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The Statesman and the Dynamo: Authority in *The Education of Henry Adams*

Abstract: Both great-grandson and grandson to American presidents, Henry Adams wrote *The Education of Henry Adams* in 1907 as a critique of American modernity and what he analyzed as the end of republican politics. According to Adams, developments in capitalism, the physical and biological sciences, and “machine politics” rendered obsolete an early-modern form of representative authority through which statesmen educated citizens as heroes and great men. Defining education as the appeal to and identification with an ultimate authority, Adams frames his autobiography as a string of attempts at education through Washington politics, journalism and teaching, and discoveries in thermodynamics. I argue that Adams uses the *Education* to respond to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s injunction in *Representative Men*: that democratic men must educate through example and, most importantly, must stepping down to allow others’ authority. By framing the *Education* as a critique of modernity and his failure to modernize, Adams insists that 20th century democracy will require a “new American” and new concepts of authority and education. While the *Education*’s content presents Adams’s diagnosis of democracy, its form diminishes Adams’s authority for what new American might succeed him. Readas a work of political theory, the *Education* not only helps explain elite anxieties over American citizenship at the turn of the century, but clarifies broader connections between literary and political representation.

*Draft: please do not circulate beyond the panel without author’s permission.*

Man is his own star.

* Epilogue to Beaumont and Fletcher, *Honest Man’s Fortune*;

Epigraph to R.W. Emerson, “Self-Reliance”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Max Weber concluded his 1917 “Science as a Vocation” with an invitation for those troubled by his diagnosis of the modern disenchanted world. “To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man,” Weber wrote: “may he rather return silently, without the usual publicity build-up of renegades, but simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him.”[[2]](#footnote-2) These words may well describe what motivated the American Henry Adams, a fellow diagnostician of modernity, to write *The Education of Henry Adams* in 1907 and publish it posthumously six months after his death in 1918. For while Adams, like Weber, wrote extensively on the shift from “magical means” to “technical means and calculations” in American politics, Adams framed the autobiographical *Education* as a return to the self-inquiry of Augustine’s *Confessions*.[[3]](#footnote-3) Adams, however, did not run to the arms of the old churches in turning away from modernity, but rather looked to scientific authority as the new grounds for magic: for a new way to reenchant the world. The goal of this essay is to read *The Education of Henry Adams* as posing a question distinct from other critics of modernity – how to define the self once authority is gone – and as answering this question through a mode of self-inquiry that updates Augustine’s audience and interlocutor from God to modern science.

Political theorists have generally recognized Adams as the great American pessimist. Wilson Carey McWilliams called him “an annoying, as well as perplexing, figure in American thought and letters.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Judith Shklar named the *Education* “a matchless contribution to the literature of pure sadness.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Recent works by James P. Young and Garry Wills have returned to Adams’s broader oeuvre to find a complex historian and theorist whose insight is often clouded by other studies’ fixation with the *Education*.[[6]](#footnote-6) Born February 16, 1838, in Boston, Adams was the great-grandson of one president and the grandson of another.[[7]](#footnote-7) Unlike his forefathers, he never took any influential political office. He was an assistant to his diplomat father during the Civil War, and turned down several significant federal positions after, despite knowing personally every president in his lifetime; likely his greatest influence was his close relationship to Secretary of State John Hay.[[8]](#footnote-8) Citizens knew Adams better as a journalist and historian. He wrote many biographies of statesmen and volumes of the *History of the United States during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*. He composed two novels, one published anonymously, the other pseudonymously, and later in life wrote on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, his *Mont Saint-Michel and Chartres* a partner text to the *Education*.

Adams’s great contribution to American political thought is his comprehensive analysis of modernity. In politics, the republican statesmanship of the founding and postrevolutionary periods had succumbed to the “machine politics” of patronage systems in New York and other urban centers, with changes in immigration straining representatives’ ability to present uniform, monolithic ideals. In the study of history, the increasing interest in structural accounts obscured the agency of previous leaders like George Washington or Thomas Jefferson. Technology extended people across the country through the railroad, the steamer, and the telegraph; science split people into atoms. Modernity changed not simply the political or material makeup of the nation, but to Adams it changed how Americans *saw* America. If politicians weren’t paralyzed in the web of patronage politics, they remained but an effect of atomic or structural causes. Like Thomas Carlyle, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Adams forecast the end of great men in democratic times. Like Max Weber and Friedrich Nietzsche, Adams saw in modernity the disenchantment of authority and politics.

Unlike those authors, Adams framed this investigation of modernity and its concomitant crisis of authority through the personal narrative of *The Education of Henry Adams*. Although Adams never referred to the book as an autobiography, it provides an intimate-though-third-person account of Adams’s life from youth to the time of writing.[[9]](#footnote-9) By analyzing modernity through self-inquiry, Adams addresses a question that perhaps only Emerson and Nietzsche had come close to investigating: with the former authorities of God, history, great statesmen, and even individual agency gone, how do you construct the self? Adams frames this question as his search for “education,” presaging Hannah Arendt’s asking “What is Authority?” when “even this prepolitical authority which ruled the relations between adults and children, teachers and pupils, is no longer secure.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Carlyle, Tocqueville, and Mill had been concerned with the loss of great men: Adams is concerned with the loss of those who looked up to them.

This is the first of two arguments I plan to make of *The Education of Henry Adams*. The second focuses specifically on Adams’s form of self-inquiry. It is significant that it was Adams’s editor to add the book’s first subtitle, “*An Autobiography*,” and not its author. Developing toward the end of the Enlightenment, autobiography builds individual authority through the mastery of one’s experience and its public declaration. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* doesn’t simply narrate Franklin’s rejection of paternal authority and entrepreneurial development: it also exemplifies Franklin’s turning to the self as the grounds of analysis through which to know the world. Authors before Adams like Franklin or Frederick Douglass had looked to autobiography to replace paternal authority with one invested in the individual and reading populace.

But with those authorities slipping away, Adams writes the *Education* as a return to the confession, a genre of literature reliant upon a pre-Enlightenment conception of authority and epistemology: to write on the self, as Augustine did, is to know oneself *through* an external authority, rather than to confirm one’s self as authority alone. The goal of the *Education* recalls that of the *Confessions*, whose author told God “in you my ‘scattered selves are reunited’”[[11]](#footnote-11) Adams, though, will not blindly run back to the old institutions of Weber’s invitation: instead, he writes the *Education* to locate authority not in the individual or God, but in the developments of science that characterized modernity. Adams’s interest in the discovery of the atom, the second law of thermodynamics, and in particular the dynamo, isn’t his succumbing to technical means, but rather an attempt to find enchantment and faith in science. Through this, Adams figured, the “new American” could recover a sense of self in modern times (*EH*, 390).

