Populism and John Dewey
Convergences and Contradictions

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Introduction

Populism is unsettling the powers of the world and John Dewey can add to the agitation. The term, populist, is most often used to describe leaders who champion "the people" and rail against establishments. In the 1980s, Reagan was called a populist for his calls to "return power to the people," away from "big government." The 2006 US elections were interpreted as resurgent populism on the Democratic side. "Incoming Democrats Put Populism Before Ideology," read the headline in the *New York Times*. [1]

Politicians play a role but populism is more than the rhetoric of politicians. It is the "different kind of politics" described in my 2002 Dewey lecture, a democratic, citizen-centered politics for the 21st century that is emerging in many different settings. There is evidence that such a politics is especially attractive to the "Millennial Generation," born after 1982.[2] I thank the Ginsberg Center for the chance to develop these arguments.

Political knowledge is importantly social and experiential, as Lawrence Goodwyn has put it. My first encounter with deeper meanings of populism came in an unforgettable experience when I was nineteen, working as a field secretary for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in St. Augustine, Florida in 1964.

One day I was caught by five men and a woman who were members of the Klu Klux Klan. They accused me of being a "communist and a Yankee." I replied, "I'm no Yankee - my family has been in the South since before the Revolution. And I'm not a communist. I'm a populist. I believe that blacks and poor whites should make joint to do something about the big shots who keep us divided and held down." For a few minutes we talked about what such a movement might look like. Then they let me go. When he learned of the incident, Martin Luther King, head of SCLC, told me he identified with the populist tradition and assigned me to organize poor whites. Experiences organizing poor whites taught me the enormous and wide impact of the new *collective power* of historically marginalized African Americans. Poor whites I worked with constantly remarked that blacks "had really got their act together; we should do the same thing." For white southern students in the movement, its examples of power offered the possibility of redemption not only for blacks but also for ourselves and our families.

As a democratic movement and philosophy, populism has three elements. It is a movement building popular power to break up unjust concentrations of wealth and power. It is a culture-making movement, sustaining and advancing values of community, liberty, and equality. And it is a civic learning movement, developing people's civic identities, imaginations, and skills. The freedom movement had strong populist aspects, in ways that are neglected. Thus, SCLC sponsored citizenship schools across the South, directed by Dorothy Cotton, in which people learned skills of community organizing. Andrew Young once called these "the invisible foundation of the whole movement."

The silence about populism's meaning indicates a larger crisis. Populism highlights the feelings of pervasive *powerlessness* that today feed the disengagement of citizens from public life and isolation from each other.

Powerlessness generates hopelessness and the substitution of personal solutions for public approaches. Powerlessness, with its cynicism and fatalism, is a problem behind the problems of our age. Feelings of powerlessness are widespread not only on "the Arab street" but also in suburbs, inner cities, and the University of Michigan. Redressing powerlessness is essential to meet other challenges facing humanity, from global warming and sectarian warfare to growing divisions between rich and poor, from pandemics like AIDS to erosion of communities.

Populism's focus on culture-change and culture-making -- wedding popular power with egalitarian communal values and civic development -- makes it the alternative to the political projects that shape the world: state-centered democracy, on the one hand, and market-oriented politics -- the "Washington consensus" or "neo-liberalism" - on the other.[3] It also highlights their core similarity: a deracinated view of the human person, whether "new man" or *homo economicus.*[4]

Populism as a tradition and political philosophy can ground today's civic ferment in the US. Putting populism and John Dewey in conversation illuminates this potential. John Dewey, a pivotal figure in educational reform and pragmatic scientific inquiry, is a foundational theorist for today's civic engagement movement in higher education and elsewhere. Dewey sought to counteract trends that remove the human being from living communities. He had a decidedly populist bent. But Dewey also embodied what might be called the democratic *aspirations* of intellectuals - wish without much power. A major flaw in today's civic ferment is an insufficient understanding of the power dynamics involved in culture-making.

In the following I begin with connections between civic engagement efforts and populism, drawing attention to the capacity- building operations of power at the heart of democratic populist movements. Such a concept of power answers the main objection raised by progressives to populism: what about its "dark side," the way populist-sounding movements can be reactionary or vehicles for demagogues? I then explore the work of Dewey in relation to themes of civic development and power. Dewey had rich insights about civic learning, but a weak theory of power. I conclude by suggesting how populism, challenging domination by experts outside civic life, can recast the way we think about the period from now until the 2008 election and the meaning of that election.

Populism and Civic Engagement

"We are the ones we've been waiting for; nobody else is gonna rescue us."

Civil rights song by Dorothy Cotton, Director of SCLC Citizenship Education Program, inspired by "Poem for South African Women" by June Jordan

"The world is flooded with laws and policies, councils and committees. It is tragic that most of these deal with the structures of society, rather than the heart of society - the people. But the eternal truth of the democratic faith is that the solution always lies with the people."

Marie Ström, Citizens at the Centre, IDASA HIV/AIDS training manual, adapted from Saul Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals

Signs of a shift from structure to civic agency are multiplying across the world, in many scholarly disciplines and fields of practice. The awarding of the 2006 Nobel Peace prize to Mohammed Yunus for his pioneering work in micro-lending in Bangladesh and elsewhere is a case in point. Micro-lending is based on a deep respect for the capacities of poor people, especially poor women, to become agents of their own development and co-creators of their communities. In 2006 in South Africa and Lesotho, the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), a leading democracy group across Africa, trained local government officials and HIV/AIDS workers to think of themselves as "organizers not bureaucrats," to conceive of "citizens at the centre," co-creators of community solutions to the AIDS pandemic, and to see democracy mainly as a society, not a state. [5]

In the United States, scholars of civic initiatives such as Peter Levine, Cynthia Gibson, Carmen Sirianni, and Lew Friedland, among others, have chronicled multiple signs of civic ferment with a sense of co-creative civic agency. In higher education these include strands of the service learning movement represented by the Ginsberg Center and efforts to strengthen public engagement such as Imagining America, the Diverse Democracy efforts of AAC&U and the American Democracy Project of AASCU. Broad based organizing efforts - cross partisan civic organizations affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, Gamaliel Foundation, PICO and DART - include more than 180 groups, several thousand congregations, and several million families. They often use the language of the citizen as "co-creator." Many forms of "deliberative democracy" with a strong view of civic agency have developed in efforts associated with Public Agenda, the National Issues Forums, and the Study Circle Resource Center. There are large civic environmental initiatives like the National Wildlife Federation's organizing of a community rooted conservation movement. We have found that Public Achievement, the youth civic education and engagement initiative whose central philosophical conception of citizenship is based on SCLC's song, "We are the ones we've been waiting for," has broad resonance in many societies, from Northern Ireland and Scotland to many Balkan countries, Palestine, Israel and South Africa. Public Achievement's growth suggests the potential global appeal of democratic populism.

All these express populist themes of civic power, culture change, and civic learning. Populism is emerging in electoral politics in the US. As Peter

Levine has noted, "It appears that the 2008 presidential campaign will offer several strong but contrasting flavors of populism." Republican Sam Brownback and Democrats John Edwards and Barack Obama all voice versions of populism. For instance, Obama argues that "We are going to re-engage in our democracy in a way that we haven't done for some time." He says his campaign is "not just to hold an office, but to gather with you to transform a nation…It must be about us. It must be about what we can do together." [6]

The question is, how can all this ferment begin to come together in a movement?

In the last century and a half, there have been three broad democratic populist movements in the United States, with counterparts elsewhere in the world. The first emerged in the late nineteenth century among small farmers. Populism resurfaced as a broad movement during the 1930s to defend democracy and to mobilize civic energies to meet the challenges of the Great Depression and fascism. The "people," seen by intellectuals in the 1920s as the repository of crass materialism and parochialism, were rediscovered as a source of strength and hope. Many key architects of the third populist upsurge, the black freedom movement, had roots in the 1930s and 1940s' movement.

I believe that we are on the threshold of a fourth great populist movement. Each movement builds on earlier ones and also takes a character reflecting the challenges and resources of an age. Today's best democratic understanding of populism weds civic life to organizing for people's power. It is a movement with a cooperative, egalitarian, pluralistic ethos and civic learning features, strengthening communities in an age when local communities are everywhere endangered. It can be called "civic populism." To make the case, it is necessary to analyze the legacy.

The Historical Meaning of Populism: [7] Academic and left-wing critics commonly have charged that populism's idea of who makes change - "the people" -- is a loose and ill-defined compared to the rigor of class-based or interest group politics. Many on the left also charge that populism is *reformist*, focused on practical ends, with only vague long term goals like "breaking up concentrations of wealth and power." [8]

If one is skeptical about sweeping blueprints for the future or precise definitions of who should lead the process of change, these features are strengths. Thus, the porousness of the concept of "the people" allows inclusive understandings when movements seek allies and when organizers have a democratic orientation. Similarly, populism's practicality - a "politics of getting things done," as Stephanie DeWitt has put it - comes from its grounding in the gritty concerns and everyday problems of living communities. [9]

Populism's themes reflect a different way of looking at the world than structures and blueprints, as Marie Ström conveys in her quote above, a language of what Mary Dietz calls "roots." Sheldon Wolin argued that populism is the "culture of democracy" itself:

Historically [populism] has stood for the efforts of ordinary citizens and would-be citizens to survive in a society dominated by those whose control

over the main concentrations of wealth and power has enabled them to command the forms of technical knowledge and skilled labor that have steadily become the hallmark of so-called modernizing societies. A culture of survival is very different from a... market-culture littered by the disposable remains of yesterday and shaped by manipulation of attitudes and desires...

A culture of survival is conditioned by the experiences of hard times in a changing world...of drought, depressed markets, high railroad and grain storage rates, and manipulated currencies... Its practices issued from taking care of living beings and mundane artifacts, from keeping them in the world by use and memory. To sustain the institutions of family, community, church, school and local economy demanded innovation as well as conservation...

The reason why democracy should be grounded in a populist culture is not because those who live it are pure, unprejudiced, and unfailingly altruistic. Rather, it is because it is a culture that has not been defined by the urge to dominate and that has learned that existence is a cooperative venture over time.[10]

The values of community and equality that Wolin notes are central to populism are not unique to groups struggling for survival. They can also be sustained by the anchoring institutions of civic life in middle class communities, such as family, congregation, cultural groups, schools, or local businesses with community roots. And these values can be articulated at every level of society, as in the case of the cultural workers of the Great Depression, later discussed. But Wolin is right in the intuition that egalitarian communal values often find sustenance in communities "struggling for survival," like nineteenth century farming communities, or African American communities that resisted the brutalities of segregation by forming networks of self-help and mutual aid, or today's new immigrant communities trying to preserve some sense of heritage in the cultural maelstrom of a degraded, hyper-competitive, consumerist and individualist society. The insights from cultures of survival sharply challenge the condescension of elites, and, as I will argue, recast conventional discussions of racism and identity politics.

"To-day is election day," John Dewey wrote from Ann Arbor, Michigan, to his wife, Alice, traveling in Paris in 1894. "I should like to have voted for a few Populists…but the atmosphere [around here] looks very republican." Through his life, Dewey referred positively to the Populist Party, formed in 1892. Thus he favorably quoted Fred E. Haynes - whom he described as "one of the most careful and thorough of the historians of American political life" -- as saying "with great justice" that whatever limits there might have been in features of their platforms, the leaders of the Populist Party were "Fundamentally sound in their opposition to the growing power of wealth…"[11]

Populism included the electoral party to which Dewey referred that went by the name of Populist, or People's Party, formed in 1892 from the merger of farmers cooperatives, the Knights of Labor, and other groups. But it was a broader movement and philosophy than a party. "People's politics" has

roots that reach back to Greek and Roman popular revolts. Populism drew specifically from eighteenth and nineteenth century traditions such as Jeffersonian democracy and, in Europe, Romanticism and Scandinavian folk schools. As a modern politics by the name, populism took shape in both Russia and the United States in late nineteenth century agrarian movements. These blended forward looking themes with traditions of "the commons," cooperative rural practices of deliberation and public work, and working class mutual aid traditions.[12]

Historian Gianna Pomata has detailed how Russian populism crystallized Romantic themes in European intellectual life which held that "a way into the future could be found that would not destroy the ancient folkways but rather give them new value and meaning…The Populists advocated the defense of the Russian agrarian tradition and of Russian village life, with its spirit of equality and solidarity." In the twentieth century, populism gained renewed support after the October revolution of 1917 as a potent alternative to Stalinism in the Soviet Union. In the mid-thirties it was ruthlessly suppressed by Stalin, who saw populists as his chief enemies. The Stalinist doctrine advanced the necessity "to annihilate the influence of Populism as the worst of the enemies of Marxism and of the whole cause of the proletariat." As Pomata noted, "An impenetrable silence fell on populism" that affected subsequent European intellectual and political life as well as Soviet historiography.[13]

The memory of populism was radically attenuated, but Pomata also observed similarities in Russian students of the 1870s and activist students like herself in Milan, Paris, and Berlin who "returned to the people" a hundred years later. The parallel, as she said, was the desire to find "...a more authentic culture and the belief that this culture was to be found among 'the people,' in the heritage of memory, experience, and struggle…"[14]

In the US in the nineteenth century, the Populist Party grew from two decades of movement building in the rural South and Midwest that began after the Civil War, in 1866, with the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, continuing with a huge network of cooperatives in the 1880s across the South and Midwest in the farmers' alliances, black and white. The alliances shared with the Grange a strong emphasis on civic development, organizing neighborhood gatherings, newspapers, lecture circuits, and reading circles. Alliance economic efforts aimed at freeing farmers from the domination of banks and railroads through cooperative purchasing and marketing and produced policy ideas like progressive income taxes and easier credit. Organizing generated what the Lawrence Goodwyn has called a "movement culture," based on an ethos of respect, cooperation, self-help and a vision of a "cooperative commonwealth" to replace the dog eat dog capitalism of the late 19th century. The farmers' movement included tentative interracial alliances, always in tension with the ancient legacy of racial bigotry that was a defining element of southern culture.[15] The black historian Manning Marable recounts his family's oral history about his great-grandfather:

During the 1880s, many black and white farmers in Alabama joined the Alliance, a radical agrarian movement against the conservative business and planter elite. Morris was attracted to the movement because of its racial egalitarianism. Throughout Georgia and Alabama, black and white Populist Party members held joint picnics, rallies, and speeches. Populist candidate Reuben F. Kalb actually won the state gubernatorial contest in 1894 [though electoral fraud prevented his taking office]. On the periphery of this activity, in his small rural town, Morris Marable became sheriff with the support of blacks and whites. He was intensely proud of his office, and completed his duties with special dispatch...Morris carried a small Bible in one coat pocket at all times and a revolver under his coat. In either case, he always planned to be prepared.[16]

Populism has many ripples. Thus, for instance, David Mathews, a formative voice in the Kettering Foundation for which he serves as president and the broader deliberative democracy movement, proudly traces his family's political lineage to the same movement as Marable. His ancestors were leaders in the Alabama and Texas branches of the Populist Party. In the 1898-1899 session of the Alabama legislature, his grandfather's father, James Waldrum Mathews, opposed the planter-sponsored constitution that effectively disenfranchised poor black and white farmers.[17]

At the core of democratic populist movements is a philosophy of civic independence that distinguishes populism from either socialism or unbridled market capitalism. As Eric Foner has observed, the relative absence of a strong socialist or labor party did not signal a void, but rather the presence of something else. "Precapitalist culture…was the incubator of resistance to capitalist development in the United States," wrote Foner:

"The world of the artisan and small farmer persisted in some parts of the United States into the twentieth century, and powerfully influenced American radical movements...These movements inherited an older republican tradition hostile to large accumulation of property, but viewing small property as the foundation of economic and civic autonomy...Not the absence of non-liberal ideas but the persistence of a radical vision resting on small property inhibited the rise of socialist ideologies.[18]

Themes of civic liberty have run through every democratic movement in America, from labor organizing of the 19th century to the women movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

America, like Europe, has also experienced amnesia about populism as a serious political and intellectual project. Elite condescension toward "the plain people" has been a significant factor. As Goodwyn described in *The Democratic Promise,* progressive historians by the 1960s had reduced "populism" to a caricature of backward-looking nativism and parochialism, a portrayal with virtually no relation to the actual movement.

Populist movements also speak a different language than modern, "scientifically minded" elites. They are culturally based more than structurally based. Their agent, "the people," is not historically indeterminate, but it is a different kind of category than "class" or "interest groups," a different idiom than charts and statistics of modern social science, a different politics than political campaigns with their focus groups

and poll-tested sound bytes. Populism challenges the culturally uprooted, individualized thinking characteristic of professional elites and systems, left and right. Populist movements are narrative. They grow from the sense that an elite is endangering the values, identities, and practices of a culturally constituted group of people, its memories, origins, common territory and ways of life. "People" is understood through language, stories, symbols, oral traditions, foods, music, ways of remembering. A people may have a moment of birth, sacred texts, foundational spaces. A people can also have dual identities, as conveyed in W.E.B. Du Bois' great work, *The Two Souls of Black Folks.*

The cultural themes of populism always are contested. But in democratic populism, as people defend their ways of life they develop in democratic ways. They become more conscious of other groups' interests, more inclusive in their understandings of "the people," and more expansive in their vision of future possibilities. Anyone involved in broad organizing or movements like the sixties' freedom struggle has seen this.

If attended to, such cultural discontents provide immense resources for democratic change in an era like ours, when egalitarian and community values are under assault by marketplace dynamics and cultural forces around the world fueled by growing disparities of wealth and power. How populism develops depends on who organizes its discontents. The questions of which elites threaten the people, what strategies are available, who the people include, all are dynamic and open. A populist perspective helps to make sense of the "culture wars." It also shows the need for a populist alternative to the "populism" on the right that purports to champion rooted culture but leaves marketplace dynamics untouched, and "populism" on the left, which challenges marketplace triumphalism but reproduces *homo economicus* in its theory of the "new man and woman."

Culture theory on the right: Buffers against modernity. The last generation's conservative politics in America has been associated with the theory that "culture," what conservatives understand to be ways of life that teach responsibility, loyalty, connection, initiative, and self-reliance, are under siege in the modern world. Cultural values and their foundations are especially endangered by government and by professions that turn people into clients or consumers of services. Such views grow from a long tradition of conservative thought. Dating from writers like as Alexis de Tocqueville and Edmund Burke, the English conservative who championed "little platoons" of communal life against the modern age, conservatives in this vein have seen community-rooted settings as the bulwark of liberty and tradition against the winds of modernity. Robert Nisbet, a pivotal figure for cultural conservatives, argued that Nazi Germany was the culminating fusion of state power and modernist culture, destroying autonomous local structures:

"All autonomous organizations were destroyed and made illegal: professions, service clubs, voluntary mutual aid groups, fraternal associations, even philatelist and musical societies. Such groups were regarded, and correctly, by the totalitarian government as potential sources of future resistance.[19]

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Nisbet also emphasized dangers of the capitalist marketplace. In his view, the market celebrates an acquisitive individualism that erodes the authority of the church, the family, and the neighborhood. It corrupts civic character, public honor, accountability, and respect for others. Capitalism alone produces a "sand heap of disconnected particles of humanity," he said. But he had scant ideas about how to counter marketplace dynamics. Like his conservative followers, he overwhelmingly focused on "big government."[20]

By the beginning of the 1980s, conservatives such as Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus, co-directors of the Mediating Structures Project of the American Enterprise Institute, were giving practical application to the idea of the colonizing, destructive power of government. To Berger and Neuhaus, big government "aspires to an all-comprehending jurisdiction." Acting out of its bureaucratic imperatives, justified by ideologies of equality, justice, and the public good, the state tends inevitably to expand its power, scope, and authority at the expense of such small-scale "structures of daily life" as families, churches, neighborhoods, and cultural and voluntary groups. Stripped of any attachment to particularity of background - religion, race, or group identity - the state is the ideal expression of professional culture and the "general will." But there is terrible cost: "A growing trend toward legally enforced symbolic sterility in public space" that denies the authority of communities to make public their traditions and values; the weakening of family and small-group bonds and the widening intrusions of experts and professionals into the most private realms of life; and, accompanying such processes, the erosion of those buffers that protect the individual against what they called "the mega-structures" of modern society.[21] They also despaired, that nothing could change the mega-structures. Peter Berger voiced such pessimism, writing with Brigitte Berger:

"*We are quite capable of imagining forms of Gemeinshaft that we would find more appealing than the American class system. Unfortunately these are not realistic options…the realistic question is the extent to which the totalitarian tendencies of [government] may still be curbed."*[22]

In their perspective, mediating structures are defensive buffers against the modern world. Intellectuals with a conservative cultural bent such as David Brooks, Michael Joyce, Bill Schambra, Bob Woodson, and Mary Ann Glendon have developed these themes. In their view, mediating structures of family, religious congregation, cultural and ethnic group, and neighborhood are threatened by social engineering and by liberalism that defines freedom as escape from communal restraint.

It is impossible to understand the "culture wars" without taking into account these cultural arguments, the anxieties and discontents they address, if often defensively, and the lack of progressive response. The pseudo-populist argument of Thomas Frank that working class whites, befuddled by cultural appeals, ignored their "self-interests," defined economically, in voting for Republicans reduces culture to false consciousness. His book, *What's Wrong with Kansas?,* was a hit with Democrats after the 2004 elections. But its popularity on the left shows the problem.

Republicans have been making hay out of Democratic obliviousness to cultural discontents and their hidden power dynamics for a generation by speaking in populist accents - the reason for the journalistic equation of "populism" with Republicans like Reagan and Bush. Thus, in the 1980 election, Reagan declared that, "Thousands of towns and neighborhoods have seen their peace disturbed by bureaucrats and social planners through busing, questionable educational programs, and attacks on family." In his words, it was a time for "an end to giantism" and "a return of power to the people." Similar views were voiced by Michael Joyce in the fall of 1992. Joyce said that "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."[23]

"Populists" on the right in the US, Europe and elsewhere have put progressives on the defensive. To understand why requires a look at cultural theory on the left.

Culture on the left: Brake on critical, cosmopolitan consciousness. In recent decades in the US, left oriented citizen action has often invoked "populism," reflected in Frank's approach and many issue groups' self-description. But its approach has also been highly economistic. Put differently, in recent years left populism has had scant connection to cultural wellsprings of American democracy or discontents about disruption of communal ties. As Dana Fisher shows in *Activism, Inc.,* a disconnection from community cultures on the issue-based left and election campaigns is embodied in techniques like the door to door canvass. It flows from a cultural stance: progressive activism, however named, has reflected an anti-traditionalist cultural theory descended from the Enlightenment, with new expressions in the culturally uprooted activism of the late sixties.

From Enlightenment theorists of the 18th century onward, the tendency on the left was to see the sundering of people's communal, particular, and historical identities - their "roots," in the words of the French philosopher Simone Weil[24] - as an indispensable, if perhaps tragic, prerequisite of cosmopolitan consciousness. Left intellectuals proposed, in place of community weakened or lost, community based on "new relationships."[25] While they were eloquent about human dislocations, the dominant trend in the views of both Karl Marx and Frederich Engels was to see workers' break with rooted, communal traditions as necessary for progress. Marx called for a "radical rupture" with particular identities such as religion, place, and ethnicity. For Engels, "tradition is the great retarding force…but being merely passive is sure to be broken down."[26]

Gianna Pomata described the differences between populist and socialist intellectual currents in Europe. "The Populists called into question one of the most basic tenets of European political thought - the belief in progress…Populism and Marxism thus came to represent two contrasting positions." This difference included differing conceptions of the future and also of agency. The peasant class which Marx argued "represents barbarism inside civilization" was for Populists "the leadership in the struggle for a better future." [27]

If such views simply reflected notions of nineteenth century theorists they would make little difference now. But they have continued to shape the progressive imagination. On the socialist left, the view of cosmopolitan consciousness as a process of breaking with local, particular, national, and traditional identities has been the pattern, with exceptions like William Morris or Martin Buber here and there. It informed Michael Harrington's view of a "rational humanist moral code," which he saw replacing "traditional moral values." The socialist view was succinctly summarized by Stanley Aronowitz in his essay entitled, appropriately enough, "The Working Class: A Break with the Past." According to Aronowitz, all particular identities of "race and nationality and sex and skill and industry" are obstacles to the development of cosmopolitan and oppositional consciousness.

Such sentiments also infused liberal thought. The cultural stance of liberalism has held that enlightenment comes from intellectuals at the center, not the backwaters. Garry Wills expressed such a view in his critique of proposals for decentralized power. "The smaller the locale, the stricter the code; and this code…has always been at odds with the social openness, the chances for initiative, praised by liberals." In his reading, "What our history actually reveals at the community level is local conformity, rigid mores, religious and other prejudice, aristocracy and control."[28]

In the 1960s, these views became intertwined with generational experiences to produce a sweeping alienation from mainstream America, its groups, symbols, stories, and traditions. Alienation found expression in the slogan, "Don't trust anyone over thirty!", or the sophisticated but disastrous generational statement by Paul Cowan of 1968, *The Making of an UnAmerican.* After the 1960s, a new generation of young activists worked to get beyond disdain for Americans. But their issue-focused approaches which came to characterize most progressive activism had little cultural rootedness.[29]

Cultural estrangement hides power and sustains technocracy. Technocratic politics - domination by experts removed from a common civic life -- has spread throughout contemporary society like a silent disease. It is a politics without a name, presenting itself as an objective set of truths, practices, and procedures and, on the left, informed by values such as social and economic justice, equal opportunity, and human rights. However well intentioned, technocratic politics turns groups of people into abstract categories. It decontextualizes "problems" from the life of communities. It privatizes the world and creates cultures based on scarcity. It erodes the experience of equal respect. All these features can be seen in modern political campaigns, with their "outsider" flavor, as if candidates are marketing to voters as customers choosing among different brands of toothpaste and posing themselves as something of a combination between super-hero and American Idol, whose election will solve all our problems.[30]

There are also many democratic stirrings that do not fit the conventional left-right spectrum, as civic scholars have described. The question is, how can such stirrings generate a larger, self-conscious movement? I believe a deeper theory of culture and power is an essential element.

Toward a Populist Theory of Culture and Power: Alternative voices in recent years offer material for moving beyond static views of culture and for developing a populist theory of culture and power based on appreciation of the immense resources within communities and societies. In contrast with progressive theories of community cultures as brakes on cosmopolitan consciousness, a new generation of social historians concerned with the actual development of popular movements - how it is that ordinary people, steeped in experiences of subordination, develop the courage, spirit, and confidence to assert themselves -- has produced a rendering of the roots of movements with far more nuance.[31] Social history draws attention to the contradictory quality of community settings and cultural traditions, full of oppositional currents, democratic elements, and insurgent themes as well as hierarchical and repressive ones. Social historians have described the ways in which powerless groups draw inspiration from cultural elements that many write off as simply oppressive.

Sara Evans and I, drawing on such social history as well as our experiences as southerners in the civil rights movement - white southerners in the movement, in my experience, had to come to terms with the ironies of culture in a way that many northerners could avoid - conceptualized the democratic potentials of culture with the idea of free spaces.[32] The concept aims to show how powerless groups draw on and transform inherited resources as they develop public skills, public identities, and power.

