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Jesse B. Markay
Skidmore College

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**Walter Lippmann, John Dewey, and American Political
Democracy**

By

Jesse B. Markay

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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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ABSTRACT

Journalist Walter Lippmann and philosopher John Dewey engaged in an extended dialogue in the 1920s regarding the condition and future of American democracy. In a series of books and essays the two intellectuals confronted issues that have been debated since the creation of the American republic and that remain contested today: how public opinion is formed; the capacity of individual citizens to render judgments concerning public affairs; the role that public opinion ought to play in formulating public policy; the possibility of establishing a truly democratic community. This paper argues that the issues Lippmann and Dewey addressed and the conclusions they reached are products of their experiences during the Progressive Era, World War I, and the immediate post-war era, but that they also reflect the characters of each man. While neither man was able to fashion wholly satisfactory responses to the challenges of American political life, both framed the issues in original and provocative terms that serve well in any contemporary discussion of American democracy.

Jesse B. Markay
Skidmore MALS
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The ink on the Declaration of Independence was scarcely dry before many of the revolutionary leaders began expressing doubts about the possibility of realizing these high hopes...The American people seemed incapable of the degree of virtue needed for republicanism...Too many were unwilling to respect authority...By the early 19th century, America had already emerged as the most egalitarian, most materialistic, most individualistic society in Western history. In many respects this new democratic society was the very opposite of the one the revolutionary leaders had envisaged.

Gordon Wood
The Radicalism of the American Revolution¹

In the 1920's John Dewey and Walter Lippmann engaged in an extended dialogue regarding the condition and future of American democracy. It was a debate that has been called "an epic confrontation" and a "battle for America's political mind."² The issues that Dewey and Lippmann confronted were issues as old as the American republic. On one side was John Dewey: the philosopher of democracy; a man who had faith in the power of education to prepare citizens to become active participants in the democratic process; an advocate of a method of scientific inquiry that was available to everyone; champion of social justice. On the other side was Walter Lippmann: skeptical of the capacity of the public to judiciously govern their lives; a believer in restricting decisions regarding public affairs to a modern aristocracy of unusual intellect and of especial

¹ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 229-30.

² Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1995), 159.; John Patrick Diggins, "From Pragmatism to Natural Law: Walter Lippmann's Quest for the Foundation of Legitimacy," *Political Theory* 19, no. 4 (1991): 533.

virtue; an advocate of rule by those who possessed expertise; a searcher for bedrock principles of social authority and legitimacy.

There was a curious arc to the relationship between Dewey and Lippmann. The books Lippmann wrote during the years before World War I expressed views he would later move beyond or disavow. But Dewey was impressed by the pragmatic approach and bold energy with which Lippmann engaged the problems of the day. Lippmann became managing editor of the *New Republic* when it began publishing in 1914. Dewey became a regular contributor and the journal served as Dewey's principal medium for the expression of his views on public affairs over the next twenty years.³ Dewey found himself caught up in the *New Republic's* and Lippmann's enthusiasm for American entry into the war in Europe and in a series of essays he enthusiastically advocated their position. It was a decision he came to regret so deeply that "like a burnt child who shunned the fire" as late as 1939 Dewey was urging Americans to avoid a different war, "no matter what."⁴ World War I also had a profound effect on Lippmann. He came away disappointed in the peace negotiations and alarmed at the ease with which public opinion was manipulated. In a series of articles and two books written in the first half of the decade Lippmann expressed his doubts about the future of American democracy. Dewey believed Lippmann had produced "the most effective indictment of democracy as currently conceived ever penned."⁵ In 1926 Dewey took up the challenge and wrote his only work of formal political philosophy.⁶

³ Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1991), 193.

⁴ Cushing Strout, "William James and the Tradition of American Philosophers," *Partisan Review*, March 2001, 58.; John Dewey, "No Matter What Happens - Stay Out," *Common Sense* 3 (1939).

⁵ John Dewey, "Public Opinion," *New Republic* 30 (1922). Dewey: The Middle Works 13:337

⁶ Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 300.

Dewey remained a committed pragmatist and believer in the democratic life the remainder of his life. Lippmann's thought evolved dramatically as time went on: "No contemporary who read Lippmann's early books and followed his career could have predicted where his thinking would take him by mid-century."⁷ Once an enthusiastic admirer, Dewey became a harsh critic.

Both men were of the Progressive Era, an age in which Americans still thought to a great degree in terms of 19th century values: decentralization, competition, equality, agrarian, small town. By 1920, the contours of 20th century America were triumphant – centralized, industrialized, secularized, and urbanized.⁸ John Dewey and Walter Lippmann were trying to resolve familiar and ancient issues, but their conversation was sharpened in ways peculiar to the era in which it took place and by the people they were.

The Progressive Era is generally described as the years between the turn of the twentieth century and the end of World War I. The decade before was a momentous turning point in American history. In the 1890s immigration from southern and eastern Europe exploded, a consumer culture began to take shape, businesses consolidated, political parties were dramatically realigned, and the United States took its place on the international stage.⁹ From 1893 to 1897, America suffered the most severe depression it had experienced to that point. Populists formed their own political party. A "phantasmagoric popular social threat" haunted the nation which was manifested in

⁷ Diggins, "From Pragmatism to Natural Law: Walter Lippmann's Quest for the Foundation of Legitimacy," 522.

⁸ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958; reprint, 1972. 16th), 43.

⁹ Richard L. McCormick, "Public Life in Industrial America, 1877-1917," in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 117.

“twisted forms in the perceptions of the businessmen, statesmen, and intellectuals”¹⁰ The Progressive Era originated in these challenges to American life and the accompanying sense of anxiety. Progressivism may have been, as Richard Hofstadter wrote, a “remarkably good-natured effort” to achieve some measure of “self-reformation.”¹¹ But memories of the shock of the last decade of the nineteenth century were not far beneath the “surface placidity” of the era.¹² The sense that at any moment things could come undone pervades much of Dewey’s and Lippmann’s writing from the pre-war period, often on the same page they display the optimism of characteristic of the era.

Out of the Progressive Era came a number of reforms intended to more securely bind society. A great deal of the effort was to Americanize immigrants arriving from foreign lands, and to urbanize those relocating from American farms. The Progressives sought to smooth the conflict between labor and capital. There were measures for worker’s safety, child labor was restricted, cities began to clean up slums. Anti-trust laws and business regulations were implemented, tariffs were lowered, postal delivery was expanded, savings banks were established, municipal reforms were instituted. Constitutional amendments in 1913 authorized a federal income tax and established direct election of senators. The process of Amendments for Prohibition and granting women the vote had begun. As historian Richard L. McCormick has described the Progressive era: “The formation of settlement houses, the fight for woman suffrage, the physicians’ campaign for public health, the legal establishment of racial segregation, the

¹⁰ Charles Berquist, *Labor and the Course of American Democracy: US History in Latin American Perspective* (New York: Verso, 1996), 48.

¹¹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 5.

¹² “Surface placidity” in Henry F. May, “The Rebellion of the Intellectuals, 1912-1917,” in *Ideas, Faiths and Feelings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 18.

restriction of immigration, and the regulation of business corporations (however diversely) the drive of native, white, middle-class Americans to improve and control the often frightening conditions of industrial life.”¹³

Identifying Progressive reforms is relatively uncontroversial, but characterizing a Progressive “Movement” is more problematic. Historian Arthur Link claimed that Progressivism was really a shifting alliance of “many progressive movements” composed primarily of interest groups or classes “seeking greater political status and economic security.” Despite diversity and tensions among the movements, they shared a sense of common ideals and mutual objectives. In Link’s estimation, Progressivism functioned successfully during World War I and survived “in a crippled way” through the months following the war. But inexorably it came apart. “The important fact about the progressive coalition of 1916,” Link argued, “was not its strength but its weakness.”¹⁴ Peter Filene challenged the existence of the movement at all in “An Obituary for The Progressive Movement” in which he pronounced that the movement “never existed.”¹⁵

There is one certainty regarding the historiography of the era: every historian of the era has their own Progressives. Richard Hofstadter’s Progressives were “victims of an upheaval in status...men who suffered...through the changed pattern in the distribution of deference and power” that took place around the turn of the 20th century.¹⁶ Jackson Lears argued that the Progressives were really “anti-modernists,” deeply

¹³ McCormick, “Public Life in Industrial America, 1877-1917,” 126.

¹⁴ Arthur S. Link, “What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920’s?” *The American Historical Review* LXIV, no. 4 (1959): 838.

¹⁵ Peter G. Filene, “An Obituary For “The Progressive Movement”,” *American Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1970). See also Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (1982).

¹⁶ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.*, 135.

ambivalent about progress.¹⁷ James Kloppenberg's Progressives were a generation of radical pragmatic philosophers, searching for alternatives to the philosophic idealism of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ The Progressives of Daniel Rodgers were cosmopolitan reformers inspired by European social democrats.¹⁹ For Elizabeth Sanders, politically mobilized farmers from the south and west were actually responsible for Progressive reform. They were the ones with enough political power to legislate reform when the urban North and organized labor were unable get the legislation passed.²⁰ Robert Johnston's Portland Progressives were radical anti-capitalists.²¹ Gabriel Kolko's Progressives were triumphant commercial interests who "operated on the assumption that the general welfare of the community could best be served by satisfying the concrete needs of business."²² Casey Nelson Blake wondered if the Progressives suffered from an "anxious spasm of middle-class nostalgia for a village culture."²³

Urban middle-class post-Victorians desperate to eliminate social divisions are Michael McGerr's Progressives. "The middle class had not only rejected longstanding individualism; it had adopted a new 'creed,' the will to use association and the state to end class conflict and the other problems of industrial capitalism."²⁴ Theda Skocpol sees

¹⁷ Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), xiii.

¹⁸ James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁹ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

²⁰ Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

²¹ Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

²² Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-Interpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 2-3.

²³ Casey Nelson Blake, "The Lost World of Progressive Reform," *Raritan* (2005): 153.

²⁴ Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 68.

the Progressives as reformers “infused with determination to root out ‘corrupt’ forms of party patronage...As corruption was fought the ‘public interest could quickly be recognized, embodied in reform laws, and implemented by experts...”²⁵

Some of the historian’s Progressives are direct contradictions of each other. Henry May’s Progressives believers in the “national credo” which had as its first article of faith “the reality, certainty, and eternity of moral values. Words like truth, justice, patriotism, unselfishness, and decency were used constantly, without embarrassment, and without any suggestion that their meaning might be only of a time and place.”²⁶ But Eric Goldman saw things differently. The Progressives were moral relativists: “In the year of Wilson’s inaugural, Lippmann’s *Preface to Politics*, presented the first conscious all-embracing relativism in the discussion of public affairs. It scorned all moral absolutes. The book was received with great enthusiasm in Progressive circles.”²⁷

As he described in *The Search for Order*, Robert Wiebe’s Progressives were members of a confident, educated “new middle class...newly self-conscious business men” who sought to devise a world “derived from the regulative, hierarchical needs of urban-industrial life.” They sought “continuity in a world of endless change.”²⁸ On the other hand, in *Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism*, Morton White identified a number of intellectuals – Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., John Dewey, Thorstein

²⁵ Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 265.

²⁶ Henry May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time 1912-1917* (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1959; reprint, 1964), 9. See also Richard M. Abrams, “The Failure of Progressivism,” in *The Shaping of Twentieth Century America*, ed. Richard M. Abrams and Lawrence W. Levine (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 211.

²⁷ Eric Frederick Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform*, 25th Anniversary ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 173.

²⁸ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 174, xiv.

Veblen and Charles Beard – as his Progressives.²⁹ They had in common the rejection of the arid forms of nineteenth century. Historian David Hollinger has proposed that the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of the Progressive Era (and Walter Lippmann in particular) was best captured in the titles of Wiebe's and White's books: a search for order and a revolt against formalism.³⁰ Those two impulses were very much in evidence in Dewey and Lippmann, though for Lippmann, what had once been a revolt, became a search for formal principles.

In 1915, Progressive political reformer Benjamin DeWitt described what he thought the essence of Progressivism entailed: the removal of corruption from public life; increasing popular participation in American politics; the “conviction that the functions of government at present are too restricted and that they must be increased and extended to relieve social and economic distress.”³¹ Given those elements, Henry May's observation that Dewey's political thought “was inescapably rooted in the Progressive Era” rings true.³²

John Dewey was born in Burlington Vermont in 1859. Dewey's father, who had been a quartermaster with a Vermont regiment in the Civil War, supported his family as a grocer. His mother was a passionate, evangelical Christian who enquired often regarding the state of her son's souls. He entered the University of Vermont at the age of fifteen

²⁹ Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt against Formalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1947, 1949, 1957), 12.

³⁰ David A. Hollinger, "Science and Anarchy: Walter Lippmann's Drift and Mastery," *American Quarterly* 29, no. 5 (1977): 475.

³¹ Benjamin Parke DeWitt, *The Progressive Movement: A Non-Partisan, Comprehensive Discussion of Current Tendencies in American Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 5.

³² May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time 1912-1917*, 148-49.

where he studied philosophy and the new theory of evolution. He taught high school for a year in Oil City, Pennsylvania where he decided to try to make a career of philosophy.

