

# The Conscription of Informal Political Representatives\*

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INFORMAL political representation—the phenomenon of speaking or acting on behalf of others although one has not been elected or selected to do so by means of a systematized election or selection procedure—plays a crucial role in advancing the interests of groups. Sometimes, those who emerge as informal political representatives (IPRs) do so willingly (*voluntary representatives*). But, often, people end up being IPRs, either in their private lives or in more public political forums, over their own protests (*unwilling representatives*) or even without their knowledge (*unwitting representatives*)—that is, they are conscripted. None of the few theories of informal political representation extant accommodate conscripted IPRs. The account detailed here introduces the phenomenon of *conscripted informal political representation* and explains its place in a complete theory of informal political representation. Conscripted IPRs can, like their voluntary counterparts, come to have significant power to influence how various audiences regard those for whom the conscripted IPRs speak or act. Upon attaining such power to influence, conscripted IPRs, like their voluntary counterparts, come to have pro tanto duties to those they represent—duties that arise despite IPRs' unwittingness or unwillingness. Understanding the phenomenon of conscripted informal political representation allows us to surface essential normative questions about informal political representation that are otherwise occluded.

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## I. THE CALL TO REPRESENT

As an IPR, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke and acted for Black Montgomerians from the pulpit,<sup>1</sup> in political planning meetings,<sup>2</sup> and in leaflets urging a bus boycott.<sup>3</sup> He made demands on their behalves on the nightly news<sup>4</sup> and in back rooms.<sup>5</sup> He negotiated for them with the mayor of Montgomery, city commissioners, and bus company representatives.<sup>6</sup> So positioned, King had significant power to shape the political negotiations that unfolded between boycotters, the City, and the bus company, and played a central role in shaping how Black Montgomerians' values, interests, and preferences were understood by the rest of Montgomery.<sup>7</sup>

But to hear King tell it, this was not what he had planned, at least not at first: "I neither started the protest nor suggested it. I simply responded to the call of the people for a spokesman."<sup>8</sup> Then, on Thursday, December 8, 1955<sup>9</sup>—the fourth day of the boycott<sup>10</sup>—King and other members of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) met with the "city fathers"<sup>11</sup> to offer up a list of proposals on behalf of the Black Montgomerian community: "The mayor then turned to the Negro delegation and demanded: 'Who is the spokesman?' When all eyes turned toward [King], the mayor said: 'All right, come forward and make your statement.'"<sup>12</sup>

Call this *audience uptake*. Audience uptake occurs when an audience—an individual or a group—takes a person or group to speak or act on behalf of another person or group.<sup>13</sup> By King's own account, he became an IPR for Black Montgomerians at that news conference when and because "all eyes turned toward [him]" after Montgomery's Mayor Gayle asked "Who is the spokesman?"<sup>14</sup>

Being taken to represent a group although one has not been elected or selected by means of a formal, systematized election or selection procedure is both a

<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1958] 2010), pp. 50–2.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 34–6.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 35–6.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 97–100.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 100–1.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 97–101.

<sup>7</sup>Although many examples in this article are drawn from the political context of the US, the account provides a general conceptual and normative framework for understanding conscripted informal political representation.

<sup>8</sup>King, *Stride toward Freedom*, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 60, 96.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup>See also Michael Saward, *The Representative Claim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 48.

<sup>14</sup>King, *Stride toward Freedom*, p. 98.

widespread and an undertheorized phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> Often, we treat it as a deviant case of formal political representation.<sup>16</sup> But informal political representation is neither an addendum to nor is it well captured by even our best theories of formal political representation. Accordingly, we need an account of informal political representation that takes the phenomenon on its own terms and does not treat it as derivative of formal political representation. But, to develop such an account, we first need to know what the phenomenon is.

Recently, several theorists have characterized IPRs as arising by virtue of their own volunteering. These voluntarist accounts focus on people or groups who take themselves to speak or act for others though neither elected nor selected to do so. Laura Montanaro discusses Oxfam's self-appointment as the IPR of the poor.<sup>17</sup> Michael Saward emphasizes representative claim-makers, who advance themselves as representatives by their own say-so.<sup>18</sup> Andrew Rehfeld emphasizes not the would-be representative's self-appointment, but instead their averment that, yes, they have become a representative.<sup>19</sup> Voluntarist accounts have in common an assumption that, to become an IPR, one must choose to do so.<sup>20</sup>

But that's not always how it is. Although it is true that people often hold themselves forth as representatives for various groups, what makes it the case that a party emerges as an IPR (rather than a wannabe) is not their own say-so.

<sup>15</sup>On informal political representatives, self-appointed representatives, non-electoral representatives, and similar phenomena, see especially Dario Castiglione and Mark E. Warren, "Rethinking democratic representation: eight theoretical issues and a postscript," Lisa Jane Disch, Mathijs van de Sande, and Nadia Urbinati (eds), *The Constructivist Turn in Political Representation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 21–47, <<https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474442602.001.0001>>; Emmalon Davis, "Typecasts, tokens, and spokespersons: a case for credibility excess as testimonial injustice," *Hypatia*, 31 (2016), 485–501, at pp. 490–3; Samuel Hayat, "Unrepresentative claims: refusing to represent as a source of power and legitimacy," MS (2020); Laura Montanaro, *Who Elected Oxfam? A Democratic Defense of Self-Appointed Representatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Jennifer C. Rubenstein, "The misuse of power, not bad representation: why it is beside the point that no one elected Oxfam," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 22 (2014), 204–30; Saward, *The Representative Claim*; Nadia Urbinati and Mark E. Warren, "The concept of representation in contemporary democratic theory," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11 (2008), 387–412. For an earlier example of what I am identifying as *conscripted informal political representation*, see Jane Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), pp. 39–125, 251.

<sup>16</sup>"Formal political representation" picks out representation in which a representative emerges into their role as a direct or indirect result of a systematized election or selection procedure. Examples are numerous and varied: congresspersons elected by their districts, judges appointed by elected officials, non-governmental organizations' boards of directors elected by members of the organization. What unites such cases are the systematized processes by which representatives are chosen and the fact that it is the parties to be represented that perform these processes, either directly or indirectly. By contrast, IPRs emerge by virtue of audience uptake alone, and an audience can, but need not, comprise the party to be represented.

<sup>17</sup>Montanaro, *Who Elected Oxfam?*, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup>Saward, *The Representative Claim*, pp. 36–7. Saward offers a brief example of a non-voluntary IPR, but neither treats the phenomenon in depth nor explores its implications for informal political representation more generally; pp. 61–2, 187, n. 17.

<sup>19</sup>Andrew Rehfeld, "Towards a general theory of political representation," *Journal of Politics*, 68 (2006), 1–21, at pp. 6, 12.

<sup>20</sup>While these theories could possibly accommodate conscripted IPRs, none sufficiently acknowledges the distinction between voluntary and conscripted IPRs, nor appreciates the importance of the distinction.

Rather, people become IPRs when and because they are selected by others through audience uptake. This means that, often, people end up becoming representatives despite their reluctance (*unwillingness*) or even unawareness that they are so situated (*unwittingness*). Thus, it is not true that, to become an IPR, one must appoint oneself,<sup>21</sup> make a representative claim,<sup>22</sup> or accept the position once it is conferred by an audience.<sup>23</sup> Some choose to be representatives while others are conscripted. Or so I will argue.

This article reconceptualizes informal political representation to accommodate both conscripted and voluntary IPRs. An IPR's desire to represent, intention to represent, or awareness that they represent may each play a role in helping us understand how an IPR came to be in their position and what their duties are once so positioned. Yet neither desire nor intention nor awareness is necessary for emerging as an IPR.

