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Education for public democracy: A theoretical and ethnographic investigation

Sehr, David Thomas, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1993

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A

Education for Public Democracy:
A Theoretical and Ethnographic Investigation

by

David T. Sehr

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University
of New York

1993

c 1993

David T. Sehr

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Abstract

Education for Public Democracy:
A Theoretical and Ethnographic Investigation

by

David Sehr

This study explores the ideological roots of two major strains of democracy in the U.S., and using a set of analytical categories developed from one of these ideological traditions, analyzes key aspects of two urban alternative public high schools that aspire to public democratic education.

The first ideological tradition is a hegemonic one that sees democracy as a privately-oriented, individualistic system with little room for most people to participate in self-rule. This tradition is rooted in the political thought of Hobbes and Locke, the authors of the Federalist Papers, Adam Smith and the Utilitarian Liberals, and twentieth century American pluralist theorists and free market economists.

The second ideological tradition provides a counter-hegemonic vision of democracy, grounded in the work of Rousseau, Jefferson, Dewey, Mills and several important feminist theorists such as Carol Gould, Nancy Fraser, Carole Pateman and Carol Gilligan. This ideological tradition of public democracy sees people's participation in public life as the essential ingredient in democratic government.

Drawing on the public democratic theoretical tradition, an outline is developed of the essential values, attributes

and capacities a public democratic citizen should possess. Based on these essential citizenship characteristics, a set of analytical categories is constructed for studying the curricula of schools that aspire to teach public democratic citizenship. These analytical categories are employed in sample analyses of various aspects of the curriculum of two "democratic" alternative urban public high schools. Field research in the study schools involved class observations, informal teacher and student interviews, and in one school, a series of student focus group discussions.

This study explores two competing visions of democracy which frame a discussion of the problems and possibilities of democratic citizenship in the U.S.; it demonstrates a method for analyzing school curriculum and practice, to see to what degree "democratic schools" promote young people's development as public democratic citizens; and it encourages debate and further research into the kinds of curriculum and organizational features educators should and should not employ to promote public democratic citizenship.

Education for Public Democracy
A Theoretical and Ethnographic Investigation

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Introduction

This dissertation is motivated by a conviction that even as the United States has just celebrated the two hundredth anniversaries of its Constitution and Bill of Rights, American society, and the democracy that should be at its heart, are facing serious problems. In my estimation, this country's mounting social ills can only be addressed through the active efforts of citizens to expand their power, vitalize their democracy and take greater control over their government and their lives.

My project is to undertake a theoretical and ethnographic study which explores the possibilities for creating education for public democratic citizenship, within an urban public high school context. Education can be a key institution for helping people begin to move beyond the narrow, privately-oriented citizenship roles they now play, and take on new roles as effective public citizens. Part I (Chapters 1-4) provides the theoretical foundation upon which I make this claim, and build my ethnographic study.

Before one can enter into a meaningful discussion of education for democracy, it is necessary to understand something about the roles of ideology and hegemony in the processes of social reproduction and social change; and the role of education as an institution for both intellectual and ideological preparation of young people. It is the task of the first chapter to examine the concepts of ideology and

hegemony and the importance of education in promoting the counter-hegemonic project of creating public democracy.

Because this study invokes the potent American cultural ideals of democracy and citizenship, it is important to ground the work in an exploration of the ideological history that forms the basis of our understandings of these concepts. In Chapter 2, I identify two powerful, competing democratic ideological traditions that have struggled to shape the understandings and practices of U.S. democracy.

The first is a hegemonic tradition that sees democracy as a privately-oriented, individualistic system with little room for most people to participate in self-rule. In this construction of democracy, most citizens are expected to restrict their public political activity to voting for their preference from a pair of pre-designated candidates for any given political office. While elected officials then get on with the business of governing, most people turn their attention back to the private worlds of family, job and fulfillment of needs in the consumer market. This ideological tradition traces its roots back to the seventeenth century thinkers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, to the authors of the Federalist Papers, to Adam Smith and the utilitarian liberals, and then on to twentieth century American pluralist theorists and their free market economist colleagues. I call the vision of these theorists federalist democracy, for its most coherent early American explication in the Federalist Papers.

Chapter 2 also discusses the roots of the second theoretical tradition, which provides a counter-hegemonic vision of democracy founded on the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson. I call this understanding of democracy public democracy.

In the third chapter, I examine the contributions of more recent theorists to the development of the concept of public democracy, by looking at the work of John Dewey, C. Wright Mills and several important feminist and participatory democratic theorists such as Carol Gould, Nancy Frazer, Carole Pateman, Carol Gilligan and others. This understanding of democracy sees people's participation in public life as the essential ingredient in democratic government.

In Chapter 3, I also take on a task which many critical educational theorists, despite their eloquence, have neglected. Drawing on the theoretical tradition of public democracy, I outline some of the essential values, attributes and capacities that an ideal United States citizen would have to possess in order to participate effectively in a public democracy. Establishing some sense of the key values, attributes and capacities necessary for public democratic citizenship sets up a vision toward which aspiring democratic educators can help their students develop.

As I argue in Chapter 4, educators who wish to move in the direction of public democratic education can benefit

from an examination and analysis of the experience of others who are working toward this goal. Given the deteriorating state of social life in many U.S. inner cities, it is particularly urgent for educators to examine possible models of democratic education that are situated in urban public schools. But before one can fruitfully study real examples of democratic schools, it is necessary to deal with two issues which are essential for orienting both the conduct of field research and the analysis of collected data. I have devoted much of Chapter 4 to an examination of these two issues.

The first issue is that of the nature of political "socialization" in schools. I argue that political learning or socialization is a complex, interactive process which is constantly being negotiated between teachers and students. Based on this understanding, one can construct a research model that takes into consideration not only the organization, educational programs and practices of schools to be studied, but also the ways in which students respond to the school and its teachers, and make their experience in school their own.

The second issues involves the need to develop analytical categories that will help make sense of what one finds in a concrete study of democratic schooling. I have found it useful to develop analytical categories which draw on the ideological history that forms the basis of current understandings of democracy in the U.S. Specifically, I

propose in Chapter 4 a number of ideal organizational features and educational practices which I believe will engage students in school work and school life, and help them develop the values, attributes and capacities I discussed in Chapter 3 as necessary for public democratic citizenship. This creates a framework of analysis that researchers and educators can use as a standard for assessing the degree to which a school's organization, curriculum and classroom practices may help nurture students as public democratic citizens. Such a framework of analysis provides a way of reading ethnographies of democratic schooling which connects a school's educational practices to the tradition of ideas associated with public democracy.

In Part II (Chapters 5-7) I report on my field research in two urban alternative public high schools that are attempting to create an experience of democratic education for their students. It is important to note that I do not attempt to develop a complete ethnographic description and analysis of the cultures of the two schools, as might be done in a traditional ethnographic study. Instead, I describe my research experience in each school, and do a fairly detailed analysis of a few selected events, observations and conversations with students and teachers, utilizing the framework for analysis that I developed in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5, I offer a narrative account of how personal, institutional, social, cultural and political

dynamics influenced the evolution of this field research project. One of my aims in this chapter is to demonstrate some of the complexities and obstacles that outside researchers face in designing and conducting qualitative studies of urban democratic schools. Field research is not at all a straightforward "scientific" endeavor. Rather it is an intensively negotiated process that involves all the human dynamics that can come into play when a person from one culture ventures into another cultural world as a visitor, observer and ultimately a kind of evaluator of the practices of the other culture.

Chapter 6 presents a more detailed description of the organization, curriculum and teaching approaches of the two high schools, as well as discussion of the official goals the schools have for educating their students for democratic citizenship. This provides the necessary background for understanding the analyses I do in the following chapter.

In Chapter 7, I draw selectively from my field notes to describe a few examples of ways in which these two schools encourage student engagement in the schools' programs and school life generally, and attempt to nurture the values, attributes and capacities that students will need for public democratic citizenship. These examples, drawn from my observations in classrooms and faculty meetings, as well as conversations with students and teachers inside and outside of school, also provide glimpses into the ways students understand and respond to their experience in these schools.

For each selected snippet of school life, I analyze the extent to which the chosen example seems to demonstrate (or not to demonstrate) educational practices that are likely to promote public democratic citizenship. My analysis uses as an analytical tool the set of characteristics and practices of an ideal-typical democratic secondary school that I developed in Chapter 4. This analysis serves two purposes: First, it demonstrates the viability of the analytical framework I have developed for studying schools which aspire to public democratic education. Second, my analyses of the slices of school life that I have documented can be expected to stimulate discussion and debate among democratic educators, as well as further research into the most promising organizational features and educational practices for promoting public democratic citizenship.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter. Here, I offer my reflections on some of the lessons I have gleaned from my research in Uptown and Metropolitan High Schools. These lessons touch on issues I identify as important for the study of urban "democratic" schools, as well as my insights into some of the qualities of school organization, curriculum and practice that make for effective public democratic education. I highlight the need for researchers and educators to consciously address issues of cultural difference. I stress the need for schools to establish humane, caring communities of teachers and students grounded in personal relationships. I argue that democratic

educators must put public democratic education at the center of their school's mission. Finally, I make a strong case for building student voices into the process of school governance.

Although this study by no means exhausts the questions of how we can most fruitfully research democratic education, and what we might learn in the process, I hope it offers a useful framework for analysis, and perhaps a few insights into effective educational practice, which might contribute to shaping public discussion of these issues.

Part I
Theoretical Underpinnings for the Research and Practice of
Public Democratic Education

Chapter 1

Ideology, Hegemony and Education

In this first chapter I examine the concepts of ideology and hegemony as they have been used by several major theorists of ideology: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Louis Althusser, and Antonio Gramsci.¹ Based on my reading of these theorists, I argue that ideology is an important force contributing to the persistence of the current social order in the U.S., with its low levels of democratic participation; its privatized ideas and practices of democracy; and its entrenched social relations of domination.

As marxists, these theorists are concerned primarily with the problems of class domination and the possibilities for people to organize to challenge these relations of

¹ One might also examine Karl Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936). However, Mannheim's project is quite divergent from that of the theorists I have chosen to draw upon. Mannheim sees ideology as a set of beliefs that are inherently tainted by class or group based interest. His project is to try to make interest conscious, so its effects can be purged from ideology, to allow for a purer study of what remains -- knowledge (un-tinged by interest). Thus Mannheim is primarily concerned with creating a scientific sociology of knowledge, not with understanding how ideology might contribute to social stability or change.

Nevertheless, what is interesting for social change projects is his concept of utopia or utopian ideas. He sees utopian ideas as the engines of change and advancement of society. For Mannheim, utopian ideas "succeed through counteractivity in transforming the existing historical reality into one more in accord with their own conceptions" (p. 195). There is a sense, then, in which Mannheim's concept of utopia corresponds with a Gramscian conception of counter-hegemonic ideology, which I will discuss shortly.

domination. However, it is important to recognize that there are also other types of domination in U.S. society, such as domination based on race, gender and sexual orientation, which also figure prominently in the current hegemonic order. Some would argue that these forms of domination are mere bi-products of capitalist social relations.² However, while racial and gender based inequality certainly serve the interests of capitalism at times, they also have their own histories and dynamics.³ Efforts to challenge the existing hegemonic order must take this into account, and address not only inequality and injustice based on class, but also continuing oppression based on race, gender and sexual orientation. Since these

² Perhaps the most prominent theoretical argument in this vein is Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, excerpted section on gender relations found in Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg (eds.), Feminist Frameworks, (New York: McGraw Hill, Inc., 1984), p. 121-131.

³ For a wide sampling of feminist theorists on the nature of gender based domination, see Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg (eds.), Feminist Frameworks, Part 2, "Alternative Feminist Frameworks," pp. 81-209. See also, Zillah Eisenstein, "Constructing a Theory of Capitalist patriarchy and Socialist Feminism," in Women, Class and the Feminist Imagination, Karen V. Hansen and Ilene J. Philipson (eds.) (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); Barbara Ehrenreich, "Life Without Father: Reconsidering Socialist-Feminist Theory," also in Hansen and Philipson, pp. 268-276; Mary Dietz, "Context Is All: Feminism and Theories of Citizenship," in Daedalus, Fall 1987, p. 1-24.

On debates over the primacy of race versus class domination, see Kenneth B. Clark and Carl Gershman, "The Black Plight: Race or Class?" New York Times Magazine, Oct. 5, 1980; William J. Wilson, The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

forms of domination are part of the hegemonic order, ideology plays a role in their persistence in society as well. Therefore analysis of the role of ideology in class based domination can also contribute to an understanding of the role of ideology in these other forms of domination.

Using Antonio Gramsci's idea of counter-hegemonic struggle, I will argue that ideological change will be a necessary component of efforts to combat existing relations of domination, and to establish an expanded public democracy in the United States. Because of the importance of education for ideological reproduction, if there is to be a vitalization of Americans' ideas and practices of democratic citizenship, schools necessarily will play a central role in such a process.

A simple stock taking of the present state of political and social life in the United States demonstrates the compelling need to expand current dominant notions and practices of democracy and democratic citizenship.

The State of American Democracy and Democratic Consciousness

In the Constitution, the American founders developed a blueprint for United States federalism: a complex political system which divided government powers along both institutional and geographic lines. This was not a system of direct democratic government, but rather representative government. In fact, with a few notable exceptions, the idea of the participation of ordinary people in the project

of self-government, and the actual practice of direct democracy, have been systematically discouraged since the birth of the U.S. republic.⁴ So there is little reason to expect classical notions of direct democracy to be flourishing in the U.S. today.

However, now even many of the constitutionally limited, yet still significant, participatory accoutrements of American liberal representative government appear to be falling into decay. Americans' faith in government, and their interest in public affairs are at a low point.

Alienation has become a central indicator of modern political crisis [in the U.S.], whether it is measured by plummeting electoral participation figures, widespread distrust of politicians,⁵ or pervasive apathy about things public and political.

This is especially true of young people. As a 1990 New York Times article puts it,

While apathy and alienation have become a national plague, the disengagement seems to run deeper among

⁴ As Benjamin Barber notes, there are still some pockets of direct popular democracy at the local government and neighborhood level. He mentions New England town meetings, which "continue to play a significant role in local government" in only three states -- Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut. He also mentions moves toward decentralization and neighborhood control in several city governments. See Benjamin Barber, Strong Democracy (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 268-269.

Also, several states have initiative and referendum laws that allow people to have direct input into the process of creating and passing legislation. As I will argue later, although these and other practices of direct democratic participation exist, they are part of a secondary political tradition which goes against the historical mainstream of political thought and democratic practice in the U.S.

⁵ Ibid., xiii.

young Americans, those 18 to 29, setting them clearly apart from earlier generations.

The New York Times article quotes from two separate reports to support this claim. First, a report by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press states that this generation of young citizens "knows less, cares less, votes less and is less critical of its leaders and institutions than young people in the past." A second report, by People for the American Way, argues that there is a "citizenship crisis" and that "America's youth are alarmingly ill-prepared to keep democracy alive in the 1990s and beyond."⁷

Since most people are not interested in public affairs and don't trust public officials, the only times they are motivated to get involved in public debate, or in many cases even to vote, is when a major political scandal surfaces, or when they perceive the threat of a war, a tax increase, or some other problem that might directly affect their lives. Otherwise there is a widespread sense of political alienation and even a mass rejection of the idea of public citizenship itself.

If American citizens remain withdrawn from public life, the future of our society will continue to be shaped, by default, by members of the following two groups: 1) the most

⁶ Michael Oreskes, "A Trait of Today's Youth: Apathy to Public Affairs," The New York Times, 28 June 1990, A1.

⁷ Ibid.

powerful and influential business and finance leaders, who help shape the economy in which most people earn their living and seek satisfaction of their consumer needs and wants; and 2) those who do participate regularly and powerfully in public life and government. This second group includes both issue-oriented interest groups and, again, powerful business and finance leaders, who because of their economic importance can exercise their influence through both formal and informal means. In many cases the members of these two groups represent the same or similar social class interests -- those of business and the upper classes.⁸

As many people have become increasingly alienated from public life, those left as stewards of American society have established a record of their achievements. If this record portends future developments, most Americans should have reason for concern. To illustrate this point, I will highlight just a few of the recent social and economic trends that our political guardians have overseen.

Enormous concentration of wealth

* "The share of net worth...held by the top 1 percent of households jumped from below 20 percent in 1979 to more than 36 percent in 1989." The number of American billionaires leaped from 21 in 1982 to 71 in 1991. "The wealthy's share of the total wealth expanded as much during the Reagan boom as it did in the 100 years -- roughly 1830 to 1929 -- in which America transformed itself from an egalitarian land of

⁸ E.E. Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America. (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1975) (orig., 1966), 20-45.

small farmers into the world's reigning industrial power."⁹

* While corporate presidents' earnings "soared to 160 times that of the average worker, union membership sank, and pay and productivity ... stagnated."¹⁰

* Between 1972 and 1988, real weekly pay of both white collar and blue collar workers fell by 11% in constant dollars.¹¹

Shrinking middle class; growing lower class

* Between 1969 and 1989, the percentage of Americans with middle incomes fell from 71.2% to 63.3%. During the same period, the percentage of Americans with low incomes (less than half the median income) rose from 17.9% to 22.1%.¹²

Tax Burden Shifted Downward

* During the 1980s the top tax bracket was cut from 70% to 30%.¹³

* Between 1960 and 1986, the effective tax rate on corporate profits was cut from 46% to 21%.¹⁴

Homes and Homelessness

* "The U.S. leads the 19 major industrial nations in homelessness and in percentage of people living in big homes [5 rooms or more]."¹⁵

⁹ Sylvia Nasar, "The Rich Get Richer, But Never the Same Way Twice," The New York Times, 16 August 1992, Section 4, 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kevin Phillips, The Politics of Rich and Poor (New York: Random House, 1990), 18.

¹² The New York Times, 22 February 1992.

¹³ Sylvia Nasar, "The Rich Get Richer..."

¹⁴ Steve Brouwer, Sharing the Pie: A Disturbing Picture of the U.S. Economy (Carlisle, PA: Big Picture Books, 1992), 9.

¹⁵ Andrew L. Shapiro, We're Number One! (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 77.

* Homelessness in the U.S. doubled between 1983 and 1987, and by 1992, the U.S. Coalition for the Homeless put the number of homeless Americans at three million.¹⁶

Prisons and Schools

* The U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, jailing 426 of every 100,000 people. The U.S. prison population has more than doubled since 1979.¹⁷

* The U.S. ranks seventeenth in the world in public spending on education per Gross Domestic Product.¹⁸ Federal spending on education fell 18% between 1979 and 1991.¹⁹

These and similar trends have been felt with special severity in America's cities. Cities have become plagued with the sharp contradictions of extremes of wealth and poverty; cutbacks in federal expenditures for urban services and programs for the poor; continued de facto school segregation between city and suburb; the destruction of communities by violence and drugs; the lack of economic opportunity for minimally skilled people of color; worsening patterns of racial and gender bias and discrimination; rising tension between the police and communities of people of color; and continual fiscal austerity, limiting the possibilities for public policy responses to these problems.

These trends represent a stunning deterioration in the quality of life over a broad spectrum of American society.

¹⁶ Ibid., 78.

¹⁷ Tom Wicker, "The Iron Medal," The New York Times, 7 January 1991.

¹⁸ Shapiro, 56.

¹⁹ Brouwer, 21.

The foundation for our collective future as a society is cracking. The 1992 street uprising in Los Angeles following the acquittals of police officers who had been videotaped beating Rodney King, can be understood as a both symptom of this deterioration and a warning. As Cornel West sees it, "What we witnessed in Los Angeles was the consequence of a lethal linkage of economic decline, cultural decay and political lethargy in American life."²⁰

If the United States is to address its mounting social problems, there will have to be much broader and fuller participation in the decision making processes that shape society. People must re-enter -- or in many cases enter for the first time -- the public life of their society. Privately-oriented individuals must become active, effective, publicly-oriented citizens. They must organize to take control of the powerful institutions of society, or create new social institutions through which to build social justice, fairness, equality, economic opportunity-- in short, the conditions necessary for the self-development of all members of society.²¹ Democracy must be revived and widely expanded to ensure that society's broadest possible interests will be served.

²⁰ Cornel West, "Learning to Talk of Race," The New York Times Magazine, 2 August 1992, 24.

²¹ Carol Gould, Rethinking Democracy. Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy and Society (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 110.

There are two major obstacles to the vitalization and expansion of democracy in the U.S.

1) Current dominant conceptions of democracy and of a citizen's role in a democracy-- following a long tradition in liberal political and social thought-- tend to be only minimally concerned with participation in public life. Instead they are oriented chiefly toward individual, private economic activity as the fulfillment of the promise of democracy.

2) Traditional democratic practice in the U.S. has been conditioned by the ongoing social and economic relations of capitalism as well as by the framework of established liberal, federalist, representative political institutions within which people live their lives. Traditional democratic practice has been one of quite limited participation by most people in government and public affairs.

These two major obstacles to the vitalization and expansion of U.S. democracy are actually two sides of a dialectical relationship which can be summed up as a hegemonic ideology of democracy. People's conceptions of democracy and of their roles as citizens in a democracy have an impact on the way they act in a society that claims to be democratic. At the same time, people's ideas about what democracy is or could be are shaped in large part by the day-to-day realities of the way they live within the existing system of social relations, and the boundaries that

are thereby set on their practice of democratic citizenship.

Marx and Engels: Ideology and Social Change

In The German Ideology Marx and Engels offer a strong critique of the German philosophers who, following in the Hegelian tradition, attribute the power to shape history to the universal principles and ideas that philosophers articulate. For Marx and Engels, ideas are not the motive force of history. Ideas are shaped by historical reality, and in particular, by the mode of material production of an era, and the social relations that develop in connection with the mode of production.²² The social relations of production produce distinct social classes, one of which controls the means of production and thereby dominates all the other social classes.²³ By virtue of its control over the means of material production, this ruling class also controls the means of intellectual production.²⁴

The dominant class, through the work of its intellectuals, articulates its own particular ideas about the nature of social reality, presenting them as universal ideas-- as "the only rational, universally valid ones."²⁵

²² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 47.

²³ Ibid., 53-54.

²⁴ Ibid., 64.

²⁵ Ibid., 65-66.

By setting up its own interpretation of reality as the only valid one, the ruling class presents its particular class interests as the common or general interest of the society.²⁶ If other classes accept the ruling class interpretation of reality, they come to believe that the existing social order supports the general interests of society. It is this sense that the social order serves the interests of all members of society, even though in fact it serves primarily the interests of the ruling classes, that gives rise to the marxist concept of ideology as false consciousness.²⁷ Ideology as false consciousness thus refers to the set of ideas that are formed from, justify and legitimize the interests of the ruling class. Through the process of ideological production, the ruling class achieves legitimacy for its continued domination.

This marxist description of the system of class rule and its legitimation through ideological production is of course oversimplified. Marx and Engels state that one class dominates all the others and that its ideas become the ruling ideas of the society. However, one of their own examples demonstrates the likely complexity of any actual historical situation. In what is apparently a reference to nineteenth century England, they state that "...[I]n an age

²⁶ Ibid., 65-66.

²⁷ Frederick Engels, cited in Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 65; Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971) 76, 149.

and in a country where royal power, aristocracy, and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea." (p. 65.) This example illustrates how in an actual historical situation, there is not necessarily any single, clearly dominant class. Rather, dominance is shared, but also continually contested--in this example by three powerful classes or dominant groups.

The dominant political ideology of this period is a bi-product of this contestation. As a result, the dominant explanation of the nature of political reality-- which because of its dominance is also the normatively approved explanation of reality-- is that of the separation of powers. In this case, the dominant ideology that emerges from the competition among the most powerful groups in society serves to legitimate their shared domination of the society.

Nevertheless, even such a jointly constructed ideological explanation of political reality only maintains its legitimacy as long as the other social classes accept it. When a class's experience of the social relations of production impels it to reject the dominant explanation of social reality, and thus the legitimacy of the dominant classes, it then will move to challenge their rule. It will become an insurgent class.

Marx and Engels see the challenge to bourgeois rule by the proletariat as a historical inevitability. Workers'

ever more desperate living conditions, which arise from the social relations of production, will supposedly force the proletariat to revolt and overthrow capitalist relations of production.²⁸ But Marx and Engels fail to recognize that there are other possible responses to oppression, such as inter-class negotiation of improved (if not equal) social relations; or on the other hand, mass alienation and more or less silent submission to oppression. A system of domination can remain in place for a long period, even if deemed illegitimate by large segments of the population. Such a system can remain in power as long as it maintains its legitimacy in the eyes of important sectors of the population, particularly those in key administrative and bureaucratic positions in the institutions that give direction to much of social life, as well as the institutions of last resort for enforcing social conformity, such as the police and the military.²⁹ So neither oppression, nor conscious recognition of oppression by subordinate groups, are guarantees of imminent revolution. Nevertheless, the de-legitimation of a regime among some segments of a population is a necessary step in the breakdown of a system of domination. It raises the

²⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), 76-79.

²⁹ Max Weber, Economy and Society, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 212-213, 264.

possibility that the regime could be challenged, and perhaps transformed.

Marx and Engels say that people from all non-ruling social classes will support an insurgent class movement that seeks to overthrow the existing ruling classes, because many members of subordinate classes stand to gain in a new social order. When this occurs, the interests of non-ruling classes temporarily coincide with those of the insurgent class. If enough of the members of subordinate classes come to challenge the ruling classes, a revolution may arise which, if successful, will put the insurgent class in power. Once in power, the new ruling class will continue to receive support from the subordinate social classes until it becomes clear that the new ruling class is in fact serving its own class interests, and not those of the whole society.³⁰ At such time, the new ruling class, in turn, loses its legitimacy, and the cycle of revolution begins again. However, each new revolutionary challenge to the legitimacy of the ruling classes has a broader social base than previous ones; and it aims for a deeper transformation of the previous social order.³¹

By making this argument, Marx and Engels want to highlight the importance of material social conditions both in shaping ideological explanations and legitimations of

³⁰ Marx and Engels, German Ideology, 66.

³¹ Ibid., 66.

class rule, and in providing the impetus for challenges to class rule, and ultimately for revolutionary social transformation. They argue that ideas cannot be separated from their basis in material social reality, as the German 'ideologists' (philosophers) would have it. Therefore, ideas are not in themselves the motive force for social change.³²

However, in making this argument, Marx and Engels do not fully acknowledge the central role of ideology in their own model of revolutionary social change. In this model, although dominant ideologies -- i.e. the dominant descriptions and explanations of the nature of social reality -- develop from their basis in the social relations of production, people's ideas and beliefs are not simply tied to their position in the social class order. People formulate their own interpretations of social reality based on their experience of it, and based on all the ideological input that surrounds them. People make their own decisions about whether to accept or reject the dominant ideological explanations of social reality, and the legitimacy of the rule of the dominant classes. Thus the question to what extent and for how long people accept the dominant explanations of social reality -- i.e. the dominant ideologies -- is crucial for the continuing legitimacy of the social order. Without some significant degree of

³² Ibid., 66-67.

legitimacy, a social and political regime cannot long survive.³³

The important point here is that ideas matter. People's conceptions of social reality -- grounded in their experience of everyday social relations and yet also influenced by the ideological production of the dominant classes -- affect their willingness to grant legitimacy to the existing social and political order. They also affect their willingness to take action to challenge the existing social order.

I now return to my own chief concern: democratic ideologies and practices. People's understandings of what democracy is, and of the extent to which the political and social realities of the U.S. measure up to those conceptions, affect the degree to which people will consider the political and social system to be legitimate -- i.e. legitimately democratic. If people feel that U.S. democracy is legitimately democratic, that is, if they accept the dominant ideas about what democracy is, and the dominant explanations of social reality in the U.S., they will continue to support it. They will continue to play their roles as defined by the dominant understandings of what democracy and democratic citizenship entail. However, if people do not feel that U.S. democracy is truly democratic - - if they reject the dominant explanations of the nature of

³³ Max Weber, Economy and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 264-265.

democracy and the nature of existing social reality -- they might begin to take action to change the social and political order.

Althusser on Ideology

Louis Althusser attempts to flesh out a theory of the role of ideology and ideological state apparatuses in the persistence of the existing social order.³⁴ He starts from the idea that the continuance of a social order depends upon the reproduction of its mode of production and of the social relations of production that develop with it and support it. The mode of production is reproduced as long as the material means of production (equipment, raw materials, etc.) and labor power are reproduced. The material means of production are replenished through normal investment in capital. Reproduction of labor power depends on paying workers and managers at least enough so that they can live, work and raise children; teaching workers and managers the skills they need to participate in the production process and in social life; teaching workers submission to the ruling ideology; and teaching managers effective use of the ruling ideology.³⁵

³⁴ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-186.

³⁵ Ibid., 128-133.

These last two points raise the issue of the importance of ideology for the reproduction of the social order. If ideology is important for the proper reproduction of labor power, it is even more important for reproduction of the overall social relations of production which are, ultimately, relations of exploitation.³⁶ But before going into detail about the role of ideology in the reproduction of the social relations of production, I will first discuss Althusser's understanding of ideology.

For Althusser, ideology is "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."³⁷ The conditions of people's existence are the social relations of production, which involve the domination of some social groups and classes by others through control of capital and the purchasing of labor power from workers. These social relations set the conditions under which people live their lives.

There is a further complexity to Althusser's theory of ideology. He states that ideology always has a material existence. Various versions of imaginary relationships of individuals to the social world are channeled through the several ideological state apparatuses (religions, schools, communications media, etc.). They are not imposed on people. Rather, individuals, acting as independent subjects

³⁶ Ibid., 149-150.

³⁷ Ibid., 162.

in the world, consciously adopt certain of these imaginary explanations of social reality. They then act according to these ideas, participating in material practices that have been defined by the relevant ideological apparatuses. For example, people who have adopted a religious view of the world will tend to take certain actions that correspond to the practices of their religion, such as attending church or temple services, or perhaps even attempting to live on a daily basis according to the teachings of that religion.³⁸ In this way, people's lived experience reinforces their acceptance of ideologies as common sense descriptions of social reality.

Althusser argues that all human practice takes place "by and in ideology;" and that all ideology works through people as subjects.³⁹ Ideology also functions by imposing itself as "obviousnesses," which people accept as common truths. One of these key obviousnesses is that individuals are subjects who act independently in the world.⁴⁰ Through ideology, people come to see the obvious need to subject themselves to domination. Domination is seen as an obvious, natural state.⁴¹ Thus people come to accept social class relations in which economic inequality and unequal power

³⁸ Ibid., 167-169.

³⁹ Ibid., 170.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 172-173.

⁴¹ Ibid., 181-182.

relations are understood as the just outcomes of choices made by individuals acting as free subjects. By holding that all human practice takes place by and in ideology, Althusser is saying that people understand the world through various ideological lenses, all of which distort their perceptions of social reality. People develop an imaginary view of social reality and their relationship to it. Through their own activity or "practice" in the social world, individuals reinforce their false understanding of the relations of domination in which they live. Since this imaginary view is seen as the "obvious" view, it remains an unexamined understanding of social reality.

Althusser and Ideological State Apparatuses

Having said this much about Althusser's conception of ideology, it is possible to explain in greater detail how he sees the role of ideology in the reproduction of the social relations of production. Reproduction of the relations of production is a complex process, and Althusser explains it via a marxist analysis of the structure of society. From Althusser's structuralist perspective, society is made up of economic base and superstructure. The economic base encompasses capital, labor and the relations of production. The superstructure includes:

- 1) The legal structure and the state, which together form the repressive apparatus. The major institutions of the state and legal structure are the government and its

bureaucracies, the police, the courts, the prison system and the military.

2) The ideological state apparatuses. These are the educational system, religion, family, the law (which is also one of the repressive apparatuses), the political system and parties, trade unions, communications and media institutions, culture and sports.⁴²

Althusser is careful to argue that the superstructure is not an independent force in society. It is determined "in the last instance by the economic base." Nevertheless, this determinism is mitigated by the fact that there is also "relative autonomy of the superstructure with respect to the base," as well as "reciprocal action of the superstructure on the base."⁴³ This means that the state and all its apparatuses play a relatively autonomous role vis-a-vis the economic structure of society. Moreover, state apparatuses, including the ideological apparatuses, can exert some influence on the economic structure, even as that structure strongly conditions the actions of the state apparatuses.

Following Marx, Althusser believes that class struggle to transform the economic conditions of production is the essential social struggle. However, there is a conflict that accompanies the struggle over the economic conditions of production. That is the conflict over people's

⁴² Ibid., 142-143.

⁴³ Ibid., 135.

consciousness of the nature of the social relations of production, i.e. consciousness of the social relations of domination that are integral to the functioning of a capitalist mode of production. This struggle over people's consciousness takes place at the level of ideology.⁴⁴

According to Althusser, class struggle is the struggle for state power, and the ability to use the state apparatuses to serve class interests.⁴⁵ Because the ideological state apparatuses are the institutions that generate and disseminate explanations of social reality, they are central to the process of creating consent to the existing social order. Therefore, for a class (or classes) to control state power over the long term, it must gain control over the ideological state apparatuses, and through them, attempt to secure its legitimacy in the eyes of the subordinate classes.⁴⁶

For this reason, ideological state apparatuses are a terrain of class conflict-- both "the stake... [and] the site of class struggle."⁴⁷ This raises the possibility that the subordinated social classes might "turn the weapon of ideology against the classes in power."⁴⁸ This could be

⁴⁴ Ibid., 147.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 146.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 147.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 147 (footnote).

done if the subordinated classes were either to exploit the ideological contradictions among the different ideological state apparatuses, or take over positions of power inside important ideological apparatuses.

There are innumerable examples of contradictions between different ideological state apparatuses that could be used to challenge the ideological domination of the existing social or political order in the U.S. One prominent example can be seen in the Iran-Contra scandal of the mid 1980s. This was a situation in which the political apparatus was generating its usual discourses about American political values of democracy, rule of law, Constitutional checks and balances on the powers of the different branches of government, and specifically, the overall righteousness of the Reagan administration. This ideological discourse crashed head-on into discourses put forward by the news media when it became known that the administration had been selling arms to Iran (a country that had been thoroughly vilified as a terrorist state), and had used the profits to subvert the clearly stated will of Congress by illegally financing the Contra army against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Another example, perhaps closer to most people's personal experience, is found in the contradictions between U.S. political ideology about equal rights, economic opportunity, and justice, and the cultural ideological productions (popular songs, art, and again, the news media) that focus on existing social inequality, lack of

opportunity, discrimination in the housing and job markets, and many other examples of persistent injustice in the U.S.

Existing ideological apparatuses are themselves the objects of struggle for control between dominant and subordinate groups. Subordinate groups can attempt to take over ideological apparatuses and use them to challenge dominant ideologies. An important example is the work of progressive educators who are able to take control of schools, and create new educational practices and curricula that help students develop critical understandings of their existing social world, as well as alternative visions of a more democratic and just society. Such schools create alternative ideologies and practices that challenge dominant ideologies and existing social relations of domination.

Other ideological apparatuses that are also sites for struggle are political parties, mass communications media and various arts and cultural institutions. However, the national education system, as one of the most important ideological apparatuses, is one of the most critical sites of ideological conflict, and is itself a stake in the struggle.

Althusser in fact claims that education is the most important ideological state apparatus. He notes that no other ideological apparatus has the obligatory audience of virtually all children for six or more hours a day from the

ages of six to eighteen.⁴⁹ He fails to mention, however, that TV, which is not obligatory, probably has the willing attention of most children for at least as many hours. Nor does he take note of the fact that in schools, children are not merely passive receptacles of ideology. Many students resist, tune out, use school for their own creative social purposes, or even drop out.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Althusser is correct in saying that schools have, at the very least, tremendous potential for exerting a powerful ideological influence on young people. The school system is, after all, the one major social institution charged with the task of the intellectual and social formation of young people.

Having gone through this much of Althusser's theory of ideology, it is clear that he offers some important, useful ideas for understanding the role of ideology in the reproduction of the existing social relations of production. However, he also presents some arguments that appear to be contradictory.

Like Marx and Engels, Althusser wants to anchor his theory of ideology in a determination "in the last instance" by the economic base. But this only meshes with the rest of Althusser's arguments if we understand him to mean that "the last instance" of economic determination actually never

⁴⁹ Ibid., 152-157.

⁵⁰ Paul Willis, Learning to Labor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). Of course, as Willis shows, resistance does not necessarily lead to liberation.

comes. For if there is relative autonomy of the state, and if there is reciprocal action of the superstructure (including ideology) on the base, then the superstructure cannot be entirely determined, even in the last instance, by the base. If there is reciprocal action, then the relationship between superstructure and base is a reciprocal relationship. That is, it is a dynamic, dialectical relationship. It is a relationship that is determined not by one term only, but by the interaction of the two terms -- economic base and superstructure. Although ideology is formed within the context of existing relations of production, and is therefore influenced by the limits that are set by that context, it is not strictly determined by that context.⁵¹

Similarly, individuals cannot be understood as being subjects solely for the purpose of subjecting themselves to domination, as Althusser would have it. Either they are subjects or they are not. If people are subjects -- free thinking and acting agents -- it is indeed still possible that they will choose to subject themselves to domination. In fact, history demonstrates that they often will choose relations of domination, or at least choose not to overthrow known relations of domination in the face of the unknown. Nevertheless, if people have the capacity to act as subjects in their own history, if they are indeed agents, then it is

⁵¹ Raymond Williams, pp. 84-88.

possible that they will reject relations of domination, and choose self-determination and freedom. Thus reproduction of existing relations of domination is not a foregone conclusion.

In fact, Althusser's detailed theory of ideology and the role of ideology in the reproduction of the relations of production, points clearly toward the potential role of ideology in breaking the chain of social class reproduction, with its attendant relations of domination. Althusser outlines what is for him the mechanism of ideological reproduction -- the ideological state apparatuses. Yet he makes much of the fact that there is constant struggle within and among ideological apparatuses. If there is constant struggle over the content of ideological production and for control of the apparatuses of ideological production; and if ideological production is so important for the reproduction and legitimation of existing social relations; then ideological reproduction and subsequent social reproduction are by no means guaranteed.

In the U.S., if there is to be any attempt to challenge the existing social order and remake it along more democratic and just lines, struggle for control of ideological apparatuses and the ideologies they generate will be a necessary part of the process. Key stakes in this ideological conflict -- since the U.S. is a country that claims to be democratic -- are the very conceptions of democracy and democratic citizenship, and the concrete

practices that follow from, and at the same time reinforce those conceptions. Because the educational system is one of the most important ideological apparatuses, struggle within, and for control of part or all of it, will be a crucial part of this ideological struggle.

These conclusions, which I offer as a hopeful, less deterministic re-reading of Althusser's theory, seem to me to be in line with the ideas of Antonio Gramsci. This is not merely coincidental. Althusser obviously was influenced by Gramsci's work, which he sees as a kind of an outline that he attempts to fill in and "systematize."⁵² Althusser makes an important contribution to social theory by specifying some of the major mechanisms of ideological production and the dynamics of ideological conflict. Unfortunately, Althusser perhaps over-systematizes -- one might even say mechanizes -- Gramsci's ideas. In doing so, he eliminates some of the sense of possibility in Gramsci's writing.

