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Presidential Address

Organizing Powers in Eventful Times

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Historical and social scientific explanations often rely on major happenings and crises to define the topics of our inquiries or to delineate historical periods. But these models often prove limited and problematic. The challenge is to understand how action unfolds in a crisis and, in the process, reconfigures resources, opportunities, and horizons of possibility for new lines of strategic response. These questions are addressed through a comparison of Herbert Hoover and Harry Hopkins as they dealt with the onset of the Great Depression. Both men had the skills, network ties, and reputational resources that figure centrally in models of effective agency, but the contemporary assessments of their efforts differed dramatically. This pair of lives—Hoover and Hopkins—permits a cross-sectional comparison as both men wrestled with the onset of economic collapse and a sequential comparison as Hopkins inherited responsibility for relieving a crisis that had been shaped and reshaped by Hoover's actions.

A sense of impending disaster can focus the mind. But it can also be met with paralysis, denial, or calming, numbing loyalty to routine. Even after an extended period of time, when threats cannot be ignored and the damage is visible, it may be difficult to mobilize a response. Writing almost six years after the stock market crash of 1929, one officer of the American Red Cross captured this sense of a nation becalmed by looking back to World War I: "There was shell shock then. There is depression shock today" (Nicholson 1935: 296; Dulles 1950). This sentiment resonates in the here and now as we are bombarded with regular reports of climate change, regional conflict, economic dysfunction, and urban decay. The will and capacity to act dissolve in the face of such problems—some immediate, others anticipated with dread.

Without minimizing the political and moral challenges, a piece of our particular and professional unease about eventful times may also stem from the fact that historical and social research frequently relies on major happenings and crises to define the topics of our inquiries or to delineate historical periods. But, considered more closely, these models often prove limited and problematic. While we may celebrate or condemn the aftermath of a crisis, the challenges of understanding how action unfolds in a crisis remain analytically underappreciated even as these eventful times are the very stuff of the most gripping historical narratives. As William Sewell (2005) has argued, events have been narrated but rarely understood theoretically as "turning points" (Abbott

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2001: 240–60) in the sense of a class of happenings that transform—*or* have the potential to transform—social order.

That "or" points to a significant silence in our understandings of the processes of social change, the connection between events understood as opportunities for social transformation and the conditions and lines of action that lead from opportunity to substantial reorderings of social structure and cultural frameworks. Our attention is drawn easily to those eventful times that appear directly responsible for "history changing" outcomes. As a consequence, we are prone to commit the error of selecting on the dependent variable. With rare exceptions (e.g., Go 2008), we have few comparisons of the ongoing development of social orders that differ only in some eventful episode, an earthquake or hurricane or plague affecting one case but not the other. Extended studies of particular places demonstrate that some crises are followed by extensive social change while others are not (e.g., Viterna 2013). Political revolts rather than economic volatility or plagues seem to matter for extensive reordering of the social structure in Renaissance Florence (Padgett and McLean 2006)—some plagues are more transformative than others (Trinitapoli and Weinreb 2012). Even when it is possible to compare the impact of the "same" event—be it industrial revolution or world war or global financial crisis—across multiple national societies simultaneously, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of prior differences from the consequences of action within a crisis.[1]

In the effort to construct a path from eventful disruption to social transformation, many scholars have turned their attention from the character of the disruption, substituting analyses of strategic action (Fligstein 2001; Sheingate 2003) that reconstruct how key individuals, networks, and social movements have generated transformation. With the spotlight on strategy, events are conceptualized as a specific kind of opportunity with the potential to amplify the possibilities for creative, strategic, entrepreneurial action that are already present in an institutionally complex society (Friedland and Alford 1991). From this theoretical vantage point, world historical actors are not vehicles for some teleological force but rather are *bricoleurs* who move across and between relatively settled domains of social life, transposing elements and exploiting opportunities for various forms of social arbitrage that can be found in "the architecture of field overlap" (Evans and Kay 2008). Armed with this theoretical vocabulary, one can construct explanatory narratives that track the arcs of social change. Yet, like pure eventfulness, the language of strategic action leads into a theoretical black box. We know that action has been skillful or entrepreneurial because it has produced some significant social change.

The challenge is to align these two black boxes to generate a degree of mutual illumination. Events can be characterized not as acute shocks but temporally extended periods of disruption and potential reorganization within which skillful actors act, fail, and act again. Following William Sewell's (2005: 119) reading of Michael Mann

1. For examples of comparisons across projects within specific periods, see Jenkins and Perrow (1977) and Ganz (2000) on efforts to organize agricultural workers in California. These papers combine comparisons of "episodes" separated in time (organizing efforts across different decades) and comparisons across multiple efforts during the same moment in time.

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(1986), events can be understood as shaped by the "changing conjunctures between spatially distinct power networks." Sociological institutionalists would insist on expanding this idea of spatial distinctiveness to encompass the "distance" that is defined by the distinctiveness of social domains (Friedland and Alford 1991). From this vantage point, strategic action is refigured such that it is not only a direct emanation of some quality of the actor such as social skill or entrepreneurial zeal, but also as the product of iterative learning in a complex and shifting institutional context. Familiar scripts are revised and elaborated in the face of the often harsh feedback of subsequent outcomes and events. Shocks provide a context in which the temporal extension of the crisis, along with efforts to repurpose familiar forms and scripts, may allow actors to reconfigure social organization, sometimes in seemingly small ways that produce transformations on a large and lasting scale.

Varieties of Eventful History

As Franklin Delano Roosevelt's aide, Rexford Tugwell, reflected decades after the shock of what had come to be known as the "Great Depression": "the crisis might well make its own conditions" (1965: 172). But such paths from eventful times to the conditions for strategic action are easily obscured by our understandings of events. One approach to understanding major happenings in history characterizes crisis as the product of social structural strains, the emergence of an aggrieved social group or the contradictions built into a mode of social and economic organization. In such accounts, the identification of social origins stands in for the explanation of outcomes, without attending to the nature of the "event" as an extended process. As historian Lynn Hunt wrote of the literature on the French Revolution, the revolution "merely serves as the vehicle of transportation between long-term cause and effects; as a result, the emergence of a revolutionary politics has become a foregone conclusion" (1984: 3). This type of argument exemplifies Sewell's "teleological" temporality (2005: 83–85). Whether the revolution is understood as a way station on the path to capitalism or, in Tocqueville's telling, to the modern administrative state, the political eventfulness does not shift the overall trajectory of historical change. As Hunt demonstrates, the intentions and strategies of political actors disappear in this black boxing of the crisis. As a consequence, she concluded, "revolutionary innovations in the forms and meanings of politics often seem either predetermined or entirely accidental" (1984: 10). Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery offer a similar critique of the literature on "transitology" in Eastern Europe post-1989, in which "theories of transition are often committed to some pregiven future or rooted in an unyielding past" (1999: 4).