Recognizing and accommodating conscripted IPRs improves our theory in at least three ways:

First, the theory helps us get the right analytical grip on informal political representation by identifying a core feature of the phenomenon obscured by other accounts: the power IPRs can have to influence how the represented are regarded by various audiences and how they come to have this power to influence.<sup>24</sup>

Second, the theory provides a more coherent and more complete account of both how IPRs come to have duties to those they represent and how their duties vary depending on, *inter alia*, whether they volunteered or were conscripted. Many of an IPR's duties emerge by virtue of their power to influence audiences, not by virtue of choices that that IPR may have made to gain that power. Willingness plays no role in constituting a party as an IPR, but does make a difference to what duties that party thereby acquires. Voluntarist accounts conflate what makes it the case that a party is an IPR with what makes it the case that an IPR has duties by virtue of being so positioned.

Third, a theory of informal political representation that accommodates conscripted IPRs tells each of us what we may owe the represented because, as we shall see, any one of us may be an IPR.

In Section II, I provide a general characterization of IPRs and briefly distinguish them from formal political representatives (FPRs). In Section III, I explain audience uptake—the sole constitutive condition for a party's emergence as an IPR—and discuss the importance of conscripted IPRs to a complete theory

<sup>21</sup>Montanaro, *Who Elected Oxfam?*, pp. 42–4, 45.

<sup>22</sup>Saward, *The Representative Claim*, pp. 36–8, 95–102.

<sup>23</sup>Rehfeld, "Towards a general theory of political representation," pp. 6, 12–13.

<sup>24</sup>To say that a representative has the power to influence how the represented are regarded by an audience in a context is to say, at least, that (1) the representative is able to affect the audience's doxastic attitudes concerning the represented group in that context and (2) part of the explanation as to how the representative does so is that the representative is regarded by the audience as speaking or acting on behalf of the represented group.

of informal political representation. In Section IV, I analyze conscripted informal political representation in greater detail and consider why audiences conscript IPRs. In Section V, I discuss the powers and duties of conscripting audiences. In Section VI, I consider some normative implications of conscription for the conscripted IPRs themselves. In Section VII, I conclude.

## II. INFORMAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

### A. GENERAL CHARACTERIZATION

Informal political representation is a subtype of the more general phenomenon of informal representation. Informal representation generally, like its formal counterpart, is a triadic relationship between a representative, a represented party, and an audience. An informal representative is an individual or a group who speaks or acts on behalf of another individual or group in a given context, despite not having been elected or selected by means of a systematized election or selection procedure. Call this *informality*. When informality obtains, there must be another way such representatives are selected. Informal representatives are selected by audiences. As noted, we may call the fact that makes it the case that someone is a representative under conditions of informality *audience uptake*.

Audiences come in all shapes and sizes. They may be large or include just one person. An audience might be the crowd at a political rally or a political pundit or my mother or yours.<sup>25</sup> An individual or a group becomes an informal representative of another individual or group in a context just in case informality and audience uptake obtain.

Informal representation is not essentially political,<sup>26</sup> but becomes more or less political by virtue of its subject matter and the forum in which it occurs.

*Subject matter.* Informal political representation may emerge in forums that are not inherently political.<sup>27</sup> Imagine you and some friends are around the dinner table. None of your friends is religious, but you are. The conversation turns to the practice of prayer. Your friends ask you about not only your own practice, but about fellow congregants' practices. You serve here as an informal representative for others—maybe just fellow congregants, maybe religious people as such. Nothing about the case as described makes it especially political. Then, the conversation shifts. Your friends ask about how your fellow congregants feel about the permissibility of prayer at town meetings.<sup>28</sup> Dinner with friends is not usually what we have in mind when we think of traditional political forums, yet

<sup>25</sup>See also Saward, *The Representative Claim*, pp. 37–8.

<sup>26</sup>I thank David Estlund for a helpful conversation on this point.

<sup>27</sup>Throughout this article, I use different types of examples—some uncontroversially political, others not. This mixture is intentional and meant to illustrate that we may be political actors in many forums in our own lives in ways that are not obvious to us. The force of the argument does not depend on a reader's agreeing that all the examples are political.

<sup>28</sup>See, e.g., *Town of Greece, NY v. Galloway*, 572 U.S. 565 (2014).

you are being called upon to be an informal representative concerning a distinctively political subject matter—in this case, for a group of which you are a member, although that need not be so.

*Forum.* Like formal representation, informal representation may arise in more or less obviously political forums. An informal representative may speak or act in a traditional political forum—like Greta Thunberg addressing the United Nations Climate Action Summit as an IPR for Generation Z or, as she has put it, “we who have to live with the consequences” of climate change.<sup>29</sup> Her representation is informal, but arises in a traditional political forum. Or, as above, IPRs may emerge at the dinner table. In between these extremes, many cases of informal representation are more or less political by virtue of their respective forums.

Both the forum in which an IPR emerges and the political power held by the audiences in that forum affect whether that IPR has power to influence and, if so, how much. While most of us are unlikely to have the amount and type of power to influence Greta Thunberg has—invited to speak at the United Nations for an entire generation—it is likely each of us will be IPRs at some point in the course of our everyday lives in the less obviously political forums we frequent. (Consider for a moment whether you have ever been asked to speak for all your compatriots when traveling abroad.) Recognizing informal political representation as a position that may be thrust upon any of us also helps us understand just how many and varied are its manifestations.

Sometimes, IPRs are both witting and willing, and in some cases are even informally authorized,<sup>30</sup> like King in the opening example. But not always. Consider a forum like a small town meeting. Several individuals come together to make decisions for a larger group. However, these individuals do not think of themselves as serving in any sort of representative role—that is, they unwittingly serve as IPRs for silent or absentee counterparts.<sup>31</sup> Were we to inform them of their roles as IPRs and apprise them of the duties I argue follow from that role, they might then become unwilling IPRs.

We might ask how town meeting attendees would behave differently were they to realize they informally represent others. Surely many would balk at the mere suggestion that they have duties to absent others merely by virtue of having shown up. Yet, it is simply part of our everyday moral situation that we end up speaking or acting for others—whether before Congress, at the dinner table, or in the town meeting, sometimes in spite of ourselves.

<sup>29</sup>NPR Staff, “Transcript: Greta Thunberg’s speech at the UN Climate Action Summit,” *NPR*, Sept. 23, 2019, <<https://www.npr.org/2019/09/23/763452863/transcript-greta-thunbergs-speech-at-the-u-n-climate-action-summit>>.

<sup>30</sup>Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, pp. 62–3. For a detailed account of informal authorization and informal ratification, see Wendy Salkin, “Democracy within, justice without: the duties of informal political representatives,” *Noûs* (forthcoming), <<https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12391>>.

<sup>31</sup>Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, p. 251.

## B. DISTINGUISHED FROM FORMAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES

Although sometimes superficially similar, IPRs differ from FPRs in foundational respects. It would therefore be an error to think that formal political representation is an ideal form of political representation of which informal political representation is a nonideal approximation.

First, authorization in formal and informal contexts is markedly different. The FPR speaks or acts for a group by virtue of a systematized election or appointment scheme. The procedure tends to be stable and well established. IPRs may also be authorized, after a fashion, if they come to receive support or endorsement from most or all of those for whom they are taken to speak (call this *group uptake*, a type of *audience uptake*). But informal authorization will be fundamentally different from formal authorization, and, more importantly, authorization is not a precondition for emerging as an IPR.<sup>32</sup>

Further, FPRs tend to represent groups with well-defined memberships, the compositions of which are determined by law or, in cases of non-governmental but still corporately organized bodies, established procedures and bylaws. While IPRs can also represent groups with well-defined memberships, they often represent groups whose memberships are not well defined and for which there are no established procedures for determining membership.

Just as authorization looks markedly different in formal and informal contexts, so too does accountability.<sup>33</sup> Formal contexts often have organized and, in theory, reliable methods for holding representatives accountable. For instance, an FPR may be subject to impeachment, recall, or just good old-fashioned voting out. In informal cases, what accountability mechanisms there may be—for instance, protest, disavowal, or dissent—will be more varied and less reliable.<sup>34</sup>

An individual or a group can serve as both an FPR and an IPR, sometimes at the same time, and sometimes for groups whose memberships overlap. King formally represented the Montgomery Improvement Association<sup>35</sup> and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference,<sup>36</sup> while informally representing, among others, Black Montgomerians.