Gramsci: Ideology, Hegemony and the Role of Intellectuals in Social Stability and Social Change

Much of Gramsci's effort in The Prison Notebooks is directed toward demonstrating the necessity of ideological struggle as a force for radical democratic social change. In making this argument, Gramsci uses the concept "ideology" in a very specific way. He is not talking about ideology as

⁵² Althusser, p. 142 (footnote).

merely a "system of ideas." He is talking about ideology as a set of ideas that are "necessary to a given structure," and are grounded in the social relations and practices that arise within that structure.⁵³

The structure Gramsci speaks of is that which is formed by the capitalist mode of production and the social relations of production that support it. This structure forms the base upon which the superstructural forms of civil society and the state are built. Ideologies in Gramsci's sense are historically powerful forces in civil society. "[T]hey 'organise' human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc."⁵⁴ Gramsci is talking about hegemonic ideologies -- ideologies that through their linkage with concrete everyday practices, secure the social hegemony of a particular class or classes.

Social hegemony is the "'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life" by the dominant class, based on its position as the controller of the production process.⁵⁵ It provides day-to-day order in civil society, the realm of "private" life. Hegemony is necessary for the smooth

⁵³ Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (editors and translators), (New York: International Publishers), 376-377.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 12.

functioning of the existing social order, with its unequal relations of economic and political power, which result in a few social groups or classes dominating the others (to varying degrees). It is the force that provides legitimacy to the existing social order.

Social hegemony is backed up by political government (the state), which uses the legal system as well as its coercive powers to enforce discipline on those individuals and groups who do not offer their active, or at least their passive consent to the general direction of social life.⁵⁶ But the coercive aspect of the state is necessary only in the last resort. In the enormous majority of situations, social life is governed and regulated by the complex of ideologies and practices that constitute hegemony.

Hegemony is not merely a static condition of social domination. It is an ongoing process, "a complex interlocking of political, social and cultural forces," that supports a particular social order.⁵⁷ Hegemony is produced through all the processes of cultural production and reproduction as they interact with existing distributions of power in society, and enter into the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁷ Williams, p. 108. There are many interpretations of Gramsci's ideas on hegemony. In this essay I draw heavily on Raymond Williams' reading of Gramsci.

practical consciousness of individuals.⁵⁸ Raymond Williams provides an excellent explanation of hegemony:

The concept of hegemony...sees the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living -- not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense.⁵⁹

The process of hegemony thus creates for most people a "sense of reality" that attempts to place beyond question or criticism much of social life, including the existing relations of domination and subordination within which different social groups live.⁶⁰ Such relations are usually seen as simple common sense realities. But precisely because hegemony is a living social process, it carries within it seeds of change. Again, Williams offers a detailed description of this complicated situation:

A lived hegemony is always a process.... It is a realized complex of experiences, relationships and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits.... It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own. We have then to add to the concept of hegemony the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony, which are real and persistent elements of practice.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 110.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The reality of any hegemony ... is that, while by definition it is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive. At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in the society.⁶¹

In order to understand how a hegemonic ideology might come to be challenged, it is necessary to examine how hegemony is established and maintained.⁶² As has been said, hegemony is a complex social process that results in the manufacture and reinforcement of public consent to the existing social order. Intellectuals play a central role in this process. They take key positions in the social superstructures of civil society and government, often acting as deputies of the dominant classes.⁶³ They serve as the dominant classes' functionaries through their work in the institutions of business, education, religion, communications, culture, politics, etc. They direct and manage the organizational and technical work of business. Intellectuals perform similar functions in the bureaucratic and political work of government. They also fill directive and technical positions in the law enforcement, justice, and

⁶¹ Ibid., 112-113.

⁶² From this point on, when I speak of hegemony or hegemonic ideologies, I use these terms in the sense laid out by Gramsci and Williams. That is, I am speaking of hegemony and hegemonic ideologies as not merely dominant sets of ideas or explanations of the world, but I also include the sense of concrete everyday practices that are connected with such ideas, in a mutually reinforcing, dialectical relationship.

⁶³ Gramsci, p. 12.

penal systems, as well in the military. Through these roles, intellectuals help shape the everyday practices of the vast majority of individuals. In addition, intellectuals take active roles in ideological production as teachers, writers, artists, philosophers, scientists, religious functionaries, news and other media figures, entertainers, etc.

If intellectuals fail to play their roles in the construction and management of social hegemony, or if they play alternative or counter-hegemonic roles, mass consent to a social order can begin to erode. If this occurs, dominant groups must attempt to reestablish public consent to the social order. Depending on the seriousness of the situation, at times mass consent can only be reestablished around somewhat altered social relations and practices. When this happens, social change occurs.

Gramsci identifies two main types of intellectuals -- organic intellectuals and traditional intellectuals. Both types play important roles in determining whether a social order will be maintained or whether an existing hegemony will be challenged. Traditional intellectuals are those of historically established categories which arose under previous social relations of production. They have remained in existence despite far-reaching social transformations. Examples of traditional intellectuals are ecclesiastics, such as theologians, clergy and religious administrators, religious teachers, and charity workers; and secular

intellectuals such as philosophers, academics, scientists and artists.⁶⁴

Traditional intellectuals tend to see themselves as an autonomous, independent social group, pursuing physical or metaphysical "truths," un beholden to other social classes. To a limited extent they are correct. Some intellectuals still feel more closely allied to their own traditional institutions and historical practices than they do to the institutions and causes of current social classes and groups -- whether dominant or subordinate. However, the fact remains that traditional intellectuals are tied to the vestiges of previously dominant social formations that have lost much of their former power to hold them and support them. So these intellectuals find themselves drawn increasingly toward enlistment in the positions and causes of the newer social classes and groups. Traditional intellectuals become targeted for recruitment to the causes of both dominant and subordinate social groups.

An example of this phenomenon is provided by the traditional intellectuals of the Catholic Church. The Catholic clergy are ostensibly loyal to the Church's stated primary mission of saving souls and helping people live a more spiritual life. This is certainly the way the Pope and the Church hierarchy in Rome would have it. Historically, however, the Church has usually aligned itself with the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7.

existing social order in any given country, and its intellectuals have supported that social order through their organizational and ideological work. Even when the Church's intellectuals have focused almost exclusively on spiritual life, this has had the effect, by default, of supporting existing material social relations.

But through the theology of liberation, Catholic clergy and lay intellectuals in Latin America and other parts of the world have become embroiled in a quite worldly class struggle. Many have chosen a "preferential option for the poor," and now organize and fight on the side of the poor for greater social justice and more equitable social relations. Others have continued to support the existing social order. But in countries like El Salvador and Brazil, where social inequality and injustice are so stark, and where the forces for and against fundamental social change have become so hotly engaged, there is little room for Church people to remain outside the struggle. In recent visits to Latin America, the Pope himself has felt compelled to call publicly for greater social justice and equality, even though he strongly rejects liberation theology, and has done much to attempt to neutralize its clergy practitioners.⁶⁵

A similar case can be made about traditional, secular intellectuals. They often present themselves as autonomous,

⁶⁵ Alan Cowell, "Pope Challenges Brazil Leaders on Behalf of Poor," New York Times, Oct. 15, 1991, A-15.

non-class aligned individuals, busily pursuing their truths in the arts, sciences or other academic fields. Yet the social base that provides for the independence and 'intellectual freedom' of these intellectuals is relatively narrow and weak. Take, for example, the university. The university is perhaps the single most important institutional base for these intellectuals, yet this is clearly a site that is highly influenced by the dominant classes. Universities receive significant portions of their operating monies from corporate grants and contracts, which tie scientists, artists and other intellectuals into projects that directly and indirectly serve corporate interests. Universities are even more dependent on the state. To the extent that the state acts in the service of the dominant classes, universities and their intellectuals are further brought into the service of the dominant classes.

However, as Althusser points out, as ideological state apparatuses, universities are the objects and sites of ideological struggle. Some traditional intellectuals in universities will no doubt be recruited to work for the dominant classes. Some will attempt to maintain an independent stance, serving as well as they can the ideals of their intellectual and institutional traditions. Nevertheless, what these independently oriented traditional intellectuals create are cultural products, which as such will become the object of ideological contestation. Both

dominant and insurgent social groups will attempt to use these cultural products, whenever possible, to support their hegemonic or alternative hegemonic positions. Other traditional intellectuals will work directly in the service of insurgent subordinate groups. They will support and even help organize the causes of the poor, people of color, feminists, environmentalists, and others who challenge the existing social order. So traditional intellectuals are indeed a group that is open for recruitment to the causes of both dominant and subordinate social groups.

Organic intellectuals arise in connection with the emergence of new social classes. They perform essential economic, social and political functions for the class from which they arise. The capitalist class, for example, develops its own (or recruits from other classes) managers, technicians, lawyers, politicians, academics and cultural agents such as artists and writers. These groups organize and maintain the social relations of capitalism through their work in business, government and cultural production.⁶⁶

Subordinate social groups, especially those that are rising to challenge the existing social order, can also develop their own organic intellectuals. These are the people who, regardless of what roles they play within the existing system of economic relations, serve their social

⁶⁶ Gramsci, p. 5.

class or group by being its leaders and organizers. So while organic intellectuals of the dominant classes perform technical, organizational and ideological functions to support the existing hegemony, organic intellectuals of subordinate classes and groups can act as counterhegemonic change agents.

An important challenge for progressive organic intellectuals is to assimilate traditional intellectuals and enlist them in social change projects.⁶⁷ Traditional intellectuals have important skills, resources and institutional locations that give them, potentially, significant cultural, ideological and organizational power. If they are not enlisted in progressive causes, they may become the kind of "accommodating intellectuals" who, despite their attempts to remain objective and "professional," serve the status quo by default. Or they might become fully incorporated into the existing hegemonic order as active agents in its maintenance and reproduction.⁶⁸

As progressive subordinate social groups develop organic intellectuals, the latter provide the focus and direction necessary for these groups to organize as movements. They do this, in part, through their articulation of counter-hegemonic ideologies. These

⁶⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁸ Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, Education Under Siege (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 39.

alternative ideologies create new understandings of the social world, and new visions that serve to mobilize members of the subordinate groups, as well as uncommitted traditional intellectuals, to struggle for social change.

Gramsci makes the point that all members of society have certain intellectual capacities, which they utilize in varying degrees in their work and in other spheres of their daily lives. Individuals use their intellectual abilities to understand and evaluate common conceptions of the social world and govern their participation in existing forms of social life. They can therefore either go along with dominant social conceptions and practices, or challenge them and seek to change them. The task for progressive subordinate social groups then, is to develop the critical intellectual capacities of their group members, so that they will create new, liberating conceptions of the world and work to bring them into existence.⁶⁹

The Importance of Education

The primary social institution for developing people's intellectual capacities, and thus for developing people as intellectuals of any type, is the school system.⁷⁰ Advanced capitalism requires, in the first place, at least a minimally trained work force that is also ideologically

⁶⁹ Gramsci, 9.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 10.

socialized to accept the relations of domination that are central to that mode of production. It also requires the development of large categories of both specialized technical intellectuals, and intellectuals of the managerial and directive type.

Therefore, in a highly developed capitalist nation such as the U.S., the system of schools must be established broadly enough to educate the vast majority of people at a basic level. For a significant number of people, it must also offer higher general levels of education, and multiple educational specializations, so that from among the masses who have received a basic education, intellectuals can be developed to perform the technical, directive and organizational functions of the system for the dominant groups.

But in order to generate a cohort of highly qualified intellectuals who will manage the machinery of the social order, it is also necessary to create a relatively large pool of highly educated and trained people from which the system-serving intellectuals can be drawn. The selectiveness of the process means that many who receive a fairly high level of intellectual training will not -- or at least will not at all times -- be incorporated into the types of positions for which they have been trained. Such a selection process "creates the possibility of vast crises of unemployment for the middle intellectual strata, and in all

modern societies this actually takes place."⁷¹ The under-utilization of a large cohort of intellectuals is potentially very dangerous for the existing social order. These intellectuals could become a source of leadership for counter-hegemonic movements of resistance and struggle for social change.⁷²

Moreover, the fact that schools are contested ideological terrain means that even efforts by the dominant social groups to educate and socialize a compliant work force are likely to meet resistance. Students may reject the best laid plans and programs offered by the school. Of course, as Paul Willis demonstrates in Learning to Labor, students' resistance to official school culture and expectations can itself be incorporated into the dynamic process of young people's socialization to working class jobs and working class lives. So student resistance to school culture does not alone guarantee the formation of a counter-hegemonic social movement. Still, the fact that young people can and do draw on their own cultures and knowledge to resist socialization to the dominant order raises the possibility that their resistance could be organized around counter-hegemonic projects. This could

⁷¹ Ibid., 11.

⁷² Ibid., 11. It is interesting that conservative economist Joseph Schumpeter elaborates on precisely the same problem in his classic book on capitalist political economy. See Joseph Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1950, orig. 1942), 152-155.

happen if some young people among them received the support and guidance, either inside the school or outside, to nurture their intellectual development along critical, activist lines. These young people could become progressive organic intellectuals and take on leadership roles among the subordinate social groups from which they have come.

The question that arises is, Who would provide the support and guidance to help develop young people's counter-hegemonic consciousness and activism? Gramsci's answer would be, in the first place, a revolutionary political party.⁷³ He believes the party is the chief institution -- outside the school system -- for developing oppositional organic intellectuals. Gramsci argues that the basic function of a revolutionary party is to develop members of the working class into "qualified intellectuals, leaders and organizers" of an emerging new society.⁷⁴

But Gramsci wrote in quite a different time and in a different socio-historical context from the one in which we find ourselves in the late Twentieth Century in the U.S. There is no radical democratic and socialist party of any political significance in the U.S., and none on the political horizon. So a political party is not likely to provide an outside-the-school source of support and guidance to help young people develop into counter-hegemonic organic

⁷³ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 15-16.

intellectuals who can fight for an expanded public democracy.

Yet there are other counter-hegemonic forces in society, some of which are working to expand democracy. These include such groups as feminists; civil rights organizations; community-based organizations; groups organized around the social, cultural and political concerns of people of color; environmentalists, etc. As I will discuss later, such groups can provide spaces in which young people and others can learn to understand critically the ideologies and the concrete injustices of the hegemonic social and political order and organize to challenge it.

The current battle for a counter-hegemonic vision and practice of public democracy has been joined on many cultural and ideological fronts. Some of the groups in this struggle have understood that it is not enough to fight strictly for greater political power. They have come to realize, following Gramsci, that the only way to create an expanded public democracy in which they can hold greater political power is by working to change American culture. In addition to the spaces that are created by organizations of feminists, people of color, environmentalists and others, another key site for the struggle for a new hegemony of public democracy is the public education system.

Within the contested ideological terrain of schools, committed progressive teachers can take on roles as public, transformative intellectuals, "who combine conception and

implementation, thinking and practice, with a political project grounded in the struggle for a culture of liberation and justice."⁷⁵ They can fight for control of their own workplaces, the schools, in order to transform them from institutions of ideological and social reproduction into places where teachers and students examine dominant ideologies and existing social relations from critical, ethical perspectives.⁷⁶ This work helps develop young people's capacities for critical thinking. It can also lead students to formulate and articulate alternative visions of society, and begin to take action to realize those visions. An educational process such as this would be a powerful preparation for the young, developing public democratic organic intellectuals among the students.

Gramsci's category of organic intellectuals of subordinate groups is central to a theory of the process of radical social change. Organic intellectuals of subordinate groups can organize the cultural and political struggle for a new hegemonic order based on principles of justice, freedom for the self-development of all, and a radical democracy in which "every citizen can govern."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, Postmodern Education (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 109; See also Aronowitz and Giroux, Education Under Siege (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 36-37.

⁷⁶ Aronowitz and Giroux, Postmodern Education, 108-110.

⁷⁷ Gramsci, 40.

The idea of "organic" intellectuals "refers both to the relation of intellectuals [as leaders and organizers] to the classes in whose behalf they speak, and to the breakdown of the distinction between leaders and the led."⁷⁸ That is, organic intellectuals are themselves of the social groups which they lead, and remain attached to them. Furthermore, any member of a social group has the intellectual capability to play a social and political leadership role. It is precisely the taking on of such a role that defines one as an organic intellectual. This is an egalitarian conception of intellectuals and of political leadership. It contrasts sharply with other marxist views, particularly the leninist-oriented views which see revolutionary leadership coming from an elite, vanguard party.⁷⁹ Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals is, therefore, an important part of his vision of a radical democratic society.

The image of the U.S. as a world model -- a beacon of democracy -- is at the center of a hegemonic ideology that partially masks the systemic relations of domination and subordination, the inequalities and injustices of American society. It is the particular construction of the dominant American ideology of liberal, republican democracy, together with its associated hegemonic practices, that allows people

⁷⁸ Stanley Aronowitz, "The Future of Socialism," in Crisis in Historical Materialism, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

to accept as natural, common sense realities the continued existence and recent exacerbation of vast inequalities in every area of social life from level of political power to level of economic subsistence. The project of articulating a radical, participatory vision of democracy and struggling to bring it about is the most important counter-hegemonic project that can be undertaken in the United States today.

As Althusser and Gramsci argue, the conflict between established ideological conceptions and practices and alternative ones takes place in the political, legal and especially the cultural arenas of society. Much of the struggle to establish a new hegemonic order, under new ideological conceptions and practices of democracy, goes on through the work of feminist, African American, Latino and other organized subordinate social groups. Intellectuals -- in Gramsci's inclusive and egalitarian sense of the term -- play an important role here. Organic intellectuals, and others who are recruited to the cause, organize people to support these existing counter-hegemonic democratic projects and to develop new ones.

However, the educational system, as a key apparatus in the process of ideological production and in the training of intellectuals, is one of the most important sites for the struggle over hegemonic ideas and practices of democracy. Public education, the one public institution specifically charged with preparing young people to become full members of society, can play a central role in the formation of

young people's understandings of democracy, and of themselves as citizens in a democracy. In their function of helping students develop their intellectual abilities, schools also strongly influence the ability of young people to participate intelligently and effectively in a democracy.

Public schools are, literally, instruments of the state. Since the state, and its schools, are instruments of the hegemonic order, it might seem futile to look to schools as possible instruments of counter-hegemonic challenge to dominant understandings and practices of democracy. But if hegemony is understood as a dynamic process, and if schools are seen as sites of ideological contestation, then it is possible that there is a "transformative role that schools can play in advancing the democratic possibilities inherent in the existing society."⁸⁰ Educators who seek to play such a role must engage young people in projects of study, dialogue and action that will enable them to begin to reconstruct the current hegemonic ideology of democracy along more participatory, public, egalitarian and just lines.

Before I enter into a discussion of how educators might do this, it is necessary first to explore the raw material of such a project. That is, it is important to examine

⁸⁰ Henry Giroux, Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 185.

closely the evolution of the major strains of the dominant, as well as some of the alternative ideological traditions of American democracy and citizenship. That is the task of the next two chapters.

Chapter 2: Ideological Roots of American Democracy

A central part of the struggle over the shape of democracy in the U.S. lies in the confrontation between a hegemonic ideology of democracy and a competing alternative vision and practice of democracy. For those who would participate in the fight for a more participatory, egalitarian and just democracy, it is necessary to understand the ideological roots of the competing conceptions of democracy in the U.S. In this chapter I will trace the ideological roots of what I see as the two major traditions of democratic thought that have shaped American understandings and practices of democracy. One of these ideological traditions, which I call Federalist democracy, has become the hegemonic democratic ideology in the U.S. The second tradition, which I designate public democracy, has been a subordinate, counter-hegemonic democratic ideology, with its proponents constantly pressing for the opportunity to put it into wider practice.

Two Traditions of Liberalism

American political ideas and practice follow from a tradition of Liberal political thought that traces its roots back to the seventeenth century thinkers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. The dominant strain of this Liberal tradition runs from Hobbes to Locke to the American founders, through Adam Smith and then the Utilitarians, then on to twentieth century American pluralist theorists and their free market

economist colleagues. I will call this dominant tradition Federalist Liberalism, for the vision of democracy that is articulated in the Federalist Papers. This tradition has contributed much to the theory and practice of American democracy, from its initial assumptions about inalienable individual rights to the very structure and processes of the government that is intended to protect those rights.

However, this socio-political world view, as realized within the context of its liberal economic counterpart, a capitalist economic system, has led to serious social problems, even as it threatens democratic practice and individual rights. It is also this liberal world view that now inhibits our ability as a society to understand our problems, envision solutions, and begin to make the changes necessary to bring those solutions into being.

But the Liberal tradition contains within it a second, subordinate strand of thought which in many ways challenges the assumptions of Federalist Liberalism. This line of thought is also based on Lockean conceptions of individual rights and government protection of those rights. But as articulated by Thomas Jefferson, its strongest early American proponent, this strand of liberalism adopts some of the key tendencies in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thinking, as I will demonstrate a bit later.

Jeffersonian Liberalism has its own problems and failings. However, it is a theoretical perspective that

points to new ways of approaching the social and political problems which arise with Federalist Liberalism, and which are unresolvable within that ideological framework. It has a theoretical affinity with the work of John Dewey and C. Wright Mills, as well as feminist theorists such as Carol Gould, Nancy Fraser, Carole Pateman, Carol Gilligan and others.¹ Jeffersonian Liberalism provides a theoretical foundation for the counter-hegemonic tradition which I will refer to as public democracy.

Common Theoretical Roots

The men who formulated and worked to ratify the United States Constitution, creating the structure of U.S. government, believed, in the first place, that a society has a right to establish a form of government of its own choosing.² They believed, following Hobbes and Locke, that people come together in political society for protection against what Hobbes termed a "war of everyone against every one";³ or, as Locke put it, for protection against their

¹ The expansions upon Jeffersonian thought developed by these twentieth century theorists are explored in Chapter 3.

² Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison, The Federalist Papers, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: New American Library, 1961), 33.

³ Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. Michael Oakeshott (New York: Collier Books, 1962), part 1, chapter 13, 100.

constant exposure "to the invasions of others."⁴ In this way, people effect the "mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates," all of which Locke referred to by the general name, "property."⁵ Since property was seen as the best buffer against life's insecurities, the acquisition of property was the fundamental human right, underlying the other rights of life and liberty.

According to C.B. MacPherson, Locke established the principle that an individual's labor was that individual's own property. Therefore one could sell one's labor, and another person could purchase it. Locke also stated that one's labor was the source of the production of value. By this line of reasoning, Locke justified an individual's unlimited appropriation of value, which becomes property. As MacPherson has put it, "the individual right of appropriation overrides any moral claims of the society."⁶ For MacPherson, this idea is one of the central tenets of an ideology of "possessive individualism."

Following Locke's reasoning, the American founders designed a constitutional government and later a Bill of Rights around the need to protect these two guiding

⁴ John Locke, Second Treatise on Government: An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government, ch. 9, pt. 123, in Social and Political Philosophy (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co., 1963), eds. John Somerville and Ronald E. Santoni, 184.

⁵ Locke, ch. 9, pt. 123, 184.

⁶ C.B. MacPherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 220-221.

principles: the individual right of appropriation (i.e., the pursuit of property) and individual liberty. Among their most important contributions to the definition and practice of American democracy was precisely this: the system of government which they created provided for formal protections of many fundamental individual liberties, such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, expression and the press, and freedom from various kinds of unfettered incursions by the state into people's fundamental rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

The founders thought they could best protect these liberties through a federalist, republican government. They were quite clear about their antipathy toward direct democracy, for two reasons. First, they believed it could not be practiced on the scale of a large nation state. Second, they harbored fears about the people's ability to govern itself, without threatening established property relations, which they believed arose from natural differences in people's abilities to acquire property.

Federalist Liberalism

In The Federalist Papers, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay expounded their views on the virtues of the U.S. Constitution. James Madison in particular laid out some of the chief threats posed by popular government to property and liberty, and the remedies that he believed the

Constitution provided against those threats.⁷ He was careful to contrast the problems caused by direct democracy with the solutions available in the indirect democracy of federalist, republican (representative) government.

In "The Federalist, No. 10," Madison explained that from people's differing abilities of acquiring property there naturally arose in a society differences in the kind and amount of property that people had. These property differences resulted in the formation of factions with distinct interests. Examples of factions with distinct interests were creditors and debtors; landed, mercantile and manufacturing interests; and propertied and property-less interests. Madison said it was one of the primary roles of government to adjudicate among these conflicting interests.⁸

In a popular government, what was most to be feared was a majority faction that would sacrifice to its private interests "both the public good and the rights of other citizens."⁹ Madison argued that in a direct democracy, which he assumed could only exist in a small society, a majority faction would constantly arise. For Madison, a representative republic was the only form of popular

⁷ Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison, The Federalist Papers, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: New American Library, 1961), especially, No. 10, and Nos. 47-51.

⁸ The Federalist, No. 10, 78-79.

⁹ Ibid., 80.

government that could ameliorate this problem. It did so through the buffer of the electoral process, and through the extended national size and diversity that were attainable only under representative government.

In a republic, democracy is indirect, in that government powers are delegated to elected representatives. Madison believed that the electoral process acted as a kind of filter against the passions of private interests. Those chosen for government, he believed, would tend to be people of wisdom, imbued with the public interest.

In addition, said Madison, representative government, unlike direct democracy, had the capability of being extended over the large population and geographical area of the U.S. The great number of people electing each representative would make it less likely that candidates would be able to subvert the electoral process. At the same time, the great diversity of interests encompassed within the large geographical area of the U.S. would work against the possibility that an interested faction of the majority would be able to organize itself.

Madison argued that through such means, representative government would protect against "a rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked project."¹⁰ It is worth noting that his examples of improper, wicked

¹⁰ Ibid., 84.

projects were all projects that would threaten established monied or propertied interests.

Besides the threat posed to property and liberty by the possible formation of a tyranny of the majority, there was also the threat of the accumulation of too much power in any one branch of the government. This would upset the balance of powers in the government, eroding an important source of protection for individual rights and liberties. Madison's discussion of this problem provides further evidence of his distrust of direct popular participation in government.

Madison warned that periodic direct popular participation in modifying the Constitution or "correcting breaches of it" -- an idea which Jefferson advocated for dealing with any one branch of government that tried to overreach its assigned powers -- was not an appropriate means for protecting against such a dangerous accumulation of power.

The danger of disturbing the public tranquility by interesting too strongly the public passions is [itself] a ... serious objection against a frequent reference of constitutional questions to the decision of the whole society.¹¹

Madison later reiterated his concern about limiting both popular participation in government and the power of government itself.

In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control

¹¹ The Federalist, No. 49, 313-315.

itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.¹²

Madison argued in "The Federalist, Nos. 47 and 51" that there were two key safeguards, or "auxiliary precautions," apart from a dangerous direct appeal to the people, that would effectively protect against the possibility of accumulation of all government powers in one branch. These were the separation of powers among the legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government as proposed in the Constitution; and, again, the extent and variety of interests contained within the U.S. federal system of government.

From this brief review of relevant sections of The Federalist Papers, it can be seen that one of Madison's primary concerns was to protect individual property and liberty from violation by the government, or by a faction of citizens who might use the government to trample the rights of others. Since direct popular participation in government was seen as a potential threat to individual property and liberty, it had to be limited and controlled. This was to be accomplished through the governmental institutions and political processes of U.S. federalism, which channeled popular participation, and constitutionally divided and diffused political power. Under this system, the people would be left to their private, individualistic pursuit of

¹² The Federalist, No. 51, 322.

property. The role of citizens in their government would be limited chiefly to their right to vote for representatives who -- it is hoped -- would honestly and effectively carry out the actual business of government.

Jeffersonian Liberalism

Thomas Jefferson shared Madison's concern for protecting individual rights to property and liberty. He also recognized the threat to these rights that could arise through the abuse of power in government. He believed that government should leave people, as much as possible, "free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement."¹³ For this reason, he agreed with Madison on the necessity of constitutional controls, including separation of powers, to prevent the concentration of power in any one branch of government.¹⁴ However, an important difference in their thinking arose around this point--the need to protect against abuse of power in government.

Madison seemed content to rely on the mechanisms of constitutional government to protect against the corruption of power. In his view, the government, with its separation of powers, would keep itself in check and avoid the illegitimate amassing of power. Madison's major concern was

¹³ Thomas Jefferson, Crusade Against Ignorance: Thomas Jefferson on Education, ed. Gordon C. Lee (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), 53.

¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, ed. William Peden, (W.W. Norton and Co., 1982, orig. 1787), 120.

in keeping the direct influence of the people out of government, for he saw their extensive participation as a chief source of government corruption. In short, Madison exhibited a profound mistrust of the people.

Jefferson had a very different view. His main fear was of leaving the government to look after itself, even if there were constitutional checks in place. Jefferson believed that

every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe their minds must be improved to a certain degree...¹⁵

So while Madison sought to protect the government from the people, Jefferson believed that the people were the only ones who could guarantee that the government did not become corrupted. Madison assumed that involving the people too much in the political process would automatically awaken dangerous "public passions". But Jefferson envisioned a highly interactive relationship between government and citizens. The government should work purposefully to educate the public's ability to reason; and the citizens, in turn, would apply reason in the numerous aspects of their participation in government. Jefferson explained that this relationship between government and citizens would take the form of a complex social process, which would guard against

¹⁵ Jefferson, Notes on Virginia, 148.

corruption and abuse of power. He understood this process as follows.

Jefferson believed that people possessed different kinds and degrees of talent. Those who rose to the top of society due to their virtuous efforts and natural talents formed a "natural aristocracy."¹⁶ The natural aristocracy benefitted society through its overall leadership and its service in government. Jefferson believed that there was also an artificial aristocracy, based on wealth and the social position into which people were born. He saw this artificial aristocracy as a corrupting influence in society, and especially in government. Jefferson believed this artificial aristocracy would try to use its wealth and social connections to get into positions of political power, where it would presumably do political "mischief", abusing its power and threatening the public's liberty and property.

Jefferson proposed to limit the artificial aristocracy's ability to acquire political power in three ways. First, he intended that the electoral process itself would give voters the opportunity to judge the worthiness of candidates for government office. Voters would then choose members of the natural aristocracy of the talented and virtuous for government office, over the artificial

¹⁶ Jefferson, Crusade Against Ignorance, 162.

aristocracy of the wealthy.¹⁷ This was comparable to Madison's reliance on citizens to vote into government people of wisdom and public virtue. But Jefferson didn't wish simply to rely on the mechanism of an electoral filter against interested majority passions. He intended, instead, to educate citizens so that they might better recognize the public interest and protect their rights.

Thus Jefferson's second approach to the problem was a proposed law to establish a system of mass public education for all boys in his home state of Virginia. This proposed system called for free elementary education for all (white) male children.¹⁸ The purpose of this level of education was explicitly to prepare citizens to participate intelligently in representative government. They would study, especially, history, to

avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; ...qualify them as judges of the designs of men; ...enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views.

Education would thereby render "the people the safe, as they are the ultimate, guardians of their own liberty."¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., 163.

¹⁸ Like the other American founders, Jefferson did not intend women, slaves or Native Americans to exercise the rights of citizens. For this reason, he proposed no public education for them. He did, however, several times propose legislation that would have abolished slavery in the state of Virginia. See Jefferson, Notes, 137, 6n. These proposals, like his proposal for public education, were never passed.

¹⁹ Ibid., 148.

According to Jefferson, this level of education was intended, ultimately, "to instruct the mass of our citizens in these, their rights, interests and duties, as men and citizens."²⁰

Elementary education would be followed by continued free education through the university level for those boys from poor families who demonstrated great talent and hard work at their studies. Wealthier families could also put their boys through this educational system, as long as they were willing to pay the tuition.²¹ Through this proposed system of public education, Jefferson hoped to prepare the "aristocracy" of ability to compete successfully with the aristocracy of wealth for positions of leadership in government and civil society.

Jefferson's third approach to the problem of the disproportionate access of the wealthy to political power was a legislative effort at direct, though limited, economic redistribution. Jefferson wrote and gained passage of two laws in Virginia which worked to disperse hereditary fortunes over a period of generations. He felt that these laws "laid the ax to the foot of the pseudo-aristocracy."²²

²⁰ Jefferson, Crusade, 117.

²¹ Jefferson, Notes, 147.

²² Jefferson, Crusade, 164.

Besides these ideas for undercutting the influence of the wealthy in government, Jefferson proposed several other measures to enhance popular participation in government. First, he proposed legislation to divide up the state of Virginia into a system of small wards. These wards were to be "little republics," self-governing over many local matters such as roads, law enforcement, care of the poor, etc. Most significantly, the ward system would provide a mechanism for direct popular participation in the governing of the state. As Jefferson envisioned it, "a general call of ward meetings by their wardens on the same day through the State, would at any time produce the genuine sense of the people on any required point, and would enable the State to act in mass, as [the people of Massachusetts] have so often done... by their town meetings."²³

In addition, Jefferson believed that when there was a publicly felt need to change a government's constitution, or to correct abuses of it, the people could be called upon to elect delegates to resolve the problem through a constitutional convention. A convention would be called whenever two of the three branches of government voted with two thirds of their members to do so.²⁴ As previously

²³ Ibid., 164-165.

²⁴ Jefferson, Notes, 221.

mentioned, Madison explicitly rejected this idea, for fear that dangerous public passions would be aroused.²⁵

Jefferson also favored universal (white) male suffrage, as a means of minimizing the potential for elections, and government, to be corrupted. He therefore wrote universal free manhood suffrage into his proposed draft of a new constitution for Virginia.²⁶ He explained his reasoning on this question as follows.

The influence over government must be shared among all the people. If every individual which composes their mass participates of the ultimate authority, the government will be safe; because the corrupting of the whole mass will exceed any private resources of wealth... It has been thought that corruption is restrained by confining the right of suffrage to a few of the wealthier of the people: but it would be more effectually restrained by an extension of that right to such numbers as would bid defiance to the means of corruption."²⁷

Jefferson had a fairly simplistic understanding of the potential for corrupting or manipulating the electoral process. He was perhaps unable to imagine the enormous amassing of corporate and individual wealth in the twentieth century, which in combination with the rise of the centrality of mass media in elections, has created a large market for the purchase of influence in government. Nevertheless, his proposed remedies for the tendencies toward corruption in government suggest an important

²⁵ The Federalist No. 49.

²⁶ Jefferson, Notes, 211.

²⁷ Ibid., 149.

constant in his thinking on democracy: Jefferson believed almost instinctively in the need to involve the people actively in the day-to-day business of their government and public life.

Again, this was in stark contrast to the spirit of Madison's thought on popular participation. It also ran counter to the practice in most states at the time, in which there were substantial property requirements attached to voter eligibility.²⁸ Based on this review of Jefferson's ideas on the relationship between citizens and government, it is clear that he accepted and championed the basic liberal principles of protection of property and liberty through representative republican government. However, he envisioned a far more extensive role of the people in such a government, including a significant degree of direct popular participation, than did James Madison or other key liberals of his time. Jefferson, in contrast to Madison, had a deep faith in the potential, indeed the necessity, for common people to participate actively in their government and ensure that it served the public interest.

In this regard, Jefferson echoed some of the themes that Jean Jacques Rousseau articulated in The Social Contract. For example, Rousseau stressed the importance of

²⁸ In Notes on Virginia for example, Jefferson listed that state's property requirements for eligibility: ownership of 100 uninhabited acres, or 25 acres with a house, or a house or lot in a town. Ibid., 118.

reason, and especially the development of public reason, to enable a society to create a public good.²⁹ Jefferson recognized the importance of this idea, and attempted to implement it by proposing a system of public schooling for the state of Virginia that would educate the people and train their ability to reason, not only to protect their individual rights and interests, but also to inform their public duties as citizens. This system of education would help develop citizens' watchfulness over government, to protect against deception, corruption and potential infringements on liberty. But it would also inform and train people to contemplate public issues and public actions; it would sharpen people's ability to choose good leaders; and indeed it would serve to develop good leaders from among the people at large.

Jefferson, like Madison, was not an advocate of direct democracy, either as practiced by the ancient Greeks or as championed by Rousseau. Jefferson, with Madison, simply didn't believe it could be practiced on a scale beyond that of a town.³⁰ They both favored representative democracy as a means of extending the principal of popular rule over a large nation. This puts both at odds with Rousseau, who believed that representative government was entirely

²⁹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, (New York: Penguin Books, 1985, orig. published 1762), 83.

³⁰ Jefferson, "Letter to Isaac A. Tiffany," in Social and Political Philosophy, eds. John Somerville and Ronald Santoni, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1963), p. 280.

incompatible with democracy, because for him, the people's "sovereignty cannot be represented."³¹

Nevertheless, Jefferson, with his faith in the participation of the people, was a good deal closer to the spirit of Rousseau's thought than was Madison, who feared their participation. Jefferson's instinctive reliance on the people to resolve constitutional problems and abuses -- albeit indirectly, through representative constitutional conventions -- was very much in line with Rousseau's faith in assemblies of the people as "the shield of the body politic and the brake on the government."³² Jefferson's desire for universal white manhood suffrage was also, within the representative form of government, akin to Rousseau's belief in the critical importance of the participation of all citizens in the business of the state.³³

Jefferson and Rousseau were also of a similar mind in their fear of people's tendency to pursue private interests at the expense of their participation in public affairs. For both of them, this posed a serious threat to the well-being of democratic government. Thus Jefferson warned:

[people] will forget themselves, but in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights.³⁴

³¹ Rousseau, 141.

³² Ibid., 139.

³³ Ibid., 140.

³⁴ Jefferson, Notes, 161.

Rousseau likewise stated:

It is the bustle of commerce and the crafts, it is the avid thirst for profits...that commute personal service [in public affairs] for money.³⁵

Rousseau felt that if citizens became so involved in the pursuit of private gain that they could not participate in their government and public affairs, this would mark the downfall of democratic government and the beginning of tyranny.

As soon as someone says of the business of the state-- 'What does it matter to me?'-- then the state must be reckoned lost.³⁶

For Rousseau, the problem came down to the exercise of sovereignty. If citizens did not take an active role in expressing their will on public affairs and participating in government, then "the silence of the people permits the assumption that the people consent."³⁷ Whatever government leaders chose to do would be seen as a legitimate representation of the general will.

Jefferson was also well aware of another problem that greatly concerned Rousseau -- the corrosive effect of economic inequality on political equality, and on the possibilities, therefore, for freedom and self-government.³⁸ Jefferson's proposal for a system of public

³⁵ Rousseau, 140.

³⁶ Rousseau, 141.

³⁷ Rousseau, 70.

³⁸ Rousseau, 96-97.

education, along with his inheritance legislation, reflected practical attempts to mitigate the effects of economic inequality. His proposed education system's main purpose was to thwart the ability of the artificial aristocracy of the wealthy to corrupt the government. His inheritance laws seemed to follow directly from Rousseau's prescription for limiting the extremes of inequality through legislation.