A second challenge to seeing what happens within the events stems from the language in which other social scientists characterize the "big happenings" that mark turning points in history, the beginnings and ends of eras that are central to the practice of periodization. Here, too, there is a kind of black boxing, but one in which the event dissolves into a space of indeterminacy, even randomness. Paul Pierson began his analysis of path dependence with the "Pólya urn" in which processes start with a

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random draw of a red or black ball. The "intriguing features" of increasing returns, Pierson explained, include their unpredictability. "Because early events have a large effect and are partly random, many outcomes may be possible. We cannot predict ahead of time which of these possible end-states will be reached" (2000: 253).

This sense of randomness and unpredictability can also be found in explanations that invoke exogenous shock. An unanticipated catastrophe, like that flap of a butterfly's wings in China or impact of an asteroid in the Yucatan, creates a space and time of indeterminacy and marks the beginning of a process that becomes more analytically tractable as it plays out. In a sense, such processes begin as "entirely accidental" and eventually become "predetermined" to rearrange the terms of Lynn Hunt's critique. Over longer stretches of time, this produces a "systems-and-crises" or "logics-and-transitions" imagery of history, in which the movements within relatively coherent systems or regimes alternate with episodes of revolutionary change (Clemens 2006: 493–94). As Craig Calhoun has written, "the emergency" has been "woven into a social imaginary" in which "international and global affairs have come to be constructed largely in terms of the opposition between more or less predictable systems of relationships and flows and the putatively unpredictable eruptions of emergencies" (2004: 374). Yet another variant on this theoretical imagery appears in "punctuated equilibrium" models of institutional change, "the problem … is that institutions explain everything until they explain nothing" (Thelen and Steinmo 1992: 15). So if Hunt's complaint was that political events and crises are too often reduced to expressions of social structural strain, Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo highlighted how a different conception of events and crises divorces the explanation of outcomes from prior social structure by introducing a moment of radical contingency.

A third model of change suggests a path between the disappearance of events into accounts of social structural origins and the transmutation of events into moments of radical uncertainty. Many theorists—including members of SSHA whose influence on my argument will be evident—have underscored the importance of networks of relationships and social skill in the explanation of meaningful changes in political organization. Network imageries of power—from Michael Mann's (1986) literally towering analysis of the sources of social power to the rigorous and rich reconstruction of networks of control by Julia Adams (1996), in her research on the Dutch East Indies, as well as John Padgett and Chris Ansell (1993) in their study of Cosimo de Medici—push us to think beyond the all or nothing conception of crises evoked by concepts of contingency, randomness, and shock. Short of absolute apocalypse, in which case social science and all else will be lost, even catastrophe plays out within specific organizations of power and structures of meaning that channel, exploit, and respond to events. What is interesting is not just the degree of indeterminacy but, following scholars such as Charles Tilly (1995) and Neil Fligstein (2001), the skills, experiences, and "repertoires" that actors bring to such opportunities (Clemens 1993, 1997). Yet by focusing so insistently on the individual or organizational actor and reducing the context to "opportunities" and "fields," we lose sight of how capacities to act are shaped by their moment and, in turn, reshape the moments to come.

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Social structural origins, degrees of openness and contingency, the mobilization and deployment of skill and networks—all these illuminate the politics of organizing powers in eventful times. But the anatomy of the crisis remains elusive—its extension in time and the endogenous paths by which response reshapes crisis. Our practices of conceptualizing events and delineating topics of inquiry too often make it difficult to grasp the specific opportunities afforded by a crisis, such as the ways in which resources, networks, and strategic repertoires are deployed in political projects.

In many cities, this would be a purely academic quibble. However this talk was delivered in not just any city, but in Chicago. And, to quote the words of our mayor, Rahm Emanuel: "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste. And what I mean by that it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before."[2] To which the political novice—or the academic analyst—might respond, "How?" To meet the mayor's challenge, we must identify the characteristics of "serious crises" that constitute opportunities as well as the nature of the levers that can be used to generate change. To join the mayor's injunction to Lynn Hunt's critique, the challenge is to understand how the anatomy of a crisis shapes—and is shaped by—the organizational forms and meanings of politics.

Two Men and a Crisis

Rather than wrestling with these questions on purely theoretical ground, my argument follows two lives as they intersected with one extended crisis. With apologies to all those within SSHA who have championed inclusiveness and attention to difference in our scholarship, these lives belong to two dead white men, both from Iowa, born within sixteen years and three hundred miles of one another: Herbert Hoover who would serve as president of the United States from 1929 to 1933 and Harry Hopkins who took charge of relief programs for Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt of New York from 1929 to 1932 and then served as federal relief administrator under President Roosevelt during his first and second terms. This pair of lives—Hoover and Hopkins—permits both a cross-sectional comparison as both men wrestled with the onset of economic collapse and a sequential comparison as Hopkins inherited responsibility for relieving a crisis that had been shaped and reshaped by Hoover's actions.

These two men not only shared the same crisis with its particular configuration of social origins and eventful contingency, but also came to the crisis with surprisingly similar backgrounds, experiences, skills, and networks (for biographical background, on Hoover: Burner 1979; Hawley 1998; Wilson 1975; on Hopkins: Clapper 1937; Hopkins 1999; Roll 2013; Sherwood 1950). Neither had the advantage of a complete and stable family, both were shaped but not defined by religious upbringing, and both seized the opportunities afforded by access to higher education. Hoover was admitted to Stanford where he studied engineering, Hopkins to Grinnell where he laid the foundations for a career in social work. At this point, admittedly, their biographical

2. *Wall Street Journal* 2008.

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trajectories diverged as Hoover set off on a spectacular career in large-scale mining that traversed continents, made him a millionaire, and brought him international fame for managing the evacuation of American citizens from Europe at the onset of World War I. During the war, Hoover administered food relief to Belgium and, after the armistice, to war refugees throughout Europe. He was courted by both parties as a political candidate, served as secretary of commerce under Harding, and then used his role in organizing the response to the catastrophic Mississippi River floods of 1927 as an audition for his campaign for the presidency in 1928. His campaign film—an innovation—was titled *Master of Emergencies* and his career to this point unquestionably merited the claim (Balogh 2003: 231).