In the past few decades, political theorists have increasingly turned to literature to expand the canon of concepts and authors studied.[[12]](#footnote-12) In American political thought in particular, authors like John Schaar have greatly expanded our appreciation of the diverse methods of political writing.[[13]](#footnote-13) But whereas scholars have increasingly turned to the novel, pamphlets, or oratorship in the study of political theory, the trend has been toward progressive, emancipatory, optimistic authors. Henry Adams, the self-titled “conservative christian anarchist,” is an example of an author whose politics are not quite as self-evident, and thus who rewards more careful consideration of his writing and the *Education*’s unique form of political inquiry (*EH*, 319).

The first two sections of the paper lay out Adams’s critique of modernity in the narrative of the *Education*, by looking at (1) his conception of authority as rooted in a republican form of educative statesmanship, and at (2) the conditions of modernity eroding this authority. In the final section, I explain (3) how the *Education* inherits Augustine’s orientation toward readers as eavesdroppers, his didactic style of writing, and confession as a form of self-inquiry looking to external authority, looking at particular at Adams’s move from the religious Virgin to the scientific Dynamo. In closing, I evaluate the success of the *Education*’s solution and offer alternative approaches to modern politics and autobiography more progressive than Adams’s.

**Authority and Education in Modern Times**

In the opening chapters of the *Education*, Adams’s recollections of his youth in Boston and Quincy introduce readers to an old guard of American representatives: these statesmen provide fixed ideals through which citizens define themselves and their places in society. Around the age of six, Adams spends a summer with his grandfather John Quincy Adams, known in his family simply as “the President.” One day, the young Henry refuses to leave for class. The President, exiting his library, takes Adams’s hand and silently leads him to school. Although Henry sees avenues for escape on the way, he is “paralysed with awe,” unexpectedly reverent:

This act, contrary to the inalienable rights of boys, and nullifying the social compact, ought to have made him dislike his grandfather for life. He could not recall that it had this effect even for a moment. With a certain maturity of mind, the child must have recognized that the President, though a tool of tyranny, had done his disreputable work with a certain intelligence. He had shown no temper, no irritation, no personal feeling, and had made no display of force. Above all, he had held his tongue. (11)

As in Arendt’s definition of authority as the absence of force, J.Q. “had said nothing; he had uttered no syllable of revolting cant about the duty of obedience and the wickedness of resistance to law; he had shown no concern in the matter; hardly even a consciousness of the boy’s existence.” His authority doesn’t need to explain itself: it doesn’t need to address its subjects.

Adams’s early descriptions of Boston politics invoke nineteenth-century debates over heroic leadership best articulated by Carlyle and Emerson, both of whom Adams mentions frequently throughout the *Education* (30, 27). In his 1841 *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History*, Carlyle argues that heroes like Dante, Luther, and Napoleon were “leaders of men,” the “creators… of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or attain.”[[14]](#footnote-14) On the one hand, the hero is creative and active; on the other, he provides an historical ideal to which other men appeal for guidance. “We cannot look,” Carlyle writes, “however imperfectly, upon a great man, without gaining something by him.”[[15]](#footnote-15) The hero is “a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven… of native original insight, of manhood and heroic nobleness.”

J.Q. Adams is part of an entourage of statesmen who provide the young Henry ideals to emulate. In the second chapter, Adams exhorts his father’s political character as “the larger part of his education”: Charles Francis Adams “possessed the only perfectly balanced mind that ever existed in the name” (*EH*, 21). Like Carlyle’s heroes above the masses, C.F. Adams had “the faculty of standing apart without seeming aware that he was alone.” He’s different, but his character works with “mastery of form”: twice, Henry calls his father a “model” (21, 22). Other great men guide Adams. Charles Sumner, “the classical ornament of the anti-slavery party,” was “the boy’s ideal of greatness; the highest product of nature and art” (24). He was “heroic.” These men, Adams will write later, figure in his “story of education” “only as educators or educated”: their influence “on the mind of a boy… was wholly political and literary” (28).

Alongside these heroes are classic republican statesmen preserved in New England. Of Daniel Webster, Sumner and others, “it was the old Ciceronian idea of government by *the best* that produced the long line of New England statesmen” (25). These were heroes like Carlyle’s, monolithic: “the little group of men in Mount Vernon Street [Adams et al.] were an off-shoot of this system; they were statesmen, not politicians; they guided public opinion but were little guided by it.” Carlyle “found friendship and alliances” there, and Adams describes the men as varieties of Tocqueville and Mill. Boston, he writes, “had solved the universe” (26). When he ventures to Washington, D.C. for the first time, Adams observes the same: “Senators were a species; they all wore an air, as they wore a blue dress coat or brass buttons; they were Roman” (35). These are leaders to be seen, to stare forward and speak little.

Unlike Carlyle’s heroes, doers of great deeds, representatives’ greatness for Adams is almost purely educative: they influence citizens not through gentle coercion but as passive, relational figures. Adams frequently describes heroic figures as silent, isolated, or inertial. J.Q., the great image of silent authority, a “protégé of George Washington,” was “a statesman designated by destiny, with nothing to do but look directly ahead, follow orders, and march” (40). When Senator Timothy Howe likens Adams to a begonia later in the book, Adams considers it his “ideal of the successful statesman”: “standing always in the most prominent positions” despite having “no useful purpose” (228). Adams’s heroes, educative as they are, don’t really do much in the *Education*.[[16]](#footnote-16) They’re transcendent, but they stand for Adams far more as living monuments to provide ideals to emulate, rather than as active, instrumental forces.

According to Adams and others, these great men were disappearing. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Tocqueville and Mill had mourned the passing of great men in democratic times. Carlyle wrote *Heroes* in reaction to what he saw as the leveling of human life in a “machine universe.”[[17]](#footnote-17) In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle’s fictional Teufelsdröckh claimed “the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb.”[[18]](#footnote-18) According to these authors, the democracies of America and Europe brought with equality a humbling mediocrity from which few great men could emerge. In the 1835 introduction to the first volume of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville lamented what he saw as the loss of “the majesty of laws”: “the people despise authority while fearing it.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Worse yet, “we have destroyed those independent beings who were capable of fighting single-handed against tyranny.” In 1859, as Adams left college, Mill echoed similar regrets in *On Liberty*. The order of the day in democratic times was “mediocrity.”[[20]](#footnote-20) The people no longer learn from “dignitaries in Church or State”: “No government by a democracy or a numerous aristocracy… ever did or could rise above mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign Many have let themselves be guided (which in their best times they always have done).”[[21]](#footnote-21) Both Tocqueville and Mill, whom Adams at one point calls “the two high priests of our faith,” saw the educating impact of great men fading.[[22]](#footnote-22) True genius, Mill thought, was measured in “eccentricity,” and “that so few now dare to be eccentric marks the chief danger of the time.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Adams will meet Mill in 1863 while a diplomat in England during the Civil War, and in a chapter called “Eccentricity” will summarize other English claims that Americans lacked greatness (*EH*, 99). To his English colleagues, “the American mind was not a thought at all; it was a convention, superficial, narrow and ignorant; a mere cutting instrument, practical, economical, sharp and direct” (141). English society had been aristocratic, spontaneous, creative: American society was instrumental, predictable, common.