We defined free spaces as places in the life of communities with public qualities, in which powerless groups have capacity for self-organization, for engagement with alternative ideas, for development of public skills and identities. These entail new self-confidence, self-respect and concern for the commonwealth. In free spaces, people create culture. They draw confidence from inherited traditions and rework symbols, ideas, and values to challenge ruling ideas. Free spaces highlight what can be called the prophetic imagination as an alternative to outside critic. The prophetic stance finds in a society's cultural repertoire many treasures for developing new visions of the future and for reconstructing the story of who "the people" are and how they came to be. [33]

Thus, for instance, the historian E.P. Thompson in his work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, described places such as taverns and sectarian churches in which working people found space for intellectual life and democratic self organizations, separate from the gentry and the crown.[34] Women in 19th century conservative but publicly active women's organizations defined by domestic roles developed the confidence and power that laid groundwork for 20th century suffrage. In the long history of the African American freedom movement, blacks forged spaces for culture making even in overwhelmingly oppressive settings, such as the slave system. Christianity was taught to slaves by slave owners in an effort to break their ties with African roots and socialize them into passive, docile roles. Yet Christianity provided rich materials to use in fashioning strategies and language for everyday resistance (for instance work songs and Gospel music) as well as far ranging radical insurgent visions of a transformed racial and political order (such as the Exodus narrative). Ideals of freedom

and equality from the Declaration of Independence were also appropriated by a long line of black leaders. [35]

A dynamic theory of culture that can be called populist is now appearing in anthropological and development literature. Thus, Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton, editors of *Culture and Public Action,* a splendid recent book from UN and World Bank experiences in development work across the world, emphasize the cultural dynamism that we sought to convey with the idea of free spaces. It challenges individualist, economistic, and technocratic frameworks that dominated the development literature. Rao and Walton define culture as "about relationality - the relationships among individuals within groups, among groups, and between ideas and perspectives." This definition draws attention to locally rooted cultures and to their foundations in families, cultural groups, congregations and the like, and also to larger cultural patterns in societies developing over long periods of time. As they put it "Culture is concerned with identity, aspiration, symbolic exchange, coordination, and structures, and practices that serve relational ends such as ethnicity, ritual, heritage, norms, meanings and beliefs."[36]

They build on James Scott's *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.* Scott shows how "high modernism," infused with egalitarian ideals and combined with state power and weak civil society, has devastated local cultures, mores, and relationships all over the world. The irony is that this process has been carried out by progressives with the best of liberal, egalitarian intentions.[37]

In *Culture and Public Action,* the authors argue that development workers, to be successful, must shift from "one size fits all" technocratic interventions and instead recognize and tap the ingenuity and cultural resources of ordinary people in communities. Amartya Sen and Arjun Appadurai in particular also stress the dynamic, future-oriented qualities of culture, understood as meaning systems at multiple levels.

Thus, Arjun Appadurai 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 recent cultural theory with deeply appreciative participatory action research conducted with an affiliate of Shack Dwellers International, a poor people's housing organization, in Mumbai, India, Appadurai develops the concept of the "capacity to aspire" on the part of the poor. He proposes that, "in strengthening the capacity to aspire, conceived as a cultural capacity especially among the poor…the poor could find the resources required to contest and alter their conditions of their own poverty." Emphasizing the elements of future orientation in culture challenges conventional theory. 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." Thus economists have had franchise over "development," over the future. "Culture is opposed to development, as tradition is opposed to newness and habit to calculation."

In contrast to the tendency to see culture in static and past-oriented terms, Appadurai stresses culture's open, interactive, fluid, dynamic, and created

qualities. People's capacity to aspire is tied to "voice," the development of power and recognition that people gain through sustained organizing. "Voice must be expressed in terms of actions and performances which have local cultural force." The development of voice also means learning how to negotiate larger contexts. Such a process, in turn, can "change the terms of [their] recognition, indeed the cultural framework itself." To organize for voice and recognition requires cultural action and savvy strategic maneuvering. "There is no shortcut to empowerment. It has to take some local cultural form to have resonance, mobilize adherents, and capture the public space of debate."[38]

A dynamic theory of culture suggests a capacity-oriented, relational theory of power.

Power as relational and generative: In the free spaces of populist movements, people have an experience of power that confounds conventional views. Most power theories are based on models of power as one way; the term "power" is largely synonymous with force, control, and rule. Power theory is drawn from scarce resource systems like land or money (or the hyper-competitive scramble for prestige and position in universities). Such a view is present, for instance, in Steven Lukes' classic work, *Power: A Radical View.* Lukes takes what he calls a "three - dimensional view of power, illuminating not only power to get others to act and power to prevent action but also power to shape language which makes certain issues relevant and suppresses others.[39]

Here, power is one directional. Even power theories that are more relational usually conceive power as imposed *on* people. More recent theory in critical studies has described the ways in which dominating power relationships are "encoded" in languages, practices, and identities. Michel Foucault is especially influential in this school of thought. Such power theory is rich with insight, but it pays little attention to how human beings deepen democratic agency, the capacity to act to shape their worlds.[40] Academic theories rarely see power as what people *do* in reciprocal interactions to get things done. More, there is no conception of the potential democratic power embedded in community life or in the motifs, stories, symbols and narratives of the larger society. Today's critical theorists focus on critique and neglect power as cultural resources that can be drawn upon and developed to challenge and transform dominant powers and relations.

It would be naïve to ignore either extreme concentrations of power or power's sometimes brutalizing operations in the modern world.[41] Here, the most effective local organizing of recent years offers considerable insights. Leaders in broad based organizing such as Ed Chambers, Gerald Taylor, Mike Gecan, Sister Christine Stephens, Ernesto Cortes, Rev. Johnnie Ray Youngblood, and Marian Dixon, as well as democratic theorists such as Benjamin Barber, Rom Coles, and Alison Kadlec, have sought to develop relational theories of power and politics. Organizers go back to the root of the word, power (from *poder,* meaning to be able). They point out the sharp limits of academic theories of power because of their lack of attention to relationality. They argue that if one thinks about power as the capacity to act, not as what is done to someone else, power is always best conceived as

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"two-way," even in situations of considerable inequality. As Ed Chambers put it in *Roots of Radicals,* a compilation of insights from such organizing, "People who can understand the concerns of others and mix those concerns with their own agenda have access to a power source denied to those who can push only their own interests…There can be no creative power without some acknowledgement of the other's interests, just as there can be no healthy love if the self is wholly lost in concern for the other."[42] For poor and working class people, organizing for power in these terms means changing power dynamics to be more interactive and relational with positional leaders in politics and business, full of tension but also productive results. It also involves developing the public capacities of relational leaders, often women, at the center of community life.[43]

A populist theory of power creates a larger context than does broad-based organizing because its goal is building a movement, not simply organizations. Populist theory perforce must analyze cultural dynamics in the larger society, as well as interpersonal and local dynamics of particular organizations. Cultural power, like information power, highlights power's generative, open qualities. Such power cannot be conceived adequately as a zero-sum force, power *over*. Cultural power is power *to create* -- identities, narratives, practices. It can involve innovation or restoration. At the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, we have expressed the generative dimensions of power through the concept of citizenship as *public work*, highlighting the productive, not simply distributive, qualities of politics.[44] A view of the generative qualities of power also explains the potential catalytic power dynamics in government and professions, where power is also a nonfinite relationship. In such systems of cultural and information-constituted authority, power can be dramatically increased as knowledge is pooled and cultural identities and relationships are valued and brought into a public mix.

A dynamic, capacity-oriented, and culturally rooted approach to power offers possibilities for moving beyond dead end debates. For instance, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa, read as a dynamic, culture-creating populist movement, offers an alternative to the wars surrounding identity politics. The BCM tied the development of pride in African traditions and cultures to community organizing and political activism. Xolela Mangcu, the main intellectual heir to Black Consciousness Movement founder Steven Biko, argues that the BCM was not "essentialist." It did not believe in the unique virtues of blacks. Biko's key allies included the radical Afrikaner theologian Beyers Naudé. Rather, Biko and others stressed communal and egalitarian values in African cultures as resources for challenging not only apartheid but also the dominant Western culture of materialism, individualism, and domination broadly. Their arguments closely paralleled Sheldon Wolin's. [45]

This approach creates a populist alternative both to the identity politics widespread across the globe, and also to the posture of "objectivity" found among technocratic elites, left and right. It appreciates democratic and communal resources to be found in "cultures of survival" with which to mount challenges to the throwaway, isolating cultural currents of our time,

without claiming these cultures' unique virtue. Our colleague Atum Azzahir, an outstanding public intellectual, founder of the Powderhorn/Phillips Cultural Wellness Center, begins with African themes and also makes much the same point about "indigenous cultures," including European.[46] The Cultural Wellness Center takes a sharply different approach than conventional "service delivery" efforts that focus on poor people's deficits, needs and deficiencies. It emphasizes health as a civic and cultural question, not simply an individual question. Its philosophy of health is based on a deep appreciation for ordinary people's capacities, the resiliency and resources to be found in communities, and the health-generating dimensions of cultural identities. The Center, like other Minnesota efforts such as William Doherty's Families and Democracy Partnerships and the Neighborhood Learning Community, both later described, radically rethink professional work in civic terms that emphasize cultural grounding for public action and also the now untapped abundance of energies and civic talents in a sense frozen by one-way, technocratic patterns of service delivery. Such approaches open immense new strategic possibilities for crossing the conservative liberal divide in areas such as childhood development, health, education and other human service fields.[47]

They also suggest both the strengths and the limits of the work of John Dewey.

John Dewey's "Modernizing Populism"

John Dewey's biographer Alan Ryan locates Dewey's views and identifications in the broader populist strand of American political and cultural history:

Although Dewey was not in the Marxist sense an enthusiast for class warfare, he had the old populist inclination to divide the world into the privileged and the people... the upholders of the partial interests of particular social groups and the upholders of the interests of 'the people.' He did not espouse a backward-looking populism or hanker after agrarian radicalism...he was a forward-looking, modernizing populist."[48]

Dewey's philosophy, pragmatism, and his commitments to "democracy as a way of life" advanced themes in the populist tradition, especially civic learning. At the same time, since democratic populism, based on a dynamic sense of cultural resources, dissolves sharp distinctions between "backward-looking," on the one hand, and "forward-looking" and "modernizing," on the other, Ryan's characterization of Dewey's populism in these terms also hints at a key limit of Dewey's theory.

Dewey and civic development. Dewey saw Americans as a people forged from democratic diversity, and America's democratic traditions as experimental, open, practical, and based in values of universal importance. One of the least plausible charges against him is that his philosophy was about *means* with no concern for *ends*. "I make no apology for linking what is said in this chapter with the name of Thomas Jefferson," Dewey began "Democracy and America," the conclusion of *Freedom and Culture,* defending active democracy against both Marxist and conservative alternatives.

Dewey championed the country's founding ideals. "[Jefferson] wrote 'these truths are self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'" Dewey said, "His fundamental beliefs remain unchanged in substance if we forget all special associations with the word *Nature* and speak instead of ideal aims and values to be realized - aims which, although ideal…are backed by something deep and indestructible in the needs and demands of humankind."[49]

Populism is based on faith in the intelligence and talents of common men and women everywhere. Respect for the unrealized democratic potentialities in human beings is a powerful, admirable theme that runs through the core of Dewey's philosophy. Human development was at the center of his first serious statement on democracy, his essay "The Ethics of Democracy," written in 1888. Democracy, according to Dewey, involves an ethical ideal, not simply a government. Its aim should be the development of the potentials of each individual. "Democracy means the *personality* is the first and final reality," Dewey wrote. "It admits that the chief stimuli and encouragement to the realization of personality come from society; but it holds, nonetheless, to the fact that personality cannot be procured for any one, however degraded and feeble, by anyone else, however wise and strong."[50]

Dewey here introduced a focus on the importance of *work* as a source of development and democracy, extremely unusual among political theorists, along with a sharp criticism of most people's degraded experiences of work. "Democracy is not in reality what it is in name until it is industrial as well as civil and political…"[51]

Dewey was proudly, though far from uncritically, "American," but he extended his emphasis on human democratic development across the world. Indeed, he had strong appreciation for the insights and contributions of many other societies and cultures. For instance, his descriptions of the integration of esthetic experiences with life in earlier societies are replete with praise. "We do not have to travel to the ends of the earth nor return many millennia in time to find peoples for whom everything that intensifies the sense of immediate living is an object of intense admiration," Dewey wrote in *Art as Experience.* "Bodily scarification, waving feathers, gaudy robes, shining ornaments of gold and silver, of emerald and jade, formed the contents of esthetic arts and, presumably, without the vulgarity of class exhibitionism that attends their analogues today." Thus, "domestic utensils, furnishings of tent and house, rugs, mats, jars, pots, bows, spears were wrought with such delighted care that today we hunt them out and give them places of honor in our art museums." Dewey developed a critique of the detached "museum art" of modern life and the accompanying penchant for artists to "exaggerate their separateness to the point of eccentricity." In his view capitalism produced both an international market that detached art from context and also a *nouveaux riches* who sought to evidence his "good standing in the realm of higher culture…as his stocks and bonds certify to his standing in the economic world."[52]

Real understanding required attention to context. "It is a commonplace that we cannot direct, save accidentally, the growth and flowering of plants, however lovely and enjoyed, without understanding their causal conditions," Dewey wrote. "It should be just a commonplace that esthetic understanding - as distinct from sheer personal enjoyment - must start with the soil, air, and light out of which things esthetically admirable arise."[53]

Dewey envisioned a variety of ways to reintegrate art into contexts and, more broadly, a democratic way of life, from the buildings and spaces of the modern world and the educational experiences of young people to the productive activities of workers. Thus, his ideal of democratic development was tied the work of the craftsman as much as the efforts of the self-conscious artist. Indeed, Dewey saw artists, as he saw professionals in other disciplines, as essentially practicing crafts, with problem-oriented and relational patterns of learning, deeply attentive to context.

Forty years after he had introduced the idea of human development through work in the "Ethics of Democracy," he argued in *Art as Experience* that "the intelligent mechanic engaged in his job, interested in doing well and finding satisfaction in his handiwork, caring for his materials and tools with genuine affection, is artistically engaged." He decried the rarity of such experiences in the modern worksite. "The labor and employment problem of which we are so acutely aware cannot be solved by mere changes in wages, hours of work, and sanitary conditions. No permanent solution is possible

save in a radical social alteration, which affects the degree and kind of participation the worker has in the production and social distribution of the wares he produces…this modification of the nature of experience is the finally determining element in the esthetic quality of the experience of things produced."[54] Though he would have resisted the comparison, in such passages Dewey sounded like the late Pope John Paul II, whose 1981 Encyclical "On Human Labor" was an eloquent call to make the "subjective experience" of work the touchstone of modern economies.