Let me underscore the analytic challenge posed by Herbert Hoover to contemporary theories that emphasize the role of agency, social skill, and expansive networks. Setting aside his political ideology and economic theories, it is hard to argue that Hoover was not astoundingly well-prepared to serve as executive officer at the time of a multifaceted, massive, complex social disaster. And yet he is popularly remembered as a failure, a devastating, total, laughable failure. Hoover fought this assessment for the rest of his very long life, and many political historians now acknowledge his complaints that parts of the early New Deal built upon plans developed by his administration (Kennedy 2005: 118). But the reputational judgment of his time poses an important puzzle. Given that Hoover had the skills, network ties, and reputational resources that figure so centrally in our models of effective agency, how can we understand rather than assume his apparent impotence in the face of crisis?

Before I address that question, let me return to the second of my dead white men from Iowa: Harry Hopkins. Setting aside that piece about Hoover's multimillion dollar fortune, Hopkins was a similar sort of phenom. After graduating from Grinnell, he relocated to a settlement house in New York City and very soon was making his way up the ranks of one of the oldest and most important welfare organizations, the venerable Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor where he worked from 1912 to 1915, and as executive secretary of the New York City Board of Child Welfare (Hopkins 1999). During the war, he moved to the domestic service of the American Red Cross and by the 1920s was serving as that organization's associate manager for the Gulf District, which was particularly important for its concentration of military bases. The Red Cross was responsible both for "home service" to the families of servicemen and for supporting relocation processes and resettlement.[3] All in all, this

3. A young Hopkins appears in the Red Cross archives asking "What should be the attitude of the American Red Cross on matters of State Legislation? … I assume that there will be a national policy adopted on this matter which should affect all divisions. It is important that we get a statement from you on this matter as early as possible because we are being pressed rather vigorously by state departments for legislative assistance." No policy appears to have been set in response to his query and, as late as 1933, the chairman of the Red Cross continued to advise that it would be "unwise to issue any statement at this time, adding that where flagrant activity was initiated it could be handled on its own basis and that there were instances in which local leadership not initiated by us at times did more good than harm. In any event no instruction will go out on this matter." H. L. Hopkins to F. C. Munroe (January 17, 1920); Mr. Fieser to Mr. Schafer, Mr. Winfrey, Mr. DeWitt Smith (February 23, 1933); Records of the American National Red Cross, 1917–1934, RG 200, Box 68 051.001 Legislation, National Archives and Records Administration.

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was not too bad for a boy from Iowa. On a smaller scale, Hopkins had accumulated many of the same resources as Hoover: experience in private relief agencies and public bureaucracies if not in large corporations; and network ties to political and economic elites in New York City rather than nationally and internationally.

So as the developments that would combine to form what we know as the Great Depression began to emerge in the late 1920s—economic struggles and drought on the farms, industrial unemployment in cities and mining areas—both Hoover and Hopkins could be numbered among the relatively small group of individuals with extensive experience in the management of large-scale relief and crisis. Admittedly Hoover's experience to date had been more varied, more celebrated, and much more remunerative, but both Hoover and Hopkins would clearly count as "skilled actors" with a record of the "political entrepreneurship" theorized by Adam Sheingate (2003).

These roughly parallel biographies only heighten the puzzle of the contemporary judgment of their efforts to meet the crisis. Hoover was judged an abject failure at the time, an assessment hammered home by the flood of memoirs and biographies of the Roosevelt administration, which would not be substantially revised by historians until the 1970s (e.g., Burner 1979; Hawley 1974; Wilson 1975). By contrast, Hopkins's allies agreed that he had done all that could be done in a difficult situation, while his enemies labeled him a consummate manipulator who had successfully harnessed federal relief to Democratic party politics. Although public opinion split in its evaluation, there was agreement on the magnitude of his accomplishment; a 1939 Gallup poll identified "relief and the WPA" as both the "greatest accomplishment" and the "worst thing" accomplished during the New Deal (Kurzman 1974: 114). Hopkins would later move into the central decision-making circles of World War II, recognized as "Lord Root of the Matter" by Winston Churchill and dispatched as the personal delegate of the president to both Churchill and Stalin (Roll 2013; Sherwood 1950). Whatever the judgment of Hopkins—and it should *not* be that he ended the Depression, in a short time he had spent more dollars and employed more Americans than any government agency outside of wartime and went on to another political act in international affairs with his reputation as a skillful actor intact (if temporarily damaged by his flirtation with a presidential run in 1938, before FDR had announced that he would run for a third term).

Taken together, Hoover and Hopkins capture the difficulty of explaining the outcomes of action in eventful times by invoking the strategic skills or entrepreneurialism of actors. Hoover was "master of emergencies" until he wasn't. Hopkins, as aide to the "affable sphinx" (Kennedy 2005: 111) who had defeated Hoover for the presidency, combined a similar range of experience across private organized charity and electoral politics, yet sustained his position as a central actor across more than fifteen years of crisis from the onset of the Great Depression through his death in 1946. Obviously, a great many factors contributed to their different biographical trajectories and diverging historical reputations. The puzzle for an "eventful" analysis is the extent

In defending the ambiguity of the relationship of their organization to electoral and legislative politics, the leaders of the Red Cross preserved an important space for strategic action.

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to which the temporal extension of the crisis illuminates the limits and salience of skillful strategic action in either resisting or promoting the social change that may have become possible due to the crisis. For the purposes of the argument here, I focus on only one element—a categorical distinction or cultural boundary—that was at stake in those years of economic and social strain: the extent of voluntary versus government responsibility for the unemployed. To invoke the words of Robert Penn Warren's (1946: 277) protagonist, Willie Stark, how did unemployment relief and a roster of other government benefits become "Free. Not as Charity. But as a Right"?

From "Normal Crisis" to Crisis

To explore this question, let us return to that saying of Mayor Emanuel's: "never let a serious crisis go to waste." One of the regular pastimes in Chicago is dissecting the sayings of the current occupant of the mayor's office and the skills developed in that pastime are helpful here. What, after all, is a crisis and when do we know that we are in one?

When events are conceptualized as discrete moments of radical indeterminacy produced by exogenous shock, the thing to be explained is how that radical uncertainty is eventually resolved in a way that produces some significant historical change. What is lost in the process are the initial reactions to what may or may not be understood to constitute a crisis and the subsequent efforts to shape shared understandings of a stretch of eventful time. In the case of the Great Depression—and one can argue that the same holds for many of our contemporary dilemmas—the earliest responses can be understood as performative and interpretive struggles over whether any given crisis is or is not a "normal crisis." Such struggles were evident in the reaction to one prong of the gathering troubles of the late 1920s: the spreading and deepening drought that would come to afflict more than twenty states at its worst point (Woodruff 1985). Viewed in terms of the substance of Hoover's reputation, the drought represented "an excellent opportunity to reestablish and enhance his tarnished image as a capable and concerned political leader." Disaster, after all, was Hoover's home turf and it was "generally expected" that he would "skillfully direct the relief operation and that the successful handling of the relief operation would strengthen his position with Congress, the press, and the American public" (Hamilton 1982: 850–51).

