John Dewey and Citizen Politics: How Democracy Can Survive Artificial Intelligence and the Credo of Efficiency

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> Intolerance, abuse, calling of names because of differences of opinion about religion or politics or business, as well as because of differences of race, color, wealth or degree of culture are treason to the democratic way of life. Merely legal guarantees of the civil liberties of free belief, free expression, free assembly are of little avail if the give and take of ideas, facts, experiences, is choked by mutual suspicion, by abuse, by fear and hatred.
>
> —John Dewey, "Creative Democracy—The Task before Us"

> Without some kind of oversight, the golem, not God, might emerge from machines . . . it is naïve to believe that government is competent, let alone in a position to control the development and deployment of robots, self-generating algorithms, and artificial intelligence. Business is self-interested and resists regulation. We, the people, are on our own here . . .
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> —Sue Halpern, "How Robots & Algorithms Are Taking Over"

> In the past the man has been first. In the future the System must be first.
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> —Frederick Winslow Taylor, *Principles of Scientific Management*

> I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.
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> —"Invictus," Nelson Mandela's favorite poem

Abstract

In this essay, drawn from the 2017 Dewey lecture for the John Dewey Society, I argue that a positive response to the question raised by nine scientists in a *Scientific American* essay, "Will Democracy Survive Big Data and Artificial Intelligence?", February 25, 2017, requires a different kind of politics, citizen-centered, educative, productive, and empowering, as well as places to learn and practice such politics. Drawing on Dewey's 1902 speech, "The School as Social Center," I suggest schools embedded in communities as potential "free space" for citizen politics which transforms the widespread sense of victimhood into civic agency. This kind of politics in community-embedded schools can counter what Robert Kanigel calls the "Credo of Rational Efficiency" that drives civic unravelling, growing powerlessness, and a Manichean politics, accelerated by Big Data and Artificial Intelligence. Manichean politics is especially corrosive and disempowering and derives from the fact that hatred is the most efficient emotion to activate for cheap, quick political results. The essay details examples of citizen politics and signs of public interest in schools as free spaces.

Citizen Politics, John Dewey, and the Crisis in "Modernity"

Can we become masters of our fate in an age of smart machines governed by an efficiency creed, with its conviction that "the system is the solution"? In this 2017 Dewey Lecture I answer affirmatively the question raised by nine scientists in a *Scientific American* essay, "Will Democracy Survive Big Data and Artificial Intelligence?"[1] I argue that we need a different kind of politics, citizen centered, educative, and empowering, as well as places to learn such politics and put it into practice. Drawing on Dewey, I use schools embedded in communities as a case study for developing civic power.

Early in his career as a radiation oncologist, O. Carl Simonton discovered that a significant factor in cancer patients' survival was the conviction "that they exerted some influence over the course of their disease." This "mind-body link," initially scorned in positivist medicine, has become accepted over time.[2] I follow Simonton. Belief in agency makes a difference in our fate as it does in treating cancer.

My belief grows from a tradition of politics, democracy, and social thought which puts citizens at the center, with their ineluctable inefficiency.[3] I experienced this politics firsthand in the freedom movement as a young man. Citizen politics differs from the efficiency logic of government and markets. John Dewey was an eloquent theorist and promoter of this democratic tradition. Here I draw from his 1902 speech, "The School as Social Center," and also other deep resources, including the Catholic and conservative schools of thought which Dewey opposed, "power and love" and "developmental politics" from the freedom movement, community organizing politics, cultural politics, public deliberative politics, and public work politics, an integrative framework which builds on and enriches the other forms

of citizen politics. I argue that these counter what Robert Kanigel calls the "credo of rational efficiency," that in my view drives Manichaean politics in which hatred is easier to activate than public love. Public love holds in tension an end (like winning an election) with values like recognition of the intrinsic dignity and worth of even one's enemies. The Manichaean mindset is central to the efficiency culture. The task of developing citizen politics is challenging but not impossible.

Today, public life is full of danger signs. "Americans are losing faith in democracy—and each other," write Nathaniel Persily and Jon Cohen in the *Washington Post*. Their polling shows dramatic erosion of faith in government and other institutions—the media, organized religion, public schools, banks, unions, and big business. "The problem is even worse," they continue. "Americans do not trust each other. Fully 67 percent say 'you need to be very careful in dealing with people.'" Young adults are the most distrustful of all.[4] Apocalyptic warnings abound. "We are entering the age of strong men," says the conservative David Brooks, pointing to Putin, Erdogan, el-Sisi, Xi Jinping, Kim Jong-un, and Donald Trump. "In America the basic fabric of civic self-government seems to be eroding following the loss of faith in democratic ideals."[5] On the left, Samuel Freeman sees renewed relevance for Frankfurt School pessimism, holding that "capitalist consumer culture makes emancipation impossible because it generates false needs that become strong desires."[6] Pankaj Mishra in *Age of Anger* sees a metastasizing rage against modernity. "Existential resentment . . . [is] caused by an intense mix of envy and sense of humiliation and powerlessness . . . as it lingers and deepens [it] poisons civil society and undermines political liberty and is presently making for a global turn to authoritarianism."[7]

To overcome the dangers we must break the grip of the Manichaean mindset and efficiency's hold on politics by embedding science, technology, work, and politics in civic life, face-to-face contexts, what Sara Evans and I call free spaces, where people of diverse beliefs and interests, working together for purposes far larger than efficiency, develop agency.[8] Efficiency, as Neal Postman puts it, generates the idea that "society is best served when human beings are placed at the disposal of their techniques and technology . . . worth less than their machinery."[9] People and relationships must come first.

Free spaces, relational contexts with room for self-directed action and development, are also places for what John Dewey called *experimental inquiry*. As Roudy Hildreth explains, such inquiry is a starting point for democratic values to critique fictions like the idea that the goal is to do things ever faster and more efficiently. It begins a process of action, reflection, and action.[10] Here I use Dewey's 1902 speech "The School as Social Center," where he identifies a site for such mingling, learning, and experimental inquiry as the school "thoroughly socialized . . . in contact at all points with the flow of community life," different than schools of his time which he saw as under "control . . . by the state."[11]

In *Dewey's Dream*, Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett describe Dewey's rationale for such schools: "It is not the judicial, legislative, and administrative State

but rather the complex schooling system of American society that . . . must function as the *strategic subsystem* of the society."[12] Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett also criticize Dewey for putting aside school experiments when he left Chicago for Columbia University in 1904. Dewey's loss of working relationships with Hull House weakened his vision. The inspiration of Hull House runs throughout his Social Center address.[13]

To build a movement for such schools (and other free spaces) we need a politics that revolves around citizens' interests and capacities, not a politics dictated by the credo of efficiency. In the following, I sketch the unraveling of civic and public life and the rise of Manichaean politics associated with the efficiency creed, culminating in smart machines used with the singular goal of making things faster, cheaper, and more effective to achieve a narrow objective. Then I make a constructive case for action in three parts. First, I explore resources in Dewey's work for what Yvonne Hofstetter, one of the *Scientific American* authors, calls "the fight for our freedom against the rise of intelligent machines." These include belief in the vast capacities of every person, social intelligence, and his critique of detached experts. Second, I begin to develop the idea of a movement for the school as civic center as one example of face-to-face relational sites. Such a movement builds on today's community schools movement and proposes another stage through explicit attention to Dewey's four functions of schools as social centers: places for interaction, creation of ethical culture, inquiry about larger context, and addressing challenges of the changing world of work. Such schools also need a fifth role, enlarging Dewey's understanding of citizenship with citizen-centered politics. Finally, I argue that for the community schools movement to go to a next stage requires citizen politics enriched by insights of democratic movements. These include nonviolence and the politics of the freedom movement, community organizing, cultural politics, deliberation, and public work. I also note the appearance of more relational politics in mainstream elections that point to reawakening democracy as a way of life.

The Politics of Efficiency: Mobilizing and the Manichaean Mindset

> If our hearts shall turn away so that . . . we worship the gods of pleasure and profits and serve them, we shall surely perish out of the good land.
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> —John Winthrop, 1633

> We are all involved in this political corruption. None of us can stand aside; our feet are mired in the same soil, and our lungs breathe the same air.
>
> —Jane Addams, 1902

The struggle to make technology the subject, not the master, of human beings and civic values is as old as the nation, as John Kasson has described in *Civilizing the Machine*.[14] In today's world the threats to civic and democratic values from technology also take new forms.