John Dewey's philosophy led him into fierce debates about the role of citizens.

According to progressive intellectuals, changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century - technological developments, urbanization, the growth of scientific knowledge and the like - meant that theories of citizen involvement needed radical revision. The modern world, wrote Walter Lippmann, "had upset the old life on the prairies, made new demands upon democracy, introduced specialization and science…and created the impersonal relationships of the modern world."[55] Lippmann and other progressives in the *New Republic* - Dewey's political home from its founding until 1937 - argued that new forms of participation must replace face to face ties. Editor Herbert Croly said that "the responsibility and loyalty which the citizens of a democratic nation must feel one towards another is comprehensive and unmitigable," but the connections of small town communities needed to be replaced by "the loyal realization of a comprehensive democratic social idea." New technologies created opportunities to replace face to face communications. Citizens, in Croly's view, no longer need "assemble after the manner of a New England town-meeting" since there existed "abundant opportunities of communication and consultation without any meeting…the active citizenship of the country meets every morning and evening and discusses the affairs of the nation with the newspaper as an impersonal interlocutor."[56]

The detachment of democratic participation from place evolved into an attack on the ideal of active democracy. By the late 1920s, a growing consensus among social scientists advanced the "democratic realist" position that held most people to be in the grip of blind instincts and in need of guidance. Thus in 1934, Walter Shepherd, in his presidential address to the American Political Science Association, declared "the dogma of universal suffrage must give way to a system of educational and other tests which will exclude the ignorant, the uninformed, and the anti-social elements." Shepherd argued 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." To make certain his audience understood whom he had in mind, he concluded by calling for academics to lead the nation, for "men of brains" to "seize the torch."[57]

Dewey's colleague at the *New Republic,* Walter Lippmann, a formative voice in public debate, developed a more sophisticated argument but one that was even more challenging to Dewey's belief in democracy as a way of life. The problem with active democracy in the modern world was that most people possessed very limited information, according to Lippmann. Thei

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 have to be compressed into very short messages, the difficulty of making a small vocabulary express a complicated world, and finally the fear of facing those facts which would seem to threaten the established routine…" People's minds processed information through stereotypes - what social psychologists have more recently called "frames" - that they have learned. The consequence is that people are passive and manipulated.[58] Though his logic was different, Lippmann's solution was like other social scientists: There must be "some form of expertness between the private citizen and the vast environment in which he is entangled." Citizens' role was minimal: "To support the Ins when things are going well; to support the Outs when they seem to be going badly." The premise of active self-governing democracy was mistaken, he said. The test of government was not citizen involvement, but rather whether it delivered the goods.[59]

Dewey addressed these technocratic critics of participatory democracy in several ways, with varying success. In response to the pretensions of credentialed intellectuals and academics, Dewey made action, not detached thought, the foundational experience of human beings who make meaning in the world. As Ryan put it, "One reason why Dewey was never able to accept the orthodox argument of stimulus-response was the fact that it made the organism whose behavior was supposed to be built up out of endless stimulus-response circuits too passive, too spectatorial, and too much a creature of the environment." Rather, the person "makes sense *of* the world for the sake of acting productively *on* the world." This focus led Dewey to a critique of detached intellectuals who imagine the primacy of their own thought. "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 social contexts. Dewey observed the aura of infallibility which those armed with "expertise" could assume. "The dogma worked out practically so as to strengthen dependence upon authority," he wrote. "Just as belief that a magical ceremony will regulate the growth of seeds to full harvest stifles the tendency to investigate…so acceptance of dogmatic rules as bases of conduct in education, morals, and social matters lessens the impetus to find out about the conditions which are involved in forming intelligent plans."[60]

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. Here he anticipated by decades the work of social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu. Habit, for Dewey, was "human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity."[61]

Habits are not blind repetitions but are learned patterns that create predispositions for action in unexpected circumstances. Habits can be

changed and developed through "intelligent action." This has proven a fertile theory 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 to education for democracy. "The real crisis we face is not a threat to America's economic or military dominance but the ebbing strength of our democratic and egalitarian culture." Meier recalls the "traditional public function of schools: to pass on the skills, aptitudes, and habits needed for a democratic way of life," observing that these "are hard to come by; they are not natural to the species. They are as hard to teach as relativity. Democratic culture needs citizens with very strong habits."[62]

Dewey's direct responses to the arguments about the practical impossibility of active democracy showed his populist inclinations. But they were much less successful.

The "Dewey Problem." 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 Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett in their lively "Deweyan" manifesto, *Dewey's Dream.* "What we mean by the Dewey Problem is, what *specifically is to be done beyond theoretical advocacy to transform American society and developed societies into participatory democracies…?*[italics in original]"[63]

This "Dewey problem" is illustrated by the weaknesses of his reply to critics of citizen democracy, *The Public and Its Problems,* published in 1927. He agreed with the "realists" that citizens were bewildered by modern conditions. Public transactions are those which have significant indirect consequences for those not directly involved. But this creates an enormous challenge. "The machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified, and complicated the scope of indirect consequences, has formed such immense and consolidated unions in action, on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot distinguish itself." Yet such a discovery is the foundation of action. Thus, publics are inchoate and disorganized and "The outstanding problem of the Public is discovery and identification of itself…"[64]

Dewey affirmed that society needs organized intelligence and that social scientists play a key role (though he had in mind public intellectuals like Henry George, not detached academics). But he said newspapers were potentially better sources of knowledge than critics acknowledged, when combined with good social science, effective reporting, and engaging presentation. Democracy, he argued, "will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication."[65]

He held that in order to organize themselves and deal with indirect consequences, publics formed "states" to serve their common interests. He acknowledged that inherited forms of government were inadequate to the tasks. "The 'new age of human relationships' has no political agencies

worthy of it." Americans had inherited "local town-meeting practices and ideas. But we live and act and have our being in a continental nation-state."[66] Thus, democracy needed to take an open-ended approach to state-making. "By its very nature, a state is ever something to be scrutinized, investigated, searched for. Almost as soon as its form is stabilized, it needs to be re-made."

Finally, Dewey called for recovery of local community. "Evils which are uncritically and indiscriminately laid at the door of industrialism and democracy might, with greater intelligence, be referred to the dislocation and unsettlement of local communities," he wrote. He argued that "Vital and thorough attachments are bred only in the intimacy of an intercourse which is of necessity restricted in range…Democracy must begin at home and its home is the neighborly community."[67]

Even his enthusiastic biographer Robert Westbrook, who sees Dewey as the key theorist for modern participatory democracy, levels a devastating critique at the weaknesses of this book. Westbrook observes that Dewey gave no clue as to how an increasingly distanced group of social scientists might become re-engaged. He neglected to mention ideas on how the state might become more participatory. "Dewey's political theory and ethics pointed to a government that would include, indeed maximize, agencies of direct democracy…yet despite the implications of his own argument, he appeared to have given little thought to the problems and possibilities of participatory government." Nor did he develop any strategic idea for the rebirth of local democracy. "It was unclear how a public that was the product of a social transformation showing no respect for place could remain strongly attached to local settings," Westbrook observes. Westbrook concludes by using Dewey's own arguments. "He was himself constantly railing against those who were guilty of wishful thinking because of an inattentiveness to means…Dewey's failure to constitute participatory democracy as a compelling 'working end' as well as the demanding conditions he set for its realization, made *The Public and Its Problems* a less than effective counter to democratic realism." [68]

Alan Ryan explains the fact that Dewey's philosophy often had a "magical" quality, "never…fully seized of the nastiness of political dilemmas," by factors external to his philosophy: during his formative years, before moving to Chicago, Dewey lived in small communities and had small audiences. [69] I believe that there was a deeper problem.

Dewey and Power: Dewey, who emphasized the importance of conscious attention for full understanding of anything, gave little explicit attention to the concept of power. As a result, his political arguments and prescriptions often have an idealized, almost wistful tone. Just as he relocated politics in the state, in the dynamic I described in my first Dewey lecture, he also thought about power in the conventional terms of force. "Not only have we separated the church from the state, but we have separated language, cultural traditions, all that is called race, from the state - that is, from problems of political organization and power," he argued in his essay, "America in the World," an idealized defense of World War I whose enthusiasm he came to regret but which is suggestive for its underlying

definitions. "To us language, literature, creed, group ways, national culture, are social rather than political, human rather than national interests. Let this idea fly abroad." [70] Even in sober moments, Ryan argues, Dewey equated "power" with "force." Force meant getting people to do things they wouldn't otherwise do.[71]

Dewey's treatment of power tended to assume that power is a one-directional operation, power *over* others, not power *to act* in relationship with others. "Power" understood differently, as the relational capacity to act, entails closer attention to power and public agency, the dynamics of communal solidarity, and social movements that are crucial for change. To use Deweyan language it makes "problems" out of what he took for granted.

Public Agency:[72] John Dewey translated his conception of the human person as *problem-solver* into the view that the ideal human agent is the citizen scientist. For instance, this is a strong 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. More important still, it is the only assurance of the possibility of a public opinion intelligent enough to meet present social problems."[73] The habits Dewey cites 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 strikingly *cognitive* habits, continuing his life long penchant to place the emphasis on ideas in direct contravention of his deeper theory of action. This tendency was present early on. At Michigan, for instance, he enthusiastically signed up to be editor of the hair-brained scheme of Franklin Ford in 1892 to launch a newspaper, *Thought News,* dedicated to thought, until public derision caused him to pull out.

There was a contradiction throughout Dewey's career between his deepest concept of the person - that the organism "makes sense *of* the world for the sake of acting productively *on* the world" - and his tendency to prioritize thought over action. This is evident, for instance, in his approach to micro-cultures such as schools, communities, and workplaces. Dewey was eloquent about normative civic dimensions of such settings. For a brief period, in the Chicago Lab School, he developed a practical site for working through his ideas. But as Benson, Harkavy and Puckett detail in *Dewey's Dream,* his inattention to the institutional politics of the school's relationship to the University of Chicago soon caused the severance of his relationship. An adequate theory of agency poses places like the Lab School and their relationships *themselves* as a focus for action -- *how to organize* for democratic change. There are a number of habits and traits that are not on Dewey's list but that are crucial for organizing and sustaining a democratic site like the Lab School. An organizing citizen needs to be relational, appreciative of the resources of settings and also able to imagine alternatives (possessing the "capacity to aspire"), astute in reading power and interests, skilled in listening and communication, strategic, and able to see connections between particular problems, the contexts in which they operate, and larger systems.

Our own experiences in the partnerships of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship have repeatedly brought home how easy it is for professionals to lose any sense of context when they focus on "the problem." Dewey at his best conveys a richer concept of the human person than "problem solver."[74] Though Dewey sought to resist uprooted thought by regularly invoking context, in fact a concept of agency that puts the emphasis on problem solving tends to detach activity from context, especially in the hands of culturally uprooted professionals. "Problem-solvers" lose the awareness that discrete "problems" have different meanings in different settings. They forget the ties of particular problems to webs of other problems. They neglect the holistic qualities of environments in which a person acts. And they assume long range ends as "givens," focusing on efficiency of means. Decontextualized problem solving is the trait of technocracy. Given Dewey's championing of common people, it is unfair to charge him with being a technocrat, as Christopher Lasch among others, has done. But it is easy to see the reason for the charge: "problem solving" suggests a technocratic frame of mind.[75]

The concept of the person as a "co-creator" of her environments, a maker of contexts and communities, is more adequate to the democratic task. It suggests a shift from person "in herself" to a democratic citizen "for herself," the transformations needed for democracy to become a "way of life." Such conceptual language is intimated by experimental psychology that emphasizes humans as unique, relational agents of their development even in early childhood. Infants create ideas drawing from diverse sources, as they learn to negotiate and shape their environments. This science points toward a political, open, and dynamic concept of contexts and of the humans who make them.

The late Esther Thelen pioneered in this science, moving toward a "grand unifying theory" of the field of early childhood development. Thelen's science was based on a relational, interactive, emergent understanding of complex systems and how to theorize them. She acknowledged a debt to Dewey but a stronger debt to William James, who emphasized more than Dewey the idiosyncratic qualities of each person and the gritty, turbulent, ironic and heterogeneous qualities of experiences (Ryan also observes this contrast between James and Dewey).[76] Thelen's theory challenged views of infants as passing through pre-determined "stages" of development. She argued instead that infants are experimental, self-realizing agents, profoundly relational and interactive with their contexts. A group of former students and co-researchers described the embodied quality of thought in the 2005 Presidential Session of the Society for Research on Child Development. Drawing on many of her experiments, they concluded that infants are constantly assembling holistic patterns, such as reaching or walking, out of many elements, including testing, perceiving, feedback, and experimenting with ideas. "[An] integration of body and mind is a fundamental characteristic of all goal-directed activities…Thought is always grounded in perception and action."[77]

Thelen not only challenged stage theories of development and disembodied thinking. She also differed from conventional views about

scientists and science. She saw the scientist as part of the equation; she certainly would have added the capacity to build relationships to Dewey's list. In Esther Thelen's view, theory grows not only from use of the scientific method but also from a rich and interactive set of plural relationships, with "amateurs," parents and families, as well as with other scientists. In democratic terms, Thelen's science suggests a conception of the person not simply as a problem solver, but more broadly as a co-creator of the contexts in which problem-solving takes place.