As a strategic actor, however, Hoover worked with the materials and the situation as defined by the crisis. In the case of natural disaster, the recognized expert actors leading the response to this piece of the problem were concentrated in the American Red Cross, a distinctive piece of American civil society that had chapters in more than two thousand of the nation's three thousand some counties and a national board that included, *ex officio*, representatives of six different cabinet agencies. Since the Taft administration, US presidents were appointed to serve as president of this federally chartered voluntary organization—so this was truly a monster in Tocqueville's terms (2004: 821), a joining of the art of civic association to the administrative state.

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Confronting the drought, the Red Cross sought to contain it within existing categories of "normal" disaster and thereby to preempt demands that they do more or attempt any novel response. In June 1929, their official publication explained that: "Crop losses due to wind, excessive rain, frost, drought, hail, insect pests, etc., are frequent throughout the United States. They are a part of the economic hazards to which agriculture and industry alike are subjected from time to time."[4] Precisely because such threats to agriculture were to be expected in the normal course of things, farmers should anticipate these risks and prepare themselves accordingly. The Red Cross asserted this limiting principle for relief as a kind of civic commandment, a sentiment that was echoed in a great many letters to President Hoover as the possibility that federal funds would be tapped for relief came to be vigorously debated. As that Red Cross author asserted, the primary responsibilities of the Red Cross were for disaster relief and support of the military in time of war: "To add to these responsibilities amelioration of the losses due to economic hazards would mean virtually the establishing of national insurance against the natural lean year hazard of agriculture, industry and commerce."[5]

As one rainless month followed the others (Woodruff 1985), the Red Cross was eventually pushed to expand its mandate to include drought in the same category as hurricanes and tornados, earthquakes and floods. But they absolutely refused responsibility for unemployment, even in rural industries where many were suffering from severe malnutrition. Reading forward through the bimonthly issues of the *Red Cross Courier*, one waits and waits for the premier disaster relief organization to notice that what we now know as the Great Depression was under way. Setting aside the drought and occasional epidemic of hunger, well into the autumn of 1929, all looked fine in the eyes of the chairman, Judge John Barton Payne: "This year 1929," he announced, "doesn't show any let-up in the steady advance of prosperity in the United States, our expertly informed authorities of the Executive Departments at Washington state with assurance."[6]

The first acknowledgment that this was not an ordinary drought appears only in the autumn of 1930, and then in a piece reprinted from a Virginia state agricultural agency that pointed to the intersection of drought with industrial unemployment afflicting urban areas:

> It is not time to lose courage, however, the very seriousness of the situation calls for a steady hand and a stout heart. The level-headed farmer will not indulge the long face. He will seek to adjust his farm and living to meeting the losses. If he gives up because this seems impossible, it will not help matters, but produce a situation more critical. *There is no room for him in the cities already congested and going through a period of depression* that will be further increased by the

4. *Red Cross Courier*, June 1, 1929, 3.
5. Ibid.; Hamilton 1982: 860.
6. Payne 1929: 7.

> farmers' plight … . No outside remedy or leadership can take the place of the farmers' own experience.[7]

This delay in the recognition of the crisis as a "nonnormal crisis" was also evident with respect to the other major development that fed into what would come to be known as the Great Depression: unemployment, both in cities and rural industries. Here, one can track the active intervention of the Hoover administration to minimize any sense of crisis, in order to keep events within the parameters of the normal. As Hoover would write shortly after his defeat for reelection in 1932, he had ordered a house-to-house census in the spring of 1930 in order to assess the actual extent of unemployment. Overall, he concluded, "there was an average of 1.7 breadwinners to each family. One breadwinner, generally speaking, was enough to keep a household from want; therefore, in each ten families which needed no relief, there might yet be seven unemployed persons."[8]

From both President Hoover and the officials of the Red Cross, we see the kind of effort to control the definition of the situation that is central to Mark Blyth's (2002) analysis of the Great Depression as a battle of ideas. The Red Cross, for example, "refused to conduct surveys of need for fear that these would attract attention" (Hamilton 1982: 861). Such efforts focused insistently on normalizing an unfolding crisis and containing it within familiar categories of periodic drought and industrial unemployment. But, looking backward, we already know the futility of the effort. The cumulation of hard winters, hobo camps, and Hoovervilles eventually eroded the capacities of all but the most determined of denialists. If the outcome of a crisis is determined by contests of ideas and definitions, this cognitive shift alone seems sufficient to explain the turn to an unprecedented intervention by the federal government.

Where we have erred in this case, I would argue, is in assuming that because Hoover and his allies lost the battle over definitions; it also follows that all their efforts to meet the growing depression by other means were without lasting effects, that they did not shape the conditions that were made by the crisis—or at least not beyond Hoover's own electoral defeat in November 1932. If one looks closely at those early years of the crisis, which are too often ignored by accounts that use the "event" of the crash to delineate a period that begins with Hoover's failure and ends with Roosevelt's election, the evidence suggests a rather different conclusion.

In meeting the initial phases of the crisis, what Hoover and his allies and many Americans saw was actually an unprecedented deployment of familiar methods as well as innovative strategies. The final report from the President's Emergency Committee for Employment (PECE) documents the full range of exhortation and experimentation that we would expect of a full and desperate flowering of Hoover's "American System" (Hayes 1936). Information was collected, publications were explained, efforts were made to exhort firms, city and county governments, voluntary associations, and

7. "The Farmers' Dilemma" (reprinted from the Bulletin of the Department of Agriculture and Immigration of Virginia for September). *Red Cross Courier*, October 1, 1930, 3. Emphasis added.
8. Hoover 1952, 49.

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individual homeowners to do a little more to make or share work in order to nudge the national economy toward recovery. New proposals were floated before potential funders, with Colonel Arthur Woods (chair of the PECE) asking the Rockefeller Foundation to support a program of kitchen gardens for the unemployed in "rural industry" (a category that fell between the jurisdictions of the urban-oriented Community Chests and the Red Cross understanding of its own mandate for natural disasters that had been stretched to cover agricultural drought).[9]

In the eyes of the ideological champions of voluntarism, the initial accomplishments of these efforts to meet the depression were significant. A study done for the Russell Sage Foundation reported that state and local public relief and pensions had increased by a factor of 3.7 between 1929 and 1931. Private relief, while slightly less than half this in total amount, increased almost fivefold. In economic crisis, as in war, American governance proved to be exceptionally "expansible" to borrow a term from Ira Katznelson (2002: 98). This capacity was exemplified by the social technology of the community chest, a form of federated drive, "invented" in a few cities during the progressive era and then spread nationally during World War I, aided by the relocation of Newton Baker, the former mayor of that very civically minded city of Cleveland, to his new position as Wilson's secretary of war. Many of those "war chests" were converted to "community chests" after the armistice, consolidating a new war-driven capacity for private, locally organized relief largely under the control of businessmen's organizations (Clemens 2010b).