He returned to Vermont and wrote his first published article, "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism." Dewey began graduate work in philosophy at Johns Hopkins in 1882. There for a brief time he studied with Charles Peirce, one of the first to hold to the principles of pragmatism. Dewey claimed that it was not until many years later that he understood how important Peirce was to the development of American philosophy.³³ Dewey began teaching at the University of Michigan in 1884. He would remain there for ten years except for one year at the University of Minnesota. He married Alice Chipman in 1886. Over the next 14 years they had six children, two of whom died in this period. In 1894 Dewey accepted a position at the University of Chicago, then only in its second year. He became Chair of the Philosophy, Psychology, and Education departments allowing him to pursue an interdisciplinary approach and cultivate ideas that stressed the social dimensions of human behavior. He organized the Chicago Laboratory School. While in Chicago he met Jane Addams who had a profound impact on Dewey's thought, particularly on his ideas about harmonizing society and overcoming social divisions. She was a "radicalizing influence," teaching Dewey much about the politics of the big city.³⁴ As biographer Alan Ryan noted:

Those of Dewey's readers who think that Dewey was astonishingly naïve about the workings of the political system and about the real causes of the irrationality and inefficiency of most modern societies may be grateful that he had Jane Addams to take him on guided tours of the red-light district and to teach him

³³ John J. McDermott, "John Dewey: A Biographical Sketch," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), xvii.

³⁴ Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 149.

about the meat-packing factories and the insanitariness of the food that emerged from the hideous place.³⁵

Dewey was at the peak of his intellectual powers during his years at Chicago. He “lived for the next several decades on the philosophical resources he accumulated in Chicago.”³⁶

Dewey developed the essential tenets of his philosophic pragmatism in those years. Dewey rejected the central observations of traditional philosophy. He believed that philosophy ought to deal with human problems, not problems concocted by philosophers. He had no use for philosophical puzzles that presupposed dichotomies such as percept/concept, reason/will, thought/purpose, intellect/emotion, appearance/reality, experience/nature, belief/action, theory/practice, facts/values, and self/others. He believed in a radical empiricism in which the experiencing subject and experienced object constituted one integrated unit. Dewey thought it impossible to ever obtain certain and unrevisable knowledge. He believed in a pluralism of experiences, values, and meanings. He believed that human action can improve the human condition. The community was central to Dewey. The individual was intrinsically constituted by and in her or his social relations. In that way individual achievement was inextricably bound with the development of community. The creation of a genuinely democratic community depended on critical discourse and continual and open communication. Education was the essential element for the development of community life. Lived experience was the central precept of philosophic inquiry. A community based on inquiry would develop a

³⁵ Ibid., 151.

³⁶ Ibid., 154.

culture that prized conscious experience. He had a firm faith in science, but by science, Dewey meant the systematic application of practical wisdom.³⁷

Dewey left the University of Chicago in 1904 under unpleasant and largely unexplained circumstances, but the final straw seemed to be the dismissal of Alice Chipman Dewey as principal of the Laboratory School. Dewey and family left Chicago for New York where Dewey became professor of philosophy at Columbia University and lecturer at Teachers College. In New York he played a more active role in public affairs than he had in Chicago.

His exposure to Hegel at Hopkins “left a permanent deposit” in his thinking despite subsequent transformations in his philosophical outlook.³⁸ Particularly important to Dewey’s mature philosophy were two of Hegel’s arguments. First, individuals could never be isolated from their history, culture, or environment. Second was that Hegel’s thought satisfied, as Dewey explained, “a demand for unification that was doubtless an intense emotional craving, and yet was a hunger that only an intellectualized subject-matter could satisfy.” Dewey’s “demand for unification” formed a basis of his pragmatism. In his brief and only attempt at autobiography, Dewey wrote in 1930, “The sense of divisions and separations that were, I suppose, borne in upon me as a consequence of a heritage of New England culture, divisions by way of isolation of self from the world, of soul from body, of nature from God, brought a painful oppression – or,

³⁷ Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 8., Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, & Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990), 86-88.

³⁸ John Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," in *Contemporary American Philosophers*, ed. George Plimpton Adams and William Pepperell Montague (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930) (reprint *Later Works* 5:153), 153.

rather, they were an inward laceration.”³⁹ Overcoming the “divisions and separations” Dewey found in philosophic permeated his pragmatism and was at the core of his political philosophy.

In 1913, when Walter Lippmann’s first book was published, Dewey was fifty four years old and acknowledged as America’s foremost educator and philosopher.

Walter Lippmann was born in New York City in 1889.⁴⁰ His father was a successful investor and Lippmann was raised in comfort, traveling to Europe yearly with his art-loving and collecting parents. John Morton Blum, historian and editor of Lippmann’s correspondence, observed that even as a child Lippmann led an “ordered life,” which developed into a life-long sense of discipline, control and self-possession.⁴¹ He attended private schools in New York City and in 1906 entered Harvard with a class that included John Reed, Heyward Broun and T. S. Eliot. While at Harvard, Lippmann worked with the poor in Boston, founded the Harvard Socialist Club and wrote for journals concerned with social justice.

An editorial Lippmann had written in 1908 caught the attention of William James and so impressed the Harvard professor that James introduced himself to Lippmann and asked him to tea. From that day on Lippmann visited with James weekly, confiding to his mother that his first conversation with James was “the greatest thing that happened to me in my college life.” When James died Lippmann wrote, “I love James more than any very

³⁹ Ibid., 154.

⁴⁰ Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 2.

⁴¹ John Morton Blum, “Walter Lippmann and the Problem of Order,” in *Public Philosopher: Selected Letters of Walter Lippmann*, ed. John Morton Blum (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1985), xi.

great man I ever saw.”⁴² James reinforced Lippmann’s sense of the importance of experimentation, pluralism and action. Graham Wallas spent a year at Harvard as visiting professor while Lippmann was a student. In 1908 Wallas wrote *Human Nature in Politics* in which he contended that politics, like human life, was essentially an irrational phenomenon, a claim that Lippmann would take up in his first book. Wallas was so impressed by Lippmann that he dedicated his 1914 work, *The Great Society*, to his former student.

Lippmann was also drawn to George Santayana, the Spanish philosopher who taught at Harvard.⁴³ There were stark differences between James’s pragmatic pluralism and Santayana’s search for absolute moral values. Lippmann referred to James frequently in his early works, but his later work bore Santayana’s imprint.⁴⁴ Santayana chose Lippmann to be his teaching assistant and groomed him as his successor in Harvard’s philosophy department.⁴⁵ “In later years, Lippmann claimed it was Santayana who saved him from becoming a pragmatist. Throughout his life, Lippmann sought an order in the universe which the intellectual could articulate for a society uncertain of its goals.”⁴⁶

Lippmann left Harvard after graduating in 1910 and began writing for a Boston newspaper. He left that position to work for renowned muckraking journalist Lincoln

⁴² Walter Lippmann, "An Open Mind: William James," in *William James Remembered*, ed. Linda Simon (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 253.

⁴³ James, Santayana, Wallas and Lincoln Steffens (and Dewey?) were among a number of older men drawn to Lippmann, as he was to them. Historian James Kloppenberg noted in this regard Lippmann’s “ability to ingratiate himself with older men who thought they saw in him a younger version of themselves.” Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920*, 490 fn. 43.; see also Ronald Steel, "Walter Lippmann," in *Invisible Giants: Fifty Americans Who Shaped the Nation but Missed the History Books*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 177.

⁴⁴ Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*, 21.

⁴⁵ Steel, "Walter Lippmann," 175.

⁴⁶ William E. Leuchtenburg, "Walter Lippmann's *Drift and Mastery*," in *Drift and Mastery* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1961), 2.

Steffens at the magazine *Everybody's*. In 1912 Lippmann joined the administration of George Lunn, a socialist who had been elected mayor of Schenectady, New York. Historian Melvyn Dubofsky has noted that, "socialism in this period had become Americanized." One million votes were cast for Eugene V. Debs in the 1912 presidential election. In the years from 1910 to 1912 socialist mayors were elected in Madison, Berkeley, Scranton, Bridgeport, Butte and Schenectady.⁴⁷ Lippmann was attracted to socialism out of distaste for the haphazard disorganized way society operated, rather than out of concern for the wretched of the earth.⁴⁸ Lippmann left Lunn's administration after four months, disillusioned with the prospects of establishing a socialist haven in the idylls of Schenectady. He returned to New York City where a publisher friend urged Lippmann to write a book about politics. Lippmann retired to the woods of Maine to write his first book. His purpose was to diagnose public disaffection from the political process. To a great extent it was an aberration, because it was the only book he would write in which he proposed unleashing human energy, rather than finding means to harness it.

A Preface to Politics was published within months of the presidential election of 1912 in which Democrat Woodrow Wilson was victorious. It was a "remarkable" election in which Theodore Roosevelt, running on the Progressive Party ticket, received three million votes and Debs received another one million votes.⁴⁹ Despite the significant number of votes cast for third party candidates, the total number of voters declined from the 1908 election, continuing a trend that had begun in 1896. Participation in presidential

⁴⁷ Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1969; reprint, 1973), 13.

⁴⁸ Steel, "Walter Lippmann," 177.

⁴⁹ Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 137.

elections had dropped precipitously since 1896 when approximately 80% of those eligible voted. In the 1912 election only 58% of those eligible chose to participate.⁵⁰

Lippmann argued in *A Preface to Politics* that politics had an “unreal connection to actual conditions.”⁵¹ The failure of political institutions to address the real concerns of the American public was the source of public apathy toward politics. That failure was also responsible for corruption in business and government, the *bête noir* of progressives. Alternatives to formal government (“the real, but invisible governments”) thrived because they stepped into the breach between state and public.⁵² Parties, political machines, trade unions, political and social clubs, and powerful corporate interests operated independent of legal restrictions.⁵³ The “thought processes in Washington were too lumbering for the needs of the nation” and the government had become largely irrelevant.⁵⁴

“Rutineers” dominated American politics, politicians who lacked imagination and simply and blindly followed precedent. “They imitate the old-fashioned thing their grandfather did, and ignore the originality which enabled him to do it.”⁵⁵ The category was not limited to conservatives. Good government advocates were only searching for easier ways of doing things; “tinkering reformers” were still routineers. Nor were radicals

⁵⁰ Walter Dean Burnham, *The Current Crisis in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 136. Participation calculated over the entire period 1900 to 1916 declined by 18% when compared to the previous sixteen year period. See Walter Dean Burnham, “The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe,” *American Political Science Review* 59, no. 1 (1965): 10.

⁵¹ Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics* (New York: Kennerly, 1913) (reprint, 1962 Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press), 23.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

much better; they sought only to impose new kinds of routines.⁵⁶ Even progressive reform appeared to Lippmann as monotonous, trivial and irrelevant.

Routineers tried to eliminate evil by outlawing it, by devising modern “taboos” in the guise of laws. This was a fundamental theme of *A Preface to Politics*. Lippmann believed Freud, particularly his theories regarding sublimation, could help explain politics’ inability to satisfy human desire.⁵⁷ Instead of ignoring emotional responses, or trying to outlaw them, Lippmann argued that politics needed to redirect them towards socially beneficial ends. Legislating against conduct merely created the kind of neurotic behavior Freud believed came from repressing human impulses. Politics, wrote Lippmann, would always be irrelevant to the public’s business “if the only method it knows is to ostracize the desires it cannot manage.”⁵⁸ Lippmann particularly admired Jane Addams for her treatment of human foibles without oppressive moralizing.⁵⁹

Historian Charles Forcey observed that there were others who had made this kind of argument without the “penumbra of semi-scientific jargon.” Graham Wallas had done so in 1908 in his *Human Nature in Politics*.⁶⁰ Twenty years before, sociologist Lester Ward had attacked legislation for being more concerned with preventing crime than for preparing citizens for constructive work. In 1907, another sociologist, Edward A. Ross, had argued along similar lines in *Sin and Society*.⁶¹ Lippmann railed against anti-trust laws, arguing that trusts were the result of greed, a natural human trait. Simply outlawing

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁷ Freud took notice of *A Preface to Politics* and referred to it as the first practical attempt to apply his psychology to politics. See Charles Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann, and the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 109.

⁵⁸ Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, 34.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁰ Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann, and the Progressive Era*, 109.

⁶¹ Ibid., 111.

trusts would never work; a claim that had also been made by progressive authors Walter Weyl and Herbert Croly. "For Lippmann as for Croly and Weyl the example of government 'repression' most frequently cited was the Sherman Anti-Trust Act."⁶²

William James, in his 1910 essay "The Moral Equivalent of War," had also pursued this theme: "Military feelings are too deeply grounded to abdicate their place among our ideals until better substitutes were offered."⁶³

The first step towards creating a new political order would be to discard "the futile hopes of mechanical perfection so consistently blasted by natural facts" so that we might harness "human power for human purposes... political power to the nation's needs."⁶⁴ The founders and drafters of the American Constitution "had a rather pale god, they had only a speaking acquaintance with humanity, so they put their faith in a scaffold, and it has been part of our natural piety to pretend that they succeeded."⁶⁵ Mechanical politics denatured politics by removing personality, an effort that "ran against the grain of living forces, the result is a deceptive theory of politics."⁶⁶ Politics ought to encourage creativity, but when it became purely mechanical it ceased to engage the real energy of the nation. Disappointment in government resulted from its failure to perform to expectations, the result of representatives being "trained to interpret a constitution, instead of a life... they worship man and distrust men"⁶⁷

⁶² Ibid., 113.