Technological transformation brings many benefits, from ease of communication across the world (pooling knowledge, communicating with my relatives and friends in South Africa), to vast increases in capacities to diagnose disease, explore the universe, and clean the environment. The problem, from a political perspective, is that digital technology is both immensely powerful and simultaneously reductive. It creates a tool for manipulation on a new scale, especially when governed by the efficiency principle.

"The datafication of everything . . . leaves behind whatever can't be quantified," writes Sue Halpern in the *New York Review of Books* last December.[15] For instance, datafication relies on proxies used to represent vastly more complex realities, with biases of the programmers written in. Today, algorithms are used to predict who will commit a crime, influence sentencing, determine hiring, and determine one's credit rating. Cathy O'Neil begins *Weapons of Math Destruction* with the story of Sarah Wysocki, an elementary school teacher in Washington. Though she received excellent reviews from her principal and from parents, Wysocki got a termination notice because her score in the system for evaluation of teachers generated by an algorithm outweighed positive evaluations from humans. The algorithm, developed by Mathematica Policy Research, may well have used test results of her students compared to their scores the year before, when others taught them. It could be wrong on many grounds. Did earlier teachers doctor the test numbers upward to protect themselves? Did several of her students have a bad day when they took the test (the small numbers would radically skew her score)? No one knows; such algorithms are kept secret. "Verdicts . . . land like dictates from the algorithmic gods," writes O'Neil.[16]

While algorithms reduce vast complexities to proxies, the thinning of social relationships themselves has also been underway for decades.[17] Loneliness is especially acute among young people, and new technologies contribute.[18] Jennifer L. Cline, in "Losing Face: How Facebook Disconnects Us," reports results of a series of focus groups and individual interviews she did with college students which illustrate this dynamic. She asked young adults if they preferred social media or face-to-face communications. Almost everyone said they preferred face-to-face connection, but they also expressed a good deal of anxiety about how to engage others face-to-face—and saw social media as the easy and convenient way out. "These young adults acknowledged wishing they felt more competent when relating to others face-to-face," Cline says. "Unfortunately being 'out of practice' created a vicious cycle in which lack of social competence led to greater dependence on social media use which led to even more interpersonal awkwardness." Extensive

social media use led to curating one's self-presentation and in turn to feelings of greater vulnerability. Such self-curation also feeds "an increase in internal incongruence because they know that their real selves, the selves they actually know and experience, are different from the idealized selves they present." Looking at others' posts and comparing the idealized self-presentations to themselves results in a diminished sense of personhood. These dynamics create an anonymous on-line culture, in which "users post things . . . that they would never say in real life . . . aggressive comments, rude insults, and aggressive opinions."[19]

In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey decried the development of impersonal systems, "those 'great impersonal concerns' . . . which now pervasively affect the thinking, willing, and doing of everybody." He believed "opinion has been regimented as well as outward behavior."[20] The digital revolution increases capacities of political powers to regiment opinion and behavior, undermining "the collective intelligence" which Dewey saw as the heart of a democratic society.

Today, algorithms are able to sort through vast amounts of data collected through evidence, like bread crumbs in the fairy tale, which internet users leave behind in the sites they visit, the information they post on Facebook, the brands they buy, who they talk with, and what they read and watch. Google alone processes more than 24 petabytes of data a day, thousands of times the quantity in the US Library of Congress.[21] As the *Scientific American* authors put it, "for collective intelligence to work, information searches and decision-making by individuals must occur independently. If our judgments and decisions are predetermined by algorithms . . . this truly leads to a brainwashing of the people." Collective intelligence requires social diversity. "Pluralism and participation are not . . . to be seen as concessions to citizens but as functional prerequisites for thriving societies." They observe that "today, algorithms know pretty well what we do, what we think, and how we feel—possibly even better than our friends or family or even ourselves . . . We are being remotely controlled ever more successfully." These dynamics centralize power and point toward other dangers. "A centralized system of technocratic behavioral and social control using a super-intelligent information system would result in a new form of dictatorship," they warn.[22] Peter Levine adds, "Precisely because the power [of data-driven behavioral economics] is soft, imperceptible, cheap and ubiquitous, we don't resist it."[23]

Short of dictatorship, without necessarily malevolent intent, algorithms are used by governments to shape behavior. The *Scientific American* authors cite governmental "nudging," a concept championed by policy advisor Cass Sunstein in the Obama administration. "Under the label of 'nudging' and on massive scale, governments are trying to steer citizens toward healthier or more environmentally friendly behavior . . . The new, caring government is not only interested in what we do but also wants to make sure that we do the things it considers to be right." On a much larger scale than anything yet planned in the US and with more

sinister motives, the Chinese government is planning for every citizen to receive a "Citizen Score," monitoring behavior of people on the internet and the behavior of their social contacts. The Citizen Score will determine whether people can get loans, jobs, or travel visas.[24]

Today, the politics of the internet in the aftermath of Russian interventions in the US 2016 election has become front page news. Less known, "kompromat" or a "fog" of disinformation is spread by new technologies to manufacture public cynicism and confusion through fake news stories and other methods. "By eroding the very idea of a shared reality and by spreading apathy and confusion among a public that learns to distrust leaders and institution alike," writes Amanda Taub, "kompromat undermines a society's ability to hold the powerful to account."[25]

Such dangers are exacerbated by expert detachment from civic life, a dynamic with old roots. Jane Addams in 1902 warned about the emergence of a class of professionals, or "experts" as she described them, who saw themselves outside the life of the people. She said the corrupt ward boss, whom she battled constantly, was more democratic than the outsider, because at least he participated in the life of the people.[26]

Addams's warnings applied to a group of architects of a new way of seeing the world that replaced "politics" with efficiency-minded administration. "We all have to follow the lead of specialists," wrote Walter Lippmann, an editor of the *New Republic,* the leading journal of progressive intellectual opinion. In his view, a growing body of opinion "looks to the infusion of scientific method, the careful application of administrative technique." In the modern world, science became the model for liberal thinking, and "only those will conquer who can understand." The magazine touted the outlook of engineering and the image of the state as a "machine."[27]

Nevertheless, in the US substantial countertrends to the machine model continued through the 1930s and 1940s in both rural life and urban settings. Among intellectuals a movement of what Andrew Jewett called "scientific democrats" looked at science not as value-free techniques but as cultural practices like free inquiry and cooperative experiment. Scientific democrats gained substantial footholds in USDA and other federal agencies, described later. On the ground in local communities, professionals like home economics agents in cooperative extension were often "citizen professionals," whose main interest was in helping communities develop a capacity for self-directed public work. They challenged conventional yardsticks of success. As Isabel Bevier put it, home economics gave extension work in land grant colleges "an idealism and a cultural element . . . as well as a new measuring stick. Heretofore, results had been largely in terms of livestock or crops; hereafter, the measure of successful agriculture was the kind of life produced."[28] I return to this submerged history later.

Especially following World War II, the machine image became dominant, merging with the credo of efficiency which assumes ends as uninterrogated givens and focuses on making means ever more efficient.[29] "The kind of life produced"

disappeared as a measuring stick. Looking back at the twentieth century's end, Kanigel observes that "it is only modest overstatement to say that we are all Taylorized . . . from assembly-line tasks timed to a fraction of a second to lawyers recording their time by fractions of an hour, to standardized MacDonald's hamburgers, to information operators constrained to grant only so many seconds per call."[30] Thus, when the Center for Democracy and Citizenship joined with the National Issues Forums and other groups to organize discussions on the purposes of higher education, people were surprised at the question itself. Dave Senjem, the Republican minority leader of the Minnesota Senate, said "'What's the purpose of higher education?' is a profound question that we've never discussed in all my years in the legislature."[31]

The efficiency creed shaped North Atlantic definitions of democracy and politics. In 1960, Seymour Martin Lipset defined democracy as a system of elections with little intellectual dissent in *Political Man*.[32] Similarly, politics was relocated in the state.[33] *The New Republic* articulated the consensus: "the business of politics has become too complex to be left to the pretentious misunderstandings of the benevolent amateur."[34]

In fact a few did dissent, like Bernard Crick in his great 1962 work, *In Defense of Politics.* Recalling earlier understandings and drawing on Hannah Arendt as well as Aristotle, Crick described politics as "a great and civilizing activity" that involved engagement of diverse interests to achieve some public goal. Crick argued that politics is about plurality, not similarity. He defended politics against a list of forces including nationalism, technology, mass democracy, conservative, liberal, and socialist ideologies.[35]