Confronted by deep and growing unemployment, those committed to models of voluntarism understandably turned first to these familiar scripts. In the process, many reaffirmed the linkage of a specific method of relief to a particular model of democratic governance and political liberty. Robert W. DeForest—who served, to list only a few positions, as an officer in the American National Red Cross, as president of the New York Charity Organization Society, and as a leading figure in the establishment of the Russell Sage Foundation (Hijaya 1980)—telegraphed Hoover, praising his response as an inoculation against the political dangers exemplified by the Roman mob:

> I WARMLY AND ENTHUSIASTICALLY APPROVE YOUR APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL RED CROSS COMMITTEE AND THE REASONS GIVEN THERFOR [*sic*]. IF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE LEARN TO LOOK TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FOR PANEM THE STEP TO A DEMAND FOR CIRCENSIS IS NOT FAR OFF. TO UNDERMINE THE SOUND AMERICAN TRADITION OF DEPENDENCE UPON THE SPIRIT OF VOLUNTARY AID IS A CRIME.[10]

Surrounded by allies such as this, the indeterminacy and space for strategic action created by the crisis narrowed. One side of the politics of the moment was defined by

9. Family Food Production, Historical Record, 1931–1932 RG 1.1, Series 200, Box 332, Folder 3945, Rockefeller Archive Center.

10. Robert W. DeForest to Herbert Hoover (January 19, 1931). American National Red Cross, Correspondence 1931, January 19, Box 61, Herbert Hoover Presidential Papers—Subject File.

efforts to reinforce the categorical boundary between politics and organized relief in order to prevent any transformation of the relation of citizens in need to the federal government.

This should not be understood as a purely ideological reflex. Consider what advocates of these methods of private relief would have learned from their efforts to "transpose" (Sewell 1993) their favored methods of mobilizing funds in support of war or the normal crises of urban poverty and periodic unemployment. In the first winters of deep depression, 1929–30 and 1930–31, the outpouring of private contributions was extraordinary in terms of prior peacetime charitable campaigns (war fund totals were significantly higher)—even if ultimately unequal to the enormous need. In the final months of 1931, the Prosser Committee in New York City had carried out a fund-raising campaign in the familiar style, using canvassing of business and mobilization through associations and elite networks to raise $18 million to provide work to unemployed heads of families over the winter.

But, even before the year ended, it was clear to many of those involved that even $18 million would not be sufficient. The state funds provided by Governor Roosevelt's bond-funded Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA) were running low and the economy showed few if any signs of revival. As a stopgap, a complex arrangement was worked out in which a private voluntary relief effort (the Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee or EURC) made a loan to the city government to allow payment of wages to those on public work relief, guaranteed by funds from the city's portion of a state appropriation. The demands of the situation had made it clear that no single, institutionally pure solution to the unemployment crisis was sufficient. Harvey Gibson, chairman of the EURC, underscored this point early in January 1932: "I wish to emphatically point out that the money available from the Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee for Home Relief and Work Relief is inadequate by a great amount to meet the distress existent this winter because of unemployment without the help of the City. This fact becomes more and more obvious to our Committee daily."[11] On the frontlines, with those holding practical responsibility for relief, the bright categorical distinction between American voluntarism and government funding was beginning to fail.

And it became worse. By the end of the year, it was already clear that relief for the unemployed would be needed through spring into summer. Leading figures in the Republican Party, most notably Governor Gifford Pinchot of Pennsylvania, articulated a case for federal funding of relief and became an increasingly vocal critic of the president (Olson 1972; Pinchot 1927). Even that stalwart of voluntarism, Walter S. Gifford (at various times president of the New York Charity Organization Society and American Telephone and Telegraph as well as chair of the successor to PECE, the President's Organization for Unemployment Relief or POUR) testified to his support for federally funded relief in principle although in practice he thought relying on private relief was inevitable because "we have … built up the system the other way"

11. EURC (2nd). Publicity. News Releases. No. 406. Vol. VIII EURC. Immediate Release. January 8 (John Price Jones Papers, HBS)

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(Burner 1979: 267). The "object lesson" of the extended impotence of private relief had eroded the alliances in support of established methods of response to "normal crisis." The categorical distinction between relief as charity and relief as right had dimmed, even if it had not yet been relocated.

From Crisis to Contested Change

In retrospect, it seems obvious that all this private voluntary effort was insufficient to the magnitude of the unemployment crisis. But this does not mean that the extended period of trying to make old methods work was without consequence. In the process, many of those with long experience and deep loyalties to organized private relief as a response to "normal crisis" came to appreciate the profound limits of that approach in the context of a nationwide economic depression. In this way, the crisis was remaking its own conditions.

Had Hoover and his administration chosen to move more decisively in this direction, the door was already unlocked. Yet when others attempted to push at the level of public policy rather than relief practice, the defense of established alignments between voluntarism and a defense of political liberty was fierce. In the first months of 1931, Congress considered proposals to authorize federal aid to the unemployed and, when these were clearly defeated, to give a gift of $25 million to the American Red Cross in appreciation of its support for the American people. Days were spent in heated debate, the chairman of the Red Cross announced that if such a gift were made the organization would refuse to accept it, and plans were laid for a rapidly mobilized $10 million fund-raising drive for the Red Cross. Shortly after the bill was finally defeated, members of the Red Cross held their annual gathering in Washington, D.C. In response to insistent questioning as to why the organization had rebuffed this offer despite the magnitude of unemployment and hunger, the Red Cross leaders sent their legal counsel out in front of the local delegates to read the corporate charter and underscore the fact that local groups were dependent upon the national organization for their legal existence (Clemens 2010a: 91–96). Although opposition to the proposed $25 million appropriation had been cast as a defense of American voluntarism, that lawyer's lecture made clear that the American Red Cross was not quite the kind of democratic and self-governing organization that its members and local volunteers had assumed it to be.