In a different context, research over the last generation has shown that organizing which develops people's co-creative agency generates profound changes in the sense of self, skills, behaviors and values, what the organizer and public intellectual Ernesto Cortes calls "*metanoia,* a theological concept meaning transformation in being. These changes are visible in what are called "broad based citizen organizations" affiliated with networks like the Gamaliel Foundation, Industrial Areas Foundation, and PICO. Such groups often use the concept of citizens as co-creators. In a splendid treatment of these themes*,* Rom Coles described how such organizing, drawing on diverse traditions, "inflects these traditions in light of a radical democratic ethos that accents inclusion, dialogue, receptivity, equality, difference, a taste for ambiguity, patient discernment, and an affirmation that political relationships centrally involve ongoing tension, some compromise, and humility in the face of disagreement."[78]

Our work at the Humphrey Institute's Center for Democracy and Citizenship began in 1987 with a populist, everyday politics in which citizens are co-creators.[79] Drawing from experiences of broad based organizing, as well as the citizenship schools of the civil rights movement, our goal has been to develop concepts and practical methods that can feed broader movement building. With partners, we translated citizen-centered politics to varying settings, from a nursing home and the College of St. Catherine, to the Metropolitan Council and Minnesota Extension Service. Our sustained work has included partnerships with new immigrants and the West Side of St. Paul in the Jane Addams School for Democracy and the Neighborhood Learning Community,[80] and also the youth civic learning initiative of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship called Public Achievement.[81] Key colleagues have included Bill Doherty, whose Families and Democracy partnerships use a public work approach. These have pioneered models of the "citizen professional" and organizing to change the cultural forces undermining family life.

Across all the CDC collaborations, the idea of the citizen as co-creator has been at the center. In the Jane Addams School, for instance, everyone is a "learner" and a "teacher"; students learn they are not doing "service," but are participants and colleagues in public work. In the Families and Democracy partnerships, citizens and families possess the primary knowledge, responsibility, and capacity to address challenges - professionals are citizen professionals. In Public Achievement, the conception of the citizen as a co-creator of communities and democracy through public work means that young people are citizens now, not citizen in preparation. Public work involves a diverse mix of people creating public

wealth, things of lasting civic benefit, whose value is determined through continuing conversation, and in Public Achievement young people choose issues they want to address and are coached by older people. Such concepts and practices pose every setting as open to change and re-creation. They teach methods like "power mapping," one on one interviews, and strategic thinking, that illuminate the politicality of every setting. The CDC web site is full of stories of transformations that take place in identity and outlook as people learn the everyday politics needed to make changes.[82]

In another context, Jennifer O'Donoghue's pioneering research illuminates micro-processes of transformations in identity and sense of agency among poor and working class young people, mostly of minority backgrounds, active in inner city community organizations in northern California. The groups' focus on young people's power and learning. Their commitments and practices have much the same effects as Public Achievement at its best. Drawing on research that shows low income and minority young people to be less civically engaged and more marginalized in community life, posing community groups as potentially alternatives to those who look simply to schools for remedy, O'Donoghue undertook a qualitative research project that explored public learning opportunities in community based youth organizations (CBYOs). These, she hypothesized, were likely to have more "free spaces" for youth than schools.

O'Donoghue found dramatic and positive changes in identity, behavior, attitudes and hopes among these young people, most of whom had struggled or failed in school and felt marginalized by the larger culture, and who sometimes came from families of abuse, violence, and neglect. "Participating here and doing things here helps me feel like I've accomplished something. My experience here has given me a little piece of pride I never had," said one young woman. In contrast to prior experience, many reported learning more openness, trust, and connection. "My mom used to say, you can't trust anybody," said another. "But I feel I can really trust these people." Another element was "coming out" to be seen. As one put it, "I'm starting to open myself up more and show who I really am and where I'm coming from." Said another, "I was one of those youth who was always in the background… When I started speaking my mind, it was a hard to explain feeling because I've never actually spoken my mind..."

Young people learned to see others in different ways. "I used to have the same attitude as some adults, that some youth just mess it up," said one. "But now I look at them like, what have they gone through in their life for them to be like this?" Another reflected, "I used to look at people and make judgments right away. I don't do that anymore, or not nearly as much as I used to. I'm friends with all sorts of different people now." Finally, many reported a new sense of civic identity. This meant being involved in the community "to affect it in a drastic change toward positivity," as one put it.[83] O'Donoghue summarized features of the micro-cultures that generate such changes:

"In explaining what they valued about their CBYO experience, young people emphasized an organizational culture characterized by a commitment to youth power and learning. They conveyed their organization,

at its best, as 'just like all about youth empowerment.' Supporting youth power, for these young people involved believing that all young people were capable of making change, opening space for young people to create or build things in the world, and challenging them to do it. The idea of creating something real and lasting was extremely powerful for these youth. Being committed to youth meant also being flexible and responsible to the people who make up the organization and to the broader community around them..."[84]

Like the conception of the person as an active agent and the micro-cultures in which they develop a new sense of self, the larger communities in which young people and others develop civic skills and identities can also be understood not simply as things to be espoused but as contexts to be consciously repaired, sustained and re-created.

Communities: John Dewey invoked community as the ground for democratic values, anticipating critics of technocracy like James Scott. "Fraternity, liberty and equality isolated from communal life are hopeless abstractions," he wrote in *The Public and Its Problems.* "Their separate assertion leads to mushy sentimentalism or else to extravagant and fanatical violence which in the end defeats its own aims."[85] But Dewey's community, like his concept of agency, was abstract. He neglected the gritty, power-laden, and culturally rooted work needed to retrieve, sustain, and generate democratic values in a world that assaults them. The most insightful leaders of people's organizing have a profound sense of this work. "We are not a grassroots organization," said the Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood, a leader in East Brooklyn Churches, a model for organizing over a generation. "Grassroots are shallow roots. *Our* roots are deep roots. Our roots have fought for existence in the shattered glass of East New York."[86]

When he turned to strategies and concrete examples, Dewey had a *liberal* idea of community in mind, with little sense of potentials of more conservative traditions, with their often fierce defense of roots. During World War I, he sought to get the federal government to intervene in the politics of the Polish community 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 Ryan says, "The Catholic church still struck Dewey as a threat to human intelligence and social reform, and he still complained that its emphasis on supernaturalism was a threat to science, and its emphasis on authority a threat to individual liberty. The church's leaders and rank-and-file Catholic intellectuals returned his distaste."[87]

In recent years, broad based citizen organizing has sought to ground organizing in multi-dimensional connections with community institutions and diverse traditions. This meant taking seriously the real religious beliefs of participants, first in local churches of Catholic and Protestant orientation, later in synagogues and mosques as well. It also meant changing the very definition of "leadership." Leaders in low income and minority community organizing were traditionally the visible public actors and activists, typically male. In the new organizing, key figures became the more invisible "relational leaders," most frequently women, who worked behind the scenes

to keep school PTAs going, ran day to day activities in churches, and were the people neighbors turned to for support and advice. Sister Christine Stephens, a key figure in this shift, described the innovations of the Mexican American group Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) in San Antonio. "COPS built on the basis of PTA leaders, parish council members, stalwarts of the church guilds," she described. "Not the politicos, the people who have wheeled and dealed." Stephens described this as a key shift in the social bases of organizing. "The approach builds around the people who have sustained the community," against enormous pressures. "For example, these are women whose lives by and large have been wrapped up in their parishes and their children. What COPS has been able to do is to give them a public life and a public visibility, to educate, to provide the tools whereby they can participate." Politics also became redefined to put citizens back at the center and to reintegrate politics into the horizontal relations of daily life.[88]

In another example, sustained alliance-building in the geographic area of the West Side in St. Paul, a historically rich immigrant neighborhood, led leaders in the Jane Addams School to help create a neighborhood-wide coalition, the Neighborhood Learning Community, NLC. The NCL aims to develop a "culture of learning" across the area. Traditional professional strategies do not work to create such culture change. The informational approaches common in professional settings, where parents and educators are given research findings, have little potential to engage families' interests, develop families' power, or to create substantial relationships between schools and their surrounding communities. Traditional social service approaches deliver educational enrichment experiences to students conceived as customers, not as creative agents who have potentially rich cultural and other resources to bring. As democratic educational theorist Nick Longo points out, "Developing a neighborhood culture of learning counters prevailing trends and invites non-experts to participate in education reform." It is a "citizen centered model…that asks experts to…be on tap not on top." The challenge is that "this constitutes several paradigm shifts: seeing ordinary people as producers, not consumers; actors, not spectators; and teachers, not students." Jerry Stein, an educational scholar and activist, says it amounts to a "Copernican Revolution," understanding that schools need to orbit communities and families. [89]

Dewey believed that living, active communities and publics would someday be created through richly diverse communicative action. As he put it, "Communication alone can create the Great Community."[90] But communities, like Copernican Revolutions, are built on a large scale in the modern world through popular movements. In such movements, communication is one dimension of a larger process of building collective power.

Dewey and the people's movement of the Great Depression: The populist movements of the 1930s and Dewey's relationship to them are helpful to look at in this regard. His efforts to articulate a populist conception of democracy as a way of life differed from left wing conceptions of agency and Marxist visions of the future, in ways that have continuing relevance to

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movement building. Yet left wing organizing has at times also had a populist character that is full of important lessons. This was dramatically true after the Seventh Congress of the Communist International shifted in 1935 from a rhetoric of class struggle to a populist rhetoric of "the people." This shift unleashed an amazing array of creative democratic efforts and generated a vital social movement in the US and elsewhere. At the heart of the movement was a profound irony - the turn in the communist movement toward populist organizing came at the same time Stalin undertook a ferocious assault on populism as a distinctive intellectual and political project. Dewey could see sharply the flaws in Stalinist ideas. But he seemed at best only dimly aware of the teeming populist practices underneath them, and all around him.

A full treatment of Dewey's populist concepts, the left's populist organizing, and the relationship between them in the 1930s and 1940s is beyond the limits of this lecture, but I can sketch the bare outlines. Throughout, Dewey remained a critic of Roosevelt's New Deal. He believed that capitalism had failed and needed replacement by a different economic system. He saw the New Deal as a half way measure. The National Recovery Administration, for instance, a key element of Roosevelt's response, "loaded the dice in favor of the existing system of control of industry, with a few sops thrown to labor." In his view, "there is no way out for America except to recognize that labor has prior claims upon production, which take precedence of current return upon property." [91]

Dewey's emphasis on "labor's priority" was more in the tradition of Abraham Lincoln than Karl Marx. Dewey was sympathetic to working people and to trade unions. Indeed, he was a zealous advocate of school teachers' organizing. But he resisted class struggle language. He argued that the failure of public education was due to elite control. Thus in strikingly populist accents, he said that a teachers union allied with other trade unions was necessary to combat "the state of servility…" that characterized education.[92]

His populism was also evident in the way he thought about efforts through the 1930s to create a third party (if not in his actual quixotic efforts themselves). His concept envisioned an alliance of farmers, blue and white collar workers, small business and professionals. He saw labor support as critical. But winning the middle class was the key. To achieve this, the party's approach must be non-statist and respectful of small property. "The first appeal of a new party must be to what is called the 'middle class': to professional people, including, of course, teachers, the average retail merchant, the fairly well-to-do householder, the struggling white collar worker including his feminine counterpart, and the farmer."[93] Socialist theory dismisses such populist programs as at best temporary expedients on the way to class politics. But Dewey's view articulated a democratic alternative both to privatized culture and statism: people need small property to be self-governing, independent, productive citizens of the commonwealth.[94]

Finally, Dewey also played an extremely important role in criticizing the duplicity and self-delusion affecting many intellectuals in the 1930s who

turned a blind eye to the totalitarian tendencies of the Soviet Union. In 1937, he served as chairman of the Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made Against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials, generally referred to as the Dewey Commission, because he believed in his "right to a public trial." He also served as honorary chair of the Committee for Cultural Freedom, formed in 1939, which warned of "the tide of totalitarianism…rising throughout the world…washing away cultural and creative freedom" in Russia and fascist regimes.[95]

In all these cases, Dewey's advanced democratic *populist ideas,* not a vision of "classless society" or socialized production or the modern "mass" man and woman (populism is the antithesis of the whole constellation of terms associated with "mass"). Dewey saw democracy as a work in progress; the core problem was bringing concentrated power and wealth under control. But he had much weaker *populist practice*. Thus he had little feeling for how the Roosevelt administration, precisely because of its pragmatic responsiveness to changing conditions and popular moods, helped to catalyze democratic organizing. He also did not perceive that below the surface of formal leftwing politics, its organizing was generating democratic energies.

Thus he saw Popular Fronters as simply communist dupes defined entirely by their ideas about Russia. In fact, as a wealth of scholarship suggests, the tone of the nation's collective response to the Great Depression was set by a populist-style movement called the Popular Front. It mobilized civic and democratic energies well beyond formal politics as well as through elections. It addressed domestic challenges of poverty, racism, hunger, workers' powerlessness in the face of large employers and many other questions. The historian Eric Foner notes the ironies: the Communist Party, its leaders slavishly loyal to the Soviet Union, helped to greatly "expand freedom" in America. [96]

All over the world the shift from class struggle to popular fronts generated democratic energies as left wingers shifted focus from an abstract internationalism and the language of socialism to mining of democratic resources within specific societies and cultures. In colonies of the Global South, this shift helped to launch "national liberation struggles" that fueled independence. It also generated creative social changes of many kinds. Thus, in the Indian state of Kerala, communist organizing of landless peasants, continuing for decades, producing enormous transformations. As Peter Evans observed, "Decades of social battles [around land reform] changed people's cultural images of themselves and their society. Humiliated lower-case peons were given scripts in which they were heroic rather than despised, in which they were supposed to exercise agency rather than hoping for charity, and in which their neighbors were comrades in collective endeavors rather than competitors for scarce resources."[97] Amartya Sen draws intensively on the movements of Kerala in his theory of "development as freedom."

