

history. To get our bearings in the wake of insurgence, do we need a “way in,” so as to construct a moral and political interiority where liberation is the liberation of the responsible subject, and the unflinching assumption of a type of responsible citizenship amid a divided community? Or do we need a “way out” of this liberation narrative in which the terms of liberation and their narrative ordering or structuring have themselves not been questioned? In the face of the insufficiencies of both narratives to balance questions of moral responsibility with transformative political action, perhaps we need an altogether different type of waystation in order to think through the reconfiguration of that order that gives “inside” and “outside” meaning (Luxon 2021). Each of these possibilities demands that the colonial archive be connected deliberately and thoughtfully to a social institution that is querying the relationship of freedom and history by cultivating new social relations and new imaginaries. Here, I want to push hard on what it is that we political theorists turn to archives to accomplish. Although we have come to recognize that archives should *not* operate under the sign of inclusion—giving voice to the voiceless—we have not yet figured out how to use them in the service of world-making in periods of radical change. After all, world-making is not a process of simply groping toward a collective self-understanding of an inchoate project where the archivist can discern that process after the fact, so to speak. It also is a question of retrospectively a certain past viewed as binding and a certain future viewed as shared to create new modes of sociality, obligation, and representation. Taking up the challenge requires a more rigorous confrontation with how we engage in artefaction. That is, how do we re-create contexts in the midst of their transformation and to whom do we hold ourselves accountable for this figurative work?

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ARCHIVAL SILENCE: HOW DO WE WRITE THE HISTORY OF THE SUBALTERN WHO CANNOT SPEAK?

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One of the most profound paradoxes of archival research is how we investigate histories that do *not* appear in the archives. This is a problem particularly when we attempt to trace the lives, thoughts, and practices of some of the most marginalized people in society: those who are excluded from view, pushed to the margins, or made to disappear completely. Such silences are not accidental. Rather, they are potent evidence of subordination *and* often causal means for enacting such subordination. Silences constitute a systemic problem of archival evidence, testimony, voice, and information about the lives of those people who are most marginalized and subordinated in society. As a result, some of the most potent injustices of our time become invisible in the archives. They fall into an epistemic black hole and often work their effects through the same means.

Spivak (1988) posed this question with signature clarity and rigor, asking whether the subaltern can speak. The answer to such a question is complex, both for Spivak and those influenced by her. We are inquiring not only about literal speech but also a whole host of phenomena that foreclose the social presence of subordinated people. Asking whether the subaltern can speak is ultimately an epistemic question, one that challenges the very construction of the subject and its participation in modern societies.

It would be too simplistic to say that this is merely a matter of exclusion. We might well be talking about people who are *included* in the archive but whose contributions, voices, and even presence pass with no notice. Here, the subaltern might “speak” yet remain unheard, unseen, unnoticed, ignored, misunderstood, uncomprehended, or delegitimated. Therefore, exclusion is only one dimension of archival silence. Equally important are the pathways of silent inclusion, obscuring, rendering invisible, and delegitimizing the subaltern.

The question is how such silences are obscured, how they become absent from the archives. That is exactly the problem: silences by definition are not present, but they may simply mask something that is present but imperceptible. They may be a product of our own perception, or they may reflect a genuine absence. Such epistemic considerations lie at the heart of archival silence, and they present us with many puzzles. The absence of the subaltern from the archives suggests that something problematic is at work, but the absence itself is...silent. Subaltern silence is a non-object, a lack, an unexplained absence. In its pure form, it

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presents us with a formidable paradox. The very imperceptibility of such silence removes the subaltern from view, causing us to be unaware that anything bad has occurred.

To work in the face of such a paradox, we must devise carefully thought-out interpretive strategies. Although silence is by definition undetectable, there often are other clues that can point toward its presence. The presence of silence might sound paradoxical: What, after all, is the difference between silence and...nothing at all? Here, we must acknowledge that—in the archives at least—silence often has some positivity. It can be indicated by various other practices and archival traces.