The publicity surrounding the fights in Congress contributed to the erosion of commitment to familiar models of voluntary fund-raising that extended well beyond the relatively elite networks centered on the dominant private charity organizations. At the level of public opinion, as it existed in an era before modern polling, shifts were evident in how some citizens thought about the morality of relying on private donations. Although the correspondence in Hoover's presidential files was generally supportive of his opposition to linking federal funds to charitable relief efforts, at least one correspondent articulated the position that would come to be dominant in the Roosevelt administration. The events of our own recent past have taught us all to

be suspicious of the words of bankers, but consider what W. B. Farris of the Interstate Building and Loan Association wrote to Hoover in January 1931:

> I believe in the Red Cross for ordinary times and events. In the cities we have the community chest, to which I contribute regularly for the dependants [*sic*] of our city, but the drought is very unusual and covers the country people. I think they should be helped and that adequately; but it all should be done by law and the money raised through the income tax. No other way is democratic and fair and by it the burden falls on those who can pay it and in just proportion.
>
> Now if you attempt to raise it by soliciting methods; you will penalize the good people and put an unjust burden on them and the stingy will not contribute. This city is typical; I know some rich citizens who will not give; no orator can touch their hearts; and the generous ones who are already doing much will be compelled to do more.
>
> I beg of you to try and have money raised by law and taxes; no other way is fair to all.[12]

Pigs fly, hell freezes over, and bankers call for higher taxes.

If sentiments of justice drove some to argue for a shift to tax-supported relief efforts, for others the issue was the sort of social unpleasantness that had led civic elites to embrace the innovation of the annual civic campaign as a substitute for a seemingly endless stream of "drives" for one or another charitable organization. While giving may be a pleasure, being asked to give is often experienced as harassment. As a Mrs. Watshall wrote to the president in February 1931:

> It <u>does</u> seem that as enlightened a government as we are supposed to [have?] could handle a food and clothing situation such as there is this winter without turning the job over to the Red Cross to do by begging. Ever since the war we have been a victim of "drives" … as well as a victim of high taxes. It is very disgusting to be accosted every time you go to the post-office by some "drivers" that are parked in that public building. I must say they are often women who could use their time at home to better advantage and I am a woman's rights woman too.
>
> We managed a war of some magnitude and [it] does seem a nation like this could provide food and clothes for the destitute of this year by employment mostly and if not by that means by government management supported by taxes.[13]

These complaints document the "credible discrediting" of the once-dominant model for responding to national crises. Precisely because the Hoover administration had been so deeply committed to the capacity of one model of relief, the shortcomings of that model were now evident even to those who supported this form of voluntarism in

12. W. B. Farris to Herbert Hoover (January 21, 1931). American National Red Cross, Correspondence 1931, January 19, Box 61, Herbert Hoover Presidential Papers—Subject File.
13. Mrs. Watshall to Herbert Hoover (n.d., received February 2, 1931). American National Red Cross, Correspondence 1931, January 19, Box 61, Herbert Hoover Presidential Papers—Subject File.

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"normal crises." By the summer of 1932, Hoover had moved to the point of signing legislation that made loans available for "self-liquidating projects" (e.g., construction that would eventually pay for itself through leases, tolls, or other sources of income), although loans could not be made directly to states to support relief payments (Kurzman 1974: 61).

In the process, Hoover lost his capacity to repeat his role as "master of emergencies," what historian David Kennedy has called "Hoover's own distinctive political genius. It embodied the principle of government-stimulated voluntary cooperation that lay at the heart of his social thought, even while it provided for direct government intervention in the private economy if voluntarism proved inadequate" (2005: 44). It was this second element of Hoover's favored model, the resort to direct government intervention, that became much more *politically* difficult as the unemployment crisis endured. While many small donors as well as relief professionals came to recognize the insufficiency of this model, large donors were aware that "government stimulation" of voluntarism might easily lead to "government subsidy" of voluntarism that would directly threaten their well-being.

As a consequence, and somewhat perversely, support for voluntarism wavered. In October 1931, as the nation looked forward to another hard winter of unemployment with full knowledge of the inadequacy of the most innovative methods of private fund-raising and the intensity of political opposition to federal funding, Irenee DuPont wrote to Walter S. Gifford, the chairman of the POUR:

> One of the obstacles in obtaining good contributions [from the wealthy] is the uncertainty of the tax situation. There seems to be a prevalent feeling that Congress will raise the income tax rate and remove the provision whereby losses may be offset against other income … . I think it would be very constructive if Mr. Hoover announced that no ex post facto income tax law should be passed and that he would veto a tax law if it included such an unjust provision.

The chairman replied that: "I have already received a letter from your brother and have taken the matter up with the Secretary of the Treasury. I hope that it will be possible for some announcement to be made along the lines you and your brother suggest."[14]

Hoover's distinctive "political genius" had long rested on a choreography of government funds and authority, solicitation of help from private business, and mass contributions from citizens both as volunteers and donors. With each season of hunger and discontent, the components of this model were further disassembled. As more and more calls came for direct government aid, Hoover's reaction was to fiercely decouple these pieces, and to insist on purely voluntary action. In effect, the demands from businessmen and the wealthy for a purely voluntary response to the crisis led Hoover to abandon—or, perhaps more accurately, to deconstruct—the position at

14. Quoted in Hopkins 1936: 46–47.

the intersection of cross-cutting networks and practices that he had so masterfully exploited in earlier crises.

The politics of the moment destroyed the conditions for skillful action, a threat recognized by some of Hoover's most prescient allies including James L. Fieser, the longtime vice president of the American Red Cross. Events had forced Fieser to reconsider whether it was "a menace to the future of the Red Cross to become involved in the unemployment question." By May 1932, he still hoped that it would not be necessary to use federal funds to purchase commodities for relief but urged that "we may continue to keep the issue fluid and unfixed, preserving our power of adjustability to meet new and extraordinary future needs just as our past history, particularly of the last two years, has been wisely marked by wholesale exploratory entrance into new fields of cooperative action of the public good."[15] Yet even as longtime champions of voluntarism, from New York City charity circles to Fieser of the Red Cross, came to entertain the possibility of a shift toward government-funded relief, the president found his room to maneuver increasingly constrained by a different set of political allies and ideological commitments.

From Contested Change to Reconfiguration

What do these conflicting positions over the boundary between federal funds and unemployment relief suggest about how crises do or do not produce social change? Given the collapse of Hoover's capacity to respond to the crisis, we might be tempted to offer a modified version of model two—crisis followed by indeterminacy and opportunity. If the only lesson to be remembered is that it took some time to get to the point where a crisis was widely recognized, nothing would seem to prevent an adequate explanation of change as driven by new actors—President Roosevelt aided by Harry Hopkins—who swoop in after a few years of crisis to impose a new model. Indeed, Hoover's own complaints that much of his planning was swiped without credit would not be entirely at odds with such an account.

