the world* that can only be known by those who inhabit the magical world of sense: that magic is real!

This fictional example offers a helpful starting point because it illuminates so much of what matters about a “world of sense”, what it is and how it works. We can draw out three key features of a “world of sense” from this example: *epistemic* (what we believe and take ourselves to know), *ontological* (what there is and how we think about that which there is), and *affective* (what we feel, when, and why).

Epistemic

As I mentioned before, a “world of sense” refers to the world as we live in and make sense of it. It captures the epistemic toolkit we have developed for knowing the world, as well as those parts of the world we actually experience given the tools we have.

In the project of living we are not alone, however, and so our “world of sense” comes with a ton of inherited information, handed down from parents and teachers, distributed in schools and social groups. This *living archive* acts as another epistemic tool, one that provides logics, scripts, and representations through which we filter what we see.⁷

A “world of sense” is something we collectively share and construct. It picks out our shared reality, a common realm that we can collectively think and talk about, and share and listen

within. Our “world of sense” comes to constitute what we take to be “common sense”: how we assume others will reason and believe, what they will know, and the other information and assumptions we take for granted in our interactions with others. That I could reliably predict that you would know or be familiar enough with *Harry Potter* that I could use it as an example demonstrates the collective nature and epistemic influence of a “world of sense”.

This example also reveals how some features of the world are so pervasive, some experiences presumably so universal, that they become a part of the *dominant* “world of sense”. *Harry Potter* was and continues to be a major part of the cultural zeitgeist, so much so that even those who haven’t read a single book or watched one minute of the eight movies (or countless other media) it spawned are roughly aware of the series and its impact. That I know that *Harry Potter* is a part of the dominant “world of sense” is what allows me to communicate some meaning through it as an example.

The *dominant* “world of sense” is one that we must all know (or at least be greatly familiar with) if we are to effectively communicate and safely navigate the social world. Consider that within the *Harry Potter* series, the non-magical world is the dominant one. This is why the magical world is hidden; because from within the logic of the dominant world of sense, magic is not real. As such, even when muggles encounter the magical by accident, they write those encounters off. And, witches and wizards must know, and try to live by, the rules of the dominant world if they are to remain undiscovered.

What this example also makes clear is that there can be worlds within worlds, much like the magical world exists within the broader, dominant, muggle world. A “world of sense” is sensitive to the world as we live in and need to describe it. As the magical and muggle community live in the world *very* differently, they have different needs. Their “worlds of sense” will reflect this distinction. Muggles need no words to describe Quidditch, for instance, a game they will never see let alone have the chance to play. But if wizards and witches are to “pass” as muggles, they probably need to know a little about English football.

Within the world of *Harry Potter*, the magical world is the marginalized one. The knowledge developed from this “world of sense” does not become part of or shape “common sense”. It is not considered so important that everyone, even those who are not magical, should know of and about it, or learn its language and adopt its rules. The magical world is not the one

with *power*. After all, the leader of Great Britain is the Prime Minister, not the Minister of Magic!

Tensions can arise when the dominant world epistemically marginalizes other worlds. One way an alternative “world of sense” can be marginalized is by quashing the possibility of its existence. In fact, this is partially what motivates the main conflict throughout the *Harry Potter* series — Voldemort wants to respond to muggle domination with magical supremacy!

A world can also be epistemically marginalized when the dominant world limits what we know about the people who inhabit it, or when it unjustly shapes how we think of them and how they think of themselves. At least part of what Voldemort is responding to is how magic and its purveyors are thought of and constructed by the dominant world, and the suppression of the magical world that this then generates.

Ontological

Our epistemic toolkit helps us make meaning of our “world of sense”, and a huge part of that world is other people. Over time, we come to distinguish between our selves and others, between us and them. But we have to do something with all of that information or risk being overwhelmed. This is where interpretive and organizational schema do the heavy lifting.

We can think of schema as epistemic shortcuts, and they do invaluable work. One of their most important tasks is to organize and categorize the information that we receive: *this is cool, that is not; Gryffindors are good, Slytherins are evil; this is masculine, that is feminine*. Sometimes, however, the passive project of organizing becomes an active project of construction; instead of merely responding to our environment, we start to actively shape it.

Though schema often capture what things are like or how they really are, they sometimes provide a roadmap for how something *ought to be*. Thus, they play an especially important role in shaping who we become and how we think of others. Schemas act as frameworks, or “containers” for thought, and through them we are interpellated, molded like a piece of clay, into a particular way of being. These frameworks, loaded with social meaning, inform not only how we conceive of our selves but also how we understand each other.