The Communist Party in the US experienced the tensions of such a change in practice. As Gary Gerstle found in a study of the textile town of Woonsocket, Rhode Island,

Many party members and sympathizers, especially those long committed to Leninist doctrine, found this change [from class struggle to Popular Front] wrenching. Some, however, genuinely embraced the Popular Front precisely because it seemed...an opportunity to overcome their isolation from American workers and their marginality in American politics. They enthusiastically set about constructing a new radical language, one that was respectful of American political traditions and consonant with cherished American notions of freedom, independence, justice, and equality.[98]

The "struggle for socialism" of the early 1930s had created ferocious fights between radicals and moderates. After 1935, the call *to defend democracy* meant broad alliances replaced demands to choose "which side are you on?" America's democratic heritage came to be understood as a treasure trove of resources. The struggle to defend democracy became not simply defensive; at its best, it became a movement to deepen democracy. Even the Communist Party claimed "Jefferson, Paine, and Lincoln."

Dewey's abstract bent produced its own ironies. Thus Dewey envisioned vital communities that would someday combine face to face relations with intellectual life. If community "be re-established, it will manifest a fullness, variety, and freedom of possession and enjoyment of meanings and goods unknown to the contiguous associations of the past," he wrote. "It will be alive and flexible as well as stable, responsive to the complex and world-wide scene in which it is enmeshed." [99] Yet as part of the populist movement, such community cultures were appearing right next door.

Thus, Harlem was the scene of a remarkable public culture, vividly rendered by Barbara Ransby in her biography of the civil rights leader Ella Baker. From the 1920s through the 1930s, the Harlem Renaissance nourished wider democratic changes, the combination of life and flexibility and stability Dewey longed for. Activists of every stripe - from anarchists to communists, mingled with day laborers and a range of professionals -- artists and poets, labor organizers, teachers, ministers and musicians, in an explosion of political, literary, artistic, and intellectual creativity. As Ransby described, "The streets of Harlem provided a cultural and political immersion like no other…infused as it was with the exciting intellectual rhythms of the black diaspora. The serious exchange of ideas, cultural performances and political debates flowed out of classrooms, private homes, meeting halls, and bars onto the neighborhood thoroughfare of Lenox Ave." [100] In Harlem, free spaces ranged from jazz spots like the Cotton Club to churches, labor study groups, local businesses, unions, the Harlem library, schools, labor education groups, and theater projects. These settings mingled to create a vibrant public culture. People learned skills of dealing with others who are different. They knew that what happened in Harlem mattered to "American civilization." A whole generation of intellectual and cultural and activist leaders - Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Jacob Lawrence, Adam Clayton Power, and many others - were schooled in this milieu. Key architects of SCLC's approach were also formed in Harlem.

The thirties and forties' movement also had strong trans-local dimensions. Historians such as Lary May in *The Big Tomorrow,* a treatment of the transformations of "the American dream" presented in movies,

Lisbeth Cohen, in *Making a New Deal,* showing the agency of blue collar workers in using mass cultural forms like radio to forge a larger sense of collective identity, and Michael Denning in *Cultural Front,* an analysis of the cultural politics of the Popular Front, have richly detailed the populist organizing among "cultural workers" of many kinds - from journalists, screenwriters and artists to scholars and educators and union organizers. Denning effectively disputes the idea that intellectuals in the Popular Front were dupes of the communists. He uses the idea of an "historic bloc" of variegated forces of diverse interests and motivations united around certain overarching goals (defeat of fascism, defense of democracy, and pursuit of economic and racial justice). The overall result was that the content of the American dream in the popular culture shifted from the individualist, WASP-oriented, consumerist ideal of the 1920s to a far more cooperative, racially pluralist and egalitarian vision of democracy in the New Deal. In the process, cultural workers developed a consciousness of their own potential roles in the battle of ideas and conceptions of the good society, as allies of industrial workers, blacks, farmers, small businesses and other groups, and also fighting for themselves and their own interests. Theorists of this cultural politics like Lewis Corey saw the struggle as about professionals' own interests for socially relevant work. As Denning puts it, a "craft vision of professionals, intellectuals, and artists was a crucial element of the depression left."[101] Public meanings of work also gave a strong civic cast to New Deal programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps.[102]

The Popular Front generated a democratic aesthetic illustrated by Martha Graham's 1938 dance masterpiece, *American Document*. It emphasized American folk traditions, multi-ethnic heritages, and ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address. "What is an American?" she asked. She answered, not only Anglo-Saxons but also blacks, immigrants, and workers. All were needed for democracy. The appeal of Earl Robinson's great song on the same theme and with the same message, "Ballad for Americans," showed the reach of this democratic aesthetic. Made famous by Paul Robeson, it was sung at both Republican and Communist Party 1940 conventions.

Today's broad-based organizing is rooted in this tradition. The contribution of Saul Alinsky, its founder, was not "inventing community organizing," as is imagined. Rather Alinsky codified organizing lessons of the Popular Front. His 1946 book, *Reveille for Radicals,* was in fact a call to revive the movement without socialist baggage - Alinsky identified himself as a populist. The populist movement for the 21st century needs to draw on this heritage. Finally, populism challenges technocracy.

Populism Versus Technocracy in the 2008 election season

A new triumphalism in technocracy is evident in many settings, recalling today Walter Shepherd's call from 1934 for "men to brains [to] seize the torch." For instance, it is expressed in the zeal of many scientists to roll back the purported delusions afflicting people of faith. Thus the Fiftieth Anniversary issue of the leading British science journal, *The New Scientist,* in 2006 began with description of a large California conference of scientists that had all the flavor of an old fashioned camp meeting - in this case going on the offensive against religious belief. In 2006, the evolutionary biologist Robert Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion,* a best seller on the *New York Times* list, launched a ferocious attack on religious conviction of all varieties and also on the "Neville Chamberlain School" of scientists lacking what he thought was requisite zeal for the anti-religious crusade. As H. Allen Orr observed in the *New York Review of Books,* Dawkins demonstrated a "mission to convert," that was intolerant, refused ambiguity or doubt, lacked engagement with any of the sophisticated views of adversaries, showed a cavalier attitude toward historical evidence, and demonstrated a strikingly Manichean bent of mind. Dawkins embodies the rectitude of ideological zealots of any variety.[103]

In high level politics, the technocratic bent is also pervasive. As one policy leader in Washington told me during our New Citizenship effort with the White House Domestic Policy Council from 1993-95, "the contempt in the Washington beltway toward the American people is often breathtaking," a pattern Joan Didion detailed in her campaign coverage from 1988 through 2000 for the *New York Review of Books.* Technocratic trends culminate in high level presidential campaigns, now based on treating citizens as customers and candidates as rock stars and superheroes.[104]

Yet under the surface of degrading and elitist trends, a manipulative culture "littered by disposable remains," there are also signs of a new movement. Here, I conclude by looking at how a populist perspective can reframe the coming election.

Many descendants of John Dewey's emphasis on communication and "socialized intelligence" describe it as an emerging world wide movement for "deliberative democracy." Others, such as Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett in their book, *Dewey's Dream,* see it as a movement for democratic education reform. They propose that a movement for "university-assisted community schools constitute[s] the best practical means to help realize Dewey's general theory of participatory democracy."[105]

I have much respect for these practices, sites, and those who make these arguments. Deliberation at its inclusive best, in ways urged by authors such as David Mathews, Daniel Yankelovitch, Hal Saunders, Nöelle McAfee, Alison Kadlec, Matt Leiningher and others, challenges the stranglehold that technocrats have gained over policy making. Kadlec, following Dewey, observes insightfully that deliberation can disclose public problems, injustices and power inequalities.[106] Deliberative democrats help bring back a respect for the intelligence of ordinary citizens. And, like Dewey, they

emphasize democratic "habits," such as the capacities to engage people of other views and interests. Because deliberative democracy is so clearly related to Dewey's focus on communication while it also provides part of the missing answer to the "democratic realists," it is not surprising that he has become a foundational theorist in this movement. But the democratic movement needs to put deliberation in a larger context of practices. Public work that solves public problems and creates public wealth involves a continuing conversation about the meaning of its products. It also points toward a thicker conception of civic agency than the deliberative citizen. A populist conception of agency highlights not only citizen judgments about problems and what government might do about them. This was Dewey's view, reflected in *The Public and Its Problems*, in which citizens, when they recognize public problems, become a public as they form a state to act on them. Dewey's perspective is the common approach taken in most deliberative efforts - people deliberate mainly about government's proper course of action. In a populist perspective, by contrast, the question is not "what can government do?" but "what can we all do?," posing "problems" or "issues" as parts of larger cultural dynamics. Publics form as they do public work. They are not formed, as Dewey proposed, through government. Government is a resource of the people, but not the only one. Public work illuminates a broader range of citizen talents, whether teens who told Jennifer O'Donoghue how important it was to create things of lasting value or IDASA's approach that teaches local officials to shift focus from what *government and health workers* should do about HIV/AIDS to what *the citizenry in communities* do.

Another of Dewey's contributions was his sustained focus on schools and educative processes in general. Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett add practicality to his concerns, with an inspiring track record of "making real" Dewey's idea of schools as centers of community life, connected to community problems. Yet many settings, not simply schools, need to be conceived as civic learning environments - families, cultural groups, libraries, congregations and small businesses, neighborhood organizations and art projects, to mention a few. Moreover, while academics have much to contribute, they have more to learn from groups outside of higher education. Finally, to transform the cultural dynamics and concentrations of wealth and power that threaten communal and democratic values will require civic learning and populist organizing in a myriad of locations, beyond schools - religious denominations and unions, professional associations and shop floors, courtrooms and jailhouses, dot com companies and farming communities, environmental groups and government agencies, legislatures and Congress. Higher education has interactive ties to all of these and more.

A populist movement integrates democratic practices and sites with a conception of public agency that sees the citizen as co-creator, "We are the one's we've been waiting for." This is the "citizen at the center" stance, the title of Ström's and Gibson's pieces.

Higher education takes on many roles in a populist movement. Our institutions are potentially key "agents and architects" of democracy, as Elizabeth Hollander and I put it in *The Wingspread Declaration* on the civic

mission of research universities. They are not simply its researchers, critics, service providers, or the educators of its future leaders. Scholars' work is not only to analyze and critique but also to stimulate conversations, to expand the sense of the possible, and to help activate civic and political energies. Redefining higher education's role in these terms is crucial in the early 21st century. Higher education is the premier knowledge institution in an era of exploding knowledge and knowledge technologies. It generates and diffuses conceptual frameworks that structure practices of all sorts, from global finance to parent education. It trains and socializes professionals. Higher education is thus a theater for significant strategic action if it takes up a robust democracy-building mission and identity.

But a populist movement challenges us to place ourselves as a strand of a larger movement, not see ourselves as tutoring the larger society in the skills and values and habits of democracy. All this requires a shift from critic, service provider, and outsider to what I would call a relational intellectual, embodying the craft nature of the professions. Craft is relational, contextual, and unique in its products, a far different view of professional and academic work than decontextualized expertise. Thus, looking at the experiences and practices of those such as Bill Doherty, or the scholars doing public work profiled by Scott Peters highlight the deeply contextual, relational and craft nature of "scholarship." But these roles are different than the roles of "service" or "critique" that define the main paradigm of higher education public engagement today. In all these cases of interactive, collaborative public work, scholars help people *identify* and sometimes *organize on* communal values, *authorize* these values, and *amplify* their stories and experiences, connecting these to other contexts.[107]

We need to "return to the source," in the phrase of the great African activist intellectual Amical Cabral, the people themselves. In this process, not only communities struggling for survival in the United States but also areas of the world such as Africa, viewed with condescension in the West, hold potential for global leadership.[108] We have a challenge to reconnect with the living networks, histories, cultures and stories of communities, with the democratic currents of American culture, and with populist democracy movements around the world. At a deep level, we need to recover awareness that we are not outsiders, prime movers or Archimedean points. We are fellow citizens.

This view has direct relevance for the 2008 election. We need to join with others to challenge the focus on which candidate will rescue us. The better question is, Which candidate do we want to work with the day after the election to create a flourishing democratic society? We need to build a November 5 Alliance to answer it.

Notes

1 See Hedrick Smith, "Reagan's Populist Coalition," *New York Times*, March 16, 1980; I explore the contrasting populist rhetorics of the 2000 presidential campaign in *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life* (Philadelphia: PennPress, 2004), chapter one.

2 "A Different Kind of Politics: John Dewey and the Meaning of Citizenship in the 21st Century," Dewey Lecture, University of Michigan, November 1, 2001, on web at www.cpn.org; also published in *A PEGS Journal: The Good Society*, 2004. For evidence of millennials' interest in such politics, see Nick Longo and Matt…, *Students and Politics: A CIRCLE Working Paper* (College Park: CIRCLE, 2005). I continued King's charge to organize poor whites in Durham in 1966 working for Operation Breakthrough, a poverty program that many saw as simply a "Black Power" agency (I believe that Howard Fuller, the dynamic African American director with whom I had many conversations, also identified with southern populism). Dorothy Cotton recounted the excitement in SCLC when a group of poor whites came to the SCLC Dorchester Center, for a week of citizenship school training – a story that I believe remains untold. SCLC's populism was very different than the politics of caution, evident in the national leadership of the NAACP, or the politics of alienation from American cultural traditions in the left wing of the movement, later widespread in the student movement. My own writings over the years on concepts and topics such as community organizing (*The Backyard Revolution* and *Community Is Possible*), the wellsprings of democratic movements (*Free Spaces,* with Sara Evans), the commonwealth tradition in American political culture (*CommonWealth*), citizenship as public work (*Building; America*, with Nan Kari), and reintegration of political practices into everyday life (*Everyday Politics*), as well as this lecture, can all be seen as efforts to develop the populism I learned in SCLC. In full disclosure, I should note that in addition to my own direct experiences in SCLC, my father, Harry George Boyte, a reporter for the *Charlotte Observer*, then manager of the Atlanta Red Cross, then on the Executive Committee of SCLC from 1963 to 1967, also identified with southern populism.