But this explanation mischaracterizes the succession of administrations. As relief administrator for Governor and then president Roosevelt, Hopkins was a product of Hoover's world of voluntarism, private social work, and state and local social policy—the same world where I first engaged with questions of American political development as a research assistant for Theda Skocpol as she was writing *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* (1992), which would profoundly challenge understandings of the development of the American welfare state. If Hoover had supported these arrangements in principle, Hopkins had lived deeply inside their machinery. In New York State, municipal work relief projects were part of a lineage that could be traced to Josephine Shaw Lowell's efforts on the Lower East Side in 1893 (Waugh 2001)

15. James L. Fieser to Herbert Hoover (May 20, 1932). American National Red Cross, Correspondence, 1932 January–July, Box 62. Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, Presidential Papers—Subject File.

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through Hopkins's own projects of work relief landscaping city parks in the economic downturns just before World War I (Roll 2013: 21).

But whereas Hoover had reacted to growing unemployment by sponsoring studies and interpretations of results that minimized the problem, Hopkins shouted that the house was burning down and not enough people were paying attention. As New York State, under then governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt, became one of the first to make the effort to pass legislation and authorize the bonds to fund additional work relief, Hopkins was back from the Gulf District and once again embedded in the world of New York City social workers and municipal relief. Faced with massive unemployment in the city and state, he was appointed secretary and then later chairman of the New York State TERA (Roll 2013: 30). In this role, he sought that elusive balance between shouting "crisis" to mobilize support while reassuring citizens of the capacities of the state relief programs:

> Pointing out that 1,500,000 persons in the State, or one in ten, were receiving relief, and that 2,000,000 persons, or one in six, should be receiving relief, he declared that "if this State and country ever was facing disaster, it never has faced a crisis so crucial as the present."
>
> Mr. Hopkins said he feared that because well-meaning persons were reading in the newspapers of enormous relief drives and of large relief programs they would believe these things were actually being done, instead of being merely talked about.
>
> "The plain fact," he asserted, "is that the crisis is not being met. And if it is not being met in New York City and New York State, what in the name of heaven must the unemployment situation be throughout the United States?"[16]

Having already distributed $27 million appropriated by the state legislature to cities and counties, Hopkins would continue his relief efforts supported by the passage of a $30 million bond approved by voters in November 1932.[17] But while the funding source was novel, Hopkins's inbox was flooded with suggestions for how to support and organize this effort that would be familiar to any charity lady or utopian reformer of the late nineteenth century—donate the proceeds of the day's last cup of coffee to the poor, buy rural land (conveniently for sale by the author of the letter) to create an agricultural settlement for unemployed workers.[18] Working—often improvisationally—to distribute new funds through a creaky architecture of local governments and indirectly to private relief organizations, Hopkins cultivated the bureaucratic skills that would serve him in good stead as the man in charge of Lend Lease during World War II (Roll 2013), a program that sent military equipment and material around the world to needy allies as opposed to funds to desperate New York communities. When FDR appointed Hopkins to take charge of federal relief,

16. "State Relief Needs Stressed by Hopkins" 1932.
17. "Voters Urged to Aid Relief Bond Issue" 1932.
18. Plans and Suggestions for Relief, 1931/1932/1933, Box 7, Papers of Harry L. Hopkins, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library.

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his successor as governor of New York complained that FDR had "the entire country from which to make a choice … . I am at a loss to know how to replace [Hopkins] without seriously crippling the work in New York State which is after all the most important in size and in need of any state in the union."[19]

As Hopkins moved to Washington, D.C., for the inauguration, his project was not to displace a world of voluntary relief with publicly funded federal entitlements, but rather to organize a new division of labor in which the federal piece was premised on citizen rights while the activities of private actors—both voluntary and for profit—were choreographed on other fronts. As Gerald Berk has shown (2009), key pieces of economic policy and industry code setting built on models of public-private governance can be traced through Hoover back to the progressives. President Roosevelt expressed his commitment to a variant of this vision of collaborative governance in language borrowed from social work. It was the responsibility of the national government, he argued, to ensure a "well-adjusted" economy that would provide employment to all those who wanted a job and were capable of holding one. State, local, and private relief, by contrast, would be responsible for the "unemployables" including the elderly, the disabled, children, and other "unadjusted" individuals.

Private relief organizations quickly "adjusted" to this new configuration, advancing what the Charity Organization Society of New York labeled the "therapeutic hypothesis." Long-term joblessness, they argued, could produce stress, mental disorders, and domestic violence—all the kinds of syndromes that would be central to the post–World War II transformation of private charity into nonprofit counseling documented by Andrew Morris (2009). These newly named "nonprofits" would then be a key ingredient for the next expansion of governance, Lyndon Johnson's Great Society with its reliance on "nonprofits for hire" (Smith and Lipsky 1993). Rather than relegating private charity to the prehistory of the New Deal, we should heed Marc Schneiberg's (2007) advice to moderate strong forms of path dependence with attention to "what's left on the path" and therefore available for repurposing in crises yet to come.

To build the federal piece of a new public-private configuration, Hopkins energetically transposed and repurposed schemas and resources (Sewell 1993). First, he declared that all public money must be spent by public agencies (Hopkins 1936). A few months later he captured a key resource for the federal effort, announcing that all public money must be handled by public employees. Formerly private social workers now became, en masse, government employees. He did not forbid relief in kind but rather allowed experimentation with cash relief. Finally, his initial policy that relief would be given regardless of race, marital status, or whether a person was on strike, cut out the need for the careful delineation of capacities and status that was central to the social worker's technology of the case method. And, in time, his push to limit relief and expand federal works projects preempted the need for social workers to supervise family budgets. What was left was the capture by public agencies of a large number of skilled social service administrators who could be set to different tasks.

19. Telegram from Gov. Herbert Lehman to FDR (May 19, 1932). TERA Correspondence 1931–1933. Box 7, Papers of Harry L. Hopkins, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library.

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These important changes in the character of social support make it tempting to think of the New Deal as a direct displacement of social work by citizen rights and entitlements powered by the political commitments of individual actors. As governor, Roosevelt proclaimed that "Home relief is being given to individuals to whom society will have failed in its obligations if it allows them to suffer through no fault of their own." Such statements have been taken as grounds to claim the power of ideas to move history: "In this one sentence, Roosevelt dashed the myth of self-reliance and asserted the responsibility of government to care for its citizens in time of depression. Relief was not a privilege, implied Roosevelt, but a right" (Kurzman 1974: 72).

