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Dale Tomich (1946–2024)…in His Own Words (Part I)[1]

Interviews, February–June 2024 by Juan Giusti-Cordero

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> I guess I've always been not moved by simply a racial analysis of slavery, or race as an independent field of study. In some way I thought that these things were historically contextualized and relational. I understand that a little bit better now—fifty years later—than I did then. I don't know, I think I had a set of initial hunches that I never let go of in my whole work. I was always developing these hunches.
>
> —Dale Tomich, February 2024

Dale Tomich, who passed away in August 2024, had a singular trajectory as a Caribbean scholar. His best-known work, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy (1830–1848)* (1990) stands rather apart in Caribbean historiography even though his construct of the "second slavery" has been fertile for Atlantic history (Blackburn 2024; Dal Lago 2025). Tomich has been especially recognized beyond the United States, where his work has been at the cutting edge of scholarship in political economy, Marxist theory, theoretical history, and historical

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methodology. Over the course of four decades, Tomich's books and essays have been seminal for "contextualizing and theorizing the history of the modern world economy, particularly the role of New World slavery (the plantation) in the construction of modern capitalism." (Crichlow and Giusti 2024: 249). Dale's close understanding of Caribbean and Brazilian history, which he merged into a study of Atlantic history, built bridges where few scholars have crossed. Always self-effacing, Dale did not often discuss his remarkable intellectual path; yet it is relevant to understanding the multiple layers of his work, its wider context, and its possibilities.

An earlier series of interviews, done between November 2023 and February 2024, focused on his family background in 1950s/1960s industrial Milwaukee and a tradition of skilled labor that was being savaged by automation and runaway shops. These interviews were published in a dossier organized by Dale's former students in *Cultural Dynamics* (Crichlow and Giusti 2024; see Dal Lago 2025: 134). The interviews published here overlap with the earlier ones but focus more closely on Dale's collaborations in the journal *Radical America* between 1968 and 1970; the making of his dissertation; Dale's early years in the extraordinary academic environment that was Binghamton Sociology between the 1970s and the 1990s; the significance of Dale's relationship with Sidney Mintz; the making of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*; and Dale's deepening reflections thereon. And not in strict chronology, more like "successive approximations."

While we would have liked to cover Dale's prolific later years in greater detail through additional interviews, his untimely death left us wishing for much more. However, Dale's more recent trajectory is well-documented in his published and unpublished papers as well as in excellent interviews in Brazilian publications that also cover aspects of his intellectual formation (Tomich 2015b, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). Moreover, the intellectual context and the questions that he would return to time and again largely took form in these early years. The interviews featured here were made in the last months of Dale's life, between February and June 2024.

E. P. Thompson, who influenced Dale's early work decisively, often stressed the importance of context. "Thompson always told me when I was his student: history is the discipline of context" (Tomich 2019b: 781; Thompson, 1971). And these interviews are, for sure, a source of context. The interviews underscore Dale's formative years and his heterodox methodology, which gains in simplicity and depth when looked at from the vantage point of those early years; from their "back door," as it were.

Dale's introduction to E. P. Thompson, and to the importance of context, happened to be through such a "back-door" in 1966–67, when Dale was an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Thompson published the first edition of his biography of William Morris (Thompson 1955) when he was still a member of the British Communist Party, and before writing *The Making of the English Working Class* (Thompson 1963). Morris's biography was Dale's first reading of Thompson. Across 150 pages of that first edition (which were deleted from later editions), Thompson debated orthodox Communist theses on politics, literature, and history; "and you can see where *The Making* comes from…you can see the development of his historiography very clearly" (Tomich 2019b: 11; for Dale's own writing on his Wisconsin and Binghamton years, and the impact of Brazil scholarship, see Tomich 2016: 17–25). In the new introduction to *Circuit*,

Dale "presents the influences that shaped the writing of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*" (Tomich 2016: n.p.). "My intention is that this new introduction will give readers, especially younger scholars, a better understanding of how and why the book was written" (Tomich 2016: n.p.) That's been my intention with this "back door" as well, not just on Circuit but also to shed some light on Dale's broader project of theoretical history.

Dale obtained his BA (1968) and PhD (1975) in Madison. In those years, Wisconsin was one of the top History programs in the United States while also rivalling Berkeley as an intellectual hotbed of 1960s student radicalism. Dale studied European social history under Harvey Goldberg, a specialist on French socialism whose legendary lectures were usually packed with over 2,000 students and ended with standing ovations. Against Goldberg's express directive, the students made bootleg recordings that are now on YouTube. Goldberg became Dale's first mentor and close friend. Dale was also close to Hans W. Gerth, a leading scholar on Max Weber who had been an assistant of Karl Mannheim. In Madison, Gerth had collaborated and later clashed with his star student C. Wright Mills. A junior-year semester at the University of Warwick (England) studying with E. P. Thompson shaped Dale's historical outlook decisively.

While a History undergraduate, Dale also worked under Robert Starobin. Starobin broke new ground in the historiography of enslavement was a vehement academic voice of the emerging Black Power movement. In 1968 Dale wrote together with Starobin and by himself for *Radical America*, the leading magazine of the New Left at the time.

Formally, *Radical America* was the journal of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) but in practice it became a fertile sounding board for diverse currents of the late 1960s and early 1970s, from U.S. labor history to U.S. and European Marxist theory to surrealism to cartoon art. The journal ran from 1967 to 1973. Until 1971, when the journal moved to Cambridge (Massachussetts), *Radical America* embodied the national import of Madison radicalism. Graduate students from the Madison's History Department (especially U.S. History) had a major presence in *Radical America*.

Like most of U.S. academia at the time, UW-Madison was still overwhelmingly white. Manning Marable did an M.A. in History at Madison in 1971–1972 and left for the University of Maryland, where he completed his PhD in 1976. He found that the black student population in Madison was "pathetically small" and that the university had done "next to nothing" to change the situation (Marable 1996). Important work was however progressing in the History department on Black history and on C.L.R. James since the late 1960s; and *Radical America* staffers (and collaborators from Detroit and Chicago such as Dan Georgakas, Franklin Rosemont, Eric Perkins, and John Higginson) were at the forefront.

Dale edited *Radical America* in 1969–70 with Paul Buhle, who was the journal's founder, chief editor, and networker. With Buhle, Dale was instrumental in linking the journal with the work of C.L.R. James. James was then known for *Black Jacobins* but was not yet recognized as a major political and cultural thinker. A special issue in 1970 on James in *Radical America* became a best-seller and remains a key reference to James' work. Buhle would become a major scholar on James as a cultural thinker and his authorized biographer, while Dale would build on James'

approach to social history and political economy in dialogue with world-systems studies (Buhle 1991, 2017, 2020).

Another landmark *Radical America* (1971) issue that Dale worked on centered on Black labor. The issue grew out of Madison connections with Detroit's insurgent Black auto workers and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW). LRBW's focus on class politics "from below" and Jamesian links influenced Dale' thinking, along with the Italian *operaio*/*autonomista* currents. Dale first appears as General Editor of *Radical America* with Buhle in the July–August 1969 issue, following his first year in the History PhD program. Dale continued in that position for the next six issues.

Dale's interest in the Caribbean was largely self-driven and self-taught, as Wisconsin did not have a Caribbean studies program (no U.S. universities did at the time). Dale found that U.S. history was too narrowly focused on the United States itself, and that this was a particular shortcoming for the study of slavery. His selection of Martinique for his graduate work was a compromise with Goldberg, whose work on French political history and Socialist politics at least offered some connection with France's Antillean colonies. Dale's master's thesis on Aimé Césaire and Négritude relied heavily on C.L.R. James for a modern perspective on the Caribbean but did not yet delve into social and economic history. Césaire's world stayed with Dale and his dissertation on the political economy of slave emancipation in Martinique was a pioneering work in French Caribbean social and economic history, a field that was still nascent in the 1970s. In Sidney Mintz's (1974) *Caribbean Transformations* Dale found ways to reconceptualize the enslaved as, in a sense, workers and peasants—a way of seeing that was both historically grounded and conceptually informed. Mintz would consider Dale "his student," although he was never formally his student.