I have searched for these traces across 200 years of French colonialism and Caribbean postcoloniality (Olson 2023, 2015). My particular focus is on the French slave colony Saint-Domingue and the modern nation of Haiti that emerged from it. I aim to carefully plot the penumbras of silence, looking for gaps, ruptures, and ambiguities in the archives. All of this provides source material for observing how they reveal the subtle presence of subordination that otherwise could go unnoticed.

Close attention to the archives often reveals that silence is an active achievement. It is created by specific practices of *silencing*. The Haitian colonial archives display many of these practices: silencing through law and violence, which are relatively obvious, but also more subtle practices of containment, displacement, resignification, delegitimation, and other ways of rendering people invisible and inaudible—sometimes in plain sight. These strategies of silencing develop continuously over several centuries: silencing becomes more subtle, diffuse, pervasive, and effective. By tracing these practices, we often can infer the actual forms of silence left in their wake.

In addition to the practices that produce silence, silences themselves can sometimes be detected by careful interpretation. Subordination often is not clean or absolute. Rather, there are frequent ambiguities, loose ends, and lingering intuitions that some voice or presence has been foreclosed. In these cases, silences can have a penumbral quality, with shadowy edges and ambiguous boundaries. Careful interpretation can reveal traces pointing toward something broader and bigger that has been removed from view.

In these cases, it is important to preserve the ambiguity of the original sources and to work within it. Otherwise, we risk silencing those sources yet again by our own reactions, biases, and over-hasty conclusions. Ambiguous traces of subaltern silence must be drawn

out carefully in an epistemically sophisticated way. At times, this means *not* being able to draw a determinate conclusion about the facts of the matter. For instance, there was an upstart agrarian rebellion in postcolonial Haiti in 1844: the Army of Sufferers. They succeeded in overthrowing the Haitian government and made various attempts to explain their dissatisfaction. These statements were so inchoate and ambiguous, however, that we cannot determine what they were trying to say. Nonetheless, we learn much about the silencing of these people by observing the traces of their attempts to speak. Sometimes observing the possibility of archival

silence is the best we can do, and our conclusions themselves must remain ambiguous. Much can be added to what we understand about subaltern silence by observing these moments of ambiguity.

Sometimes silences are revealed by the reaction to them. The Haitian archives overwhelmingly consist of elite sources: memoirs, administrative correspondence, news reports, business records, political manifestos, pamphlets, broadsheets, regulatory proposals, and so on. They often vividly reveal elite reaction to something that is happening *sub rosa*—removed from our view and potentially from theirs as well—but that was chafing and bothering the dominant classes. Such phenomena often register the psychic tensions of colonial subordination. This may take the form of elite reaction to slave fugitivity or rampant paranoia about potential dangers that might befall those who exercise control over the colonies. In the Haitian archives, we see anxieties of being poisoned by disgruntled slaves, fear of incitement from abolitionist infiltrators, and even paranoia about what might happen if the doctrines of the French Revolution became known in the colonies. Here, we do not hear the voices of silenced subalterns, but we have the often-fevered speculations of those silencing them. The anxious discourse of these elites is finely detailed, implicitly confessing the ills that they have inflicted on those they dominate. Reading between the lines provides a vivid portrait of the forms and practices of silencing, as well as fears about what might happen if those regimes of silence were to fail.

Of course, such elite reports are themselves always suspect. They often are motivated by anxious speculation that reveals as much about the psychic state of those recording it as it does about the state of social relations in the colonies. Colonial elites had many fears and many concerns. Sometimes they were justified and sometimes they were merely confessions of the bad conscience of colonial domination. As a result, it is always important to interpret these sources with care, attempting to discern moments of subaltern silence within the noise of elite discourse.

The passage of time itself sometimes reveals things that otherwise would be hidden from view. Silences can have an episodic character, appearing and disappearing over time. The Haitian postcolonial archives, for instance, often reveal tensions along intersecting axes of race, class, and geography. This takes the specific form of tension between a loudly talkative dominant, mixed-race class, on one hand, and a predominantly silent stratum of Black, rural subsistence farmers on the other. The latter group is almost entirely absent from the archives, except for several

occasions when they rise up in anger against those who dominate them. In these moments, we suddenly see something like a subaltern voice, although one that is poorly expressed and almost silent itself. The episodic appearance and disappearance of such moments of voice reveal silences that are undetectable in their own time but whose existence can be triangulated from brief moments when that silence was breached.