I now discuss audience uptake and how it brings about IPRs.

<sup>32</sup>Audience uptake is not a form of authorization. Authorization requires the conscious, if not intentional, conferral of power to the authorized party. By contrast, audience uptake is a fact that makes it the case that a party comes to have the power to influence an audience—a fact that can be realized in a variety of ways, some conscious and others not, some intentional and others not. I thank an anonymous reviewer for asking about this.

<sup>33</sup>On representative accountability, see especially Ruth Grant and Robert O. Keohane, “Accountability and abuses of power in world politics,” *American Political Science Review*, 99 (2005), 29–44; Montanaro, *Who Elected Oxfam?*, pp. 85–90, Saward, *The Representative Claim*, pp. 102–10.

<sup>34</sup>As I discuss in “Democracy within, justice without,” notwithstanding these and other distinctions between informal political representation and formal political representation, the two phenomena fall in far corners of a space of political representation, throughout which we find many different types.

<sup>35</sup>King, *Stride toward Freedom*, pp. 96–7.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 168.

### III. AUDIENCE UPTAKE

#### A. GENERAL CHARACTERIZATION

Audience uptake obtains when an audience takes one party to speak or act for another party in some context. Audience uptake is the constitutive condition for the emergence of an IPR—that is, one becomes an IPR when and because one is taken to speak or act for someone or some group besides oneself.

That an audience, and not necessarily an audience comprising the represented group, makes it the case that a party is an IPR for a group may strike one as counterintuitive. Indeed, acknowledging this fact has some unusual and, one may object, undesirable consequences. First, one can come to be an IPR non-voluntarily, although we might well have thought that the position of IPR is, like its formal counterpart, undertaken only with the consent of the representative. Second, groups represented by IPRs may be saddled with representatives they would not choose, but cannot shake.

What is required for audience uptake to obtain will differ in its particulars from case to case. Still, some general things can be said. Consider the following rubric for assessing whether, in a given context, audience uptake obtains:

*Ascription.* An audience ascribes a speaker's or actor's statements or actions to a group or its members.

*Credibility conferral.* An audience regards a speaker or actor as a credible source of information about a group or its members.

*Testimonial reliance.* An audience relies on a speaker's testimony when attempting to understand what a group's members want, value, or prefer.

*Invitation.* An audience invites a speaker or actor to stand in for a group or its members when the group's members' interests are at stake in a given forum.

This rubric is illustrative, not exhaustive. Not all of the above features must be satisfied for audience uptake to obtain, and other features may also indicate uptake. However, as a general matter, the more features satisfied, the more confident we can be that audience uptake obtains.<sup>37</sup>

Uptake has both backward-looking and forward-looking aspects. For instance, by virtue of taking a particular party to represent a given group in a given context, the uptaking audience may revise a belief it had previously formed about the represented group's members. Uptake here has a backward-looking updating function. Uptake may also be forward-looking: if at an earlier time in one context,

<sup>37</sup>This account accommodates heterogeneity as to types of IPRs. For instance, a party who receives *credibility conferral*, but not *invitation*, may have a different type of power to influence than a party who receives *invitation*, but not *credibility conferral*.



an audience had taken a party to represent a given group, that same audience might invite the party to sit in as the representative of that same group later on.

Uptake is indexed to the audience that brings it about. If one audience takes you to be an IPR for a given group in one context, you become an IPR for that group from the perspective of that audience. It does not follow that you become an IPR for that group from the perspective of any other audience. Two further considerations follow from this point. First, that another audience takes some party to represent a group does not require me to follow suit. I can recognize another audience's uptake without conferring uptake myself. Second, my disagreement with another audience concerning its uptake does not revoke that audience's uptake. I may criticize that audience for its uptake or try to discredit its uptake. Still, that audience can go on regarding the party as an IPR, even over my objections.

Uptake may also be realized in different ways. It may be static or dynamic and may occur synchronically or diachronically. Imagine you are a bystander at an emerging news story in your neighborhood. A news anchor pulls you aside to ask how your neighbors are holding up during the emergency curfew imposed after a tornado damaged your town's water system.<sup>38</sup> You emerge as an IPR for your neighbors at that time. In other cases, uptake may not happen all at once. Imagine you are a scholar who has for years conducted longitudinal studies and in-depth interviews on the impact of tornado damage on the lives of people in that same neighborhood. Eventually, your work comes to be of some renown and, accordingly, you are invited to speak in numerous public forums about the neighborhood's denizens. Over time, you are taken to speak for them.<sup>39</sup> So, too, may uptake be revoked or disappear quite differently in the two cases. The interviewed neighbor may be an IPR only for that one interview. By contrast, although the scholar may have come to be viewed as an IPR only slowly, they may remain in the position for many years after.

Audience uptake can be much more easily identified in some cases than in others.<sup>40</sup> For example, where the audience is one person or a handful of people, uptake might be clearly identified—Mayor Gayle publicly invited King to speak before television cameras as “the spokesman.”<sup>41</sup> By contrast, where a larger, more amorphous, or private audience is involved, identifying uptake may be more difficult. How many readers sat in their private homes, read *There There*, then took its author, Tommy Orange, to speak for Indigenous Americans living in big cities?<sup>42</sup> Matters are even more complex when the audience is not an individual but a group. How many audience members at the United Nations Climate Action Summit had to regard Thunberg as an IPR for Generation Z for it to be said that

<sup>38</sup>See, e.g., Breaking News Staff, “State of Emergency declared in Brookville, fire ban issued due to water issue,” *WHIO*, May 29, 2019, <<https://www.whio.com/news/local/state-emergency-declared-brookville-entire-city-without-water-after-tornado-hit/vNnQzRsubWcqEyeOYnGcVL>>.

<sup>39</sup>On the relationship between speaking for and speaking about, see especially Linda Alcoff, “The problem of speaking for others,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 20 (Winter, 1991–1992), 5–32, at pp. 8–9, 30, n. 7; Saward, *The Representative Claim*, p. 49.

<sup>40</sup>I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

<sup>41</sup>King, *Stride toward Freedom*, p. 98.

<sup>42</sup>Tommy Orange, *There There: A Novel* (New York: Knopf, 2018).

the audience, as such, took her to be? Of course, it is possible to simply acknowledge that some members of an audience regard a party as an IPR, while others do not. And because, unlike FPRs, there are no limits as to how many IPRs a given group can have, many different IPRs may receive their uptake from the same large and amorphous audience, even if not from the very same audience members.

Audience uptake may even elude the very audience that brings it about. That you take someone to speak or act for others does not mean that you realize you do. I discuss unwitting audiences in Section V.

Audience uptake should be distinguished from a connected but distinct phenomenon: creating conditions that make audience uptake more likely. Uptake can be brought about only by an audience that sincerely takes it to be the case that a party is a representative in a particular context.<sup>43</sup> By contrast, almost any party can try to create conditions that make audience uptake more likely. For instance, a person who wants to be seen as a representative for some group *G* might claim “I speak for *G*!”—attempting to create conditions that make it more likely that an audience will come to view them as a representative for *G*. Or members of *G*, who already sincerely take a given party to be their own IPR, may try to create conditions under which other audiences will do so as well. This seems to have happened to King in Montgomery when he received “the call of the people for a spokesman.”<sup>44</sup> Or, instead, a third party may try to create such conditions. Montgomery’s mayor took just such an approach during the bus boycott:

On Saturday, January 21, the city commission made a different attempt to stifle the boycott. Mayor Gayle met with three little-known black ministers who were not members of the MIA, the Reverends William K. Kind, Benjamin F. Mosely, and D. C. Rice, and announced to the press late that evening that a settlement had been reached. With the active complicity of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, the commissioners’ erroneous story claimed that the “prominent Negro ministers” had agreed to a plan whereby ten front seats would be reserved exclusively for whites and ten rear ones for blacks. Saturday night, as the *Advertiser* went to press, the wire services began distributing the story on the reported settlement.<sup>45</sup>

Mayor Gayle was simply acting as if these ministers were representatives for Montgomery’s Black community—he lacked the sincere doxastic attitude required for audience uptake. Gayle chose to pretend that these ministers were IPRs for Black Montgomerians—creating conditions under which others would come to believe this and confer audience uptake—precisely to avoid having to

<sup>43</sup>“Sincerely takes it to be the case” is intentionally broad. An audience may, for instance, believe, suppose, assume, or take for granted that a party is an IPR.