So even though Jefferson was a devoted disciple of liberal, representative democracy, he had an inkling of its internal contradictions. He recognized that the democratic ideals of political equality and public participation could come into conflict with the tendencies in liberalism toward economic inequality, and toward the abandonment of public life.

These contradictions have affected the conduct of political life in the United States in several ways. First, Liberal thought, and the material reality of life in liberal society, tell people that they must seek the fulfillment of their most basic needs in the private sphere. Indeed, the very ideas of liberty and individual rights, as has been shown, are intimately linked to the pursuit of private property. Thus, as Jefferson understood, there are strong incentives for people to abandon the public sphere in pursuit of private gain. Second, the pursuit of private gain leads inevitably to economic inequality. As Jefferson well knew, economic inequality leads to political inequality, as the wealthy exercise inordinate political

influence. Third, economic inequality creates obstacles to the participation of the poor in the public sphere. For as the poor must toil ever harder in the private sphere in pursuit of their material survival and security, they have less time and energy to devote to public life.

Because Jefferson had a sense of these contradictions, if not a fully elaborated understanding of them, he was concerned about the wealthy pseudo-aristocracy and its corrupting influence on government. That is why he proposed so many measures to counter their power and minimize their influence; and why he argued repeatedly the need to maximize popular participation in government and public life.³⁹ That is also why he insisted on the need to educate people to be citizens and future government leaders: to keep the public sphere alive, honest, and effective in the face of forces that would impede it.

The Triumph of Federalist Liberalism

The writers of the Federalist Papers, for their part, also understood that economic liberalism led to economic inequality. But they viewed such inequality as inevitable, arising from the exercise of individual liberty. By implication, they were willing to accept a significant

³⁹ Jefferson, "Letter to John Taylor," in eds. Somerville and Santoni, Social and Political Philosophy, 252-254. Also, Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson, Writings, 1380, in Francis Moore Lappe, Rediscovering America's Values (NY: Ballantine Books, 1989), 198.

degree of political inequality (arising from economic inequality) to protect the right to unequal acquisition of property. That is why Madison was so concerned about minimizing popular participation in government, to prevent the propertyless masses from instituting "wicked projects" of egalitarian politics. He offered an institutional view of the proper functioning of government, in which constitutional structures and mechanisms, once in place, would protect against the excesses of popular demands as well as the abuse of power of those in government. Although these institutional mechanisms have historically acted as checks and balances to rein in some serious abuses of government power, their tendency to limit and control popular participation has also systematically discouraged individuals from taking an active role in their government and public life.

As can be seen, despite their shared foundations in liberal thought, Federalist and Jeffersonian Liberalism represent sharply divergent trends in American political thought -- trends that have been at odds since the founding of the U.S. republic. Federalist Liberalism, however, has been the dominant ideology, supporting, and supported by, the accumulation and mass consumption needs of capitalism.⁴⁰ Two later developments of liberal political theory, utilitarianism and pluralism, have reinforced the

⁴⁰ I will discuss these points a bit later in this chapter.

basic tendencies of Federalist Liberalism and deepened their imprint on American political institutions and practices.

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a social and political philosophy that gained prominence during the nineteenth century with the writings of Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill. Utilitarian theory is founded on several of the basic assumptions of Federalist liberalism, including the following:

1) Individuals are essentially equal in their liberties and rights. 2) Individuals are motivated by self-interest and they pursue their self-interest rationally. (As noted earlier, this self-interest generally takes the form of material or property interests.) 3) Individuals desire freedom, defined as an absence of external constraints on their pursuit of self-interest.⁴¹

⁴¹ Carol Gould, Rethinking Democracy. (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 92-93. Gould calls the theory that is based on these assumptions liberal individualism. She considers Locke, Jefferson, Bentham, and James and John Stuart Mill as an undifferentiated group of liberal individualist thinkers. She opposes this group to pluralist thinkers, examples of whom she identifies as Madison, Dewey, Schumpeter, Dahl and Berelson. Presumably, the key point of differentiation between these two groups is whether they conceive of political actors as individuals or as groups.

I have a different scheme for differentiating these theorists. I believe that all those whom she mentions trace their roots back to the liberal individualist tradition of Locke. However, I find the crucial defining characteristic to be not whether they understand political participation as an individualistic or a group phenomenon; but rather how they understand the public sphere, and the proper nature and extent of popular participation in it. It is based on this distinction that I group Madison and the utilitarians Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill with the pluralists Schumpeter, Berelson and Schattschneider; and I group Jefferson with Dewey, C. Wright Mills, Robert Dahl (esp. in his later work) and recent participatory democratic theorists such as Carole Pateman, Benjamin Barber and Carol Gould herself. I discuss several of

Utilitarianism starts with these assumptions, but goes further, to formulate explicitly some ideas that are only implicit in Federalist liberalism. Utilitarians define individual self-interest as pleasure or happiness. The community or society is considered an artificial aggregate of individuals, formed to facilitate its members' free pursuit of their self-interest. The general interest of the community is understood as simply the sum of the interests of the individual members who make up the society.⁴² Therefore the best society is defined as the one that provides the greatest balance of pleasure over pain for the greatest number of individuals.⁴³

Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill were all strong proponents of democracy in their era. Indeed, in his later writings Bentham called for radical democratic reform of British government. All three men favored universal suffrage within a framework of representative government. At first glance, then, it would seem that these utilitarians were champions of the public life of participation in

these theorists in Chapter 3.

⁴² Frances Moore Lappe, Rediscovering America's Values (NY: Ballantine Books, 1989), 8.

⁴³ Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy, (NY: Touchstone Books, 1972) p. 775. See also, John Plamenatz, The English Utilitarians (Oxford: Basil Blackwell and Mott, Ltd., 1966). For relevant readings of the primary texts, see Jeremy Bentham, A Bentham Reader, ed. Mary Peter Mack (New York: Pegasus, 1969); John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, with Critical Essays, ed. Samuel Gorovitz (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971); John Stuart Mill, Representative Government, ed. Currin V. Shields, (NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958).

democratic government. However, John Stuart Mill's work, especially Representative Government and On Liberty, can be read as highly mistrustful of placing government in the hands of a participating public.

In Representative Government, Mill, to an even greater degree than the American Federalists, constructed a scheme of government around institutions and political practices intended to buffer government from the possible democratic excesses of the unenlightened masses. These mechanisms included the establishment of a professional, expert administrative service and an expert Legislative Commission; a system of proportional representation to guaranty representation of political minorities; bicameral legislatures; and plural voting based on intellectual ability.⁴⁴ In On Liberty, Mill made a powerful argument for the primacy of individualism and the personal freedoms of private life over the rights of government or society to interfere or impose its will.

The point I wish to make is not that such controls or principles for limiting the possible excesses of popular opinion or the reach of government into private life are misguided or unnecessary. Indeed, in the current U.S. political climate of intolerance propagated by the likes of Pat Robertson and Pat Buchanan, and tacitly promoted during

⁴⁴ J.H. Burns, "Utilitarianism and Democracy," in J.S. Mill, Utilitarianism with Critical Essays, ed. Samuel Gorovitz (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971), 270.

the twelve years of Reagan-Bush presidency, certain of Mill's well-argued principles supporting minority rights and limitations on interference in private life are welcome resources in the ideological struggle against fanaticism. The problem is that this fear of democratic excesses can, and I would argue has, been used to support a dominant ideological climate which has devalued all of public life and democratic participation itself. This tendency has been strengthened by the connection between political utilitarianism and the ideology of classical free market economics.

John Dewey has argued that utilitarian social thought is closely related to laissez-faire economic theory. This theory enshrines as "natural laws" several key propositions: that self-interest leads individuals to work and this produces wealth; that delaying gratification leads to creation of capital and production of greater wealth; that the market is regulated by an equilibrium rule of supply and demand. These natural laws, coordinated by the invisible hand of Providence, ultimately work to the benefit of everyone, and thus of society. Since the social system is supposedly regulated by natural laws, politics and government are seen as unnatural, imperfect add-ons to society. Their role, therefore, should be strictly limited.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1988, orig. 1927), 90-92.

Indeed, those who developed liberal and utilitarian economic and social theory were reacting in large part against established, oppressive government structures and practices. As Dewey said, "they were activated by a desire to reduce [government] to a minimum so as to limit the evil it could do."⁴⁶ The role of government for utilitarian free market economists, then, was simply to allow these natural laws to work, as well as to enforce contracts and protect property relations. Thus in this strain of utilitarian theory, the pursuit of pleasure or good was to take place almost entirely in the private, economic sphere.

The representative mechanisms of the political system were assumed to be sufficient to adjudicate among clashing individual interests and to produce policies that would keep the economic system functioning properly. This, in turn, would produce the individual pleasures or goods that would add up to the society's total good. Widespread popular political activity, especially if it sought to challenge or in any way limit private pursuit of economic gain, was seen as an "unnatural" threat to the "natural" laws of liberal economics and utilitarian politics. It was to be avoided, or at least controlled and limited as much as possible. In this view, the main goal of politics became system maintenance.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁷ Kalman Silvert, The Reason for Democracy, (NY: Viking Press, 1976), 31-32.

Pluralism

Pluralism is a twentieth century conceptualization which understands democratic politics as a process of competition among interest groups or parties. A few of the notable theorists of pluralism have been Joseph Schumpeter, David Truman, Robert Dahl (especially in his early writing), and E.E. Schattschneider. Pluralist explanations of American political practice have enjoyed wide acceptance among academics as well as in the broader social world.

Pluralism posits an essentially Utilitarian model of social life, adding a few of its own key concepts. As in Utilitarianism, individuals are seen as creatures whose most basic motivation is rationally to pursue their self-interest (pleasure or good) in the private sphere. However, individuals also belong to, or identify with groups, whose members share common material or ideological interests. These groups often become involved in public political activity based on their members' shared interests and views.

There are two main types of groups relevant to the political system: 1) interest groups which seek to achieve their goals by influencing government officials, politicians or public opinion; and 2) Political parties which seek to achieve their ideological and material interests by sponsoring candidates for elections to public office; and formulating policy positions and overall platforms upon which these candidates run, and presumably, if elected, attempt to govern.

Although some pluralist theorists imply that most, if not all citizens belong to groups that can at least potentially become active in exerting influence in the political process, others believe that most people rarely participate so directly.⁴⁸ E. E. Schattschneider in particular offers evidence that strongly supports the claim that most people, and especially lower income people, do not generally participate in such interest group politics.⁴⁹ Instead, these theorists believe that the most important aspect of the political process is the organization of political competition by political parties. Most people, if they are going to participate, enter the political process only to support specific candidates (and thus the policy platforms) that the parties offer. According to these theorists, citizens in a modern democracy are not, and cannot be self-governing. Citizens participate in the political conflict of elections by voting, and government and policy are produced as by-products of the competition.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ David B. Truman seems to take the first position in The Governmental Process. Political Interests and Public Opinion (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 34-37. The second position is taken by E.E. Schattschneider, in The Semi-Sovereign People (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1975, orig. 1960), and by Joseph Schumpeter, in Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, third edition, 1962, orig. 1942).

⁴⁹ E.E. Schattschneider, The Semi-Sovereign People, 32-35.

⁵⁰ Schumpeter, 282; Schattschneider, 126, 133-134.

This view of citizen participation has become not only descriptive, but also prescriptive, i.e., normatively approved. It has come to define the ideal of the democratic process, and in so doing, has also defined the limits of democratic participation. The right to choose leaders from among those offered by the organized political parties, along with the existence of organized elite groups that pressure government to serve their interests, are now widely viewed as the defining characteristics of democracy. Thus although some theorists, such as Robert Dahl, are careful not to call such a system a democracy, in common parlance and understanding, the U.S. political system -- a pluralist, low participation republic -- is a democracy.⁵¹

With the wide acceptance of pluralist theories of American politics, the concept of government of the people and by the people has been emptied out of the idea of democracy. What we have instead is government of elites, by elites (through their interest groups and parties). Most citizens are merely spectators of the political conflict, participating only by casting their votes, if they do even that. Yet the pluralist theorists insist that this system somehow produces government for the people. And so they call it democracy. The word democracy remains a slogan that

⁵¹ For Dahl, the U.S. political system, and many other modern representative systems, are "polyarchies." Dahl defines polyarchy as that collection of institutions which support the selection of leaders in representative "democracies." Robert Dahl, Democracy and Its Critics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 218-221.

Americans revere and celebrate; but it has been emptied of most of its Jeffersonian participatory connotations.

Instead, through the theoretical reinforcement of utilitarianism and pluralism, American democracy has come to be conceived of largely in Federalist liberal terms. Utilitarianism dissolves the concept of a public, societal good into a balance of pleasures and pains of all the individuals in society. But the pursuit of happiness or pleasure is to take place within the sphere of the natural laws of the economic world. As in the Federalist view, then, any economic inequality that arises is viewed as natural, and is to be defended. The implication is that the political inequality which results from economic inequality is natural and acceptable.

In addition, politics, especially popular political activity, and even government itself become suspect -- seen as artificial social constructions outside of "natural" economic laws. This line of thinking reinforces the dual Federalist fear of dangerous popular participation on the one hand, and the general mistrust of government on the other. The solution is also Federalist: control and limit popular participation in politics, and rely as much as possible on the mechanisms of divided, representative government and the private sphere to prevent abuse of power. Utilitarian thinking leads to the demise of the idea of the importance of popular political activity. Indeed, it

pronounces a death sentence on the public sphere itself as a critical center of life in a democratic society.

Pluralism accepts utilitarianism's faith in the primacy of the economic realm in society, but also adapts the economic model to politics. It creates a model of political parties and interest groups competing for political power and influence in government. The propensity of economic inequality to lead to political inequality is not a major concern for pluralists, because politics is understood as essentially an elite activity. The people are essentially demobilized politically, except for their voting activity, and the vote is thought of as a political resource shared equally by all. Pluralism does remove the concept of the public sphere from utilitarianism's death row, but only to remake it as TV spectacle, with citizens as passive viewers. It offers a theory that explains and legitimizes the U.S. system of elite politics, ratified through the minimal popular participation of voting, and cannonizes it as democracy itself.

Pluralist theory, building on utilitarian theory and based on Federalist Liberal themes, acts as a powerful ideological constraint on people's conceptions of their role as participants in the public sphere. The public sphere becomes TV -- people are involved only in selecting the channel of a particular political candidate; after that they just watch. And pluralist theory allows them to celebrate this as democracy.

This passive vision of the role of citizens in U.S. democracy is further reinforced by several aspects of the interplay of consumer culture and U.S. political ideology and practice.

Consumer Culture and Ideology

Stuart Ewen has observed that the coming of a "culture of abundance" by the late 19th century allowed for "the flowering of a provocative, if somewhat passive, conception of democracy"--a "consumer democracy."⁵² Mass production processes for the first time put colorful art images, stylish ready-made clothing, and other traditional symbols of privilege within the economic reach of the masses.⁵³ The result was the illusion of a growing egalitarianism in terms of people's material possessions. In actual fact, the system of industrial production that created the culture of abundance was predicated on the exploitation of workers and the maintenance of social inequality. Nevertheless, the symbolic egalitarianism created by the mass availability of consumer goods was seen as an important democratizing component in American society. Traditionally, those few people who enjoyed material privilege in any society were also the ones who monopolized political power. So when

⁵² Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 32.

⁵³ Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, "Images of Democracy", in Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 169-182.

symbols of material egalitarianism became widespread in the U.S., it was easy for people to associate those symbols with, and even substitute them for, the idea of the political egalitarianism of democracy.

This conceptualization of American democracy in consumer terms is perfectly synchronous with the ideas of Federalist Liberalism. It offers a facsimile of material equality, thereby disguising economic inequality, and making it less likely to be held up as a cause of political inequality. It also encourages people to look to the economic sphere for substitute gratification of their desire for political equality. In this way it further devalues the idea of a vital public sphere where citizens might participate equally in the work of self-government.

This privately oriented, economic conception of democracy has continued to be an important mainstream ideological force in the United States. It was strongly reinforced by nearly fifty years of Cold War rhetoric. This rhetoric, emanating from political figures as well as from the advertising industry and the mass media more generally, constantly compared Soviet or Chinese Communism with American democracy. But such comparisons, couched in terms of Communism versus democracy, concealed more than they revealed. "Communism" is a term that was used to bring together both political and economic components of Soviet, East European and Chinese systems-- they were one-party totalitarian political systems welded to state socialist

economic systems. Similarly, the term "democracy" was used as a shorthand for the political and economic configuration of U.S. society -- a system of two-party, representative government within a capitalist economic context.

The conflation of the economic and the political into single terms encouraged people to think of each term as an internally undifferentiated whole. In the all-encompassing environment of Cold War propaganda, terminological precision was bound to be lost. Communism became a code word for all that is evil, but somehow inferior; democracy for all that is good and superior. What was left was the vague sense that democracy had something to do with freedom, just as communism had to do with unfreedom.

Given American society's enthrallment with consumerism, comparisons between communism and democracy often ended up on economic grounds. Communism was always found wanting for its lack of freedom, but especially for its lack of consumer freedom due to its notoriously short supplies and limited varieties of consumer goods. Cold War ideology had set up the simplistic opposition between Communism and democracy. So by its logic democracy came to mean, for many people, simply freedom of choice in an abundant consumer's market.

Political Practice

This limited vision of democracy has been strengthened not only by the ideological trends I have been describing. It has also been reinforced by the fact that opportunities

to exercise democratic influence in actual practice in the U.S. have always been severely limited. For one thing, even the right to vote --supposedly the key to democracy, the one act of direct, regular public participation -- has been seriously and systematically restricted throughout American history.⁵⁴ In addition, the capitalist context in which American democracy exists creates a needs structure that greatly limits the kinds of demands people will be likely to make on the political system. It also creates economic inequalities which, as discussed earlier, result in unequal access to political resources.

Voting Eligibility

At the time of the first U.S. Presidential election in 1789, the right to vote was quite restricted in most states.

Requirements that voters be property holders or taxpayers limited the electorate to some 50-75% of adult white males. Since adult white males were only about 20 percent of the total population, only about 10-15 percent of the population was eligible to vote that year.⁵⁵ Black men (both slaves and free men), Native American men, as well as all women, were categorically denied the right to vote.

⁵⁴ This has been true despite the gradual formal enfranchisement of adult citizens over time. See Piven and Cloward, Why Americans Don't Vote (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

⁵⁵ Bruce Campbell, The American Electorate, (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, Winston, 1979), 12-13.

White male, and later black male suffrage were expanded dramatically during the nineteenth century, but as Piven and Cloward argue, votes were tightly controlled by clientelistic political party organizations. Politics for most of this period remained focused on sectional, ethnic and religious interests. This deflected mass political pressures from challenging elite interests.⁵⁶ Then in the late 1800s, elite interests did come under serious challenge from a mobilized and enfranchised radical populist movement. In 1896, business interests responded with massive financial and organizational support for Republican candidate William McKinley, enabling him to defeat Democratic-Populist candidate William Jennings Bryan.⁵⁷ This victory for business interests was followed by a series of major electoral reforms, including new voter registration procedures. The effect of these reforms was to initiate a dramatic decline in electoral participation among low income white voters.⁵⁸

The demobilization of Black voters took place through a separate process, but with the same basic result. Black men had been guaranteed the right to vote with the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1870. However, they were only able to exercise it relatively freely during the years

⁵⁶ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, Why Americans Don't Vote, (NY: Pantheon Books, 1988), 27-41.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 46-51.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 17-21, 53-56.

of Reconstruction (and Union occupation) of the South. After that, their voting rights were nullified by a series of restrictions on voter eligibility, including poll taxes, property qualifications, literacy tests, and the system of the white primary, which excluded blacks from participation in the Democratic primary in southern states. Since the South was effectively a one-party Democratic region for the hundred years after the Civil War, this last device virtually eliminated black influence in southern electoral politics until the 1960s.⁵⁹

Women received the right to vote in 1920. But they did so in the midst of the national trend toward demobilization of low income voters. The result was that, for the most part, the only women who actually became voters were middle and upper class (white) women.

By the early twentieth century, according to Piven and Cloward, voter eligibility restrictions, "sharply reduced voting by the northern immigrant working class and virtually eliminated voting by southern blacks and poor whites."⁶⁰ Although the most blatant discriminatory eligibility requirements, such as the southern white primary, literacy tests and poll taxes were eliminated during the 1960s by the Voting Rights Act and the Twenty-fourth Amendment to the

⁵⁹ Edward S. Greenberg, The American Political System: A Radical Approach, third edition, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1983), 211-212.

⁶⁰ Piven and Cloward, 6.

Constitution,⁶¹ a complex system of obstacles to voter registration has remained largely in place in most states. This has the effect of perpetuating a pattern of extremely low voter participation in the U.S., a pattern which is especially prevalent among low income and lesser educated Americans.⁶²

Piven and Cloward believe that the disenfranchisement of low income and working class voters has led the political parties gradually to abandon both campaign rhetoric and policies that favor working class interests. This, in turn, reinforces the alienation of low income people from politics. The political parties then defend the obstacles to voter registration to maintain the political status quo on which they have built their organizations.⁶³

Thus the whole history of voter participation in the U.S. is one of seriously limited voting eligibility, through a variety of devices; and a resulting politics that has avoided challenges to elite interests. This is very much in keeping with the Federal-ist liberal reluctance to allow popular participation to threaten property or money

⁶¹ Bruce A. Campbell, The American Electorate, 31.

⁶² Piven and Cloward, 17-18.

⁶³ Ibid., 18-19.

interests. The result is that many people do not participate even in the basic political act of voting.⁶⁴

Capitalist Political Economy and Non-participation

Other forces besides the politics of voting restrictions have contributed to the de-politicization of American citizenship. For example, there is also the fundamental fact that in a capitalist democracy such as the U.S., the society's well-being is entirely dependent on the well-being of the capitalist economy. The maintenance of private profits is the condition for individual citizens' livelihoods (as workers), as well as for the material support of the very structure of government and whatever programs or services it would provide.⁶⁵ Therefore

⁶⁴ Voter turnout for the 1988 presidential election was only about 50 percent of the U.S. population that is of voting age. This was the lowest turnout in a presidential election since 1924, and continued a steady decline which began in the 1964 election. See Richard Berke, "Experts Say Low 1988 Turnout May Be Repeated," New York Times, November 13, 1988. Even a significant increase in participation in the 1992 presidential election brought voter turnout to only 55% of the voting age population. See Robert Pear, "55% Voting Rate Reverses 30-Year Decline," New York Times, November 5, 1992. This of course means that even in an exceptionally high participation year, some 45% of the U.S. adult population did not vote in the presidential election.

The September 19, 1990 issue of the New York Times also reported on a study by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press that showed that political alienation is on the rise in the U.S., and that this trend is especially strong among low and middle income people (defined as families earning less than \$50,000 a year).

⁶⁵ Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, On Democracy: Toward a Transformation of American Society, (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 53.

government officials are structurally bound to serve, or at least consider the needs of capital, as they formulate policies and programs. So proposed policies are always evaluated on the basis of their potential effects on corporate profits. This means that virtually every policy that would provide a public good at the expense of corporate resources or freedoms, unless it offers clear benefits to corporate interests, faces an uphill battle for passage. In the U.S., this produces a political landscape which is inherently sparse in its policy offerings for low income and working people. Such a political landscape offers little to encourage the participation of these inactive citizens. The political alienation of these people is therefore further reinforced.

Moreover, since the economy's major investment decisions, upon which working people depend for their material security, are controlled by private capital, working people are always in a precarious economic condition. Because of this, they are forced to concern themselves primarily and continually with seeking material gain, i.e., higher wages, in the private sphere.⁶⁶ With the decline in the power of organized labor, this is increasingly a private, individualistic struggle. Public sphere activity is always a lesser priority, unless there is a political issue that presents a tangible threat to the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 54.

voters, such as the likelihood of higher taxes or the poisoning of the local environment.

In this way, capitalist democracy creates a needs structure geared toward the short-term pursuit of material needs.⁶⁷ Historically, American capitalist democracy has usually satisfied enough of the needs it has generated (while leaving enough insecurity) to discourage most people from abandoning the short term economic struggle for political struggle. As Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers see it, "the structure of capitalist democracy thus effectively encourages the reduction of politics to striving over material gain."⁶⁸

It is no wonder that many Americans see their prime freedom in democracy not as that of participation in running their government. They have, practically speaking, no experience with that. Rather, they rejoice in what they see as their true freedom, their consumer freedom: their right to head for the stores to buy their happiness. So Washington's birthday, Lincoln's birthday, Memorial Day, Independence Day--all the patriotic holidays, and all the other holidays as well-- become occasions for giant sales at the malls. Federalist liberal democracy is symbolically reaffirmed in the ritual of holiday sale shopping. The vision of democracy as the participation of the people in

⁶⁷ Ibid., 54-57.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 54.

the process of self-government is relegated to a secondary theme in American political consciousness.

It is nevertheless important to note that participatory politics do still exist in certain quarters of U.S.

institutional life, taking such forms as public hearings, school board meetings, city and town planning boards and zoning boards, New England town meetings, etc. Along with these practices there remains an ideological current which understands democracy as public political activity. This will be the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

The Public Democratic Alternative

Although Federalist liberal ideology has long enjoyed a hegemonic position in American society, Jeffersonian liberalism has represented a constant ideological undercurrent, challenging the demobilizing, privatizing tendencies of the dominant ideology and urging popular participation in a vital public sphere. The Jeffersonian tradition has been carried forward, expanded and refined in important ways by a number of theorists, including John Dewey, C. Wright Mills, and several contemporary feminist and participatory democratic theorists. These theorists recognize many of the contradictions and flaws in the liberal theoretical tradition. They take the participatory, publicly-oriented conception of democracy as a theoretical guidepost, while noting the concrete ways in which social and political reality have diverged from it. They then propose various ways to move society back toward that goal.

The Public: Its Importance and Its Problems

Dewey believes that communication is what holds a democratic community together. Only through communication can people know about the consequences of their interdependent activities in society. The process of individuals discussing their desires, choices, and the

consequences of those choices for society allows people to discover their shared interests in the consequences of their actions. This is what generates "social consciousness" or "general will," and creates the ability to act on collective goals. It is this process of communication and deliberation over collective goals that constitutes a democratic public.¹

Mills agrees with this understanding of how a public should function. However, Mills envisions not a single monolithic public, but rather a society of many publics. In "a society of publics, discussion is the ascendant means of communication, and the mass media... simply enlarge and animate this discussion, linking one face-to-face public with the discussions of another."² Through public discussion, opinions are formed on social problems. When these opinions are translated into action, people exercise control of their society.³

Thus communication should serve two main purposes for the public. First, it provides information so that people can understand the shared social consequences of individual and group actions. Second, through discussion it allows for the formation of public opinion, which can become the basis

¹ John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1988, orig. 1927), 153-154.

² C. Wright Mills, Power, Politics and People, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 35.

³ Ibid., 36, 355.

for democratic action. In the United States today, there is apparently an abundance of information. Yet most citizens are involved in relatively little public discussion, and even less public action. This represents a serious problem for a country that professes to be democratic.

Dewey finds the roots of this dysfunctional public in the rise of industrial capitalism. With industrialization and urbanization has come the growth of enormous corporate organizations, which dominate social life and exert a major influence on government. These large-scale organizations have become "the most significant constituents of the public and the residence of power" in society, because "they are the most potent and best organized of social forces."⁴ The official public sphere for the debate of major public issues is now dominated by these organized, well-funded and strategically positioned corporate forces. The voices (and potential influence) of ordinary citizens are simply drowned out. In this context, liberal ideology's conception of government's role as merely the protector of property interests has serious political consequences. It legitimizes government's catering to corporate needs. It works against the development of a fully inclusive democratic public which can command the service of its government for truly public ends.⁵ Dewey notes the result:

⁴ Dewey, 107-108.

⁵ Ibid.,

"the Public seems to be lost; it is certainly bewildered."⁶

C. Wright Mills describes the same tendencies in American society, as they are played out some thirty years after Dewey's comments were written. Mills argues that control over society's most momentous decisions has passed into the hands of a small "power elite" made up of members of the top leadership in business, the military and politics.⁷ Beneath the power elite there is a middle level of power, populated by some members of the middle and professional classes and their interest groups, as well as professional politicians at local, state and federal levels, including members of Congress. Members of this group are primarily concerned with locally oriented issues; and when concerned with larger issues, it is with respect to how those bear on local concerns. They rarely gain access to power over the broad international decisions that most strongly shape American society. They may occasionally gain some influence over them; but they usually do not seek, nor can they maintain, long term control. These decisions rest firmly in the hands of the power elite.⁸

The third and lowest level of power is that of ordinary citizens--the general public. Mills concurs with Dewey that the public is in disarray, exerting very little influence in

⁶ Ibid., 114, 116.

⁷ Mills, Power, Politics and People, 26.

⁸ Ibid., 30-32.

political affairs. But whereas Dewey sympathetically notes the public's bewilderment, Mills takes a much more cynical view: "If we accept the Greeks' definition of the idiot as an altogether private man, then we must conclude that many American citizens are now idiots."⁹

Both Dewey and Mills believe that industrialization and urbanization have undermined the possibility of building the kind of participatory democratic public that Jefferson imagined. They note the concentration of power in corporations and large organizations, dwarfing the diffused power that individuals might exercise in their government. They also see a breakdown of face-to-face communication, and with it, the fading of possibilities for fully inclusive public discussion, the key to democratic deliberation and action.

The U.S. has become a mass society. The mass media dominate communication in all corners of society. The official public sphere, where most discussion and debate over important social decisions takes place, is now constituted essentially by the mass media. As a result, far fewer people express opinions as hear them, and to a large extent, people have become mere media markets.¹⁰ There is little or no opportunity for people to answer back quickly or effectively to what they hear through the mass media. In

⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰ Ibid., 35.

addition, channels for putting opinions into action are controlled by large organizations or authorities, in which ordinary individuals have little or no influence.¹¹ In such a situation, people

lose their will for decision because they do not possess the instruments for decision; they lose their sense of political belonging because they do not belong; they lose their political will because they see no way to realize it.¹²

Most people have become passive listeners and viewers, not active discussants and participants.

Of course many contemporary theorists would disagree with a characterization of people as a passive mass who accept media messages exactly as they are disseminated. In this contemporary view, the receivers of mass media messages construct the meanings of those messages. The "reader" of mass media texts "has control over meanings and also over the role they play in his life. This is the result of a negotiation that takes place between the text and its socially situated viewers."¹³

However, it must be remembered that an important part of a viewer's social situation is the influence of society's hegemonic ideologies. We call an ideology hegemonic not only because it is the ideology of society's dominant

¹¹ Ibid., 355.

¹² Ibid., 37.

¹³ Paolo Carpignano, Robin Andersen, Stanley Aronowitz and William DiFazio, "Chatter in the Age of Electronic Reproduction: Talk Television and the 'Public Mind,'" Social Text, No. 25/26, 1990, p. 49.

groups. An ideology is hegemonic precisely because most people in society accept its explanations and justifications of social reality. Therefore although readers of media texts may control the construction of meanings, they do not simply invent the materials with which to construct them. Unless there are glaring contradictions between people's lived experience and the meanings provided by the dominant ideologies, they have no reason to construct meanings that differ from those of the dominant ideologies.

In fact, even if there are glaring contradictions, hegemonic ideologies remain a powerful enough force that people often will still settle, despite their doubts, for dominant "common sense" explanations of social reality. To take a classic example, that is why people are so often willing to accept government and media pronouncements about the righteousness and inevitability of rushing off to war. Most people patriotically support war efforts despite the obvious personal risk of life; the sometimes blatant elite commercial motives behind cries for war; not to mention questions about the morality of war, or about the consequences of expending the vast quantities of a nation's resources that are required for war.

The Persian Gulf War was a case in point. Despite all the public information that should have raised people's doubts about U.S. motives for going to war -- President Bush's early public statements about the need to protect oil interests, to name just one example -- it seemed most

Americans were willing to believe the then hastily reconstructed mythology about the need to destroy the totalitarian menace, Saddam Hussein. The flood of yellow ribbons and American flags onto U.S. streets provided compelling evidence that most people had accepted, at least temporarily, the hegemonic appeals to patriotism and defense of freedom.

I say this not to deny the existence or possibility of counter-hegemonic resistance. Clearly people all have the potential to construct their own meanings from the messages they receive and the materials of their social position within their culture. Yet while people have the potential to create their own meanings for media messages, they often create meanings that are very close to the meanings that were intended by the sources of the messages, i.e., meanings that coincide with hegemonic ideologies.

For most people, critical reading of mass media messages and the political and social world around them does not come naturally. Just as critical reading of academic texts is a skill that must be trained, so the capacity to read critically mass media and cultural texts, as well as the social texts of everyday life, must also be trained. The fact that individuals have the ability to learn to read critically their social world and to act independently based on their reading of it, is nevertheless a very hopeful idea. The fact that people can think and act independently of hegemonic ideologies and entrenched social practices raises

the possibility that the privatistic ideological and practical tendencies of contemporary U.S. democracy can be challenged.

That is why Mills' comment about American citizens as idiots, despite its cynical charm, comes across as much too strong. By labelling American citizens idiots, i.e., "altogether private" people, Mills seems to deny the possibility that people have the capability to interpret reality, discuss it and act independently on public issues. But recognizing the potential of individuals to think critically about social reality and act independently to affect it is one thing; realizing that potential on a mass scale, and building democratic publics made up of people who think and act independently, is an infinitely more difficult proposition.

For Dewey, in order to constitute an inclusive democratic public, it is necessary for people to understand the processes of change in society.¹⁴ Therefore a science of society is needed to conduct "social inquiry" into the social consequences of significant individual and collective actions.¹⁵ The implication is that social scientists must play an important role in helping people understand social reality. The knowledge of social reality that social scientist produce must then be fully disseminated, in a form

¹⁴ Dewey, 165-166.

¹⁵ Ibid., 177.

that is engaging and comprehensible to all. For unless the findings of social inquiry are read and understood, "they cannot seriously affect the thought and action of members of the public."¹⁶ Not surprisingly, Dewey suggests that there must also be a related inquiry approach to education to develop ordinary people's (as opposed to just social scientists') abilities to comprehend their social world and act in it.¹⁷

Mills, too (his cynicism notwithstanding), believes that inclusive democratic publics can and must be developed. He believes that education can play a critical role in this process. Education should help people become self-educating individuals, capable of turning "personal troubles and concerns into social issues," which can then be publicly examined. The exercise of this capability is the cornerstone for the construction of democratic publics.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 183. This message is especially relevant for the scholars conducting today's social inquiry, in particular those in Cultural Studies, who see themselves as in the vanguard of a movement to redefine knowledge to include previously unheeded voices and perspectives. Doing new and powerful intellectual work does not justify unedited, clumsy and often incomprehensible writing, especially if the ostensible intent is to challenge the exclusivity of traditionally privileged knowledges.

¹⁷ Ibid., 201; also Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: The Free Press, 1966, orig. 1916).

¹⁸ Mills, 367-68. Mills writes here on the education available in the metropolitan liberal arts college for adults, but his comments are relevant for education more generally, provided it is a liberating, publicly oriented education, of which I will speak in greater detail later. Mills, like Dewey, also believes that social scientists exercise an important responsibility in educating the general public about the connections between private troubles and public issues. See C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination,

Mills feels that such an education will cultivate informal community leaders and other critical thinking citizens who can mediate and interpret the information that comes through the mass media, and potentially enable them to "answer back," transforming a one-way media-to-mass communication into a public discussion.¹⁹

Having said this about the role of education in developing democratic publics, Mills steps back and qualifies his argument: "I doubt that education, for adults or adolescents, is the strategic factor in the building of a democratic polity.... Mills believes that liberating education must be linked with, and supportive of, "movements with direct political relevance" in the larger society. He also notes, however, that in the absence of such movements and the publics that would create them, schools can act as incubators and nurturers of the people and the kind of intellectual interaction from which such movements will grow.²⁰ These movements become new publics in which people who have been excluded from the official public spheres can participate.

Schools can act as incubators of citizens' democratic values, and their capacities for thinking, discussion and debate; and they can be forums in which public discussion

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

¹⁹ Ibid., 371.

²⁰ Ibid., 373.

takes place. They can also provide an institutional setting in which people actually begin to take control of their personal and social futures. Schools can (although they generally do not) allow and encourage students to become self-directed learners. As students make both the process and content of their education their own, they enter into a process of self-discovery and self-formation. Part of this process involves coming to an understanding of the self as an agent who acts within existing social structures, affected and limited by them, but also capable of resisting and influencing them. At their best, schools will provide opportunities for students to take this journey of discovery and formation of self, in its interaction with society, through study of, and experiential learning in the social world outside of school.

In these ways schools can help build publics that will develop new understandings of social reality. Discussion and debate about social reality can lead to identifying problems and their sources, developing possible solutions and working for change. If vital democratic movements exist, schools can help prepare people to participate in them. If such movements are in decline, schools can help nurture the kinds of thinking, discussion and experience that are necessary for their renewal.²¹ Schools can thereby lay the groundwork for people to organize and act publicly.

²¹ Ibid., 369-373.

Social Movements as Counterpublics

Historically, various political and social movements have asserted themselves in American life. Often they have been formed as responses by subordinated social groups to domination by the larger society, and exclusion of their voices from official public spheres. Thus "women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians" have organized "subaltern counterpublics," where they can create discourses with which to articulate new understandings of their "identities, interests and needs."²² Nancy Fraser gives U.S. feminism as an example of such a counterpublic,

with its variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places. In this public sphere, feminist women have invented new terms for describing social reality, including "sexism," "the double shift," "sexual harassment," and "marital, date and acquaintance rape." Armed with such language, we have recast our needs and identities, thereby reducing, although not eliminating, the extent of our disadvantage in official public spheres.²³

The formation of these counterpublics occurs in spite of the power of the dominant, privatizing liberal ideology and the concrete political economic factors that discourage public participation. Through their activities in these counterpublics, some of the most politically marginalized

²² Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in Social Text, No. 25/26, 1990, p. 67.

²³ Ibid.

groups can participate in society's definition of reality and influence decisions about actions to be taken. By their very participation in these social activities, individuals challenge the assumptions of the dominant privatized strain of American liberal ideology. They also gain the opportunity to begin to create new understandings of how society should be organized and run. This represents a major accomplishment as well as a continuing challenge for participants in these counterpublics.

Of these counterpublics, feminism produces perhaps the most comprehensive theoretical critique of American social and political ideology and practice. It also contributes several important themes to a new vision of what is required for a more inclusive and just democracy than that provided by hegemonic liberal individualist ideologies. In the following section I will discuss my interpretation of the importance of these themes based on my reading of a number of feminist social theorists.

Feminism's Contributions to a New Vision of Democracy

There are at least three central, related themes in feminist theory that should be integrated into any valid understanding of the essential components of a democratic society: 1) the social connectedness and interdependence of individuals, and the importance of an ethic of care and responsibility that holds them together; 2) reconceptualizing the relationship between the private

sphere and the public sphere; and 3) equality for all in terms of economic, social and political rights. I will discuss each in turn.