Our being-in-the-world, who we are and how we exist in the world, is not just up to us; it

is a product of our environment, culture, and upbringing. Through our interactions with others we come to learn what is expected of us, and we receive messages about who we are or should be. We discover which schema apply to “us”, or which we wish to be, and we strive to conform to these constructs.

The way in which expectations and beliefs shape who we are and how we think of others captures the ontological aspect of our “world of sense”. This aspect concerns the ontological effects of our epistemic toolkit: how our beliefs and frameworks for understanding the world then come to make and reshape that world.

Within the *Harry Potter* series, the magical are constructed, in the dominant “world of sense”, as inherently evil and deviant. This compels wizards and witches to hide, even if they do so in plain sight. This belief further results in a part of the world being hidden from view (i.e., the existence of magic and those who wield it), which in turn reinforces the belief that magic isn’t real.

As this example shows, the epistemic (beliefs, knowledge) has material (physical, ontological) consequences. Basically, our beliefs about the world can then affect how the world really is!

Difficulties arise when we fail to take into account the constructive influence of our “world of sense”, or when we deny or refuse to acknowledge the role it has played. Though they are not without guilt, at least some Slytherins behave as they do because it’s expected of them. This is especially true of Draco Malfoy, whose internal struggle we bear witness to through the last two books of the series.

Other difficulties are the result of our inability to recognize when the world has disconfirmed our belief. Only at the end of the series is it revealed that Professor Snape, a Slytherin and former-Death Eater, has spent Harry’s entire life trying to protect him. Yet, the evidence of this had been present throughout the series, we merely struggle to recognize this because it conflicts with our expectations of who Snape really is. Our inability to recognize this evidence may also have something to do with how we come to *feel* about Snape given how he is constructed within the text.

Affective

Many (though perhaps not all) readers imagine themselves as characters within the *Harry Potter* series. In fact, facsimiles of the “sorting hat” exist online that allow us to determine which house *we* would be sorted into were we Hogwarts students. That we identify with certain characters, or imagine ourselves as “belonging” to certain Hogwarts houses goes a long way towards shaping how we feel in response to certain events that occur within the series. We root for the heroes and rejoice when the villains are slain. That we have these affective responses is in no small part a result of the beliefs and ontological constructions that shape the world of *Harry Potter*.

The affective dimension of a “world of sense” involves our sensibilities, our ability to *feel* concerned and to have an array of emotions, from empathy and compassion to anger or despair.⁸ It concerns, as well, our ability to affect and to be affected by others. The demise of certain “bad guys” in the *Harry Potter* series, like Professor Dolores Umbridge or Bellatrix Lestrange, certainly moves us less than the demise of the characters we were rooting for, like Cedric Diggory or Fred Weasley.

The epistemic and ontological aspects of our “world of sense” determine what emotional responses are considered appropriate. Consider, for instance, how bizarre it would be to learn that someone *wants* to be sorted into Slytherin or is rooting *for* Voldemort! After all, within the magical world, they’re the bad guys (this is why it’s so shocking that Harry Potter’s son is later sorted into Slytherin)!

Our epistemic toolkit and schematic constructions do important work here in shaping how we interpret the emotional responses of others. Whether an emotional expression gets uptake depends in some part on whether that emotion conflicts with our schema. This explains why it is difficult to recognize Snape’s courage or Draco’s fear - these emotions are in tension with the schema that Slytherin are cruel and callous. The epistemic and ontological also help us to determine which emotional expressions are permitted, and whether an emotional expression is considered reasonable or overreactive. Because house-elves are constructed as enthusiastic servants, almost no one (even her friends) understands Hermione’s passion for elf liberation; her concern for the elves seems illogical as a result.

Of course, just as the epistemic and ontological aspect of our “world of sense” shape our affective sensibilities, they can also limit and constrain our emotional responses, producing what

philosopher Kristie Dotson refers to as *affective numbness*. Affective numbness occurs when we are not responsive to certain experiences, like when we fail to feel sympathy (or feel indifference) for someone's pain. Consider, for instance, the indifference shown by Draco and other Slytherins in using the slur "mudblood" to refer to their muggle-born classmates. When such numbness is systemically produced by our world of sense, it generates an *affectability imbalance*.⁹ That some wizards are pureblood supremacists, inconsiderate and dismissive of the feelings of muggle-born wizards, is an example of such an imbalance. This imbalance is generated by a lack of *reciprocity* - an inability on the part of the purebloods to recognize that their muggle-born counterparts are wizards much like themselves!