Writing in the first-person allows Adams to capture particular examples of this change in politics. At the end of his education at Harvard, he runs for Class Orator, “the representative of his class” (51). This position strikes Adams as “political as well as literary success”: exactly “the sort of eighteenth-century combination that fascinated an eighteenth-century boy.” Adams figures this position will be like that of great statesmen, and in some ways it is: the process allows “no active candidacy,” Adams to be chosen without his consultation (52). But when Adams wins the oratorship, he notes with surprise that he’s neither the best scholar nor the most popular. He’s the mediocre pick. His only pleasure is a gentleman’s positive review of Adams’s “self-possession”: his ability to “stand alone” like the statesmen of old (53).

According to Adams, the republican New England statesmen were not authoritative for their actions but their educative potential: authority is ideal, imitable, and inertial, and guides less citizens’ behavior than their identification with these figures. Authority is, above all, aristocratic: it requires social hierarchy with little interaction between ranks, and it represents not the *average* but the *best* of citizenry. Far from the rebellious teenage years of the self-educated Ben Franklin, the *Education* portrays young Adams looking always to learn from these men.

**The Political, Demographic, and Scientific Conditions of Modernity**

Yet early in Adams’s *Education*, these great men begin to disappear. At the end of its first chapter, Adams writes that “this prehistoric stage of education” ended at age ten, upon J.Q. Adams’s falling, his paralysis, and his death two days after collapsing symbolically on the House floor (16). From early in the *Education*, Adams suggests that this concept of statesmen is unfit for the future. Webster and others of Boston exemplified the politics of “turning away one’s eyes as one approaches a chasm” (27). Other critics of modernity explained these political changes as almost an inevitability of democratic politics. Although Adams saw the Civil War as the first chasm challenging American politics, he specifies three major conditions of modernity in the *Education* that will decentralize, relocate, or obscure old forms of authority: political corruption sponsored by patronage systems and scandal, changes in immigration as captured in the rise of urban centers and close of the frontier, and developments in the physical and biological sciences.

Adams’s first brush with corruption occurs shortly after his initial visit to Washington. Before arriving in the capital, Adams had witnessed “nothing but eighteenth-century statesmanship”: but “America and he began, at the same time, to become aware of a new force under the innocent surface of party machinery” (38). Adams watches a bargain between the Massachusetts Democrats and the Free Soilers, exchanging the state’s votes for a seat in the Senate. The Free Soilers give the spoils to Sumner, and Adams “learned the nature of a flagrantly corrupt political bargain in which he was too good to take part but not too good to take profit.” Before the late nineteenth century, American parties had already relied on machinery: on patronage and collusion outside the election process. Statesmen benefitted from this machinery, but didn’t dirty their hands with it. Sumner’s windfall is Adams’s first clue that politicians, not statesmen, had begun to create “a machine which no one but themselves could run.”

Before he has any choice, Adams is already implicated in the political decay that would lead to the urban patronage politics of political machines in the 1880s and 90s: “he had himself helped to deduce Charles Sumner from the sum of political corruption. On that line, too, education could not go further. Tammany Hall stood at the end of the vista” (38-39). At the end of the nineteenth century, a series of political machines would shift power from statesmen to pockets of influence in urban centers of America. In the wake of patronage politics, neither George Washington nor or D.C were any longer “an ultimate relation, like the Pole Star” (37). The rise of patronage shifted politics to New York, disseminating authority to the various machines. An 1898 cartoon titled “New York’s New Solar System” showed society’s new orbit around the sun: Richard “Boss” Croker of Tammany Hall (*fig. 1*).[[24]](#footnote-24)



Figure :

“New York’s New Solar System”

Machines nurtured a nationwide turn from politics to the economy, even within the state. Adams wrote of William Seward’s diminishing influence after the war, that “the State department had ceased to be the centre of his interest, and the Treasury had taken its place” (*EH*, 193). Here was the rise of political economy: the trust, the gold standard, the banks, the railroad. Even if the state increasingly put more hands on the national economy, politicians couldn’t keep theirs clean. The best example of this in the *Education* is Jay Gould’s attempt to corner the gold market in 1869, through buying up gold and forcing wheat farmers to sell by railroad (211). What startles Adams is President Ulysses S. Grant’s involvement in the scandal and the administration’s lack of transparency (212). Grant’s corruption worries Adams, “a young man who had hitched his wagon, as Emerson told him, to the star of reform” (213). For Adams, the trust and scandal are almost inevitable in democracy: in an 1870 article, he wrote of the corporation that “wherever a popular and limited government exists this difficulty will be found in its path.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

The authority of pre-modern politics?: “politicians had tacitly given it up,” and now “nine tenths of men’s political energies must henceforth be wasted on expedients to piece out, – to patch, – or, in vulgar language, to tinker, – the political machine as often as it broke down” (220). Under the authority of God or heroes, power distributes from a central source out to society. “Modern politics,” Adams writes later in the *Education*, is “a struggle not of men but of forces. The men become every year more and more creatures of force, massed about central powerhouses. The conflict is no longer between the men, but between the motors that drive the men, and the men tend to succumb to their own motive forces” (331).

The immediate effect on Adams is to turn his interests away from Washington politics, and eventually toward studying statesmen as cogs in the machine, “as measures of mass and motion” (309). In 1880, he’ll anonymously publish *Democracy*, a novel set to capture modern politics.[[26]](#footnote-26) The book’s main character, Lightfoot Lee, goes to Washington “to see with her own eyes the action of primary forces; to touch with her own hand the massive machinery of society; to measure with her own mind the capacity of the motive power.”[[27]](#footnote-27) With many references to Adams’s socialite life on Lafayette Square, *Democracy* follows Lee through her courtship by a senator corrupted by lobbyists. Here too Adams mourns a past politics.