The key influences for Dale's heterodox interpretation of Marx are C.L.R. James, E.P. Thompson, György Lukács, Karl Korsch, Renato Panzieri and *operaismo*, Roman Rosdolsky, Immanuel Wallerstein, Terry Hopkins, Fernand Braudel, Sidney Mintz, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Harvey Goldberg, Joan Scott, Georges Haupt, Detroit's worker-intellectual General Baker, and the Chicago surrealist Franklin Rosemont, to mention the most salient. Dale reviews these theoretical influences in the Introduction to the second edition of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* (2016). Some of these cross-currents were diffuse or not yet present in Dale's 1975 dissertation, but his voracious reading and reflection in the following years pushed him in new directions—beyond E. P. Thompson's "history from below," beyond static categories of "race" and "class," beyond nation-states. Dale's move to a teaching position in the Binghamton Sociology Department marked a new chapter. Dale taught there from 1976 until his retirement in 2020 and collaborated in the Fernand Braudel Center with Immanuel Wallerstein and Terence Hopkins.

Dale thought that Wallerstein's world-systems perspective tended to flatten differences between places, times, and social relations. At the same time, Dale appreciated how it opened new conceptual spaces, set new challenges, and helped to see connections between an heterodox Marxism and the *Annales* school. Wallerstein's partnership with Hopkins—who became, in many ways, Dale's mentor—leavened the world-systems perspective with wider questions—especially

from the tradition of Karl Polanyi's historical sociology. In this context, Hopkins' methodological perspectives were key[2].

Dale's own work studied slavery through the lens of both history and sociology, and as part of the modern capitalist world system. He stressed, as did Rosdolsky, how a succession of forms of labor should not obscure—and, rather, expressed—the ongoing logic of capital. Dale was indifferent and often skeptical about the wave of postmodernism that enveloped academia since the 1980s. He remained committed to the study of labor, production and the large-scale movement of capital as indispensable to historical understanding.

The concept of a "second slavery" in the nineteenth century, which Dale put forth in the 1980s, has proven fertile. The "second slavery" perspective is the centerpiece of Robin Blackburn's *The Reckoning: from the Second Slavery to Abolition, 1776-1888* (Verso 2024), the fifth and final volume in his monumental history of Atlantic slavery. Dale activated an international research network, the Second Slavery Seminar, and edited several publications in collaboration with the Braudel Center: *The Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World Economy and Comparative Microhistories* (with Michael Zeuske, 2008), a special issue of *Review*; *The Politics of the Second Slavery* (2016), *New Frontiers of Slavery* (2016), *Slavery and Historical Capitalism during the Nineteenth Century* (2017), *Atlantic Transformation: Empire, Politics, and Slavery during the Nineteenth Century* (2020), and *The Atlantic and Africa: The Second Slavery and Beyond* (with Paul E. Lovejoy, 2022). On the topic of the second slavery, Dale's collaborations with Michael Zeuske -- who developed the related concept of "mass slavery" -- were especially significant. Dale also edited the publication of Eric Williams' dissertation, *The economic aspect of the abolition of the West Indian slave trade and slavery* (2014); coedited with Richard Lee the 2016 special issue of *Review* cited above; and coordinated the translation of Luiz Felipe de Alencastro's (2018) magisterial *The Trade in the Living : The Formation of Brazil in the South Atlantic, Sixteenth to Seventeenth Centuries*.

Dale was the author of numerous essays on historical method and Marxist theory, some of them collected in *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy* (2004). In 2021, Dale published *Reconstructing the Landscapes of Slavery: A Visual History of the Plantation in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* in collaboration with a U.S.-Brazilian-Cuban team of scholars (Tomich, et al. 2021). Dale became increasingly committed to a perspective that was at once deeply historical and theoretically comprehensive, with multiple simultaneous and interacting "temporal planes" of space-time shaping and being shaped by global capital.

In recent years, Dale saw his work gain broader recognition beyond the United States, especially in South America and Europe, inspiring scholars of both slavery and the capitalist world economy. Brazilian and Portuguese scholarship had a decisive influence in Dale's work (Canabrava [1946] 1981; Franco 1969; Castro 1976; Godinho 1981–1983; see Tomich 2005). Dale's influence in Brazil has also been profound, and his circle of students has been a driving

[2] See the special issue of *Review (Braudel Center)*, Vol. 39, No. 1/4, 2016 for a Hopkins dossier. (The entire *Review* archive is available at JSTOR https://www.jstor.org/journal/revifernbraucent) Significantly, Dale dedicated the second edition of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* no less than to Harvey Goldberg and Immanuel Wallerstein (2016: 25)

force in current Brazilian social history and social theory (see Tomich 2011; Salles 2015; and essays by Marques, Parron, and Marquese in Crichlow and Giusti 2024). Their influence on Dale's work was far-reaching, as was the stimulus of their intellectual energy and friendship over decades. Dale maintained a close relationship to the Laboratório de História Comparada e Mundial of the Universidade Federal Fluminense (Rio), lecturing, taking part in seminars, and fostering dialogue between Brazilian and international researchers. Dale's ongoing dialogue with Cuban and Puerto Rican historians was also important for Dale's developing scholarship.

The Fernand Braudel Center, formerly in Binghamton, gained a second life in the Centro de Estudos sobre Desigualdades Globais at the UFF, which focuses on large-scale economic issues. The Braudel Center's library was donated to the Centro UFF. The Centro will also house Dale's library and papers. In June 2025, the students at the UFF dedicated their second annual symposium to Dale, under the title "O Atlântico como Espaço Histórico da Escravidão: Circulação, Conceitos e Experiências."

Dale was above all a dear friend, a warm and generous person, and a mentor to many. In Brazil, he married Luiza Franco Moreira, a professor of Comparative Literature who was his intellectual partner. Dale became an avid *futebol* fan of São Paulo's Corinthians team and frequently travelled to Brazil with Luiza and their daughter Laura.[3]

The following interviews catch a glimpse of Dale as he looked back on his intellectual trajectory. After a period of remission, his health had begun to deteriorate in February 2024 and by June it had worsened considerably. At first, Dale had been a bit skeptical about talking much about his personal life—who would care about this, he would ask. Quite Dale. But then we got into the swing of the interviews and he was eager to go back in time. Dale was ready to talk about his own making.

The two last interviews, unlike the previous seven, were not on Skype (our standard means of communication). These final interviews were in Syracuse, where Dale was under treatment and Dale and Luiza were fighting his last battles. Naturally, Dale was exhausted from the treatment and from going back and forth between hospital and rehab. In these last two interviews Dale's recollections were slower but his memory, critical acumen, and sense of humor were all there.

Dale's closing words in our last interview stayed with me: "I'm having a hard time speaking, projecting my voice, but this is a really lovely and important conversation."

I thought so too.

[3] This article would not have been possible without Luiza's encouragement and wise advice. I wish also to thank Phil McMichael, Enrico Dal Lago and Paul Buhle for their comments at different stages of the article. Needless to say, any shortcomings are my own. My gratitude as well to the editor of JWSR, Andrej Grubacic, also a former student of Dale's, who enthusiastically welcomed the project.

I. RADICAL AMERICA

JUAN: Tell me about *Radical America*, which was originally called an "SDS Journal of the History of American Radicalism." Was it linked to SDS (Students for a Democratic Society)?[4]

DALE: Well, it never was. I mean, it adopted the name. Nobody really cared, it just sounded good. *Radical America* had nothing to do practically with SDS. Just some umbrella of the movement. Look at the years it was published, there was never one article on Vietnam. One article on student protest. *Radical America* was basically recuperating working class and radical history.