The affective attitudes generated by our world of sense matter because they compel certain responses and move us to act in certain ways. The students of Hogwarts are so incensed by the actions of Dolores Umbridge that they foment their own resistance, organizing what they cheekily refer to as "Dumbledore's Army".

Concluding remarks in progress...

Worlds within Worlds

Zooming out from the *Harry Potter* series, this fictional example illuminates a real phenomenon. Just as the world of *Harry Potter* is shared by magical and muggles alike, our world contains a plurality of "worlds of sense". Each "world of sense" is both shaped by, and in turn shapes, its inhabitants. The concepts, constructs, and affective attitudes of each "world of sense" are determined by the world as its inhabitants live it. Consequently, each "world of sense" will be equipped with a different set of tools, and these tools will be suited to knowing different parts of the world.

Of course, these "worlds of sense" are not impregnable. Language and concepts can move across worlds, like when slang from one world becomes jargon in another. People, too, can traverse worlds, much like Harry Potter moves from the magical world of Hogwarts to the non-magical world of the Dursley's (his guardians) home.

Also like in the book, one "world of sense" may come to be the dominant one. When this occurs, the way of knowing, being, and feeling of that world comes to be the one that is most visible or widely-known. This means that its concepts and resources, its way of making the

world, its affective responses, are ones we are all expected to know and to operate with and within.

The dominant world thus becomes the one that is *official* or authorized, its account of reality being endorsed as the one that is true. This has important consequences for worlds that are non-dominant, and for those who reside within them.

First and foremost, the dominant world may oppress and marginalize non-dominant worlds. It does so when it discredits the knowledge that is accessible from these worlds, or when it renders these worlds invisible. Fittingly, Kristie Dotson refers to this disappearing trick as a kind of magic. When a world is marginalized in this way, it becomes difficult for those who inhabit it to share what knowledge they have. This is especially so because what they share may be interpreted through the lens of the dominant world. This world may lack the epistemic tools necessary to understand what those in marginalized worlds mean to communicate.

Interestingly, that some worlds are marginalized relative to the dominant one generates an interesting imbalance. The marginalized are often required to traverse into the dominant world. To survive there, they must know the world *as the dominant live it*: to know what they will attend to in a situation, how they will interpret what they see, and what affective reaction may be produced. To accomplish this, the marginalized must have the epistemic toolkit necessary to understand the dominant “world of sense”. Thus they possess a robust epistemic toolkit, equipped with resources that allow them to understand the world as they live it *and* as the dominant live it.

The need to *world-travel*, as the marginalized do, is often the product of vulnerability. The magical are vulnerable to the non-magical (lest we forget the lessons of the Salem Witch Trials, considered canon within the series), the poor to the wealthy, women to men. The dominant are not vulnerable to the marginalized, however, and so they have no need to travel into marginalized worlds. As such, the dominant are unlikely to know the world from the perspective of the marginalized, or to have the tools that the marginalized possess.

This imbalance produces an *epistemic asymmetry*, one that plays an important role in our assessments of resistance. Those who engage in resistance often speak *from* worlds that are marginalized, but they speak *to* a public that resides within the dominant world. To that public,

the injustice that resistance seeks to remedy may be invisible; or, it may not seem unjust, at all. This generates an epistemic demand on resistance. Resistance must make visible what is invisible and problematize what has been normalized. To accomplish this, resistance needs the public to travel to a world other than their own.

Resisting from Marginalized “Worlds of Sense”

Rather than bringing the public into the “world of sense” of poverty, Resurrection City brought poverty to the public. To some extent, the Poor People’s Campaign was inspired by the experiences of King and Robert Kennedy’s as they toured the Mississippi Delta. There they witnessed firsthand the hardships of poverty, watching as a Head Start teacher carved up a single apple to share among 8 students.¹⁰ They heard from another group of children, who were asked at noon what they’d had for breakfast that morning, that they’d not yet eaten.¹¹ Just as these experiences had lifted the veil of King and Kennedy’s middle- and upper-class sensibilities, Resurrection City would aim to do the same for the public.

In 1954, historian David Potter argued that prosperity is the basis of US national character, and that this abundance had in turn shaped the individual character: it had made us “people of plenty”.¹² Prosperity shaped, as well, the “world of sense” of most Americans, and gave way to certain beliefs. Chief among these is the belief that offering aid de-incentivizes work and will lead to a dependence on welfare.¹³ Poverty is also conceptualized as an issue of individual opportunity rather than group rights. Consequently, poverty was not seen as a civil rights issue, and President Johnson’s policies were designed to avoid the development of federal programs or the redistribution of wealth. His legislation instead sought to address poverty through state-based welfare and community-action programs.