Social Interdependence and the Need for an Ethic of Care

Liberal theory, particularly in its utilitarian individualist variety, conceives of independent, egoistic individuals as the fundamental units of society. These individuals come together in society merely for their mutual protection (from each other and from hostile foreign forces) and for the convenience of carrying out desired joint activities. This understanding of society makes a valuable contribution to democratic theory in its conceptualization of individual rights and freedom. However, it also generates strong ideological pressures that work against people's ability to conceive of and carry out the ongoing public activities that are necessary for democracy.

Feminist writers have theorized alternative conceptions of society in which individuals are understood as socially constituted, interdependent beings. For example, "maternal feminists" draw on the experience of women in childbearing and childrearing to portray the individual as a person grounded in relationships.²⁴ They propose a politics that

²⁴ Mary G. Dietz, "Context Is All: Feminism and Theories of Citizenship," in Daedalus, Fall 1987, 10-11.

follows from such interconnectedness, one that is based on an ethic of care and responsibility such as that which Carol Gilligan identifies with women's voice.²⁵

There has been some debate among feminists over how the idea of an ethic of care should be used in feminist theories of democratic citizenship. My view is that an ethic of care and responsibility is the necessary foundation for a democratic public. For a public to function requires some shared sense of community--some degree of mutual care, compassion and empathy among its members. Otherwise, there is no possibility of striving democratically for a common good, and no responsibility to take care of society's most vulnerable members. If one accepts that individuals are socially constituted beings, it follows that "the health of the social whole is literally vital to a socially constituted individual's well-being."²⁶ Maintenance and development of the social whole in turn, requires an ethic of care, in which individuals act with a sense of responsibility and care towards other members of the community, including those most in need. This ethic of care

²⁵ Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982, 164.

²⁶ Frances Moore Lappe, Rediscovering America's Values, NY: Ballantine Books, 1989, 13. Although Lappe is probably not known specifically as a feminist theorist, I find that her writing and activist work are infused with an ethic of care.

must be publicly oriented. It must not remain linked exclusively to the intimate relations of family life.²⁷

Carol Gould takes this position in elaborating her democratic theory. She proposes a social ontology that has as its fundamental units "individuals-in-relations" or "social individuals."²⁸ By taking individuals-in-relations as a starting point, Gould makes it impossible to fall into theorizing an individualistic, privatized democracy. She builds her theory of democracy on a concept of equal positive freedom, understanding freedom as self-development. Self-development depends on the actions of individuals as agents in their own development. However, since individuals are "social beings," they must "act in and through their social relations" and social institutions. Thus "freedom...requires the full development of both individuality and community."²⁹

²⁷ This is Dietz's main concern and criticism of the maternal feminists--that they have no commitment to public life; that they are apolitical. I would argue, with Joan Tronto, that an ethic of care can, and indeed must be the basis for a full theory and practice of democracy. I also agree with Tronto that it expressly must not be understood as gender-based and linked to women. Dietz, 13. Joan Tronto, "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care," in Signs, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1987.

²⁸ Carol C. Gould, Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economics and Society. NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 105.

²⁹ Carol C. Gould, "Private Rights and Public Virtues: Women, the Family and Democracy," in Beyond Domination: New Perspectives on Women and Philosophy, ed. Carol C. Gould, Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984, 5.

Traditionally, the complementary concerns of individuality and community have not been valued equally in public life. Specifically, the concern with community, as well as related concerns with the nurturing of life and with peace, must be more fully incorporated into the ethos of the public sphere.³⁰

From "Private" Concerns to Public Issues

There are two main ways of drawing the distinction between private and public issues. The traditional way is to consider public everything relating to the law or government; and to classify as private all matters relating to "economic, cultural, personal or family life." The second method of dividing private and public is to consider public all of institutionalized social life, including government and corporate bureaucracies and the activities connected with them. The private would then include all non-institutionalized life, such as interpersonal relations and individual actions.³¹

Historically, whichever way the private/public distinction has been drawn, it has been used to validate certain issues as worthy of public consideration. By the same token it has served to ban other issues, and the people

³⁰ Ibid., 17. Gould also notes that such traditionally "masculine" public values as "individual achievement and self-esteem" should play a much greater role in the private sphere of personal relations.

³¹ Ibid., 7.

involved in those issues, from public discussion and action. So for example, within the first framework, the activities of individuals and corporations in the economic realm are considered private matters, in which public regulation and interference are to be minimized. Of course the second conceptualization disputes this, putting all institutionalized social life, including economic activity, within the public realm, thereby opening it to public action.

The question of which matters are appropriate for public action continues to be fiercely debated. Indeed, the debate has intensified since the late 1970s, when conservative political forces began to solidify their strength. But in the current debate, neither of the older conceptualizations of public and private are adequate.

Starting in the late 1970's, conservatives have crusaded for privatization and deregulation of the economy and of many aspects of government activity, including public schooling. At the same time, the conservative "family values" discourse has become a thinly veiled drive to weaken or ban a number of private, individual rights such as women's control over reproductive decisions, freedom of artistic expression, and freedom to choose one's sexual orientation. So on economic matters, conservatives wish to operate under the first conceptualization of public as only that which has to do with the law and government; and even working under this narrow definition, they want to shrink

the public sphere by having the private sector and "markets" attempt to manage problems or tasks that the government now does. However, when it comes to issues of personal or family life, conservatives want to expand the public sphere, so that they can more readily regulate certain formerly private activities.

For very different reasons, feminists have also pushed for a broadening of the definition of public to include not only those issues that are connected with the state or with institutional life, but all issues that can be considered "of concern to everyone."³² Feminists have noted that historically women, and many of the issues connected with women's socially defined and restricted roles as wives and mothers, have been relegated to the private sphere of domestic life.³³ This meant that under cover of their assignment to private, family life, women were excluded from full participation in public life. They also effectively lost their equal rights as individuals, since these rights could only be protected in the public sphere of law and government.

Feminists have not allowed this situation to go unchallenged. Like conservative family value crusaders, they have fought to bring formerly "private" issues into the public sphere of debate and government policy making.

³² Fraser, p. 71

³³ Ibid., 59-60.

However, in stark contrast to the conservative project of bringing private issues into the public sphere in order to limit individual expression and freedom (for the presumed purpose of better serving the community as a whole), feminists have sought to expand the public sphere in order to protect and strengthen individual rights and freedoms.

Nancy Fraser makes the theoretical argument that no issue can be excluded a priori from public discussion. There is no way to determine in advance of discussion whether an issue is indeed "private," or whether it is shared privately by a large number of people and might be linked to common causes or amenable to public solutions. She cites the example of the problem of wife or partner battering. This was traditionally considered a private, "domestic" problem, and was therefore excluded from discussion in the official public sphere. It was only when the women's movement forced the issue into public discussion and debate, as a problem that is widespread in patriarchal societies, that it was recognized as a public issue that should be dealt with institutionally as well as privately.³⁴

It is in this sense that the feminist theme "the personal is political" takes on concrete meaning. This slogan is based on the idea that what happens in personal life is connected to what happens in public, political life.

³⁴ Ibid., 71.

Personal life is affected by public life; but it can also help shape political life.

The example of domestic violence against women illustrates this point. When women organized a feminist counterpublic, they built on their personal lived experiences and shared identity as women. They then used their alternative public sphere as a forum in which to debate and clarify issues that were raised by their personal, but shared experiences. Through this process, domestic violence was revealed as one of many widespread social problems that women face. By projecting their discussion to a wider public, women forced this issue onto the agenda of the dominant public sphere. Thus, through discussion in a subaltern counterpublic, a so-called "personal" or "private" problem was understood as having public or social causes, and possible public solutions. Reconstituted as a public issue, it helped shape public debate and public actions.

There are a multitude of other issues that could, and indeed formerly have been considered "private" concerns of individuals, of families, or of the economic "marketplace." Through public discussion and debate, often initiated in subaltern counterpublics, it has been recognized that these issues can and should be addressed publicly, through social, legal and political institutions. A few obvious examples are rape, AIDS, child care, racial and ethnic discrimination, unemployment, and all manner of workers'

health, safety and organizational rights. This process seems to be very much what C. Wright Mills had in mind when he spoke of the need to link private troubles to public issues.

There is another sense in which the feminist idea of connecting private life and public life, i.e., in which the personal is political, is relevant. Since individuals are socially constituted, ongoing interpersonal relations have an impact on people's character formation. In ongoing social contexts where interpersonal relations are based on a recognition of "the agency and the equality of others," individuals are encouraged to develop such values. Values which respect other people's agency and equality are an essential foundation for a democratic character. The development of a democratic character in individuals, in turn, creates a force for a democratic public life. Conversely, if public life is inclusive, democratic and egalitarian, it will reinforce such values in interpersonal relations.³⁵

Equality

Central to feminism has been the belief in the essential equality of women and men, and the struggle to achieve for women the equal social, economic and political rights that are their due. Women's experience of domination and inequality in society has also sensitized feminists to

³⁵ Gould, "Private Rights," 7-8.

the systemic inequalities that other subordinate groups face. It has imbued feminist democratic theory with an acute awareness of the need for substantive equality in social life as a precondition for democratic practice.

Feminism's first concern is with women's struggle for equality with men. Feminism demands the "recognition that women are 'individuals' like men ... autonomous persons, free and equal ... beings who can enter into the practice of self-assumed political obligation."³⁶ A prerequisite for women's autonomy is control over the child-bearing function. That is, women must have access to birth control as well as safe, legal and affordable abortion.

Furthermore, social institutions must be structured so that the care of dependent members of society (primarily children, but also the sick and the elderly) does not automatically devolve privately upon the family, and ultimately on women.³⁷ Society must take greater collective responsibility for care of its dependent members, so that women do not retain such responsibilities as part of their forced gender roles. These are perhaps the most basic conditions for women's equality. Women cannot participate

³⁶ Carole Pateman, The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critique of Liberal Theory, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 176.

³⁷ Johanna Brenner, "Feminist Political Discourses: Radical Versus Liberal Approaches to the Feminization of Poverty and Comparable Worth," in Women, Class and the Feminist Imagination, ed. Karen V. Hansen and Ilene J. Philipson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 494.

freely and equally in society as long as they are forced by social pressure or by the lack of institutional alternatives into specified gender roles.

Even if freed from the burdens of unchosen, unmanaged childbearing and dependent care, much more is required before women will enjoy full and equitable access to the benefits of social, economic and political life. The struggle to achieve women's equality has led feminist theorists to a commitment to universal social equality. For example, Johanna Brenner calls for social "interdependence and the legitimate claim of each individual on the community to meet her or his needs for good and productive work, physical sustenance, emotional support and social recognition."³⁸ This is similar to Gould's insistence on equality of access for all to the material and social conditions of self-development.³⁹

The right to the conditions of self-development implies the right to participate in the creation and management of those conditions. This means that the arenas in which decisions are made about the creation and disposition of the conditions of individual development must be open to the participation of those who are affected by the decisions. They must become public spheres. By this definition, then,

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Gould, Rethinking Democracy, 25.

not only the political arena must be open to full democratic participation, but so also must be the economic arena.⁴⁰

For society to be democratic, participation in these public spheres must be on an equal basis. Fraser points out that in the dominant liberal conception, existing social inequalities do not affect discussion or deliberation in the public sphere. Social inequalities are supposedly bracketed, set aside so that participants can "speak to each other as if they were social and economic peers."⁴¹ However, in practice social inequalities are not set aside so easily. Often the myth of equal participation in discussion and deliberation obscures a dynamic in which members of dominant social groups actually retain control of the process. Participants from subordinate social groups-- women, workers, the poor, and members of non-dominant racial or ethnic groups-- "are silenced, encouraged to keep their wants inchoate, and heard to say 'yes' when what they have said is 'no.'"⁴²

Official public spheres are not culturally neutral arenas. Rather, as in the society at large, the "cultural styles" of dominant social groups are more highly valued than those of subordinated groups. So the input of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25-26.

⁴¹ Fraser, 63. Fraser takes Habermas' conception of the public sphere as the liberal model that she is criticizing.

⁴² Jane Mansbridge, "Feminism and Democracy," The American Prospect, No. 1 (Spring 1990), 127, quoted in Fraser, 64.

latter by definition carries less weight in public deliberations. This problem is compounded by the fact that the mass media, which are the primary means for the communication of information and ideas relevant to public deliberations, are not freely accessed or controlled. They are, with a few exceptions, privately owned and run for profit, subject only to limited government regulation.⁴³ The media can be accessed either by paying for a message to be carried, or by decisions of news organizations or program producers that a particular event, story or piece of information will "sell." As a result, those outside the highest levels of the dominant social group and its culture (i.e., those who do not have a great deal of money to spend, or are not by their social position alone considered newsworthy) generally find it difficult to get their messages carried by the mainstream media.

For all of these reasons, it is clear that equal participation does not currently exist in the public spheres relevant for managing the conditions of people's self-development. Equal democratic participation requires a much greater degree of social equality. Of course feminists are not the first to make this argument. Related points have been made by many democratic theorists, some of whom I discussed earlier.

⁴³ Fraser, 64-65.

However, the feminist movement not only makes the theoretical argument for equality, but also struggles concretely, as a democratic subaltern counterpublic, to achieve it.

Feminists have organized to minimize the negative impact on participation of existing social inequalities. Through a complex network of organizations, publications, cultural productions, legal and political activities, feminists are able to make their collective voice heard in official public spheres. At the same time, feminist theory and practice continue to direct public energies toward attempting to reduce and eliminate social inequalities, and reshape the consciousness and structures of society.

Summary: Contributions of Feminism to Public Democratic Theory

Feminist ideas and practices have contributed much to the creation of a new vision of U.S. democracy. Feminists have theorized the need for what I believe is an indispensable building block for a society that intends to be publicly-oriented, egalitarian and democratic: an ethic of care and responsibility. They have stretched and reshaped the debate over the proper relationship between the personal and the political (the private and the public). Feminism has emphasized the need for substantive social equality as a prerequisite for equal participation in

expanded and inclusive democratic public spheres. Feminism has also organized and worked to project its program of social, economic and political transformation onto ever wider publics, and to attempt to implement it point by point. Although there have been innumerable setbacks-- and in fact presently we seem to be in a period of backlash against efforts to achieve equality-- the feminist movement continues to be an important force pressing for equality.

Strengths and Limitations of Counterpublics as Vehicles for Democratic Change

The women's movement is not the only counterpublic through which people are working to make their voices heard. As I noted earlier, similar counterpublics have been created by other subordinated groups, including such racial and ethnic groups as African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asians; as well as non-ethnic based groups such as gays and lesbians, environmentalists, workers and political leftists. Counterpublics are born when people of similar background are driven together by the oppression of their social situation, or by some other shared sense of injustice or common cause. In a non-egalitarian, multicultural society, counterpublics can serve as arenas where subordinated groups develop and strengthen their cultural identities and identify the major obstacles that confront them. This is a process of cultural consciousness

raising. These counterpublics generate the discourses that they will direct toward influencing wider publics.⁴⁴

The work of counterpublics is in this sense ideological. They produce counter-hegemonic discourses which attempt to undermine and replace dominant conceptions of social reality. At the same time, these movements also work through legal, political, economic and cultural means to reshape concrete social structures and social relations. In turn, this practical work itself can have the effect of changing or reinforcing the consciousness of both participants and nonparticipants. The processes of ideological and practical change are closely intertwined in the work of counterpublics. An important aspect of this change process is provided by the educational nature of much of what goes on in these groups.

Education takes place through counterpublics in a number of ways. First, the sharing of participants' personal experiences helps them recognize that their private troubles might in fact be rooted in public issues, and therefore might be amenable to public solutions. Second, there is an important process of the dissemination and exchange of ideas and information that takes place through

⁴⁴ Ibid., 67. Fraser notes that subaltern counterpublics are not necessarily democratic; and even if they intend to be democratic, they sometimes do not act openly or democratically. But to the extent that they challenge the exclusionary practices of dominant public spheres, and "help expand discursive spaces," they at least potentially contribute to building a more inclusive democracy.

their intricate networks. Third, a great deal of discussion and debate takes place in counterpublics. This contributes to the formation of group identities, definition of problems, examination of structures of power and proposals for action. Fourth, participation in political actions provides invaluable experience which can further influence people's understandings and political worldviews, as well as their ability to act publicly and effectively in the future. Finally, political actions and the articulation of counter-hegemonic ideas also contribute to educating larger publics, outside the counterpublic.

However, existing counterpublics are by no means currently mobilizing vast majorities of U.S. citizens for mass participation in democratic publics. So although they represent a positive development and a hopeful sign, their existence, in itself, cannot be taken as evidence that widespread participation is at hand. Nor can it be hoped that existing counterpublics as presently constituted can, through their efforts alone, mobilize the great majority of privately-oriented, nonparticipating citizens. At present, many existing counterpublics give the impression of being too particularistic to attract majority followings.

Part of the problem is that counterpublics are often seen -- and often see themselves -- in terms defined by hegemonic ideologies of privatized democracy. The work of counterpublics is therefore understood not in public, universal terms, as a struggle for full inclusion and

opportunity for the self development of all. Rather, counterpublics are sometimes understood by their members and by larger publics in particularistic terms. Operating under particularistic self-conceptions, the interaction of diverse publics can degenerate into a pluralistic struggle for the self interest of antagonistic groups. The gain of one group is understood as coming only at the expense of others.

Nevertheless, working from a particularistic self-conception, counterpublics might make some contribution to expanding democracy by struggling to force official public spheres to become more open, inclusive, and egalitarian. Specifically, counterpublics would work for their own participation on equal footing with others in official public spheres. Alternatively, numerous counterpublics could develop, responding to a wide enough range of interests that most people could be motivated to become active in one or more of them. By the sheer numbers of their participants, and the extent of their networks for cultural production and communication, they could come to rival or even displace the official public spheres as centers for defining and acting upon social reality. However, in that case, democracy would depend on the ability of these multiple publics to communicate across their differences, so that cross-public deliberation could lead to

agreement on overall social goals and actions to be taken.⁴⁵

This would amount to a form of participatory pluralism. The danger, as with elite pluralism, is that public life would disintegrate into a struggle for the self-interests of the diverse groups. There would be no possibility of formulating a public interest which would foster the self-development of all members of society.

The counterweight against the centrifugal forces of self-interested pluralism is an ethic of care and responsibility. Subaltern counterpublics are of little use for building inclusive, participatory, publicly-oriented democracy unless their members profess and act on an ethic of care and responsibility. It is the glue that can potentially hold society and public life together. Care, which is based on empathy for others, provides the moral and humanitarian impetus for people to work toward public goals, instead of for purely private interests. A sense of responsibility calls on people to take up the burden of participating in public life. It also serves as a check on irresponsible individual or group action. There can be no truly public life without the wide acceptance in society of an ethic of care and responsibility.

Counterpublics must work not simply to enhance their own group interests at the expense of others. They must

⁴⁵ Ibid., 69-70.

work for their own concerns within a context of working toward the good of the whole society. Such work has as its starting point communication with other groups in society.

Counterpublics must send out their discourses not simply as missiles to demolish their opponents in official public spheres. Doing so runs the risk of creating enemies out of concerned, nonpartisan bystanders who might otherwise be converted into allies. Rather, counterpublics must articulate their discourses as invitations to dialogue. They should condemn injustice, and forcefully. But it is also crucial that they keep open the channels of communication and dialogue between themselves and the larger society. Only through dialogue can there be the possibility of mutual learning, and the creation of new and broader definitions of the public good.

The Need for Ideological Change

For the members of counterpublics and others to develop an ethic of care and responsibility requires ideological change -- what Antonio Gramsci would call a struggle for an alternative ideological hegemony. Average citizens must be encouraged to reconceptualize their common sense ideas about their relationship to other members of society, as well as about democracy and their role as citizens in their democracy.

Regarding their relationship to other members of society, people must come to view each other as equal,

interdependent members of a social whole. They must see that they are indeed individuals, but they are individuals-in-relations. Their individuality itself is formed in the dialectical interaction of individual agency with existing social relations and social structure. Social relations provide the context within which individuals exercise their freedom of self-development.

Society is an individual's home. If there are weaknesses in society, if some individuals or groups are not able to develop to their full potentials, they cannot be full participants and contributors to society. As a result, the social context in which all members of society seek their own development is weakened. This weakens the whole society. Every individual's self-development is therefore connected to the self-development of all others in society.

The privatized and individualistic ideologies that currently dominate people's understandings of the world deny and disguise the reality of people's interdependence. They are ideologies of short-sighted irresponsibility. They are ideologies that allow individuals intentionally to close their eyes to the consequences of their actions or their inaction. These ideologies justify abandoning individual responsibility for shaping society; and substituting for it a blind faith in an economistic invisible hand. These privatistic ideologies deny that people can shape their own

social future. They deny in principle that people can rule themselves.

An alternative understanding of people's relationship to each other in society, based on a recognition of their interdependence and on an ethic of care and responsibility, can be called interdependent individualism or simply responsible individualism. The sense of identification with and empathy for other members of society that follows from this worldview results in people feeling both a responsibility for the consequences of their individual actions, and a need to act publicly for the good of others and for the good of the whole society.

Currently predominant understandings of democracy are inadequate for such an interdependent, socially responsible view of society. Such a social vision would require that privately-oriented, consumerist understandings of democracy (i.e., Federalist models) be replaced with more publicly-oriented, participatory democratic ideas and practices. American citizenship must be reconstructed on a foundation of public democratic values, attributes and practices, if a public democracy is to be forged in the United States.

Public Democratic Citizenship

This chapter has drawn upon a wide range of social and political theorists to sketch the outlines of an alternative hegemonic vision and practice of democratic citizenship.

This alternative understanding of democratic citizenship builds upon a long tradition of American political philosophy that sees democracy as publicly-oriented rule by participation, as opposed to the dominant hegemonic views of democracy as private, individualistically-oriented rule by consent. Based on this reading of the political and social theory discussed in this chapter, I offer the following outline of the values, attributes and capacities I believe an ideal-typical American citizen would have to possess in order to participate meaningfully in a public democracy.

1) **An ethic of care and responsibility as a foundation for community and public life.** This includes an understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of people as "individuals-in-relations;" and following from that, the need for individuals to live as responsible members of communities.

2) **Respect for the equal right of everyone to the conditions necessary for their self-development as individuals-in-relations.** This provides the basis for such fundamental liberal democratic principles as equal individual civil and political rights, and equal political power and voice. Yet it places these principles squarely within the context of a publicly-oriented concept of democracy, in which the rights of individuals are balanced by their responsibilities to each other and to the larger community. A respect for equal individual rights within this context creates the possibility for a sophisticated

sense of justice that continually weighs individual claims against social concerns. Respect for everyone's equal rights to self-development involves acceptance of the fundamental equality of members of all social groups in society, including that of social groups other than one's own. This implies acceptance of a person or a group's right to be different from oneself, or from the accepted norms and values of the community, as long as that difference doesn't interfere with the rights of other community members. This acceptance and respect for difference is an essential condition for building public democracy in a multiracial, multicultural society.

3) An appreciation of the importance of the public.

This has several aspects, including recognizing the need to expand and create new public spheres as sites for discussion and debate of public issues; understanding the public nature of certain "personal" problems; appreciating the need to participate in public discussion and debate, and to take action to address public issues.

4) A critical/analytical social outlook. A critical social outlook is geared toward examining critically the nature of social reality, including the "common sense" realities of everyday life. It also seeks to understand the underlying relations of power in any given social situation.

5) The capacities necessary for public democratic participation. These capacities include analysis of

written, spoken and image language; clear oral and written expression of one's ideas; habits of active listening as a key to communication; and facility in working collaboratively with others. In addition, capacities for public participation include some knowledge of key U.S. Constitutional rights, and the political processes of government, from the local to the national level. It is also necessary for public citizens to understand some of the complexities and inter-connections of major public issues to each other and to issues in the past; and more importantly, to know how to learn more about any important issue or set of issues that arises. Finally, a public citizen must possess the self-confidence and independence of mind to be able to take appropriate public action when necessary.

Chapter 4

Education for Critical Consciousness and

Public Democratic Citizenship

The theoretical project of this study so far has involved looking closely at U.S. democracy as presently and historically conceived and practiced. A hegemonic tradition has been identified that sees democracy as a privately-oriented, individualistic system with little room for most people to participate in self-rule. The theoretical shape of a counter-hegemonic tradition of democracy in the U.S. has also been outlined. This understanding of democracy sees people's participation in public life as the essential ingredient in democratic government.

A number of critical educational theorists have argued that schools can play an important role in promoting such a counter-hegemonic understanding of democracy, and helping to build a more democratic and just society in the U.S.¹ The last chapter ended by bringing the theoretical discussion down to the level of reality, by outlining some of the essential characteristics that a public democratic citizen should possess. These are the key values, attributes and capacities that schools should help young citizens develop.

¹ To name just a few: Michael Apple, Ideology and Curriculum (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Aronowitz and Giroux, Education Under Siege and Postmodern Education; Giroux, Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life; Jesse Goodman, Elementary Schooling for Critical Democracy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Ira Shor, Critical Teaching and Everyday Life (Boston: South End Press, 1980); Kathleen Weiler, Women Teaching for Change (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1988).

The current chapter will take on three main tasks. First, it will offer a brief argument for the importance of field research in urban public schools that can be studied as possible models of democratic education. Second, it will review some of the traditional research on political learning or "socialization," as well as recent work in educational ethnography. The argument will be made that the field work and analysis done in this study build on the work in these two research traditions.

Third, this chapter will propose a number of ideal organizational features and school practices which can be expected to engage students in school work and school life, and nurture the values, attributes and capacities young people need for public democratic citizenship. These ideal school organizational features and practices will serve as categories of analysis for the study of two existing urban public alternative high schools. They will also provide a framework for analysis that researchers and educators can use in analyzing the degree to which other schools' organization and practices may help nurture public democratic citizenship.

**Transforming Hegemonic Ideas and Practices of Democracy
through Education**

The processes of change at the ideological and practical levels are highly interdependent. Participatory democratic practice is central to the struggle for the hegemony of a new democratic worldview. Conversely, if public democratic practices are to take hold in society, they must be supported by people's belief in the appropriateness of such action.

The struggle for a new hegemonic democratic ideology and practice can take place in part through the educational processes and activist projects of counterpublics. But as I have argued, most existing counterpublics, as presently constituted, are themselves steeped in the current hegemonic democratic ideologies of particularism and privatized individualism. Their efforts to develop a new democratic hegemony are not likely to move far beyond attempts to establish participatory pluralism, with its inherent centrifugal tendencies toward social division and inter-group antagonism.

To transcend the limitations of existing counterpublics as sites for developing alternative hegemonic ideas and practices of democracy, it is necessary to look to an earlier point in the process of hegemony production. An auspicious place to begin to develop the seeds of a counter-hegemonic movement for an inclusive, participatory,

publicly-oriented democracy is the institution of public education. As numerous theorists have suggested, and as I argued in Chapter One, some of the most important sites of ideological and social reproduction, as well as resistance and struggle against that reproduction, are the institutions of formal education. Schools are also the most important institutional sites -- although clearly not the only sites -- for the development of intellectuals. Intellectuals, both traditional and organic, play crucial roles in organizing and supporting either the institutions of a hegemonic social order, or counter-hegemonic movements and institutions. For these reasons, schools are potentially key sites for struggles to establish counter-hegemonic ideas and practices of democracy and democratic citizenship.

At least since the time of Thomas Jefferson, education has been seen as a means for preparing young people for democratic citizenship. Schools have long been sites for the "socialization" of students according to the dominant notions of privately-oriented democratic citizenship that were discussed in Chapter 2. However, schools have also been used by progressive and radical democrats to prepare young people for more active, critical, publicly-oriented democratic citizenship. There is great potential for more such counter-hegemonic work to be done in schools.

From the point of view of the activist researcher or educator who wishes to participate in building a counter-hegemonic movement for public democracy, the question

becomes, simply: How can schools be organized and run to prepare young people for public democratic citizenship?

There is a need for case study research on existing schools that are potential models of education for empowered public citizenship. The research must examine and criticize the actual workings of such schools, so that they might be improved upon as educational models.

Need for Democratic Urban Education

It is especially critical to hold up models of empowering education that serve an inner-city population, i.e., students who are primarily of African American and Latino background. These students tend to be ill-served by urban public education. This point is made by Michelle Fine, discussing high school dropout rates.

Dropout rates nationally fall at 25 percent. In many urban high schools, however, they reach 60 and 70 percent. Dropping out of high school is, in some schools, a nearly anomalous event. In other schools, it is a shared tradition. The latter schools are low income, urban and often, "of color," and in these communities, the consequences are almost always devastating.²

An empowering urban education would seek to break this social trap. It would teach young people of color and others to take control of their lives, to work with others to accomplish personal as well as collective goals in their social, economic and political lives. It would prepare them

² Michelle Fine, Framing Dropouts, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 21.

for public democratic citizenship. Existing models of this type of education must be identified, studied, improved upon and publicized, so that progressive urban educational reform can take place.

But before launching into a discussion of potential models of democratic urban public education, it is necessary to address an important prior issue: What is the nature of the interaction between schools and students, as schools try to "teach" citizenship to young people? This issue has been addressed, directly or indirectly, by a number of social researchers from two distinct traditions -- political socialization and educational ethnography. By reviewing some of the significant work from these two research traditions, one gains important insights into how to go about studying schools and their students.

Political Socialization and Educational Ethnography: A Brief Review

Many of the important early studies of political socialization suffer from a crucial conceptual weakness. They understand socialization as a uni-directional process in which young people are inculcated in the political values and norms of a society, to ensure the political system's persistence.³ As a result, many of these studies focus on

³ Herbert Hyman, Political Socialization (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959); Fred Greenstein, Children and Politics. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); Robert Hess and Judith Torney, The Development of Political Attitudes in Children (Garden City, NY:

easily measured outcomes of political socialization, such as students' attitudes toward government and their passive knowledge of political figures and governmental offices and functions.⁴ Their methodology reflects this outcome-centered orientation, in that these early socialization studies are dominated by surveys and highly structured interviews.⁵

R.W. Connell challenges previous political socialization studies for failing to recognize "the conscious creative activity of the children themselves in the development of their own beliefs."⁶ With this theoretical shift, Connell introduces the possibility of students as active subjects in the socialization process. William Wentworth carries the theoretical argument further by developing a theory of socialization that posits a "cultural context of interaction" which limits, but does not determine individual activity. Thus the success of the process of socialization is "directly dependent upon the

Doubleday, 1968).

⁴ Stuart Palonsky, "Political Socialization in Elementary Schools," The Elementary School Journal, 87, No. 5, (1987).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ R.W. Connell, The Child's Construction of Politics, (Carlton, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1971), 232.

willingness of the novice to submit...to expected conduct." Socialization is understood as a negotiated process.⁷

This understanding of political socialization has three important consequences for research. First, it suggests the need for research to examine closely the processes of political socialization/ education. Second, if individuals are seen as agents in the socialization process, it becomes much easier to see them also as active agents in the political system itself. Thus Connell is much more conscious of questions of students' developing conceptions of popular sovereignty and power than are earlier researchers.⁸ Third, the new focus on socialization as process and on students as agents seems to lead away from the macro-sociological orientations of the early socialization studies, and toward micro-focused, qualitative research methods such as open-ended interviews and educational ethnography.

There have been a number of good ethnographic studies published in the last ten years or so examining various aspects of life in schools. Some have looked at the consequences for students' school success of the different ways students and teachers of different racial or ethnic

⁷ William Wentworth, Context and Understanding. (NY: Elsevier North Holland, Inc., 1980), 108, 134.

⁸ Connell, Child's Construction of Politics, 59.

groups use language;⁹ or of the different views students have of the usefulness of schooling given existing social and economic realities.¹⁰

Several studies have examined the socialization of students from different social class backgrounds for different positions in society.¹¹ Wilcox makes a strong case that by first grade, upper middle class and lower middle class children are already receiving very different kinds of socialization to prepare them for their respective future occupational roles. Her study, however, gives little indication that these children have, or will have an active role to play in negotiating that socialization process. Connell et al. and Willis, go much further than Wilcox. In their respective studies, they illuminate some of the complex processes of interaction among school, community and student cultures, including cultures of resistance, which contribute to the process of social class reproduction.

To varying degrees, these studies have wrestled with the issue of the processes of socialization that go on in

⁹ Shirley Brice Heath, "Questioning at Home and at School: A Comparative Study," in Spindler, George (ed.). Doing the Ethnography of Schooling. (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982).

¹⁰ John Ogbu, "Ethnoecology of Urban Schooling," in Mullings, Leith (ed.), Cities of the United States. (NY: Columbia University Press, 1987).

¹¹ Kathleen Wilcox, "Differential Socialization in the Classroom: Implications for Equal Opportunity," in Doing the Ethnography of Schooling, ed. George Spindler (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982); R.W. Connell, et al., Making the Difference (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1982); Paul Willis, Learning to Labor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

and around schools, and the role of class, race and peer group culture in those processes. The Connell et al. and Willis studies have also both dealt seriously with the question of the role of agency, i.e., students' active negotiation with the processes of socialization. But except for Heath's study, which involves intervention by the ethnographer (after the study was completed) to improve the educational process, these studies have all focused on the seemingly inevitable reproduction of different forms of social domination.

What they haven't done is to take the issue of agency a step further, to explore the possibilities students might have to constitute themselves as political actors and thereby avoid the fate of socialization to powerlessness in assigned race, gender or class roles.¹² If schools are socializing institutions, then even though they by no means determine the political formation of young people, they do have some influence in this process. Schools that create a context which promotes students' development as active

¹² Even though Willis recognizes the potential for "the lads'" resistance to be channeled into progressive political and social action, his field research and analysis focus on the social and cultural forces that prevent this from happening. It is an insightful study in this regard; but his research does not attempt to illuminate how a progressive school might work with students such as the lads to help prepare them for the kind of critical, conscious and organized resistance that is required for social and political change. That was not the project of the people who ran the school he studied, and it was not his project in Learning to Labor.

democratic agents could therefore become forces for progressive political and social change.

Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux have pointed out the need for a "language of possibility for curriculum theory and practice."¹³ The work of Aronowitz, Giroux and other critical educational theorists has contributed a great deal to developing this language of possibility, focusing particularly on developing the connections among educational, cultural and political theory. What is needed now is to begin to connect more directly the language of possibility in theory with an emerging language of possibility in democratic educational practice. Jesse Goodman puts it in the following terms:

What is needed is to build upon the language of possibility by developing an educational language of democratic imagery, that is, a theoretical language which is informed by and rooted in images of real (or hypothesized) people involved in tangible actions that take place in actual settings.¹⁴

Goodman's book is an excellent example of a study which does this: It examines the lived experiences of teachers, students and parents in an independent alternative elementary school whose faculty and administration have embraced the task of preparing students for active democratic citizenship. Similarly, Kathleen Weiler studies the lives and work of several feminist teachers and

¹³ Aronowitz and Giroux, Education Under Siege, 154.

¹⁴ Jesse Goodman, 173.

administrators in two urban public high schools.¹⁵ The educators she studies are all "committed to social justice and equality for both men and women."¹⁶ Both Weiler and Goodman critique their schools through the lens of critical educational theory (and in Weiler's case, feminist theory as well) and its developing language of possibility.

I believe, in the same spirit, that it is important to examine the organization and practices of real schools that are attempting to prepare young people to be effective public democratic citizens. For the researcher or the educational practitioner who wishes to study a school's programs and practices, it is useful to have a framework of analysis to guide the research. The following provides a framework of analysis in the form of a discussion of how schools could contribute to developing participatory democratic worldviews and practices among young people.

Ideal Organization and Practices for Engaging Students and Promoting Public Democratic Values, Attributes and Capacities

There is no single educational theorist who addresses adequately the kinds of school practices that will most effectively develop publicly-oriented democratic worldviews and practices in young people. I therefore bring together

¹⁵ Kathleen Weiler, Women Teaching for Change.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

ideas from a number of sources to create a composite picture of some of the orientations and practices of an "ideal-typical" secondary school designed to help prepare young people for active, public, democratic citizenship. Taking a Weberian sociological approach, I will use this "ideal-typical" model of democratic schooling as a standard against which I will compare and analyze the orientations and practices of two existing urban alternative public high schools, both of which consider preparing students for democratic citizenship an important part of their mission.¹⁷

Schools can organize themselves to help young people develop the values, attributes and capacities that will serve as their foundations for public democratic citizenship. However, the qualities necessary for publicly-oriented democratic citizenship are not acquired through abstract study alone. They are acquired and honed through concrete experience as well as study. Therefore, if schools are to help develop young people's capacities for public democratic activity, they must not only teach about democratic values, but also create regular opportunities for students to develop them and use them.

As I have argued, political learning or "socialization" as it takes place in schools is a negotiated social process.

¹⁷ The usefulness of ideal types in research is discussed in Max Weber, Economy and Society, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 20-22.

Thus even if a school takes seriously the task of preparing students for democratic citizenship, and designs its programs around this goal, it will have little success unless students are fully engaged in the schools' educational program. Democratic education must be organized and practiced in ways that involve students actively in their work and their school life.

School Characteristics that Engage Students

There are several characteristics of school life that are likely to engage students in a school's programs.¹⁸ Some of these characteristics not only help engage students in their school work, but also contribute in themselves to promoting democratic perspectives and capacities in students. The most important school characteristics for promoting student engagement are the following.

1) Schools should create an atmosphere in which students feel a sense of belonging or membership in the school community. They should feel welcomed and cared about, and consider themselves involved in the life of the school, not just academically, but also socially (have good

¹⁸ I draw here on Fred Newmann's important work on student engagement. Although Newmann is interested in student engagement in academic work generally, the organizational principles he suggests for schools are also applicable to the task of engaging students in school work and experiences that specifically promote democratic thinking and action. See Fred Newmann, "Student Engagement in Academic Work: Expanding the Perspective on Secondary School Effectiveness," in Rethinking Effective Schools, ed. J. Bliss and W. Firestone (New York: Prentiss Hall, 1990).

friends there, participate in extra-curricular and after-school activities).

2) Schools should make sure that students are safe, not only physically, but also emotionally/psychologically. That is, it should be safe for students to express themselves, risk making mistakes without fear of embarrassment, try new things, etc.

3) School work should have intrinsic interest for students. It should build on their prior knowledge and respond to their interests.

4) School work should be meaningful not only within the school and for school purposes, but also in the real world outside school. It should make meaningful connections to things in the real world.

5) Schools should create conditions that give students a sense of ownership of them. For example, they should have some input into decisions governing their lives in the school. Students should also be allowed flexibility in how they approach their learning and at what pace they proceed. They should have the opportunity to explore questions and topics that they consider important. They should be encouraged to construct and express their growing knowledge in their own language, rather than regurgitating book language or teacher language.

To create education for public democracy, it is obviously not enough to engage students in their academic work. The content of the work students do, as well as the

way it is organized, must be designed to help students begin to think and act democratically.