JUAN: So there wasn't a great interest in the antiwar movement among you.

DALE: To write about it? No.

JUAN: The anti-war movement was too bland?

DALE: No, we just weren't interested in it. It was a journal of American radicalism. It was really about working-class and labor history and the history of radicalism, particularly in the U.S. But we were more likely to do stuff about the Hot Autumn in Italy [1969–70] than to write about Vietnam... When no one else really cared in SDS. They didn't have much focus on working-class issues. They would just read about Vietnam. And nothing about the Black Panthers.

JUAN: And there was nothing in *Radical Ame*rica about the counterculture music, rock?

DALE: Oh, yeah, a lot about that. That was the funny thing. There was an issue on rock 'n roll. Just go through the issues in the Brown collection, it's worth it. Look at each issue. They did radical comic books. It was about radical counterculture in a certain way. The guy who did the "Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers" spent a whole day stoned out on my porch. Gilbert Shelton.[5] But nothing, nothing activist. We just had a different set of interests, and we were trying to do something that we thought was rooted more deeply into the popular culture and working class.

JUAN: You edited *Radical America* with Paul Buhle. What is his place in the history of radical thought in the U.S.?

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[4] Dale's first contribution to *Radical America*, co-authored with Robert Starobin, was published in the September–October 1968 issue. Dale first appears as General Editor of *Radical America* with Buhle, in the July–August 1969 issue (Vol. 3, No. 4), following his first year in the History Ph.D. program. Dale continued in that position for the next six issues. The July-August 1969 issue also features a report on the first *Radical America* editorial conference, held in Madison in June with delegates from New York City, Chicago, Buffalo, and Austin. Dale appears as part of the Madison delegation.

[5] The "Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers" was an underground comic about threesome of "freaks" (not hippy, not siblings) that originated in Austin, Texas. It ran from 1968–1992 and was regularly reprinted in underground papers around the United States and in other countries.

DALE: He's at Brown.[6] Paul is a lovely guy who had great instincts. He was the one who really put *Radical Americ*a together and got in touch with all kinds of movements and people. Buhle did all this stuff. I had a little input in the profile of *Radical America*. I just helped him put it together. I would like to think I added some stability to it because he was all over the place. I met Franklin Rosemont and John [Higginson] and Eric [Perkins] through him. Those were probably my most lasting connections from *Radical America*.[7]

JUAN: Was he active in SDS, since *Radical America* was "an SDS journal of American radicalism"?

DALE: Not really. If you went to a meeting, you were in SDS. There was no... thing, you know. The whole group around him just had a real sense of Americanness. And not surprisingly, they were all in American History [within the History Department at the University of Wisconsin].

JUAN: That was Buhle's academic field, mostly?

DALE: Yes, American cultural history. So I was the one who dealt with "foreigners."[8] What counted, what helped me with them…part of my attraction to them was that I had worked with E. P. Thompson in my junior year (1966–67) and that was the New History, so I used that. I mean, all this happened when I was still an undergraduate, they drafted me into it.[9]

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[6] Buhle is a Senior Lecturer at Brown University, where he has taught since the 1990s. His wife, Mari Jo Buhle, is a prominent feminist historian. She taught at Brown's Departments of American Civilization and History since 1974 until her retirement in 2009 and was named William J. Kenan Jr. University Professor Emerita.

[7] *Radical America* had a remarkably long run for a Left, originally university-based, journal. Its last issue was Vol., 21 No. 6 (Nov–Dec 1987). Nearly all the issues of *Radical America* are found online at the Brown University Library Center for Digital Scholarship. The site describes *Radical America* as follows: "The SDS-connected Radical Education Project, formed in 1966, encouraged SDS members to start long-distance study groups that would explore topics relevant to the new radicalism. Paul Buhle, then a U.S. history graduate student at the University of Connecticut, started one that he called *American Radical History & Political Thought*, exchanging letters with a handful of interested SDS members across the country. After a few months he got their cooperation in a mimeographed "journal" called *Radical America*." Franklin Rosemont (1943–2009) was an anarchist surrealist poet and labor activist. He was a key figure of the Chicago Surrealist Group and of U.S. Surrealism in general. (Rosemont 1978; Rosemont and Kelley 2009)

[8] The tension between a focus on "the fine points of European theoretical controversies" and the acknowledgment of a "distinct American radical past," as characterized by Paul Buhle (1990: 219), marked much of *Radical America*'s persona and its success; perhaps especially so in the early years. It was a creative tension, and not the only one, in *Radical America*. C.L.R. James and E.P. Thompson—a Caribbean and an Englishman—were the formidable hallmarks of the "middle ground" of sorts that *Radical America* staked out. Buhle's extensive work on C.L.R. James grew out of that "middle ground." So does Dale's early critique of Althusser and the significance of Thompson and James for Dale's intellectual trajectory. One alternative that others favored—"to link European Marxism with U.S. practice" underestimated the theoretical import of the United States' own radical history. In Buhle's (1990: 219) words, proponents of the latter option "started from too far outside to find their way back to America."

[9] Dale's first contribution to RA, with Robert Starobin, was published in the September-October 1968 issue. Dale first appears as General Editor of RA, with Buhle, in the July–August 1969 issue (Vol. 3, No. 4), between his first and second year in the History graduate program. Dale continued in that position for the next six issues. Dale's article with Starobin was titled "Black Liberation Historiography." In the September 1969 issue (Vol. 3, No. 5) Dale published an extended critique of an article that had proposed an Althusserian reading of Marx (see below).

JUAN: You graduated in 1968, so in '67–'68 you were still an undergraduate. Paul Buhle was that central to *Radical America*? [10]

DALE: He **was** *Radical America*, and it was too much. And he needed a co-editor... and people pushed me to be the co-editor.

JUAN: Where did *Radical America* get the money?

DALE: Cookie sales, I don't know…(Laughs) It was all through these patches. Plus fans, subscriptions… Actually, we had a high subscription rate—2,500. Which is really high for a small independent journal like that.[11] One best-selling issue was by a guy named Bill Watson who was a shop-floor militant in Detroit. He wrote a great article called "Counter Planning from the Shop Floor" (Watson 1971)[12] about workers [who] really organized the production plan themselves, if that didn't happen, there would be no production. And [in 1973] Agnelli from Fiat bought 3000 copies.[13] We had to have extras printed. That was our sale to Fiat management.

JUAN: Fiat?!

DALE: Yeah. Fiat. They bought 3,000 copies.

JUAN: Why was that? (Laughs)

DALE: Because they wanted to understand how their own production line worked.

JUAN: That's crazy. Really?

DALE: Oh, well, how does management work? They don't do anything, you know. They need workers. (Laughs)

JUAN: That's crazy.

DALE: But if you look at them… Like, one issue would be all about work, working-class militancy, etc., and then the next one would be rock and roll counterculture. So what would

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[10] https://library.brown.edu/cds/radicalamerica/about.html

[11] Paul Buhle listed some the "bestseller" issues that *Radical America* published, and talked about its finances: "First, *Radical America Komiks*, 1969 [Vol. 3, No. 1], ridiculing imperialism, but also sexual repression, while celebrating marijuana and youth culture. It sold 30,000 copies and attracted serious attention from the FBI and was sold mostly in drug paraphernalia 'head shops' or from SDS tables on campus. Second, the C.L.R. James anthology [Vol. 4, No. 4, 1970] (but also an accompanying Black Power/Workers' Power issue, heavily attached to Detroit's League of Revolutionary Black Workers) [Vol. 5, No. 2, 1971], each sold perhaps 8,000, with classroom assignments in Michigan. And third, a Women's Liberation issue [Vol. 4, No. 2, 1970] that contained an essay used widely by women's history classes, in reprinted forms, for some years, probably 7,000. Other issues: 4,000 tops. With the exception of these issues, *all* others lost money. The magazine was subsidized by small donations and of course by no salaries for the staff." (Buhle and Mohandesi 2015)

[12] This was in the same issue as Dale's translation of René Depestre interview of Césaire. Watson's article was later published as a pamphlet by RA and then by the New England Free Press.