⁶³ William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," in *Writings, 1902-1910* (New York: The Library of America, 1910), 1281.

⁶⁴ Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, 21-22.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 31.

Lippmann advocated development of specialized expertise to reorient the political process. In familiar Progressive fashion he believed experts could improve working conditions, prisons, child care, vocational guidance, and education. Experts could help Americans break out of “the ruts” they were in.⁶⁸ There was a role for art: “Art enlarges experience by admitting us to the inner life of others.”⁶⁹ While he argued that concentration of economic power was not always a problem, the state had the responsibility to develop creative means to intelligently direct the trusts rather than allowing them to “run wild.”⁷⁰

Apparent in *A Preface to Politics* was Lippmann’s admiration for John Dewey and his pragmatic philosophy. It was a sentiment Lippmann expressed in essays and reviews published in the *New Republic* in 1915 and 1916. Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* was a “great book,” one “rich in the wisdom which democracies need.” Dewey possessed the “most powerful intellect devoted to the future of American civilization.” He had done what creative thinkers must do; he had “extracted a philosophy out of the possibilities which exist in our world.”⁷¹

Lippmann applauded Dewey’s call for philosophy designed to meet the needs and purposes of men and women. Heretofore, Lippmann wrote, philosophy’s claim was that it “determined us; we conformed to it.” But the greatest value of Dewey’s work in Lippmann’s eyes was the frank recognition that philosophy had *always* been the product of particular people at particular times, “a human being’s adjustment of his desires to his limitations.” Lippmann understood Dewey to be saying that philosophy was a projection

⁶⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 85-86.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 26-27.

⁷¹ Walter Lippmann, “The Hope of Democracy,” *New Republic* (1916): 231.

of the “very soul” of the philosopher, an autobiographical statement of sorts. “Let us continue to write autobiographies,” Lippmann wrote, “but let us be sure that we know they are autobiographies.” Dewey had urged that philosophers should put away the “illusions of divinity with which they shrouded their work. That pretentiousness is the enemy. It turns human thoughts into monstrous absolutes, and takes the impossible position that some of man’s thoughts are too sacred for man’s criticism.”⁷² David Hollinger has observed that Lippmann’s early work was a “vehicle for precisely the combination of hopes and aspirations found in the classic texts of the pragmatist philosophers.”⁷³

Sounding much like the pragmatic Dewey, Lippmann, in *A Preface to Politics*, declined to outline hard and fast policies because to do so “inverts the whole order of things” and created “theoretical tangles and pseudo-problems.”⁷⁴ He proclaimed that “no axiom can ever be a substitute for what really makes life worth living...each man in his inward life is a last judgment on all his values.” That is, “the goal of action is in its final analysis aesthetic and not moral – a quality of feeling instead of conformity to rule.”⁷⁵ Words like “justice, harmony, power, democracy,” he wrote, “are simply empirical suggestions which may produce the good life.” But modern men and women were under no obligation to adhere to traditional standards, “we should be idolatrous fools to do so.”⁷⁶ In Lippmann’s “revolt against formalism,” he wrote, “If only men kept their minds

⁷² Walter Lippmann, “The Footnote,” in *Early Writings* (New York: Liveright, 1970), 307-10.

⁷³ David A. Hollinger, “The Problem of Pragmatism in American History,” *The Journal of American History* 67, no. 1 (1980): 103.

⁷⁴ Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, 151.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

“freed from formalism, idol worship, fixed ideas and exalted abstractions man’s experience becomes the center of thought.”⁷⁷

The type of statesman Lippmann envisioned would be one who regarded all social organizations as an instrument. “Systems, institutions and mechanical contrivances have for him no virtue of their own: they are valuable only when they serve the purposes of men. He uses them, of course, but with a constant sense that men have made them, that new ones can be devised.”⁷⁸ It was the willing, deliberate, conscious individual who ought, in Lippmann’s view, to be at the center of the system. There was a need for men (and they were always men to Lippmann, though he frequently noted the inequity of excluding women from political and social power) who were “aggressively active towards the world which gives man a miraculous assurance that the world is something he can make.”⁷⁹

There were those, including his mentor Graham Wallas, who were troubled by Lippmann’s apparent conviction that man’s irrational impulses were stronger than reason. As Charles Forcey observed, what Lippmann seemed to be looking for was a leader creative and imaginative enough “who could save the class from its own stupidity.”⁸⁰ Walter Leuchtenburg noted, “Lippmann’s celebration of the autonomous untrammelled will ran the peril of embracing an outright anti-intellectualism.”⁸¹ Lippmann soon

⁷⁷ Ibid., 153.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 15..

⁸⁰ Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann, and the Progressive Era*, 115.

⁸¹ Leuchtenburg, "Walter Lippmann's *Drift and Mastery*," 5.

disavowed the celebration of “irrational impulsive humanism” on display in *A Preface to Politics*.⁸²

There is a considerable shift from the concerns Lippmann described in *A Preface to Politics* to those revealed in the book he completed eighteen months later, *Drift and Mastery*. Lippmann was now less concerned with unleashing the dormant energy of the American public than he was with harnessing that energy. He was troubled by the potential for anarchic frenzy “against the chaos of a new freedom.”⁸³ He was concerned about a public thrown into confusion, unable to cope with the freedom that came from escaping the restraints of tradition. Only a civic minded elite, it seemed, could save the public from themselves.

Traditional forms of authority had been overthrown:

We inherit freedom and have to use it. The sanctity of property, the patriarchal family, hereditary caste, the dogma of sin, obedience to authority – the rock of ages, in brief, has been blasted for us. Those who are young today are born into a world in which the foundations of the older order survive only as habits or by default.⁸⁴

The problem then, as Lippmann saw it, was that “we don’t know how to behave when personal contact and eternal authority have disappeared...we have changed our environment more quickly than we know how to change ourselves.”⁸⁵ The very perception of impermanence was daunting in itself. Churches were empty, not because of indifference on the part of the parishioners, but because of their intellectual failure to deal with the sudden change in civilization. The public was disillusioned by the judicial

⁸² Merle Eugene Curti, *Human Nature in American Thought: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 355.

⁸³ Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914); (reprint, 1985. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 17.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

system. “It is the bad sociology of judges and their class prejudices that are destroying the prestige of the bench.”⁸⁶ Traditional political units were poorly suited for the age; unions, boards of trade, cooperative societies acted as “little governments” instead. “The world is so complex,” Lippmann wrote, “that no official government can be devised to deal with it.”⁸⁷ America stood at a time of unprecedented change, nostalgic for its past, naively optimistic about its future, unable to master the present. “We have lost authority. We are ‘emancipated’ from an ordered world. We drift.”⁸⁸

Americans were particularly uneasy about the power of business and they looked to government to buffer them from unbridled economic power.⁸⁹ The public had concluded that “private commercialism is an antiquated, feeble, mean, and unimaginative way of dealing with the possibilities of modern industry.”⁹⁰ The size of economic units needed to be addressed by the “new science of administration” rather than mechanically restricting economic size. Lippmann supposed that government would eventually take over ownership of railroads and then steel, oil, lumber and coal, “private property will melt away.” But there isn’t any sense in *Drift and Mastery* that this was something to be hoped for because a more just society would result. Lippmann’s complaint was that private property was an inefficient way to organize things. The solution to problems of the American economy were purely technical, a matter only of combining popular control with administrative power.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Ibid., 93-95.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 96.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 111.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁹¹ Ibid., 87.

What thwarted the growth of American civilization, Lippmann observed, was the “murky vision of what we grandiloquently call the ‘will of the people.’”⁹² This was an issue that Lippmann and Dewey would return to later in the 20s. Questions regarding the identification of the “public interest” generally turn on determining what the “interest” is. But for both Lippmann and Dewey, the first step was to identify the “public.” In *Drift and Mastery* Lippmann argued that there were in fact multiple American publics, each of them being held back by their failure to recognize the potential for power within them. Consumers constituted one public, though their complete independence was doubtful, something that Thorstein Veblen had argued.⁹³ In any event, Lippmann claimed that granting women the vote would increase the political power of consumers enormously: “The mass of women do not look at the world as do workers; in America at least their prime interest is as consumers. They have more time for politics than men, and it is no idle speculation to say that their influence will make the consumer the real master of the political situation.”⁹⁴ Woman, as producers, constituted another public, one with growing influence. The rights too longed denied to women would not be withheld much longer, “in fact, they will be forced upon millions of women who never trouble to ask for any of

⁹² Ibid., 8.

⁹³ See for instance, Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899, 1912; reprint, 1959. New York: Mentor Book), 60.

⁹⁴ Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest*, 54. Lippmann was not noticing anything that had not been noticed before in what Meg Jacobs has called “purchasing power progressives.” (Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 77. The National Consumers League came into being in 1898 when local leagues decided to form a national office to promote the interests of consumers. Florence Kelley’s appointment as general secretary in 1898 led to a significant increase in membership and an enlarged public presence. Kelley, with her “rage for social justice” was able to use the power of an organized public to expand state responsibility for the welfare of women and children. (Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Two Political Cultures in the Progressive Era: The National Consumers’ League and the American Association for Labor Legislation,” in *U.S. History as Women’s History: New Feminist Essays*, ed. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

these rights.” What was uncertain was the form this life, replete with new freedom, would take. “Each step in the woman’s movement is creative. There are no precedents whatever, not even bad ones.”⁹⁵ Lippmann acknowledged the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman in promoting alternatives to “housekeeping arrangements inherited from the early Egyptians.”⁹⁶ Lippmann predicted a number of things would be done collectively:

The idea of having forty kitchens, forty furnaces, forty laundries, and forty useless backyards in one square block, managed by forty separate and overworked women, each going helplessly to market, each bringing up children by rule of thumb, -- all that is a kind of individualism which the world will get away from.⁹⁷

Labor was another public. Lippmann asserted that unions were currently obstructionist, but without unions, industrial democracy was impossible and “without democracy in industry...there is no democracy in America.”⁹⁸ The real peril to America, he argued, was the existence of “great masses of unorganized and perhaps unorganizable workers.”⁹⁹ In the end, “the hopes of democracy are bound up with the labor movement.”¹⁰⁰

Lippmann proposed a litany of solutions for the problems of publics adrift without providing any methods of implementation, something he would deride in the 20s. Industry had to be reformed through education. A survey of American natural resources

⁹⁵ Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest*, 123.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 128. Lippmann was describing the sort of innovation Charlotte Perkins Gilman had advocated: “The home cares and industries, give no play for her increasing specialization...the woman who is able to do one of these things perfectly, and by so much less able to be all other, suffers doubly from not being able to do what she wants to do, and from being forced to do what she does not want to do.” (Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women & Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*. Small, Maynard & Company: Boston, 1898; reprint, 1966. New York: Harper & Row), 155.

⁹⁸ Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest*, 58.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

had to be undertaken. The railroads had to serve the development of our natural resources. Waste and graft had to be eliminated. Vast sums of money had to be found to implement methods to humanize labor. A new class of properly educated business men had to be created. The banking system had to be revamped so as to provide credit at the lowest possible costs. Methods of integrated the worker as an essential part of his industry had to be found. Unions had to recognize their responsibility for more than the narrow interests of their members to become “understanding directing partners of business.” For some industries, public ownership had to be undertaken, for others, cooperative societies had to be developed. A variety of consumer protections had to be administered. The consumer had to be made more discriminating; he had to “civilize his desires.”¹⁰¹ Lippmann recognized the uncertainties of the modern age as a “thousand terrors.” Only when “society is intelligent enough to make destitution impossible” and guaranteed a minimum of security for everyone could there be progress. “Social hesitancy will disappear...every issue will not be fought as if life depended upon it, and mankind will have emerged from a fear economy.” Lippmann argued that change had to be a “matter of invention and deliberate experience.”¹⁰²

We can no longer treat life as something that has trickled down to us. We have to deal with it deliberately, devise its social organization, alter its tools, formulate its method, educate and control it. In endless ways we put intention where custom has reigned. We break up routines, make decision, choose our ends, select means.¹⁰³

As historian David Hollinger has observed, the “mastery” Lippmann was proposing to utilize to overcome the “drift” of modern life was the discipline of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 95-98.

¹⁰² Ibid., 176.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 147.

science.¹⁰⁴ Lippmann had his own idea about what science was. It was a method and spirit rather than a fixed body of knowledge. The intersubjectivity of science meant that from the same set of facts, men and women would come to the same conclusions; it would provide the discipline and passion necessary to unite and inspire disparate civilizations. Because of advancements in science, “Lippmann encouraged people to believe they would be organized, efficient, functional and under firm control without sacrificing impulse, choice, fantasy, and liberty.”¹⁰⁵ The difference between *A Preface to Politics* and *Drift and Mastery* is that in the latter the emphasis is on “firm control.”

Dewey was in complete agreement with Lippmann about America adrift. His support for entry into World War I was predicated on the hope that war would shock Americans out of their complacency. He believed that science: directed, conscious, reflective inquiry was the key to the problems of American democracy. But the science that Lippmann advocated was more akin to managerial expertise than it was to the sort of science that John Dewey extolled. “Dewey was confident that since the method of experimental science and the processes of democracy were basically congenial, even parallel, democracy’s more realistic hopes lay in science...yet science remained the property of a limited technology.”¹⁰⁶ That was the problem in Dewey’s mind, that science was available to only a portion of society. It did not have to be that way. Dewey’s science was available to everyone; that was the purpose of education. Dewey’s contemporary,

¹⁰⁴ Hollinger, "Science and Anarchy: Walter Lippmann's Drift and Mastery," 463.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.: 469.