3 Both are questioned by economists such as Amartya Sen, Joseph Steiglitz, Omano Edigheji, and Peter Evans, partly because these approaches have failed in their own terms. As Evans said, "Neither the original [state-centered] development project nor its neo-liberal successor managed to combine increased standards of living with increased inclusion in a way that came close to replicating the experiences of the industrialized North during the Post-War II "Golden Age of Capitalism." The vast majority of the citizens of Africa and Latin America, as well as most Asian agriculturalists (outside of China) experienced little 'catch-up' in the sense of a diminished gap between their living standards and those of the North. Consequently, it is not surprising that the vision of increased capital accumulation in the presence of functioning markets as sufficient to deliver well-being no longer has the political or intellectual charisma that it did." Peter Evans, "Population Health and Development: An Institutional-Cultural Approach to Capability Expansion," paper for Successful Societies Volume of the Successful Societies Program, October 12, 2006 draft. It seems to me highly significant that a critique of statist and neo-liberal approaches is appearing from the heart of establishment institutions themselves such as the World Bank and UN Development Programmes. See for instance Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton, Eds., *Culture and Public Action* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004).

4 For a striking example of the convergence on a theoretical level of "progressive populist" and "conservative" economics, see Paul Krugman's essay, "Who Was Milton Friedman?" in *The New York Review of Books,* February 15, 2007, pp. 27-33. To make the case about the "predictive power" of rational choice theory, Krugman, like most rational choice theorists, takes mid- and late twentieth century America, with its highly individualist, hyper-competitive, consumer-oriented culture, as a universal depiction of the human condition.

It is important to note that democratic intellectuals with a citizen-centered orientation from elsewhere, such as Michael Edwards of the Ford Foundation, Omano Edigheji of the Centre of Policy Studies, and Xolela Mangcu, a leading South African public intellectual,

have differing views about "populism's" global potential. Thus Michael Edwards, British, director of the Global Governance and Civil Society Program of the Ford Foundation, argues that populism as a term has been too discredited to be truly useful as a descriptor of new forms of democracy (personal correspondence, 5 January, 2007). For his views on agency, see Edwards, "Looking back from 2046: Thoughts on the 80th Anniversary of the Institute for Revolutionary Social Science," Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex, IDS Bulletin, March 2007. In contrast, as noted above, Mangcu and Edigheji believe that populism may turn out to be an effective way of describing citizen-centered politics in Africa, about which they have both written a great deal. For instance, Omano Edigheji, research director at the Centre for Policy Studies, argued in a paper for a 2006 seminar with staff from the President's office for a "society-centric approach to development and government." He proposed that "The success of the developmental state "will be dependent on its ability to promote a people's contract in an empowering way", coming to rely less on service delivery and much more on the ingenuity and creativity of communities and citizens. "This [means] an emphasis on cooperative work and deliberative traditions bringing people together across lines of different parties, racial backgrounds, class divides and other differences for the common good". Omano Edigheji, "The Emerging South African Democratic Developmental State and the People's Contract ," Paper developed for the Democratic Develoment State in Africa Project, Centre for Policy Studies, presented at the seminar by Peter Evans and Omano Edigheji on the Developmental State with the Office of the President, August, 2006. See also footnotes 11 and 16, for the arguments of Gianna Pomata and Vladimir Khoros that a distinctive populist politics emerged globally in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

5 On Idasa's work, see Harry C Boyte, Marie-Louise Ström and Bennitto Motitsoe, "Democracy as Social Responsibility: Debating the Role of the State," *Cape Times* August 28, 2006; and Marie-Louise Ström, *Citizens at the Centre* (Cape Town: IDASA, 2005).

6 Peter Levine, "Three forms of populism in the 2008 campaign," February 7, 2007(www.peterlevine.ws/mt/); Obama quoted from Ibid., and also Adam Nagourney and Jeff Zelney, "Obama Formally Enters Presidental Race with Calls for Generational Change," *New York Times* February 11, 2007, p. A22. For a sampling of arguments about populism's resurgence, see James Lardner, "Populism's Revival," *Around the Kitchen Table: A Demos Journal*, November, 2006; David Brooks, "The Fighting Democrat," *New York Times* November 5, 2006, Paul Krugman, "True Blue Populists," *New York Times* November 13, 2006; Timothy Egan, "Fresh Off the Farm in Montanta, a Senator-to-Be," *New York Times* November 13, 2006. Evidence of populism's re-appearance seems world wide. For instance, though it doesn't use populist language, the special May, 2006, issue of the South African Communist Party, *Bua Kominisi!* on the presidential succession debates struck a populist tone. It revised a crucial tenet of Marxism, that the capitalist workplace with its productive relations are the image of the future (when socialized). Instead, the document called for turning the left's view on its head, valuing as primary the sphere of "reproductive labor," community life with its use values, including entrepreneurial activity, as the embryo of a different society. *Bua Kominisi!* Vol. 5:1, May 2006 Special Issue. Subsequent debates also called for an appreciation for "pre-capitalist values," an enormous break with left wing theoretical orthodoxy, though one prefigured by the practices of the Popular Fronts later described.

7 For theoretical and historical treatments of populism, see in Harry C. Boyte and Frank Riessman, Eds., *The New Populism: The Politics of Empowerment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986)

especially the articles by Sheldon Wolin, Robert Bellah, Mary Dietz, Lawrence Goodwyn, Manning Marable, Gar Alperovitz, Elizabeth Minnich, and Robert Coles, as well as "populist testimonials" by Studs Terkel, Barbara Mikulski, Cora Tucker, and Tom Harkin. Vladimer G. Khoros detailed pre-modern themes that are precursors of populism. Despite his strained efforts to show support for populism in the writings of Marx and Lenin – the book was written in the Soviet period – Khoros parallels Gianna Pomata's arguments, demonstrating that populism emerged as a distinctive modern political project, different than socialism, in many parts of the world in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

Khoros, *Populism: Its Past, Present and Future* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984). Also Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1995); Romand Coles develops a superb treatment of the "transformative populist" potential, as well as what he sees as limits, of broad based organizing in his review essay, "Of Tensions and Tricksters: Grassroots Democracy Between Theory and Practice," *Perspectives on Politics* Vol. 4:3 (Fall, 2006), pp. 547-561.

8 For an argument that populism is a "persuasion," not a political project, see Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995). For critiques, see for instance, instance Bruce Palmer, *Man Over Money: The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Jeff Lustig, "Community and Social Class," *democracy* 1:2 (Spring, 1981), pp. 96-108; Jim Green, "Culture, Politics and Workers' Response to Industrialization in the US," *Radical America* 16:1&2 (January-April, 1982; Carl Boggs, "The New Populism and the Limits of Structural Reform," *Theory and Society* Vol. 12:3 (May, 1983) and Boggs, *Social Movements and Political Power: Emerging Forms of Radicalism in the West* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Cornell West, "A Black Socialist Critique," in Boyte and Riessman, *The New Populism,* pp. 207-12; Joseph M. Kling and Prudence S. Posner. Eds, *Dilemmas of Activism* (1990); and Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997). Denning is sympathetic to populist language, but argues that socialist-oriented "labor populism" is preferable.

9 Stephanie Devitt described this in an essay about what led her to work with politicians who had a populist outlook:,

"At the end of my sophomore year in college, I read the book *There's Nothing in the Middle of the Road but Yellow Stripes and Dead Armadillos* by political satirist Jim Hightower. His twangy drawl leapt off of the page and, after spending too much time for a 19 year old knee-deep in feminist theory, the book spoke to a part of my life that academics had forgotten. It reminded me of the conversations in my parents' kitchen between my dad and the local bean salesman, bailer or combiner who stopped by for business and a chat…At the end of the day, populism for me is a politics of getting things done... …The presence of "common sense" is a key barometer for true populist movements in my understanding."

Stephanie Devitt, "Reflections on Populism," November 28, 2006, in author's possession.

10 Sheldon Wolin, "Contract and Birthright," Boyte and Riessman, Eds., *The New Populism*, pp. 285-6.

11 John Dewey, *Collected Works* (Vol. 6), p. 232. Many thanks to Jim Farr for finding these references to Dewey's explicit views on populism. I owe a large debt to Jim for his arguments in our conversations over the years about the importance of Dewey and the need to explore his thought in more detail.

12 Nan Kari and I trace these cooperative work traditions in the experiences and cultures of immigrant groups in *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1996).

13 Ibid., pp. 35, 38.

14 Gianna Pomata, "A Common Heritage: The Historical Memory of Populism in Europe and the United States," in. Boyte and Riessman, *The New Populism: The Politics of Empowerment,* 30-31.

15 History taken from Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*; also Thedore C. Blegen, "Agrarian Crusade Started with Granger Move and Later Populist Revolt," *St. Paul Pioneer Press* Special 75th year commemorative history issue, December 31, 1933; and Omar H. Ali, "The Making of a Black Populist: A Tribute to the Rev. Walter A. Pattillo," *Oxford Public Ledger* Vol. 121:25 (March, 2002, accessed on web November 16, 2006).

16 Manning Marable, "Black History and the Vision of Democracy," in Boyte and Riessman, *New Populism,* p. 202-3.

17 *Alabama House Journal*, 1898-99 (Jacksonville, FL: Vance Printing Company), p. 459.

18 Eric Foner, "Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?" *History Workshop* 17 (Spring, 1984), pp. 57-80.

19 Robert Nisbet, "The Total Community," in Marvin Olson, ed., *Power in Societies* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 423.

20 Robert Nisbet, quoted in Harry C. Boyte and Nan Kari," "The Commonwealth of Freedom," *Policy Review* #86, November, 1997, accessed 12/17, 2006

http://www.policyreview.org/nov97/freedom.html

21 Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, D.C: American Enterprise Institute, 1977), quotes taken from George Will, "Trinchiness at Christmas Time, *Minneapolis Tribune,* December 24, 1979.

22 Peter Berger, with Brigette Berger, *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 53.

23 Ronald Reagan, quoted from William Schambra, *The Quest for Community and the Quest for a New Public Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1983), p. 30; Michael Joyce, from *Project Public Life*, the newsletter of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, December, 1992.

24 Weil and some of those others who observed and challenged this pattern of left deracination are described in *CommonWealth: A Return to Citizen Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1980); in *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* with Nan Kari (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), and in *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life* (Philadelphia: PennPress, 2004).

25 See Harry C. Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1980), and more extensively, Boyte, "Populism versus the Left," *democracy*, spring, 1981; and *CommonWealth*, chapter two.

26 Karl Marx, *The Holy Family* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishers, 1956), p. 123; Friedrich Engels, *The Housing Question* (Moscow: Progress, 1970), p. 29.

27 Pomata, "A common heritage," pp. 35-36.

28 Michael Harrington, *The Twilight of Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), 291; Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford Univerity Press, 1977), 44; Stanley Aronowitz, "The Working Class: A Break with the Past," in *Divided Society: The Ethnic Experience in America*, Colin Greer, ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 312-13. Gary Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self Made Man* (New York: New American Library, 1969), pp. 463, 468. This analysis of the left wing stance of outside critic and the theories of social change involved was outlined in Harry C. Boyte, "Populism and the Left," *democracy* 1,2 (April, 1981): 53-66, and developed in *CommonWealth: A Return to Citizen Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989), especially chapter 3.

29 I describe this dynamic in *Everyday Politics,* building in part on an unpublished article on "the new populism" written for *The Nation* with Nan Kari.

30 I develop this argument in Harry C. Boyte, "Public Work: Civic Populism versus Technocracy in Higher Education," in David Brown and Debbi Witte, Eds., *HEX: A Ten Year Retrospect* (Dayton: Kettering Foundation, 2007).

31 With brilliant insight, the social historian and theorist David Scobey, chair of Imagining America, has observed that one of the invisible sources of discontent among scholars in academia is the contrast between their own privatized experiences and the vibrant subaltern publics they have discovered among poor and working class communities that were involved in democratic movements and action. Citation.

32 Robert Coles, the Harvard psychologist, gives a fascinating account of his own realization of this dynamic as he worked in a Freedom House in Mississippi in 1964, in "A Working People's Politics," Boyte and Reissman, *The New Populism,* pp. 83-99.

33 I saw the power of the prophetic imagination first hand as a young field secretary for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. It was Martin Luther King's genius to draw on and radically rework core American and southern symbols, traditions, and themes – "freedom," "democracy," "citizenship," "Christianity," "the southern tradition," and many

others -- to frame the goals and meaning of the movement itself. Sara Evans and I made this point about the prophetic imagination in contrast to the stance of left wing critic in Harry C. Boyte and Sara M. Evans, "Democratic Politics and a Critique of the Left," *Tikkun* (Summer, 1987). For a parallel treatment also contrasted the prophetic stance with the stance of outside critic see Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

34 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966), 2nd edition.

35 Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1980); Frederick Harris, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken? The Erosion and Transformation of African American Civic Life," Report for the National Commission on Civic Renewal (College Park, Md: Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy, 1999).

36 Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton, "Culture and Public Action," in Rao and Walton Eds. *Culture and Public Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 5

37 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1998).

38 Arjun Appadurai, "The Capacity to Aspire," in Rao and Walton, Eds., *Culture and Public Action*, pp. 60-62, 69. Appadurai's account also underlines populism's practical qualities. This practical focus on "getting things done" and common sense – closely associated with the felt need to sustain the communal values and ways of life under threat – emerges in Appadurai and all other populist accounts.

39 Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (New York: Macmillan, 1974).

40 See for instance, Andrew Ross, *Universal Abandon: The Politics of Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). As Linda Alcoff has described, these perspectives reflect despair over loss of agency, or the capacity to act to shape the world. See "Cultural Femnism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13:3 (1988), pp. 405-36. Postmodernist and poststructuralists reify "The Power," and in the process remove it from "the people," embodying what organizers call a "unilateral notion" of power and its operations.

41 As Susan Sterett commented about a draft of this lecture, "it is a good idea to recognize that the world is a mess. But then we need to ask, 'so what are we doing to do about it?'" commentary on Populism and Dewey, Denver University public lecture, January 18, 2007.

42 Edward Chambers with Michael Cowan, *Roots of Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice* (New York: Continuum, 2003) , pp. 28, 31.