Yet state-centered democracy dominated and produced the major strand of liberalism, "mass politics," which stresses universal claims, distributive justice, individual rights, and a consumer view of the citizen. Thus, long before the internet, mass politics was reductionist, holding citizens to be singularly concerned with fulfilling needs and wants, not with questions of purpose, creativity, civic contribution, or meaningful work. In such politics, the emphasis is on distribution to citizens conceived as customers, not on agency or citizens as cocreators.[36]

I experienced mass politics from the inside. Though I had life-shaping experiences with citizen politics in the civil rights movement, I also participated in a consequential development in mass politics when Citizens for a Better Environment in 1974 invented the modern canvass powered by a formula. The canvass involves paid staff going door to door on an issue, raising money and collecting signatures. The formula that makes it work identifies an enemy or "target" and defines the issue in radically reductionist, good-versus-evil terms in order to produce a majority of "50% +1." Over the past four decades many canvass operations have developed, including environmental and consumer organizations and the Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) network on college campuses. For years I defended the canvass and,

implicitly, the formula which makes it efficient, and co-authored *Citizen Action and the New American Populism* with Steve Max and Heather Booth, founder of the Midwest Academy training center which was the hub for spreading the method. I remember well the urgency we felt in the face of massive mobilization by large corporate interests to roll back environmental, consumer, affirmative action, progressive tax, and other legislation in the early 1970s. We saw the canvass as an efficient way to fight back on a large scale and in fact it did produce successes on environmental, consumer, and other issues, even during the Reagan presidency. We estimated that the canvass reached 12 million households a year in the mid-eighties.[37]

Over time I also came to see problems. I described these in 2001, in "A Tale of Two Playgrounds," a paper for the American Political Science Association. The efficiency rationale has unintended consequences. The Manichaean formula polarizes civic life, objectifies and abstracts "the enemy," erodes citizenship, and communicates that politics is warfare. Indeed, I founded the youth civic and political education initiative Public Achievement, with an organizing team, as an explicit alternative to Manichaean politics.[38]

New technologies dramatically increase the reach of the Manichaean formula. It is used in robo-calls, internet mobilizations, cable TV and talk radio, Michael Moore's documentaries, and Karl Rove's "axis of evil" framework after 9-11. It shaped the election of 2016. A report by Chuck Todd and Carrie Dann, "How Big Data Broke American Politics," details the increasingly polarized campaigns and politics over the last two decades. "Polarization isn't new, but it's definitely worse than it was 20 years ago," they write. "And thanks to technology and the manipulation of demographic data, those charged with the setting and resetting of American politics . . . have set the stage and conditioned the country for a more permanent polarized atmosphere."[39]

Linda Honold, a major leader in progressive politics, described to me her disillusionment with the polarizing Manichaean formula and its expression in mobilizing approaches with a 50% + 1 rationale. Former chair of the Wisconsin Democratic Party, she led implementation of what is called the Wisconsin Blueprint Project, developed by 125 progressive leaders from labor unions, the League of Conservation Voters, Planned Parenthood, Wisconsin Citizen Action, and others. Honold, as a young single mother on welfare, had used programs like CETA, Pell grants, aid for dependent families, and public universities to get out of poverty. After time in business and getting a doctorate in organizational theory, she joined the progressive activist world out of desire to champion such programs. But her tenure as state chair of the Democratic Party was frustrating. "It used a 50% + 1 approach that didn't engage people." Many groups in the progressive coalition use the good versus evil formula. Indeed, a handbook called *Heroes Narrative*, used by progressive groups around the country, frames every issue as a struggle of heroes versus villains.[40] Even groups which don't use the canvass use a mobilizing approach, getting people out to rallies, town meetings, press conferences, and other events. Honold says that while the 50% + 1 formula is entrenched, some leaders are beginning to

ask questions. Her own research has shown how it feeds public anger at government, which candidates like Scott Walker have tapped with success. In the conclusion I describe signs of an alternative emerging in mainstream electoral politics.[41]

In this context, the work of John Dewey represents a tradition vital to recall.

John Dewey against the Technocrats

John Dewey was not naïve about conflict and power, as Hildreth shows in his essay, "Reconstructing Dewey on Power," and Jeanne Oakes and John Rogers also demonstrate in their 2003 Dewey Lecture and later their book, *Learning Power*.[42] He also sensed novel dynamics of power in an information society, where power is not simply a zero-sum scarce good that requires a bitter struggle in which gains are matched by losses on the other side. Rather, knowledge power is increased through shared transactions. Dewey believed in what he called "the social" quality of knowledge production and dissemination through education. He argued that recognizing knowledge's social quality was key to the future of democracy.

A passion for the relevance of ideas, for intellectual work that actually makes a difference in the real world, was a constant theme for Dewey. "The work of history," he argued, "was to free the truth—to break down the walls of isolation and of class interest which hold it in and under." But truth only becomes free, he added, when it "distributes itself to all so that it becomes the Commonwealth."[43] Such a perspective on "truth" and "knowledge" made Dewey a sharp critic of knowledge "for its own sake" and experts detached from public life.[44]

There was, throughout Dewey's career, a deep respect for ordinary people's values, their activities, and their intelligence.[45] Dewey's democratic faith grew from his conviction that everyday citizens have what might be called a relational way of acting and seeing often missing in more educated groups. As he put it in a tribute to Jane Addams, cofounder of Hull House, her belief in democracy derived from her "deep feeling that the simple, the 'humble' peoples of the earth are those in whom primitive impulses of friendly affection are the least spoiled, the most spontaneous."[46]

Dewey sought to ground intellectual life in the activities and work of common people. In his view, the entire tradition of philosophy had made an invidious—and invalid—distinction between thought and action, intellect and work. "The depreciation of action, of doing and making, has been cultivated by philosophers," Dewey wrote in *The Quest for Certainty*, his attack on the idea that inquiry can be separated from the social context.[47]

Dewey's basic argument, profoundly democratic in its implications, is that all knowledge—"academic" no less than "practical"—is the product of an interplay of experience, testing and experiment, observation, reflection, and further action. This process can be summarized as experimental inquiry. All have the capacity to participate in such inquiry.

Building on these premises about the social nature of knowledge, "social intelligence," and its action orientation, Dewey developed a dynamic vision of democracy as "a way of life," not simply a form of government. John Dewey's philosophy led him into fierce debates with the technocratic strands of liberalism.

By the late 1920s, many social scientists advanced a "democratic realist" position that ordinary people are in the grip of blind instincts and need guidance. Thus in 1934, Walter Shepherd, in his presidential address to the American Political Science Association, declared that "government demands the best thought, the highest character, the most unselfish service that is available" and called for "an aristocracy of intellect and character."[48] Walter Lippmann developed a more sophisticated argument, but one that was even more challenging to Dewey's belief in democracy as a way of life. Lippmann observed that most people possessed very limited information. Their vision of the "real world" was distorted by "artificial censorship, the limitations of social contact, the comparatively meager time available in each day for paying attention to public affairs, the distortion arising because events are compressed into short messages, the difficulty of making a small vocabulary express a complicated world, and finally the fear of facing those facts which threaten the established routine."[49] Lippmann's solution was to have a "form of expertness between the private citizen and the vast environment in which he is entangled." Citizens' minimal role was to be measured in efficiency terms: "To support the Ins when things are going well; to support the Outs when they seem to be going badly." The test of government was whether it delivered the goods.[50]

Dewey addressed technocratic critics of active, participatory democracy in several ways. In response to the pretensions of credentialed intellectuals and academics, he made action, not detached thought, the foundational experience of human beings. As his biographer Alan Ryan put it, the person "makes sense *of* the world for the sake of acting productively *on* the world."[51]

In response to social scientists' arguments that most people are in the grip of raw instincts, Dewey's book, *Human Nature and Conduct,* proposed that "habits," not "instincts," shape most of human behavior.[52] Dewey argued that habits can be developed through "intelligent action." This has proven fertile for educational innovation. Thus, Deborah Meier, the great democratic educator, founder of the Central Park East schools in East Harlem and Mission Hill School in Boston, has demonstrated the fruitfulness of the concept of habits in her schools for democracy.[53]

I believe that Dewey's most significant strategy, building on the Hull House settlement and also the Lab School he founded in Chicago, came earlier, in the concept of "schools as social centers."