<sup>44</sup>King, *Stride toward Freedom*, p. 89.

<sup>45</sup>David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow, 2004), p. 54.

continue negotiations with King, whom he had already identified as the most significant IPR of Black Montgomerians.<sup>46</sup>

The point here is a conceptual one: it is possible to create conditions that make audience uptake more likely without thereby oneself performing uptake.<sup>47</sup> Distinguishing audience uptake from creating conditions that make uptake more likely helps us understand the place and importance of self-appointment within a complete theory of informal political representation. That a party makes a self-appointing claim (“I am the emissary of ... the entire Jewish People,”<sup>48</sup> say) may explain why uptake obtains in a case. An audience, hearing the self-appointing claim, confers uptake. However, while self-appointing claims can create conditions that make audience uptake more likely, they are not themselves audience uptake.

## B. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Yet, it may seem that audience uptake is not sufficient, or even necessary, for someone to be an IPR. There may seem to be cases in which an audience is entirely mistaken in taking someone to represent a group (*false positives*), and cases in which an audience should recognize someone as a representative of a group, but fails to do so (*false negatives*).<sup>49</sup> Let us consider each of these in turn.

### i. *False Positives*

Imagine Ambor is one of few Black students at an elite university in the US. She is sitting in a political theory seminar with 14 white classmates, where the discussion turns to the experience of growing up Black in the US. Suddenly, everyone turns to Ambor, expecting her to speak for Black American students.<sup>50</sup> You may quite reasonably think the audience is deeply mistaken in doing so. After all, Ambor was born and raised in Jamaica and moved to the US only recently for college—facts known to her classmates. Surely the audience, her classmates, have gotten something wrong. On such a view, only certain instances of audience uptake, of a certain epistemic quality, confer the status of IPR. Other instances that do not meet this quality threshold generate *false positives*. If an

<sup>46</sup>King, *Stride toward Freedom*, p. 98. An audience can simultaneously take several parties to be IPRs for the same group. However, given the known context of these negotiations, it is reasonable to conclude that Gayle decided to act as if these other ministers were IPRs, rather than sincerely believing it. See Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, pp. 54–5.

<sup>47</sup>By distinguishing these phenomena, I deny neither that creating conditions that make uptake more likely could be a valuable political practice in its own right, nor that one could create such conditions in ways that are in good faith. I thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging this clarification.

<sup>48</sup>Isabel Kershner, “Speech by Netanyahu opens political divisions in Israel, too,” *New York Times*, Mar. 1, 2015, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/02/world/middleeast/netanyahus-speech-opens-political-divisions-in-israel-too.html>>.

<sup>49</sup>See, e.g., Rehfeld, “Towards a general theory of political representation,” p. 13.

<sup>50</sup>I thank an anonymous reviewer for offering a variant of this example. For a similar classroom example, see Davis, “Typecasts, tokens, and spokespersons,” pp. 491–2; see also Lawrence Blum, *High Schools, Race, and America’s Future: What Students Can Teach Us about Morality, Diversity, and Community* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2012), pp. 54–5, 162.

audience attempts uptake in an epistemically mistaken way, then the uptake is faulty. Faulty uptake, you may think, does not confer representative status.

However, these apparent false positives are only apparent. To see this, we must separate out distinct questions. First, has the audience come to regard Ambor as representing Black American students? Second, has the audience done so in an epistemically criticizable manner? The answer to each question is “yes,” but they are distinct questions and must be treated as such.

The first question concerns whether the audience brought about uptake, where this means the audience sincerely regards Ambor to be speaking or acting for Black American students. Here, the audience did: Ambor’s classmates regard her as a representative of Black American students, and, by so regarding her, they make it so. They have conferred this role on Ambor and, by so doing, she has gained a power: the power to influence how her classmates regard Black American students. Of course, it is available to Ambor to encourage her audience to revoke uptake. But unless revocation occurs, Ambor is for them an IPR of Black American students, for good or ill.

The second question concerns criticizability. The audience regards Ambor as representing Black American students despite her lack of knowledge about what it is like to grow up Black in America and despite the audience’s awareness that Ambor grew up in Jamaica. The audience is epistemically criticizable at least for being improperly responsive to the available evidence and for discounting Ambor’s earlier testimony concerning her upbringing. But the audience’s epistemic errors neither render its uptake inert, nor make it the case that uptake has not obtained.

In short, the fact that an audience’s uptake is errant does not mean uptake has not obtained. Even if on the basis of glaring epistemic errors, the audience members have formed a sincere belief that Ambor represents Black American students.

By characterizing uptake this way, we develop a nuanced understanding of the relationships of power that arise between the parties, even in cases originating in audience error. Both the audience and the IPR come to have power with respect to the represented group: (a) the uptaking audience exercises power to confer a power on the uptaken party such that that uptaken party’s statements and actions are imputed to the represented group; and (b) the uptaken party is imbued with derivative power to influence how the represented group is regarded by the audience and possibly, as a result, many conditions affecting the group’s members’ lives.

*Objection.* It is counterintuitive that audience uptake makes it the case that one is an IPR.

*Reply.* Absent an audience, it would make little sense to characterize a speaker or an actor as a representative. The speaker or actor may be a representative hopeful or a representative has-been, but absent some audience who ascribes the IPR’s statements or actions to another (the represented), there can be no representation.

*Objection.* By identifying audience uptake as the constitutive condition for the emergence of an IPR, the account empowers audiences and disempowers IPRs and represented groups, who we might otherwise have thought have the right to say who speaks or acts for whom.

*Reply.* This account does not give audiences power. Rather, this account acknowledges power that audiences in fact have by identifying what lies at the core of being an IPR (the power to influence) and what confers that power (audience uptake). In doing so, the account more completely and more accurately describes how IPRs emerge.

*Objection.* No *true* representative relationship can be built on mistake. The aforementioned audience just got it wrong in taking Ambor to represent Black American students. Sure, the audience takes Ambor to represent Black American students, but their uptake did not bring about a *real* representative. Real representatives, for instance, (1) are group members, (2) know about the group, or (3) self-appoint as group spokespersons.

*Reply.* These are perfectly reasonable criteria for determining whether someone, respectively, might be (1) a descriptive representative of a group<sup>51</sup> or (2) an epistemic authority about a group, or (3) tries to create conditions that make audience uptake more likely by self-appointing. However, they are not criteria for determining whether someone is an IPR. The objector elides distinctions between informal political representation and other types of representative phenomena. Although errant, the objector's elisions are understandable. Often, an audience's reason for taking a given party to be an IPR is that the party is a descriptive representative or an epistemic authority, or self-appoints. However, we should resist the objector's temptation to collapse a useful distinction between an audience's reasons for bringing about uptake and the fact that uptake has obtained. I consider audiences' various reasons for taking parties to be IPRs in Section IV.

## ii. False Negatives

One might instead think that, although no audience has conferred uptake on a given party *P*, *P* may still be an IPR. Perhaps the audience has standard rules it normally uses to decide on IPRs, but did not apply those rules to *P*.<sup>52</sup> Had the

<sup>51</sup>On descriptive representation, see especially Alcoff, "The problem of speaking for others"; Davis, "Typecasts, tokens, and spokespersons"; A. Phillips Griffiths and Richard Wollheim, "Symposium: how can one person represent another?," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume*, 34 (1960), 187–224, at p. 188; Jane Mansbridge, "Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women? A contingent 'yes'," *Journal of Politics*, 61 (1999), 628–57, at p. 628; Jennifer M. Morton, "The Miseducation of the Elite," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 29 (2021), 3–24; Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence: The Political Representation of Gender, Ethnicity, and Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1967] 1972), pp. 60–91; Wendy Salkin, "Not Just Speaking for Ourselves", MS (2021); Melissa S. Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>52</sup>See, e.g., Rehfeld, "Towards a general theory of political representation," pp. 5–7, 9, 11–17, 19.

audience applied the rules, it would have identified *P* as an IPR. So, *P* is an IPR. The audience just failed to identify *P* as one.