43 This argument about relational power was developed in Bernard Loomer, "Two Conceptions of Power," *Criterion*, 15:1 (1976), pp. 12-29, a piece widely used in organizing, especially the Industrial Areas Foundation. See Rom Coles, "Of Tensions and Tricksters," for splendid treatment of power and the IAF approach. For descriptions of views of Chambers, Cortes, Taylor, and Stephens, see Boyte, *Community Is Possible,* Chapter Five, *CommonWealth,* Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, and *Everyday Politics,* Chapter Three.

44 See for instance Harry C. Boyte, "Civic Populism," *Perspectives on Politics*, 1,4 (2003).

45 Xolela Mangu, Personal conversation, Johannesburg, South Africa, 7 December, 2006. Drawing on his own experience as well as the views of Black Consciousness leaders, Mangcu describes the spaces in the BCM that developed democratic consciousness, power and capacities. "The BCM started community development projects throughout the country [that] ranged from community health clinics to schools to home-based industries. In addition [it] concentrated on intellectual dimensions of development…the leitmotif was the philosophy of self-reliance which was popularized through slogans such as 'black man you are on your own'". The cultural themes of the BCM were communicated powerfully to larger audience by BCM publications. Mangcu describes how "as a little boy I was one of the vendors of one of these newspapers [of the BCM], the VOICE. Through these

publications Biko prefigured a new generation of black writers, poets, and intellectuals in what has oftentimes been described as the Black Renaissance of the 1970's." Thus, *Black Review*, a leading journal, editorialized that "the projects created had led to a creative environment for objective reflection and formed a basis for communal action." Xolela Mangcu, "Civic Capacity in a Democratic South Africa," paper delivered to Lessons from the Field, Roundtable on Building Citizen Capacity," Pretoria, IDASA, June, 2004, p. 7; Xolela Mangcu, "Technocratic Creep in South Africa," unpublished paper in author's possession, pp. 16-17.

46 See Azzahir's reflections in Atum Azzahir and Janice Barbee, "Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center: Cultural Reconnection and Community Building for Personal and Community Health," in *The End of One Way* (Minneapolis: The McKnight Foundation, 2004), pp. 44-61; also Boyte, *Overcoming the Citizenship Gap: The Civic Life Movement in Minnesota* (St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society with the Kettering Foundation, forthcoming). The need for a "populist alternative" to both essentialism and liberalism constantly strikes me in South Africa. For instance, Frederic Van Zyl Slabbert, former leader of the Parliamentary opposition to finds it easy enough to level devastating critiques of the "identity mysticism," based on the penchant of some ANC leaders to divert attention from their policy failures and to reinforce their own positional power by invoking "the right kind of blood." But his solution -- to "tell history like it was" and for political leaders to simply "get on with it" – begs as many questions as it answers. Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, *The Other Side of History: An Anecdotal Reflection on Political Transition in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2006), especially chapter one.

47 A number of these examples of cultural and community capacity and civic professionalism are described in my forthcoming *Closing the Citizenship Gap: The Civic Populism Movement in Minnesota* (St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, 2008), and form the basis for Minnesota Works Together, a new populist and civic organizing effort in Minnesota.

48 Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), pp. 296, 245.

49 *Freedom and Culture* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), pp. 155-56.

50 John Dewey, "Ethics of Democracy," *Early Works* 1: p. 244.

51 Ibid., pp. 246, 248.

52 John Dewey, John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1934, pp. 6-7, 8.

53 Ibid., pp. 12, 4.

54 Ibid., p. 5, 342.

55 Walter Lippmann, quoted here from William Schambra, *The Quest for Community and the Quest for a New Public Philosophy* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1983,), p. 5.

56 Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 139; 453.

57 Lasswell and Meier, quoted from Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 284; Shepard, quoted Ibid., p 285.

58 Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 11, 18, 55, 132-22, 328. Lippmann, *Phantom Public* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), p. 106.

59 Lippman, *Public Opinion,* 196-97.

60 *The Philosophy of John Dewey* Edited by John McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 357, 382.

61 Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, Middle Works 14:31-32. 286.

62 Deborah Meier, "So What Does It Take to Build a School for Democracy?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 2003, p. 16 and personal interview, Boston, November 1, 2001.

63 Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett, *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in the Age of Educational Reform* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, forthcoming 2007).

64 John Dewey, Later Collected Works 2: 314; *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1954), pp. 185.

65 Dewey, Later Collected Works 2:306.

66 Ibid., 255.

67 Dewey, *Public and Problems,* pp. 212-13.

68 Robert Westbrook, *Dewey and American Democracy* pp. 317-18.

69 Ryan, *Dewey and the High Tide,* pp. 105-06.

70 Quoted Ibid., p. 205.

71 Dewey quoted in Ibid, p. 201; Ryan, *Dewey and High Tide,* pp. 194-95.

72 My understanding of agency draws on Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mishe's careful, detailed treatment of the concept, "What Is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 103: 4 (January, 1998), pp. 962-1023. Identifying several theoretical traditions that feed the concept – those that focus on habit or routine; on purposive and goal oriented behavior; and on public and communicative action -- Emirbayer and Mishe propose a reconceptualization of agency a "as temporally embedded process of social engagement informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative future possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)." They stress that agency is always temporally located and, "more radically," press the case that "the structural contexts of action are themselves temporal as well as well as relational fields," an emphasis that highlights that structures are created, not fixed, and thus open to continuous shaping and reshaping ("What Is Agency," pp. 963-4.) I would add that the concept of agency is enriched by sustained attention to relational, generative power, especially attuned to its cultural aspects.

73 Dewey, *Culture and Freedom* p. 148; more generally see his discussion in this chapter, Six, "Science and Free Culture."

74 I develop this with examples in "Public Work: Technocracy versus Civic Populism in Higher Education, *The Public Academy: A Ten Year HEX Retrospect* (Dayton: Kettering, 2007, forthcoming).

75 See for instance, Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America* (New York: Vintage, 1965).

76 Ryan, *Dewey and High Tide*. As he puts it, "James' sense of the irreducible plurality of human passions and his interest in the quirkiness and peculiarity of individual lives…made James much readier than Dewey could ever be to appreciate the furious emotions that led people into war and the yet more furious emotions that war stirred up. P. 157. I have learned about Esther Thelen's relation to the pragmatic tradition generally and Dewey and James specifically from David Thelen, her husband, former editor of the *Journal of American History* and a wonderful populist historian in his own right. David and I are old friends and have had many conversations on these themes. I also greatly benefited from spending several days with her students and co-researchers in Bloomington, Indiana, in June, 2006, discussing the parallels between Esther Thelen's science and democracy. For Esther's discussion of her intellectual debt to John Dewey, see Esther Thelen and Linda B. Smith, *A Dynamic Systems Approach to the Development of Cognition and Action* (Boston: MIT Press, 1995), p. 328.

77 John P. Spencer, Melissa Clearfield, Daniela Corbetta, Beverly Ulrich, Patrick Buchanan, Gregor Schröner, "Moving Toward a Grand Theory of Development: In Memory of Esther Thelen," 2005 Presidential Address, SRCD, Atlanta, pp. 15, 17.

78 Rom Coles, "Of Tensions and Tricksters," p. 550.

79 Harry C. Boyte, *CommonWealth: A Return to Citizen Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

80 Nan Skelton and Nan Kari, Eds, *Alive with Hope: The Story of the Jane Addams School* (Dayton: Kettering Foundation, forthcoming 2007).

81 Robert Hildreth, "Theorizing Public Achivement," on CDC web site www.publicwork.org under research/working papers, also note dissertation for a "Deweyan" take on PA.

82 See for instance Hildreth, "Theorizing," Boyte, "Tale of Two Playgrounds," and the links to the Mankato Public Achievement web site, where Joe Kunkle chronicled the many changes in self-concept, skills, and perceptions of the environments that young people develop through PA.

83 Jennifer O'Donoghue, "Powerful Spaces: Urban Youth, Community Organization, and Democratic Action," Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2006, pp. 101-06.

84 Ibid., p. 45.

85 Dewey, *Public and Its Problems,* p. 149.

86 Youngblood quoted from Jim Sleeper, "East Brooklyn's Second Rising," *City Limits,* December, 1982, p. 13.

87 For a detailed discussion of Dewey and the Polish community, see Westbrook, *Dewey and Democracy* , pp. 212-23; for discussion of Dewey's war with Catholics, Ryan, *Dewey and High Tide,* pp. 336-43; quote from 336.

88 On organizing versus mobilizing, see Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) – a book that has become a favorite of broader based organizing networks; interview with Christine Stephens, San Antonio, July 4, 1983; also drawn from interviews with Ernesto Cortes, July 4, 1983 and Beatrice Cortes, July 8, 1983, both in San Antonio.

89 Nick Longo, *Community forthcoming,* 139; Stein, quoted in Longo, p. 138.

90 Dewey, *Public and Its Problems,* p. 142.

91 Westbrook, *Dewey and Democracy,* on Dewey's stance toward the Deal, pp. 440-52; on his role as a critic of Stalin and the Show trials, pp. 480-81, 485; see also Ryan, *Dewey and High Time* , pp. 284-95.

92 Dewey quoted from Ryan, *Dewey and High Tide* p. 296.

93 Dewey quoted in Westbrook, *Dewey and Democracy,* p. 444. Westbrook has an excellent discussion about Dewey's efforts to conceptualize a nonstatist radical alternative to unbridled capitalism, pp. 452-58.

94 I made this argument in *CommonWealth: A Return to Citizen Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989), building on Eric Foner's proposal that the reason socialist and labor movements had never made much headway in America was not due to an *absence,* such as relative affluence or the divided working class, but rather a *presence* of a tradition of democratic radicalism based on small property. This argument expands the arguments of like Michael Denning, following James Green, that populism is about "rent, credit and taxes" and takes the tradition as a positive, not a sign of lesser politics.

95 CCF quoted in Westbrook, *Dewey and Democracy*, p. 485.

96 Eric Foner, *Story of American Freedom* ; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible* . The wider problems on the left stemmed from the teleological assumptions built into its theory. The Marxist left – not only communists but also anti-Stalinists such as Sidney Hook -- saw organizing as a *means* to ends which were in fact hugely problematic, such as government ownership of the economy, and, in cultural terms, "the new socialist man" of the future, uprooted from traditions. This contradiction between democratic organizing practices at the left's best and undemocratic ends can be seen as the left's profound irony across the world, creating the terrible destructions of the sort described by James Scott. Despite this contradiction, in its great periods of organizing leftists generated lessons and theoretical insights about power, politics, and culture change of continuing relevance. Nowhere was this clearer than in the 1930s and '40s.

97 The importance of cultural dynamics emerges clearly in Evans account. "Looking at the dynamics of health outcomes…validates a perspective on civil society that spotlights the role of culture…the construction of affect-laden cultural ties built around social imaginaries and collective narratives…" Culture change took place within public institutions as well as within civil society. "The changes in social relations that matter are not simply changes within civil society. They are also changes in the concrete social relations that connect civil society to public institutions…social imaginaries and collective narratives are as important to the functioning of public institutions as they are to the transformation of civil society." Peter Evans, "Population Health and Development: An

Institutional-Cultural Approach to Capacity Expansion," chapter for Sucessful Societies Volume (in author's possession), forthcoming, pp. 27, 28, 29.

Here is a bit of suggestive anecdotal evidence: During the December 2006-07 holidays, on the Wild Coast of South Africa where my wife's family has a place, we spent a good deal of time talking with Anu Idicula, a friend of my brother in law Bertil, about the state of Kerala and its social movements. Anu comes from an educated Indian family in Kerala, with lineage dating from the 12th century. Both her parents are medical doctors in a rural area– Anu follows suit in education, with a Ph.D. in biochemistry, now getting a degree in law. She says Kerala, as a result of culture change, now has a vital culture of public art, public discussion, and has a fierce ethic of public accountability that has greatly decreased corruption. Its people are extremely proud of Kerala. For instance, people will clean up public areas (there is a long tradition of people cleaning their own doorstep). Teachers go from Kerala all over India and many have come to South Africa. When I described the difference between socialism and populism – and how socialist movements have done populist organizing at certain times -- she agreed that it was populism that shaped Kerala's culture. A well-functioning, socially concerned government has been important (and is itself largely the product of the popular movement), but the key was the movement organizing that developed popular power, drawing on Kerala traditions and culture. She says Kerala is now very well organized, with a lot of unions and other civic and social groups. "Everyone takes part." She described the local businesses where people gather in the mornings, laborers and professionals alike, to read papers, and talk about world events – like a whole Indian state full of Humphrey drug stores. She says young people from Kerala are feeding the technology boom across India. Many of her friends are involved.

98 Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile Town, 1914-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 163.

99 Dewey, *Public and Its Problems,* p. 216.

100 Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003), p. 73.

101 Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow;* Lisabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal,* Denning, *The Cultural Front*, p. 99.

102 Melissa Bass, "The Politics and Civics of National Service," Ph.D. dissertation Boston: Brandeis University, 2004).

103 Robert Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006); and H. Allen Orr, "A Mission to Convert," *New York Review of Books,* January 11, 2007, pp. 21-24.

104 For accounts, see my Log of Camp David on the CDC web site, www.publicwork.org and also Benjamin Barber, *The Truth of Power: Intellectual Affairs in the Clinton Era* (New York: Norton, 2001).

105 Benson, Harkavy, Puckett, *Dream,* xiii.

106 Alison Kadlec, *Dewey's Critical Pragmatism.*

107 Scott Peters and his colleagues and students have found many agricultural scholars functioning in these ways. See for instance Scott Peters, Nicholas R. Jordan, Margaret Adamek, Theodore R. Alter, Eds., *Engaging Campus and Community: The Practice of Public Scholarship in the American Land-Grant University System* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2006). I detail these also in Boyte, "Citizenship as Public Work," Joseph Tulchin and Meg Rosenthal Eds*., Citizenship in Latin America* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center, 2006).

108 This is the premise of the Toward Citizen Democracy Project that Omano Edigheji and I are organizing in association with CODESRIA, the organization of African social scientists.