The Community School Movement and Schools as Social Centers

Today school policy debates embody the efficiency imperative, sharply eroding older memories of schools as free spaces, civic meeting grounds where people develop agency.

Voucher champions like Education Secretary Betsy DeVos argue that they "empower parents" through school choice, but this means seeing the market as the best mechanism for allocating resources. As Deborah Meier observed, "The notion that we can leave it to the whims of individual parent choice in marketplace fashion is problematic. Good parents are inclined to put their own children's immediate interests first."[54] By promoting a voucher system, leaders like DeVos or Cory Booker on the Democratic side turn citizens into customers.[55]

Most policy makers on the pro-public school side who tout democratic values like diversity and inclusion also seek to design efficient means, like high stakes testing with little interest in lay citizens' input. Luke Bretherton describes how school reform efforts led by lay citizens reveal the deep expert-knows-best bias in schools. "What comes across time and again is the hostility 'non-experts' provoke," he says. Bretherton argues that increasing public support for schools will require a shift from the technocratic, top-down mindset to approaches which involve the diverse citizenry in school change and school life.[56]

It is useful to recall that citizen politics was in fact central to the development of American education. As Lawrence Cremin described in *Transformation of the School,* "the politics of education . . . exhibited unique tendencies over the past century," by bringing together a wide assortment of people with radically different interests and views. "In almost every state citizens organized to do battle in the cause of public schools. The political coalitions they formed frequently drew together the oddest collections of otherwise disparate interests." The movement for schools, with mechanisms for popular power like local school boards and parent teacher associations, left an indelible mark of popular ownership and agency. "By the artful device of lay control the public was entrusted with the continuing definition of the public philosophy taught its children," writes Cremin. "In this political process by which the public defines the commitments of the schools . . . one finds the decisive forces in American educational history."[57]

Citizen politics is stirring again in the "community schools" movement, across divides of party, race, class, and region. I realized its possibilities when I was talking with my nephew Luke Truan. Luke, like many in his Georgia county of Gwinnett (the congressional district, the seventh, has been represented by a Republican in Congress since 1994), leans Republican and conservative. But he doesn't like labels. "What makes it difficult for me to identify with one political party is that politicians on both sides of the aisle switch what they support very often." He observes that politicians dispute the existence of common ground even when it is pointed out in public settings.

His community and Camp Creek Elementary school, where his son Erik goes to school, reflect a changing demographic mix. Education also has "moved to the forefront" of his interests since Erik started his elementary school career. The school is strongly connected to the community, with many ways for parents and others

to get involved. The grocery store has a Camp Creek night. Parents come in and out of the school without having to get permission. Almost half the families were involved in support of a school play this spring. Luke has become friends with the school staff as well as the teachers. Luke, long active in IT security work, is worried about loss of relationships in the high tech world. "I believe building relationships with people and not technology is one of the most important activities that we need to do. I would love to see a national campaign of 'Get offline and Get connected' really take off with the younger generation." He also believes that Camp Creek's use of technology is a model. "Their usage of technology to get the community and parents involved is a great example of how to use technology to connect people."[58]

I see Luke as part of a growing movement for community schools. For instance, the Coalition for Community Schools works with hundreds of schools across the country and dozens of partners. One is Communities in Schools, a coalition which involves more than 2500 schools in projects to bring community resources into schools. Partners also include the National School Board Association and the National Parent Teachers Association. The coalition has identified more than 5000 community-oriented schools which meet their broad criteria. Community schools, in their view, "provide expanded learning opportunities that are motivating and engaging," not only during school hours, but also after school and in summers. They "offer essential health and social supports and services." They "engage families and communities as assets in the lives of their children and youth." The coalition has a commitment to "college, career, and citizenship," based on the concept that "21st century skills will not only guide [students] through their post-secondary and professional career, but that they will make them better . . . citizens in a democratic society." Community schools have formed many partnerships with colleges and universities, and the university-assisted Community School Network, organized by the coalition and the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania, includes 70 colleges and universities. "There is a new energy and growth," said Ira Harkavy, a pioneering leader in school-higher education partnerships who founded the Netter Center and helped to create the coalition. Since its official launch in 1997, the coalition has adopted a "large tent" approach which invites community schools with a variety of approaches and types (it includes public, charter, parochial, and private schools), that agree with the core principles of expanded learning opportunities, parental involvement and a "whole child" philosophy.[59]

I believe that Dewey's concept of schools as social centers can help to move the community school movement to another level of importance in our time of democratic crisis.[60]

Schools as Social Centers

Education was central to the democratic way of life in Dewey's view. In "Democracy in the Schools," he said democracy "has to be enacted anew in every generation,

in every day and year, in the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions." For Dewey, education was at the center of democratic society; democracy was the spirit of education.[61] Dewey advanced the idea of schools as social centers to equip citizens with resources for action in a world that was more and more impersonal. His four core elements remain relevant today.

Throughout his 1902 lecture, Dewey drew on the example of Hull House. He saw the settlement as a space for sustained, face-to-face mingling among diverse populations in cities like Chicago, and contrasted such space with the forced and destructive "Americanization" which he believed was occurring when different races and cultures encountered one another in impersonal and antagonistic settings. For example, in factory-like schools where children are instructed with rote learning and have little chance to interact, young people "are frequently left floating and unstable between the two [their immigrant cultures and the dominant culture]. They even learn to despise the dress, bearing, habits, language and beliefs of their parents." In contrast, at Hull House "the new labor museum . . . show[s] the younger generation something of the skill and art and historic meaning of the older generations . . . Many a child has awakened to an appreciation of admirable qualities hitherto unknown." Thus, for Dewey, the first element of schools as social centers involved creating a "means for bringing people and their ideas and beliefs together, in such ways as will lessen friction and instability and introduce deeper sympathy and wider understanding."[62]

In today's context, where the "relational" is being replaced with the "informational," such an idea of educational sites as places for mingling, developing understanding, and building human relationship has renewed importance. The concept of the school as such a site can make explicit and intentional the animating spirit of community schools as a counter to technocratic patterns.

Second, the school as social center provides, in Dewey's view, an antidote to the loss of "the old agencies" like family and religious groups, which for all the faults Dewey the modernist saw in them, served to keep young people "living decent, respectable, and orderly lives." Schools embedded in communities must supply young people with "compensation for the loss of reverence and the influence of authority." Dewey suggested school activities such as "the social club, the gymnasium, the amateur theatrical presentation, the concert" and others to generate ethical behavior and values.[63]

Such a project of ethical civic repair is more relevant than ever in our age of eroding relationships and cyberbullying. As I will show, a citizen politics perspective also goes beyond Dewey's modernist bias. He saw schools replacing family and faith. Schools embedded in community life can strengthen, not replace, mediating institutions such as families, congregations, and others.

Third, Dewey observed that "life is getting so specialized, the divisions of labor are carried so far, that nothing explains or interprets itself . . . Hence we must rely upon instruction, upon interpretations that come to us through conscious channels"

to gain some sense of the larger workings of institutions and society as a whole.[64] If the early twentieth century seemed complicated, today's world represents a quantum leap in complexity. But here the enormous popular interest in and use of the internet suggests a deep desire to gain understanding of our modern condition, supplemented by popular history, science, and geography channels, museums, reading groups, and a host of other adult education experiences. Just as Hull House equipped new immigrants a hundred years ago with knowledge of the whole, schools embedded in the life of communities hold potential to be centers for vitally important adult learning.

Finally, for Dewey, schools as social centers needed to equip people to cope with a changing world of work. Using examples like lawyers and doctors who "must go on studying all his [or her] life," Dewey argued that "what is true of the lawyer and the doctor . . . is true . . . of all sorts and degrees of people. Social, economic, and intellectual conditions are changing at a rate undreamed of in past history. Now, unless the agencies of instruction are kept running more or less parallel with these changes, a considerable body of [people] is bound to find itself . . . left stranded and become a burden for the community to carry."[65]

In the age of robots and smart machines, the dangers Dewey saw more than a century ago are multiplying rapidly. Schools embedded in the life of communities which consciously attend to the challenges of the changing world of work can develop learning opportunities to help keep people up to date with new skills. If they become conscious sites of civic power and develop alliances with other groups, they also can push back against today's economic logic in which efficiency, doing things ever faster and more cheaply regardless of the cost in human displacement, is the criterion for innovation.