This false negative is also only apparent. That an audience has standard rules it otherwise uses to decide which parties represent should not have bearing on the instant case. We might say that the audience erred by not applying its standard rules and we may even say that, had the audience applied those rules, uptake would have obtained. But where the rule has not been applied and uptake does not obtain, no IPR has emerged. That the parties contemplated here are not IPRs does not mean that they are not representatives at all. Other concepts of representation may apply to these parties. For instance, as the first in her family to attend college, Ambor might appropriately be considered a descriptive representative for first-generation college students whether or not her classmates take her to be.

In short, what matters to understanding whether an IPR has emerged is only whether audience members sincerely take that party to speak or act for a given group. And although, contra voluntarists,<sup>53</sup> a party's willingness to represent is not required for that party to emerge as an IPR, willingness affects the nature and strength of the IPR's duties—a consideration to which I return in Section VI.

#### IV. CONSCRIPTION

Ta-Nehisi Coates has publicly bristled at “being seen as a spokesperson for black America.”<sup>54</sup> Coates has been adorned with many titles: “a defining voice of our times,”<sup>55</sup> “the pre-eminent black public intellectual of his generation,”<sup>56</sup> “the laureate of black lives,”<sup>57</sup> “the neoliberal face of the black freedom struggle.”<sup>58</sup> Each of these designations is an instance of some form of audience uptake, converging on the conclusion that Coates is an IPR for Black Americans. In this role, Coates has significant power to influence how a wide variety of audiences regard Black Americans. What he says is taken up by audiences and ascribed to other Black Americans as expressions of their own views, values, and commitments. Coates has this power independently of ever having intended to attain it: “Obviously I write,” he says, “and I write for the public and I want my thoughts

<sup>53</sup>See, e.g., Montanaro, *Who Elected Oxfam?*, pp. 42–4, 45; Rehfeld, “Towards a general theory of political representation,” pp. 6, 12–13; Saward, *The Representative Claim*, pp. 36–8, 95–102.

<sup>54</sup>Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Ta-Nehisi Coates looks back at 8 years of writing in the Obama era,” interview by Robin Young, *Here & Now*, WBUR, Sept. 28, 2017, <<https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2017/09/28/ta-nehisi-coates-eight-years-in-power>>.

<sup>55</sup>Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Imagining a new America,” interview by Krista Tippett, *On Being*, Oct. 16, 2017, <<https://onbeing.org/programs/ta-nehisi-coates-imagining-a-new-america/>>.

<sup>56</sup>Jennifer Senior, “Through the lens of the Obama Years, Ta-Nehisi Coates reckons with race, identity and Trump,” *New York Times*, Oct. 1, 2017, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/01/books/review-ta-nehisi-coates-we-were-eight-years-in-power.html>>.

<sup>57</sup>David Smith, “Ta-Nehisi Coates: the laureate of black lives,” *Guardian*, Oct. 8, 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/oct/08/ta-nehisi-coates-our-story-is-a-tragedy-but-doesnt-depress-me-we-were-eight-years-in-power-interview>>.

<sup>58</sup>Cornel West, “Ta-Nehisi Coates is the neoliberal face of the black freedom struggle,” *Guardian*, Dec. 17, 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/17/ta-nehisi-coates-neoliberal-black-struggle-cornel-west>>.

considered, I want my writing considered. But I didn't ask for a crown.”<sup>59</sup> Coates was conscripted.

An IPR is conscripted just in case they are taken by some audience to speak or act for some group, but do not take themselves to speak or act for that group—that is, the party is unwitting or unwilling.<sup>60</sup> Though it is possible for each of us to be conscripted into the role of IPR in the course of everyday life, it is far more likely for some than others. Representative conscription is an experience so common among members of subordinated groups that it has become fodder for satirical news sites, which publish skewering articles like “Aisha Unceremoniously Elected Spokesperson for All Black Women”<sup>61</sup> and “Aboriginal Coworker Asked to Speak on Behalf of 700,000 People in Passing Conversation.”<sup>62</sup> As these examples attest, it is especially common for members of a society's dominant groups to take members of subordinated groups to speak or act for the whole of the groups of which they are members,<sup>63</sup> often based on the errant assumption that members of subordinated groups are doxastically or conatively homogeneous.<sup>64</sup>

It need hardly be stated that there is something worrisome and, in many cases, objectionable about representative conscription.<sup>65</sup> So, why does it happen? There are two ways of understanding this question. First, what motivates audiences to seek out IPRs? Second, given that audiences seek out IPRs, for what reasons do they take some people rather than others to be those IPRs?

*Audience motivations.* Audiences may be motivated by a wide variety of interests to seek out IPRs. Some audience motivations—for instance, learning about a group or including group members' perspectives in a deliberative decision-making process—can reflect sincere regard for a represented group. Such *group-regarding* motivations are not uniformly objectionable. Other audience motivations, by contrast, are uniformly objectionable—for instance, seeking out IPRs so as to publicly appear concerned for a group, or to avoid more direct interactions with the group, or selecting IPRs whose statements or actions will justify the audience's currently retrogressive relationship with the represented

<sup>59</sup>Coates, “Ta-Nehisi Coates looks back.”

<sup>60</sup>Saward, *The Representative Claim*, pp. 61–2, distinguishes parties that claim someone is a representative (*makers*) from parties of which such claims are made (*subjects*). Applying this distinction here, while both voluntary (willing and witting) and conscripted (unwilling or unwitting) IPRs are subjects of representative claims made by others (audiences), only voluntary IPRs are subjects of self-made representative claims.

<sup>61</sup>Taylor Garron, “Aisha unceremoniously elected spokesperson for all black women,” *Reductress*, Nov. 21, 2017, <<https://reductress.com/post/aisha-unceremoniously-elected-spokesperson-for-all-black-women>>.

<sup>62</sup>Clancy Overell, “Aboriginal coworker asked to speak on behalf of 700,000 people in passing conversation,” *Betoota Advocate*, <<https://www.betootaadvocate.com/uncategorized/aboriginal-coworker-asked-to-speak-on-behalf-of-700000-people-in-passing-conversation>>. I thank Yarran Hominh for sharing this article with me.

<sup>63</sup>In some cases, like Ambor's, an audience misattributes group membership to a party and takes the presumed group member to speak or act for a group of which they are not a member.

<sup>64</sup>On this point, see especially Davis, “Typecasts, tokens, and spokespersons”; and Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic exploitation,” *Ergo*, 3 (2016), 569–90.

<sup>65</sup>See especially Davis, “Typecasts, tokens, and spokespersons,” pp. 490–3, on “the harm of *compulsory representation*” (p. 490); and Berenstain, “Epistemic exploitation.”

group.<sup>66</sup> Such *audience-regarding* motivations share the aim of using an IPR as a mere means to further the audience's ends, often absent regard for either the IPR or the represented, sometimes at the expense of both. Mixed motivations are possible. A community organization may add members of previously absent groups to a citizens' panel both to add new perspectives to decision-making and to shore up its public image as inclusive. Moreover, an audience's motivations may not be known to the audience itself.

*Audience reasons.* Second, for what reason(s) does an audience take some party rather than another to be a given group's IPR? While answering this question depends, in part, on empirical research concerning when and why audiences take some parties rather than others to be IPRs, we can identify some broad categories of reasons:

1. *Descriptive representation.* An audience may take a given party to be an IPR for a group because that party is a group member or descriptively similar to group members in some respect, like the tornado-stricken neighbor. Such IPRs are regarded as standing in as tokens of given types.
2. *Epistemic authority.* An audience may take a given party to be an IPR for a given group because that party has authoritative knowledge about the group, like our aforementioned tornado scholar.
3. *Derivative uptake.* An audience may take a given party to be an IPR for a group because some other audience already does.
4. *Instrumental usefulness.* An audience may take a party to be an IPR for a group because it is instrumentally useful to the audience to do so. Note, however, that if an audience treats a party as an IPR solely for instrumental reasons and fails to satisfy the sincerity requirement, this is not uptake.