At the same time, the face of poverty has changed. The white male “hobo” of popular imagination has transformed into an image that is single, Black, and female. As a result, poverty comes to be seen as a “Black issue” and this shapes the construction of the poor as menacing, lazy, and impulsive.

The epistemic and ontological dimensions of the “world of sense” of affluence in turn influence affective responses to poverty. In the early 60s, a spate of stories on relief administration depicts the poor as “cheaters” who “gobbled up taxpayer’s funds”¹⁴. Gallup polls

at the time also tell a depressing story, with over 64% of Americans in 1964 holding the view that idleness led to poverty. This in turn generated a general distrust of and hostility towards the poor, an affective response best exemplified in, of all places, the welfare offices where the poor sought help. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, sociologists studying welfare use, report that the public welfare system aimed to keep rolls low “by intimidating and shaming [welfare applicants] to the degree that they are reluctant either to apply or to press claims, and by arbitrarily denying benefits to those who are eligible”.¹⁵

From the “world of sense” of the people of plenty, it would be difficult to know the reality about poverty in America. As political theorist Michael Harrington writes, poverty so conflicted with prosperity as the basis of national identity that it was seen as un-American, an anomaly.¹⁶ Accordingly, the poor were seen as responsible for their own economic circumstances, their poverty incompatible with the idea of America as a nation of plenty. This led to a paternalistic approach to welfare benefits that made aid conditional on compliance with middle-class norms.¹⁷ As a consequence, the majority of the poor weren’t registered for welfare benefits at all! This helped to produce a public that was largely unaware of the scale of poverty.

Nicknamed the “City of New Hope”, Resurrection City would make poverty visible. More importantly, it would provide a new model for living and motivate the demand for a robust, federally administered social program. And so, some 3000 of America’s poor, from as far as Seattle and Los Angeles, made the slow trek to Washington, traveling by train, car and, in some cases, by mule.

Resurrection City, though temporary, functioned more-or-less like any other city. It had a medical center, school, and newspaper, and provided social services like health care and day care. This self-run city demonstrated the ability of the poor to work together, their industry and willingness to engage in meaningful work, and the positive effects of such social programs on the poor. The provision of these services also acted as a model for what such programming might look like if administered at a national scale.

The residents of this makeshift city also challenged the image of poverty, drawing together a geographically, politically, and racially diverse coalition of America’s poor. Poor whites from Appalachia, Black sharecroppers from the South, Native Americans from the West, Mexicans from the southwest and Puerto Ricans living in the northwest, lived, worked, and ate

together in Resurrection City.

Organizers may have hoped that in putting poverty on display, the public would be as moved as King and Kennedy each were. King was so shaken by his visit to the Head Start program that he left in tears. Congregating the poor together would visibly communicate to the public the harsh conditions that accompany poverty, like starvation and sickness, and hopefully elicit the sympathy of the white middle-class.¹⁸

The tenants of Resurrection City understood the reality of poverty because they lived it. As Myrna Copeland, a volunteer with the Poor People's Campaign writes, "when it comes down to the nitty-gritty...[the poor] know more than we [in the middle-class] do because they've lived through the destitution and the poverty"¹⁹. Through Resurrection City the poor could share what they knew with the public, unveiling poverty as a problem that cut across geographic and racial lines, and challenging conceptions of the poor as lazy or apathetic.²⁰ Resurrection City thus offered living testimony to the inadequacy of state-based welfare programs, as well as the need for robust social services and an universal basic income that would be federally administered.

A War of "Worlds"

The promise of Resurrection City was short-lived, however, and the demands of the campaign were largely unmet. Six weeks after settling in the nation's center, the city was dismantled and its residents evicted. Rocked by internal conflict between organization leaders, besieged by negative press, and battered by unending rain, the campaign was all but defeated. In the end, more radical aims (e.g., universal income) were sacrificed for more modest goals, like welfare reform. Then, as now, Resurrection City and the Poor People's campaign lives in memory as a failure.