To accomplish this purpose and, more generally, to move the community movement as a whole to a next stage, "social centers" deeply woven into the fabric of communities and tied to other civic learning sites require a fifth role that enlarges Dewey's citizenship with an explicit citizen politics. Social learning centers need to become "civic centers," where people learn and practice such politics.

Citizen Politics

> Power properly understood is . . . the ability to achieve purpose . . . to bring about social, political, and economic change . . . the concepts of love have usually been identified with the resignation of power and power with the denial of love. [But] power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic . . . It is this collision of immoral power and powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our time.

> —Martin Luther King, "Where Do We Go From Here?"

The gap between Dewey's vision of participatory democracy and the means to realize it is often noted by biographers. "Dewey never actually developed, let alone implemented, a comprehensive strategy capable of realizing his general theory in real world practice," write Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett in *Dewey's Dream*.[66]

Part of the problem, in my view, was that Dewey translated his conception of the person as problem solver into the view that the ideal human agent is the citizen scientist. For instance, this is the emphasis throughout *Culture and Freedom*. He argued "the future of democracy is allied with the spread of the scientific attitude. It is the sole guarantee against wholesale misleading by propaganda."[67] The habits Dewey cited as part of the scientific attitude—willingness to suspend belief, to look at evidence and go where it leads, to hold ideas as provisional hypotheses, to enjoy new problems—are important attributes of the democratic citizen. But they are also *cognitive* habits. In Public Achievement, the civic education youth initiative in which young people choose issues they want to address and are coached by older people, we have seen how young people's development of civic agency, the capacity to work across differences to address problems and shape their environments, includes cognitive skills but also involves community and civic organizing skills. These include "power mapping," learning the culture of everyday environments, one-on-one interviews and active listening, developing and sharing public narratives, public speaking, mutual accountability, and the capacity to act in open environments with many versions of right and wrong.[68]

Most significantly, Dewey, reflecting the progressive world in which he worked, made a definitional mistake by removing "politics" from civic life. Dewey's definition can be found in "School as Social Center." "I mean by 'society' the less definite and freer play of the forces of the community . . . that have nothing to do with politics or government," Dewey said. He proposed that citizenship needed to be defined more broadly, "to mean all the relationships . . . involved in membership in a community."[69]

Dewey was right to define citizenship as grounded in the free play of community life. But he was wrong to see community life as apolitical. One consequence was that he defined the political world in ideological terms and made a faulty distinction between modern and traditional communities in the political work of creating a democratic society. During World War I, he sought to get the federal government to intervene in the politics of the Polish community, intervening on the side of liberal groups against conservative and Catholic ones. He championed public schools and opposed parochial ones. He became embroiled in a polemic with the Catholic church. As Alan Ryan says, "The Catholic church still struck Dewey as a threat to human intelligence and social reform. . . . The church's leaders and rank-and-file Catholic intellectuals returned his distaste."[70]

To develop the "social intelligence" required to counter the rising control of smart machines driven by the efficiency principle we need an understanding

of politics much broader than ideology, capable of overcoming bitter divisions. Dewey intimates this need in his essay, "Creative Democracy," which begins this lecture. But his great insight needs to be translated into politics. For instance, this involves recognizing the rich and powerful challenge to technocracy by conservatives and Catholics.

Dating from writers like Edmund Burke, the English conservative who championed "little platoons" of communal life against the modern age, communitarian conservatives have taken intellectual leadership in the fight against technocracy and the displacement of human beings by scientific triumphalism. Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus, codirectors of the Mediating Structures Project of the American Enterprise Institute, illuminated the colonizing, destructive power of government and technocracy on human communities. As Berger and Neuhaus observed, acting out of bureaucratic imperatives justified by ideologies of equality, justice, and the public good, the state tends to expand its power, scope, and authority at the expense of small-scale "structures of daily life" such as families, congregations, neighborhoods, and cultural and voluntary groups. But costs are high: "A growing trend toward legally enforced symbolic sterility in public space" that denies the authority of communities; the weakening of family and small-group bonds and the widening intrusions of experts and professionals into the most private realms of life.[71]

Subsequently, intellectuals such as Bill Schambra, Bob Woodson, Mary Ann Glendon, and Yuval Levin have developed these themes. Michael Joyce, president of the Bradley Foundation, which Hillary Clinton famously designated as the "heart of the right wing conspiracy," put them into a vivid polemic. "Americans are sick and tired of being told they're incompetent to run their own affairs. They're sick and tired of being treated as passive clients by arrogant, paternalistic social scientists, therapists, professionals and bureaucrats."[72] It is impossible to understand the left-right divide today without attending to the appeal of such arguments.

Important strands of Catholic social thought point beyond ideological divides, to a democratic citizen politics which puts the conservative critique of technocracy in conversation with other currents of thought. For instance, in his 1995 *New York Times* opinion piece, "The Pope vs. the Culture of Death," Paul Baumann called on Catholics to bring their critique of the efficiency gospel and its embodiment in materialism and technocracy into a larger democratic movement.[73] Pope Francis's climate encyclical *Laudato Si'* is a brilliant continuation of this tradition. *Laudato Si'* welcomes scientific and technological discovery while contextualizing these in a larger cultural context.[74]

In addition to insights from Dewey and conservative and Catholic thought which I have highlighted, I propose five other elements of citizen politics:

Nonviolent "Developmental Politics"

Though we didn't use the term, I first learned "citizen politics"[75] in the citizenship schools of the freedom (civil rights) movement which had a central focus

on developing agency.[76] Charles Payne, pointing to citizenship schools, freedom schools, and other experiences which developed capacities for action, identifies what he calls "developmental politics," another term for citizen politics. He locates such politics in the "organizing" dimensions of the movement, contrasted with "mobilizing" activities like demonstrations, sit-ins, and freedom rides.[77] The difference between mobilizing and organizing is now well-established in the literature, though in the larger world it is muddied by the fact that most mobilizing efforts call themselves "organizing."[78] Such citizen politics is full of tension and conflict. It involves relationship building and development of public capacities among self-organizing citizens to solve public problems and to create and sustain public goods and civic institutions, the mediating structures held dear by conservatives.

Citizenship schools taught nonviolence as a philosophy different than pacifism, the refusal of violence in any circumstance, and also different than current theory and practice which define nonviolence as simply tactical.[79] Nonviolence in the movement tradition involves spiritual, moral, and psychological disciplines that refuse to demonize opponents or see them in reductionist terms. In *Stride toward Freedom,* Martin Luther King develops a profound account of the spiritual and moral disciplines of such a philosophy, what can be called public love. Public love involves nonviolence as struggle, not inaction; understanding opponents, not seeking to defeat or humiliate them; distinguishing between evil actions and the persons who commit the actions; and a sense of personal redemption gained from refusal to hate. "Hate . . . corrodes the personality and eats away at its vital unity," King wrote. "The nonviolent approach . . . first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect. It calls up resources of strength and courage they did not know they had."[80]

In *Power and Love,* Adam Kahane describes his work over decades as a designer, facilitator, and organizer of practical social change projects building on the "power and love" framework.[81] His efforts took him from Canada to India, from Guatemala to South Africa. Some initiatives had striking results, as in the Canadian initiative on climate change and the birth of the sustainable agriculture movement. They testify to the power of nonviolent political strategy and philosophy when carefully developed and practiced as a framework which brings together groups of widely varying views, backgrounds, and interests.[82] This insight overlaps with the relational organizing philosophy of the broad-based community organizing network, the Industrial Areas Foundation.