¹⁰⁶ David W. Marcell, *Progress and Pragmatism: James, Dewey, Beard, and the American Idea of Progress* (Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, 1974), 244.

William English Walling wrote this of Dewey, “If Dewey expects science to guide us, this does not mean that he expects scientists to guide us.”¹⁰⁷

In *Drift and Mastery* Lippmann wrote, “Democracy in politics is the twin brother of scientific thinking...the scientific spirit is the discipline, the escape from drift, the outlook of a free man.”¹⁰⁸ This was a portent of things to come in Lippmann’s developing thought. Science could be possessed by only a few. But if science belonged to the experts, who owned democracy? Dewey had a very different idea. As David Marcell observed, Dewey insisted that “science had to be democratized and democracy made scientific before true progress could be assured...Progress was the cornerstone of the entire range of John Dewey’s thought.”¹⁰⁹ Historian John Recchuiti, writing about the development of social science in the Progressive Era wrote, “This unresolved tension between science as elitist enterprise and science as democratizing force was a formative and unresolved paradox.”¹¹⁰

The first issue of the *New Republic* was published in 1914. Willard and Dorothy Whitney Straight provided the finances.¹¹¹ Herbert Croly, Walter Weyl, and Walter

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Robert Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 122.

¹⁰⁸ Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest*, 151. After writing most of this paper, I came across something regarding this particular sentence from *Drift and Mastery* written by James Kloppenberg, “This was precisely the argument that Dewey had tried repeatedly to make, but he never made it more persuasively – perhaps because he never made it so clearly.” Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920*, 320. I would take no issue regarding the “clearly” portion, but while the language may seem to express a Deweyan thought, in context, it does not seem to be the argument Dewey repeatedly made.

¹⁰⁹ Marcell, *Progress and Pragmatism: James, Dewey, Beard, and the American Idea of Progress*, 244, 47.

¹¹⁰ John Recchuiti, *Civic Engagement: Social Science and Progressive-Era Reform in New York City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 13.

¹¹¹ The Straights are one of the three Progressive era families Eric Rauchway considers in *The Refuge of Affections*. Of the Straights he writes: “[They] created it to fulfill the shared elements of their reform agendas and thus to give their marriage a public presence. These shared elements comprised a set of convictions about their duty to the benighted, who were in this case a public that required education on political matters so that it could manage its own affairs and become truly self-governing.” Eric Rauchway,

Lippmann were the editors.¹¹² They described the magazines mission in terms that were congenial with Dewey's views regarding the participation of public intellectuals in guiding public opinion and Dewey contributed the first of some 160 of his essays the *New Republic* would publish over the years. When the *Lusitania* was attacked in May 1915, Walter Lippmann and the *New Republic* began advocating preparedness for the possibility that the United States would be drawn into the war. Their sympathies were clear: the *Lusitania* "having united Englishmen and Americans in a common grief and a common indignation," might ultimately "unite them in a common war and a common destiny."¹¹³ Soon after, Dewey began to express his own sentiment in favor of preparing for war.

By 1915 Dewey was assailing German philosophy, arguing that German romanticism and a fixation on philosophic dualisms produced Germany's militarism and belligerence.¹¹⁴ Dewey made it clear that he believed German aggression would not end on its own and that Americans ought to be prepared for war. From the early 19th century, the course of German history could be reduced to the thought of one man, Immanuel Kant. German exaltation of the state, something Dewey found repulsive, was a climax of the "line of moral regeneration which took its start from Kant." Moral duty became

The Refuge of Affections: Family and American Reform Politics, 1900-1920 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 32.

¹¹² Croly in 1909 made the claim that achievement of "our American national destiny" depended on national action directed by national leaders. The Progressive Croly sounded very different than the Progressive Dewey and his radical participatory democracy. Herbert David Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: Bibliobazaar, 1909; reprint, 2006), 33.

¹¹³ Quoted in Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*, 89.

¹¹⁴ John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (1915; reprint, Middle Works. Vol: 8).

equated with political subservience; moral obligation merged into political obedience; rational thought overwhelmed by emotion.¹¹⁵

In the summer of 1916 Dewey began writing a series of essays published in the *New Republic*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Seven Arts* extolling the benefits that would accrue with America's entry into the war. The first pieces were ostensibly concerned with education, but in a deeper sense they were oriented towards an analysis of the process of social integration. He displayed an enthusiasm for war that had little to do with the direct aims of any war-making effort. Dewey spiritedly predicted that war would provoke a reassessment of the America educational system.¹¹⁶ He recognized proposals for universal military service that would assimilate immigrants and develop within them a sense of public responsibility, a very Progressive sort of program. Though he did not hold out any hope that a program compelling service would be successful, he was gratified that there had been an awakening to the fact that immigrants remained as alienated from the general society as they were on the day they arrived in America.¹¹⁷

As biographer Alan Ryan has noted, "Dewey's communitarianism is more than communitarianism of the neighborhood. He was a benign, mild, and good-natured nationalist, but he was a nationalist."¹¹⁸ Dewey argued that the possibility of war had "forced men out of narrow sectionalisms into a larger social unit," though he warned of nationalism purchased through appeals to fears, suspicions, jealousies and latent hatreds.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 227-28. Thorstein Veblen took a similar position in his *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution*, published in 1915, the same year Dewey's *German Philosophy and Politics* was published. Veblen argued that Germany was driven by an "unstable cultural compound" of idealism and industrial efficiency. Quoted in Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 234.

¹¹⁶ John Dewey, "Our Educational Ideal in Wartime," *New Republic* 6 (1916).

¹¹⁷ John Dewey, "Universal Service as Education," *New Republic* 6 (1916).

¹¹⁸ Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 156.

But, surprisingly, he argued that America's exceptional history militated against the rise of aggressive nationalism. Even America's nationalism would be exceptional, "our unity cannot be a homogenous thing" as was Europe's. American nationalism would be based on intelligence and scientific planning; it would not take social organization for granted. War would mean that the "melting pot" would be transformed into a "symphony."¹¹⁹ War would create the conditions in which "hyphenism" would be welcomed "in the sense of extracting from each people its special good ... The point is to see that the hyphen connects instead of separates." To develop the "symphony," the American educational system would need to be "nationalized in a way which recognizes that the peculiarity of *our* nationalism is its internationalism."¹²⁰

By late 1916, Dewey was sure that war was coming:

We can hardly welcome the war merely because it has made us think, and has made us realize how many of the things we called thoughts were asylums for laziness. But since the war has come, we may welcome whatever revelations of our stupidity and carelessness it brings with it, and set about the institution of a more manly and more responsible faith in progress than that in which we indulged in the past.¹²¹

War would force Americans to make a reassessment of their fundamental beliefs, most importantly the idea that progress was inevitable. "Even a great and devastating war," he wrote, "is not too great a price to pay for an awakening from such an infantile and selfish

¹¹⁹The image of America as an orchestra was one that Progressive intellectual Horace Kallen had utilized in 1915: "So in society each ethnic group is a natural instrument...all make the symphony of civilization." Horace Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," *The Nation*, Feb. 18, 25, 1915. Randolph Bourne believed that out of the exchange between immigrants and native-born a new culture would develop. Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," *The Atlantic* 118 (1916).

¹²⁰ John Dewey, "Nationalizing Education," *Journal of Education* 84 (1916).

¹²¹ John Dewey, "Progress," *International Journal of Ethics* 26 (1916): 234.

dream. Progress is not automatic; it depends upon human intent and aim and upon acceptance of responsibility for its production.”¹²²

The United States entered the war in April 1917, but as historian David Kennedy has observed, “Americans went to war in 1917 not only against Germans in the field of France but against each other at home.”¹²³ Dewey refused to believe that America’s entry into the war was the cause of increasingly frequent outbreaks of violence against German-Americans and those who opposed entry: “Much of the violence of current intolerance is unconscious testimony that the diverse ingredients of our population are not, after all, so integrated as we desire.”¹²⁴ Dewey retained his faith that intolerance coincident with war would be expunged by the reorganization war would foster. But by late 1917 Dewey was forced to confront the unanticipated consequences of war. Congress had passed sweeping laws dealing with espionage, sedition and trading with the enemy. These laws made it possible that virtually any criticism of the Wilson Administration could be ruled illegal.¹²⁵ Dewey argued that those who made irresponsible accusations against people they disagreed with were themselves culpable of disloyalty and sedition. “I do not think to defeat Prussianism abroad it is necessary to establish Prussianism at home.”¹²⁶

In 1915, Randolph Bourne then an admiring student wrote of Dewey, “Professor Dewey has given us a whole new language of meaning. After reading him, you can see

¹²² Ibid.: 238.

¹²³ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 41.

¹²⁴ John Dewey, "In Explanation of Our Lapse," *New Republic* 13 (1917): 294.

¹²⁵ Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform*, 196.

¹²⁶ John Dewey, "Democracy and Loyalty in the Schools," *New York Post*, December 19, 1917.

nothing again in the old terms.”¹²⁷ Just two years later, Bourne reacted in horror as

Dewey stridently advocated American entry into World War I:

What I come to is a sense of suddenly being left in the lurch, of suddenly finding that a philosophy upon which I had relied to carry us through no longer works...Professor Dewey and his friends felt that the forces were too strong for them, that the war had to be, and it was better to take it up intelligently than to drift blindly in... If the war is too strong for you to prevent, how is it going to be weak enough for you to mold it to your liberal purposes.¹²⁸

“The crowning failure of progressivism,” wrote historian Richard Abrams, “was the American role in World War I...The failure in progressivism lies not in the decision to intervene but in the futility of intervention measured by progressive expectations.”¹²⁹ It was not Dewey’s finest hour and it ought to be acknowledged as such. Dewey was swept up in enthusiasm for war in a way that seemed incomprehensible to many of his admirers. To his credit, Dewey’s struggle with the realities of war and the rise of hyper-patriotism at home led to his reassessment of just what war meant. War is the means towards some end, but that end is always destruction. There may be, there *are* occasions when destruction is warranted. Destruction then becomes the means to some other end, just as Dewey taught in countless other situations. But he wasn’t clearheaded enough to see it in 1915. Maybe that says less about John Dewey than it says about war itself.

Lippmann was also terribly disappointed about the course of the war. Lippmann had come to the attention of Colonel Edward House, Woodrow Wilson’s closest advisor, through the *New Republic*’s editorial stance and Lippmann’s *The Stakes of Diplomacy*

¹²⁷ Randolph Bourne, "John Dewey's Philosophy," *New Republic*, March 13, 1915, 5.

¹²⁸ Randolph Bourne, "Twilight of Idols," in *The World of Randolph Bourne*, ed. Lillian Schlissel (New York: Dutton, 1965), 131.

¹²⁹ Abrams, "The Failure of Progressivism," 223.

(1915), his first book concerning foreign policy.¹³⁰ On American entry into the war, House facilitated Lippmann's appointment to a secret team known as the *Inquiry*. The task of the *Inquiry* was plan for post-war Europe. Lippmann was also responsible for a great deal of President Wilson's Fourteen Points. In the spring of 1918 Lippmann went to London to conduct intelligence and arrange for the dissemination of propaganda. Lippmann was profoundly impressed by how easily public opinion could be molded. Disillusioned by the course of negotiations in Paris after the war, Lippmann returned to the United States.¹³¹

The war for democracy had been won. "The American people began the war with a single purpose – to defeat German," wrote historian William E. Leuchtenburg, "but during the next few months they were promised a millennium, and when the ultimate disenchantment followed, they turned away from the idea of world responsibility."¹³² Wilson, seeing himself as the only spokesman for those who really wanted peace, had gone to Paris to negotiate the peace. His greatest victory came when the Peace Conference incorporated the League of Nations into the peace treaty. But Wilson was unable to rouse enough support to overcome the opposition of senate Republicans and the United States never joined the League. In the midst of his campaign for the League,

¹³⁰ Walter Lippmann, *The Stakes of Diplomacy* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1915). One of the criticisms of Lippmann was that he never settled on a consistent political philosophy. But to a remarkable degree (with the not insignificant period before WWI) Lippmann's ideas regarding foreign policy remained very similar to those he expressed in 1915. For a discussion of Lippmann's inconsistent political theory see Benjamin Wright, *5 Public Philosophies of Walter Lippmann* (Austin: University of Texas, 1973).

¹³¹ Steel, "Walter Lippmann," 178.

¹³² Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932*, 47.

Wilson suffered a stroke. The country was ruled by “a regency headed by his wife” from October 1919 to March 1921.¹³³

World War I marked the first time large scale governmental control of the American economy was attempted. Business leaders and public administrators worked together to manage the economy and the inescapable conclusion was that it worked.¹³⁴ The amalgamation of government agencies that managed the wartime economy during World War I served as models for similar efforts during the New Deal and World War II.¹³⁵ The success of the war effort seemed to prove that an efficient state had developed in the Progressive Era, employing the kind of intelligent control that both Lippmann and Dewey had advocated. But those promising activities “all stopped with breathtaking speed after the Armistice on November 11, 1918.”¹³⁶ The decision to terminate almost all of the federal administrative programs rested with Wilson, who from the beginning of the war had been concerned with those programs, not because he believed war would militarize the nation, but because he feared it would “corporatize it.”¹³⁷

In 1919 a series of dramatic strikes broke out. Police struck in Boston, steelworkers and coal miners walked off the job and serious questions about the ultimate loyalties of worker were raised. In the spring of 1919 violence erupted across the country. In June bombs exploded in eight cities in an apparently coordinated attack. By autumn, millions of Americans believed revolution was imminent. In November 1919, Attorney

¹³³ Ibid., 61.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 40.