The deeper problem with political machines in America is that they further fragmented the nation into diverse constituent parts. Many machines, located as they were in bustling urban industrial centers, had relied on immigrant support earlier in the century, and changes in the acceleration and demographics of immigration would add to American multiplicity. Though oblique, mentions of race in the *Education* suggest that while Adams wasn’t wholly against open immigration, he recognized it as fuel for the machines and thus another obstacle for democracy.

After assisting his diplomat father for the north during the Civil War, Adams describes his return from London as though he were one of the many just migrating to America:

Society offered the profile of a long, straggling caravan, stretching loosely towards the prairies, its few score of leaders far in advance and its millions of immigrants, negroes and Indians far in the rear, somewhere in archaic time… Meanwhile each newcomer needed to slip into a place as near the head of the caravan as possible, and needed most to know where the leaders could be found. (*EH*, 185)

The racial landscape of America was changing, and (according to Adams) its newcomers needed guidance. In addition to freed blacks’ slow and resisted integration into the demos, some thirty-five million Europeans would cross the ocean to settle in the United States by 1910; these numbers spiked in the 1880s and 90s, at the peak of Adams’s academic career.[[28]](#footnote-28) For most of the nineteenth century, lax immigration law, open land, and the flexibility of frontier democracy meant that immigrants had a relatively easy time moving across the country.[[29]](#footnote-29) Political machines mid-century often aimed to naturalize immigrants immediately prior to elections, and, as a result, party interests usually united to overcome nativist legislation.[[30]](#footnote-30) Developments in transportation and communication eased the passage of immigrants across the continent. Merely six years after Adams’s birth, “he and his eighteenth-century, troglodytic Boston were suddenly cut apart… by the opening of the Boston and Albany Railroad; the appearance of the first Cunard steamers in the bay” (*EH*, 4-5).[[31]](#footnote-31) Toward the end of the century, German and Irish immigration subsided as Eastern and Southern European immigration surged: Polish, Italian, and Russian immigrants accompanied consistent migration of Chinese workers to the west and rising Jewish immigration to the east.[[32]](#footnote-32) In 1890, the U.S. Census declared the frontier closed, and as public lands disappeared in the west, immigrants arriving in the east increasingly remained in the cities, enticed by new industry.[[33]](#footnote-33) The cities where big political machines churned were changing drastically. Although in 1890 a third of Americans lived in cities, two-thirds of immigrants lived there, and by 1910, 80% of those coming through Ellis Island would stay in urban centers.[[34]](#footnote-34) With the increased movement of black Americans from the south and the incipient emergence of suburbs, cities like New York presented a microcosm of economic and ethnic multiplicity.

Adams does not dwell on race at length in the *Education*, nor was he particularly progressive on the topic. Though he described himself as an abolitionist, he misunderstood the need for a more efficient Reconstruction following the war.[[35]](#footnote-35) In letters toward the end of his life, and in a few spots in the *Education*, Adams reveals his growing anti-Semitism at a time somewhat premature of global arguments scapegoating the Jewish for the corruptions of capitalism.[[36]](#footnote-36) These comments are connected to a general uneasiness about the urban city. Around the time that he returns from London, Adams writes:

His world was dead. Not a Polish Jew fresh from Warsaw or Cracow, – not a furtive Yacoob or Ysaac still reeking of the Ghetto, snarling a weird Yiddish to the officers of the customs, – but had a keener instinct, an intenser energy, and a freer hand than he, – American of Americans, with Heaven knew how many Puritans and Patriots behind him, and an education that had cost a civil war. (*EH*, 186)

Given that Adams invokes a few identifications that he spends the rest of the book lamenting, it isn’t entirely clear whether he’s endorsing this racial stereotype or not. But at the very least, in this moment and others he perpetuates what was an increasing tendency in the American mind to connect new immigrants to the ills of the city, and thus corruption. In the same passage, Adams describes himself lost among them: “a flotsam or jetsam of wreckage.”

Throughout the rest of the book, Adams depicts the American people as increasingly caught between the cogs of new machines: “for a hundred years, between 1793 and 1893, the American people had hesitated, vacillated, swayed forward and back,” between industry and capitalism, “centralising, and mechanical” (269). It came down to the gold standard, the American preference for which signaled to Adams the election of “the capitalistic system with all its necessary machinery.” Like with Grant’s hand in the gold scandal, the people’s submission to the gold standard indicates to Adams the fall of republican ideals and the rise of instrumental politics. For “the rest was [a] question of gear; of running machinery; of economy; and involved no disputed principle.” “There,” Adams writes, “education in domestic politics stopped.”

Those technological advancements that continued to spread Americans across the continent symbolized for Adams the final condition of modernity – perhaps the most important – that had spurred the crisis in authority prefacing his book. As Adams told Brooks in a letter while writing the *Education*, “as I understand it, the whole social, political and economical problem is the resultant of the mechanical development of power.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Developments in modern science not only scattered citizens in networks of railroads, canals, and telegraphs. Like many thinkers of his time (such William James, Henri Bergson, and the social Darwinists), Adams saw world-historic implications in discoveries like that of the atom or of the second law of thermodynamics. In particular, Adams would be on the forefront of American historians who insisted on historical theories influenced by science: he dedicated the final seven chapters of the *Education* (and his final writings) to developing theories such as “A Kinetic Theory of History” or the “Law of Acceleration.”[[38]](#footnote-38) These developments resulted in chaos: “suddenly society felt itself dragged into situations altogether new and anarchic, – situations which it could not affect, but which painfully affected it” (*EH*, 380). Evolution and thermodynamics predicted progress or decline; the atom and the dynamo obscured or supplanted God and man’s agency with electricity.

According to Adams, the American has become obsessed, reverent toward technology and science. “The American layman had lost sight of ideals,” Adams writes, “the American priest had lost sight of faith” (258). American faith no longer looks to God but the railroad: not the leviathan of the Old Testament but the sprawling railway monopolies captured in Frank Norris’s 1901 *The Octopus*. This “one active interest” has “absorbed the energies of some sixty million people to the exclusion of every other force” (*EH*, 258). For Adams to understand how the new American will be educated, he needed to find an authority from which these energies originate. Adams himself had looked for parentage in scientific discovery. While in England during the Civil War, Adams meets “the geological champion of Darwin,” Sir Charles Lyell, whose *Principles of Geology* Adams would review for the *North American* (175).[[39]](#footnote-39) Lyell had popularized a concept of “Natural Uniformity,” arguing that the geological processes that created Earth still govern today (176). Upon learning the basics of evolution, “Adams gave up at the attempt to begin at the beginning, and tried starting at the end, – himself” (178). Attempting to connect himself back to the first vertebrate (“a very respectable fish”), Adams reflects his surprise to “find a legitimate parentage as modern as though just caught in the Severn below”: “To an American in search of a father, it mattered nothing whether the father breathed through lungs, or walked on fins, or on feet” (179). Among its many impacts, Darwin’s discoveries had disabused the modern mind’s belief in God. In geology and evolution, Adams continues to look for the patriarchal lineage he’d lost with the fall of great statesmen. How could *The Education of Henry Adams* itself provide Adams this window to modern authority?