Relational Organizing

In one project in South Africa, Kahane worked closely with Ishmael Mkhabela, the leading South African figure in the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) network. "Mkhabela's approach to co-creating new social realities is to build and unite the power of multiple actors so that they can realize both their own potentials and

the larger potential to the system of which they are a part." He quotes Ed Chambers, successor to Saul Alinsky who founded the IAF. Community leaders in relational organizing, says Chambers, expand power understood as the capacity to act, "power to," not "power over." "In this fuller sense 'power' is a verb meaning 'to give and take,' 'to be reciprocal,' 'to be influenced as well as to influence.'"[83]

These insights represent the further development of organizing efforts rooted in the Great Depression. Saul Alinsky began his work in "Back of the Yards," an area of 90,000 impoverished, mostly Eastern European, Catholic immigrants in the shadow of meat packing companies. He helped to organize an array of groups into the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC), first in a campaign to support a union organizing drive that brought together Catholic priests, small business, housewives, youth, communist organizers, the American Legion, and labor rank and file in a freewheeling mix. This model of diverse groups working together in a "people's organization" continues to be the heart of the IAF.[84] Alinsky's first book, *Reveille for Radicals*, emphasized the need for popular organizations to be rooted in and to work through local community life. "The foundation of a People's Organization is in the communal life of the local people," argued Alinsky. "Therefore the first stage in the building of a People's Organization is the understanding of the life of a community, not only in terms of the individual's experiences, habits, values and objectives but also from the point of view of the collective habits, experiences, customs, controls and values of the whole group, the community traditions." Alinsky's view was shared by intellectuals and activists who helped shaped the civil rights movement two decades later.[85] *But it differed from Dewey's impulse to take the side of liberals in communities.*

In the 1960s, Alinsky shifted his emphasis. His second book, *Rules for Radicals*, was "written in desperation" as an attempt to create a "realistic" primer for radicals.[86] The irony was that his "realism" embodied the estrangement of mass society, consumer society, mass politics, and the uprooted person. As his biographer Sandy Horwitt has described, Alinsky had given up on local communities and mediating structures.[87] In *Rules,* Alinsky proposed a strategy to unite the "have nots" and the "have some, want mores" in alliance against the "haves," a reductive, Manichaean politics that made it a handbook of mobilizing left and right today, including the Tea Party.[88]

After his death, organizers and leaders in the Industrial Areas Foundation went back to organizing, creating new knowledge about public leadership development, power, public life, and other concepts and practices.[89] Luke Bretherton, one of community organizing's finest theorists, contrasts its citizen politics, what he calls "the politics of a common life," with claims that today's "problems are so overwhelming and so urgent that they are beyond the scope of widespread deliberation and human judgement . . . and instead [require] a 'neutral,' top down procedure." He observes that alarmism "can involve leaving it all up to the market to

decide or trying to find a one-size-fits-all technocratic administrative solution." Bretherton argues that technocracy displays "*the* modernist prejudice: the need to abandon tradition and eviscerate rather than reform existing institutions in order to inaugurate the 'new,' 'the modern,' or the 'progressive' solution."[90]

There are also limits in broad-based organizing's politics from the vantage of culture and social change. It largely accepts Alinsky's assumption that the broader culture cannot be changed. Organizers and leaders make a distinction between "building organizations" of the poor and powerless, their aim, and "movements," which they see only as fleeting and transitory. The challenge of spreading citizen politics on a scale sufficient to tame the new technologies is to bring nonviolent citizen politics and community organizing together with concepts and practices that can translate them into a movement to effect widespread changes in the fabric of society. Such a movement needs cultural politics.

Cultural Politics

Arjun Appadurai stresses the dynamic, future-oriented qualities of culture, understood as meaning systems at multiple levels from the local community to the whole society, as well as its close relationship to agency. He argues that "it is in culture that ideas of the future, as much as of those about the past, are embedded and nurtured." Combining insights drawn from cultural theory with deeply appreciative participatory action research conducted in partnership with shack dwellers, Appadurai developed the concept of the "capacity to aspire . . . conceived as a cultural capacity especially among the poor [who] find the resources required to contest and alter conditions of their own poverty." This challenges conventional ways of thinking about culture. As Appadurai puts it, "For more than a century, culture has been viewed as a matter of one or another kind of pastness—the key words here are habit, custom, heritage, or tradition." In contrast, Appadurai stresses culture's open, interactive, dynamic, and created qualities tied to agency. "Empowerment . . . has to take some local cultural form to have resonance, mobilize adherents, and capture the public space of debate."[91] Cultural power, like relational power, highlights power's generative, open qualities. Such power is power to create identities, narratives, practices.

The theory and practice of intercultural development has kinship with Appadurai's cultural politics. It stresses skills and identity shifts like those experienced by Jane Addams and others in Hull House, as people from diverse backgrounds learned how to negotiate a culturally pluralist space.[92] "Addams's own initial sense of superiority [over poor immigrants] had been grounded partly in her rarified cultural accomplishments," writes Louise Knight in her biography of Jane Addams. "Perhaps nothing so dramatically marked the significant transformation of her ideas . . . as her eventual abandonment of that attitude." Addams wrote, "The uncultivated person is bounded by a narrow outlook, unable to overcome differences in dress and habit,

and his interests are slowly contracting within a circumscribed area." In contrast, she saw a cultivated person as "a citizen of the world because of his growing understanding of all kinds of people and their varying experiences." Knight says "she was describing herself . . . but also many of the working people of the Nineteenth Ward."[93]

Finally, cultural politics points to a kind of storytelling different than the Manichaean model of the heroes narrative. The heroes narrative asserts that "every great story, from *The Iliad* to *Star Wars*, is told with 'heroes and villains.'" In fact, this radically reductionist account obliterates the complexity of great narratives by using an abstract binary model which sees no complexity on "the other side" and purifies one's own. By way of contrast, Charles Wilkinson, in his splendid book *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations,* shows how many Native American tribes have found inspiration in Charles Eastman's *Soul of the Indian.* Eastman names oppressive structures. He portrays both Indian life and European-American communities as full of complexity and contradiction. He shows commonalities between Indian values and strands of European American culture like Christianity, with a story of hope and inclusion.[94]

How might public policies foster citizens as agents of their own political, civic, and cultural development? Deliberation as a strand of citizen politics holds insights.

Deliberative Politics

Public deliberation, a version of citizen politics which contrasts sharply with today's inflamed public discussion, is widely discussed today in Deweyan circles. The Kettering Foundation, a pioneer in the field, describes deliberation as not only formal public settings but also everyday conversations in which people are "weighing possible consequences against what is deeply important to them . . . mulling over or sorting out what they hear, perhaps changing their minds as they learn about someone else's experience. Eventually, they may settle on some work that they need to do."[95] Such public talk cultivates skills of listening and judgment, as Derek Barker, a political theorist at the Kettering Foundation, describes in an essay contrasting deliberative politics based on "mutual understanding" with agonistic politics of liberalism or the search for the solidarity of republicanism. "Mutual understanding," Barker says, "strikes a mean between the unitary collective identity of republican civic virtue and the generalized individualism of the liberal virtues. . . . We need not agree with one another but as members of a discursive community, we make a good faith effort to actually understand [others'] beliefs and worldviews. . . . We should have the cognitive skills and habituated experiences to effectively communicate across our differences."[96]

At moments such public conversation has been joined with concepts of government as an empowering partner, neither a dependency-creating deliverer of services nor an enemy of citizen initiative. For instance, in *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal,* Jess Gilbert recounts how, from 1938 to 1941, a group of agrarian leaders in the Department of Agriculture, most

of whom saw themselves as "Deweyans," worked with land grant colleges, cooperative extension workers, and community leaders to develop an initiative on rural America. "They create[d] and promote[d] an alternative understanding of reality, or counter-narrative that challenges the dominant society," writes Gilbert. The opposite of detached experts, "they strongly supported historical traditions local knowledge, regional cultures, cohesive communities, and other illegible [James Scott's term] practices like family farming. Nor did the agrarian New Dealers place 'supreme confidence' in science, much less in industrial farming." They were, in short, participatory democrats. "Their vision of democratic planning stood second to none in its promise of transforming rural American into a more egalitarian society [with] a wider distribution of power and resources for common people."[97]

The "intended New Deal" effort described by Gilbert included farm organizations and unions, churches, youth clubs, professional and business groups, and government agencies, training about 60,000 discussion leaders, involving over three million people. Parallel "Philosophy Schools" on large topics related to challenges of modern society for 35,000 extension agents and others sought to broaden professionals' perspectives beyond the disciplinary boundaries in which they had been socialized. As Jewett describes the spirit of these efforts, "Many . . . understood the term 'science' to include the social forces that shaped the application—and perhaps even the production—of scientific knowledge." In such a "dynamic concept of science," said Charles Kellogg, a leading soil scientist in the USDA, "the relevancy of fact is as important to truth as fact itself." For Kellogg, "so what?" questions need always to be added to the question "Is it so?"[98]

Such New Deal efforts helped to bring older ideas of government of and by the people into the twentieth century. They conveyed the idea that democracy is something people make together. USDA initiatives launched a process of participatory land use planning across the country that helped to birth soil conservation districts and plans for preventing soil erosion, fertility depletion, and protection of family farms. In turn, these created precedents for a later tradition of government-as-partner which we built on in the New Citizenship initiative from 1993 to 1995 with the Clinton Domestic Policy Council and the civic engagement committee of the Obama 2008 campaign. Efforts of the New Citizenship are described in Carmen Sirianni and Lew Friedland's *Civic Innovation in America.* Peter Levine's writings on his civic engagement blog and in his book, *We Are the Ones We've Been Waiting For,* bring these traditions to the field of "civic studies."[99] These create a subterranean current of civic possibility in the age of the smart machine. They are enriched by public work.

