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Sheldon Wolin, *Fugitive Democracy and Other Essays*, ed. by Nicholas Xenos  
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016)

Political Studies Review

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This volume collects together some key essays, the earliest of which was first published in 1969 and the latest in 2005, from one of the most important and influential political theorists of this period. These essays chart the efflorescence of Wolin's late-developing radicalization, marked in the differences between the 1960 and 2004 editions of his classic *Politics and Vision*. They include some well-known assaults on notions of political theory, and particularly democratic theory, that acquiesce in the boundaries imposed on it by conventional forms of constitutionalist politics, notably 'Political Theory as a Vocation', as well as the title essay. The book is dominated by a series of scholarly and intense essays on Athenian democracy, Hobbes, Weber, Marx, Arendt, the Frankfurt School, Rawls, Rorty, and Foucault, together with reflections on the politics of the 1960s, the new right, and on contemporary US politics, many drawn from Wolin's journal *democracy*. These are hardly discrete topics for Wolin, and the collection is criss-crossed with his enduring preoccupations with the nature of civic participation, power, revolution and dissent, conformism, and particularly with antipolitical ways of thinking about politics.

This is a very rich collection, and I would recommend it to anyone with an interest in political theory and its possibilities. Wolin's furious humanism is characterized not only by fluent and wide-ranging scholarship but splendid rhetoric (he is an immensely sensitive and persuasive reader of Hobbes, the essays on whom are a particular highlight): "When scrutinized according to such measures as cost-effectiveness, the bottom line and productivity, the ideals of the humanistic liberal arts education cannot survive, except as an appendage to the culture industry or as a Potemkin village where the sons and daughters of the rich and infamous receive a polish unobtainable elsewhere" (pp. 47-8). If in this instance, he may be suspected of preaching to the

choir, few readers should come away with all their presuppositions unscathed. So what is fugitive democracy? It is democracy as “a project concerned with the political potentialities of ordinary citizens, that is with their possibilities for becoming political beings through the self-discovery of common concerns and of modes of action for realizing them” (p. 100). This self-recognition and seizure of agency is an enduring possibility but only realized at particular moments, when the iron cage of constitutional, bureaucratic, administrative and economic thinking is cracked open. Failure to see this, for Wolin, means that we are consigned to narrowly technical views of the political. It is not difficult to find this stark framing of democratic theory theoretically constraining and practically fragile: while Wolin concedes that democratic agitation is another form of the slow drilling of hard boards, constitutionalism and the bureaucratic organization of democratic party politics are viewed as mere ‘containment’ of democratic forces. However, his deep challenge to so much contemporary cant is brilliantly illuminated in this collection.