**The *Education* as an Appeal to Authority**

Throughout these early encounters with authority and his overview of modernity, Adams repeatedly returns to a fundamental question: with authority gone, how should he define himself? This search for social position resonates in the Adams’s consistent claim of his failures to find education, and in his many different social roles, from diplomacy to journalism to teaching. Adams’s answer culminates in writing *The Education of Henry Adams* itself. While writing the book, Adams told Richard Olney that although he might “throw it into the fire like half a dozen of its predecessors,” that it had “at least served one purpose – that of educating *me*.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Adams repeated a similar idea in another letter to Henry Osborn Taylor the following year.[[41]](#footnote-41)

To unpack this passage and Adams’s solution to modern disenchantment requires we consider how Adams wrote the *Education* in a genre of self-inquiry long-abandoned: the confession. Adams draws on Augustine’s *Confessions* and an idiosyncratic reading of Rousseau’s *Confessions* to return to three criteria of the genre: (1) an appeal to readers as eavesdroppers rather than interlocutors, (2) a sharp division between the narrative of education and a didactic section for readers, and (3) a construction of self through appeal to an external, objective authority. But this authority is not God: the *Education* is instead an attempt to define Adams through an engagement with modern science, not as technical but almost-magical means.

When Adams reluctantly sent the revised second edition of the *Education* to Henry Cabot Lodge for publication in 1916, Adams included an “Editor’s Preface,” which he had written yet signed with Lodge’s initials (*EH*,400).[[42]](#footnote-42) According to “Lodge,” Adams would say “half in jest, that his great ambition was to complete St. Augustine’s ‘Confessions’” (400). From Augustine, Adams adopts a mode of self-examination whose audience is an unaddressed but observant reader. Long after his conversion in the garden, Augustine writes:

Why let others overhear my testimony, as if they could treat my symptoms? People want a transgressive knowledge of others’ lives, but are blissfully ignorant of what might change their own. Why, anyway, should they care to hear from me about my own condition if they will not hear from you about theirs?[[43]](#footnote-43)

Augustine authorizes the *Confessions* through a conversation with God, whereas eavesdropping readers are encouraged to confess as well. In the “Author’s Preface,” Adams also references Rousseau’s *Confessions* through a quote that places Rousseau closer to Augustine:

“I have shown myself as I was; contemptible and vile when I was so; good, generous, sublime when I was so; I have unveiled my interior such as Thou thyself hast seen it, eternal Father! Collect about me the innumerable swarm of my fellows; let them hear my confessions; let them groan at my unworthiness; let them blush at my meannesses! Let each of them discover his heart in turn at the foot of thy throne with the same sincerity; and then let any one of them tell thee if he dares: – ‘I was a better man!’” (*EH*, xiii)

Although Adams writes that Rousseau “began his famous *Confessions* by a vehement appeal to the Deity,” this isn’t Rousseau’s first appeal. He first introduces his book pledging an unprecedented objective, to portray “simply myself”: “I know my own heart and understand my fellow man.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Rousseau claims he is unique, that “I may be no better, but at least I am different.” That Adams chooses Rousseau’s second paragraph, where he pledges, if needed, to “present myself before my Sovereign Judge,” suggests that he modeled the *Education* closer to the genre out of which Rousseau was transitioning and which Augustine had pioneered.

Thus Adams wrote the *Education* first as a form of self-education and only secondarily for the education of others. He made this clear in letters surrounding the initial publication of the *Education*, circulatinga hundred copies of the first edition among anyone mentioned in the manuscript a week after he wrote the preface.[[45]](#footnote-45) He wrote to Lodge: “I send you a volume, in the nature of proof-sheets, which contains allusions to you and yours which I wish you would glance at, and after running your pen through anything that seems to you personally objectionable, return the volume to me.”[[46]](#footnote-46) Adams resisted publishing the *Education* up to his death, rejecting Houghton Mifflin’s request in 1907.[[47]](#footnote-47) In a letter to Charles Milnes Gaskell, he wrote that “I hardly think my ‘Education’ is fit for any public. It is only proofsheets, full of errors, and I’ve not given it to any library here. The more I watch the coming public the more likely I think it that the public of fifty years hence will be something quite different from the past.”[[48]](#footnote-48)

What Adams liked in Augustine, he told William James, was “the notion of writing a story with an end and object, not for the sake of the object, but for the form.”[[49]](#footnote-49) The *Education*’s parity with Augustine’s *Confessions* is clearest in the final chapters that elaborate Adams’s dynamic theory of history. Adams admitted that these were influenced by Augustine, intended to replicate the “Father,” “Son,” and “Spirit” books that conclude the *Confessions*.[[50]](#footnote-50) Augustine’s self-inquiry through God resulted in these philosophical treatises; Adams’s search results in his scientific theories of history, which he would continue in his final writings. Like with Augustine, then, Adams’s objective was that the text educate only insofar as it motivate other readers to self-examine, or at the very least to draw some philosophical value from these final theories.

But Adams’s most significant inheritance from Augustine is his appeal to authority to define the self. Augustine’s first goal was self-examination through a conversation with God: “do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.”[[51]](#footnote-51) According to Charles Taylor, Augustine was the first to experiment with “radical reflexivity,” to evaluate experience itself rather than simply live it.[[52]](#footnote-52) From this first-person experience, Taylor writes, Augustine proved God’s existence: “I am aware of my own sensing and thinking; and in reflecting on this, I am made aware of its dependence on something beyond it, something common.”[[53]](#footnote-53) In the *Confessions*, Augustine says to God that “you gather me from my own scatterings, after I have torn myself from your unity and fallen apart into multiplicity.”[[54]](#footnote-54) Adams takes from Augustine his use of “unity and multiplicity” to describe education through authority. In the preface, he wrote “that St. Augustine, like a great artist, had worked from multiplicity to unity, while he, like a small one, had to reverse the method and work back from unity to multiplicity” (*EH*, 400).