Public Democratic School Practices

An ideal-typical secondary school can do a number of things to nurture democratic qualities in young citizens. The practices that I will suggest here are, like all school practices, complex social processes. They involve a number of social actors -- teachers, administrators, students, parents, other community members -- with various and often changing agendas. These actors operate within a structure that is shaped by numerous and often contradictory institutional, cultural and historical forces such as national, state and local government and politics; the economic context; local school board policies and traditional school practices, etc. For this reason, the practices I will describe are likely to have multiple, overlapping effects, some of them perhaps unintended. Each practice nevertheless attempts to contribute to the development of certain specific public citizenship values, attributes and capacities. I will therefore organize my discussion of recommended practices for an ideal-typical high school as much as possible according to the democratic quality it is primarily intended to promote. At the same time, I will indicate some of the other qualities that each educational practice addresses secondarily.

Exploring Students' Interdependence With Others

Schools can create opportunities for students to explore their interdependence with others, both through study and through experiential learning. One example is the study, through research and discussion, of the connections between people's actions and their effects on others and on the society as a whole. This can begin with an examination of students' own individual actions, such as their treatment of shared school property (computers, desks, public spaces, etc.) and the impact this has on the quality of school life. Discussions of public property and public space can also be connected to larger issues of taxation, how tax money is spent for schools and other services in rich versus poor communities and in white communities versus communities of color.

Another example would be an ecological/sociological life-cycle study of common products that a society uses. This would include examining the processes of production, distribution, use and disposal of a product, and the social relations that surround each stage in the life cycle. Such a study would show some of the connections between people as consumers and users and disposers of products, and people as manufacturing workers, designers, distributors, retailers, refuse carters, etc., of those same products. As the working conditions, standard of living, life style, etc. of people are uncovered at various intersections with the life cycle of a product, hierarchical patterns based on class,

race and gender begin to become apparent. Such a study also gets into some of the effects on the environment of each stage of a product's life cycle. It would provide initial insights into the complex interdependence of people with each other and with the earth.¹⁹

School practices that explore people's interdependence with others are aimed directly at developing an ethic of care and responsibility in young people. At the same time, however, they also help students develop other values and capacities that are important for public democratic citizenship. For example, study of the consequences of students' and other people's actions in school and in larger communities, along with studies of the social relations surrounding the life-cycles of products both can help students begin to comprehend the complexities and connections among public issues. In addition, they help students begin to look more critically at social realities that they normally take for granted. They also raise young people's awareness of some of the public consequences of private actions, an important step in understanding the nature of the public.

These and other projects can be conducted as collaborative group research projects. In group research

¹⁹ Ira Shor offers an excellent description of his use of a similar teaching practice, getting his students to "extraordinarily re-experience the ordinary," by doing extended social analysis of such common items as chairs and hamburgers. Ira Shor, Critical Teaching and Everyday Life, 156-166.

projects, students must work cooperatively with others to reach agreement on goals and strategies appropriate to their tasks, and then work to accomplish them. Group projects can focus on traditional curricular themes in any specific subject area. But whenever possible, these projects can be action projects, linked to real issues. They can be oriented toward studying and acting on the social reality of the school site itself, or that of the surrounding community or the larger world.

An example of an action project focused on the world outside of school might involve students doing research on a local environmental issue such as pollution of a local stream. Their work could culminate in an expose, made available for the local news media, about the type and sources of the pollution, which could be used as part of organizing efforts to pressure polluters to clean up.²⁰

Traditional school practice has discouraged collaborative work, often equating it with cheating, and

²⁰ Other examples of community action research projects conducted by students and teachers are detailed in a social studies curriculum published by Educators for Social Responsibility. Case histories are provided on student campaigns to save a local forest from development by having the county government purchase it as parkland; and a petition drive to organize high school students nationally to support a nuclear weapons freeze. Educators for Social Responsibility, Making History. A Social Studies Curriculum in the Participation Series (Cambridge, MA: Boston Area Educators for Social Responsibility, 1984), 46-53, 55-72.

Some of the work of teachers and students using the Foxfire Approach takes on similar action research orientations. Examples of this work are chronicled in Hands On: A Journal for Teachers (Rabun Gap, GA: The Foxfire Fund, Inc.)

prohibiting it. Instead, schools have encouraged students to work as individuals in competition with each other. Yet public life, in the sense in which I have been using the term, requires that individuals work with others to define and act on common goals. Thus the ability to work collaboratively with others will be a necessary attribute for citizens who wish to transform existing public spheres into arenas in which issues will be discussed and debated, and people will decide together how to address common issues and problems. Cooperative group research projects such as those I have discussed teach young people through experience the value, and some of the social skills, involved in working with others to achieve common goals and address social issues.

Action research projects in particular give students invaluable experience in wrestling with the obstacles that come up in working with others to define public problems, locate sources of the problems, and confront the power structures that allow the problems to exist. Through these types of activities, young people can develop the worldviews, the knowledge and the capacities to begin to have an impact on their social and political worlds.

Promoting Study of the Concept of Community

A second approach that schools can take is to promote the study of the concept of community, including analysis of

what defines a community; discussion of why communities are important; the common problems and shared experiences of historical and contemporary communities; and the solutions or possible solutions to community problems. Exploration of the concept of community and study of various real life examples of communities is an important part of developing an ethic of care and responsibility. But the concept of community cannot be explored without also examining the roles of individuals in communities. This question can move students into the issue of the rights and responsibilities of individuals within various kinds of communities, including large, multicultural, would-be "democratic" societies such as our own.

Students can get a taste of the relationship between the rights of individuals and their responsibilities to each other and to their communities by participating in school-sponsored internships or community service work with local social service, development or community organizing programs. Host organizations for student placements can be selected specifically for their work, in various forms, helping people secure their access to the conditions necessary for their self-development.²¹

²¹ Harry Boyt discusses the limitations of many student community service programs that are more oriented toward building students' resumes than getting them involved in addressing the needs of the community. He also describes programs that avoid this pitfall. Harry C. Boyte, "Turning On Youth to Politics," The Nation, 252, (May 13, 1991), 626-628.

This could mean securing basic human needs such as housing, food, clothing, employment, education, health care, etc. Or it could involve helping people secure their fundamental civil and political rights.

The work of such organizations -- some governmental and some non-governmental -- is an essential component of the relationship between individual and community that holds a society together. However, the mere fact of students' participation in community service projects may not lead to the development of students' consciousness about public issues and their responsibility to participate in public action to address these issues. To be effective tools for building students' citizenship skills, community service programs should be connected to regular seminar-style meetings that provide students with opportunities to discuss and reflect upon their experiences, as well as the larger social and political contexts within which they take place.²² When participation in community service is combined with systematic reflection, it can help students become more aware of public problems and issues; allow them to experience the value of publicly-oriented work; and

²² Mara Gross makes a similar suggestion in her dissertation on the experiences of students in a community service program. Gross suggests the need to make community service a central part of the curriculum, fully integrated with the students' academic work, to encourage students to process and reflect upon their community service experiences. Mara Gross, "Reflection in Action: A Practitioner's Study of Four High School Students' Experience in Community Service" (Ed.D. diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1991), 188-192.

contribute to their appreciation of the importance of public life and public action.

The exploration of individual rights and responsibilities in communities can lead to investigation of the struggles of various non-majority social groups, past and present, and the obstacles they have faced in their quests to develop themselves in society. An important part of such a study would be an examination of the role of conflict in popular social struggles for a more just society. Such an approach would provide students with important insights into the nature of power, as well as possible models for their own attempts to gain greater social and political power.²³

Students can also be encouraged to make connections between their own experience and the experience of the groups studied. They can identify similar obstacles to self-development in their own lives and their own communities, and begin to recognize the public nature of certain problems which they previously may have thought of as purely "personal" or "private" problems. This can lead into discussions of justice as connected to individual rights, and the need to struggle for justice through discussion, debate and action in public spheres. This gets

²³ Michael Apple, Ideology and Curriculum, 82-104.

into the theme of the nature of the public and the importance of public life.

Encouraging Study of Cultural Diversity

Third, schools can encourage understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity in students' own school, local and national communities. Schools, especially those that serve students of Latino, African American and Asian American background, should make a point of having students explore and value their own cultural heritages. A prominent argument in the literature on the education of students of color states that the legitimation and celebration of students' cultural identities contributes to their development of a strong self-image, as well as to their academic achievement.²⁴ Students' increased self-confidence and intellectual development are important prerequisites for social and political empowerment.

To promote the kind of cross-cultural understanding and respect that is necessary for democracy in a multicultural society, schools should have students share their knowledge of their diverse cultural heritages with each other. There should also be regular opportunities for students to discuss issues of racial and ethnic relations and tensions, from

²⁴ Jim Cummins, "Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention," Harvard Education Review 56, (Feb. 1986): 23.

their own experience and knowledge. Perhaps even more important, students should be encouraged to work on cooperative projects in culturally diverse groups on a regular basis, so that intercultural tolerance and understanding will develop naturally along with the camaraderie that comes from working together for common goals.²⁵

Activities that promote cross-cultural understanding and respect contribute directly to students' development of an ethic of care and responsibility. Student discussion and study of racial and ethnic tensions in their experience and in their communities, along with discussion of ways to address them, are also important for developing an ethic of care and responsibility. Such discussions, in combination with the concrete experience of working on cooperative projects in mixed racial and ethnic groups, help build students' awareness of and respect for each other's equal rights as individuals-in-relations. School practices that legitimize and value students' cultural heritages, nurturing their self-confidence and facilitating their intellectual development, as well as activities that involve students in cooperative group work, are important for students' development of the capacities necessary for public democratic participation.

²⁵ Daniel Goleman, "Psychologists Find Ways to Break Racism's Hold," New York Times, 5 September 1989, C1.

Critical Examination of Social Reality

Fourth, schools can encourage students to examine and evaluate critically the social reality in which they live. One way to approach this is through inquiry learning, which puts students in the role of inquirers, or researchers, rather than passive recipients of knowledge from teachers and textbooks.²⁶ Students' inquiries should be addressed, in part, to understanding the processes of change, or lack of change, in society. The study of social change processes involves examination of the social consequences of significant individual and collective actions or events, in the context of existing social structures, institutions and power relations.²⁷

I spoke earlier of investigating the social or public consequences of students' and others' individual actions, to help illustrate the interdependence of individuals in society. This relationship provides the basis for community and public life, and creates a justification for an ethic of care and responsibility. When I now mention the study of the social consequences of individual and group actions, the focus is more on understanding how such actions affect, and

²⁶ My discussions of student research and study up to this point have assumed the need to use inquiry-oriented approaches to education in schools that intend to promote public democratic citizenship. I am now making that assumption explicit.

²⁷ John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems, 165-66, 177, 201.

are affected by, existing structures and relations of power in society.

Another way of approaching this question is to have students examine their personal life situations, and those of people in their own and surrounding communities. The focus here can be on drawing connections between personal troubles and public issues, particularly as they relate to problems of social inequality and the inequities in people's power in society.²⁸ Discussion of inequalities that are socially imposed on the basis of race, gender and class differences should be a central part of this type of investigation. The critical study of current local, state, national and international news can be helpful in raising students' consciousness of major public issues, so that they can relate those issues to their own experience and that of people in surrounding communities.

Another way into the critical study of social reality is through the study of culture. As I discussed in the first chapter, cultural production plays crucial roles in both reinforcing and challenging the hegemony of existing social relations. Through a critical study of culture, students can become more conscious of the ways in which music, art, video, T.V., movies, advertising, the news media, etc. support and/or resist people's acceptance of social inequalities and unequal power relations in society.

²⁸ Mills, Power, Politics and People, 367-68.

Developing Students' Capacities for Public Democratic Participation

Fifth, if students are to investigate, discuss and debate the nature of social reality to prepare them for public democratic activity, they must develop and train a number of critical capacities. For example, they must learn to analyze written, spoken and image language, from mass media sources as well as face-to-face sources.²⁹ People are bombarded in all their waking hours with verbal and image language intended to inform, direct, entertain, and especially to persuade them to believe or accept some idea, to act a certain way or to buy a particular product or service. They must learn to analyze such messages to trace their source, their purpose, and who would be likely to benefit or suffer -- i.e., what would be the consequences -- if one reacted to the messages in specific ways or not at all. This is necessary so that people can comprehend public discussion and debate, and draw their own conclusions about the concrete social significance of the various issues under discussion, and options for action on those issues.

Close textual analysis of written, spoken and image language can only be learned through practice. Schools can offer students the intellectual support and guidance to

²⁹ Stewart Ewen contends that images in mass culture are "a prime way ideas get expressed in our society." Control of images constitutes "a form of power." My notes from a Ewen lecture at the City University of New York Graduate Center, May 9, 1991.

master the craft. In Lives on the Boundary, Mike Rose emphasizes the importance of the guidance he received from his college mentors as he learned close reading of written texts:

I developed the ability to read closely, to persevere in the face of uncertainty and ask questions of what I was reading.... My teachers modeled critical inquiry and linguistic precision and grace, and they provided various cognitive maps for philosophy and history and literature.³⁰

Schools must not only train young people in the ability to analyze various texts. They must also help students develop their capacities for expressing their ideas. Young citizens must learn to express themselves well in writing and speech. They must also learn how to get access to public forums in which to express their ideas and opinions. This could involve gaining access to coverage in the mass media through demonstrations or other events, or even producing and distributing their own media creations such as videos, films, newsletters, etc. The capacity to communicate and access to public forums are both necessary for participation in public discussion and debate.

Young citizens in the U.S. must also possess knowledge of basic Constitutional issues and rights, and understand political processes at the local, state and national levels. If they are to participate in the political system, they

³⁰ Mike Rose, Lives on the Boundary, (NY: Penguin Books, 1990), 58.

must have some sense of how it works and what their rights are.

Another capacity that is crucial for young citizens to develop, and one that is often overlooked, is that of active listening. In all classroom interactions, whether in discussion of students' understandings of new knowledge or their positions on social issues, students and teachers should focus first on listening, on trying to understand and empathize with the points of view that others are expressing. Disagreements can and should be voiced; but not before students and teachers have done their best to understand fully the points that are being made and where they are coming from in terms of the speaker's experience and knowledge. This helps create a classroom environment in which students "can nurture each others' thoughts to maturity."³¹ Such an educational environment contrasts sharply with the more common "banking" or "adversarial" models of education.³²

³¹ M.F. Belenky, B. Clinchy, N. Goldberger, J. Tarule, Women's Ways of Knowing, (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 221.

³² The "banking" model of education is described in Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (New York: Continuum, 1981), 57-74. It involves a teacher as the knowledge authority "depositing" knowledge into the "empty" heads of passive students. In the "adversarial, doubting model," teachers, and presumably students, challenge fellow students' ideas, trying to induce doubt, and from doubt, thought and learning. But since many women, as well as many students of color are already self-doubters, this model may simply discourage them from ever gaining the confidence to think for themselves. Belenky, et al., p. 228.

Interacting in this way allows students and teachers to learn from each other's different experiences and perspectives. It also fosters patterns of communication among students that are in keeping with an ethic of care. Such patterns of communication are necessary for enabling democratic public spheres to function in a way that can produce agreement on public goals and strategies for achieving them.

This approach to education has much in common with what Paulo Freire calls problem-posing, dialogic education. Dialogic education creates a new relationship among students and between students and teachers.

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it.³³

In addition to developing these capacities of analysis, expression and active listening, students must also increase their knowledge of the complexities of major public issues. To this end, schools should encourage students to investigate the linkages among issues across academic disciplines, national and cultural boundaries. We live in

³³ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 67.

an era of global connection and interdependence in everything from capital, labor, consumer and currency markets, to the consequences of environmental destruction, to mass media coverage of events, trends and ideas, to telecommunications capabilities. It is an era of technological revolution and information explosion. Therefore public issues are increasingly complicated, and multiply connected with other issues at the levels of cause, process and effect. If citizens are to be able to participate in public deliberations about these issues, they must have a more sophisticated understanding of them.

For example, students could participate in thematic studies, investigating the treatment of problems or issues from the perspectives of various academic disciplines. They could also look at an issue comparatively, as it manifests itself and is addressed in different countries or cultures. Students could also gain insight into global interdependence by studying the actions and policies of individual nations and major corporations, and some of their consequences for people in those and other societies.

As another aspect of their need to increase their knowledge of the complexities of major public issues, students must also gain enough knowledge of science, and the nature of the construction of scientific knowledge, to develop the self-confidence to make their own evaluations of public issues related to science and technology. An

important part of such education would be the study of the relationships between science/ technology and society -- how each shapes and affects the other. The idea that science is influenced and shaped by society, and that science in turn shapes society, is based on the larger notion of the social construction of knowledge. A key step in the education of young people for public democratic citizenship takes place when they grasp the insight that all knowledge -- that which they carry around in their heads, as well as that which they confront in their schoolwork and in the larger world -- is socially constructed.³⁴

Students need to be aware that whatever text they study -- be it a news report, a piece of literature or art, a historical article, an advertisement, or a political or scientific argument -- is a socially constructed text, representing particular points of view or ideological positions that can be identified and discussed. Moreover, the meaning of a given text is "not restricted to a single, harmonious and authoritative reading."³⁵ It could be open to any number of interpretations or "readings." Since texts are open to a variety of interpretations or readings based in part on the positions or experience of readers, students'

³⁴ Vito Perrone, A Letter to Teachers (San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers, 1991), 29.

³⁵ Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (New York: Methuen, 1980), 104; quoted in Giroux, Schooling and the Struggle for a Public Life, 139.

present knowledge becomes an important resource upon which they can draw when confronting new knowledge.

For this reason, students' own knowledge must be validated in school, and actively brought to bear in the learning process. Students should be encouraged to make connections between their previous knowledge, including that which they have acquired in their experiences with family, peer groups, mass media and other aspects of their daily lives, and the new knowledge that they encounter in their school work. Such an approach is cognitively effective, in that in order to make sense of any new information, students must organize it in terms of their own existing knowledge bases.³⁶ Teachers should take advantage of this fact and actively encourage students to make such connections. Validating students' own knowledge and helping them make new knowledge their own also gives students a sense of their own voice, their own agency as intellectual actors, and their potential as social and political actors.

However, the knowledge students bring with them to school should not simply be accepted at face value and celebrated. It must also be "interrogated critically with respect to the ideologies it contains, the means of representation it utilizes, and the underlying social

³⁶ Jean Piaget, The Development of Thought: Equilibration of Cognitive Structures, (New York: Viking Press, 1977).

practices it confirms."³⁷ The idea is to help students better understand how their socially constituted knowledge and beliefs support, and are supported by existing social relations and structures of power in society. By becoming more aware of the connections between their knowledge and the structures of power in society, young people open up the possibility of taking action to transform both the state of their own knowledge and existing social relations.

Finally, if educators truly wish to help students develop their capacities for public democratic participation, schools should be organized so that students and teachers have the opportunity to participate democratically in the life of the school. Joseph Grannis argues that "every school represents to its students a model of society and its possibilities."³⁸ Therefore to the extent that democratic practices are built into everyday school life, students will be presented with living models of the possibilities and the difficulties of democratic political activity. By example and through personal experience students will have the opportunity to develop some of the basic capacities for public democratic citizenship.

³⁷ Henry Giroux, Schooling and Struggle for Public Life, 143.

³⁸ Joseph C. Grannis, "The School as a Model of Society," in The Learning of Political Behavior, ed. Norman Adler and Charles Harrington (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1970), 137.

There are innumerable possible combinations of school practices that would provide models to help students develop their capacities for public democratic activity. I will make no attempt to provide an exhaustive list of such practices. I will merely mention a few possibilities by way of example.

One of the foundations for developing student participation in democratic activity either in school or outside of school is students' strong sense of self-confidence as independent thinkers and actors within the context of their communities. Schools must encourage students to develop this sense of self-worth and power.

One of the most vital capacities that schools can nurture in young people is the ability to act as self-educating individuals. ³⁹The development of this ability requires extensive, guided practice. Schools should therefore offer students a multitude of opportunities to take control of their own learning. Schools should take seriously "students' questions and deep interests, using them as starting points for the content being examined."⁴⁰ They should make resources available to students, and provide guidance in using them and in finding other resources to enable them to investigate their interests.

³⁹ Dewey, Democracy and Education 51-53, 99; Mills, Power, Politics and People, 367-68.

⁴⁰ Vito Perrone, 27. See also John Dewey, Democracy and Education, 155.

Students who take charge of their own learning take the first step toward taking control of their lives. They develop an ability to confront new circumstances, information, issues and ideas with power-- the power to study, analyze, and understand. Understanding a situation is the condition for rational, democratic action. Maximizing student choice and control over their own activities for intellectual exploration and growth is one of the primary components of a democratic vision of schooling.⁴¹

Students could also certainly have a voice in many important aspects of the organization of school life. Meaningful participation in the processes of decision making in public institutions provides the best preparation for further public democratic activity. As Benjamin Barber puts it, "politics becomes its own university, citizenship its own training ground, and participation its own tutor."⁴² Since the public school is for most people the first public institution they will know, and the one they come to know most intimately, through their own educational careers and those of their children, it is one of the best places for

⁴¹ Dewey, Democracy and Education, 304-305.

⁴² Barber, Strong Democracy, 152. It is surprising and disappointing that in what is otherwise a thoughtful and compelling book, Barber practically ignores the issue of the role of formal education in his vision of a "strong democracy."

young people to begin to exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities.

I will not attempt to prescribe any specific plans for incorporating students into school decision making processes. This can be done to varying degrees and in many different ways. Each school that seeks actively to prepare students for democratic citizenship will want to deal with the issue of student participation in school governance in its own way. But the issue is one that should not be neglected.

Another way of building democratic practices into school life involves teachers taking greater control of the way their work lives are defined, structured and organized. This means, in the first place, that teachers, and not just administrators or textbook publishers, should play central roles in collaboratively defining and coordinating the various parts of the curriculum they will teach; choosing the materials they will use and make available to students; and deciding how to organize and guide their students' intellectual and social development. This also means that teachers should have a voice in deciding how school resources are allocated to best provide for students' needs. Moreover, teachers should have meaningful input into the way classes are scheduled, their assignments to classrooms, and the making of school policies and rules.

Finally, parents, whenever possible, should also be involved in their children's schooling. Parents have a strong personal stake in their children's future. In most cases, parents already are the primary educators of their children. They are their children's first and most constant teachers, as well as their strongest role models (whether positive or negative) for adulthood and, indeed, for citizenship. They are in a strong position to support their children's formal education through the attitudes they project about schooling in general, their children's school and teachers, and school work; and through the concrete ways they intervene in their children's educational experience by helping with their homework, staying in touch with their teachers, and monitoring their academic and personal progress.

In addition to all the above ways that parents can participate in their children's education, they should also have a voice in the school governance process. This touches on some volatile issues, even among many progressive educators. At the first mention of parent roles in school governance, questions of educational professionalism, academic freedom, and teacher and administrator job security arise. However, if schools are to be public institutions that help prepare young people for public democratic life, then parents must have some voice in how their children's schools are run.

Clearly not all parents are able to participate in school governance because of the pressures of their everyday lives. And if parents feel that their school is serving their children well, they will often be happy to leave school governance to the professionals. Furthermore, when students get to the high school level, they often don't want their parents to become deeply involved in their schools. This is sometimes because adolescents want to be treated as the adults they almost are, and be allowed to take responsibility for their school lives; and it is sometimes because of established norms in many high schools in which a parent's presence in the school is automatically assumed to be in connection with a serious academic or disciplinary problem that the student is having.

However, there are several reasons why schools should have institutionalized channels through which parents can get involved in school governance. First, when it becomes clear that a school is not working for many young people, and that it is not doing anything visibly to improve the situation, parents must be able to intervene. Second, even in a generally functional school, problems can arise which are best resolved with input from parents. Third, particularly in urban schools where teachers and administrators are predominantly European American and students are mostly Latino, African American or Asian, parents should be involved in the school in order to insure

that cultural diversity is respected and that the children are well served. Finally, and most importantly, parent involvement in school governance can provide students with a tangible and compelling vision of the possibility of public democratic participation by ordinary people from their own families and communities.

It is clear that most schools do not take it as their mission to adopt many of the organizational features, nor the educational practices that have been identified in this chapter as necessary for promoting students' development as active and effective citizens of a democracy. However, for those educators who aspire to creating schools that promote public democratic citizenship, it is important to have a way of assessing the practices of their own or other schools in terms of the degree to which they approach this goal.

This chapter has attempted to sketch the outlines of an ideal-typical secondary school for public democracy. This ideal image, rough as it is, can be used as a tool for examining and analyzing the organization and practices of existing schools. By comparing the organization and practices of real schools to the ideal-typical school outlined here, it will be possible to see the degree to which various aspects of the real schools promote (or fail to promote) the values, attributes and capacities that have

been identified as necessary for public democratic citizenship.

In Part II of this dissertation, this tool will be applied in some preliminary, sample analyses of a few organizational features and educational practices of the two urban alternative public high schools in which I did field research.

Part II: Democratic Education? Tales from Two Schools

In Part II I will report on my field research in two urban alternative public high schools that hold promise for helping young people develop a counter-hegemonic vision of democracy and citizenship--a vision of public democracy and public citizenship. I will examine the organization and educational practices of these schools for signs that they will help nurture in students some of the values and attributes discussed in Chapter 3, which I feel are necessary for a citizenry that wishes to begin building public democracy.

The two schools in this study are located in a large city in the Eastern U.S. In order to protect the identities of the teachers, administrators and students in the study, I have chosen not to use the actual names of the schools or the city in which I conducted my field research. Instead I will refer to the schools as Metropolitan High School and Uptown High School, and the city as simply Urbantown.

In Chapter 5, I will offer an account of how I came to study these two schools and how I went about conducting my research in each. Chapter 6 provides greater detail on the organization, curriculum and teaching approaches of the two schools, as an important background for understanding my analysis in Chapter 7. In Chapter 7 I conduct a few sample analyses of some of the schools' organizational features and classroom practices, and the ways their students experience

them. This serves two purposes: It hopefully will stimulate discussion, debate and further research into the kinds of organizational features and practices progressive educators should and should not employ to promote public democratic citizenship. It also demonstrates the viability of a useful method for studying certain aspects of school life, to see to what degree they may promote young people's development as public democratic citizens.

I will not attempt to construct a complete description and analysis of the culture of each school, as one might attempt to do in a traditional ethnographic study. Instead, I will narrate my research experience in each school, as I experienced it, drawing somewhat impressionistically from my field notes, interview transcripts, and collected school documents. In this way I hope to paint a picture of some of the successes, problems and contradictions that these school communities experience in their attempt to bring democratic education to urban students, a majority of whom are students of color.

It is important to acknowledge that I make no claim that the research findings in these two case studies are directly applicable to other urban schools situated in other contexts. That is, the kinds of successes and problems experienced as these two schools attempt to create education for public democratic citizenship will not necessarily obtain in other schools that take on such projects. Nevertheless, it would be foolish not to examine the

experiences of existing schools that are making conscious efforts in this direction. By examining the educational practices of two schools that actively attempt to encourage students to develop key democratic values and attributes, and by analyzing students' responses to these educational practices, I can perhaps offer a few insights to educators, parents and others who wish to create democratic urban education in their own schools and communities.

**Chapter 5: The Story Behind the Research Project
at Uptown High School and Metropolitan High School**

My initial research interest was to conduct an ethnographic study of an alternative urban public high school. The purpose was to identify those aspects of the total educational experience in the case study school that might promote publicly-oriented, participatory thinking and action in young people. I wanted to do a thorough study of the alternative school, while also investigating, on a lesser scale, a more traditional high school as well as another alternative high school. This would create a comparative context within which I could analyze the primary case study school. As I will explain later, problems of access to schools, as well as decisions I made as I conducted the research, caused me to make some adjustments in this original research plan. Ultimately, the new research plan led me to eliminate the field research at the traditional school and to rely, for background information, on published accounts of life in traditional comprehensive high schools.¹ I also expanded my field research in the second alternative high school. The resulting study does not offer a complete ethnographic description of either school.

¹ A few such accounts are the following: Ernest L. Boyer, High School (NY: Harper and Row, 1983); TheodoreSizer, Horace's Compromise (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984); Samuel G. Freedman, Small Victories (New York: Harper and Row, 1990); Michelle Fine, Framing Dropouts (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991).

Instead it draws selectively on observations and interviews in two alternative high schools which share certain social and educational values, yet have distinct school cultures. This allows me to examine and compare formal and informal processes of citizenship education and students' responses to these processes in two innovative high schools.

Alternative high schools have had a place in the Urbantown public school system since the early 1970s. There are a number of alternative public high schools, offering a wide variety of programs. They cannot easily be characterized as a group, except to say, as the Urbantown Board of Education puts it in one of their school directories, they offer "high school diploma programs for students who may benefit from an option different from that offered in the traditional high school." In addition, they tend to be significantly smaller than traditional high schools, and are often housed in school-within-a-school settings, allowing for a more "personalized atmosphere" than that available in larger schools.

My initial assumption was that I would be more likely to find publicly-oriented democratic educational practices in an alternative high school than in a traditional school. This assumption was based on the idea that I would expect to find processes of socialization toward what I see as the dominant, privatized vision of democracy and citizenship in traditional educational institutions; and processes of

socialization toward subordinate, alternative democratic visions and practices in alternative school settings.

I wanted to study high schools, rather than junior high, intermediate or elementary schools, because high school marks a kind of stepping off point for students to adulthood and citizenship. Since schooling is mandatory to the age of 16, public high school is the last publicly controlled institution of socialization where citizenship training can be expected to occur for many young people.

Beginning the Research at the Primary Site: Uptown High School

My first choice of research sites was a school I will call Uptown High School. Uptown High School is an alternative public high school in a low income and working class, Latino and African American neighborhood. Uptown High School's students are drawn primarily from the surrounding community, with only twenty-five percent coming from outside the neighborhood surrounding the school. Almost half come to Uptown High School from one of several local alternative public elementary schools. The Uptown H. S. student body is 43 percent African American, 37 percent Latino, and 20 percent European American or Asian.

Uptown is a small high school, with about 450 students in all. It is organized into three divisions or "schools": the Lower School comprises the seventh and eighth grades; the Middle School is the ninth and tenth grades; and the

Upper School is comprised of the eleventh and twelfth grades. When I began the study in January of 1990, the school encompassed grades 7-11. The first seniors graduated in June of 1991.

During the 1989-1990 school year Uptown High School had a staff of about forty teachers. The teaching staff had about 20 each men and women, and was approximately 69 percent European American, 21 percent African American and 10 percent Latino. Some teachers had many years experience in Urbantown public schools. A number of others had been recruited from teaching in respected, progressive private schools. Upon taking teaching positions at Uptown H.S., all the teachers made a commitment to dedicate themselves to the formidable task of helping create and run the school, from curriculum design to teaching to administrative decision making.

The principal and founder of Uptown H. S., Maria Landon,² is an educator who had been one of the key actors involved in establishing three local alternative elementary schools. She is widely recognized as an educational innovator. Although Maria Landon is the school's principal and overall director, accountable to local and state educational authorities, Uptown High School is a faculty-run school. Most major school policy decisions are made by an assembly of the staff, in their weekly staff meetings.

² This is a pseudonym, as are the names of all the people referred to in this study.

According to curriculum documents and published comments by the principal, Uptown High seeks to educate its students for both personal intellectual development and for empowered public action. The latter goal is expressed in the principal's statement that Uptown High School is working "to create powerful participants in society, active citizens."

Thus there are several reasons for choosing Uptown High School as a case study of a potential model of democratic education. First, through published documents and public comments by its chief spokesperson, it professes to be such a model, or at least is attempting to develop toward that goal. Second, its principal is a respected and accomplished educational innovator. Third, the fact that it serves an inner-city population of young people of color makes it an important case. If it is indeed able to provide an effective public democratic education to these students, it will be opening a new door to these members of traditionally disenfranchised groups -- the door to empowered citizenship.

In November of 1989 I submitted a brief proposal to do research to the principal of Uptown High School, Maria Landon. I submitted my proposal through the director of a network of alternative schools, of which Uptown H.S. is a member. The director of the network, Lisa Mathews, was a long time activist with whom I had become acquainted through previous work in educational activist groups. This network serves its member schools by helping them respond to

requests for information and school visits by interested school people, parents, academic researchers and the news media; offering support to those who wish to develop similar alternative educational programs in their schools; gathering data and conducting evaluations of member schools' programs; and helping the schools make a contribution to local and national debates on school reform.³

My proposal to do research at Uptown High School included plans to observe classes one or two days a week over several months, and interview teachers, students and parents about their experiences with the school. I wanted to focus first on the ninth and tenth grade school, a block of students and teachers who worked as a unit. After getting to know the educational experience of these students, I hoped to observe them as they prepared to enter the Upper School. I intended to return to the school during the next academic year for limited follow-up research to find out how the students were faring in the Upper School.

After reviewing my proposal, Maria Landon sent word to me through Lisa Mathews that she felt the proposed research would take too much staff time for interviews. Instead, at Lisa Mathews' suggestion, I was offered the opportunity to assist Connie Nichols, a consultant who was just beginning a project to help Uptown High School and other schools in the network develop new assessment and accountability practices

³ From the alternative school network's pamphlet.

that would be appropriate to the needs of these schools. Although my own research agenda was not formally approved as a project that the school would support on its own, I was granted research assistant status to work on the Accountability Project. Through my work in this project, I was able to contribute to Uptown High School's immediate needs, and in the process get to know the school, the staff, and have the opportunity to observe classes in the Middle School (the ninth and tenth grade division).

From January to June 1990, I spent one or two days a week at the school, observing classes and attending weekly staff meetings. At the time, Connie Nichols was doing a lot of off-site work, pulling together resources and people to assist the network with its efforts to develop new assessment and accountability measures. I kept Connie Nichols informed about what went on in staff meetings, and provided her with background information on the daily workings of the school, based on my observations. At Connie's request, I also met with Ruth Smith, the humanities curriculum team leader for the Lower and Middle Schools (grades 7-10) and Robert Selig, Director of the Lower and Middle Schools, and the de facto math/science curriculum team leader. Based on these discussions, and on various written curriculum descriptions and materials, I wrote up reports documenting existing assessment and accountability practices in the Lower and Middle Schools, and their relationship to the humanities and math/science curricula.

I was also the official documenter for a number of meetings of teachers and outside advisors to the school on the subject of developing and refining new assessment and accountability practices. In this capacity I attended a two day staff retreat, in which the staff worked on developing a system for scoring and evaluating students' written work.

During this period of time I learned everything I could about how the school runs. I became acquainted with several of the teachers through my classroom observations, my attendance at staff meetings and meetings for the Accountability Project and through informal discussions with teachers about the school and about their history with the school. I also began to get some sense of who the Middle School students were, by observing them and talking informally to a few of them in class, in the library, in hallways and around the school. In addition, I became an avid reader of the Uptown High School Newsletter, a weekly report of some 8-15 pages that comes out of Maria Landon's office to students, parents and teachers. Each Newsletter includes a calendar of important dates for the month, as well as news, announcements, ideas and issues that the principal, the Parent Association, teachers and students wish to share with the school community. This proved to be a valuable resource for me, filling me in on important developments I missed on days I was not in the school, and offering a guide to some of the issues and events that

different members of the Uptown High School community deemed most important.

Although my status as research assistant for the Accountability Project opened many doors for me, it also placed restrictions on certain aspects of my own research, and created some ambiguity regarding other aspects. For example, I clearly did not have authorization to organize formal interviews with teachers during school time. Nor did I have permission to organize a series of formal interviews with students. I had to get as much information from teachers as I could through informal conversations with them after observing one of their classes; in the halls between classes; before or after staff meetings; traveling on the subway after school; or by inviting a teacher to have dinner at a local restaurant. Similarly, in order to hear student perspectives on the Uptown H.S. educational experience, I depended upon brief conversations with students during breaks in classes or in the corridors or the library. I was reluctant to try to engage students or teachers in long conversations in school, either during or after school hours. I also did not feel I could make any attempt to contact students' parents to interview them about their perceptions of the school. The only exceptions to this rule were the occasions in which I did interviews that were directly related to my work as research assistant at the school.

Access Denied at the Traditional High School

At the same time that I was negotiating access and beginning my research at Uptown High School, I was also investigating the possibility of getting permission to do a few days of observations and interviews in a nearby traditional high school. I felt that doing exploratory research in this high school would provide a good control against which I could compare the educational experience of Uptown High School. It has a similar student population in terms of ethnic, racial and socioeconomic background. It is a somewhat selective high school, with admission based on a prospective student meeting certain criteria for grades in the key subject areas that the school emphasizes. The school has a fairly good word-of-mouth reputation among educators and families in the city. It is a medium-sized school with eight periods a day and a traditional academic program. There is no particular emphasis on democratic education, other than the fact that students' preparation in civic values is one of the official goals of the State Education Department for all schools in the state. It would have been very interesting to get a first-hand glimpse of the kinds of citizenship education experiences that students have within the context of such a school.

In seeking access to do research at this school, I had the support of a social studies teacher whom I had met through my dissertation advisor. He went to the principal and presented a rough outline of what I wanted to do in the

school. But before he could get to the point of offering to bring the principal a proposal from me, or arranging a meeting with me, the principal grew angry and defensive about having anyone do research in her school, citing a number of bureaucratic obstacles. "All research proposals must be submitted to the Central Board of Education. It takes weeks and sometimes months, if ever, to be approved."⁴ Based on my contact's evaluation of the situation, one thing was clear. This principal not only was not going to help me get over those obstacles; she was going to place as many as possible of her own directly in my path.

Even after this official rejection, my contact remained quite willing to help me. He offered simply to bring me in as a visitor to his classes, and try to connect me with a couple of other teachers. He also suggested that I might meet him right after school one day and he would arrange for me to meet with some of his ninth grade students. I did go to the school to meet him for lunch one day, and he introduced me to a couple of teachers, both of whom expressed interest in my research project. However, after discussing my contact's ideas about various ways to pursue research clandestinely in his school, we concluded that to do so would put him in a delicate position vis-a-vis his principal.

⁴ Notes from phone conversation with teacher from traditional high school, 3/15/90.

I decided to hold off doing anything in his school while I continued with the accelerating pace of my work at Uptown High School. As time went on, I began to realize that the job of getting to know even one school well was an enormous and complex task. I became absorbed in the on-site research at Uptown High School, putting aside the idea of comparative field research until later.

It was only when summer came that I had a chance to think further about my overall research plan. I decided, based on my reading of a number of studies of traditional high schools, that many traditional comprehensive high schools share important features in terms of their organization, curriculum and pedagogy. It did not seem necessary for me to conduct field research in a traditional high school, given the availability of published accounts on the organization and practices of traditional high schools.

It seemed more important to spend my time examining alternative high schools. I wanted to keep my field research focused as much as possible on my overriding interest in seeing, documenting, and analyzing what was happening in innovative, alternative high schools in terms of democratic education. I decided to finish my research at Uptown High School and then try to do at least enough fieldwork in another alternative high school to give me a basis for comparison with my primary case study of Uptown High School.

Planning to Expand the Research at Uptown H.S.