In sum, the problem of silence is crucial to our understanding of subaltern subordination. The paradoxes that surround it do not go away, however; they remain stubborn epistemic and interpretive challenges. The best we can do is approach the archives with creative ingenuity, using traces of what *is* there to discern that which has been erased, effaced, excluded, and silenced.

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"DOES IT MATTER...?" POLITICAL THEORY IN THE ARCHIVES OF WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.

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When I began the research for what would become *The Fire Is Upon Us: James Baldwin, William F. Buckley Jr., and the Debate over*

This article focuses on a question that remains urgent in our politics: How does the self-proclaimed "respectable," "non-racist" Right use the political energy of the "unrespectable," "racist" Right while denying that it is doing so?

Race in America, my sense of the scope of the book was modest (Buccola 2019). I proposed to write a short book that focused on the evening in February 1965 when James Baldwin, who Malcolm X (1968) aptly called "the poet" of the civil rights revolution, went toe-to-toe with William F. Buckley, Jr., who might have been justly called "the poet" of the conservative counterrevolution. The setting for the clash was the Cambridge Union, the world's oldest debating society, and the motion before the house that evening—"The American Dream Is at the Expense of the American Negro"—was the perfect one for Baldwin and Buckley to debate. Baldwin—son of Harlem turned revolutionary prophet—versus Buckley—son of privilege turned guardian of hierarchy—would face off to debate race and the American Dream in front of an international audience. The stage seemed to be set for a concise, dramatic book in which the debate would be the centerpiece of the action and the driving force of the narrative.

But then I entered the archives, and everything changed. The first archive I visited was the William F. Buckley, Jr., Papers at Yale University (Buckley Papers), a vast collection to which I would return many times. About midway through writing my first draft of the book, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture opened the James Baldwin Papers (Baldwin Papers) to researchers and off I went for the first of many trips to research that collection. Then there were the archives of the supporting characters in my story. It was in the archives that I got a true sense of the story I needed to tell, the heart of which was the backstory of each man—and I could not get to that heart without the archives.

To defend this claim here, I limit this article to a particular strand in the Buckley side of the story. Given the theme of the debate, one of my primary aims was to uncover, understand, and reconstruct how Buckley and the writers he surrounded himself with at his *National Review* magazine reacted to the Black liberation struggle of the 1950s and 1960s. As I did this research, the published record was rich with evidence. Buckley used the pages of *National Review* as a platform from which he and his colleagues sought in the area of "race relations," as he put it in 1965, to be "extremely articulate, non-racist while not attempting a dogmatic racial egalitarianism either."¹ A good history of this aspect of the American Right could be written using only the published writings of these figures. We could, for example, use only the published writings of Buckley and his circle at *National Review* to provide a sound sense of how one group of right-wing intellectuals justified their resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education*, the sit-in protests, the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, this would be an incomplete history. This history provides a sense of how these men justified their positions, but it would not provide a sense of what they did when out of the public eye to thwart Black liberation. To understand how conservative power adapts to forces rising to displace it, we must delve into these shadowy spaces. We need, among other things, to look in the archives.

This article focuses on a question that remains urgent in our politics: How does the self-proclaimed "respectable," "non-racist" Right use the political energy of the "unrespectable," "racist" Right while denying that it is doing so?² The archives of Buckley and his circle offer many examples to ponder. Consider first the 1958 correspondence among Buckley, segregationist polemicist James Jackson Kilpatrick, and Citizens' Council leader William J. Simmons. Recall that Buckley was seeking to fashion a "non-racist" justification for resistance to civil rights. According to Buckley's understanding of "non-racism," cozying up publicly with Kilpatrick was acceptable but cozying up publicly with Simmons was problematic. Kilpatrick was an ardent defender of segregation, but he could be counted on—most of the time—to dress his segregationist arguments in the garments of constitutional theory. Simmons was a leader of a group that was aptly called The Uptown, or Rotary Club, Ku Klux Klan. "Same values as