[13] The Fiat letter is at https://libcom.org/article/counter-planning-shop-floor-bill-watson accompanying the text of "Counter Planning from the Shop Floor." The letter, dated June 4, 1973, is from the Publication Department of Fiat U.S.. *Radical America* had already moved to Somerville, Massachusetts. The peculiar letter reads in part: "We have received an urgent request from our Fiat headquarters in Torino, Italy, to obtain a copy of the article of Bill Watson…" See below on the Italian *operaistas*. At the time, Dale was still in grad school in Wisconsin but was no longer an editor of *Radical America*.

happen is like we do the working-class thing and all these people would subscribe. We have 3,500 subscribers, and then we'd come up with the rock and roll issue. And the ones from the previous issue would all cancel their subscription. And then 2,500 people would subscribe. And so the damned comic book went through the roof, but we lost most of the subscribers we had the issue before. So it oscillated crazily because there was no consistency.

And the one…I don't remember what the issue was about…but it had an image of a naked woman that was pretty much like the hood ornament on a Packard, which was to say it was bare and you could see it was feminine, but there were no real features on it. And like, suddenly like a thousand Trotskyists cancelled their subscription because we were publishing pornography. (Laughs) I mean, the whole thing was crazy. But Buhle was great at coming up with ideas, he had one foot on the counterculture and was into all these things and knew the right people, and George Rawick… He knew who to write to and how to write to them. And he was very good at that.

II. JUVENALIA

JUAN: So you did a critique of Althusser in *Radical America*? [14]

DALE: In my senior year as an undergraduate (1967–68). It was published in 1969. I was an undergraduate but a lot of what I later did, of my trajectory, is in that already. With the Althusser article you can look back and see the beginnings of all the stuff we've been talking about resonates in them, you can see the origins of it there. Those are the ones that I think became serious.

I also had a translation of Aimé Césaire and wrote an introduction to it. An earlier article with Robert Starobin[15] *in Radical America* was really Starobin's framework

[14] Dale's article was one of four comments to an article by Andrew Levine (1969: 34–47). Levine was then a graduate student in Philosophy at Columbia.

[15] Dale's first contribution to *Radical America* was as coauthor with Robert Starobin in an article titled "Black Liberation Historiography" (Starobin and Tomich 1968). The first page of the article, page 24, is missing from the Brown digital archive's copy. Dale's involvement with *Radical Ame*rica likely grew out of his relationship as a student of Starobin. Dale did his Senior Honors thesis on slave narratives with Starobin, while he assisted Starobin in his research on slave narratives and correspondence. "Black liberation historiography" analyzes George Rawick's positions on enslaved people's culture and modes of resistance, published in the preceding issue of *Radical America* (Vol. 2 No. 4, July–August 1968), where Rawick (1968) had critiqued Stanley and Eugene Genovese's positions on the matter. Taking on Rawick was quite a challenge. Rawick, a Madison History alumnus, had studied the enslaveds' daily life and would soon publish *From Sundown to Sunup; The Making of the Black Community* (Rawick 1972). This was the opening tome of the 19 volume collection of slave narratives recorded by the Federal Writers' *Project in the 1930s. The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Rawick 1972) Moreover, Rawick credited C.L.R. James for his shift toward a closer understanding of the enslaved's mentality and daily life. Rawick's differences with Genovese were not about the character of the Southern plantation economy but about Genovese's focus on the planter class and his partial acceptance of Stanley Elkins' "Sambo" thesis. Instead (citing James) Rawick (1972: 4) called for recognition of the day-to-day forms of resistance of the enslaved, which are "forms of their own choosing."

"Black Liberation Historiography" took Rawick's critique of Genovese one step beyond, in four ways: (1) it is

because I didn't know how to write a term paper even. I didn't really know where I was going. Bob would ask me to read all these slave narratives and write something about what they said about slaves recounting their own experience. I read for my senior thesis with him all these slave narratives. So I wrote it with him and it was published. But that really is juvenalia.

Starobin was teaching at Madison since 1967. He was a wonderful guy with a wonderful family. Starobin (1971; see also 1970) published *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*. And he didn't get tenure. I suspect it was probably political. And so he took off and he wound up at Binghamton.

JUAN: I understand that Starobin had gotten in trouble with Black Power people who were very critical of the way that his historical outlook was going, because he was going into slave correspondence and finding, among other things, some slaves writing to planters in an apparently affectionate way.

DALE: The best you can say is he wanted to cover the complexity of slavery. But he was really close to Huey Newton. I mean, really close. He would go around, speak at Panther things. Was a kind of intellectual guru on certain matters. So I thought that was bad.

III. FROM CLR JAMES TO THE LEAGUE OF REVOLUTIONARY BLACK WORKERS

DALE: One of the most important things we did in *Radical America* was the issue on C.L.R. James (Radical America 1970). When we did that issue, the Left public did not know C.L.R. James. Or if they knew, it was only because of *Black Jacobins* (James 1963).

JUAN: So that was really the introduction of C.L.R. James to the American left, no?

DALE: Exactly.

JUAN: There was *Black Jacobins* (James 1963) that a lot of people had **not** read.

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not enough to document the enslaveds' struggles or to establish their African roots; what matters is whether they were effective in the context of their time; (2) enslaved peoples' culture, while originally African, once transplanted to the South became something uniquely American and at the same time uniquely Black: an African-American product ("Afro-American" in the original); (3) concerning slave resistance, Rawick's explanation of why large-scale rebellions failed relied mostly on white demographic preponderance, but this is inaccurate for many areas in the South and also leaves out such realities as the brutal and subtle mechanisms of white control as well as the problem of unifying the "black community;" and (4), an important point relevant to a "history from below" perspective: the "day-to-day resistance" that Rawick stresses, while ubiquitous under enslavement, "could never become a liberation movement without organization" (interestingly, a point that Rawick could qualify with James' enthusiasm for spontaneity and "free creative activity", as he called it). The third point in particular anticipates Sidney Mintz and Richard Price's 1976 essay, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Mintz and Price 1976).

On the issue of disunity within the enslaved community, a footnote at the end of "Black liberation historiography" referenced Starobin's "forthcoming piece on the accommodationist role of slave drivers" and "Dale Tomich's History honor's essay on house servants, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1968," which Starobin supervised. Lewis Feuer (mis)quoted Starobin and Tomich in "Black liberation historiography" (1972: 173).

DALE: But that was all it. The rest of his life they wouldn't know anything about. The same with Césaire.

JUAN: Did C.L.R. James have any connection with the black workers in Detroit? He had been involved with sharecroppers in the 1930s.

DALE: I don't know. When he came to Madison, he had to give a big talk and his proposal then was that the radical students should hook up with the street gangs. Didn't seem like real practical. (Laughs)[16]

JUAN: That's interesting. Sometimes that happens, with mixed results. (Laughs)

DALE: Babes in arms. They had a moment where they were romancing the idea of hooking up with the Algerian Revolution or something. Did you check out General Baker on YouTube? [17]

JUAN: I saw a video where he gave a history of automobile factories in Detroit and how Detroit was transformed. Chrysler alone had 17 plants around Detroit in the 1950s. And that was pretty much all gone by the time he was talking. But when you were there, it was in full swing, no inkling yet of what was to come.