It is likely for this reason that Adams originally intended to call his confession *The Education of Henry Adams: a study of twentieth-century multiplicity* (342). According to Adams, his age was one increasingly of multiplicity: “The child born in 1900 would, then, be born into a new world which would not be a unity but a multiple.” (360). Without getting too lost in what for Adams are often contradictory or obscurantist terms, we can think of unity and multiplicity as the difference between authority and power. Before Augustine found God, certainly he witnessed agency in other sources: he saw it in a diversity of worldly philosophers and political leaders. But Augustine finds unity in his conversion to Catholicism and to God, an ultimate authority from which all power (and truth) emanates.

From the beginning of the *Education*, Adams depicts himself as looking for unity like Augustine: “Already at ten years old, the boy found himself standing face to face with a dilemma that might have puzzled an early Christian. What was he? – where was he going?” (17). In the first chapter of the book, Adams explains education in terms of unity and multiplicity, that “from cradle to grave this problem of running order through chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, unity through multiplicity, has always been, and must always be, the task of education, as it is the moral of religion, philosophy, science, art, politics and economy” (9-10). The *Education* presents young Henry’s relation to authority as an historical continuation of Augustine’s relationship to God. Just as Adams parroted his form, he frames his youth as a more modern Augustine. In the *Confessions*, the young theologian’s first memories are of the word[[55]](#footnote-55); in the *Education*, the young scientist’s first memories are of the senses, color and taste (5). Both are sick as children, Augustine with chest fever and Adams with scarlet fever (*EH*, 5).[[56]](#footnote-56) Like Augustine’s early infatuation with Manicheanism, Adams describes his childhood as ever between two poles: “winter and summer, cold and heat, town and country” (6). Adams writes that “from earliest childhood the boy was accustomed to feel that, for him, life was double” (8).[[57]](#footnote-57)

Education, for Adams, is to find unity – a sense of authority and the self – through or despite multiplicity. When Adams lays out his dynamic theory of history toward the end of the book, he describes man as enduring forces that “impinge on his senses, whose sum makes education” (372). Education is to know the world and one’s place in it: political, demographic, and scientific changes in modernity have frustrated this process. What education requires is that the student find himself at the nexus of these different influences. At the end of the “Author’s Preface,” Adams writes that “the young man himself, the subject of education, is a certain form of energy; the object to be gained is economy of his force” (xiv).

For Adams, though, the *Education* is not a confession to God: rather, it is an attempt to find in modern science the same authority that educated Augustine and early Americans under great men. In the chapter “The Dynamo and the Virgin,” Adams contrasts the authority of pre-modern, religious unity with what he sees as the new authority of the twentieth century. During his visit to the Paris Exposition of 1900, Adams reflects on the Virgin as “the greatest force the western world ever felt,” having “drawn man’s activities to herself more strongly than any other power, natural or supernatural, had ever done” (304). Culture and education once revolved around her: the Virgin inspired architecture, art, and science. And yet Americans have never known the Virgin: “in America neither Venus nor Virgin ever had value as force; – at most as sentiment.” (300-301). This visit inspired Adams to write an entire book on the Virgin, *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*, published privately in 1904 and intended as a partner text to the *Education*.[[58]](#footnote-58) Though substantively a book on twelfth- and thirteenth-century architecture and philosophy, *Chartres* addresses the same question of how authority educates: he ends it on Aquinas’s question, “what made an individual?” in a world of unity and multiplicity.[[59]](#footnote-59)

But in the *Education*, it is not the Virgin but the dynamo that offers Americans new authority. Before Paris, Adams first encountered the dynamo years before at the Chicago Exposition (*EH*, 267). It accompanies other strides in technology: the Cunard steamer entrances Adams in Chicago, and in Paris he fawns over the steam-engine (267, 298). But he looks to the dynamo for unity. The dynamo is “a symbol of infinity,” a machine of seemingly-endless force:

As he grew accustomed to the great gallery of machines, he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, such as the early Christians felt the Cross. The planet itself seemed less impressive, in its old-fashioned, deliberate, annual or daily revolution, than this huge wheel, revolving within arm’s-length at some vertiginous speed, and barely murmuring, – scarcely humming an audible warning to stand a hair’s-breadth further for respect of power, – while it would not wake the baby lying close against its frame. Before the end, one began to pray to it. (298)

When Adams saw the dynamo in Chicago, he called it “the first expression of American thought as a unity” (268). The dynamo will replace what the American never found in the Virgin and the hope lost at the end of the nineteenth century: “he could see only an absolute *fiat* in electricity as in faith” (298). The new American will be “the child of steam and the brother of the dynamo.” Adams describes the dynamo in spiritual terms so as to match it with the Virgin: to articulate its authority as not simply its generating electricity but its moving men such as God and great heroes had. The passage parallels what Augustine’s *Confessions* captured in “The Garden,” trading Adams’s conversion at the Paris exposition for Augustine’s under the fig tree.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Like Augustine’s narrated conversion, “The Dynamo and the Virgin” encourages Adams’s turn inward. After the exposition, Adams scatters magnets over his desk at home, staggered at the intricate convergence of forces: “he could not escape it; politics or science, the lesson was the same” (*EH*, 311). Adams’s visit to Paris in 1900 converts his gaze to “lines of force all about him”: “where he had always seen lines of will” (336). At the beginning of the book, education was simply the absorption of force through a central authority: even if the authority were God or a few statesmen, they all represent a teleological march of history and progress. From *Chartres*,Adams will “fix a position for himself” in the second text, by which he “hoped to project his lines forward and backward indefinitely” (342). Like his turn to Augustine and Rousseau, Adams seeks an *Education* that may result in a unified self. He writes that

One sought no absolute truth. One sought only a spool on which to wind the thread of history without breaking it. Among indefinite possible orbits, one sought the orbit which would best satisfy the observed movement of the runaway star Groombridge, 1838, commonly called Henry Adams. As [a] term of a nineteenth-century education, one sought a common factor for certain definite historical fractions. (371)

This is an important moment in Adams’s understanding of authority. Unlike Augustine or the Adams family before him, Adams no longer seeks any “absolute truth,” but just enough of a perspective from which he can understand the chaos around him. Toward the end of the book, Adams will describe new attempts to find himself in terms that represent multiplicity: “every man with self-respect enough to become effective, if only as a machine, has had to account for himself somehow, and to invent a formula of his own for his universe” (*EH*, 377). Adams’s confession can’t address God or J.Q. Adams, both dead, so he writes like a scientist, treating his subject in third-person, framing it within the latest advances of the atomic and physical sciences.