The enduring impression of Resurrection City as a failure is a testament to the influence of the dominant "world of sense", that of the people of plenty.²¹ This "world of sense" structured both *what* and *how* the public saw Resurrection City. To the public, the City of New Hope was not a model of communal living but a muddy shantytown rife with robbery and rape. Nor was it a site of self-governance but an "absentee-run slum", prone to crime and violence.²² Images of bedraggled participants, mud-drenched and soaked by unending rain, likely did not improve public perception of Resurrection City. As Monroe W. Karmin of *The Wall Street Journal* reports,

the public did not view the poor as “sympathy-deserving downtrodden” but as “unruly, undeserving riffraff”.²³

Resurrection City represented an attempt, by the Poor People’s Campaign, to thrust onto the public stage the “other America”, to confront the reality of poverty amidst prosperity. As we can see, however, those who reside in the “world of sense” of affluence lacked the tools needed to make sense of what they saw. Journalist Richard Lentz, for instance, speculates that crime likely did not occur at higher rates than would be expected for a population of Resurrection City’s size and income-level.²⁴ And, the filth and decay in which residents lived was to be expected given that year’s unseasonal rains and lack of resources. There is some irony in the fact that, as one SCLC staffer put it, “The poor in Resurrection City have come to Washington to show that the poor in America are sick, dirty, disorganized, and powerless — and they are criticized for being sick, dirty, disorganized, and powerless.”²⁵

What we see here is that, lacking the tools needed to see from within the “world of sense” of poverty, Resurrection City (and the squalor, crime, and chaos that came with it), failed to be legible to the public. As a consequence, the public ignored or interpreted what they saw in a way that reinforced their preexisting beliefs. The public saw in Resurrection City a confirmation of what they already believed; this confirmation preserved their “world of sense”, left unchallenged the conception of the US as a nation of abundance, and maintained the narrative that poverty is the result of personal choices rather than structural failures.

Though this example, we can begin to appreciate the limits of the dominant “world of sense” in understanding resistance from the margins. The “world of sense” of plenty was ill equipped to make sense of Resurrection City. Moreover, that participants and the public occupied different “worlds of sense” was exploited by the media to manufacture opposition to the campaign. We can see this both in the politicization of the city’s residents as criminals and in the continued pathologization of poverty.

The limits of this world can also help us to make sense of the incongruity between President Johnson and Reverend King’s assessment of the world of the United States. While President Johnson’s economic policies *did* create job opportunities, they ultimately failed to account for structural inequality of opportunities across racial groups. Nor did they accommodate for the fact that shifts in the industrial market, coupled with agricultural displacement, left

workers underemployed and under-skilled.

Above all, this example suggests that to understand resistance from the margins, we must cultivate the capacity to know the world from marginalized “worlds of sense”. To get the public to do this requires the epistemic disruption of the dominant “world of sense”. In some sense, Resurrection City was the Poor People’s Campaign’s attempt to do this. In making visible the breadth and magnitude of poverty, Resurrection City challenged the conception of America as a place where poverty could not exist. As I will explore in the next chapter, there’s more to epistemic disruption than that.

Concluding section in progress...

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⁵ Martin Luther King Jr. “The Other America” Speech, April 14, 1967.

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¹¹ Edelman, "Still Hungry in America".

¹² Potter, David Morris. *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954.

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¹⁴ As quoted in Patterson, James T. *America's struggle against poverty, 1900-1994*. Harvard University Press, 1994. 106.

¹⁵ Cloward, Richard A. "A Strategy to End Poverty." *NATION* 300, no. 14 (2015): 147-148.

¹⁶ Harrington, Michael. *The other America: poverty in the United States*. Simon and Schuster, 1997.

¹⁷ The "man-in-the-house" restriction, for instance, assumed men were the primary breadwinners and recipients of aid, making it difficult for single-parent, female-led households to qualify for aid.

¹⁸ Franklin, Ben A. "5,000 Open Poor People's Campaign in Washington." *The New York Times*, May 13, 1968.

¹⁹ Myrna Copeland, interviewed by Roland Freeman, quoted in Freeman Freeman, Roland L. *The Mule Train: A Journey of Hope Remembered*. Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998. 123.

²⁰ Rev. Jesse Jackson, "Resurrection City: The Dream . . . The Accomplishments," *Ebony* (October, 1968): 65-69, 74.

²¹ Franklin, Ben A. "Poor People's Drive Makes Gains, but Fails to Reach Goals." *The New York Times*, June 30, 1968.

²² "'Let No One Be Denied'— But in Resurrection City, 'Someday' Is Not at Hand," *Newsweek*, July 1, 1968.

²³ Monroe W. Karmin. "A Crusade Collapses: Bad Judgment Turns Poor People's Campaign into a Fiasco". *Wall Street Journal*. quoted in Senator Byrd, 90th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 114 (June 28, 1968): S 19277.

²⁴ Lentz, Richard. *Symbols, the News Magazines and Martin Luther King*. United States: LSU Press, 1999. 318

²⁵ Interview with SCLC staffer by Katherine Shannon, July 2, 1968. Quoted in Lentz, *Symbols, the News Magazines and MLK*, 319-320.