DALE: No, when it came, it came overnight. I didn't have… my real contact was through Eric Perkins and John Higginson. They're the guys I worked with to put out the *Radical America* issue. Perkins was a great guy. That was the connection and some people from Detroit like this black poet who was doing stuff and had a journal.[18] Eric and John were

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[16] James was invited to Northwestern for the 1969-70 academic year by a group of black activist students that included John Higginson and Eric Perkins. Northwestern had a distinguished tradition of African studies in the person of Melville Herskovits (1895-1963), the anthropologist who pioneered African, African-Caribbean, and African-American studies. In 1948, Herskovits founded in Northwestern the first major interdisciplinary American program in a U.S. university. William Bascom is the perhaps best known of Herskovits' students from that program. Moreover, the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University, established in 1954, is the largest separate Africana collection in the world. Black students at Northwestern, however, felt that the university did not address the issues that concerned them in a US in racial turmoil and, beginning with a sit-in in May 1968, demanded a reconfigured program of Black studies. The invitation to C.L.R. James was made in that context.

James' lectures at Northwestern and other materials related to his visit are listed in Northwestern's Digital Collection as part of its Department of Black Studies collection. https://findingaids.library.northwestern.edu/repositories/6/archival_objects/690937 On the history of the department (established 1972) see https://blackstudies.northwestern.edu/about/department-history.html

[17] "Baker was a powerfully built and amiable man who had often expressed his revolutionary views at work and in the streets, only to find them rejected as too militant. By the spring of 1968, the mood of workers had shifted" (Georgakas and Surkin 1975: 20). "General Baker was the organizer of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit, the black auto workers movement. His father's name was 'General' and he was named after him. General Baker was the smartest guy in the Sixties. He understood everything, he had an analysis of capital and race way beyond everything from the point of view of black workers in mass production industries.… I still go back to try to think about things through him." (Tomich 2024: 341).

[18] At the time, Perkins was a studying for his PhD in History with Herbert Gutman at City University of New York (see Perkins and Higginson 1971; Perkins 1977, 1996; Perkins and Turner 1976). Perkins taught at another SUNY campus (Purchase) for several years. For a visual reminiscence on (William) Eric Perkins (1948–2011) see "A Celebration of the life & legacy of Dr. William Eric Perkins." On Perkins, Dale wrote in the acknowledgments to

both from Chicago, they went to Northwestern [in Evanston, Illinois, just north of Chicago], and they also would bring up all these guys from the South Side of Chicago, and we'd hang out on the weekends. They liked to come up to Madison because Northwestern was dry and Madison wasn't. And Madison was a more hip place than Northwestern. So on the weekends they would bring some fellow lefty intellectuals from Northwestern and then a bunch of guys from the South Side of Chicago. That was the scene for a while. John and I are still very close friends, he's at UMass Amherst [where John is Emeritus Professor of History]. So we did this "Black Labor" issue that was mostly about the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (Radical America 1971)[19]. The Baron article was the main chunk of the issue. I never met Baron. He was a researcher for the NAACP who John and Eric knew from Chicago. There was a whole kind of underground network of black activists and intellectuals that we never see, who never become famous. And out of that milieu he comes, I think.

I never was that interested in the Black Panthers, which most all the other students were. The League was a revolutionary union movement, it started in the auto plants.[20] They

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Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: "Eric Perkins has been a marvelous friend whose enthusiasm, support, and wide knowledge have kept me on course ever since I first became interested in the themes of this book" (Tomich 1990).

John Higginson specialized in South African social history and taught for several years at Binghamton, where he coincided with Dale. John was later full professor at UMass Amherst and is presently emeritus (see Higginson 1989, 2017).

[19] "A special issue on Black labor which was developed by Eric Perkins, along with John Bracey and John Higginson," Radical America, 1971) The issue featured a dossier on the LRBW: Eric Perkins, "The League of Revolutionary Black Workers: Introduction;" a collection of documents titled "At the point of production," which included DRUM newsletters; an article by attorney and LRBW activist Ken Cockrel, "From repression to revolution." The issue included an article by Robert Starobin, "Racism and the American experience" and, as issue opener, the classic essay by Harold Baron "The Demand for Black Labor." Starobin's article, "Racism and the American Experience" was a revision of a 1968 essay (Starobin 1968). The article was published posthumously and was preceded by an obituary notice.

[20] The LRBW "was, in many respects the most significant expression of black radical thought and activism in the 1960s," according to Manning Marable (1998: ix). "At a time when even reactionary politicians such as Richard Nixon were embracing the slogan 'Black Power,' the League represented a militant black perspective calling for the fundamental socialist tansformation of U.S. society" (Marable 1998: ix). The League originated in the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), which grew out of Detroit's main Chrysler/Dodge assembly plant in May 1968—the first wildcat strike in 14 years. "The activities and ideas of DRUM were to inspire black workers in factories throughout the United States" (Georgakas 2024). DRUM was formed out of caucuses of Black auto workers fighting production increases and racism, particularly in job classifications, and domination by Polish-American workers in the union local and the factory floor. The League also had an important base of support among the students of Wayne State University, where a united black-white front was formed (Georgakas and Surkin 2012). Wayne State's daily student newspaper, *South End*, was also a of local community newspaper. Its circulation was a remarkable 18,000. The *South End* was a base for the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

The important documentary on Detroit radicalism, *Finally got the news* (Newsreel and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers 1970) was produced by the Wayne State student leadership and newspaper staff (see Georgakas 1973; 2024). Ken Cockrel, a student activist and WSU Law graduate "became a leading Black community lawyer, political activist, and city council member, played a leading role in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, among other groups" (Snyder 2007: 75). The LRBW had a major split in 1970–71, and an offshoot formed

were really organizing against the kind of labor hierarchies within the plants and the lack of representation in the unions. One of their YouTubes is an hour and a half history of the black worker struggle in Detroit. And then you had another film at the time, *Finally got the news* (1970), a documentary on the LRBW. It was really a lot of militancy that was clearly working-class in the major auto factories, and they were in fact fairly successful. They kind of crashed as a movement because they couldn't bridge factory movements and community movements that well. But it was really smart stuff. And interesting politics. So I was very attracted by that. What I liked about the League was that they were production workers. General Baker, who was the main thinker and organizer of the League was a foundry worker.

JUAN: The League was not into race in the same way as the Black Panthers were?

DALE: They were, but they were fighting with racism within the whole structure of production. The Black Panthers were kind of urban, they weren't connected to production at all, but to the street and marginalized black populations. There's some latter-day sociological analysis we could make. The League were just as Black as anybody. They started from what they called "nigger nation:" one Black worker did the work of ten white workers. That's how profits went up, and it was how they were all stuck in in a highly stratified division of labor inside the factories and were subject to all kinds of super exploitation. They fought against that, and had no union representation. And so it was a struggle that began within the factory and then reached out. They were into all kinds of things. Even if you just listen to General Baker's short clips, you can learn a lot on work about organizing and thinking politically, but also how capitalism works, which you never really got from the Panthers.

JUAN: So Madison was connected with things that were happening in Chicago and Detroit.

DALE: But Madison wasn't interesting that way. Chicago was really the epicenter, Greater Chicago. John worked in steel plants there a lot. The Italian *operaio* movement also had a big influence on me at the same time, and I had the example of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. The League and Autonomia reinforced one another.[21] And that's what was so attractive about the League, as opposed to the Panthers, who were just getting into shootouts. Some of their stuff, I think, was important. But then I think the Panthers themselves changed a lot after Fred Hampton was assassinated.

IV. SLAVERY AND CAPITALISM

JUAN: This all flowed into your critique of Genovese at the time?

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the Black Workers' Congress (see also Georgakas and Surkin 2012: 43–46, 53–54). Dan Georgakas, cultural editor of *Radical America*, worked closely with Detroit's League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Along with George Rawick, Georgakas exchanged visits with the activist/intellectuals of Italian *operaismo* since 1966. In 1970, Georgakas visited Italy to present *Finally got the News*. (see Gambino, 2024)

[21] See below on the Italian *operaismo*.