¹³⁵ Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 177.

¹³⁶ Eric Rauchway, *Blessed among Nations: How the World Made America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 150.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 152.

General Mitchell, initiated raids on purported anarchists and radicals. Agents invaded private homes, union headquarters, and meeting halls. Many were arrested, few were convicted, some were deported. By the end of 1920, the Red Scare was over.

Americans were tired of Progressive reformers, demands for selflessness and self-sacrifice. The war, the League of Nations debate, the Red Scare all seemed to be an extension of the “political intensity” of the Progressive era and America had had enough.¹³⁸ The economy was on the upswing; there was a general sense of material content, life was “infused with benevolent materialism.”¹³⁹ Instead of Progressive reform, the middle class was finding fulfillment in the “flowering of American enterprise.”¹⁴⁰ “What happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920’s?” asked historian Arthur Link.¹⁴¹ Link claimed that Progressivism was really a shifting alliance of “many progressive movements.” Central to Link’s argument was his contention that the disintegration of Progressivism was hastened by the absence of any effective leadership. In particular, Progressivism’s intellectual heroes abandoned the movement after World War I. Without identifying those he was indicting, Link went so far as to argue that “more than a simple desertion was involved here; it was often a matter of a cynical repudiation of the ideals from which progressivism derived its strength.”¹⁴² For whatever reason, “Progressivism of the Twenties,” wrote historian Eric Goldman, “was a beaten army, muscles aching, its ranks seriously depleted.”¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932*, 81.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Link, “What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920’s?”

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*: 844.

¹⁴³ Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform*, 203.

The presidential election of 1920 was a “national disavowal” of the ideas for which Wilson stood. “We have torn up Wilsonism by the roots,” said Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Warren Harding, who had been chosen by Republican Party professionals, won the election by capitalizing on feelings of nostalgia for the years before the war, without demanding that any sacrifices be made.¹⁴⁴ Politics no longer demanded the public’s attention as it once had. Voter turnout continued to fall to less than fifty percent in 1920.¹⁴⁵ Harding was not equipped to be president and his administration was a succession of scandals. He died in August 1923 and Calvin Coolidge became president. Coolidge came along at the right time for a nation disgusted by the revelations of the Harding administration. Coolidge “summoned up images of the democracy of New England town meeting.”¹⁴⁶ He served the needs of big business and the Old Guard of the Republican Party better than even Harding had. “Never before, here or anywhere else,” wrote the Wall Street Journal, “has a government so completely fused with government.”¹⁴⁷

One year after the Armistice, Walter Lippmann took the opportunity to assess America’s condition. His essay in the *New Republic* set the stage for his dialogue with Dewey. America was once again drifting. American leaders were too “absent-minded to behave like a government.” Labor unrest and the fear of an “imaginary revolution”

¹⁴⁴ Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932*, 88.

¹⁴⁵ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 151. Foner includes the enfranchisement of women by the 19th Amendment as one of the reasons for the decline, “women voted in lower numbers.” But political scientist Paul Kleppner argues that sophisticated statistical analysis establishes that the decline cannot be attributed to women getting the vote. Paul Kleppner, “Were Women to Blame? Female Suffrage and Voter Turnout,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XII, no. 4 (1982).

¹⁴⁶ Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932*, 95.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

gripped Americans in “hallucination.”¹⁴⁸ Freedom of speech and of the press was in danger and it wasn’t just the public at large guilty of “this grotesque performance.” Universities, the Congress, every government department, every newspaper office were “stocked with men who are in mortal terror.” America was in a panic because its leaders had not developed policy to organize the nation after the war; even more egregious was the failure of the press. The public was left imagining facts because the press was performing so poorly. “The news system being what it is, and education being where it is, it is possible to fool most of the public a good part of the time.” Still, Lippmann had hope in the public, at least that portion of it that “with all their limitations, are looking for the truth.”¹⁴⁹

Lippmann’s *Liberty and the News* was published in 1920. It is the first of the texts that constitute the dialogue between Dewey and Lippmann. In 1922, Lippmann’s *Public Opinion* appeared and in 1925 its sequel, *The Phantom Public* was published. Taken together, they constitute what historian Christopher Lasch called the “most sobering assessment of the American public’s incapacity for critical judgment and self-government” ever written.¹⁵⁰

John Dewey reviewed *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public* praising both for their analysis of the problems in American democracy. *Public Opinion*, he wrote, was a work that made an “inestimable contribution” to the practice of American politics. Dewey was even more impressed by *The Phantom Public* than he had been by *Public*

¹⁴⁸ Walter Lippmann, “Unrest,” *The New Republic*, November 12, 1919, 318-19.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁵⁰ Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 363.

Opinion.¹⁵¹ While he praised Lippmann's diagnosis, he expressed doubts about the cure he proposed. In January 1926, John Dewey presented a series of lectures at Kenyon College in which he addressed the issues raised by Lippmann. *The Public and Its Problems*, published in 1927, was based on those talks. Dewey noted Lippmann's contribution: "To [*The Phantom Public*] as well as to his *Public Opinion*, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness...for ideas involved in my entire discussion even when it reaches conclusion diverging from his."¹⁵² As historian and philosopher James Gouinlock has written, "*The Public and Its Problems* is the culmination of Dewey's instrumentalism...a proposal for the actual realization of intelligent conduct in practical life."¹⁵³

In the course of their dialogue, both men displayed the essential elements of their philosophic make-up. Lippmann: republican, skeptical, with a constricted view of the capacity of the public. Dewey: democrat, pragmatic, expansive about the promise of democracy. Also evident was the character they had developed as young men. Dewey, sensitive to "the inward laceration," sought some way to create a democratic community. Lippmann, searching for order, tried to provide an accurate assessment of democracy's limitations.

"So long," Lippmann wrote in *Liberty and the News* (1920), "as there is interposed between the ordinary citizen and the facts a news organization determining by entirely private and unexamined standards, no matter how lofty, what he shall know, and

¹⁵¹ John Dewey, "Practical Democracy," *New Republic* 45 (1925): 213-20.

¹⁵² John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927); (reprint, 1954. Athens Ohio: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press), fn 116-17.

¹⁵³ James Gouinlock, "Introduction," in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984), xxiii.

hence what he shall believe, no one will be able to say that the substance of democratic government is secure.”¹⁵⁴ What made that predicament particularly dangerous was that journalists were “confused.” American newspapermen acted under the theory that “an abstraction like the truth and a grace like fairness must be sacrificed whenever anyone thinks the necessities of civilization require the sacrifice.”¹⁵⁵ Lippmann’s point was that reporters had decided what the national interest was and they were willing to shape the news to promote that cause. They did this notwithstanding the fact that they were “critically aware” that their conception of the national interest was “special to their age, their locality, their interests, and their limited knowledge.”¹⁵⁶ Given both the economic and professional limitations of the practice of journalism, news “comes [to us] helter-skelter.” That would be fine for a baseball score, a transatlantic flight, or the death of a monarch. But where the story is more complex, “as for example, in the matter of a success of a policy or the social conditions among a foreign people – where the real answer is neither yes or no, but subtle and a matter of balanced evidence,” then journalism “causes no end of derangement, misunderstanding and even misinterpretation.”¹⁵⁷

Two years later Lippmann had decided that journalism, as defective as it was, was not entirely to blame for the problems of American democracy. He had come to understand that there was a critical problem in the way citizens absorbed information. Lippmann had learned that in wartime symbolic imagery dominated life. It was a time when “fear, pungency, and hatred have secured complete dominion of the spirit” and an

¹⁵⁴ Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 10.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 38-41.

entire population had but one picture of the enemy and of themselves. His alarm originated in the ease with which public opinion could be manipulated. Lippmann was certain that only by understanding what people thought they knew about events would it be possible to understand why they acted the way they did. Actions originated in irrational beliefs, on violent and instinctive responses to facts colored by creative imaginations. People responded as energetically to fiction as they did to reality.

Citizens were not in any real sense in direct contact with their environment. Between man and his environment stood a “pseudo-environment” composed partly of fictions and partly of representations made by man himself from incomplete information (“the pictures in our heads”). The actual environment was “too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance.” Lippmann was concerned with the “spectacle of men acting upon their environment moved by stimuli from their pseudo-environments.” Since man’s behavior occurs in the real world, acting on the basis of stimuli from the pseudo-environment was certain to lead to surprise and disappointment, one of Lippmann’s perpetual concerns.¹⁵⁸

To make sense of events, men and women utilized “stereotypes” to organize their worlds. Lippmann argued that the public was able to see only a small portion of what went on in the world, though opinions covered more territory than could be directly observed. “The facts we see depend on where we are placed and the habits of our eyes.” He recognized John Dewey’s insight in his *How We Think* (1910) for the proposition that in order to deal with the world we needed to introduce definiteness and distinction, consistency and stability before we could make sense of the world. “We define first and

¹⁵⁸ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 14-16.

then see.”¹⁵⁹ Stereotypes came from moral codes and social philosophies. The process of Americanization, for instance, was the substitution of American stereotypes for European stereotypes.¹⁶⁰ Recognizable signs from our environment were chosen and filled in using a stocks of images. There was economy in this, since to see all things new and fresh would be exhausting. Understanding that preconceptions governed the way the world was perceived would bring positive benefits:

If our philosophy tells us that each man is only a small part of the world, that his intelligence catches at best only phases and aspects in a coarse net of ideas, then, when we use our stereotypes, we tend to know that they are stereotypes, to hold them lightly, to modify them gladly. We tend, also, to realize more and more clearly when our ideas started, how they came to us, why we accepted them. All useful history is antiseptic in this fashion. It enables us to know what fairy tale, what school book, what tradition, what novel, play, picture, phrase, planted one preconception in this mind, another in that mind.¹⁶¹

Stereotypes were not “instinctive equipment,” but were socially constructed. The failure to apprehend that distinction led to confusion and to the fabrication of “collective minds, national souls, and race psychology.” They acted as a defense of the status quo, and challenges to them seemed like “attacks on the foundation of the universe.”¹⁶² Stereotypes existed prior to reason, imposing a certain character on perceptions before data was analyzed by intelligence.¹⁶³ Patterns of stereotypes determined what facts were seen and what was seen in them. Only by recognizing that opinions rested on “partial expression seen through our stereotypes” would America ever become tolerant of those who did not see the world as we did.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 80-81.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 85.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 90-91.

¹⁶² Ibid., 95.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 98.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 159.

One of the foremost American stereotypes in Lippmann's scheme was that of the inexorable march of progress. "The American version of progress has fitted an extraordinary range of facts in the economic situation and in human nature."¹⁶⁵ Belief in progress as automatic had blinded Americans. A stereotype like progress took on a momentum of its own and limited America to employing superficial responses to problems. Progressives advocated programs, but not how they were to be implemented. (Lippmann had done just that in *Drift and Mastery*) Laissez faire economics assumed the economy went on under its own power.¹⁶⁶ Americans saw progress and success in everything American; "We read back into the qualities that are presupposed in the stereotypes."¹⁶⁷

Political campaigns used language, imagery, vagueness, and tropes to invoke stereotypes. "A leader or an interest that can make itself master of current symbols is master of the current situation."¹⁶⁸ Because knowledge was limited, "we choose between trustworthy and untrustworthy reporters." The public couldn't be everywhere at all times. Many citizens relied only on vague reports about what was going on in the world. Access to information was dependent on income levels, others lacked curiosity. He argued that women in particular were often restricted in the kind of information they received by the social set to which they were born. "The Negroes and the foreign element" developed their own social hierarchies that controlled information within those groups. The individuals entrusted to act on behalf of governments, schools, newspapers, and churches were subject to the same limitations. Therefore, those institutions were unable to do much

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 113.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 116.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 207.

about “the more obvious failings of democracy, against violent prejudice, apathy, and preference for the trivial as against the hunger for sideshows and three legged calves.”¹⁶⁹

“The nation finds itself in the face of aggravated problems without any source of information that it can really trust.” So the public was left to process tainted data using defective reasoning. It meant that public opinion was built upon indirect, unseen and puzzling information about which no certain conclusions could be made. Lippmann’s contention was that democracy had never been considered in light of the distance between images in people’s minds and what went on outside their minds. For Lippmann, the dilemma only heightened the danger of expecting the public to be able to evaluate the kinds of issues before them. He held out little hope that education could solve the problem. For one thing, educators suffered from the same disability as all other citizens. And for another, “education is a matter of years, the emergency a matter of hours.” If education was merely going to reinforce the way things had always been done, nothing would change. Lippmann claimed education was ineffective in creating an engaged citizenry because all it did was reinforce traditional attitudes. Dealing with the modern world required more than simply teaching “morals, manners and patriotism.”¹⁷⁰ If political science could develop new ways to inquire about the world, perhaps education might be of some help. It might teach how to properly assess the basis of information, or about the proper use of history, or to recognize the source of attitudes and stereotypes. Then it might be possible that “the enormous, censoring, stereotyping, and dramatizing apparatus can be liquidated.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 365.