These reasons are not mutually exclusive and may compound. For instance, an audience may take a party to be an IPR because the audience regards that party to be an epistemic authority, and the audience regards that party to be an epistemic authority by virtue of that party's group membership.

By identifying and distinguishing different audience motivations and reasons, we are better able to explain why IPR conscription occurs and whom it befalls. These distinctions also help us evaluate what duties, if any, an audience's uptake generates for a conscripted IPR and to whom satisfaction of those duties is owed—considerations contemplated in Section VI. First, however, we consider how an audience's power to conscript IPRs gives rise to corresponding duties for the audience itself.

## V. THE POWERS AND DUTIES OF AUDIENCES

Audiences have a great deal of power to say who speaks or acts for whom. To take another to be a representative is to empower them, but also thereby to

<sup>66</sup>For these to be cases of uptake, the audience must sincerely take the party they find to speak or act for the group.



burden them, with power they may not want. (Coates: “I didn’t ask for a crown.”)<sup>67</sup> To what corresponding duties does such power give rise?

Begin with this general principle: each of us is responsible to identify when we make claims on others that they do things for us and to consider whether, and if so when, it is reasonable and permissible for us to make those claims on them. From this general principle, we can specify at least three audience duties: (1) to recognize generally that one is an audience, which helps one (2) to identify when one ascribes representative status, which helps one (3) to assess whether doing so is reasonable and permissible. Consider each of these in turn.

*Recognizing that one is an audience.* Audience uptake is neither rare nor remote: whenever one takes a person to speak or act for others in those others’ steads, one is an audience or part of an audience conferring uptake. Still, it is not easy or obvious to recognize when one may oneself be acting as an audience. In our everyday lives, few of us, I suspect, actively consider whether we are acting as an audience in a given interaction. Once we do so, we find that the world is full of unwitting audience members conferring uptake willy-nilly. If we know only one postal employee or just two adoptive parents, we may quite reasonably go to them with our questions about the postal service or adoption. On receiving their answers, we may then ascribe those answers, not always unreasonably, to other postal employees or other adoptive parents. The phenomenon itself is not unusual; thinking about it as creating IPRs is. The first responsibility each of us has, then, is simply to recognize that we may, individually or as a group member, be an audience.<sup>68</sup> Part of what it is to recognize that one is an audience is to recognize that one has the capacity to make a particular sort of claim on another—a claim that they speak or act for someone else.

Recognizing that one is an audience is prefatory—it puts one on alert that one has the capacity to put another in the position of IPR. However, we want to know not only that we have this capacity, but when we tend to exercise it.

*Identifying when one ascribes representative status.* Accordingly, each of us is responsible to try to identify when we tend to seek out IPRs and what motivates us to do so in those cases. We want to know when we tend to exercise this capacity and our motivations for doing so in order to assess whether, in those cases, we may.

*Assessing whether one may ascribe representative status to a given party.* Now, imagine that you have both recognized that you are an audience generally and identified a particular context in which you tend to ascribe representative status. The next question before you is whether you should take a particular party to be an IPR. Two considerations should inform your assessment: (a) Is it reasonable, as an epistemic matter, to take this party to speak or act for this group? (b) Is it morally permissible to take this party to speak or act for this group? If your answer to either question is “no,” then you ought not to take the party to speak or act for the group.

<sup>67</sup>Coates, “Ta-Nehisi Coates looks back.”

<sup>68</sup>When one is a member of a group audience, difficult and important questions emerge concerning individual responsibility for uptake conferred by the group.

*Reasonableness.* Is it reasonable to believe that the party has requisite knowledge or experience to speak or act for the group in the context at issue? In some cases, this is easily answered. A credentialed tornado scholar who has devoted a lifetime of research to a particular neighborhood likely knows enough to speak or act on behalf of the neighborhood's denizens on matters concerning their relationships to tornadoes. In trickier cases, in which an audience is not sure whether it is reasonable to believe that the party in question has requisite knowledge or experience, that audience may be tempted to consider whether some other audience already takes the party in question to be an IPR (*derivative uptake*).

Some caveats about derivative uptake. First, that another audience takes some party to be an IPR does not by itself give one dispositive reason to do so, since that other audience's uptake may be errant. By relying on their uptake, one may replicate their error. Second, we may worry that defaulting to extant IPRs can lead to entrenchment, preventing other IPRs with novel perspectives from emerging.

*Permissibility.* Suppose you conclude it reasonable to believe that a particular party has requisite knowledge or experience to speak or act for the group at issue. Is it permissible for you to take this party to speak or act for that group? A variety of different considerations will aid you, the audience, in answering this question, including:

1. *Self-appointment.* Has this party claimed to speak or act for the group or do they seem amenable to doing so? You ought to ask this, not because by doing so you will discover who is the "real" IPR, but so as to avoid burdening a reluctant or unwilling party with so weighty a role.
2. *Group uptake.* Do members of the group to be represented regard this party as speaking or acting for them? You ought to ask this so as to avoid burdening the group with an IPR the group's members would not choose for themselves.
3. *Rebuttable presumption.* Sometimes, there is a rebuttable presumption against taking a party to represent a group. These presumptions may be generated in a variety of ways, but here consider just one. Recall the tendency for members of a society's dominant groups to assume, as a matter of course, that members of subordinated groups represent those groups. When this tendency reflects an objectionable inability or unwillingness to regard members of the subordinated groups as individuals, as it often does,<sup>69</sup> it should activate in an audience a rebuttable presumption that the subordinated group member ought not to be taken to represent.

Even unwitting audiences have these duties, because these duties emerge from audiences' power to appoint IPRs, and even unwitting audiences have that power. However, because unwitting audiences do not know they are so positioned,

<sup>69</sup>See, e.g., Douglas Flammig, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 12. I thank an anonymous reviewer for guidance here.

usually they will not be blameworthy for failing to meet their audience duties, although they may be blameworthy for failing to consider whether they are audiences in the first place.

Return to Ambor. Nothing about the original case makes it reasonable or permissible for Ambor's classmates to have taken her to speak or act for Black American students. Moreover, given that Ambor is a member of a subordinated group and her audience comprises members of the society's dominant group, there is a rebuttable presumption against Ambor's classmates taking her to speak or act even for a group of which she is a member—Black students at the university. When, if ever, might it be reasonable and permissible for Ambor's classmates to take her to speak or act for other Black students at the university?

Consider two variants of the original case. In the first, Ambor is president of the university's Black Student Association (BSA). In the second, Ambor writes a popular and intensively researched column for the college newspaper about the perspectives and experiences of Black students at the university. In each case, these facts are known to Ambor's classmates. Is it reasonable and permissible in either case for Ambor's classmates to take her to speak or act for other Black students at the university?

*Reasonableness.* In both variant cases, it seems reasonable for Ambor's classmates to believe that Ambor has requisite knowledge to speak or act for at least some fellow Black students at the university regarding matters that fall squarely within the scope of Ambor's respective mandates in each variant case. Consider: As BSA president, Ambor has regular interlocution with and, so, access to the diverse perspectives of those in her constituency—BSA members. Likewise, to write her column, Ambor must research the perspectives and experiences of Black students at the university.

Add to the second variant: Recently, Ambor's columns have been picked up by an influential media outlet as part of its "Emerging Black Voices" series. The media outlet, itself an audience, takes Ambor to speak for Black students at the university, making it seem plausible that her classmates' uptake is not mere tokenization of a presumed descriptive representative, but derivative uptake of someone credentialed as an emerging public voice for Black students at the university.

*Permissibility.* Is it permissible for Ambor's classmates to take her to represent fellow Black students at the university? Relevant considerations include:

1. *Self-appointment.* Does Ambor take herself to speak or act for Black students at the university or is she amenable to doing so?