DALE: Probably. I kind of dissected the whole argument of what would later be the dualism of everything, that his whole argument was premised on the dichotomy between capitalist and pre-capitalist; that the South was separate—with its own economy—separate from everything else and that it "exported" cotton.[22] And then that whole idea of planter hegemony as the thing that held it up, paternalism. I know more of what came of it than I remember what was in it at the time, but it's a whole construction of pre-capitalist, aristocratic, seigneurial planter class that distorts everything because it doesn't see how slavery is in fact capitalist. Some people said it in different ways, but mine was kind of a methodological critique of how all of his work was constructed. It was a kind of innovative Marxism that stayed within the proven orthodoxy without ever challenging the terms of orthodox Marxism, it just worked them around. So I was arguing for slavery and capitalism being seen more geographically and historically comprehensively, and that the thing needed to be centered in the working activity of slaves.

I was very influenced by *Black Jacobins* both times I read it, and then there was all this...the League and my labor history work, trying to understand working class as a subject.

I guess I've always been not moved by simply a racial analysis of slavery, or race as an independent field of study. In some way I thought that these things were historically contextualized and relational. I understand that a little bit better now—50 years later—than I did then. I don't know, I think I had a set of initial hunches that I never let go of in my whole work. I was always developing these hunches.

JUAN: I'm interested in those. You were thinking about slavery in terms of capitalism. You were trying to see how that worked.

DALE: And then thinking about it in terms of Tronti, Panzieri…and James. That capitalism begins at the point of production. I mean, that was the key thing to analyze.

JUAN: That also meant that you were looking less at culture like Genovese. Because Genovese's is also a methodological argument. You know, not just that it's paternalism.

DALE: That's what I was critiquing, the methodology.

[22] In the *Cultural Dynam*ics interviews, Dale reflected on Goldberg's remarkable intervention in his Master's thesis defense. Goldberg opened the session by reading Dale's critique of Genovese (Tomich 2024). Dale's first paper at the Braudel Center grew out of his earlier critique of Genovese and Ernesto Laclau. Dale rejected interpretations of U.S. slavery that had characterized it as "precapitalist," (Tomich 1976: 8) "on the basis of particular production relations alone." (Tomich 1976: 8) "These writers overlook the dynamic interaction between the various parts of the system as a whole, and mechanically juxtapose 'non-capitalist' production relations, seen in isolation, to the capitalist world-market" (Tomich 1976: 8). On Genovese in particular, Dale wrote: "the Mason-Dixon Line becomes a kind of Berlin Wall through which 'mere capitalists' may pass only at the sufferance of quasi-aristocratic planters who, though they sit in splendid isolation if not insularity, must nonetheless 'adjust their economy and ways of thinking, and 'compromise' with the capitalist world-market" (Tomich 1976: 2, 8).

JUAN: In Genovese's argument culture is the focus of analyis. And that's something that you were not too interested in doing, in general, to look at black culture for instance in terms of direct links with Africa.

DALE: Ok, this is a good point, but I never wrote much about that. I never wrote much about race.

JUAN: Well, you began by looking at Césaire. Culture was important for you.

DALE: I thought Genovese had a reified notion of black culture, and then the culture of the Southern planter and hegemony, which, you know, it was very static. And my thing was…I didn't have even the words to formulate it then. I thought culture grew out of activity and the key activity was the work activity. And there's a culture.

I mean, in the Martinique book, there's a fair amount about culture insofar as it could be documented, but it was about how values and visions of the world would assert themselves in the labor process.[23] So what I really was interested in is how people worked and what their experience working was. And that was kind of a double critique. I wanted to look at slaves as workers. But then I was doing also a critique of the racial view of slavery and even of the Marxist view of slavery that never really addressed production. So what the Martinique book was about was trying to…

JUAN: You were asking: well, what if slaves were workers?

DALE: Well, they were.

JUAN: It's an ironic way of saying it.

DALE: Exactly. And it's even coming out in a critique I'm working on Nick Nesbitt's (2022) book.[24] He thinks it's not relevant to study sugar production itself. I think the only way you can understand slaves as workers is to understand what they produce and how they produce it. They're not producing "value." They're producing sugar, or cotton, or tobacco. Unless

[23] "The slave gang was the animating force of the sugar plantation. Its work was an occasion for the collective social activity of the group.… This combination of workers stimulated what Marx called their 'animal spirits' and heightened the activity of each individual worker. The ateliers could perform an enormous amount of labor in a day.… **However, the slave gang did not work by compulsion alone.** Anthropologists have compared African institutions for organizing work in complex social settings, such as the Dahomean *dokpwe*, with modern means of mobilizing labor, such as the Haitian c*ombite* and the Brazilian *mutirão*, emphasizing the ostensibly voluntary and cooperative character of each. But rather than compare precolonial Africa with present-day rural life in the Americas, it may be more revealing to compare it with the contemporaneous slave plantation. While here the continuity of the voluntary, cooperative, and festive aspects of work come into question, at the level of its physical organization and execution the similarities are striking" (Tomich 1990: 354; emphasis added).

On the other hand, "The provision grounds and 'proto-peasant activities were not merely functional for the reproduction of the social and material relations of the slave plantation. They also offered a space for slave initiative and self-assertion that cannot simply be deduced from their economic form" (Tomich 1990: 376). "The 'little Guineas,' as the provision grounds have been called, allowed collective self-expression by the slaves and form what Roger Bastide describes as a 'niche' within slavery where Afro-Caribbean culture could develop" (Tomich 1990: 384).

[24] A manuscript where Dale takes up Nesbitt's critique of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* (Tomich 1990) is being edited for possible publication.

you understand how to grow tobacco you don't understand much.[25] So, I'm trying to go back to how I started with *Grundrisse*.

V. AUTONOMISMO/OPERAISMO

DALE:. I was also reading Italian autonomist Marxism. Raniero Panzieri, Mario Tronti, and *operaismo*.

JUAN: I admire the *autonomista* work with surveys. Panzieri did many surveys on workers and some of his comrades thought he was spending too much time on that and that it was a waste of time.

DALE: He was with peasants in the Resistance. There's a small book called *Labour Process and Class Strategies* from CSE publishers (1976), it was a left thing in the '70s and '80s in England.[26] That's the first thing I found that got me going on a lot. And there's two or three essays there. Panzieri organized Italian peasants during and after the war; and he broke ground? by treating peasants as workers. And then doing things on labor process and struggle against time and really cool stuff. And then he was the founding guru of Autonomia. Some of it you can find on the web. There are some cool pictures of him with a big overcoat surrounded by peasants. Check out *Viewpoint* magazine. If you go through their archives, you might find some stuff there. I've seen and read things about Panzieri and sometimes by him online, and also in the Marxists Internet Archive. I think he's pretty important. Also, the Wages for Housework movement in the 1970s comes out influenced by that. There's a big book called *Ripresa de Marxismo Leninismo* (Panzieri 1977) that collects all of Panzieri's essays in Italian.

JUAN: So, how can you put the Italian Potere Operaio and Roman Rosdolsky in the same room?

DALE: Oh, I don't know. I think it's quite possible because if you start seeing it as method, then you see the point of production and changing relations—as real production, not some abstraction.

JUAN: And did the Italians do ethnographies of factory work, that kind of thing?

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[25] Dale: "I read Fanon to understand Césaire, I read all the books by Fanon. I found them interesting, but they were less central to me. *Black Skin, White Masks* probably influenced me the most." (Tomich 2024: 339).

[26] The Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE; founded 1970; on the CSE see F. S. Lee 2001) was the key association of radical economists in Great Britain during the following decade. The CSE's signal 1976 pamphlet, *Labour Process and Class Strategies*, opened a pamphlet series that led to establishing the journal *Capital & Class* in 1977. In *Labour Process and Class Strategies*, two of the four articles were by Italian *operaistas* Mario Tronti and Sergio Bologna. An offshoot of the CSE, the International Labour Process Conference, has been remarkably durable and recently celebrated its 43rd year with a conference in Santiago de Chile.