As I reviewed my field notes and reflected on a semester's observations at Uptown High School, I saw that I had learned a great deal about the social organization and curriculum of the school, and some of the major pedagogical strategies used, particularly in the ninth and tenth grade division. There were two key areas in which I felt I needed to learn more about the school. First, I wanted to get an inside view of the Upper School (grades 11-12), where students do a lot of independent research in order to complete their graduation portfolios. Second, I needed to hear directly from students how they feel about the educational experience they are exposed to at Uptown H.S. Although from my classroom observations and occasional brief conversations with students, I had some sense of how students respond to the school's educational program, I wanted to hear from students, in their own words, how they think about their experience at Uptown High -- what they feel they are getting out of it; to what extent they may feel a sense of power in their lives at school or outside of school; what positive aspects, contradictions or problems they may see in their school experience, etc.

These are all questions that relate to the issue of student engagement. I felt it would be necessary to examine this issue because no matter how much the educational program might be geared toward preparing students for public democracy, students will only benefit from it to the extent

that they are engaged in it. If students are not engaged in those parts of the educational program designed to nurture democratic citizenship, they will be less likely to develop the values and attributes that the school is attempting to nurture in them. In fact, through their resistance to official school programs, they might develop values and attributes entirely at variance with those promoted by the school. It would be important to explore this issue not only through more observations, but also through interviews with the students, to hear through their own accounts about the quality of their engagement in school life, and the kinds of values and attributes they seem to be developing.

Another critical issue I could explore through interviews with students would be their own sense of the degree to which their school's programs actually promote the development of democratic values and attributes. The fact that a school's official rhetoric supports such lofty goals does not necessarily mean that its practices fully do so. One check on this is through students' assessments of the day-to-day reality of school life.

I concluded that in my follow-up work at the school in the fall, I would need to break out of some of the restrictions, self-imposed or not, on my field research. I determined that I would need to get explicit permission to observe classes in the Upper School and to do formal interviews with students. I decided to do the interviews as focus group discussions, i.e., small groups organized to

promote discussion of students' experience at the school. Running focus group discussions would permit me to hear from a number of students at one time, as they responded not only to my questions, but also to the comments of their peers.

I spent September and much of October of 1990 reading up on approaches to running focus groups, getting input from Connie Nichols of the Accountability Project, as well as several Uptown High School teachers and outside researchers who know the school, and incorporating their suggestions into a proposal to expand my research.⁵ I took special care to design the research so that I could get the information I needed within a context of contributing directly to what I perceived as the needs of the Accountability Project and the school as a whole. I submitted the proposal to the principal, Maria Landon, at the end of October.⁶

⁵ Especially useful readings were Richard A. Krueger, Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988); and David L. Morgan, Focus Groups as Qualitative Research (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988).

⁶ Some administrative changes took place over the spring and summer of 1990. Maria Landon gave up some of the day-to-day administrative tasks of running the school, so she could spend more time on long-range planning, the politicking required at the city and state levels to maintain support for the school, budget and fund-raising work, dealing with outside demands on the school, and administering the whole building, which houses at least two other small schools besides the high school. The school hired a co-director, Sam Holden, to deal with daily curriculum and staffing matters, as well as the day-to-day concerns of students, families and staff. (Uptown High School Newsletter, May 14, 1990).

After a week or so, in a phone conversation, Maria Landon gave me the go-ahead to conduct the research. I needed only to set up a meeting with Maria Landon, Connie Nichols, and the head of the Upper School, Jean Summers, to discuss how the research could be done so that it would be minimally disruptive to ongoing school work, and yet serve the longer term needs of the Accountability Project and the school. I gave copies of my proposal to Jean Summers and Connie Nichols and we set a meeting date a couple of weeks away, in early December.

Then the entire process broke down.

Access Denied at Uptown H.S.

For a number of complicated reasons having to do with problems inherent in the relationship between outside researchers and school practitioners, my meeting with the school's administrators regarding how my research could proceed was cancelled. My meeting was superceded by an administrators' meeting to discuss the school's overall policy on handling requests to do research. My sense was that this meeting was precipitated not only by my request to do research, but also by a growing feeling among some staff members that outside researchers were making too many demands, and not offering enough to the school in return.

Because of its innovative structure and curriculum, Uptown High School has operated since its inception as if in a fishbowl. Visitors from all over the country are shuttled

regularly through student-led tours of the building, including observations in Lower and Middle School classes. As its reputation has grown, Uptown High has also gotten significant media attention as an inner-city educational success. With this level of public attention, it has attracted numerous researchers who wish to document and analyze its structures, processes and effects on student learning.

However, during its first academic year, 1989-90, the Upper School had consciously resisted opening itself up to high levels of public scrutiny in terms of allowing regular classroom visits from outsiders. Yet because of a felt need for assistance in setting up a new system of assessment and accountability based on student graduation portfolios, the Upper School had brought in outside experts both to help establish the system and to document how it worked. This meant that there was bound to be some presence of outside researchers in the Upper School on a fairly regular basis.

The documenting task was taken on by a professor from a local graduate school of education and her graduate student research team. One or two of these researchers was in the Upper School every other week or so, observing classes, attending meetings and interviewing staff members. In addition, one of the professors on the Accountability Project's advisory board wanted to place one of his graduate students in the Upper School to do dissertation research on portfolio assessment. In her first few visits to the

school, this particular graduate student seemed to alienate several staff members with her scientific airs and her self-possessed manner.

There were three additional factors that compounded the general level of anxiety around Uptown High School during this period. First, because of the deteriorating fiscal situation at both the state and city levels, there were threats of major cuts in public education funding. No one knew how large the cuts would be nor how they might affect alternative schools like Uptown High. Second, the school building was due to receive 180 new students in January who would not be integrated into the Uptown High program, but would nevertheless increase the level of crowding in the school. Third, because of the rapid approach of the graduation of the school's first senior class, students, parents and teachers were all in a near panic state as they tried to work out how graduation portfolios would be produced and evaluated; as a whole non-traditional system of student transcripts was created; and as students took SAT's and applied for college.

It was within this not very auspicious context that the administrators and project leaders of Uptown High School met to define a policy on who had authority to approve research requests; who should be consulted in this process; and what criteria would be used to decide which requests would be granted. As I understood it, the meeting resulted in the appointment of Connie Nichols and Lisa Mathews as the

gatekeepers for research requests. They were to use a new, strict standard for determining what research would be allowed -- only that research that was considered essential to the school's future. Apparently my proposed focus group research, as well as the research of the advisory board member's graduate student, were deemed to fall outside the limits of that category. The only project that would go forward would be the one that was documenting the school's new system of assessment and accountability.

At this point I was quite discouraged. I was forced to face the possibility that I would get no further research access to the school. I continued to appeal the decision in letters that argued the value of my research for the school's future. Connie Nichols, the Accountability Project consultant, also continued to lobby on my behalf. She thought that if I could convince the approved school of education research group that my research objectives would complement theirs, I might be able to get some access to the school by joining their team. However, she advised me that because of the atmosphere of anxiety at the school, it was not likely under any circumstances that I would get permission to conduct focus group interviews with students. People seemed to see this as a major undertaking in which they didn't want to get involved. She told me that her instinct was, "Go a notch below your preference, like maybe drop the idea of doing focus groups. Just get into the

school informally, and then work it from there." (Notes from phone conversation, 12/21/90.)

Revising the Research Plan

Facing the possibility that I would not regain research access to Uptown High School, I was forced to scale back and alter my field research plans. My previous idea was to do a full, top to bottom case study of Uptown High School, along with some limited comparative field work at another alternative high school. Now I resigned myself to the fact that I wouldn't get all the information I wanted about the Upper School at Uptown H.S., especially not the full range of student perspectives on their experience at the school. Instead, the most I could do would be to get whatever access to the Upper School I could by participating, if possible, in the research team documenting the school's assessment and accountability practices.

In the meantime, I would also try to do somewhat more extensive research at the second alternative high school than originally planned. I would try to arrange to observe classes and do focus group interviews with students at the second school. In this way, although I might not gather enough information to write up a full ethnographic study of either high school, I would be able to discuss and analyze many of the educational practices of the two schools, along with student responses to them, as far as these could be ascertained.

After a long period of exchanging letters and phone calls with the research team and people at Uptown High School, I was given the opportunity to do a few classroom observations in the Upper School. In exchange, I was to do some interviews with teachers about the portfolio assessment process, and send selected observation notes and all my interview notes to the research team. This renewed, though limited research access provided me with the opportunity to again speak informally with students during breaks between classes, at lunch time, after school, etc. In this way I was able to hear a few more student perspectives on the Uptown H.S. educational experience.

Studying the Second School: Metropolitan High School

The second alternative high school I wished to investigate was a school I will call Metropolitan High School. It is a member of the same network of alternative public schools as Uptown High School. With its approximately one hundred students, Metropolitan High School is much smaller even than Uptown High School. It is housed within one three-floor wing of a traditional comprehensive high school. Metropolitan draws its students from all over the city. The students are a diverse group in terms of racial and ethnic background. Approximately seventy-five to eighty percent of the students split into about even groups of African Americans and Latinos. Perhaps 20% of the students are of European descent, and a very small

percentage are of Asian descent. According to Co-Director Michael Bell, the students are mostly from low income families. They come to Metropolitan High School having dropped out or nearly dropped out of other city high schools. Students come from high schools all over the city. They tend to be students who are bright, but are turned off by traditional comprehensive high schools.

Like Uptown High School, Metropolitan High is a staff-run school. Its Co-Directors, Michael Bell and Karen Meese are responsible for the day-to-day administration of the school, all dealings with city and state education authorities, and public relations appearances and activities for the school.

The staff of Metropolitan High School consists of seven full time teachers/staff developers plus administrative and support staff. All are involved in the staff development work of an inquiry learning project in other schools, as well as their work at Metropolitan H.S. Five of the full time teaching faculty are of European American descent, one is African American and one is Latino. Four teachers are men and three are women. The core teaching staff is augmented by college professors or other experts in specific fields of study who teach individual courses of interest to the students.

Metropolitan High School had long been suggested to me as an excellent alternative school that worked to prepare students to think critically about their society and

themselves. Its curriculum is dedicated to inquiry learning -- getting students to learn through their own reading, research, investigation, discussion and debate. Such a curriculum focus coincides with the goal of developing in students some of the key capacities necessary for public democratic participation. For this reason I was interested in investigating Metropolitan High School as the second alternative school in my study.

I had been introduced to one of the Co-Directors, Karen Meese, by one of my professors in 1987. I had become further acquainted with her over the next couple of years through educational activist work as well as through my work as research assistant with the network of alternative schools. So when my field research at Uptown H.S. stalled in January of 1991, I contacted her to see if I could get into her school to do some class observations and some focus group interviews with students. After discussing my ideas with Karen Meese and with Michael Bell, I submitted a short research proposal letter describing what I wanted to do in the school. They presented my proposal to the rest of the staff, and it was agreed that I could come into the school and begin.

There were two stipulations made by the staff regarding my research on the school. First, neither the school nor individual staff or students should be identified in my write-up. Second, I should offer staff the opportunity to review what I wrote about the school before completing my

dissertation or submitting anything for publication. It was made clear that this did not mean they reserved the right to censor my work. Rather, they wanted to retain the right to offer comments on their perceptions of the accuracy of what I wrote about the school. It would then be up to me to decide whether, or how to use their input in my writing.⁷

As a way of introducing me to the students, I was asked to give a presentation to them at the beginning of February about qualitative research in education, and about my research at their school. I kept the presentation at a general level, talking about research issues and problems that must be considered in qualitative research on alternative high schools, and how they work. This presentation fit in well with the curriculum, because February was a group research project month for students. It may have sparked some students' thinking about research problems and approaches to their own work.

In a discussion period after my presentation, students offered suggestions on how one might best go about learning about their school, and its impact on them. Students' suggestions included spending several months in the school,

⁷ At about the same time I was granted permission to begin research at Metropolitan H.S., I also received the go-ahead to begin work again at Uptown H.S. under the sponsorship of the Accountability Project documenting team. Uptown H.S. insisted upon the same stipulations regarding prior review of my work before publication. It was clear that the alternative school coalition to which both schools belonged was starting to set common policies regarding research in their schools.

getting to know teachers, classes, and students; talking to kids about their feelings about the school; seeing if students are even going to school; comparing their attendance and academic performance in this school to their attendance and performance in their previous schools. The students' comments proved quite helpful to me, reinforcing and sharpening many of the ideas I had about how to approach my research at the school.

In mid-February I began observing at Metropolitan H.S., spending a day and a half at the school a week through the first week of May. I observed classes and hung out in the school lounge talking to students and teachers about their experience of the school. In addition, during the last three weeks of my observation period at the school, I conducted three focus groups with students on their perceptions of the educational experience at Metropolitan H.S.

I found that it was remarkably easy, and required very little time or energy from school staff, to organize the focus groups. I simply sat down with Michael Bell one afternoon, and we went through the roster of students, writing down the names of all the students who were in at least their third semester at the school. We limited the list to these students because I was interested in speaking with students who had at least a year's experience at the school. From this list, we selected names randomly, by taking every fifth name until we had a list of nine students

to invite to each focus group session. Then, each week I put notes in the mail folders of the chosen students, inviting them to a pizza lunch discussion meeting.

Michael Bell assigned me a classroom that was empty during lunchtime. I supplied the pizza and soda, and that proved to be enough of an incentive to lure from four to six of the students into participating each week. The only thing I asked of the staff was the small favor of reminding the invited students, just before lunch, to join me for lunch if they were interested.

I couldn't help but note how simple it was to organize this process, and by contrast, how prohibitively complicated the staff at Uptown High School had made it sound. I believe this says something about certain differences in atmosphere in the two schools. There was an openness and a "can do" attitude at Metropolitan toward my research, and a sense that we should just figure out how to do it in the simplest, most efficient way and go ahead with it.

The contrast with the attitudes toward my research at Uptown H.S. might be attributed to the fact that Metropolitan H.S. is a smaller school, and therefore has fewer people to raise personal or bureaucratic obstacles to a research proposal. It could also have to do with the fact that, although Metropolitan H.S. has an excellent reputation among school reformers, it does not have as high a public profile as Uptown H.S. Because of this, it has fewer academic suitors wishing to do research, and fewer outside

visitors disrupting the day-to-day life of the school. It is therefore easier for Metropolitan, at least at this point in time, to accomodate researchers in the school.

This chapter has provided the background to my fieldwork in the two alternative high schools. The next chapter will describe in greater detail the goals, organization and curriculum in each school. This creates the context for the following chapter's sample examination and analysis of a few organizational features and school practices in the two schools in this study.

Chapter 6: Organization and Curriculum of Uptown and Metropolitan High Schools

Uptown High School: Goals and Organization

According to Ruth Smith, Humanities Team Leader for the Lower and Middle Schools, the goal of the Uptown H.S. educational program is to prepare students to use their minds well. To serve this general goal, Uptown works to develop in each student rigorous "habits of mind" with which to understand the world.¹ These habits of mind should enable students to analyze whatever they see or read or hear by 1) identifying the viewpoint or perspective that is being expressed; 2) evaluating the available evidence; 3) seeing connections with relevant information, ideas, events or issues; 4) imagining other alternatives; and 5) understanding the broad significance of the subject.²

Smith believes that students who develop these habits of mind will be "thoughtful, critical and educated", i.e., the kind of citizens upon which democracy depends. They will "become empowered on a personal level" as well as a public level. Thus the Uptown H.S. project, to the extent that it is successful, is "educating citizens for a powerful democracy."³

¹ Interview with Ruth Smith, March 19, 1990.

² Uptown High School pamphlet.

³ Interview with Ruth Smith, March 19, 1990.

Uptown H.S. also subscribes to several of the guiding principles of a national network of restructured secondary schools, of which it is a member. These principles help shape the forms of teaching and learning, as well as the organizational structure of the school. These principles include the following:

1. Personalization. Although the course of study is unified and universal, teaching and learning is (sic) personalized. No teacher is responsible for teaching more than 80 students, or for advising more than 15.
2. Less is more. It is more important to know some things well than to know many things superficially.
3. Goal Setting. High standards are set for all students. Students must clearly exhibit mastery of their school work.
4. Student-as-Worker....Teachers "coach" students, encouraging students to find answers and to, in effect, teach themselves. Thus students discover answers and solutions, and learn by doing rather than by simply repeating what text books (or teachers) say.⁴

As I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, Uptown High School is organized into three divisions or schools. The seventh and eighth grades comprise the Lower School; the Middle School contains the ninth and tenth grades; and the eleventh and twelfth grades make up the Upper School.

In keeping with the goal of personalization, the Lower and Middle Schools are each divided into two mixed-grade "Houses" of seventy-five to eighty students each. Each house has a faculty team of five teachers, which includes experts in English, history, math, science and art.⁵ This

⁴ Uptown High School pamphlet.

⁵ Uptown H.S. Handbook.

arrangement allows a group of teachers to get to know a group of students very well over the course of the two years students are in a particular House.

The Advisory System serves some of the same purposes. In each School of Uptown H.S., every student is assigned to an advisory group of no more than fifteen students. The teacher or staff member who leads this group acts as the students' academic advisor, unofficial counselor and advocate. If a student is having a problem in school, or even out of school, the advisor is a person to whom the student can turn. Likewise, if another teacher sees that a student is having trouble -- academically or otherwise -- that teacher goes to the student's advisor, who will work with the student, and when appropriate, the student's parents, to help resolve the problem.

The advisory class meets on a daily basis, offering students the opportunity to discuss current school concerns; to explore issues of importance to students in such areas as family, health, sex education, ethics, current events, and public life; or simply to read, write in student journals, study or get some extra help on projects or assignments. It is also a time when students can meet individually with the advisor to discuss personal or academic concerns, problems or plans. Advisory classes also take trips, including a visit each year to a college campus, to expose students to a number of possible college options.

Lower and Middle School Curriculum and Pedagogy

The "Less is More" philosophy can be seen in the structure of the curriculum at Uptown H.S. Uptown does not attempt to be a "comprehensive" high school, in the sense of offering the full range of courses and electives that are found at most traditional high schools.

The Lower and Middle School curriculum illustrates this point. It is built around a core of two inter-disciplinary courses: humanities (which includes literature and social studies/history) and mathematics/science. These courses are taught in two hour blocks, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Around these core curriculum blocks are built foreign language classes (taught from 8:00 - 9:00 a.m.), advisory classes and electives in music, studio art, dance, sports and computer (taught at mid-day or from 3:00 - 5:00 p.m.). The two hour time periods allow for in-depth exploration of curriculum themes through a variety of means. There are fewer of the disjointed shifts in focus that arise in most schools, where a bell rings every forty minutes to tell everyone to drop whatever they're doing or thinking and move on to the next class.

There is another way in which the organization of the curriculum embodies the "less is more" philosophy. Since electives are scheduled before or after the regular school day, or during the one-hour mid-day break, during regular two hour teaching blocks teachers can devote themselves fully to teaching the core subjects of humanities and

math/science. In addition, because the advisory system largely replaces the traditional guidance counselor system, and because Uptown H.S. employs fewer non-teaching administrative staff than most schools, proportionally more staff members can be devoted strictly to teaching than in traditional schools. With more teachers teaching fewer classes, class size is kept to a maximum of eighteen students. This is well below the average class size in a traditional Urbantown public high school, which ranges from twenty-eight in vocational high schools to thirty-four in regular comprehensive high schools.

It is worth noting that although Uptown High School received some additional start-up funds, these extra funds were gradually eliminated over the first four years of its operation. The school's basic operating costs per pupil are now approximately the same as any other Urbantown public high school.

The Lower and Middle School curriculum content and teaching approaches are designed to support the school's goal of developing rigorous habits of mind in students. They also attempt to put into practice the educational principles of goal setting and "student-as-worker."

Lower and Middle School Humanities/Social Studies

In humanities/social studies, four main curriculum themes are studied, one for each year for grades 7-10. Each year is made up of three trimesters. Classes study the

year's overall curriculum theme from a different perspective each trimester. These themes were developed by the humanities/ social studies teaching team. Although each School's overall curriculum themes remain the same over time, the actual materials used and way they are taught are constantly updated and developed by the teaching teams.

Themes for the Lower School (grades seven and eight) are The Peopling of America: The discovery, exploration and settling of the North American continent; and Power: The emergence of contemporary political issues with a focus on U.S. history. Themes for the Middle School (grades nine and ten) are Justice: comparative systems of law and government; and Non-European Traditions: stability and change in selected Asian, Central American and African states.⁶

Since the Schools work as two-grade level blocks, every other year the humanities curriculum themes repeat. For example, grades seven and eight together will study The Peopling of America for one year and Power the next year. The themes will be repeated for the following two years for the next group of 7th and 8th graders, as the 9th and 10th graders study the Middle School curriculum themes, Justice and Non-European traditions.

In humanities/social studies, student work for each trimester is structured in an exhibition. The exhibition involves a formal series of assignments that students

⁶ Uptown High School curriculum document.

complete through research, literary analysis, creative writing, dramatizations of scenes or events, quizzes and art work related to curriculum themes. Students work on these assignments individually and in groups throughout the term, ideally doing multiple drafts and refining their work as they go. Final work on all assignments is due at the end of the trimester.

Students have the option of doing exhibition assignments at one of two levels: the "competency" level or the "advanced" level. Both competent and advanced level assignments deal with the same themes, issues, essential questions, etc. The advanced level simply demands a higher complexity of work. In consultation with the teacher and parents, students decide at which level they wish to work on an exhibition. This is intended to be a flexible mechanism, so that students can work at their own ability and interest levels.

Lower and Middle School Math/Science

Robert Selig, the math/science curriculum team leader, states that the Lower and Middle School math and science program stresses the importance of dealing with math and science concepts in a holistic manner that focuses on investigation, hypothesis formation and hypothesis testing.⁷ The concern is not to find single-answer

⁷ Interview with Harry Randall, math/science curriculum team leader, May 23, 1990.

solutions, but rather to develop a thought process for exploring math and science ideas. Mathematical tools and practices such as graphs, equations and computation are used in the scientific study of the physical world and human experience for data collection, description and analysis.

For math, there are three main curriculum themes:

- 1) How do I measure?
- 2) What does it mean to count?
- 3) Where am I and how did I get here?

These questions are meant to present opportunities to explore basic arithmetic, algebraic and geometric ideas, as well as graphing. The third question is a metaphor that leads to working with issues of location and direction (plotting positions and paths on a plane), velocity, transportation costs (questions of value) etc.

For science, the curriculum themes are the following:

Lower School -- How do we affect and improve the quality of life? This is a biology/natural sciences theme which looks at living organisms.

Middle School -- How do things change? This is a physical science theme that examines systems of objects and how they move relative to each other. It involves figuring out where things are and predicting where they'll be, using major notions of energy, conservation, velocity, momentum, etc.

In the Lower School, during the 1989-90 school year, math and science were taught as separate subjects. Starting the next year, however, they were to be taught as a math/science block, as in the Middle School, to create a more integrated learning environment. In general, according to Robert Selig, whenever possible math concepts and procedures are taught in the context of their use in describing science phenomena and solving science problems. However, when necessary, certain aspects of math are taught and practiced apart from ongoing class science work.

There are two classes of tasks that students are expected to master in the Lower and Middle School math/science curriculum. The first involves process skills such as collecting and organizing data. For example, students might observe an object in motion. Then they would gather data on its velocity, direction, etc. and perhaps draw a graph from it. Based on the data, students would then make the jump to the second class of tasks. According to Robert Selig, this second class of tasks gets to the essence of the math/science idea: drawing generalizable conclusions about the behavior of the object. As Robert Selig puts it, "It is in the development and discussion of math/science ideas that we use the habits of mind way of thinking...."⁸

As in humanities/social studies, exhibition assignments are the sets of tasks through which math/science study is conducted. Math/science exhibition assignments are designed by the math/science teaching team in each School.

Robert Selig states that Uptown H.S. mathematics and science teachers strive to develop projects that tie arithmetic or computational skills to larger math and science ideas. Computational skills are not handled separately, as a pre-requisite to higher order math and science ideas. Because traditional approaches to math and science instruction, by contrast, do treat computational

⁸ Interview with Robert Selig, May 23, 1990.

skills as pre-requisites to higher order ideas, they tend to "lead to exclusion of people of color and of women."⁹ This is because of the tendency for those groups to have relatively lower levels of computational training and skills. With the Uptown H.S. approach, students who are weaker in arithmetic skills are not penalized and excluded from working with higher order math and science ideas, as they would be in a standard math or science program.

Exhibitions are the concrete products of students' ongoing work in math and science. Students generally present their exhibitions orally to the teacher, or if they wish, to the class as a whole. They also hand them in in written form. The fact that students have to write up their exhibition reports, and then present them orally as well, raises the level of their expected mastery of the exhibition material.

The performance and mastery focus of exhibition-based student work and its assessment serves the school's principle of setting high goals for all students. It also supports the principle of casting students as workers/doers with teachers guiding and coaching them. In fact, as Robert Selig sees it, the perfect teacher at Uptown H.S. is not the person who can enthrall students with brilliant lectures.

⁹ Interview with Robert Selig, May 30, 1990.

"A virtuoso teacher here is the perfect coach, encouraging students to do and to learn."¹⁰

Community Service

In addition to the academic curriculum, Lower and Middle School students also work one morning (two to three hours) a week in a school/community service program. This program offers students their choice of placements with local schools, non-profit organizations or businesses. In their community service placements, students do meaningful, supervised work that provides a service to others.

Through the community service program, over the four years of the Lower and Middle Schools, students get experience in a variety of fields in different institutional settings. They help out in elementary school classrooms; do office work in public service agencies; work on special projects in local museums; give tours of their own school to outside visitors, etc. Just as one example, a Middle School student I ran into once at lunch time at a cheap Chinese restaurant near the school told me he was just returning from his community service work at a local museum of Latino culture. He and a classmate had worked there for the first trimester, and had decided to continue there for the present trimester.

I asked him about community service. He said he worked helping the museum get ready for the Three Kings Parade

¹⁰ Interview with Robert Selig, May 23, 1990.

(January 6). They worked reinforcing the parade floats, working on costumes, etc. The parade down the Avenue went well. People had also donated money with which presents were bought for kids. People dressed up as the Three Kings went visiting kids in hospitals and giving them gifts... (Field notes, 2/22/90.)

Students keep journal notes on their community service experiences, and at the end of each trimester, they write reports/critiques of their experiences. Supervisors, in turn, evaluate the students.¹¹ The community service program is intended to allow students to "contribute to [their] community," while they "develop a sense of responsibility toward others, acquire useful skills, learn about adult occupations, and participate in increasingly more responsible and complex tasks."¹²

Assessment and Family Conferences

Assessment of student progress and work is an ongoing process. Teachers assess student progress through observations of individual classwork and student group work; conferences with individual students; and evaluation of group presentations, written essay drafts and completed exhibitions. It is an observation-coaching process focused on both work in progress and final products.

At the end of each trimester, after exhibitions are completed and evaluated, teachers prepare narrative reports evaluating student progress over the trimester. Subject area and community service reports are compiled into a

¹¹ Uptown High School curriculum document.

¹² Uptown High School pamphlet.

comprehensive report for each student. These become the basis for a discussion, in a family conference, of the student's progress and work.

Family conferences take place at the end of each trimester. Students and parents read the trimester report, then meet with the student's advisor for about forty minutes to discuss it. If the advisor feels that the conference would benefit from the involvement of any of the student's subject area teachers, this is arranged. The student's presence in the conference eliminates some of the confusion that can arise when the teacher, parents and student have different understandings of what is going on in the student's work. Differences of this type can be resolved through face to face interaction among the parties. The conference process brings student, parents and advisor together to identify that student's strengths and problem areas, and to decide on appropriate next steps to facilitate student growth. The family conferences provide another mechanism for helping Uptown H.S. personalize the teaching and learning process.

The Upper School Program and Curriculum¹³

At the end of tenth grade, if students have successfully completed all Middle School courses and

¹³ Much of this section on the Upper School is based on program descriptions in the 1991 Uptown High School Handbook.

community service, and passed their second language proficiency test and their math state competency test, they enter the Upper School. Students who have not completed these requirements by the end of tenth grade can enter the Upper School on probation. Students on probation cannot participate in regular Upper School activities until they have successfully finished their Middle School courses and made concrete plans with their advisor to complete the other Upper School entrance requirements. This may mean that they will have to work during the summer to catch up with their peers.

When a student enters the Upper School, the student's advisor organizes a Graduation Committee which will have responsibility for evaluating the student's work and making a recommendation to the full faculty on the student's readiness to graduate. The Graduation Committee is made up of the advisor, another faculty member, a family member or other adult of the student's choosing, and an appointed tenth grade student.

The defining task of the Upper School is for students to complete portfolios of work that demonstrate mastery in fourteen required areas. Portfolios can take many different forms. Depending on the portfolio area, the specific topic students choose, and their own strengths and talents, students can submit written essays or artwork, do dramatic presentations or readings, create videos or multi-media projects. Although students will be evaluated on their

individual achievements, they may do part or all of a given portfolio project as a collaborative endeavor. Also, if done properly, one portfolio project can be used to cover more than one required portfolio area.

Although some of the portfolio projects may come out of work that students have begun in the Lower or Middle Schools, most of them are developed directly from the work students do in the Upper School. Student work is done in connection with the five major organizing components of the Upper School. These components include:

- 1) Regular Uptown H.S. coursework. Students take courses either at Uptown H.S., or by arrangement with local colleges, on a tuition-free basis. During the spring 1991 semester, Upper School students were enrolled in some thirty-three courses -- twenty-one at Uptown H.S. and twelve at colleges or technical schools.¹⁴ These included such courses as geometry, pre-calculus, chemistry, physiology, short story, civil rights, geography, Second World War, sociology, Video, internship seminar, computer design and maintenance, and construction trades.
- 2) Two Uptown H.S. college seminars. These are courses specially designed by Uptown H.S. and local college faculty, taken on college campuses, aimed at providing students with a broad understanding of some of the major influences on the formation of our civilization.
- 3) Internships/Apprenticeships. All U.H.S. students must complete a one-semester part-time internship or a more intensive full-time summer apprenticeship in a selected job placement. This is intended to provide students with a fuller understanding of a chosen field of work which they may wish to consider as a career option.

¹⁴ "Graduating from Uptown H.S.: Comments by Maria Landon," a one-page assessment of Upper School student progress and planning for graduation and life after graduation. Fall, 1990.

4) Advisory/Independent Study. The advisory class takes on an expanded role in the Upper School. Not only does it serve as a place where students explore personal, health, social and other issues, it also becomes a support group for students as they work on their portfolio projects. In addition, the advisor can become a supervisor for an independent study project, if a student chooses to do one for a portfolio project.

5) Post-Graduation Planning. During the first semester of the Upper School, students work with their graduation committees to develop a tentative post-graduation plan. The plan, which is revised periodically as students adjust their thinking about their futures, includes short term and long term goals. Students take a series of concrete steps to implement their plans as they move through the Upper School such as preparing resumes, investigating colleges or career training programs, preparing for required entrance exams, setting up college or job interviews, etc.¹⁵

Through all the above means, students go about creating their graduation portfolios. The fourteen portfolio areas are the following:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1) Post-Graduate Plan | 8) Geography |
| 2) Autobiography | 9) Second Language |
| 3) School/Community Service
and Internship | 10) Science/Technology* |
| 4) Ethics and Social Issues | 11) Math* |
| 5) Fine Arts/Aesthetics | 12) History* |
| 6) Practical Skills | 13) Literature* |
| 7) Media | 14) Physical Challenge |

* (Science, Math, History and Literature, along with three other portfolios of the student's choice, must be done as major presentations which will be graded -- Distinguished, Satisfactory Plus, Satisfactory or Minimally Satisfactory. Students can opt to have other portfolio items evaluated on a pass/fail basis.)

In addition, each student must choose one portfolio item and expand and develop it into a Final Senior Project. This should be a project in an area in which the student has particular talents, interests or knowledge. It will be

¹⁵ Uptown H.S. Handbook.

graded as both a regular portfolio item, and under more demanding criteria, as a Final Senior Project.

As can be seen in this description of its organization and curriculum, Uptown H.S. intends to offer students a complex, expansive and innovative set of educational experiences. Before beginning an analysis of any of the school's educational practices, and the ways in which students interact with them, I will turn to a description of the organization and curriculum of the other alternative high school that I investigated, Metropolitan High School.

Metropolitan High School: Goals, Organization and Curriculum¹⁶

Metropolitan High School is in essence a laboratory school for an inquiry learning project. This project, begun in 1980, involves a team of educators working with groups of teachers in a number of schools throughout the city, to develop innovative teaching practices. The project seeks to study teaching and learning by looking at how young people learn, not just what they have learned. Teachers and the project team work together to build teaching practices around how students actually learn.

¹⁶ Much of my description here of the goals, organization and curriculum of Metropolitan H.S. is drawn from an interview with Michael Bell, Co-Director of the school, on July 2, 1992, at the end of the semester in which I did my field work at the school.

By 1985, the inquiry team was working with twelve or thirteen groups of teachers in high schools throughout the city. One of the things that they noticed as they went around the schools was that there was a population of students who were bright, but who were not being served by the school system, and were dropping out. The inquiry team approached Urbantown's Director of High Schools and received permission to start a laboratory school to bring teachers together to serve these students. This school became Metropolitan High School.

Using Metropolitan High School as a base, the inquiry learning project staff continues to develop new teaching materials and new teaching approaches. Metropolitan H.S. also serves as a center for staff development, with participating teachers from other schools coming to observe, and with the inquiry staff continuing to go out to schools to work with teacher teams.

According to Michael Bell, a major goal of the school's educational approach is to get students to recognize that there are ambiguities in all human events, and that they will have to "think through issues," argue about them, and take positions based on evidence they gather. The school explicitly rejects a vision of education that sees young people as "vessels to pour knowledge into." For Michael Bell,

there is information kids need, and we don't deny that and don't ignore it, but the information is a

means to an end. How you acquire it, and what you do with it, is what's important.¹⁷

For this reason, the school doesn't teach to the state competency tests, or any test, for that matter. As Bell sees it,

We're quite prepared to have our kids, who are capable of passing the state competency test, pass it with a 70 instead of a 99, and know how to do science, [for example], rather than simply know how to take a science test.¹⁸

Metropolitan H.S.'s inquiry learning orientation puts students as researchers at the center of the learning process. The school staff helps students learn to "explore ideas, conduct research, evaluate information, discuss ideas respectfully, develop new sources of fact and opinion, [and] present and defend their findings."¹⁹ These goals are in the same spirit as the "habits of mind" that Uptown H.S. attempts to nurture in its students. As a member of the national network of alternative high schools to which Uptown H.S. belongs, Metropolitan also subscribes to network principles such as personalization, less is more, goal setting, and student-as-worker.

This general approach to education is connected to Bell's vision of the kind of citizenship education that Metropolitan H.S. provides. When asked whether he sees citizenship education as one of the important goals of the school, Bell responded,

¹⁷ Notes from interview with Michael Bell, 7/2/91.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Metropolitan H.S. pamphlet.

What we're trying to do is develop thoughtful individuals who are prepared to make judgments, support judgments with evidence and act on judgments. Now, depending on what your definition of good citizenship is, I mean, if you want a citizenry that will follow orders, be good army men, and vote in an election because Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum are running, we're not creating a good citizen.

If you want someone who is critical and questioning, ...if we're really successful, that's what we're creating. But that kind of citizen can say, "the process doesn't work, democracy's a sham, the people who are running, there's no difference, so what's the point of voting?" And some people would define that as a bad citizen.²⁰

Bell feels that the kind of citizen Metropolitan H.S. is trying to develop is "someone who's analytical, critical, and thoughtful"; but one who uses reasoned criticism, not [someone who's] just yelling at the top of a building."²¹ Metropolitan works to "help students become good citizens who value civil debate, and can and will engage in making informed choices for our nation."²²

Metropolitan H.S. attempts to provide a personalized, flexible, intellectually engaging environment for its students. It achieves its personalized atmosphere by several means, not the least of which is the fact that it is a very small school in terms of its student population --

²⁰ Notes from interview with Michael Bell, 7/2/91.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Metropolitan H.S. pamphlet.

only about one hundred students. Class size is also kept quite small. The average class size mandate for alternative high schools in Urbantown is sixteen students. At Metropolitan H.S., some classes have twenty to twenty-two students, so that other classes can be kept very small, to ten students or so. This allows classes taught by newer staff members, and classes which particularly benefit from smaller student/teacher ratios (such as science labs), to be kept smaller.²³

Class sizes can be maintained at these levels not because of richer per pupil funding for alternative high schools. In fact, Urbantown alternative high schools are funded at a lower per pupil rate than traditional comprehensive high schools. In alternative schools, administrative costs are kept lower than in regular high schools. For example, Metropolitan H.S. has no specially funded department chair positions. In addition, Metropolitan High School has no one funded at a principal's salary. The principal's position is funded at an Assistant Principal's rate. According to Karen Meese, these are typical staff funding arrangements for Urbantown alternative high schools. So in effect, Metropolitan H.S. is able to provide the intimate setting and the small classes that it

²³ Karen Meese, in a phone conversation, 11/15/92.

offers even while operating at a lower per pupil funding level than traditional Urbantown high schools.²⁴

The organization of the school's physical space also contributes to creating a humane, personable atmosphere at Metropolitan H.S., and cuts down on the level of alienation that students can feel at large, comprehensive high schools. Although its classrooms are spread out on three different floors in its host school building, Metropolitan has a center of gravity in a suite of two large adjoining rooms on the first floor. One room is the office, where the co-directors and staff members have their desks, piled high with books, photocopied articles, folders and other materials of the teaching trade. There are posters and cartoons on the walls, several telephones, a couple of MacIntosh computers, a copy machine, storage closets for books and other materials and staff mail folders. Students all have lockers against the office wall nearest to the doorway to the adjoining room. Students are constantly coming into the office to get to their lockers.

The second room serves as a reading/relaxation lounge for students and teachers. It has a large conference style table and chairs, and a couple of small couches against the walls. There's a sink, a refrigerator and a magazine rack loaded with newspapers and popular magazines. Students hang out in the lounge before school starts and between classes,

²⁴ Ibid.

and many eat their lunches there or come to hang out there and socialize for at least part of the lunch period.

Michael Bell's desk is located right next to the doorway between the two rooms. His chair is practically in the doorway. As students come in, he marks their attendance for the day. If he doesn't see them in the morning, and sees them later, he asks them where they've been and checks to see if everything's alright. He makes sure they're not sick or having a problem, and reminds them how important it is to be in school. He really knows all the students well, it seems. The other teachers also seem to know the students well and take a personal interest in them. The physical set-up, combined with the obviously high level of personal interest and concern staff members have for the students, makes for an environment in which students feel at home. As Michael Bell sees it,

This is a small office, and we're all in one room for a real purpose. We are instantly accessible to each other all the time. And the kids will wander in and find us very easily. And they have to because their lockers are here. There's a lot of informal interaction....