This turn to science finally explains the title of Adams’s book: its use of *Education* here is to mirror the *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin or the *Confession* of Augustine. While the narrated Adams had searched unsuccessfully for God and statesmen in his younger life, the narrator Adams recasts his life as an appeal and identification with the dynamo. In the “Prayer to the Dynamo,” which Adams included in a letter to Elizabeth Cameron between *Chartres* and the *Education*, he wrote on what might happen if even the dynamo were to be disenchanted:

Seize, then, the Atom! rack his joints!

Tear out of him his secret spring!

Grind him to nothing! though he points

To us, and his life-blood anoints

Me – the dead Atom-King![[61]](#footnote-61)

**Conclusion: Education after Henry Adams**

By the end of *The Education of Henry Adams*, its author has provided readers an ideal concept of authority, an overview of modern conditions threatening it, and a potential practice for recovering what’s lost. Adams’s solution – a classical form of confession aimed toward science – would at least instill in its confessor the comfort of finding himself in this new source of enchantment. The question remains, however, as to whether Adams was truly successful in providing this solution, and whether this solution would be of any use to a reader. After all: Adams had demonstrated, in the book’s private publication and surrounding letters, his diffident insistence that the American people would not profit from reading his tract.

Adams also thematized failure within the very pages of the *Education*: His attempts to understand the conflict that leads to the treason of the Civil War “disastrously failed” (*EH*, 85). During the war, working as an assistant to his diplomat father, Adams vows never to attempt “to be useful again,” the *Trent* affair having “dwarfed individual effort” (94). He describes his position as “irregular,” that he was more assistant son than secretary (113). He titles the chapter covering his time teaching at Harvard “Failure.” But Adams embellishes many of these accounts, including his depiction of Charles Sumner, his performance at Harvard, his Civil War diplomacy, and his teaching career.[[62]](#footnote-62) After the *Education*’s publication in 1918, many of Adams’s former students stepped forward to correct his self-portrayal as a failed educator.[[63]](#footnote-63) Though he criticized his place in the academy, Adams passionately advocated university reform later in life.[[64]](#footnote-64)

In letters surrounding Adams’s earlier writings and the *Education*, he would also lament how biographers “destroy their heroes”: that never was there “a mere biography that did not hurt its subject.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Though Adams continued to publish biographies at the behest of colleagues throughout his life, he remained suspicious of the genre.[[66]](#footnote-66) When Hay died in 1905, Adams only reluctantly helped his widow publish a biographical collection of letters; when she censored the letters, Adams grew ashamed of his efforts.[[67]](#footnote-67) In response to his brother’s request for help with their father’s biography, he wrote that “these biographies are murder, and in this case, to me, would be both patricide and suicide. They belittle the victim and the assassin equally.”[[68]](#footnote-68) Reading an autobiography around the time he was drafting *John Randolph*, Adams wrote that “after seeing how neatly [the autobiographer] can destroy the last vestige of heroism in his own life, I object to allowing mine to be murdered by any one except myself.”[[69]](#footnote-69) He depicted his own self-writing the same, describing the *Education* to Henry James as not only taking his own life but as a “shield of protection in the grave,” and he urged James find the same.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Given these attempts to limit his book’s authority, one way to assess Adams’s search for authority would be to read the *Education* as a response to Emerson’s 1850 *Representative Men*. According to Emerson, democratic heroes must lead by example and, contra Carlyle, step down:

True genius seeks to defend us from itself. True genius will not impoverish, but will liberate, and add new senses. If a wise man should appear in our village, he would create, in those who conversed with him, a new consciousness of wealth, by opening their eyes to unobserved advantages; he would establish a sense of immovable equality.[[71]](#footnote-71)

“This is the key to the power of the greatest men,” Emerson writes: “their spirit diffuses itself.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

Toward the end of the *Education*, Adams gestures amid his failures toward a “new American” whose authority may supplant his own:

The movement from unity into multiplicity, between 1200 and 1900, was unbroken in sequence, and rapid in acceleration. Prolonged one generation longer, it would require a new social mind. As though thought were common salt in indefinite solution, it must enter a new phase subject to new laws. Thus far, since five or ten thousand years, the mind had successfully reacted, and nothing yet proved that it would fail to react – but it would need to jump. (391)

Adams ends the penultimate chapter of the *Education* with this quote, and titles its final chapter “Nunc Age*”*: Latin for “now go!” or “now act!” A chasm lay before the younger Adams, into which J.Q. Adams and others had fallen.Whoever surpassed Henry had to leap. “Nunc Age” begins with an image of New York in an industrial age, “demanding new men”: “a man with ten times the endurance, energy, will and mind of the old type” (392). Adams didn’t see himself as the new man. As his final paragraph ended, for him and his colleagues, “it was time to go” (396).

Read this way, Adams’s goal in the *Education* is not simply to find himself amid the modern crisis of authority, but to suggest – like an American Nietzsche – that citizens after Adams might adopt his form of self-inquiry yet reject the man it had originally produced in writing. The use of the *Education* for readers, then, is not simply to exalt Adams’s character in the way that *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* had its author, but instead to emphasize the very form of self-inquiry as it prepared Adams for modernity.

In closing, I’ll suggest that, as provocative as Adams’s answer was, it was far from the only solution to modernity to involve American politics and autobiography: contrasted with these alternatives, Adams’s solution appears increasingly conservative. For as Shamoon Zamir points out, while Adams’s take on modernity and identity shares focus with W.E.B. Du Bois’s “double consciousness” and the 1903 *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois’s triumph was to compile these fragments into new, inclusive American identities.[[73]](#footnote-73) And not long after Du Bois, Emma Goldman would also bring together the various slivers of her identity as an immigrant, anarchist, and feminist in her 1931 *Living My Life*, an autobiography that exemplifies what Kathy Ferguson has pointed out as Goldman’s amalgamation of literary realism and radical change.[[74]](#footnote-74)

My goal in this essay, however, has been simply to demonstrate Adams’s own solution to modernity and its crisis in authority, flawed or failed as he himself admitted it was in *The* *Education of Henry Adams*, and to insist that an appreciation for its form better reveals its depths as a unique response to the political problems of modernity and disenchantment facing an anxious American aristocracy at the top of the twentieth century.