As noted above, Dale first encountered *operaismo* some years earlier: the classic articles by Bologna and Tronti in *The Labour Process and Class Strategies* were first published in English in *Radical America*'s sister publication, *Telos* (Fall and Winter 1972). In its September–October 1971 issue (Vol. 5, No. 5; Dale was no longer co-editor) *Radical America* reprinted "Italy: New Tactics and Organization," a 38-page collection of documents from the extraparliamentary Left with an introduction by Georgakas. *Radical America* again devoted an issue to the Italian extra parliamentary Left in 1973 (Vol. 7, No. 2) with articles from the groups Potere Operaio and Lotta Cotinua.

DALE: They did a lot of stuff.… Among the Italians, I never liked [Antonio] Negri. Because Negri always takes some piece of the thing and blows it into everything. I didn't know why the hell they were so hung up on Negri. I thought he was a kind of pretentious.

JUAN: One person becomes a figure, becomes representative of entire currents…

DALE: It had to do with the movement in Italy. I got to know some of the Zerowork people and then the big repression hit and all they did was anti-repression politics. There's a direct line from C.L.R. to autonomous working-class politics. No question about that. Ferruccio Gambino never did a whole lot, but you look at his stuff, you see the connection. So I met people at *Zerowork* in New York. I met Peter Linebaugh [who was on the *Zerowork* editorial collective, as was John Merrington].[27] And the connection for me was Raniero Panzieri, who wrote about the autonomy of peasant struggles in Italy and their anti-capitalist character. And Tronti was important. There were some Negri articles too, but the Tronti ones stuck out to me. So they were all about working-class resistance at the point of production, what that had to do with Taylorism etc.… And so I think if you look at method, there is a kind of connection between Rosdolsky and Potere Operaio. There's also a small book of Panzieri's essays that's kind of priceless.[28] That's the main thing. It's wonderful, you know, about work and time, all kinds of stuff. If you look at that, you'll see how it's peppered through the Martinique book.

JUAN: What about Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, who were close to E. P. Thompsonn as well as to the Italian autonomistas. Were they also significant influences in your work?

DALE: Yes, in a way. People like Rediker or Linebaugh, it looks obvious that they're Thompsonian. But what people don't understand is that my stuff came out of Thompson as well. It picked up the context thing from Thompson, then it just hooked into Wallerstein, etcetera. But I never abandoned Thompson's broader point on context.

VI. WISCONSIN BYWAYS

JUAN: You ever thought about doing Latin American history, which was strong in Wisconsin?

DALE: Well, I'm actually glad I didn't, because it was Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith.[29] The problem was—among the many problems with Wisconsin—is that the whole department just bit big into the newly arrived quantitative history. The whole department, across the board, just bit the apple of quantitative history. And that interested me not at all. That's what Latin American history at Wisconsin was, quantitative. It didn't really hit me. And lot of the lefty stuff was always about some kind of revolution or resistance.… It wasn't

[27] *Zerowork* was "an autonomist Marxist-influenced magazine. Two issues were published, one in 1975 and another 1977. The *Zerowork* archive is at https://libcom.org/article/zerowork-journal

[28] I have been unable to locate such a volume by Panzieri. Dale may have been thinking of Panzieri's essay as compiled in *Labor Process and Class Struggle*. See also Balestrini and Moroni (2023).

[29] Authors, among other works, of *Modern Latin America* (2019), now in its ninth edition.

the kind of history I wanted to do. But Wisconsin had all these really interesting African literary thinkers and some historians; and I interacted with them, let's put it that way. They weren't my mentors in any way, but they tolerated me, taught me things, and I learned from them. I wasn't uninterested in Latin American history, but it was hard to find what I was interested in there. And the Caribbean was very fresh, there was Sid, it seemed very exciting, C.L.R James…

JUAN: Nobody in Wisconsin worked on the Caribbean then, no? It wasn't a thing.

DALE: It wasn't a thing. Some people must have done a little bit, but not in History.

JUAN: It was hard to find the Caribbean in U.S. academia at the time. [30]

DALE: I tried to take—this is strange—I tried to take African History as a minor with Philip Curtin, and it just didn't work. We just didn't see the world in the same way. And it was kind of a disaster. I was advised to just get out and do something else. I did have some wonderful sessions—I don't think I took a course with him—with a man named Daniel Kunene,[31] who was a South African poet, and he would sit and talk to me about Césaire and literature, as well as Edris Makward, who was a Senegalese literary scholar.[32] So that was that was a nice breakthrough. And I learned things.

JUAN: So… What's important about Sid and how did he fit in this period?[33]

DALE: What's important about Sid? Everything. Well, how this story actually starts, is that I had a big fight with Harvey Goldberg about what my dissertation was going to be.[34]

JUAN: And what was the fight about?

DALE: Harvey wanted everyone to do dissertations on particular French trade unions and their resistance to World War One.[35] Which he was going to make up into a book eventually, I

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[30] The important exception that began to take shape during Dale's dissertation research—the Atlantic Studies Program in Johns Hopkins, led by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price—fused lowercase Anthropology and History. While Atlantic in name and scope, the program had a strong tilt toward the Caribbean.

[31] Daniel Kunene (1923–2016), South African literary scholar, translator, and writer. He was Emeritus Professor of African Languages and Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he taught for more than three decades.

[32] Professor Emeritus, Department of African Cultural Studies, University of Wisconsin and Vice Chancellor, University of the Gambia.

[33] As a reflection of Dale's "transition" regarding Mintz's work, and the constraints of the dissertation, Dale cited Mintz in his dissertation's bibliography but did not discuss his work in the text—in contrast with *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*. The two Mintz titles in Dale's dissertation bibliography are "Toward an Afro-American History" (1971) and *Caribbean Transformations* (1974).

[34] The discussions with Goldberg that Dale refers to were on broad a dissertation topic; but the immediate issue was his Master's thesis. "We had many contentious discussions. And then it turned out rather well. That was the point where I told you I just wanted to escape American history.… I always saw slavery in the Caribbean as a way of breaking out, that slavery branched out of the United States to a wider space, whatever that was. I just wanted to escape a historiography where the normative US was the center point or the focal point" (Tomich 2024: 338).

[35] On Goldberg, see Tomich (2024: 327–328). Goldberg first became a campus legend with outsize lecture classes in Ohio State, where he taught between 1950 and 1963 (see https://history.osu.edu/goldberg-center/harvey-goldberg). In

think, on the working class against the war. I started off enthusiastically about labor history, as you know, from the time I was a sophomore and when I met Thompson as a junior. But it very quickly became either about strikes or trade unions. Not very interesting. I didn't want to do that. I proposed several topics. The one I remember is I wanted to do something about Lukacs. He hated that idea. And we fought bitterly… Then he wanted me to do Vietnam because he was very active in the anti-Vietnam movement both in the U.S. and in Paris. That didn't particularly interest me. I wanted to do some kind of social history that would be a kind of total history of society, if I can put it that way. Not be so monographic. We fought and fought and fought…

Eventually, since Harvey hated French colonialism and was really interested in colonialism and anti-colonialism in small islands in the French Empire—we decided that I would work on Martinique and that I would write a thesis, my master's thesis. We had to write a thesis to qualify for the doctoral dissertation, and you had to take your exams. Then you were admitted to doctoral study. It was a slow program.[36] That's where Aimé Césaire came in. So I did that and began reading generally about the Caribbean. And I had found and had become attracted to Sid's work.

After I did my MA on Césaire, Harvey was so open and so committed to let me develop the way I wanted to develop. And he supported me. So he said, okay, now you've got to go to France, you got to do this, and you got to meet these people and go to these things. Harvey got me a full scholarship to do that. I really was greatly unburdened from the financial constraints that I'd been under and took off to Paris.

VII. PARIS ARCHIVES

DALE: I didn't know what the hell I was doing because I had taken all my qualifying exams in European history, and I was studying for a year [1970–71] (see Tomich 2024). It was quite emotionally stressing. I literally the first time I just walked out because I was tired of jumping through hoops and I said, I can't do this, I just can't take this anymore. And I walked out of the exam and didn't take it.