One of the important benefits of this structurally guaranteed, ongoing informal interaction between students and teachers in the office/locker suite is that students see some of the work that goes into making their school function. They see what it takes to run their school in terms of pulling together materials for creative, inquiry-based teaching; making phone calls and writing letters to

arrange for special trips and visiting speakers; meetings among staff members on curriculum and teaching issues, etc. Perhaps most importantly, students witness first hand one of the central, complex dynamics of their school's operation: the effort the staff makes to run the school as a fully collaborative endeavor.²⁵ All of this adds to a sense of intimacy and connection among teachers and students in the shared construction of the students' education.

Advisory classes also contribute to the family atmosphere of the school. These classes, which generally meet once a week for an hour, serve a purpose similar to that of advisory classes at Uptown H.S. Within the safe environment of the advisory group, students have the opportunity to explore a range of issues of importance to them, such as health, sex education, college and career possibilities, or other school, personal or social concerns. Once a month, advisory groups also take trips to colleges and other places of interest to students both in and out of Urbantown.

Metropolitan H.S. tries to be as flexible as possible in order to serve the diverse needs of its unique student body. Students come to Metropolitan from other schools which for a variety of reasons, they have rejected, and for the most part, have stopped attending. They arrive with varying levels of academic skills and knowledge, depending

²⁵ Ibid.

on what they were able to learn before they began cutting classes at their previous schools. At the time of my research at Metropolitan H.S., a student's graduation depended in part on his/her completion of a required number of academic credits, much as it would in a traditional high school. However, the school at that time was beginning to institute a proficiency-based set of graduation requirements, involving some type of portfolio system. Metropolitan H.S. is now moving away from the credit system altogether, in favor of this portfolio graduation requirement.²⁶

In traditional Urbantown academic high school classes, the curriculum is largely dictated by the material students will be expected to know on the state competency exams. Classes at Metropolitan H.S., on the other hand, are not geared to the state competency tests. They are not designed to "cover" all the material mandated by the state curriculum. Metropolitan H.S. believes in depth rather than coverage. The staff as a whole plans what courses to offer to meet students' needs. What is emphasized in any given course is also influenced by staff discussion of what students need.

²⁶ Ibid. In a few cases, if students have a special need to move on without completing all the graduation requirements, school staff may encourage them to take the G.E.D. test. But Metropolitan H.S. staff will continue to provide academic support and counseling to help such students prepare for and get into college.

The Metropolitan H.S. curriculum is designed to get students to do research, to investigate issues through various sources, to draw conclusions and take positions on the issues. Much of the energy of in-class work is directed toward getting students to discuss and debate issues. Students use evidence they have gathered through class readings or through their own research to argue their points of view. Students often work in pairs or small groups to gather evidence from readings and organize their arguments.

At the beginning of every semester, students do intensive, three-week group inquiry studies on different aspects of assigned research themes. In February of 1991, when I began my observations at Metropolitan, the students were working in small groups, each under the guidance of a teacher, investigating the theme of community. Different groups were doing projects on such topics as African American and Latino communities; utopian communities; housing projects as communities; gay and lesbian religious communities; and the influence of high-profile political figures such as Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, as well as popular rap artists, in the communities of their followers. Students investigated questions such as "What is a community? Do these groups constitute communities? What would make them communities?"

Teachers encouraged and guided their students to tap some of the vast resources of the city in doing their

research. Students used special library collections such as the Schomburg collection in Harlem, and interviewed activists, experts, and people with direct experience in students' research areas. At the end of the month, students wrote 15 to 20 page papers based on their research. This intensive project is used as a kick-off to every new semester, to get new students "baptised" into inquiry-based learning, and to get continuing students re-focused on the work at hand.

After the semester-opening research project, students choose classes and begin to settle into them. During my period of observation at the school, classes offered included such courses as Adolescent Issues, Spanish, French, Work and Workers, Supreme Court, African and Latin American Literature, Media Investigation, Action Research, Chemistry, Calculus, American History, Sexist Society?, Politics of Money, Novels, Evolution, Studio Art, Video, etc. Some of these classes are taught by special arrangement by college faculty at their colleges. The classes I observed were Action Research, Politics of Money, Sexist Society?, American History, and Novels. These were all taught by regular Metropolitan H.S. faculty, with classes taking place in the school, except when special trips were taken in connection with the course of study. (In the Action Research class, there were almost weekly trips to meet with educational advocates, activists and writers, to attend public forums, etc.)

Most classes are fifty to fifty-five minutes long. However, two afternoons a week are organized into two-period blocks of time to allow for more in-depth exploration of a topic of study, or for trips outside the school, or other kinds of plans that aren't easily limited to fifty or fifty-five minute periods. A third afternoon each week, from 12:15 on is blocked out for students to participate in their community service work.

Community Service placements are set up by the Metropolitan H.S. staff. They try to arrange a wide variety of placements, in lawyer's offices, schools, health centers, social services such as drug treatment programs, nursing homes, etc. Students, in consultation with staff, choose from the list of possible placements. If they are dissatisfied with the available placements, or if they have a special interest that they would like to pursue, students can work with a staff person or on their own to try to set up a community service placement that better suits them.

Community Service at Metropolitan H.S. is conceived as serving several objectives. It puts students in a position to "have a role in the wider community" outside of school, and to make a contribution to that community.²⁷ It also offers students a chance, over the course of their high school experience, to get a sense of the variety of adult roles in their community. Community Service can also allow

²⁷ Interview with Michael Bell, 7/2/91.

students to explore a particular interest they may have, and see whether it holds up under the scrutiny of direct experience. Finally, staff members can guide students to explore areas through community service in which they feel the students will be interested, but which they may never have considered otherwise. In this sense, community service provides students with an opportunity "to stick their noses into different aspects of life."²⁸

This description of the goals, organization and curriculum at Metropolitan H.S. provides some sense of the school's commitment to creating an innovative, flexible and rich educational experience for its students. Based on my description of Uptown High School, it seems that its program, too, offers a creative, first quality education to its students.

From the perspective of this study, however, there are three major questions that remain to be explored. First, how do students experience and respond to the organization and educational practices of each school? Students must be engaged in a school's educational program if they are to benefit fully from it, in the manner intended by the school. The more specific question this aims toward is to what degree are students engaged in school practices that nurture the values, attributes and capacities necessary for public

²⁸ Ibid.

democratic citizenship? This begs the second question: To what extent do the organization and educational practices of these two schools coincide with those that I have identified as contributing to the development of public democratic values and attributes in young people? The third, and perhaps most important question is one that is somewhat subjective, but is worth posing nevertheless: Are there signs that students are taking on some of these democratic values, attributes and capacities?

Chapter 7: Student Engagement and Preparation for Public Democratic Citizenship

In this chapter I will draw on my field notes to illustrate some of the ways in which the two schools in this study promote student engagement in school life and encourage the development in students of some of the values, attributes and capacities necessary for public democratic citizenship. Where appropriate, I will also point out occasional counter-examples -- situations where one of the schools may have missed an opportunity to encourage the development of students' public democratic values and capacities.

Public Democratic Values, Attributes and Capacities

As I argued in Part I, if we in the United States hope to begin to reverse the processes of social decay and political alienation that increasingly define American social life, it will be necessary to redefine and revitalize our conception of democratic citizenship. We will need to build an alternative hegemonic vision and practice of public democratic citizenship that will challenge and supplant the privatized conception of democracy that now dominates the collective American political imagination.

Schools can play a role in creating this new public vision and practice of citizenship by helping young people develop the public democratic values, attributes and

capacities that I discussed in Chapter Three. I have summarized these below:

**Values, Attributes and Capacities Needed
for Public Democratic Citizenship**

- 1) An ethic of care and responsibility as a foundation for community and public life.
 - a) understanding of the interdependence of people as "individuals-in-relations"
 - b) understanding of the need for individuals to live as responsible members of communities

- 2) Respect for the equal right of everyone to the conditions necessary for their self-development as individuals-in-relations
 - a) a sense of justice based on that right
 - b) principles of equal individual civil and political rights, and equal political power and voice, within context of a publicly-oriented concept of democracy, in which the rights of individuals are balanced by their responsibilities to the larger community.
 - c) acceptance of the fundamental equality of members of all social groups in society, including that of social groups other than one's own.
 1. acceptance of a person or a group's right to be different from oneself, or from the accepted norms and values of the community, as long as they don't threaten the equal rights of other community members

- 3) appreciation of the importance of the public
 - a) appreciating need to participate in public discussion and debate, and to take action to address public issues
 - b) recognizing need to expand and create new public spheres as sites for discussion and debate of public issues
 - c) understanding public nature of certain "personal" problems

- 4) A critical/analytical social outlook
 - a) habits of examining critically the nature of social reality, including the "common sense" realities of everyday life
 - b) habits of examining underlying relations of power in any given social situation.

- 5) The capacities necessary for public democratic participation
 - a) analysis of written, spoken and image language
 - b) clear oral and written expression of one's ideas
 - c) habits of active listening as a key to communication

- d) facility in working collaboratively with others
- e) knowledge of U.S. constitutional rights and political processes
- f) knowledge of some of complexities and inter-connections of major public issues to each other and to issues in the past
- g) knowledge of how to learn more about any important issue or set of issues that arises
- h) self-confidence, self-reliance and ability to act independently (within context of community)

SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE AND PRACTICES

In Chapter Four I enumerated several characteristics of the overall atmosphere of a school that would be likely to get students engaged in its educational programs. In addition, I laid out a series of school practices that an ideal-typical secondary school might use to nurture in young people the public democratic values and attributes listed above. These are the characteristics and practices I will use as a standard against which to compare and analyze some of the characteristics and practices of the two schools in this study.

In the lists below, I have briefly restated some of the school characteristics that I believe will help promote student engagement in the life and work of their schools; and the school practices that will promote democratic values, attributes and capacities in young people.

Characteristics of school life likely to engage students in a school's programs

- 1) Schools should create an atmosphere in which students feel a sense of belonging or membership in the school community.
- 2) Schools should make sure that students are safe, not only physically, but also emotionally/psychologically safe enough to express themselves, try new things and risk making mistakes without fear of embarrassment.
- 3) School work should have intrinsic interest for students.
- 4) School work should be meaningful not only within the school and for school purposes, but also in the real world outside school.
- 5) Schools should create conditions that give students a sense of ownership of them.

School Practices of Ideal-Typical Secondary School for Nurturing Public Democratic Values and Attributes

- 1) Create opportunities for students to explore their interdependence with others, both through study and through experiential learning.
- 2) Promote study of the concept of community.
- 3) Encourage study of cultural diversity in students' own school, local and national communities
- 4) Encourage students to examine and evaluate critically the social reality in which they live
- 5) Develop and train students' capacities for public democratic participation.

For analytical clarity, these lists separate school characteristics that promote student engagement from school practices that nurture public democratic values, attributes and capacities. However, this is something of a false distinction. Several of the school characteristics that enhance student engagement lead naturally to democratic

educational practices, just as many school practices that promote democratic thinking and action are by their nature highly engaging to students.

So even though for the purpose of ordering my discussion I will start with the characteristics of Uptown H.S. and Metropolitan H.S. that are likely to encourage student engagement, the discussion will often flow directly into an analysis of school practices that nurture public democratic values, attributes and capacities. Such a blending of analytical categories becomes inevitable as soon as I begin to look at snippets of real life in the two schools, drawn from my field notes on classroom activities and discussions, as well as my conversations with students and teachers. Because of the amount of blending between the categories of school characteristics that enhance student engagement and school practices that promote public democratic values and capacities, I will not deal systematically and separately with all the ideal school practices. Rather, I will talk about democratic school practices as they arise in my discussion of school characteristics that encourage student engagement in school life.

I will now turn my attention to the first two school characteristics that are likely to engage students in their school programs.

Student Engagement: Membership and Safety in the School Community

Based on my observations and conversations with students and teachers, a theme that comes up in both the schools I studied is the importance of relationships. Relationships between students and teachers, as well as among students and among teachers, give rise to feelings of community, of family, and of home. The tone that is set by these feelings brings together the first two characteristics listed above that are likely to engage students in the life and work of a school: 1) an atmosphere in which students feel a sense of belonging or membership; and 2) an environment that feels safe for students, both physically and emotionally. Such an atmosphere becomes a powerful source of strength that underlies the success of these schools.

The atmosphere of belonging or membership is cultivated through several of the structural/organizational features of both schools. The most important of these is size -- both schools are quite small compared to traditional comprehensive Urbantown high schools. Both Uptown H.S. and Metropolitan H.S. subscribe to the principles of personalization and "less is more." Keeping the schools small, the classes small (eighteen or so) and the teaching load small (no teacher works with more than eighty different students in a term) allows for a situation in which every

student can be known by her/his teachers, and s/he can get to know them.

The organization of Uptown H.S. into distinct Schools and Houses reinforces the sense that students belong to a specific community within the larger community of the school.

At Metropolitan H.S., there is no need to break down into "houses" because the total population of the school is essentially a house of eighty students and seven teachers. The smallness of the schools and their subdivisions creates the possibility for regular personal contact, a requisite for the development of caring relationships. As Michelle Fine states,

If voices are to flourish inside public high schools, then those institutions need to be small, personal and organized around relationships between students and adults, as well as among adults....Although small size is never sufficient, large anonymous structures will never do if we are interested in creating a sense of community and connection."¹

Students in both schools also commented to me about the feeling of informality and equality that comes from the simple fact that students call teachers by their first names. As Jose, a Metropolitan H.S. student expressed it, "One thing is, it's informal here. Like we call teachers by their first names. They don't mind. And in class it's not

¹ Michelle Fine, 220.

like a teacher-student relationship. It's like person to person"²

The regular meetings and personal development focus of Advisory classes, as well as the institutionalization of an adult mentoring role that is the result of the advisor-student relationship, reinforce the degree to which teachers know the students personally and come to truly care about them. I saw an illustration of this during a break in an Upper School class I was observing. A teacher came in to speak with Joan Mitchell, the teacher whose class I was observing.

11:00 [Break. Students go out.... Another teacher, Nancy Richards, comes in. She's a teacher involved with community service and senior internships.]

Nancy: I just wanted you to know T and R Company called. They said Ana said she wasn't feeling well. I told them to keep her there. I was very firm. [T and R is this student's internship placement.]

Joan: Did she say what was wrong?

Nancy: No.

Joan: So you think she was just going to meet that guy? I'll call her tonight. Thanks for being firm with her.

[Joan tells me about girl--one of her advisory students--and her parents.... The student has been kept very sheltered, but she's been getting around her restrictions.]

Joan: Ana is 17 and she's never been out anywhere without the parents or her sister. Or so the parents think. So of course she finds ways, creative ways, to get around it.... (Field Notes, 4/18/91)

² Field notes, 4/9/91.

This interaction that I observed was obviously part of an ongoing process of dealing with a student whose personal life was affecting her school work, in this case her work in her senior internship. The advisor was apparently in touch with the student, the family and the student's other teachers, and was working to intervene in what she saw as the student's best interest. The intervention process would continue when she called the student that evening. The question of whether it was the best thing to force the student to stay at her internship placement when she said she didn't feel well is beside the point. What is important to note is that this advisor was close enough to the student and the family to know the background of the situation, set up a plan with the internship coordinator to "be firm" with the student, and follow up with a phone call to the student that evening to discuss the situation further.

Apart from the relationships that develop within the advisory system, students in both these schools also feel that teachers display a sincerity and personal interest for their students in even the most academic contexts. This also contributes to creating a caring environment in the school. An illustration of this was offered to me by Theresa, an Uptown H.S. student who commented on the individual effort teachers make to help students.

The teachers really care about students here. Once I was having a lot of trouble with calculus. But I have dance after school. So Veronica [her math teacher] says, "It's no problem, you can meet me at 7:15 for extra help." But 7:15! I ended up

meeting her at 7:30.... But the teachers are like that.³

The smallness of the school, the caring environment, the structured and unstructured relationships that develop between teachers and students and among students themselves -- all these contribute to creating school environments that are physically safe. When people know each other in a school there is automatically some sense of accountability. And when there is a feeling of care, the likelihood diminishes of people acting irresponsibly or violently toward other members of the school community. So it can be argued that Uptown H.S. and Metropolitan H.S. are inherently safer environments than many large urban high schools.

Still, conflicts can occur and people can act irresponsibly toward others or toward other people's property. One way that Uptown H.S. deals with this reality is that many of its staff and students have received training in conflict resolution. This training helps people recognize conflicts at an early stage and use a number of strategies to defuse them through communication, before they escalate further.⁴

Beyond the question of physical safety, it is also important for a school to provide an atmosphere of emotional safety and support for students, so that they will feel free

³ Field Notes, 4/18/91.

⁴ Field Notes, 2/13/90, UHS teacher discussing conflict resolution program with group of visitors.

to express themselves, take risks, try new ideas and make mistakes from which they will learn. I saw evidence of this on several occasions in class discussions, particularly at Metropolitan High School.

One example comes from the Metropolitan H.S. novels class. In this class students are all reading different novels of their choice. They spend some time each class sharing and discussing their stories, and some of the issues and themes that arise from their reading. The rest of the class time is used for reading, journal writing about their reading, and writing up novel cards that tell a little bit about books students have read and make recommendations to other students about whether they're worth reading. One day, a student was telling the class about the novel she was reading, The Good Mother, by Sue Miller. She related a part in the book when the four year old daughter of the main character was in the bathroom as her mother's boyfriend was getting out of the shower. The little girl wanted to touch the mother's boyfriend's penis. The telling of this incident from the book sparked a long class discussion on the issue of talking to children about sex. Here are excerpts from my field notes from that class.

Chris [the teacher] initially guides the discussion, getting students to talk about their feelings about when children should be taught about sex, how to deal with children's curiosity when they touch others' private parts, etc. Maria describes her history of how she learned about sex -- from other students, from her older sister and brother -- but not from her parents. From this, further discussion follows about when it's

appropriate to teach children about sex, what to do when little kids start playing doctor, and so on....

It was a very stimulating, serious discussion. Students talked about a very sensitive subject with intelligence and maturity. Most of the students (at least six of the ten students present) took an active part in the discussion, often speaking out simultaneously to try to make their thoughts heard.

The discussion that went back and forth between Freddy and David (with others listening closely and often joining in) was especially good. At one point, David said to Freddy, "Explain to me what you would say to the kid" [i.e., explain to the child who's getting into "playing doctor" why not to do it and what sex is about]. "I'll be the four year old and you be the father. What would you say?"

At first Freddy was a bit mixed up in explaining what he'd do and say. But through the discussion, he gradually began sorting out his thoughts.... He wouldn't be able to explain everything about sex to a four year old. But he also couldn't just hit the child and tell her to stop [which is what he had said he would do at first]. He'd have to explain somewhat to her why she shouldn't do that, and maybe begin to explain something about the body.⁵

In this class, students used the springboard of an incident in a novel, and related it to their own experiences and to what they might do in the future, as parents, with their own children. It was clear that the discussion participants were listening to each other, since there was a distinct evolution of Freddy's thinking as he discussed the issue with his classmates. In addition, although the teacher initially led the discussion, students soon took control, speaking and responding directly to each other, without mediation from the teacher. This kind of discussion

⁵ Field Notes, 3/19/91.

among adolescents, dealing seriously and sensitively with a subject as personal as how to talk to young children about their bodies and about sex, could only take place in a classroom environment in which students feel truly comfortable and safe.

Jose, a Metropolitan H.S. student, offers another example that summarizes how the feeling of care, of closeness and of belonging comes across in the relationships between teachers and students at his school. He spoke to me briefly as he waited in the office for a friend who was going out to lunch with him.

Jose: Have you talked to Michael [Bell] about the school?

DS: No, well only a little bit.

Jose: You gotta talk to Michael. He gives so much to the students. Out of his own pocket. Just in tokens alone. He must go through about two packs of tokens a day. And he's not getting that money back. Or maybe he is, but he doesn't know that for sure.

And everybody's like that around here. If I asked Chris [a teacher who is passing by right at that moment] to lend me a few bucks, he'd give it to me if he had it. Right, Chris?

[Chris smiles and says yes.]

See that? And so would any of the teachers. We're close here. WE ARE FAMILY. Put that in your thesis.⁶

This feeling of school as family and community is one of the outstanding qualities one can't help but notice in Uptown and Metropolitan High Schools. It is important to emphasize that this feeling doesn't develop by accident, and

⁶ Field Notes, 4/9/91.

it doesn't come about simply because there is an extraordinarily dedicated and gifted group of teachers in each of these schools. The schools are structured and organized to nurture the kinds of relationships that create feelings of belonging, connection and care. No doubt the structuring of school life around such relationships, combined with the fact that teachers in these schools are given room to function as the professionals that they are, helps to motivate the kind of dedication and creativity that mark these faculties as special. It also creates a marvelous and engaging environment for the education and growth of high school students.

But the benefits of organizing these schools around relationships that promote a sense of belonging and care go beyond creating an engaging atmosphere for learning. The organization of these schools also models, and therefore promotes through students' lived experience in the schools, an ethic of care and responsibility. The ethic of care and responsibility that permeates these schools brings home to students the importance of developing themselves as individuals, but always within a context of their connections with others through relationships of care, mutual belonging and responsibility to a shared community. This ethic of care and responsibility forms a crucial part of the foundation for building public life and public democracy.

Student Engagement: Intrinsic Interest, Real World Meaning and Student Ownership

The third, fourth and fifth school characteristics that are likely to engage students in school life are a closely related group. For example, the third characteristic (that school work should be intrinsically interesting to students) can be seen as one aspect of the fifth school characteristic (that students should have a sense of ownership of their schools). If students are interested in their work, they think of it as their own. The fourth characteristic (that school work should be meaningful both inside school and in the real world) is related to the third in that the more school work is connected to the real world, the greater the chance that students will find it relevant and interesting to them. If students' work is connected to issues that are particularly salient in their own lives, they will also be more likely to feel a sense of ownership of it. Thus there is also a link between the fourth and the fifth characteristics.

My class observations and conversations with students in Uptown and Metropolitan High Schools are full of examples that testify to high levels of student engagement when these three characteristics were present in their work or in the organization of school activities. At the same time, many of the classroom observations and conversations with students that I recorded in my field notes also illustrate some of the ideal practices for nurturing public democratic

values, attributes and capacities in young people. I will describe and analyze a few particularly rich examples below.

Metropolitan High School's Karen Meese taught a class called Action Research. In this class, students spent an entire term investigating a current social issue, and developing a class project that would attempt to make a public impact on the issue. During the spring term of 1991, the issue they investigated was the proposed set of cutbacks in aid to Urbantown public education. Karen Meese organized the course around current newspaper and journal readings on important educational concerns in Urbantown, the nation and the world. She also set up a number of class meetings around the city for interviews and discussions with education experts, activists, Board of Education officials, etc.

I joined the class one day on a visit with a local newspaper writer, Sally Karas, who had recently done an article contrasting Japanese and American education. The students were given copies of her article to read before the meeting, as well as an assignment to prepare two interview questions in advance and to take notes during the discussion. The following excerpts from my field notes provide some sense of how the meeting went.

[The setting was rather uncondusive to discussion. Sally Karas took us all up to the Urbantown Chronicle cafeteria to have lunch. However, the tables weren't big enough for everyone to sit around one, and several of us had to pull up chairs from other tables to form

an outside circle around those seated at the table. The cafeteria was quite crowded and noisy. Neither Sally Karas', nor most of the students' voices carried very well. So most questions, answers and comments had to be repeated in order to be heard at both ends of the table. Nevertheless, most students did pay close attention and participate in the discussion. Only in the last few minutes of the hour-long discussion did a couple of students at my end of the table seem to lose interest.]

[Discussion begins with student comments/questions. Mitch says something about Japanese students studying so much that they're all nerds and freaks. Other students respond that he's just judging them by his standards. Other Japanese students don't consider good students or those who study a lot to be nerds. The culture respects such students....]

Sally Karas (SK): Almost everyone, maybe 98% of Japanese students, graduate high school. Everyone learns enough to be literate and to use numbers.... They know that if they work hard they'll get good jobs...

Jane: But you're acting as if it's all or nothing. Either they work hard and get great jobs or they don't and they're total failures. There must be hairdressers in Japan, and places like MacDonal'd's where people work...

SK: That's right. But they learn enough in high school or even in jr. high school to function in their jobs. When I was in Japan, I had a hairdresser who I became friends with. He had actually dropped out of high school. But he had learned enough in jr. high school to be able to keep records for his business, to run the business.

Male student: Do kids enjoy school in Japan? What's it like?

SK: In the early grades, school is very creative. Then in jr. high school and h.s. it gets very competitive, very rote, a lot of memorizing...

Mary: But it's different in Japan. Home and school work closely together [to support education].

SK: Yes. Families are very involved in the student's education....But I don't necessarily think that everything's perfect with the Japanese approach to

education. There is too much pressure too early on the kids....

Jane: So what's your idea of a perfect education system?

SK: Something in the middle. There it's too much pressure. Here it's too little. Kids should learn enough to get along and to want to learn new things.

Karen Meese: What are classes like [in Japan]?

SK: A lot of lecture. Not much discussion. Big classes-- 30 to 40 students in a class....

Male student: Maybe they realize if they work hard for now, they'll have it made....

Karen: [Talks about raising the ante: demanding more work from students in American schools].

Ron: But if you raise the ante, it might just blow up in your face. More might drop out. If now 15% drop out, then 30-40% might drop out.

Male student: I think if you want more people to pass h.s., you have to make it easier. Making it harder won't work. [A lot of kids just won't do it.]

SK: I think that's bad! I have to say I think that's bad, what you're saying.

Female student: What? Make it easier? But we're already way behind other countries!

Karen: That's right. Sally, what's the unemployment rate in Japan?

SK: Very low. Almost none.

Karen: And you know, right here in Urbantown at least 1 of every 10 people is out of work. And the standard of living hasn't gone up since 1973! Do you know what that means? We're not keeping up....

Female student: Yeah, it's the economy. It's not doing too well.

[Then there was discussion about whether there are jobs available now. One student said there are jobs in MacDonald's. People can get jobs if they want one. Karen replies that those jobs don't pay anything and they discuss that a bit...]

Then Karen and SK try to get students to say what would motivate them to work hard in school.]

SK: [Says something about a national competency test that all graduating students would have to take.]

Karen: What if we had a test, a national test that you all had to take. And when you went for a job, employers would ask, "Well, what did you get on the test? What was your score?" Would that make you want to work hard in school? Would that motivate you? You wouldn't necessarily like it. But would you work hard?

[A few say yes. Then one student says something like]:

What would the test be testing for? Would it really mean anything? Would it have anything to do with the job you're applying for?

[A few people pick up on that issue, commenting on how tests often have little to do with what people can actually do with their knowledge.]⁷

This class activity struck me as quite valuable, on several levels. On one level it was a good opportunity for the students to make contact with the real world of one of Urbantown's key businesses -- the news media -- and in the case of the Urbantown Chronicle we are talking about a media organization that plays a major role in defining public discourse in the city and in the nation. Students got the opportunity to go into the Urbantown Chronicle building and have lunch with a Chronicle writer. They sat around a big table, eating lunch and talking about education with Sally Karas, asking her questions and sometimes challenging her answers. In this way they were able to demystify her and her profession, and see that she was a very normal person.

⁷ Field notes, 3/25/91.

By participating as equals in a discussion in which they shared their own ideas about education as much as they listened to Karas', they also raised themselves up to her level. Students were intentionally put in the position of being the questioners and commentators on Karas' ideas. This gave them a degree of control and ownership of the process, and made it an empowering experience.

On another level, the topic, education, held intrinsic interest for the students. Discussion built upon students' experience and knowledge of education, as well as their knowledge of the Urbantown economic situation and job market. It also drew upon what they had recently read, including Karas' article. Not only was the situation real (interviewing a writer on her home ground), but the topic was one that connected directly to the students' reality. Moreover, it was also a topic of major importance in city and national politics, and in the media.

The whole process of the Action Research class also involved students in examining, discussing, debating, and writing about many of the major questions around the state of American education and its future. The process provides an excellent illustration of a set of educational practices organized into a course that encourages students to examine critically the social reality in which they live. It also gives them a great deal of practice in a number of the skills necessary for public democratic participation: active listening, analyzing written and spoken language, expressing

their ideas in speech and in writing, and throughout, working collaboratively with their peers. They also examine some of the linkages between educational issues and others (economic, political, cultural).

These activities contribute to the development of the values, attributes and capacities necessary for public democratic citizenship. Working in collaborative groups reinforces feelings of interdependence among students, which is one of the first steps toward building an ethic of care and responsibility. Since class research is focused on public issues and action, it strengthens students' sense of the importance of public life and public action. Finally, the nature of the research, which constantly asks students to examine their own ideas about education and educational policy, and to examine and challenge the ideas of others, leads to a critical, analytical social outlook.

It should be noted that the Action Research class I have been discussing is not unique at Metropolitan H.S. in its high level of intrinsic interest for students, the sense that it gives students of ownership over their work, and the way it deals with real world issues. I sat in on many classes that demonstrated these characteristics and appeared to be highly engaging to students.⁸ The third point, that school work at Metropolitan H.S. deals with real world

⁸ I will go into more detail later about students' sense of ownership and control in decisions that affect their day-to-day experience of school life.

issues, was made to me by students in short conversations we had one day at lunchtime. In separate conversations with a couple of students, after talking with each of them a bit, I asked whether they thought that Metropolitan was preparing them for life after high school. Here's how they responded:

Ann [African American]: Yes, because we talk about real life things. Also, community service, that's real life stuff....

Karen [African American]: I guess so. Because they deal with real things here. Like you were here in American History class today, right?

[She refers to an emotional, but reasoned discussion comparing the relative strengths and internal unity of African American communities and Jewish communities and how that may or may not affect the ability of members of those communities to be successful in life.]

In other schools they'd try to play that down. They wouldn't want to talk about it in class. But here we can talk about it.⁹

During one of the focus group discussions I ran, another student made the point even more strongly.

John [African American]: Something that stands out to me is history.... At one time, Karen taught an "Eyes on the Prize" class. That was sort of a history class dealing with the civil rights movement in the U.S. And that stood out, because that's been something that's been dear to me as a person in this community [the African American community]. But also just by the way that she did it, and being that she had a lot of first person accounts, you know, the people who we interviewed, and people who we talked to. And that made it just much [more] real, than always looking to a book all the time.

And lots of the educational process in Metropolitan H.S. is such that you can actually take it beyond a school. You know what I'm saying? This affects life.... I think just about every class in Metropolitan, whether direct or indirect, has an effect on your life. You know, after high school, and after college, and after whatever... every class, whether direct or indirect, somehow will have an effect.

⁹ Field Notes 4/16/91.

At Uptown H.S., too, many of the classes and much student work were characterized by high levels of intrinsic interest for students, real world meaning, and some degree of student ownership and control. The video documentary class in the Upper School is one class that combined these elements to create a highly engaging experience for students. During the first half of the semester students learned the video production process --from use of cameras, lighting and sound equipment to editing a final product -- by doing a couple of small video projects based in the school. The class I observed had done short documentaries on how Upper School advanced students feel about their upcoming graduation; and about how Uptown H.S. students and staff feel about an unpopular school dress code rule, the "no hats" rule.

The second half of the term was devoted to creating students' semester projects. The semester project has to be a documentary on a social issue that involves some sort of debate or controversy. The spring, 1991 semester topic was rap music --its effects on young people, whether there should be censorship of obscene lyrics, sexism in rap, and whether rap artists have a responsibility to "send out positive messages."

Kevin Johnson, the video teacher, offered me some of his thoughts on the project and what he wanted students to get out of it.

Kevin: Students choose the project topic. It's a democratic process. I didn't think this rap topic was the best one, but that's what they wanted to do. And it has some real possibilities.... Last semester they did a project on media coverage of the Persian Gulf War. There was so much research involved before actually getting out there and interviewing and videotaping. This time I want to have them use people as resources. I want them to talk with experts and learn from them. That way they can get right out and start taping interviews.

DS: Oh, so this isn't just going to be a public opinion kind of thing?

Kevin: No. I think there's a danger in doing that, going out and taping just anyone's opinion. I want this to be a documentary. I want them to talk with experts and really present some thoughtful ideas. Not that I want them to think students and regular people don't have anything to say. But I want them to learn that there are people out there who have really thought about this a lot, and worked on it. They'll be interviewing people like [a writer for the Village Voice who's written a lot on rap music]. And maybe members of the Parents' Music Resource Center....¹⁰ I want them to learn to use people as resources.¹¹

On the first day I observed the video class, they were just getting started on video-taping. Although the intention was to solicit the views of "experts" on rap music and its influence on young people, the students felt that they should start with interviews of their fellow students. They developed the following four-question interview guide to use with Uptown H.S. students:

¹⁰ This refers to the group that created and publicized a warning label system to be used on recordings that have sexually explicit lyrics. This group was organized under the leadership of Tipper Gore, wife of Vice President Al Gore.

¹¹ Field Notes, 4/11/91.

- 1) What kind of influence does rap music have on you or on people in general?
- 2) Do you think musicians have the responsibility to send out positive messages?
- 3) What kind of thoughts run through your mind when you listen to songs with explicit lyrics? Should these lyrics be allowed?
- 4) Do you think songs like "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" affect the way women are treated?

The class divided into two video crews, got their equipment together and headed out into the halls. I followed one crew of five, with another two students coming late from other meetings to join them. Students took turns doing the three different roles on the interview crew -- interviewer (holding microphone), camera person and sound monitor (wearing earphones). I have excerpted below parts of some of the answers students gave to the interview questions.

Q1: (influence of rap music)

Tammie (African American female): Yes. It has an influence, mostly on guys. They see how rappers dress and they wanna dress like them....

Q3: (Should explicit lyrics be allowed?)

Tammie: [She talks about the labels they now put on tapes, records and CD's if they are judged to be too explicit.] But it doesn't stop anybody from buying them. It probably just makes them more interested.

Q4: (Does "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" affect treatment of women?)

Tammie: I think a lot of factors contribute to the way guys treat women. It's not rap music that makes them treat women bad [or good]. It's the way they're brought up.

....
Q2: (Do musicians have responsibility to send out positive messages?)

Mark (African American male): Yeah, because they might influence people.

Q3: (Should explicit lyrics be allowed?)

Mark: I guess. It's all about freedom of speech.

Q1: (influence of rap music)

Andrew (White male): Well, I write songs. So I think it influences you.

Q2: (Do musicians have responsibility to send out positive messages?)

Andrew: I think musicians should send out a message, but not necessarily a positive one....

Q4: (Does "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" affect treatment of women?)

Andrew: I personally wouldn't write lyrics that are degrading. But if a person is going to go out and rape someone after hearing a song, they're already screwed up.

Q1: (influence of rap music)

Kevin (African American male): Yeah, some. There are different kinds of artists. Some talk about girls, some are political. I listen to all kinds....

Q2: (Do musicians have responsibility to send out positive messages?)

Kevin: Yes. Some use it as a tool to get a point across.

Q3: (Should explicit lyrics be allowed?)

Kevin: You mean pertaining to the First Amendment? Well some kids are too young. They hear about 2 Live Crew and they don't know what they're about. But they hear about them. So they go out and buy the tape.

Q4: (Does "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" affect treatment of women?)

Kevin: Myself, it doesn't affect me. I already have my mind made up.

....

Q3: (Should explicit lyrics be allowed?)

Eduardo (Latino male): Well, the Constitution says free speech is allowed. So they should be able to say what they want.

Q4: (Does "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" affect treatment of women?)

Eduardo: Yeah, I think it does. I think it degrades them. Like [gives name of a popular rapper], he says degrading things about women on one side. But on the other side he says "upgrade the race." It's a contradiction.¹²

Based on the above description it is clear that the video documentary class at Uptown H.S. fulfills three of the

¹² Field Notes, 4/11/91.

characteristics that encourage young people to become engaged in their school life. In focusing on the influence of rap music on young people, it deals with issues that are meaningful in the real world, and indeed are connected to students' own experience and knowledge as participants in urban youth culture. The semester video project is also of great interest to the students, for in fact it was selected by them. Their ability to choose the topic, to decide whom to interview, develop interview questions and retain ultimate editorial control over the final product, all contribute to a strong sense of ownership of the video project.

My observations support the fact that the students were engaged in the project, at least on the days when I observed. For example, on the day they interviewed other Uptown H.S. students, each student participated in some phase of the interviewing process, as well as in a technical critique session that took place back in the classroom during the last half hour of the class.

In observing the student video crews roam the school's halls in search of interview subjects, another type of ownership was apparent. The students seemed to "own" the halls and rooms of the school. They were totally at ease walking in and out of open classrooms (where classes were not going on), down the corridors, stopping briefly to talk to fellow students who were out of their classes on breaks, in travel to the library, the bathroom, or some other destination, or perhaps on free periods. Teachers and staff

members did not stop the student video teams, nor the other students for that matter, to ask for passes or for explanations of where they were "supposed to be," as is commonplace in other schools. And although the halls were not exactly quiet, they were also not particularly noisy or chaotic, and certainly did not feel in any way threatening. I attribute this situation of "disorderly orderliness" to the school's small size, and to that combination of other organizational factors described earlier which lead to an overall sense of membership and safety in the school.

The semester project investigation of the influence of rap music on young people provides an excellent illustration of one of the ideal secondary school practices for nurturing democratic values and attributes in young people. It leads students into a critical examination of the social reality in which they live. The fact that the students chose this topic shows that they are already beginning to develop a critical social outlook, an essential attribute of citizens in a public democracy.

The questions students developed for interviewing their schoolmates place them, and the interviewees, face-to-face with several vital social issues. For example, the first question on the influence of rap music on students, and the fourth, on whether a particularly misogynistic song affects the way men treat women, both seek to examine the power of popular culture in society. The second question, whether

musicians have a responsibility to send out positive messages, raises the issue of one's responsibility to a community or society. This can lead, in turn, to consideration of the need for an ethic of care and responsibility, a necessary foundation of public democratic citizenship. The third question, whether explicit or obscene lyrics should be allowed, opens up the whole issue of the relationship between individual freedom of expression and the common or social good, and the extent or limits of social power to enforce a perceived social good.

The answers students gave to these questions are also worth examining, even though they are by no means a scientific sample of the views of Uptown H.S. students. The three affirmative answers to question one point to at least some recognition among Uptown H.S. students that popular culture may have an influence on social life. Yet this is balanced by their responses to the fourth question, which demonstrate some understanding of the complexity of this relationship. The four negative answers to the question about the effect of a song on the treatment of women, all indicate that these students do not see a simplistic cause and effect relationship between a particular song and men's attitudes toward women. Even Eduardo's positive answer doesn't claim that the song causes men to act in a certain way. He simply says the song degrades women, an assumption made by all the respondents. The implication of all their answers is that they feel that the influence of popular

culture works as one part of a complex set of forces to influence individual actions.

Student answers to the second question offer no clear pattern, with two saying musicians do have a responsibility to produce positive messages, and one saying they don't, while the answers of the other two students were not recorded. However, student responses to the third question on whether explicit lyrics should be allowed are revealing, but not for the specific positions the students took. Of the four whose answers I have recorded, three students made specific reference to the question's connection to the Constitution, the First Amendment or freedom of speech. I was impressed by the fact that they did not simply say, "this is a free country", but that they had some awareness of the foundation in the Constitution of the specific freedom in question. Some knowledge of Constitutional structures and protections is one of the minimal capacities necessary for public democratic citizenship.