Civic Politics as Public Work

The labors of settlers who cleared lands, who built towns and villages, wells, meeting halls, and roads sustained a "problem-solving politics" as gritty, practical activity. As David Mathews has put it, "Nineteenth-century self-rule . . . was a sweaty, hands-on,

problem-solving politics." The way citizen politics could integrate everyday interests with larger civic purposes is vivid in the case of schools. "The democracy of self-rule was rooted in collective decision making and acting—especially acting," writes Matthews. "Settlers on the frontier had to be producers, not just consumers. They had to join forces to build forts, roads, and libraries . . . They also established the first public schools. Their efforts were examples of 'public work,' meaning work done by not just for the public."[100]

As earlier mentioned, public work traditions were embodied in 1930s educational practices in cooperative extension. C. B. Smith and M. C. Wilson, two national extension administrators with the USDA, described such work as "a new leaven at work in rural America . . . the cooperative extension work of the state agricultural colleges and the federal Department of Agriculture, which is being carried on in cooperation with the counties and rural people." They saw it as "stimulating to better endeavor in farming and home making, bringing rural people together in groups for social intercourse and study, solving community and neighborhood problems, fostering better relations and common endeavor between town and country, bringing recreation, debate, pageantry, drama and art into the rural community, developing cooperation and enriching the life and broadening the vision of rural men and women."[101]

My colleagues and I at the Center for Democracy and Citizenship (now the Sabo CDC at Augsburg College) have worked with and developed the concept of public work since the late 1980s, in civic organizing efforts that integrate nonviolent citizen politics, community organizing, cultural development, and deliberation. Our partnerships have also translated the public work approach into a variety of settings, from schools and colleges to local governments, professions, businesses, and foundations. These civic experiments are detailed in Boyte et al., *Pedagogy of the Empowered* (Vanderbilt University Press, forthcoming in 2018). At the heart of all these efforts is the idea of public work as not simply *deliberating,* or *gaining power* but as *co-creating the world,* a dynamic which transforms people's sense of victimhood into a sense of themselves as responsible and powerful civic agents.

Our work began with the observation that success in civic change depends on cultural changes in settings where people work. Specifically, to effect democratic change requires making work "more public" in multiple senses—more public in its purposes, more open and interactive, and more political, in the sense of work by a diverse public with often contending interests. To accomplish this , it is necessary to reconceive of institutions as living, dynamic, and highly complex communities, with norms, values, leadership, and cultural identities.

One key strategy involves sustained work with professionals, as highlighted by Albert Dzur in his theorizations of professional work.[102] The work of professionals affiliated with the Citizen Professional Center—Bill Doherty, Tai Mendenhall, Jerica Berge, Shonda Craft, and others—shows what public work can look like both in professions and institutions. The center was founded by Doherty, a leading family therapist and professor at the University of Minnesota. Doherty and his colleagues

developed the public work framework in family and health professions, based on the idea that the energy and talent of families and communities are the most important resource for addressing complex problems. Citizen professionals are catalysts and organizers who work *with* lay citizens, not *on* them or *for* them. Over the years the center created partnerships with a wide variety of communities and groups, including middle-class families worried about the erosion of family life in a hypercompetitive, individualist culture; Native Americans in the Twin Cities, who have led a campaign for abatement of diabetes; African American fathers fighting cultural messages which degrade fatherhood; and Hennepin County in Minnesota, reorienting their professionals as "citizen professionals" who do not have all the answers to complex problems. In every case, their work has combined on-the-ground development of civic skills and leadership with high level cultural organizing and politics, finding ways to frame concerns which resonate widely with Americans concerned about increasing materialism, consumerism, and individualism. "For me the key starting point is to ask professionals to think about their work as a contribution to the capacity for democratic living," Doherty told me. After organizing a large, cross-partisan movement called "Citizen Therapists Against Trumpism" in 2016, aimed not at a candidate but at the larger divisive, authoritarian trends in society, Doherty and his colleagues have renamed their effort Citizen Therapists for Democracy and have come to focus on overcoming the deeply ingrained Manichaean politics of today. The first large scale effort began in rural Ohio, in a weekend interaction between Trump and Clinton supporters to explore possibilities for common ground.[103]

The Citizen Therapists also present a challenge and invitation to all professionals to think about the public dimensions of their work. For instance, over the last decade, our colleagues in public work have theorized the concept of "civic science" as an important way to reframe the work of scientists as citizens' work, engaging many different views and ways of knowing, learning skills of collaborative action. Civic science was the theme of an National Science Foundation workhop in 2014.[104] A public work politics which builds on and integrates these elements holds potential to weave schools into the life of communities and connect schools, at every level, with other civic learning sites. While a co-creative, public work politics needs to be embedded in every aspect of society, it can also help to transform formal politics itself, which for all its current dysfunction, represents the way societies, at every level, debate and discuss their future.

A Democratic Awakening?

> The complex and vital challenges we face cannot be addressed effectively by any one leader or organization or sector, and so we need to build our capacity for co-creation . . . Walking Together.

> —Adam Kahane, *Power and Love*

Signs abound of a yearning for human relationships as an antidote to increasing impersonality, as Jennifer Cline found in her discussions with young adults and college students. David Mathews, in *The Ecology of Democracy,* building on years of the Kettering Foundation's research, calls relational environments "the wetlands" of democracy, drying up with the spread of technocratic systems. Dewey was getting at this in his social center address, when he described the "freer play of the forces of the community which goes on in the daily intercourse of men in an endless variety of ways."[105]

Nancy L. Rosenblum, in a recent talk at Duke University, "Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America," theorizes such wetlands as neighborhoods, where there is an "unchoreographed dance of give and take [and] our encounters are direct, personal, and carried on outside formal institutions." Rosenblum gives wonderful examples of being good neighbors drawn from literature and poetry of what she calls "the democratic ethos of reciprocity among neighbors." For instance, in Willa Cather's *My Antonio,* Grandma Burden "disregards her neighbors' origin, former social status, and character overall, and concentrates on what 'decent folk' can expect from one another day to day." Burden accords her neighbors considerable latitude, but when one family could not break their pattern of dependency, her view shifted from reciprocity to charity. "The inversion of moral hierarchy is striking," says Rosenblum. "Reciprocity among 'decent folk' supersedes love. Neighborliness is demoted into Christian charity."[106] In Rosenblum's argument, collective agency is more important than "help."

Rosenblum makes a sharp distinction between everyday democracy and the larger arena of politics and citizenship, seeing citizenship as having "something of the character of a public office [which] extends beyond formal political arenas to public accommodations and, increasingly, the universe of organized groups and associations." She argues that "neighbor is not an office," nor is neighborly action "training in or derivative of civic virtue." Citizenship theory in her view "prescribes the replication of political principles and structures of authority . . . to an ever-widening array of public institutions, to civil society, and the family." The "democracy of everyday life," by contrast, "is democracy's personal, individual, human substrate. Its earthy material."[107]

Here, theoretical innovations emerging from years of democratic practices which build agency, individual and collective, which transforms widespread feelings of victimhood, shift the terms of debate beyond the liberal view of citizenship as legal status, or the communitarian or republican one which Rosenblum is challenging, citizenship as a normative claim in communities. Our new field of civic studies, drawing on grounded theoretical traditions of agency, advances the fluid, agentic, and open concept of citizen as co-creator. For instance, public work does not rest on the classical distinction between private and public life understood as the realm of civic virtue. Rather, it is an action idea aimed at enhancing relational power. In the Industrial Areas Foundation, public is the space of diverse interests, views, and backgrounds where we bring our interests and passions, rather than

putting them aside in the name of civic virtue. The principles of agentic action in a public world are different than private life. In the former, one best employs concepts such as accountability, respect, recognition, and relational power. Private life is the terrain of intimacy and personal love. Again and again in Public Achievement and other public work initiatives in societies as diverse as Poland, Burundi, the Palestinian territories, and the United States, we have seen how public life understood in these terms and citizenship not as an "office" but as co-creation, provides extraordinarily powerful resources for relational action.