I really read a lot of Sid [Mintz] then. But you see the problem was I had no background in Caribbean history, which didn't exist anyhow at Wisconsin. So I took C.L.R. and Eric Williams and Sid with me to Paris. Maybe I tried some Carpentier, but that was a little too literary for me. I just walked into the Archives Nationales, and luckily there

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his memory, Ohio State established a Goldberg Center and its website has a collection of bootleg lecture tapes from Goldberg's Wisconsin years, mostly 1975–77 (see https://goldbergcenter.osu.edu/). Former students of Goldberg's at Wisconsin have also placed recordings of his lectures on YouTube. There is a Goldberg Center in Madison as well (see https://goldberg.history.wisc.edu/).

[36] Dale obtained his BA in History at Wisconsin in 1968, taught for a year in Milwaukee high schools in 1969–70 and entered the Wisconsin MA program in 1970, which he completed in 1971. In 1972–73, Dale spent the year doing dissertation research in Paris.

was a guy… a sweet guy, Marc Lagana, who was French but had been raised in the United States."[37] Lagana, who had just completed his PhD in History at Wisconsin [in 1974], showed me the archives. He took me to the Rue Oudinot. I just started in the archives, I hadn't read anything. In fact, there was not much of anything in the way of secondary works on the French Caribbean except old colonialist documents. And there were some French Caribbean students, they had this kind of institutional hook-up with Gabriel Debien, who was a good historian, but never lit my fire.[38] I met him a few times in the archive, and he seemed one of these masters, you know? He was the authority, and he doled out stuff to students. So I just kind of cranked through the archives, and I would spend five days a week at Rue Oudinot, which was a terrible place. It was formerly a monastery, then the state took it over, probably in some revolution, but it had no air conditioning. Rue Oudinot is on the Boulevard des Invalides, a block long, near a shameless Bon Marché department store. And that's where the colonial archives were stuck until they moved into Aix-en-Provence and better quarters. The crazy thing [about the Colonial Archives] was, it was so crowded, it was stinky because everybody was sweating. You had to hold documents on your lap so you could take notes because there was no space.

All the people who ran the archives were ex veterans of colonial wars. The director was a Senegalese who fought in Vietnam. They made a lot of noise and weren't interested in what we were doing. So I worked and worked in there. And then on Saturday, the Bibliothèque Nationale was open, so I walked across Paris and worked all day there. I was working six days a week, just trying to figure stuff out from the archives. I had gone with the intention of writing a Thompsonesque history of Martinique and plantation workers, but I couldn't find anything that would help me. Maybe now that there's more people doing

[37] Lagana was a student of both Harvey Goldberg and Georges Haupt (1974). Among his works, Lagana brought to publication *Une vie révolutionnaire, 1883–1940: les mémoires de Charles Rappoport*, which began as a research collaboration of Harvey Goldberg and Georges Haupt (1991). Lagana taught at l'Université du Québec à Montréal (U.Q.A.M.) until 2006.

[38] Rue Oudinot is the location of the Section Outre-Mer of the National Archives (SOM) housed at the Rue Oudinot (VIIe arrondissement). The Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-mer is located on the street, as was its predecessor the Ministère d''Outremer. "When I did this, there was Gabriel Debien, and very few people working on this stuff. There weren't many books. There were two or three Martinican scholars, one of whom I met, who seemed kind of not happy I was working on the field. And that was it. I mean, there weren't big bibliographies. There weren't books I could read. Even the archives in Paris were fragmentary" (Tomich 2024: 340).

On the state of historiography on Martinique in the 1970s (then almost entirely in French) see Debien (1978; on Martinique, pp. 22–26). When Dale was doing research in Paris (1972–73) Debien had not yet published his major work, *Les esclaves aux Antilles françaises, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (1974). Debien's magisterial book was based on the plantation records of hundreds of sugar, cacao, and coffee estates in Guyane, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint Domingue. The vast majority of the cases from Martinique that were covered by Debien were from the seventeenth century. In the introduction to *Les esclaves aux Antilles Francaises*, Debien (1974) wrote that compared to the richness of the available documents on Saint Domingue, "what we have for Martinique and Guadeloupe is notably poor" (*d'une insigne pauvreté*). On plantation papers, for instance, Debien lists 108 collections of plantation papers for Saint Domingue and only three for Martinique. In general, the thrust of French Antillean historiography at the time was on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Christian Schnakenbourg, who would publish important work on nineteenth-century sugar plantations and *usine*s, had still only published on the seventeenth century.

that, it's possible, but I wasn't getting much help. I was just a lost American kid trying to get my way through here and didn't have the data to write a plausible dissertation. And they were mostly judicial records, administrative reports, and so forth. Then I began to see that there was enough material that I could write about the plantation and the area, the organization of work and commerce on the plantation. So that seemed pretty viable, and that's what I began to focus on.

The funny day I had there was I was sitting at my little table in the Colonial Archives and some important-looking guy came and sat next to me. The archivist went into a back room where she never went, and she brought him these big folders. They opened like a notebook, and they were full of stuff on surveillance of colonial students in Paris in the 1930s. And it just happened that this guy went off for a two-hour lunch, and... I can't forget it… I found the almost impossible to find pamphlets of Etienne Léro, an early pre-Césaire Martiniquan surrealist writer. So in those two hours, I copied the whole pamphlet and sent it off to Franklin Rosemont who I knew from my *Radical America* days. Franklin was the head of the American Surrealist movement. I had a tight relationship with Franklin and Penelope because of *Radical America*.

JUAN: You sent that to him?

DALE: Because he was interested in it and published it. Several things they included in the book on Black surrealism was material that I had clandestinely gotten a hold of years before in Paris, and I didn't know.[39] It's in that book on black surrealism that Franklin did with Robin D. G., a prominent black intellectual. So I became a historian of the Caribbean, not because I knew the historiography of it. I knew Sid and C.L.R.. I actually knew C.L.R. But I also knew the work of Eric Williams, so that pretty much guided me and made me want to put the plantation in a bigger colonial political context.

The second semester, I moved to Harvey's apartment in the Marais and I got to walk through the courtyard of the Louvre every morning to go the Metro. It was really cool. Harvey was very good to me. He had it the other semester. [Looking at a map of Paris] Rue Oudinot. Duroc was the metro station. It was actually an interesting neighborhood. The Rue Babylone has the Bon Marché, which was one of the first department stores, close to the Duroc metro, but it had its own station. And then across the street was the Hotel Lutetia, that was the Gestapo headquarters in the war. And then across the street from that was the Maison des Sciences de L'Homme.

[39] Franklin Rosemont and Robin D. G. Kelley (2009), *Black, Brown, and Beige. Surrealist Writing from Africa and the Diaspora*. Léro was a founder of *Legitime Défense* in 1932. Among the documents Dale came across on that lucky day at the Bibliothéque Nationale, there was the only known copy of *L'Étudiant Noir*, founded in 1936 by Césaire, Léon Damas and Léopold Senghor. This was an important find. *L'Étudiant Noir* coined the term *Négritude*. "Although five or six issues [of *L'Étudiant Noir*] are known to have been published during the second half of the 1930s, only one copy seems to have survived—discovered in the 1970s by U.S. historian Dale Tomich in an old police file at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris" (Rosemont and Kelley 2009: 29). Dale translated the poem from that issue of *L'Étudiant Noir* for *Black, Brown, and Beige* (pp. 67-68).

Editor's Note: Juan Giusti-Cordero's interviews with Dale Tomich continues in "Dale Tomich (1946–2024)...in His Own Words (Part II): Interviews, February–June 2025 by Juan Giusti-Cordero," to appear in the Journal of World-Systems Research Winter/Spring 2026, 32 (1).

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