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, [1841] 1983), 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, [1917] 1946), 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. William Carey McWilliams, “Henry Adams and the ‘Burden of History’: Intimations of Fraternity amidst the Ravages of Nature Conquered,” in *A Political Companion to Henry Adams*, ed. Natalie Fuehrer Taylor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Judith N. Shklar, “*The Education of Henry Adams*, by Henry Adams,” in *Redeeming American Political Thought*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann and Dennis F. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. James P. Young, *Henry Adams: The Historian as Political Theorist* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Garry Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: A Centennial Version*, ed. Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, [1918] 2007), 7. Future citations in in-text as (*EH*, #). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams: The Middle Years* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The book’s first title, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography*, included a subtitle that was added by Adams’s former student, Henry Cabot Lodge. There is no record of Adams ever using the word to describe his text, neither in the book itself (in which he referred to the subtitle as “”*A study of twentieth-century multiplicity*) nor in letters. See Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright, “Postscript,” in *The Education of Henry Adams: A Centennial Version*, by Henry Adams, ed. Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2007), 413. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hannah Arendt, “What Is Authority?,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Garry Wills (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Among many examples, see Jane Bennett, *Thoreau’s Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994); George M. Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Thomas Dumm, “Thoreau’s Solitude,” in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Jack Turner (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 326–38; Katharine Lawrence Balfour, *Democracy’s Reconstruction: Thinking Politically with W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chap. 4; Jason A. Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), chap. 5–7; Melvin L. Rogers, “The People, Rhetoric, and Affect: On the Political Force of Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*,” *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 1 (2012): 188–203; Jack Turner, *Awakening to Race: Individualism and Social Consciousness in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), chap. 5; Michael J. Shapiro, *Deforming American Political Thought: Ethnicity, Facticity, and Genre* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006); Nicholas Knowles Bromell, *By the Sweat of the Brow: Literature and Labor in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Outside the American context, see J. Peter Euben, *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See John H. Schaar, “The Uses of Literature for the Study of Politics: The Case of Melville’s *Benito Cereno*,” in *Legitimacy in the Modern State* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, [1979] 1981), 53–87. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Electric Book Company, [1841] 2001), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Russell L. Hanson and W. Richard Merriman make a compelling argument that Adams is one of the last republican American thinkers. Russell L. Hanson and W. Richard Merriman, “Henry Adams and the Decline of the Republican Tradition,” in *A Political Companion to Henry Adams*, ed. Natalie Fuehrer Taylor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Quoted in Jason Frank, “Standing for Others: Reform and Representation in Emerson’s Political Thought,” in *A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Alan Levine and Daniel S. Malachuk (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 395. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Quoted in Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Gerald Bevan (London: Penguin Classics, [1835, 1840] 2003), 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. John Stuart Mill, “*On Liberty*,” in *Mill: The Spirit of the Age, On Liberty, The Subjection of Women*, ed. Alan Ryan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 92–93. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Ernest Samuels, *The Young Henry Adams* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Mill, “*On Liberty*,” 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. J. Ottman Lithographic Company, “New York’s New Solar System,” still image, (1898), http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/00650794/. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Henry Adams, “The New York Gold Conspiracy,” in *The Great Secession Winter of 1860-61, and Other Essays*, ed. George Hochfield (New York: Sagamore Press, 1958), 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The book’s author would be revealed two years after Adams’s death. See Samuels, *Middle Years*, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Henry Adams, “*Democracy: An American Novel*,” in *Democracy, Esther, Mont Saint Michel and Chartres, The Education of Henry Adams, and Poems*, ed. Ernest Samuels and Jayne N. Samuels (New York: Library of America, 1983), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), 26–27. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), chap. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See ibid., 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. On the influence of transportation and technology on immigration, see Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 5–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. United States Census Office, *Report on the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part I: Progress of the Nation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), xxxiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Young, *Henry Adams*, 114–118. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. As Young points out, Adams’s anti-Semitism is inconsistent and more pronounced in later letters. In earlier works, Adams includes positive Jewish characters, and his later critical remarks only partially reflect the rise of scapegoating Jews for economic issues. This does not excuse his anti-Semitism, but does suggest these remarks as connected to other critiques for which Adams saw Jewish peoples as symptomatic. See ibid., 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Quoted in Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Adams developed these theories further in his last publications: his 1894 presidential address to the American Historical Association, “The Tendency of History,” 1909’s “The Rule of Phase Applied to History,” and 1910’s *A Letter to American Teachers of History*. On these later texts, see Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams: The Major Phase* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 593. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. On Adams and Lyell, see Samuels, *Young Henry Adams*, 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Henry Adams, “Adams to Richard Olney, 1603 H Street, 30 January 1908,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Henry Adams, “Adams to Henry Osborn Taylor, 23 Avenue Du Bois de Boulogne, 22 November 1909,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright, “Introductory Note,” in *The Education of Henry Adams: A Centennial Version*, by Henry Adams, ed. Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2007), viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Augustine, *Confessions*, 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, [1782] 1981), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 332. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Henry Adams, “Adams to Henry Cabot Lodge, 1603 H Street, 5 March 1907,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 559. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Henry Adams, “Adams to Charles Milnes Gaskell, 1603 H Street, 12 April 1912,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 533. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Henry Adams, “Adams to William James, 1603 H Street, 17 February 1908,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Henry Adams, “Adams to Barrett Wendell, 1603 H Street, 12 March 1909,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Quoted Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid., 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Augustine, *Confessions*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid., 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Adams doesn’t imply this continuity simply by mimicking the *Confessions*, but in a symbolic scene shortly after his trip to school. Adams sits in a parish church built “before railways entered the New England town”: behind the bald head of J.Q. Adams, Henry sees over his shoulder “the tablet in memory of a President great-grandfather” (12). This genealogy of authorities constituted society “since the time of St. Augustine, if not since the glacial epoch.” When an Irish gardener jokes to Henry for his likely assuming that he’d rise to the presidency as well, Adams recalls his first thinking that anything else *could* happen, any “doubt whether a system of society which had lasted since Adam would outlast one Adams more” (13). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Henry Adams, “*Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*,” in *Democracy, Esther, Mont Saint Michel and Chartres, The Education of Henry Adams, and Poems*, ed. Ernest Samuels and Jayne N. Samuels (New York: Library of America, 1983), 674.. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Augustine, *Confessions*, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Quoted in Samuels, *Major Phase*, 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. See Wills, *Henry Adams*, 54, 70, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. See Wills, *Henry Adams*, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 375. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. See ibid., 313. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. See ibid., 502. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. See ibid., 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Quoted in Shklar, “*The Education of Henry Adams*, by Henry Adams,” 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Quoted in Samuels, *Middle Years*, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Henry Adams, “Adams to Henry James, 23 Avenue Du Bois de Boulogne, 6 May 1908,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “*Representative Men*,” in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, [1850] 1983), 623. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid., 631. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Shamoon Zamir, *Dark Voices: W.E.B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888-1903* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Kathy E. Ferguson, *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 190–194. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)