But, looking more closely at Hopkins's deployment of skill, the work required to make unemployment relief free, not as charity but as a right, involved a repurposing of long-familiar social work methods in at least two respects. Rather than defending the practices of private social work, he transposed them, generating a new tactical repertoire for governing. The first of these repurposings lay in Hopkins's personal practice—the correspondence of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration reveals his recognition that local and state political organizations could be handled in the same way as poor or dysfunctional families. He sent in investigators to do confidential interviews. He collected information about politicians and his own staff, much of it sent in on exactly the same letterhead and forms that private social work agencies had used to report the undue drinking, poor housework, or ill-clad children of the poor (Lowitt and Beasley 1981).

Secondly, he reinforced FDR's use of the social worker's language of "adjustment" to insist on the continued importance of a jurisdiction of relief assigned to local and private agencies. What shifted was not the existence of a boundary between public and private relief, but rather its location. Private relief was now deemed inappropriate not only for those with jobs who could not support their families, but also for those who had the capacity to support themselves through work but only lacked a job. The jurisdiction of government relief ended with those entirely outside the labor market, the "unemployables."

But this left a wide domain in which private voluntarism remained a key element of the system of governance. Repeatedly in the archives, one sees Hopkins and even FDR contemplating how private voluntary organizations could be used to extend federal influence beyond the Tenth Amendment—to use the Red Cross to monitor state's implementation of their responsibilities for the unemployables, to allow naval reserve officers positioned along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to take themselves *as private volunteers*, along with their *government-owned* vessels, and to help the Red Cross in the response to the great floods that hit the region in 1938. As the nation fell back into recession by the late 1930s, the relief structure built by Hopkins protected itself from demands for a new flow of federal funds to support local relief by once again invoking the president's division of labor between federal responsibility and the jurisdiction and state and local policy along with private voluntarism. By 1938, Hopkins's successors would defend the importance of state, local, and private relief from calls by chambers of commerce for direct flows of federal funds to local relief efforts. Thus Hopkins's organizational practice reinforced the two-tiered character of the American welfare

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state, retracing the limits drawn by southern Democrats in Congress and reinscribing the disadvantages of race and gender so powerfully identified by scholars such as Jill Quadagno (1994), Suzanne Mettler (1998), and Ann Orloff (1993).

These efforts produced a mixture of private effort with government funding and authorization that, in the end, looked decidedly familiar to veterans of predepression private social work. As Edith Abbott, a leading figure in social service, noted in her review of Hopkins's *Spending to Save* (1936), Fred C. Croxton, a figure from Hoover's administration and Rockefeller circles, "was really the predecessor of Mr. Hopkins as federal relief administrator, without the title and the recognition that went to Mr. Hopkins" and he "allocated the first $300,000,000 of federal relief funds to the states and, measured by later emergency-relief standards, did it very well" (Abbott 1936: 685).

The result was a reconfiguration of infrastructural power or a revised model of what Brian Balogh, borrowing from Alexander Hamilton, has evocatively labeled "a government out of sight" (2009). Although the specific arrangements differed, it is important to recognize the extent to which the New Deal reconstructed the hybrid, overlapping, intersectional space that was central to Hoover's abilities as the "master of emergencies." Indeed, Hopkins and Roosevelt added an important element to this hybrid model by incorporating organized labor. This innovation contributed not only to the extraordinary power and "expansibility" of the warfare state of World War II (B. Sparrow 1996; J. Sparrow 2011), but also to the explosive business backlash of the late 1940s.

Organizing Powers in Eventful Times

To conclude this retelling of events, the lives of these two dead white men from Iowa underscore basic lessons about how not to waste a crisis. The first is simply to remember that even crises take time, a lesson more often missed by social scientists with schematic models than historians deeply engaged in narrative. But for both, it is important to remember that—and how—the horizon of possibility shifts as the crisis is endured. This lesson suggests a helpful change in imagery, from thinking about crises as shocks—discontinuities that cut across the entangled threads of history—to imagining them instead as rifts or extended openings and decouplings in the ordered fabric of a particular place and time. The opportunity—that which "must not be wasted" according to Mayor Emmanuel—is a chance to (re)organize powers.

By thinking about crises as extended opportunities to reorganize powers, we also appreciate how the deployment of skill, networks, and repertoires shapes the unfolding of eventful times. As the "master of emergencies," Hoover committed to a model of action through the choreography of voluntarism, business, and government that had been central to his earlier successes. His "genius" lay in the ability to articulate three models of organization with different premises and often conflicting elements. Hoover's failure, in an important respect, lay in his inability to defend his distinctive "political genius" when confronted by the demands of his allies for a much harder stance against the mixing of federal funds with private and voluntary relief efforts.

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This specific crisis was marked by Hoover's loss and Hopkins's reconstruction of a source of power that had long figured in American nation and state building—the capacity of strategic actors to sit at the intersection of multiple networks and models of organizing. Such a location is central to Padgett and Ansell's understanding of the conditions for "robust action" (1993). Such intersections are not simply given by the past or generated out of some geometry of social structure, but are actively contested and constructed. Hopkins and Roosevelt, to a degree that is not always appreciated, repurposed the tradition of American voluntarism. As Tocqueville said of the French Revolution, they "used the debris of the old order in building up the new."[20]

"Crisis" should not be assumed to be the moment between the old that is dying and the new that cannot yet be born, to borrow Gramsci's famous phrase (1971: 276). Instead, we should remember that just as humans share the vast majority of their genome with chimps (and a very large portion with mice as well), so too the situations before and after a crisis share a great deal of their social material. Even so, small changes can produce significant reorganizations of power. Eventful times allow for more rapid mutation and reorganization of powers in ways that can durably shift trajectories of social reproduction and change. Events such as the drought and industrial unemployment that become the Great Depression do not produce change by creating moments of pure randomness. Rather, they produce partial opportunities for reconfiguration that may be exploited by skillful actors. But the skill of the actors is conditional on their location within the contours of the crisis. Ironically, the greatest opportunity to enact change may not come in the first shock of the crisis, but rather after efforts to mobilize and repurpose familiar strategies have been proven unequal to the challenge.

This imagery also suggests a different approach to thinking about the broader patterns of institutional and political change in an era in which crises seem to have become a part of our new normal. The daily revelations of the capture of public programs by private firms or the uses of foundations and nonprofit organizations as vehicles for political projects should remind us that contemporary actors are still seeking to control that space of intersecting forms of power that was so central to Hoover's early triumphs as well as to Hopkins's work in realizing the aspirations of New Deal relief efforts. So if we rely uncritically on our usual division of labor—among social, political, and business history; between one period and another—we will miss much of the action that takes place in the spaces and relations in between. And, if we miss that, we will indeed have wasted this crisis.

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20. de Tocqueville 1955: vii.

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