First variant: Ambor accepted a nomination and ran for BSA President—giving her classmates some reason to believe that Ambor is willing to represent other Black students at the university. Still, her constituency is the BSA's membership, not Black students at the university as such.

Second variant: Ambor's election to write a public-facing column voicing the perspectives of fellow Black students may suggest that Ambor wants to serve as an IPR for fellow Black students.

We may think Ambor's reasonable expectation to not be taken as an IPR in the original scenario is diminished in both variants, since both evidence Ambor's willingness to represent Black students at the university in some respect. Diminished, but not quashed: that Ambor represents in one domain does not necessarily mean she wants to represent in other domains.

2. *Group uptake*. Do other Black students at the university take Ambor to represent them?

First variant: Ambor won an election to serve as BSA president—evidence that a majority of voting BSA members want Ambor to represent them in this formal capacity. Whether it follows that most Black students at the university want Ambor to represent them in an informal capacity depends on (a) whether the majority of voting BSA members also constitutes a majority of Black students at the university, and (b) whether there is a widely accepted norm that BSA presidents also serve as IPRs for Black students on campus.

Second variant: That Ambor writes a column about the perspectives and experiences of Black students at the university does not give her classmates much information as to whether Black students at the university take her to represent them. Ambor's classmates may have evidence from other sources—perhaps Ambor's column receives widespread social media amplification and endorsement from other Black students on campus.

3. *Rebuttable presumption*. Even if the two variants make it plausible that Ambor's classmates take her to represent fellow Black students in deference to her epistemic authority, her self-appointment, or group uptake she received, the strength of the rebuttable presumption in this case cannot be overstated. We have reason to worry that Ambor's classmates simply errantly and objectionably assume that all Black students either know what other Black students think or think the same thing.

Focusing on the role of audiences in the emergence of IPRs makes salient normative features of informal political representation that are occluded if we build our theory with only the witting and willing in mind. For instance, we uncover novel normative considerations like these:

1. Audiences ought to actively avoid forming and actively aim to revise their sincere but misguided beliefs about who represents whom.
2. Audiences are criticizable for burdening members of subordinated groups with responsibilities to represent fellow group members.

To take someone to be an IPR is to both empower and burden them, and one ought not to knowingly burden another without good reason and due consideration.

## VI. SOME NORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSCRIPTED INFORMAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES

Conscription complicates our normative theory of informal political representation. An audience brings about an IPR, that IPR gains power to influence, and the represented are often at the mercy of both. However, in cases of conscription, the IPR did not ask for the power and, in many cases, the audience did not realize they were installing an IPR. Where does all this leave the conscripted IPRs themselves?

In Section VI.A, I consider some pro tanto duties that accrue to IPRs generally and discuss how those duties vary depending on different features of the IPR role. In Section VI.B, I consider when a conscripted IPR might reasonably reject duties that would otherwise accrue to them by virtue of their representative status and when, instead, their grounds for reasonable rejection might be outmatched by a represented group's need for their representation.

### A. PRO TANTO DUTIES

An IPR's pro tanto duties to the represented vary in both degree and kind depending on a number of features of their role, including (1) how much power they have to influence how the represented are regarded (*power to influence*); (2) whether they know or ought reasonably to have known that they are an IPR (*wittingness*); (3) how willing they are to be an IPR (*willingness* and *unwillingness*); and (4) how other relationships between the IPR and the represented bear on the nature and scope of the IPR's duties (*other ties*).

*Power to influence.* An IPR's amount and type of power to influence will vary dramatically from case to case, depending on various considerations, including how influential an audience they face and the scope of their representative mandate. Few IPRs have as much power to influence as Coates or King or Thunberg. If your audience is just your friends at dinner, the sort of power you have as an IPR may be rather limited; but if your audience is, say, Congress, matters are different. Or your audience, however large and influential, may regard the scope of your representative mandate to be limited. For instance, the representative mandate of the neighbor on the nightly news was limited in two ways: they spoke only for their neighbors and they spoke only on the subject matter of their neighbors' well-being during curfew. An IPR with little power to influence has (if any) correspondingly weaker duties to the represented than an IPR who has much power to influence. Because one's IPR duties track one's power to influence, all else equal, the strength of one's duties varies as one's degree of power varies.

Because the power to influence is conferred by others, it does not vanish simply because the power holder is reluctant or unwilling. So, even if one is non-voluntarily an IPR, and even if one is harmed or even wronged by having been made an IPR, one may still have great power to influence how the represented are regarded by various audiences and to thereby affect the interests and constrain the choices of the represented. It is that fact—the fact that one has or stands to

gain such power to influence—that gives rise to corresponding pro tanto duties to those one represents.

*Unwittingness.* Even unwitting IPRs can have duties to the represented, since even they may have power to influence. However, because unwitting IPRs do not know they are so positioned, they are usually not blameworthy for failing to meet their duties to the represented—their lack of knowledge is, in most cases, exculpatory. So, blameworthiness for failure to satisfy one's IPR duties tracks one's wittingness. There is, however, a constructive knowledge caveat: unwitting IPRs may be blameworthy for failure to meet IPR duties in cases where it would be reasonable to expect them to know that they are IPRs.

*Willingness.* Many who emerge as IPRs welcome the role or may even have vied for it. Unlike conscripted representatives, voluntary representatives opt to take on what may end up being considerable responsibilities. Further, by publicly signaling their willingness to represent, voluntary representatives may both make others feel comfortable leaving the representation to them and create expectations in others, including the represented, concerning how they will represent. Accordingly, whether an IPR is willing can make quite a difference to the degree and kind of duties that IPR has to the represented.

The degree of willingness an IPR exhibits corresponds to an increase in the accompanying duties' strengths. Consider:

- a. *Knowledge.* A willing self-appointed, if granted audience uptake, will be blameworthy for failure to fulfill their obligations to the represented when that IPR knows or should reasonably know they are an IPR.
- b. *Expectation.* Publicly expressing willingness generates stronger duties for the voluntary IPR than for a conscripted IPR, because expressing willingness may raise expectations in audiences, represented groups, or even other potential IPRs, that the voluntary IPR will try to represent the group well, and knowingly raising expectations in another gives us reason to satisfy those expectations.
- c. *Commitment.* A party's expressed willingness to represent may, in certain contexts, be tantamount to making a commitment to the represented, which brings with it the corresponding duty to meet one's commitments.

*Unwillingness.* Like a willing IPR, a witting but unwilling IPR knows they are taken to represent. Unlike a willing IPR, the witting but unwilling IPR neither intentionally raises expectations, nor commits to the represented. Still, it is possible that an unwilling IPR will have either the duty to represent or the duty to disavow the role's conferral ("I am speaking for only myself"),<sup>70</sup> provided one

<sup>70</sup>Disavowal of one's IPR role is not adequate for effecting its revocation; the uptaking audience must revoke the role.

of two further conditions is met: the unwilling IPR lacks grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of duties that would normally accrue to a party in their position, or the IPR's rejection of the ascription of these duties would significantly burden the represented. I consider grounds for reasonable rejection in Section VI.B.

*Other ties.* An IPR's duties to the represented may also be constrained, expanded, or otherwise shaped by other relationships in which the IPR stands to the represented. Consider some such ties:

- a. *FPR.* The IPR for one group may contemporaneously be an FPR for another, as King was an IPR for Black Montgomerians while an FPR for the Montgomery Improvement Association. Where both roles required the same action, King's duty to perform that action was overdetermined. If, however, King's two roles mandated conflicting courses of action, he would have needed to weigh these by an independent standard.<sup>71</sup>
- b. *Party whose work takes a particular group as its subject.* Often, a party whose work takes a particular group as its subject (an artist,<sup>72</sup> a researcher, or an author, for instance) is taken by an audience to represent that group and then criticized for failing to satisfy IPR duties. We may not unreasonably think audience uptake intrudes on a particular, protected social role such a party inhabits and so the party has grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of duties that would otherwise accrue to them by virtue of their power to influence.
- c. *Beneficiary.* But what if such a party, whose work takes as its subject the group they are taken to represent, accepts personal benefits that accrue to them by virtue of their IPR status? Generally, an IPR who accepts personal benefits that are products of their IPR status will, other things equal, be less well positioned to reject the ascription of duties that would accrue to them by virtue of their power to influence than IPRs who do not accept such benefits. Imagine Ambor's "Emerging Black Voices" column lands her a lucrative book deal and public acclaim. In this case, objections Ambor has to being regarded as an IPR for Black students at the university must be balanced against the consideration that she accepts personal benefits (beyond her power to influence) from being so regarded.
- d. *General moral duties.* One cannot come to have duties to a represented group that contravene one's general moral duties. A party conscripted to represent white supremacists, say, has no responsibility to white supremacists to represent them, as no one can be required to act in the service of perpetuating a morally reprehensible ideology.

