Description: This talk proposes an understanding of political modernity grounded in a study of changes in the configuration of social relationships of delegation and domination (“agency”), variably inflected by meaningful—and even mythological—legitimations of hierarchy and justifications for violence. Based in archival research on “trouble at the edge of empire” in early modern North America, it argues for a social theory of modernity as the promise and peril of life without the King. Relevance to current politics will, the author hopes, become clear by implication in the course of the talk.

Isaac Ariail Reed is a sociologist of culture, politics and history. He is the author of Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences and Power in Modernity: Agency Relations and the Creative Destruction of the King’s Two Bodies.