Themes of communal freedom and civic agency rarely make it into the public forums of elections, but there are exceptions. Linda Honold was inspired to see an alternative to mobilizing and Manichaean politics in the Obama 2008 campaign and the campaign in 2012 Minnesotans United for All Families, which successfully opposed a constitutional ban on same sex marriage.[108] Both Obama 2008 and MN United incorporated "organizing" dimensions, consciously breaking with Manichaean-style mobilizing. They demonstrated that organizing elements can be integrated into highly goal-directed and large scale efforts like elections. Organizing has a focus on building public leadership of participants. It allows space for self-organizing activity, even in political campaigns. It uses cultural methods such as storytelling ("public narrative"). It builds public relationships across difference. Finally, of crucial importance, campaigns built on relational civic politics convey some version of public love, resting on the premise that those on "the other side" are not the enemy. Rather, they are complex and full of possibilities. Both campaigns were extremely successful by conventional measures, going from enormous deficits in polls to large victories. Such campaign methods, using relational citizen politics, require campaign messages that are consonant, conveying hope, inclusion, and agency. Obama 2008 conveyed "yes we can." MN United developed a "promarriage" message after they asked skeptics about gay marriage the reasons for their skepticism. This was the first time skeptics had been asked their reasons, after 30 straight campaigns based on mobilizing and Manichaean approaches had been defeated. MN United conversations showed that worry about marriages was a key concern.

After the dismal election of 2016 and before the inauguration of Donald Trump as president, suggestions of the need for citizen politics appeared fleetingly in the national discussion. On January 11, President Obama gave a farewell address at Chicago's McCormick Place. Speaking to young Americans, he struck an inspirational tone. "I've seen you in every corner of the country," he said. "You believe in a fair, just, and inclusive America . . . and you are willing to carry the hard work of democracy forward." He proposed that any threats to democracy could be countered by "the most important office," being a citizen.[109]

Obama conveyed progressive themes, arguing that "race relations are better than they were, but we're not where we need to be." He called for appreciation for science and reason. Two days later Governor John Kasich spoke in Ohio, striking

Republican themes. He called for a balanced budget and tax cuts. He directed his remarks to business leaders, church groups, synagogues, and civic organizations. But beneath differences were parallel messages. "The best solutions in our country come not from the top down, but from a combination of the bottom up with the top responding," Kasich argued. "We need to have the community engaged. Stick your nose in somebody else's business."[110] I agree with Kasich, and also with Obama when he said, on the fiftieth anniversary of the March on Washington in 2013, that "change comes to Washington, not from Washington."[111] To transform education, to promote schools as civic centers, and to spread citizen politics more generally, it is important for electoral campaigns to emerge from the civic side, not simply from politicians.

A messy, complex but important example from the civic side appeared in Georgia in 2016 after the popular Republican governor Nathan Deal put on the ballot a constitutional amendment to allow the governor to take charge of "chronically failing" schools and the tax revenue which supports them. Under his plan, called the Opportunity School District, failed schools would either be run directly by a new state agency or be converted to charter schools under management contracts, also open to profit-making businesses. Deal claimed that passage would "empower parents" and end "an inexcusable crisis" that left 67,000 kids trapped in cycles of poverty and crime. With support from large corporations and leaders in national charter school groups, Deal's proposed amendment was expected to pass easily, following a charter school initiative in Georgia in 2012 which Deal had championed.

The Georgia Teachers Association began with a defensive tone, but as the campaign progressed and citizen organizers and local civic leaders became involved, the framework stressed a more positive theme of local power. The opposition named their group the Committee to Keep Georgia Schools Local. They described the amendment as a power grab and pointed out that the amendment proposed a false solution, with no constructive ideas for changing troubled schools like better teaching methods, teacher training, or more community tutoring. The local school coalition attracted a highly diverse group of supporters, including not only the union but also black clergy and inner city leaders, the Georgia Parent Teacher Association, rural school boards—more than 40 passed resolutions opposing it—and key Republican strongholds. The amendment was defeated with over 60% voting in opposition.

Gerald Taylor, a veteran community organizer, former director of the Industrial Areas Foundation's southeastern region, and a pioneer in IAF's relational organizing approach, served as a consultant to the local school coalition. He observes that the campaign shows how far there is to go. After the election conflicts broke out between some parent-teacher groups and others. But the campaign also showed the potential of a highly diverse coalition to bridge what many have seen as intractable racial and urban-rural divides, using the theme of local power in education. It demonstrated

that "good politics" can be "smart politics." In Taylor's view, the key to the coalition success was the shift from a typical mobilizing approach to an approach that encouraged local creativity (for instance there was a fight about whether to allow yard signs, opposed by traditional campaign consultants associated with the effort but which local communities won), engagement with local cultures, and local leadership. The campaign also emphasized contextualizing technology, metrics, and communication with what Taylor calls "social knowledge," stressing a larger vision of schools. "We argued that schools are much more than buildings or even places to teach kids," he said. "They are rallying centers in rural communities and inner cities. They are economic engines. They are community assets where people have ownership."[112]

It is positive to have national figures like Obama and Kasich emphasize citizens' initiative. It is even more promising to see coalitions like the Committee to Keep Georgia Schools Local raise the power of local communities to shape their educational fate.

Local civic learning sites—intimated by the campaign and more broadly beginning to emerge in the community schools movement—create foundations for a larger democratic awakening. They suggest one crucial strategy for the "fight for freedom" in the age of smart machines.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1.   Dirk Helbing, Bruno S. Frey, Gerd Gigerenzer, Ernst Hafen, Michael Hagner, Yvonne Hofstetter, Jeroen van den Hoven, Roberto V. Zicari, and Andrej Zwitter, "Will Democracy Survive Big Data and Artificial Intelligence?," *Scientific American,* February 25, 2017, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/will-democracy-survive-big-data-and-artificial-intelligence/.

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10.   R. W. Hildreth, "Reconstructing Dewey on Power," *Political Theory* 37, no. 6 (2009): 780–807.

11.   John Dewey, "The School as Social Center," *The Elementary School Teacher* 3, no. 2. (1902): 2, http://www.cws.illinois.edu/IPRHDigitalLiteracies/dewey%201902%20 school%20as%20social%20center.pdf.

12.   Lee Benson, Ira Harvaky, and John Puckett, *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in the Age of Education Reform* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 42.

13.   Roudy Hildreth observed Dewey's shift in orientation from local experiment to national and international initiatives after he went to Columbia University, phone conversation, April 12, 2017; Harkavy argues that Dewey's loss of regular connection with Jane Addams and the inspiring example of Hull House, contributed significantly to his failure to build on the School as Social Center and work to develop a school as civic center movement.

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15.   Sue Halpern, "Thet Have, Right Now, Another You," *New York Review of Books,* December 22, 2016, 3.

16.   Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown, 2016), 3, 4, 5, 8.

17.   Shankar Vedantam, "Social Isolation Growing in U.S., Study Says," *Washington Post,* June 23, 2006; Dhruv Khullar, "How Social Isolation Is Killing Us," *New York Times*, December 22, 2016.

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36. Thomas Spragens, *Getting the Left Right: The Transformation, Decline, and Reformation of American Liberalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009).

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their forthcoming book, *Knowledge for Social Change: Bacon, Dewey,and the Revolutionary Transformation of Research Universities in the 21ˢᵗ Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017), https://www.temple.edu/tempress/titles/2464_reg.html.

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62. Dewey, "The School as Social Center," 3, 4, 6.

63. Ibid., 4, 5, 6.

64. Ibid., 5.

65. Ibid., 6.

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68. See for instance, "Public Achievement in Fridley—Transforming Special Education," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaRimtavig8; Harry C. Boyte, "Against the Current: Developing the Civic Agency of Students," *Change* 40, no. 3 (2008): 8–15, https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ793192.

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103. For stories and literature, see the website of the Citizen Professional Center, http://www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/projects/cpc/idea.asp

104. A group of us initially brought together by Dave Thelen and including John Spencer at the University of Iowa, Scott Peters at Cornell University, Nick Jordan, Phil Zelazo, and Stephanie Carlson at the University of Minnesota, and Sherry Abbott at Syracuse University, developed the concept of civic science, akin to the "scientific democrats" Jewett describes, as an understanding of science in service of human agency, individual and collective. Civic science also overlaps with strands of complexity science.

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106. Nancy L. Rosenblum, "Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America" (unpublished lecture, Duke University), April 6, 2017, 3, 8, 9.

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