<sup>71</sup>On conflicts between IPR duties, see Salkin, "Democracy within, justice without"; on FPRs facing competing norms, see Alexander A. Guerrero, "The paradox of voting and the ethics of political representation," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 38 (2016), 272–306, at pp. 281–3.

<sup>72</sup>I thank an anonymous reviewer for asking about artists.

## B. A CONSCRIPT'S GROUNDS FOR REASONABLE REJECTION

In Section VI.A, I argued that IPRs come to have pro tanto duties to the represented just by virtue of having the power to influence how an audience regards the represented. Conscripted IPRs often have the power to influence how audiences regard the represented. Still, in many cases, conscripted IPRs will have grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of duties that would otherwise accrue to them by virtue of their power to influence. I conclude that a conscripted IPR must

1. represent only when (a) they have significant power to influence and (b) either they lack grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of duties that would otherwise accrue to them by virtue of their power to influence or their grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of the duties are outmatched by the represented group's need for their representation in particular; and
2. disavow the role only when (a) they have significant power to influence and (b) either they lack grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of a duty to disavow that would otherwise accrue to them by virtue of their power to influence or their grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of a duty to disavow are outmatched by the represented group's need for them to disavow.

A conscripted IPR has grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of duties that would otherwise accrue to them by virtue of their power to influence at least when (1) the audience's motivations for seeking an IPR generally, or reasons for taking this party in particular to be an IPR, are demeaning, degrading, or require the IPR to violate their self-respect, or (2) satisfying the duties would be unduly burdensome for the conscripted IPR.

*Audience motivations and reasons.* Some audience motivations and some audience reasons can by themselves ground a conscripted IPR's reasonable rejection of the ascription of any IPR duties that would otherwise have accrued to them. Forms of uptake that degrade or demean the conscript, or require the conscript to violate their self-respect, can ground reasonable rejection of the ascription of any duty to represent or even to disavow. In particular, if the audience's motivations or reasons are based on morally objectionable interests (like avoiding direct interactions with the represented group) or views (like the assumption that all members of the group are doxastically or conatively similar), then the conscripted party can reasonably reject the ascription of any duty to represent or disavow simply on that ground. Put differently: a conscripted IPR need not serve in an unjust cause.<sup>73</sup>

*Burdens on the conscript.* So, too, can a conscripted IPR in many cases reasonably reject the ascription of a duty to represent or disavow on the ground that to represent or disavow would be unduly burdensome:

<sup>73</sup>I thank Leif Wenar for this turn of phrase.



Laito Zarkpah, a junior philosophy and political science major, expressed frustration with feeling as though she had to be a “spokesperson” for the Black community.

“Feeling like you have to be the spokesperson for your people, that you speak for every single person that looks like you ... gets really frustrating. ... Sometimes I just want to be a student and being a Black student on campus, sometimes you’re not afforded that luxury.”<sup>74</sup>

That a conscripted IPR has grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of duties that might otherwise accrue to them by virtue of their power to influence does not, however, end the inquiry.

*Burdens on the represented group.* While, often, it will be too demeaning, degrading, or demanding for a conscripted IPR to represent or disavow, the conscript’s otherwise reasonable rejection of the ascription of a duty to represent or disavow may be outmatched in some, though few, cases by the represented group’s urgent and weighty need for that conscript, in particular, to represent or disavow. In such cases, two conditions (*need* and *uniqueness*) must be met.

*Need.* Although usually one does not need representation with the urgency one needs, say, rescue, in some cases—escalating violence or hostage negotiations, say—a group may need a representative urgently to stave off injury, danger, death, or another outcome the represented cannot be asked to bear. That a group needs a representative, however, does not answer why any particular party must be that representative. In many cases, the conscript will not be uniquely situated to represent the group. In these cases, the conscripted IPR’s duties may begin and end with making a reasonable effort to disavow the role and point out others better situated or more willing to represent—although even this may be too demanding or demeaning.

But what if this conscript is the only option?

*Uniqueness.* If a conscripted IPR is in fact uniquely positioned by virtue of special knowledge, special access, or unusual ability to represent a group that has urgent and weighty need for representation, the conscripted IPR then has very good, if not dispositive, reason to represent when a non-unique conscript would not.

So, a conscripted IPR is not responsible to fulfill the duties that would otherwise accrue to an IPR if doing so would be degrading, demeaning, or unduly burdensome, unless the represented’s need for a representative is urgent and weighty and either (1) the conscript is uniquely situated to represent the group (in which case the conscript ought to represent) or (2) there is someone else better situated or more willing to represent (in which case the conscript ought to disavow).

So, in some (though few) cases, conscription can give rise to non-voluntary obligations, like many other phenomena that make moral claims on us simply because we are in a particular place at a particular time. In other contexts, we

<sup>74</sup>Lauren McGill, “CME panel features black voices,” *Northern Iowan*, Feb. 17, 2020, <<https://www.northerniowan.com/12333/showcase/cme-panel-features-black-voices>>.

find it natural to think that even acts that wrong or burden us can confer on us responsibilities to third parties, so we should think it possible that an audience's conscripting uptake, even if wrongful or burdensome, could in some (though few) contexts render an IPR responsible to a represented group.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This article identifies and explains a phenomenon so far not characterized by others—*conscripted informal political representation*—and argues that any theory of informal political representation must have something to say about this phenomenon as a condition of its adequacy and completeness.

Representation is not the exclusive province of those born politicians, who deftly, with ease, and gladly, serve as speakers or actors for others. Rather, speaking and acting for others is a fundamental feature of everyday life. Any one of us at any time, despite our unawareness or over our protests, may be taken to speak or act for others. Whether we know it or not, what we say or do may be ascribed to others, influencing or even fundamentally shaping how they are regarded by a variety of audiences. That fact should be a consideration when we decide how to communicate with and act before others. We should want to know what is required of us if it turns out that we are representatives in spite of ourselves. That is true whether or not we appoint ourselves as their representatives. It is true whenever an audience confers on us the power to influence—a power to affect the lives and circumstances of those for whom we are taken to speak or act.

In a way, being conscripted as an IPR is not at all unusual. Often, although we do not choose to be so, we find ourselves in positions that require of us that we act, that we respond: the responsibility to offer rescue or succor, the duty to warn others of harm. Matters are similar, if usually less dire, when we are taken to represent others—an audience makes a claim on us that we speak or act in another's stead. It may be that the audience has harmed or wronged us by making this claim on us, but that consideration makes it no less true that, by virtue of audience uptake, we may come to have considerable power to influence the lives of others—sometimes many others—through what we say or do on their behalves.

At the same time, a new appreciation of the power and burden of audience uptake should make audiences—including all of us—wary. When we take a party to speak or act for others, we both empower and burden them. We make a claim on them that they represent others and, as audiences, we should take care to do so in ways both reasonable and permissible.

Recognizing and understanding conscripted informal political representation allows us to build a more complete and coherent moral theory of informal political representation—one that seats informal political representation more seamlessly into the moral structure of our everyday lives. Doubtless it will take

us some time to start seeing ourselves as representatives and audiences in spite of ourselves. That project will be aided not only by revising our concepts and refining our theories, but also by rethinking what falls within the ambit of civic education—namely, learning that often we serve in the role of representative or audience, often by mere happenstance.