¹⁷⁰ Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), 28.

¹⁷¹ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 407-08.

In his review of *Public Opinion* John Dewey noted that he was particularly impressed by Lippmann's analysis of the problem of knowledge. It was a "more significant statement than professional epistemological philosophers have managed to give."¹⁷² But Dewey thought that Lippmann "surrendered the case for the press to easily," a piquant criticism of one who made his living as an editor and journalist. There was in Dewey's mind a hope that the press could be reformed and that it might get past the sensational to doing the task it ought to be engaged, "treating news events in the light of a continuing study and record of underlying conditions."¹⁷³

Lippmann argued there was another problem in addition to the epistemologic dilemma. Americans were too busy struggling with their own lives to be able to gather and digest the data necessary to make the kinds of decisions required of an "omnicompetent" citizen. There was no one in Lippmann's experience who approached the ideal of the "sovereign and omnicompetent citizen," an individual expected to possess an "unlimited quantity of public spirit, interest, curiosity and effort."¹⁷⁴ "We are concerned with public affairs," he wrote, "but immersed in our private lives." Time and attention were limited.¹⁷⁵ Little time was spent on reading newspapers. Urban dwellers had to cope with a "bath of noise."¹⁷⁶ The private citizen is something like a "deaf spectator" Lippmann wrote, only recalling that he is affected by public affairs by the intrusion of rules and regulations, taxes, and the occasional war. Public affairs were

¹⁷² Dewey, "Public Opinion," 339. Some thirty-five years earlier Dewey had himself been involved in a project with Franklin Ford and Robert Park intended to produce just such a paper, "Thought News." The paper was never published and the project ended in "distressing" circumstances to Dewey. See Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 56-58.

¹⁷³ Dewey, "Public Opinion," 341.

¹⁷⁴ Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 22.

¹⁷⁵ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 57.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

invisible, managed in far off places, controlled by unfamiliar powers.¹⁷⁷ The citizen was poorly informed, “he lives in a world which he cannot see, does not understand and is unable to direct. In the cold light of experience he knows that his sovereignty is a fiction. He reigns in theory, but in fact he does not govern.”¹⁷⁸

Dewey agreed that the citizen was misunderstood, but he had a different explanation, one that relied on the most basic assumption of pragmatism. Dewey argued that individuals did not exist apart from social relations, nor did individuals possess rights prior to the existence of society. Dewey’s analysis of the misapprehension of the nature of the individual led him to different conclusions than Lippmann. Dewey put the blame on a distorted liberalism that was in fact a philosophy of individualism. Dewey worked from the origins of the United States. Instead of recognizing the contingent nature of the American state, liberals now imagined democracy came from “some inalienable sacred authority resident in protesting individuals.” John Locke had prominently argued that non-political rights were part of the very nature of the individual and that the proper role of government was limited to the protection of those rights.¹⁷⁹ This account of individualism was eventually supported by the study of economics as that discipline soon claimed to be the study of natural laws. Economics became entwined with politics. “Proof” that economics was based on a system of natural laws served to support the same kind of claims about politics. It was a small step to the assertion that the sole purpose of government was to protect economic interests.¹⁸⁰ This was an argument Dewey had

¹⁷⁷ Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 13.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 86.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 90-93.

made before, but the pro-business orientation of the administration in Washington only served to reinforce his point.

Changes in material conditions resulted in a “release of human potentialities previously dormant.” What may have been unsettling to the community was “liberating with respect to single persons.” Individuals found themselves freed from old habits, regulations, and institutions. Individualism and democracy developed side by side. Voting and majority rule were portrayed as the acts of individuals “in their untrammelled individual sovereignty.”¹⁸¹ But industrialization had ushered in a “new era of human relationships.”¹⁸² Democratic political theory was built on a conception of independent, self-motivated individuals, but what existed now were “standardized interchangeable units.”¹⁸³ Liberalism joined the mythology of an isolated individual possessing a “ready-made faculty of foresight and prudent calculation” with the doctrine of individuals possessing antecedent natural rights.¹⁸⁴ To Dewey this was rank nonsense. Classic liberalism failed to recognize that the “underlying and generative conditions of concrete behavior are social as well as organic.”¹⁸⁵ Dewey’s conclusion regarding the “problem of the public” was that the same forces which had created the forms of democratic government had also brought about “conditions which halt the social and humane ideals that demand the utilization of government as the genuine instrumentality of an inclusive

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 99-100.

¹⁸² Ibid., 96.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 102.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 103.

and fraternally associated public.” America had no political institutions worthy of it and as a result the democratic public remained inchoate and unorganized.¹⁸⁶

Both men attempted to describe what the “public” really was and was not. Lippmann claimed that theories regarding popular government were based on the conception that “there is a public which directs the course of events.” But in reality the public was a “mere phantom.” The public was not a fixed body, but rather consisted of those persons who were interested in a particular affair at a particular time and could affect it by supporting or rejecting the participants in that affair. “An opinion of the right and the wrong, the good and the bad, the pleasant and unpleasant is dated, is localized, is relative. It applies only to some men in some place under some circumstances.”¹⁸⁷ Private interests and relative values rarely merged into a common interest. The best that could be hoped for was an “accommodation of purpose,” something tantamount to balance of power politics.¹⁸⁸ Conventional theory treated the public as if it were an organism, one person with an organic unity. Liberalism’s treatment of the public as an organic individual created profound confusion that could be eliminated only by recognizing that “it is the individual who acts, not society; it is the individual who thinks, not the collective mind; it is the painter who paints, not the artistic spirit of the age; it is the soldiers who fight and are killed, not the nation.”¹⁸⁹ It was individuals interacting with each other that constituted the public.

Lippmann believed that liberalism had demonstrated that man was part of the natural world and that idea and custom were “bounded by time and space and

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 109.

¹⁸⁷ Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 97.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 108.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 172.

circumstances” and that all opinion had a bias and the holders of those opinions could only see the world from their vantage point, from their stereotypical perspective.¹⁹⁰ However, liberalism could never figure out what to do with this insight as it tried to fashion a coherent public. The liberal approach was to try to tame and enlighten individual interests and somehow have them fit together. But liberalism offered no way of overcoming individual interests. It made appeals to fairness; it provided a “weapon of release, but not a way of life.” Liberalism consistently misjudged the capacity of the public because it “assumed that all mankind was within hearing; that all mankind when it heard would respond homogenously because it had a single soul.” The liberal appeal to the virtue in everybody “was equivalent to an appeal to nobody.”¹⁹¹ The appeal to a sense of civic virtue could only be effective if made to actual individuals. Instead, liberalism “attempted to eliminate the hero entirely.”¹⁹² Other theories of political and social order – here Lippmann invoked Plato, Dante, Hamilton, Bismarck and Lenin – appealed to real people in contrast to the “vague unworldliness” of liberalism. Liberalism’s appeals instead were “escapes from particular purposes into some universal purpose...a flight from the human problem.”¹⁹³

Dewey argued that American democracy had developed out of “genuine community life” in stable locales. The founders attempted to create a government appropriate for a “congeries of self governing communities.” What Dewey’s age inherited then, were ideals and practices designed for local town meetings modified

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 162.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 168.

¹⁹² Ibid., 169.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 170.

through ad hoc improvisations.¹⁹⁴ As America developed and expanded, new circumstances demanded “mobile and fluctuating associational forms.” Americans kept moving. “How can a public,” Dewey asked, “be organized when it literally does not stay in place?”¹⁹⁵ Despite itself, and the lack of intelligent planning, America had achieved some measure of political unity. The cost of national unity, however, was a lost and bewildered public. As Lippmann had argued in *A Preface to Politics* twenty years earlier, Dewey saw declining participation in elections as an indicator of the public’s uncertainty. Factions, “extra-legal agencies,” and intermediary groups gained power. Citizens were reduced to voting for unknown candidates, chosen by political machines. The public was so “confused and eclipsed” that it was unable to grasp the mechanisms of government ostensibly established for their use. Transformations in material and social relations had so complicated matters that the public “cannot identify and distinguish itself.”¹⁹⁶ Because the public was so disorganized, their representatives had little reason to respond to social problems, which only amplified indifference and apathy.¹⁹⁷

Dewey went on to analyze the nature of the state. His emphasis was on the need to understand the state as malleable, not an institution based on eternal principles. The distinction between what was a public issue and what was private concern turned on an analysis of the “scope of the consequences of acts which are so important as to need control, whether by inhibition or promotion.”¹⁹⁸ The public consisted of those affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it was “deemed necessary

¹⁹⁴ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 112.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 135-36.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

to have those consequences systematically cared for.”¹⁹⁹ “The state” Dewey claimed, “is the organization of the public effected through officials for the protection of the interests shared by its members.” Because in no two ages or places did the same public exist, there could be no “best” state. The formation of the state ought to be an experimental process. As times changed so would the state; it must always be “rediscovered.”²⁰⁰ It was the job of political and social science to devise methods for determining appropriate forms of the political system. Belief in the sanctity of one system over another served as a barrier “to orderly and directed change, an invitation to revolution.”²⁰¹

There would be no need for political organization if interactions were limited to immediate face to face encounters in which consequences were “direct and vital.” In a neighborhood where each person knew the other, the state would be “an impertinence.”²⁰² But industry and technology had altered forms of existing association. New material conditions led to the formation of new publics, though those publics had no effective recourse to political institutions because those institutions “persist of their momentum.” Old political structures had to be re-formed by the public itself. Successful political organization could only be achieved through the “use of intelligence to judge consequences.”²⁰³ Activities once thought of as private became public; others once public became private.²⁰⁴ The line between what public and private “has to be discovered experimentally.” It changed over time. “To suppose that an *a priori* conception of the intrinsic nature and limits of the individual on one side and the state on the other will

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 16.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 33.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 34.

²⁰² Ibid., 40.

²⁰³ Ibid., 45.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 49.

yield good results once and for all is absurd.”²⁰⁵ Dewey was arguing for at least the possibility of state intervention in the economy, something that had been successful during the war.

The public established “dikes and channels” to confine actions within prescribed limits but their form did not come from a “general will” or any antecedent cause. Belief that laws came from other sources than human agency inevitably led to replacement of law with force.²⁰⁶ Law was the structure which canalized action, intended to make consequences predictable. Dewey went so far as to say that the nature of consequences was “indifferent,” what mattered was being able to predict consequences.²⁰⁷ A public organized as a state would have an interest in utilizing state apparatus to equalize conditions. The dependent and helpless would become wards of the public. The state would be involved in improving education and working conditions, establishing social insurance, instituting a minimum wage

There was nothing perplexing or even discouraging in the “spectacle of the stupidity and errors of political behavior.” The state was as its officials were. Only through constant watchfulness and criticism of public officials could citizens maintain the integrity and usefulness of a state.²⁰⁸ The measure of a state’s effectiveness was how well it relieved individuals from the “waste of negative struggle and needless conflict and confers upon him positive assurance and reinforcement in what he undertakes.”²⁰⁹ In the

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 65.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 53.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 54.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 69.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 72.

end, Dewey insisted, the state was to be judged by the consequences of its actions; it was no more sacred than any other institution.²¹⁰

Lippmann claimed that the while the judgments of groups were often more coherent than those proffered by individuals, groups could do nothing more than assent or dissent to some proposition put before them²¹¹ No group ever cooperated in any complex affair without some kind of central organization managed by a smaller cadre of people. Advocates of direct democracy, as many of the Progressives had been, hypothesized creative cooperation between self-sufficient individuals. But policies never developed spontaneously in the “mind” of the public.²¹² The contrast between men acting individually and as a public had been misunderstood. The fundamental difference was “between men doing specific things and men attempting to command general results.”²¹³ What the public could do was approve of something which had to be done, or assent to some proposal, “but they cannot create, administer and actually perform the act they have in mind.”²¹⁴ The public could never be a part of the realm of executive acts. It would always be confined to the role of controlling actions of others from the outside. The only way the public had any influence was by influencing an actor in an affair, which meant that the public had a secondary, indirect relationship to events. Public opinion was not a force “directing society to clearly conceived ends.”²¹⁵ Only during a crisis did public opinion mean anything at all. In a crisis the public would align “in such a way as to favor

²¹⁰ Ibid., 74.

²¹¹ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 227.

²¹² Ibid., 243.

²¹³ Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 51.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 52.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 65.

the action of those individuals who may be able to compose the crisis.”²¹⁶ But even here, public opinion could only have an effect after “somebody” challenged the arbitrary power first. Otherwise the public “can do nothing but meddle ignorantly or tyrannically.”²¹⁷

Perhaps Lippmann’s most striking claim was that what appeared to be public consent to policy was, in fact, manufactured consent. No longer were the people sovereign, the purveyors of information had assumed that position. Techniques of persuasion had been revolutionized: “It is no longer possible to believe in the original dogma of democracy: that the knowledge needed for management of human affairs comes from the human heart.”²¹⁸ It was only a fiction concocted by political theorists, Lippmann argued, that the functioning of government could ever be identified with the will of the people.

Democratic theory ignored the fact that “people are fooled, that they do not always know their own interests, and that all men are not equally fitted to govern.”²¹⁹ The political science on which democracy rested “assumed the art of government to be a natural endowment.” Jefferson believed the yeoman farmer possessed innately the requisite qualities to participate in politics and at times even suggested the capacity to govern rested in all the people (at least white people). Even someone like Alexander Hamilton who had little faith in “the people,” believed landholders, merchants and professionals owned an instinct to govern.²²⁰ To Lippmann all of this was dangerously

²¹⁶ Ibid., 68.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 70.

²¹⁸ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 249.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 257.

²²⁰ Ibid.

absurd. What made it even more pernicious was that these “natural” rulers governed on the basis of information that was incomplete.²²¹

If democracy were ever to exist as a spontaneous affair as Jefferson imagined it, the interests of democracy would have had to remain simple and easily managed, the environment within the range of every man’s “direct and certain knowledge.”²²² This much Dewey could agree with. Trouble came when that democratic vision was applied to the modern world, because the idealized citizen, competent to deal with public affairs, selflessly concerned with the course of public affairs, consistently public spirited, was nowhere to be found. The result was a bewildered public. Lippmann claimed (not very convincingly) that his argument was not about “congenital differences between the masterful few and ignorant many.”²²³ It was rather a matter of where men were placed in relation to essential knowledge. Aristocrats and democrats made the same mistake; they failed to acknowledge that “competence exists only in relation to function.”²²⁴

But, and this was the crux of Lippmann’s argument, it had never been proven that a “public opinion” actually existed which could effectively be applied to any democratic mechanism. It was folly to believe that every citizen wanted to or was competent to participate actively in government. If the voter could not master the details of political issues because he did not have the time, the interest, or the knowledge, he would not have a more informed public opinion simply because he was asked to express his opinion more often. Instead, the voter would be more bewildered, more bored and more ready to go along uncritically:

²²¹ Ibid., 258.

²²² Ibid., 270.

²²³ Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 149.

²²⁴ Ibid., 150.

These various remedies, eugenic, educational, ethical, populist and socialist all assume that either the voters are inherently competent to direct the course of affairs or that they are making progress toward such an ideal. I think it is a false ideal. I do not mean an undesirable ideal. I mean an unattainable ideal, bad only in the sense that it is bad for a fat man to try to be a ballet dancer. An ideal should express the true possibilities of its subject. When it does not it perverts the true possibilities. The ideal of the omniscient, sovereign citizen is, in my opinion such a false ideal. It is unattainable. The pursuit of it is misleading. The failure to achieve it has produced the current disenchantment.²²⁵

Problems that might have been solvable became intractable precisely because the public exerted its force. What *was* left for the public in Lippmann's scheme was the determination of whether actors in a given controversy followed appropriate rules or sought to satisfy their own arbitrary desires.²²⁶ Political scientists could devise methods of judging whether the rules were followed. Civic education could inform the public about the methods political scientists had developed.²²⁷ That was it. "When we remember," Lippmann wrote, "that the public consists of busy men reading newspapers for half an hour or so a day" the prudent course of action was for the public not to get involved in political issues at all.²²⁸

Lippmann's way out of the dilemma was reliance on experts. He argued that reliance on experts was not evidence of "sheep-like nature."²²⁹ It would be important to consult a number of experts and they ought to be forced to answer to each other.²³⁰ Lippmann did not have much to offer as to how one expert might be chosen over another. It was a question "we need not try to enter," though Lippmann, curiously enough, seemed

²²⁵ Ibid., 39.

²²⁶ Ibid., 144.

²²⁷ Ibid., 145.

²²⁸ Ibid., 118-19.

²²⁹ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 223.

²³⁰ Ibid., 224.

to feel the answer could be found in psychoanalysis.²³¹ He did not question the need to publicly air the recommendations proposed by experts, but he thought it preposterous that their deliberations would be comprehensible or even of interest to many citizens.

Dewey's response was to consider whether management of political institutions by experts would advance the cause of democracy. Non-political activities were all directed by specialists, yet the political realm resisted their influence. Most public concerns were technical matters: sanitation, public health, housing, city planning, regulation and distribution of immigrants. Solutions to those kinds of problems could only be achieved by factual inquiry, something other than counting votes.²³² But Dewey was adamantly opposed to Lippmann's proposal. Rule by experts was a "revival of the Platonic notion that philosophers should be kings," though experts had replaced philosophers because "philosophy has become something of a joke."²³³ A cynic, Dewey observed, might think that the whole expert plan was a "reverie entertained by the intellectual class in compensation for an impotence." If the masses were indeed "intellectually irredeemable" as claimed, possessed of both "too many desires and too much power," they weren't going to permit rule by experts anyway. Their very ostensible infirmities -- "ignorance, bias, frivolity, jealousy, instability"-- made them unlikely candidates for passive submission to rule by intellectuals; "rule by an economic class may be disguised from the masses; rule by experts could not be covered up."²³⁴

Dewey believed that expertise was appropriate in administration of narrowly framed issues where general policy was already established. However, if experts shut

²³¹ Ibid., 222.

²³² Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 123.

²³³ Ibid., 204.

²³⁴ Ibid., 205.

themselves off from the public as they became a separate class, they would be “shut off from the knowledge of the needs which they are supposed to serve.”²³⁵ Popular government served to educate in that it “forces a recognition that there are common interests, even though the recognition of what they are is confused.” Segregating a class of experts would inevitably remove them from deliberation with the public. The expert class would become “a class with private interests and private knowledge, which in social matters is not knowledge at all.” No government by experts in which the “masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few.”

There was a role for experts though. “The essential need...is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public.” Inquiry was something at which experts were most competent. Their expertise was not in framing policy, but in discovery and publication of the facts upon which inquiry depends. Once the facts were identified, would the public have the intelligence to make the appropriate judgments? The talent required to make decisions of that type were exaggerated in Dewey’s estimation. Until propaganda and secrecy were replaced by inquiry, “We have no way of telling how apt for judgment of social policies the existing intelligence of the masses may be.” Further, *effective* intelligence, was not an “original innate endowment.” Rather, effective intelligence was dependent upon “the education which social conditions effect.”²³⁶ Dewey envisioned a general rise in the level of intelligence resulting from a more enlightened state of social affairs, “the notion that

²³⁵ Ibid., 206.

²³⁶ Ibid., 209.

intelligence is a personal endowment or personal attainment is the great conceit of the intellectual class.”²³⁷

Lippmann understood that there were those who argued “the cure for the evils of democracy is more democracy,” that all would be solved if only the popular will could be focused and determined because the will of the people was wise and beneficent. It would not work. Technical solutions, the sort Progressives had proposed – extensions of suffrage, initiatives, referendums, recalls, direct primaries, elected judiciary – would be no more effective.²³⁸ Lippmann knew his understanding of democracy differed radically from those of active reformers who believed that the voter ought to be treated as a “responsible man.” Perhaps he had Dewey in mind:

It was believed that if only he could be taught more facts, if only he would take more interest, if only he would read more and better newspapers, if only he would listen to more lectures and read more reports, he would gradually be trained to direct public affairs. The whole assumption is false. It rests upon a false conception of public opinion and a false conception of the way the public acts. No sound scheme of civic education can come of it. No progress can be made toward this unattainable ideal.²³⁹

To this point, the dialogue between Dewey and Lippmann had been on terrain that Lippmann had chosen. Dewey had worked within the framework that Lippmann established because he felt that Lippmann’s challenge to American democracy had to be met. He considered Lippmann to be of his own “intellectual weight.”²⁴⁰ Dewey, the “philosopher of democracy,” knew that when Americans thought of democracy they thought first of political democracy, of voting, of government, and how well it responded. He knew that his passionate advocacy of radical pervasive democracy would come to

²³⁷ Ibid., 211.

²³⁸ Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 33.

²³⁹ Ibid., 146.

²⁴⁰ Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 159.

nothing if political democracy failed. Dewey was at something of a disadvantage; his writing style was nothing like Lippmann's. A sympathetic reader of *The Public and Its Problems* called it "maddeningly obscure."²⁴¹ Lippmann was a master stylist: acerbic, cutting, funny, relentless.

Dewey approached the subject of political democracy as he did most everything else, as if it were a problem to solve, experimentally. He offered a method that might be useful in developing a solution to the problems of politics in the 1920s. Lippmann on the other hand had an answer, *the* answer. But it was a facile answer. It is always easier to say no, it cannot be done. Most everybody that has ever been in a public place and looked around has at one time or another said to themselves, "That's my peer? That is who is going to make decisions that will affect my life?" Maybe the answer really was no, but that was not something that Dewey was going to allow to go unchallenged. It must have been infuriating at times to read Lippmann's biting criticism of what Dewey had spent his life defending. Doubly infuriating because so much of what Lippmann wrote had the ring of truth. All Dewey had to do was look at the White House to see that. But to Dewey's credit he tried to meet Lippmann's thrusts without resorting to platitudes and exhortations of faith. Some of the time he and Lippmann were talking past each other, a measure of how far they had come from their days in the Progressive era.

What is clear in their exchange is where each man believed he stood in relation to America. Philosopher Michael Walzer has developed a taxonomy of social criticism. One

²⁴¹ James W. Carey, "Reconceiving "Mass" And "Media", in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: 1988), 78. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. said of Dewey, "He spoke as God would have spoken had He been inarticulate but keenly desirous to tell you how it was." David A. Hollinger, ed., *The American Intellectual Tradition, Volume Ii 1865 to the Present*, Fifth ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 201.

sort of criticism is “disembodied.” It comes from a “dispassionate stranger” or an “estranged native” who displays “radical detachment.” That type of critic portrays himself as disinterested and dispassionate, “in, but not wholly of their society.” The other type of critic is the “connected,” or the “local judge.”²⁴² There is no doubt into which category Lippmann fit. He was the disembodied critic, a designation he would have been proud to bear. It was a position that served him well as a journalist and advisor to the powerful. His distance often gave him a unique and advantageous position to make judgments. But as Walzer points out, it “presses its practitioners toward manipulation and compulsion.”²⁴³ This rings true of Lippmann too.

Dewey belongs in the connected critic class. His life’s work was devoted to erasing divisions and barriers, at least the ones of which he was cognizant. There were times when Dewey had a surprisingly tin ear. He could be cruel and vengeful. His treatment of Randolph Bourne, both when Bourne was alive and after he died, was particularly unfortunate. But the power of his vision for America is as powerful today as it was eighty years ago.

Lippmann was finished in their exchange, but Dewey had more to say about democracy. Dewey was on the offensive now. Lippmann had exaggerated the importance of politics and political action and minimized the need and the potential of educating the entire public in the process of democracy. “The difficulty is so fundamental,” Dewey wrote, “that it can be met only by a solution more fundamental than [Lippmann] has

²⁴² Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 36-38.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 64. Lippmann would have fit perfectly into Robert Dawidoff’s study of Henry Adams, Henry James, and George Santayana as critical outsiders. Robert Dawidoff, *The Genteel Tradition and the Sacred Rage: High Culture Vs. Democracy in Adams, James & Santayana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

dared to give.” Democracy was “a word of many meanings.” One meaning, and “not the most inspiring,” was political.²⁴⁴

Industrialization had created a “Great Society” distinguished by vast webs of impersonal relationships. Simultaneously, industrial development “invaded and disintegrated the small community of former times without generating a ‘Great Community.’” Traditional political and legal forms were not competent to deal with the repercussions. The modern world was one where consequences were “felt rather than perceived...suffered but not known.” There were no state mechanisms to “canalize the streams of social action and thereby regulate them...Hence the publics are amorphous and unarticulated.” Issues were too complex and intricate. “The social situation has been so changed by the facts of an industrial age that traditional general principles have little practical meaning.”²⁴⁵ The environment was transformed faster than the social ethos. Beliefs and ideals seemed “thin and wavering” because they were not in tune with actual conditions. The physical tools of communication had evolved, but thoughts and aspirations consistent with this new age had not been created:

Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible.²⁴⁶

Here is where Dewey diverged so sharply from Lippmann. Public opinion was formed by communication within a community. The sources of information mattered, but everyone in community life had the capacity to utilize information if it became the subject of social

²⁴⁴ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 82-83.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 126-32.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

intercourse. Dewey was proposing that conversation was the context for opinion, not expertise, or science owned by a privileged aristocracy.

The democratic ideal was one that seemed at odds with the modern age. What had been forgotten was that democracy was richer than any formal structure. Dewey argued that if fully realized, democracy would affect “all modes of human association,” the family, the school, industry, religion. He knew the old adage, just as Lippmann did, that the cure for the problems of democracy was more democracy. He rejected that nostrum, just as Lippmann had, if it meant only the provision of more of the same. Dewey’s answer was to return to the idea of democracy itself, an effort directed at “clarifying and deepening our apprehension of it.”²⁴⁷ None of the machinery of democracy was sacred; machinery was designed to meet needs. Democracy was not itself “a mystic faith,” not the gift of an “overruling providence,” but a “well-attested conclusion from historic facts.”²⁴⁸ Democracy did not develop as an immanent idea unfolding or of some world spirit moving towards a foreordained end. Rather it was the “outcome of a vast series of adaptations and responsive accommodations, each to its own particular situation.”²⁴⁹ He believed the general trend was towards making the interest of the public “a more supreme guide.” The problem remained though – how was a “scattered, mobile and manifold public” going to find itself and express its interests? This was the first step, more crucial than tinkering with democratic forms. “The problem lies deeper; it is in the

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 144.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 146.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 84.

first instance an intellectual problem: the search for conditions under which the Great Society may become the Great Community.”²⁵⁰

What then was democracy? Viewed from the individual’s perspective, it was possession of “a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain.” From the perspective of the group, it demanded liberating the potential of members of the group consistent with the interests and goods which were held in common. Every individual was a member of many groups. All were “enriching and enriched” by participation in family life, industry and voluntary associations. Democracy was not an alternative to other forms of associated life, “It is the idea of community itself...The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.”²⁵¹

The concepts associated with democracy – fraternity, liberty and equality – were “hopeless abstractions” unless understood in association with communal life. If not comprehended in that manner, equality became merely “a creed of mechanical identity” impossible to realize; liberty became merely “independence of social ties” ending in anarchy:

[Liberty] is that secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which takes place only in rich and manifold association with others; the power to be an individualized self making a distinctive contribution and enjoying in its own way the fruits of association. Equality denotes the unhampered share which each individual member of the community has in the consequences of associated action. It is equitable because it is measured only by need and capacity to utilize, not by extraneous factors which deprive one in order that another may take and have...Equality does not signify that kind of mathematical or physical

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 147.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 148.

equivalence in virtue of which any one element may be substituted for another. It denotes effective regard for whatever is distinctive and unique in each, irrespective of physical and psychological inequalities. It is not a natural possession but is a fruit of the community when its action is directed by its character as a community.²⁵²

Dewey recognized that associations might occur without thought, but their mere existence did not mean the creation of community. True community recognized desired ends which could only be realized through communication. Culture allowed for memory and foresight, for calculation and planning, for reflective thought and action which fostered the development of shared goals and ideals.²⁵³ It was education's purpose to bring young people within "the traditions, outlook and interests" which characterized a community. "Everything which is distinctively human is learned." Foremost of the lessons to be learned was "an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community."²⁵⁴

He returned to what he considered the fundamental question: "What are the conditions under which it is possible for the Great Society to approach more closely and vitally the status of a Great Community, and thus take form in genuinely democratic societies and state?"²⁵⁵ Outdated concepts had to be discarded. First among them, was the idea that each individual was born with the native capacity to participate in civic affairs. Dewey took note of Lippmann's "omnicompetent individual: competent to frame policies, to judge their results; competent to know in all situations demanding political action what is good for his own good, and competent to enforce his idea of good and the

²⁵² Ibid., 150-51.

²⁵³ Ibid., 153.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 155.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 157.

will to effect it against contrary forces.”²⁵⁶ He had no doubt that history had destroyed the idea that an individual was competent in all situations to know what was in his best interest and to know how best to achieve it. But what permits us, he asked, to assume that statesmen had the special knowledge required for the effective organization of a democratic public? Organization was a technical problem and the requisite expertise did not yet exist. Only through the method and spirit of science would it be possible to develop the appropriate skills for any member of the democratic community.²⁵⁷

Properly informed public opinion required continuous and connected inquiry, “a thing is fully known only when it is published, shared, socially accessible.”²⁵⁸ There was room for disagreement – even if competing policy proposals were based on the same set of facts. But “genuinely public policy” could only be formed on the basis of knowledge acquired through “systematic, thorough and well-equipped search.”²⁵⁹ Dewey’s complaint was that the social sciences could not publish their findings quickly enough. Rapid communication only promoted the dissemination of news, events that deviated from the norm. But the *meaning* of the news depended on social consequences which could only be determined in context.²⁶⁰ The days were past when government could be carried on without any pretense of determining public wishes. Thus “there is an enormous premium upon all methods which affect their formation.”²⁶¹

Would it really matter, Dewey asked, if inquiry were perfected? Would the public be interested in the results? He had a surprising response. The public would be interested

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 158.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 166.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 176-77.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 178.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 179-80.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 181.

only if the art of presentation were perfected. “The freeing of the artist in literary presentation...is as much a precondition of the desirable creation of adequate opinion on public matters as is the freeing of social inquiry.”²⁶² Here Dewey was arguing for the importance of art in democracy. “The function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness...Artists have always been the real purveyors of news.”²⁶³ Sharing socially available knowledge would “directly and in unpredictable ways” alter the working of human nature. New potentialities would be released; none of them predictable.²⁶⁴ Education needed to be improved and scientific inquiry into the development of children pursued. More money needed to be spent on understanding the causes of mental illness and retardation. Improved techniques might lead to control over abnormal behavior.²⁶⁵ Ultimately the substitution of experiment for “absolutistic logic” would mean that “no longer will views generated in view of special situations be frozen into absolute standards and masquerade as eternal truths.”²⁶⁶

Dewey was restrained regarding the chance that American democracy could be reformed. “In its deepest and richest sense a community must always remain a matter of face-to-face intercourse. That is why the family and neighborhood, with all their deficiencies, have always been the chief agencies of nurture.” The Great Community, in the sense of free and full communication was possible, but it could never possess all the qualities that marked a local community. The best that could be hoped for was that the larger community would be competent to order relations and enrich the experience of the

²⁶² Ibid., 183.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 197.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 199.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 203.

smaller, more localized community.²⁶⁷ “There is something deep within human nature itself which pulls toward settled relationships,” Dewey wrote. “Happiness which is full of content and peace is found only in enduring ties with others.” He wondered if the “mania for motion, of fretful discontent” were only attempts at filling the vacuum left by the breakdown of community ties. The rise of cities, the concentration of wealth, rather than promoting social bonds, only abetted the “demolition of ties that form local communities.” He concluded that there was no way to predict either the development or further decline of community. One thing was certain in Dewey’s mind, “Unless local communal life can be restored, the public cannot adequately resolve its most urgent problem: to find and identify itself.” Democracy depended on it.²⁶⁸

There is something troubling about Dewey’s nostalgic evocation of the small face-to-face community of some distant past. Omitted from Dewey’s vision is any acknowledgement that there had always been some left out or relegated to the margins. Lippmann had made a point to consider the move towards fuller equality of women, albeit not in a completely satisfactory manner. Lippmann had at least mentioned racial inequity. Perhaps Dewey felt that democratic education and reorganization would automatically bring racial minorities into community, but if he did, he never wrote about it.²⁶⁹ His comments regarding the position of women were limited too.²⁷⁰ Dewey

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 211.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 213-14.

²⁶⁹ Dewey’s failure to address the plight of African-Americans through the course of his life is really surprising. In 1909, he gave a speech at Cooper Union in response to “The Call.” That may be a testament to Mary White Ovington’s persistence. Daniel Levering Lewis, W. E. B. Du Bois’s biographer, thinks that Du Bois probably wrote the speech which takes up less than two pages in Dewey’s collected works. David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois - Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (NY: Henry Holt, 1993), 300. The speech was found in the archives of the NAACP, not Dewey’s papers. Dewey never wrote of lynching or racial discrimination or segregation. There are virtually no mentions of race in the thirty-seven volumes of his Collected Works, nor in his correspondence. In 1932 he spoke at the NAACP’s 23rd annual convention.

certainly wasn't a racist, but African-Americans seemed outside his purview. Nor did it seem he had taken account of how often those small communities demanded stifling conformity, an observation made that had long ago been made by Tocqueville.

That being said, there are passages in *The Public and its Problems* of incomparably intense emotional power. There is beauty amidst the "maddeningly obscure." Granted, there are not many hints revealed on how to get to the "Great Community." But to see Dewey's portrait of an active, engaging, emotionally fulfilling democratic community next to Lippmann's sterile, expertly organized, republican society is to make the choice between them easy. Perhaps that is a judgment of the heart over the head.

There were only limited interactions between the two men after 1926. In 1930, Dewey wrote to Lippmann:

It was very good of you to write me about my last book. On the whole, I find more satisfaction, and certainly consolation, in the comments of those who, like yourself, are not engaged in the work of philosophy professionally, than I do from the reactions of some, at least, of my colleagues.²⁷¹

He minimized the role of racism and instead ascribed discrimination to economic considerations. In the months prior to the convention, Du Bois had written Dewey four letters asking him to write something for the *The Crisis*, but Dewey only responded to the last. Unfortunately Dewey's response has never been located. Du Bois responded to the last, saying that he understood and invited Dewey to respond whenever he could. That Du Bois persisted says something I suppose. (Dewey's papers are housed at the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University.)

²⁷⁰ Dewey's relationship with Jane Addams was one of the most important of his life. To his credit, he treated Addams as he would any of the other intellectual giants he was acquainted with. It does not seem to me that her influence on him did not have much to do with gender issues. Charlene Haddock Siegfried, a superb scholar of pragmatism, makes a convincing case that pragmatism is a powerful analytic and organizing principle for feminism. But she is a lot less convincing when she tries to demonstrate that Dewey expressed a direct concern for gender. Siegfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric*. See also Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 167 fn 13.

²⁷¹ Dewey to Lippmann, 14 January 1930, Lippmann Papers, Yale Sterling Library. It is uncertain which of Dewey's books he was referring to, though it most likely was *The Quest for Certainty*. Though Lippmann graduated from Harvard, his papers are housed at Yale's Sterling Library. There are only a limited number of items of correspondence between Dewey and Lippmann in the archives. Dewey's papers do not contain any additional items. Over the course of the years, they exchanged occasional letters,

Dewey wrote another letter in 1941, this one not to Lippmann but to James T. Farrell, the novelist: "I can't but feel that L's devotion now to classical learning and the Great Tradition is another case of Jewish inferiority compensatory reaction...About Lippmann – it would be hard to find a more egregious example of concocted ignorance."²⁷²

In 1937 John Dewey reviewed Walter Lippmann's *The Good Society* which had been published that year. Dewey was harsh in his criticism. Lippmann had "give[n] encouragement and practical support to reactionaries...because the picture he draws of Liberalism is in terms of an idealistic Utopia."²⁷³ *The Good Society* ignored the means that would be required to achieve the ends Lippmann had in mind. Lippmann's argument rested on "an extremely abstract simplification." Lippmann, Dewey wrote "has stated the legalistic and the lawyer's conception of human relations better than any lawyer I know of has stated it." Most striking is this comment: "Lippmann, like many other well-intentioned persons, is strong for government by law rather than by men..."

In 1912 Lippmann had written something quite different, "Jealous of all individuals, democracies have turned to machines. They have tried to blot out human prestige, to minimize the influence of personality...Governments have to be carried on by men, however much we distrust them."²⁷⁴

always respectful and formal, offering advice regarding publishers, enlisting assistance, passing along requests for contributions to various organizations, expressing appreciation for providing and publishing articles, praising each other for an occasional essay.

²⁷² John Dewey to James T. Farrell, February 18, 1941 (Dewey papers Morris Library, Southern Illinois University), quoted in Diggins, "From Pragmatism to Natural Law: Walter Lippmann's Quest for the Foundation of Legitimacy," 534.

²⁷³ John Dewey, "Liberalism in a Vacuum: A Critique of Walter Lippmann's Social Philosophy," review of *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Good Society*, by Walter Lippmann, *Common Sense* 6 (1937): 489.

²⁷⁴ Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, 16.

They had traveled quite a distance in twenty-five years.

Andrew J. Bacevich is Professor of History and International Relations at Boston University, a graduate of West Point and a veteran of the Vietnam War. Bacevich is the author of *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War*.²⁷⁵ His cautionary message regarding America's dangerous fixation on military power is especially convincing, coming as it does from a former officer and self-described conservative. He spoke out against the Iraq War before it began. He continues to be an eloquent opponent to the American occupation of Iraq and of the Bush administration's approach to foreign policy.

On May 13, 2007, his 27 year old son, an Army 1st Lieutenant, was killed in Iraq.

On May 27, 2007, his essay, "I Lost My Son to a War I Oppose," was published in the Washington Post. As a citizen, he wrote, he had tried to promote a critical understanding of U.S. foreign policy in books, and articles, and in talks to groups, both large and small.

Not for a second did I expect my own efforts to make a difference. But I did hope that my voice might combine with those of others – teachers, writers, activists and ordinary folks – to educate the public about the folly of the course on which the nation has embarked. I hoped that those efforts might produce a political climate conducive to change.

This I can now see, was an illusion.

Bacevich went on:

The people have spoken, and nothing of substance has changed. The November 2006 midterm elections signified an unambiguous repudiation of the policies that

²⁷⁵ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

landed us in our predicament. But half a year later, the war continues, with no end in sight. Indeed, by sending more troops to Iraq (and by extending the tours of duty of those, like my son, who were there already), Bush has signaled his complete disregard for what was once quaintly referred to as the “will of the people.”²⁷⁶

Eighty years after Walter Lippmann and John Dewey confronted the future of American democracy we have come to this. Education, precisely the sort that Dewey had in mind, education intended to transform the habits and attitudes of the American citizenry, has failed. Walter Lippmann assured us, that if nothing else (and for him, there was nothing else), at least the American public had the wherewithal to vote no, and its voice would be heard. That too is a failed promise.

How have we let this happen?

²⁷⁶ Andrew J. Bacevich, "I Lost My Son to a War I Oppose. We Were Both Doing Our Duty," *Washington Post*, May 27, 2007 2007.

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