The process of producing the video documentary projects is itself a valuable educational exercise for preparing young people for public citizenship. Doing group research on a public issue, identifying activists and experts on the issue, developing interview questions and conducting interviews, all offer students opportunities to analyze written, spoken and image language, practice active listening skills, develop their ability to work collaboratively with others, and gain an understanding of

the complexities of a major public issue. These are all capacities that are necessary for public democratic participation. In addition, the experience students get in the technical aspects of video production, from taping to editing to manipulation of the sound track (adding music, voice-overs, etc.) helps to demystify TV for students. It contributes to a critical understanding among students of how professional documentaries and news reports are made, and the degree to which ideological and political decisions play a role at every step in the process. Once students gain this critical understanding of video production, they will never again view TV news, documentaries or interviews with passivity and naive acceptance.

The experiences students had in Kevin's video class seemed to embody many of the ideal organizational features and teaching practices that I have argued will lead to high levels of student engagement and the development in students of many of the values, attributes and capacities necessary for public democratic citizenship. Because students chose their own project topics, and often interviewed the students and staff of Uptown H.S. in at least one part of their projects, the class also proved quite useful to me as a field researcher. The choice of topics served as a window into some of the issues students in the class considered important, while the interviews offered a forum for other students' views on these issues. An excellent example of

how this worked can be seen in the story of the "No Hats" video.

"No Hats" Video

A couple of weeks after I observed the video class doing their initial interviews with students for the rap music project, I accompanied them on a bus trip to HMV Music, an enormous record, tape and CD store. Kevin had gotten permission from the store manager to bring two student video crews into the store to talk with customers about their views of the warning label system for recordings with explicit lyrics.

The most interesting part of the trip for me was the conversation I had with Gail and Monica on the bus ride to the store. Gail and Monica are Upper School students, Latina and African American, respectively, in the video class. Here are excerpts from my notes on that conversation.

[I asked Gail and Monica about their first video project for this class. They told me there was one on the school's dress code -- the "no hat" rule. Note: Uptown H. S. students are officially prohibited from wearing hats in the school building. My own impression is that the rule is inconsistently enforced.]

DS: I've never understood that rule. What's it for?

Gail: I don't know. I guess it's because -- I don't know. You know, this is supposed to be such an alternative place and everything, but then they have the same rules as all the other schools....

Monica: And they want us to protest and all....
[She tells of teachers urging students to go to yesterday's student demonstration against education

cutbacks at City Hall. She points out the irony that teachers want students to be critical and to be activists, yet also want them to conform to a silly dress code.]

DS: What did you do for that video project?

Gail: We interviewed teachers and students about the hat rule.

DS: What did the teachers say?

Gail: Mostly that they don't like it either, but it's a rule.

DS: What did the students you interviewed say?

Gail: Against it! Nobody likes the rule.

[I asked if they ever protested anything in the school, against any school policies. They said something about one day when everybody wore hats as a protest. But nothing came of it.

Monica also mentioned a demonstration for outside lunch privileges for Middle School students. But since they're in the Upper School now it doesn't matter, because Upper School students can eat lunch out of the building.]¹³

This conversation provided me with several important pieces of information. First, I was made aware of a school issue that these students felt was so important that they chose it as a topic for their first short video documentary. Second, I found out that there was a student-made video tape that could provide me with a set of brief student and teacher interviews on the issue. Third, Monica's mention of the demonstration for outside lunch privileges for Middle School students highlighted the importance of that issue, which had previously been brought to my attention by other students. Fourth, I saw that however happy they may have

¹³ Field notes, 4/25/91.

been with the school overall, Gail and Monica also harbored a certain frustration with the contradiction between what the school says it wants them to be outside of school -- critical and active citizens -- and what it seems to want them to be inside of school-- acquiescent and passive students, at least when it comes to certain school rules.

To investigate the hat rule issue further, I took the first opportunity I could to borrow the No Hats video tape from Kevin. Below are my notes from viewing the five minute tape.

Narrator: [This video explores students' and teachers' views on the hat rule.] By the end of this video, you the people of Uptown H.S. should be able to determine whether the rule is a valid one.

African American male student: I think the rule should be changed.

Mike [white teacher]: What do I think, personally? Probably it wouldn't matter to me.

Joe [African American student interviewer, wearing baseball cap]: What is the big deal on guys and girls wearing hats in school?

Jean Summers [Upper School Director, African American female]: I felt it was important because, especially young black males are often judged on the basis of how they look. And because in the larger society, wearing a hat inside of a building connotes respect or disrespect, you all needed to have some consciousness about that. To make yourselves consciously aware of that, one way would be to make you all take your hats off, so that it would be an automatic response or reflex when you go into other places, in which you want to make an impression, if you want to go on a job interview etc., etc.

[Cut to interview with African American male student.]

Joe: I see you have the Jamaican colors on [referring to the green, yellow and red baseball cap the student is wearing]. Is that to be cultural, I mean, why do

you have your hat on? Are you doing this just to disobey the rules?

Ron: Well I'm one of those people you can call a rebel. I really don't feel that the rule is one that I want to follow, so I go against it....

Joe: [Says something, cut off on tape, about getting together with other students to try to change the rule.]

Ron: Well, from my experience in this school, I see that a lot of rules cannot be changed no matter what people try to do, including students. I feel that there's no need for me to try to get together with other students and make a change because there will be no change. And being that I'm gonna be leaving quite soon, I'll just be a rebel for the rest of the time and continue to wear my hat....

[In another interview Amy, an African American female student says she doesn't think students should wear hats in school.]

Amy: Well honestly, as a growing up adult, teaching you, preparing you for life, guys shouldn't wear hats. It's like a general rule....If you're going to be in a working environment, you have to learn how to follow rules and regulations.

Joe: Do you think that it should be different for a male and female? Should they both have to take their hats off inside?

Amy: Yeah. Both should have to take off their hats.... Everything should be equal for everybody....

[Note: Amy looks very much like a "growing up adult." She has a very put-together look, with her fashionable black pants suit, silver earrings and a stylish red and black leather hat. Joe, the interviewer, is wearing a baseball cap. His friend, who stands next to him during the interview, also has a hat on.]

[The video ends with several cuts to students commenting on the no hat rule.]

Students: It sucks!
Bullshit!
Keep rockin' your hats!
That's the nineties.

[Student grabs the mike from interviewer and says]:
Yeah, for the 90's. 'Cause that's the only way we're gonna' change things around here.

[Then he turns and points right into the camera and shouts]:

Suckers! Fresh! For '91!

[End of video.]

When I examine specific teacher and student comments about the hat rule in the video and in private conversations, and when I think back on my observations in the school, I see that the hat issue, silly as it might seem, becomes a window into what I find to be a serious set of problems with Uptown High School's program for public democratic citizenship preparation.

The two teachers seen in the video had differing views on the hat rule. The first indicated no personal investment in the no hat rule. The second did feel strongly enough about it that she at least made an effort to give a rationale for the rule. Yet the fact is, there was no strong commitment on the part of the faculty to enforce the hat rule consistently.

The number of students wearing hats in the video was no doubt a function of the "freedom of hats" sentiment of the video team. However, it is true that many, many students did wear hats regularly in the halls and even in classrooms. Teachers and the principal often asked students to remove their hats, and students usually complied. But often teachers failed to ask. And if they did ask, students tended to take their hats off for a while, and then put them back on later; certainly they put hats back on when they left the room at the end of class. Students were fighting a

guerilla war of style against a dress code that had been imposed on them by the teaching staff. And although the teachers were not fully united in their resolve to win the war, they also did not want to give up the principle that they had the exclusive right to impose rules (with the noblest intentions) on their young charges, the students.

Maria Landon, the principal, was aware of this contradiction, and wanted it resolved. At a staff meeting back in January 1990, she brought the issue to the teachers' attention.

[Maria Landon speaks on need to enforce rules about students not wearing hats and coats in class or in halls; no eating junk food in class; no gum; no Walkmen. Or else drop the rules. She thinks these policies are not being followed, and that it makes the school look bad.]

Maria: ...I'm not willing to write it up again in the Newsletter, nor any other regulation if staff aren't going to enforce it.

Maria's proposal: Form a student and parent committee to make rules on dress, junk food, etc.

[There's a staff discussion of the proposal. In a staff vote, the proposal is defeated by a large majority on the sense of the faculty that, as one person stated in the discussion]:

The staff assembly should be the highest authority in the school.

[It appears that teachers are not willing to delegate any of their rule-making authority to students and/or parents, even on an issue such as dress code.]¹⁴

The crucial point here is this: students had no institutionalized power over how the school was run. In

¹⁴ Field Notes, 1/22/90.

fact, a week after the staff vote against forming a parent/student rules committee, I was told by a teacher that there was no student government of any kind at Uptown H.S. As he explained it, "Helen (one of the teachers) tried to organize one with students last year, but no students turned out to a meeting. Since the administration wasn't too keen on the idea anyway, the idea died."¹⁵ Thus students had no formal authority to make or to change school rules and regulations at Uptown H.S.

This played itself out on a specific issue such as the hat rule in the following manner. Based on the video and on my observations and discussions with students, it seems that most Uptown H.S. students were against the no hat rule. According to Gail and Monica, they tried to organize against the rule by holding a one-day protest, for which everyone wore a hat to school. But nothing came of it. Since the students had no institutionalized power, and their attempt at creating organized, public power through protest seemed to fail, they fell back to a reliance on personal power -- the power of individual resistance. This dynamic could hardly have been articulated more clearly than it was in Ron's statement in the video: "I feel that there's no need for me to try to get together with other students and make a change because there will be no change.... [So] I'll just be

¹⁵ Field Notes, 1/29/90.

a rebel for the rest of the time and continue to wear my hat."

Individual resistance is an expression of a kind of power. But it is a power that is diffuse, spontaneous and fleeting. And as Ron, Gail and Monica's attitudes show us, resistance can take on a tone of frustrated resignation. I heard the same resigned tone echoed in the words of Annie, another student who had been active during the 1989-90 school year trying to organize Middle School students to win out-of-school lunch privileges.

Annie: Maria [Landon] wrote us a letter [in the Newsletter] that basically said, "Forget it. There's no way you're going to get this. So you might as well give up and stop protesting."¹⁶ You'd think since this school is so into getting us to think for ourselves and everything, they'd want us to protest. But no. ¹⁷

Although individual resistance has the potential to spark organized resistance that can lead to winning formal power, this occurs only under the rarest conditions. It is at least as likely, particularly when people begin to experience a sense of resignation in the face of continued existence of the rules, that resistance will erode or become coopted. In the video, Amy might be seen as someone who exemplifies this process. Although she resists the hat rule by wearing her hat, she has apparently already internalized the official rationale for the rule. Her position could

¹⁶ I actually read the letter in the Uptown H.S. Newsletter and it didn't say they should stop protesting. Nevertheless, clearly Annie read Maria Landon's position to mean that.

¹⁷ Field Notes, 4/18/91.

have come right out of Jean Summers' mouth: "...guys shouldn't wear hats. It's like a general rule....If you're going to be in a working environment, you have to learn how to follow rules and regulations." Amy's resistance is just a step away from desistance.

The implications of forcing students into positions of individual resistance to a school rule are of much greater consequence than whether students ultimately wear hats in school or not. The real significance of the issue is that when students are forced into personal resistance, it reinforces in them a certain cynicism about public democratic activity. It tells students public action is futile: Don't bother. Private action is the answer. Withdraw from public life. Just resist. Wear your hat. Maybe cut out for lunch. Exercise your personal freedom. But leave the public world and the power structure intact.

Such a message is all the more insidious in a school whose philosophy and rhetoric call for developing public democratic values and attributes in young people. For at the same time that students have obviously comprehended and internalized some of the school's democratic ideas and rhetoric, their day-to-day experience is one of a lack of power to affect the rules that govern their lives in school. The contradiction is not lost on the students. They try to resolve it by attempting to organize informal public shows of the student will (demonstrations, petitions, etc.) to change the situation. This is necessary because as students

they have no access to formal institutional power. When public organizing efforts fail, they retreat to exercise their private "democratic" rights of personal dress, individual resistance, and private study. Their actions fall comfortably into line with the hegemonic ideology of privatized citizenship.

From the perspective of the analytical categories I have been using on the schools in this study, the fact that students at Uptown H.S. have so little control over school rules imposes a serious limitation on their ability to develop a sense of ownership of their school. It also means that the school fails to employ one of the most important school practices for preparing students for public democratic citizenship -- meaningful participation of students in school governance.

Uptown H.S. students may feel quite safe and comfortable and "at home" walking the corridors of the building. And in many of their classes they may have a high degree of control over the shape and specific content of the work they do. These factors can both contribute to a sense of student ownership of their school. Nevertheless, the lack of a student voice in school governance can lead potentially to resentment of school authority, the formation of oppositional student cultures and the eventual disengagement or resistance of students to the official school agenda.

I do not mean to detract from the many accomplishments of Uptown H.S., nor to minimize the strides it has taken to encourage students to become critical thinkers, and to develop public democratic values and capacities. But it is possible that precisely because of such accomplishments, Uptown H.S. runs a greater risk than other schools of alienating some of its students if it fails to incorporate them into the school governance process.

Warning signals could be heard in the words of Gail, Monica and Annie. They all felt that the school should be held to a higher standard than other schools, just as it expects more of them than other schools expect of their students. For Gail Uptown H.S. "is supposed to be such an alternative place and everything...." Monica notes that "they want us to protest and all..." For Annie, the school is "so into getting us to think for ourselves and everything." All three of these students perceived that Uptown H.S.'s agenda had something to do with getting them to be thoughtful social and political actors. Therefore the school's seemingly arbitrary disregard for student concerns on issues that affected their daily lives such as the no hat rule and the no outside lunch rule for the Middle School, were seen as especially hypocritical contradictions.

It is not that Uptown H.S. students were necessarily on the verge of rebellion. On the contrary, most of the students I spoke with informally seemed to hold positive

views of the school, overall.¹⁸ Nevertheless, I call attention to the lack of organized, school-sanctioned student participation in governance for two reasons. First, it has the potential to erode students' sense of ownership of their school, and thereby detract from their willingness to become fully engaged in their school's educational project. Second, excluding students from school governance means missing an opportunity to employ one of the key ideal practices for nurturing public democratic values and capacities in young people. It means forfeiting a chance for students to develop, through personal experience, their understanding of democratic processes and their capacities for democratic participation.

The situation of students' real and perceived lack of ownership or control over their school life at Uptown H.S. contrasts sharply with that of students at Metropolitan H.S. I conclude this not only from my observations, but also from extensive discussions I had with students in a series of focus group meetings at Metropolitan H.S.

¹⁸ If I had had the opportunity to conduct focus groups with students, I would be able to speak with greater confidence about their sense of ownership and control of their school, as well as their overall views of the school. Since I was denied that opportunity, I have had to base my conclusions about these issues on my observations and on informal conversations with students in hallways, in the library, on the bus, etc.

Student Control/Ownership at Metropolitan H.S.

The most extensive discussion I had with students on the issue of their perceived sense of control over school life came in the third focus group I conducted at Metropolitan H.S. I believe it is worthwhile excerpting an extended portion of the discussion transcript.

DS: ...What I'm thinking about is the question of control. ...To what extent...do you feel you have any kind of input or control over how this school is [run]-
-? ...Like [control] over the kinds of work that you do, or the classes or the homework, or the topics that you choose, or even about the way the school is set up and run, or how you're supposed to behave, any of those things. Do you feel like you have any input...?

[Several students]: Yeah. Yeah. Yes.

Freddy [Latino male]: I think the school pretty much, we, the students have like a lot more input than they would have in any [other] school, where they would have no input, first of all. I mean we have an advisory group here that meets, like where different students meet in their advisory, and they take what they want to the student committee, and then the teachers' committee. So it's like a very democratic process that everything is run in this school. I think if more people got involved, and really cared, we'd have, the students would have even more control than they do now. Like we have a lot. We do have tremendous control.

DS: So wait, how does it work again? It works through the advisories?

[Several Students]: Yeah. Through the advisories--

Doug [Latino male]: Little groups of like eight students, they meet with a teacher. And they bring up a topic, or if there's something you have a complaint about. Then a member of that group takes it to Student Committee-- like there's one student for each advisory goes to the student committee, and brings up the issue. And Michael (one of the school co-directors) is there. And Michael is...always quiet. It's like just us talking. And mostly I don't talk, but, you know we discuss it, and we see what's up. ...For example, some girls complained about girls smoking in the girls' bathroom. It took two or three complaints or something like that, and now they're going to set up a smoke alarm and everything. So, this is the process. You

know anything can be done...except maybe a pinball machine in the bathroom, or something. You know, what is necessary for the school....

DS: So are there regular meetings with Michael, like this?

Doug: Once a week. And he has a staff meeting, which I think sometimes students are allowed to sit in.

Larry [African American male]: Students are allowed to sit in if the teachers aren't talking about students....

Freddy: Yeah. There's a meeting today that students will be able to sit in on, today at 3.

Doug: And you have as much power as [any of the teachers]. You can raise up your hand and talk what you want, and complain or discuss, or whatever. It's not like, you know, the teacher, back in high school, back in Humanities, where you know...

Doug: Yeah, everybody gets equal.

Ali [African American female]: Um, also it's not even just like the student committees or whatever. Let's say you might not be on student committee. You can always go up to Michael or one of the teachers and say your complaint or whatever.

And...the teachers here really care about you.... And one thing they're never gonna do is attack you, personally. Maybe your ideas, you know, like in classes and stuff.

But here, this school is very unique, because here students definitely get a lot of control. A lot of control. ...Like at other schools, forget it. What you say is not important. You're just a number on their computer and that's it. But here they treat you like real people. Because you are a real person, actually.

...Everything here is really done for what's going to help you in your later life.

DS: Uh-huh. Anybody have any other points?...

Larry, did you have any comment about any of that stuff, about control or feeling like you have any control?

Larry: ... The latest thing is that the trip committee, one person from the trip committee went to the staff committee and they got the student trip sort of changed.

DS: Wait, what was it going to be? [Talking to the other students]: Did you guys hear about this, this student trip committee thing? Do you know about that?

[A few students speak up all together about it. Finally Doug explains it.]

Doug: It was [a choice between] Great Adventure and the dude ranch, and the staff had already decided that we going to do the dude ranch. 'Cause the staff didn't like Great Adventure rides. But the students wanted to go to Great Adventure. And you know we said, "It's our trip. There are more students than teachers"-- this and that. So...one of the students went to a staff meeting. And he got up all the votes from the students. And he went and the students won, over the staff.

DS: So they're going to go to Great Adventure.
[Several students]: We're going to Great Adventure.¹⁹

Regarding the issue of student ownership and control, the students here could hardly be any clearer. They not only have a general feeling of control and empowerment in the school, which is partially the result of the sense of belonging and safety that I discussed earlier. But they have an institutional power base in the school as well -- the student committee.

Of course many schools have student governments that do not necessarily translate into student power in the school. Sometimes student governments simply become instruments for coopting student leaders and winning student consent to school policies. Other times student governments become marginalized from the sentiments of the majority of students. But in the case of Metropolitan H.S., these

¹⁹ Focus Group #3 transcript, 5/7/91.

students cited specific examples of the student committee having an impact on issues that really mattered to students.

From the outside, the issues cited may seem inconsequential. But dealing with a problem of smoking in the bathroom and reversing a staff decision regarding a school end-of-year trip represent concrete actions that helped improve student life at Metropolitan H.S. These kinds of experiences, taken in the context of the rest of the positive experiences students have of the school, go a long way toward building students' sense of self-respect and self-confidence as people who matter. To see this we need only look at Ali's precious statement: "But here they treat you like real people. Because you are a real person, actually."

Yes, Ali is a real person. And her realizing that she is a real person is one of the first steps toward becoming an independent social actor, who with the right preparation, could also become a public democratic political actor. An important part of the right preparation for public democratic citizenship, and one of the ideal school practices I mentioned earlier, is providing the opportunity for students to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their day-to-day experience of school life. Metropolitan H.S. gives students that opportunity.

One African American student in particular at Metropolitan H.S. left me with a strong sense of hope that carefully structured and skillfully run public high schools

can make a difference in helping prepare students for public democratic citizenship. James, speaking in the first focus group, commented on how he felt the school had helped prepare him for the future, both as an individual and as a active member of the larger society.

James: I think that Metropolitan H.S. for me has done a number of things. And one of them is open my mind to the world and see that there's other places beyond Urbantown.... And also I think that Metropolitan H.S. has made me aware of a lot of things that I wasn't aware of before. You know, social problems, political problems, as well as racial problems, and different things like that. And again, I think that it has put me in a position where I think that I will be able to succeed in higher education....

I feel that I have a pretty good idea of where I want to be or where I'm going in later life. I'm in between where I want to go into a more corporate arena or you know, [make] some kind of change on the outside. Whether I'm inside the system or outside of the system I feel that I will try to make some change and make things better for the lower rung of people in the society.²⁰

Many of the things James said seem to indicate that he has begun developing some of the values, attributes and capacities that I believe young people must possess if they are to become public democratic citizens, and through their efforts, help us create a public democracy in the United States. His statement that he has become more aware of social and political problems suggests that he is beginning to develop a critical/analytical social outlook, examining social reality and identifying problems. His mention of racial problems points to an emerging critical social outlook as well, but also implies a concern for equality and

²⁰ Focus Group #1 Transcript, 4/23/91.

justice. He speaks with an impressive self-confidence both about his preparation for college and about his sense of what he wants to do with his life and how he wants to contribute to society. His confidence in his own ability to have an impact on society as an independent social actor is one of the requisite qualities of public citizenship; i.e., one is more likely to take public action if one feels that his/her actions will make a difference.

James' specific interest in trying "to make some change and make things better for the lower rung of people in the society" highlights his appreciation of the importance of public life and his personal commitment to work for social change. It also demonstrates his belief in the equal right of everyone to the conditions necessary for their self-development. Finally, James' interest in helping the "lower rung of people in society" points to a budding commitment to an ethic of care and responsibility.

James is a young man who will graduate high school with what he feels is an appropriate intellectual preparation for college, and what I believe is an essential foundation for public democratic citizenship.

Chapter 8: In Search of Democratic Education Inside Democratic Schools

Much has been written in recent years about the problems of U.S. democracy and public life. I have argued that many of our current troubles, both in our degenerating practice of democracy and in our decaying social life, can be traced, in large part, to our inheritance of a quite limited vision of democracy and democratic citizenship. The hegemonic tradition of democratic ideas which runs from the Federalists to John Stuart Mill to Joseph Schumpeter to contemporary free market pluralists, promotes a concept of democracy that minimizes the role of ordinary citizens as political actors who can shape their own individual and collective destiny through participation with others in public life. Instead, this tradition reinforces an egoistic individualism, a glorification of materialism and a relentless consumerism as the keys to personal happiness and fulfillment.

This hegemonic ideological tradition contributes to a distrust, if not disgust, with all that is public. Alienation from public life seems especially marked among young Americans. In a focus group study conducted for People For the American Way, a social studies teacher summed up his students' attitudes toward involvement in community life in this way:

My kids are going to look at [community involvement] and say, 'Well, that's not going to buy me a Gucci

shirt, or that's not going to buy me a pair of Fila tennis shoes or something. What's in it for me?'¹

Robert Bellah and his co-authors uncover and analyze similar attitudes among Americans about their connections to communities, institutions and public life.² Such attitudes are often characterized by "desire for private benefits at the expense of public provision."³ These attitudes, which Bellah, et al. trace to "Lockean individualism," might be understood more simply as part of an ideology of irresponsible individualism. Irresponsible individualism contributes to, and helps justify, individual and collective immobilization in the face of the decay of the nation's economic infrastructure; the deterioration of our cities; mounting social inequality; heightening bias-related conflict stemming from racism, sexism and homophobia; and mushrooming violence in cities, suburbs and rural areas throughout the nation. It has exacerbated the centrifugal social forces that threaten to tear our society apart.

In order to begin to confront the myriad social problems that the U.S. now faces, it will be necessary to challenge dominant, privatized, individualistic

¹ People For the American Way, Democracy's Next Generation. A Study of Youth and Teachers (Washington, D.C.: People For the American Way, 1989), 57.

² Robert N. Bellah, Richard Masden, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven M. Tipton, Habits of the Heart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Robert N. Bellah et al., The Good Society (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

³ Bellah et al., The Good Society, 139.

understandings of democracy and citizenship, and replace them with counter-hegemonic, publicly-oriented visions and practices of democratic citizenship. Such a "reinvigoration [of public life] is not an idealistic whim but the only realistic basis on which we can move ahead as a free people."⁴

The struggle for a new democratic hegemony embraces both democratic ideology and political practice. Since education is a key institution for social and ideological reproduction, as well as resistance, schools become sites of ideological and political struggle. When our educational system is allowed to contribute to reproducing the current hegemonic democratic ideologies,

...schools produce spectators, not citizens. We are trained to watch and observe, to drop our franchise in a box, to support interest groups, and to seek private satisfaction while shunning the public world.⁵

But schools can become crucial institutions for helping young people begin to question and challenge hegemonic notions of democracy. Progressive educators can gain control of their schools and remake them into sites of experience and learning which support counter-hegemonic visions of democracy. It was to explore this possibility that I set out to study two urban public alternative high

⁴ Ibid., 141.

⁵ George H. Wood, Schools That Work (New York: Dutton, 1992), 80.

schools that are attempting to create some form of democratic education for their students.

Schools do not exist in isolation from the larger society. The ways in which knowledge is constructed in schools, and the ways students experience school knowledge and make it their own (or not), are integrally linked with the structures, practices and milieu of ideas that are current in the society at large. Therefore in any study of "democratic" education, it is impossible to make sense of what one observes and documents in a school without having a way of reading the findings which connects them to a particular tradition of democratic ideas. That is, in order to assess a school's democratic curriculum and practices, it is necessary to have in mind a clear idea of what one means by democracy and citizenship.

To this end, when I sought to examine the organization and practices of the two alternative high schools in my study, I felt it was imperative to attempt a coherent presentation of a set of ideas that challenges dominant, privatized notions and practices of American democracy and citizenship. I have called this alternative vision of democracy and citizenship public democracy. Public democratic ideas are based on a theoretical tradition that traces its roots from Jefferson to Dewey to C. Wright Mills to participatory democratic and feminist theorists such as Carol Gould, Nancy Frazer, Carole Pateman and others.

Based on my synthesis of a number of these theorists' ideas, I developed an inventory of some of the values, attributes and capacities that an ideal-typical public democratic citizen should possess. This set of citizenship characteristics includes an ethic of care and responsibility; respect for the equal rights of all to the conditions necessary for their self-development; appreciation of the importance of the public; a critical/analytical social outlook; and a set of specific capacities necessary for public democratic participation. Using these qualities of citizenship as goals toward which democratic schools ought to be leading their students, I drew on the work of a number of leading education writers and practitioners to develop a set of principles for organizing an ideal-typical democratic high school. This set of ideal principles for organizing and running a high school for public democracy then served as a tool for comparing and analyzing a few aspects of school life in Uptown and Metropolitan High Schools. Thus, I was able to tie my analysis of what I observed in the two schools to the counter-hegemonic tradition of American democratic ideas that I have called public democracy.

Lessons from the Field Research

Academic Research in Schools

Several important issues emerge from the analysis done in Chapters 5 - 7 of various aspects of life at Uptown and

Metropolitan High Schools. The first issue has to do with the relationship between academic researchers and school practitioners. This relationship has several aspects.

First, whenever outside researchers seek to study a school in operation, this places demands on school personnel to accommodate the research. Teachers must consent to being observed, and no matter how non-threatening the observer may wish to be, or how self-confident the teacher may be, this places some pressure on the teacher who is observed. Teachers and administrators also inevitably must take on some amount of extra work to facilitate research in their school. Observations must be scheduled, interviews arranged, background documents provided, etc. All of this is compounded in schools such as the two in this study, which have begun to develop public reputations as educational success stories. Such schools can become inundated with requests from scholars, journalists and other educators who wish to study them. But whether their schools are renowned or obscure, school personnel facing requests for research access can easily end up asking themselves if they even want to accommodate any researchers, unless the research will help them in some direct manner.

Contributing to educators' hesitation to allow researchers into schools is a fear that outsiders may not fully understand or accurately represent what is going on in their schools. Whether or not researchers give an accurate account of a school, it is assumed that they will in some

way evaluate what they see. This means they will likely have at least some criticisms of the schools they study. If providing access to researchers creates a high likelihood of at least some public criticism, it is easy to see why school people might be reluctant to grant such access, unless there were some clear benefit attached.

Alternative and restructured schools may be particularly sensitive to potential public criticism. Precisely because such schools are out of the educational mainstream, they tend to have less institutionalized political support than traditional schools. Therefore even successful alternative and restructured schools have reason to be hesitant about opening their doors too widely to outside researchers.

Researchers must become more aware of these issues. They must design research plans and even formulate strategies for approaching school personnel in ways that take into consideration the needs and concerns of the schools they wish to study.

Cultural Difference

Cultural difference was another important issue for members of the school communities in Uptown and Metropolitan High Schools. At Uptown H.S., for example, cultural difference was an issue with which the staff was actively dealing. In several staff meetings, people highlighted the need to remain aware of racial and ethnic

difference and the potential for teachers and students to overlook, offend, or in some way oppress other members of the Uptown H.S. community through conscious or unconscious racist actions or language. Teachers often shared articles at staff meetings concerning the manifestations of racism in school and society, or on ways to reduce racism among students.⁶ A faculty committee was formed to look into ways to make the curriculum more consciously anti-racist. During the spring 1990 semester, the staff as a whole also devoted at least two staff development sessions to workshops facilitated by Educators for Social Responsibility on dealing with racism as a staff.

Since I didn't attend staff meetings at Metropolitan H.S., I do not know to what extent the issue of cultural difference was discussed among teachers. However, issues of racism, sexism and homophobia were central themes in several class discussions I observed. An American history class focused several sessions on the roles of women and African Americans in the American Revolution. Another class which I attended regularly, entitled "Sexist Society?" examined sexism and the treatment of homosexuals in various historical and modern cultures. In both of these classes, there were highly emotional discussions among students, connecting issues from the assigned readings with their own

⁶ One example of an article a teacher distributed to colleagues at a staff meeting was Daniel Goleman, "Psychologists Find Ways to Break Racism's Hold," New York Times, Sept. 5, 1989, C-1.

deeply held feelings and experiences of racism, sexism and homophobia.

In all of these ways, both Uptown High School and Metropolitan High School took pro-active stances on the need to understand and consciously mediate cultural difference in order to build safe and caring communities among teachers, among students, and between teachers and students. In creating such communities, these schools also provided students the opportunity to participate in communities that recognize cultural difference and consciously work to overcome the conflicts that can arise from difference. For the students as well as the adults in these schools, this experience offers important lessons about the problems and the possibilities of living in a multicultural, public democratic society.

There is another area in which I observed a politics of cultural difference being played out in Uptown H.S. In this case, I believe that if the issue had been handled differently, it might have offered opportunities for students to wrestle with the realities of cultural power in American society. I refer here to the conflict between students and staff that arose over the no hat rule.

This conflict can be understood as a conflict over cultural difference in two ways: both as a conflict between adult, business culture and urban youth culture; and more specifically as a conflict between mainstream, European American culture and alternative, African American culture.

Clearly it wasn't only African American students who were wearing hats. But the wider urban youth culture trends in language usage, music, and dress are often so closely tied up with trends in African American youth culture that it is impossible to separate them.

Nor were European American teachers the only ones enforcing the no hat rule. In fact, my observations suggest that African American teachers were among the strongest supporters and enforcers of the no hat rule. Yet their reasons for supporting the no hat rule seemed to come out of a very conscious decision to try to teach students, and especially African American students, to dress according to the rules of the dominant, European American culture. As Jean Summers' comments in the No Hats video attest, the rule was aimed, at least in her mind, particularly at "young black males [who] are often judged on the basis of how they look." The point of the no hat rule was to try to train these young people in the dress habits of the dominant culture.

However, I believe that the way the Uptown H.S. staff chose to prosecute this battle over cultural norms was counter-productive, both for achieving their immediate ends of changing students' behavior, and for the much larger ends of preparing students for public democratic citizenship. As I argued in Chapter 7, a major problem with the no hat rule was that it was imposed on students without their input or consent. The approach the school took on this issue was

essentially a behavioristic one, which attempted to bypass students' own consciousness and will as human agents.

Despite Jean Summers' statement that she wanted to make students "consciously aware" of the dominant cultural norm that insists people not wear hats in public buildings, the hat rule's method amounted to simply forcing students to take off their hats, "so that it would be an automatic response or reflex when you go into other places in which you want to make an impression..."

But young people obviously do not act merely through habit and automatic responses to stimuli. Students are thinking, decision-making young people who at times consciously and at times unconsciously take part in the creation of their culture. If a school wishes to help students develop into thinking, public democratic agents, it seems inappropriate to impose cultural rules on students without their input. A more democratic approach would affirm students' cultures and their right to make their own cultures, as well as their right to participate in making rules about when and where it is appropriate to celebrate their cultures through dress and other forms of self expression. By bringing students into the rule-making process, the school would create a forum for discussing and problematizing youth culture in the context of its relationship to the power of dominant, adult culture. In this way, the school would be engaging students' reasoning and critical thinking capacities, as opposed to just their

"reflexes." If we want to prepare young people for public democratic citizenship, this is exactly what we want to do.

Difference and Democratic Education

In studying schools which aspire to be democratic, and especially in studying urban democratic schools, the issue of cultural difference, and how conflict over difference is handled, is a critical concern. This issue is important for researchers, who by their training, their position in the academic world, and perhaps by their personal social backgrounds, might be seen as culturally different from the people in the schools they wish to study. Within the schools, and particularly in urban schools, the issue of cultural difference takes many forms. There will likely be cultural differences among teachers, among students, and certainly between teachers and students. Because of the power of youth culture in students' lives, even when teachers are of the same racial or ethnic background as their students, there are cultural gaps to negotiate.

In a multicultural society such as the United States, it is crucial for social stability that we all learn to understand and respect cultural diversity. The dangers of intolerance and conflict based on cultural difference can be seen from Bosnia to the newly independent states of the defunct Soviet Union, to Los Angeles to Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

Beyond the question of social stability, respect for cultural difference is also essential for public democracy. It is impossible to build a shared public life, in which people strive to create a common good, unless people have respect for cultural difference among their fellow citizens. This is why the development of an ethic of care and responsibility is so central to the possibility of strengthening public life and building public democracy.

But learning to deal with cultural difference is not as simple as just getting people to understand and respect their differences, although that in itself is an enormous enough task in a society that has always been afflicted with racism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia. There is another point that I have tried to make in my discussion of the various manifestations of difference in my work in these two schools. It is necessary not only to understand and accept difference, but also to recognize that there are power differences associated with cultural differences. That is why class discussions of race, gender and sexuality issues at Metropolitan H.S. at times became quite emotionally charged. And that is also why the no hat rule at Uptown H.S. became an important one for many students. The lesson here is not only that cultural difference must be understood and accepted, but that cultural power differences must be negotiated. Learning to negotiate these power differences should be a key part of a democratic education.

Other Lessons for Public Democratic Education

Despite whatever shortcomings I observed in my research at Uptown and Metropolitan High Schools, these two schools, through their organization, curriculum and teaching practices, are promoting public democratic values, attributes and capacities in their students in a number of ways. By way of summary, I will comment on just a few examples which illustrate how these schools nurture public citizenship.

Most importantly, these schools have created humane, caring and safe environments, built around personal relationships that are consciously fostered among teachers, between teachers and students, and among students. By creating environments which encourage collaborative work among teachers and among students, and assigning teachers to take responsibility for the well-being of specific groups of students in advisory classes, the development of personal relationships becomes not only possible, but necessary. Anonymity and alienation are defeated. An ethic of care and responsibility is promoted. These schools model the possibility of community, which is the necessary foundation for public democratic life.

On the issue of encouraging students to respect the equal rights of all to the conditions necessary for their self-development, I have already commented on one aspect -- helping students come to terms with, and respect cultural difference. In the American history and "Sexist Society?"

classes at Metropolitan H.S., for example, issues of diversity, equality and justice were constant themes of readings and class discussions. Respect for everyone's equal right to develop themselves in society is one of the most basic democratic values.

Understanding and appreciating the importance of public life is another essential attribute of a public democratic citizen. When young people are encouraged to recognize the importance of public life, and their participation in it, the privatistic ideology of democracy is undermined. Both the video documentary class at Uptown H.S. and the Action Research class at Metropolitan H.S. demanded that students become engaged in public issues.

These two classes also encouraged students to take on a critical social outlook. Students in these classes were expected to investigate an issue through a variety of sources, question their own ideas, weigh the evidence gathered, and adopt a position on the issue. The position they took would then be expressed publicly either in writing a piece for publication or creating a video on the subject. Taking on a critical/analytical social outlook is a fundamental step toward public democratic citizenship.

The investigation into the life of these two schools highlighted a number of ways in which students are encouraged to develop many of the specific capacities necessary for public democratic citizenship. Both schools put a heavy emphasis on students doing research, sometimes

in collaborative teams, sometimes on their own. This is a critical citizenship skill, which once mastered, enables people to teach themselves whatever they might need to know about new public issues, as they arise. Student research often involved interviewing people and thus analyzing spoken language; reading books and articles, and analyzing written language; and in the case of the video class, looking at the language of images, and learning to express themselves in that medium.

Although, as in any school, not all students progressed as quickly or as far as some of their peers in mastering many of these citizenship capacities, most students I saw seemed engaged in the learning process. I was also impressed by the articulateness and self-confidence of the students with whom I spoke at both schools.

Reflecting on my research experience at these two alternative high schools, I am left with a sense of hope. Schools can engage urban high school students in their curricula and school life in ways that can help them develop the values, attributes and capacities necessary for public democratic citizenship. But it is by no means a simple or formulaic task. The people who have created Uptown and Metropolitan High Schools found it necessary to design their schools in ways that are radically different from the design of traditional, comprehensive high schools. They are small, staff-run schools built around personal relationships among teachers and students, with curricula that emphasize

research and the creation of knowledge by students. But even with all their structural and organizational features in place, these schools still must struggle with meeting adolescents' complicated individual and collective needs, as they try to nurture the qualities these young people will need to become productive, thoughtful and effective democratic citizens.

Much of what has been written here is founded on the theoretical notion that democratic expansion in the U.S. will require cultural change, i.e., change in the hegemonic ideologies of democracy and citizenship, to reflect a more public understanding of democracy. Schools can play a role in bringing about this cultural change. But they will only be able to do so if they adopt the goal of creating public democratic education as a central mission, and design their structures, curricula and teaching practices to serve that goal. This implies the need to look systematically at what public democracy and citizenship mean, and design programs that will help young people develop public democratic outlooks and capacities.

In this process, democratic educators will have to face the central issues of cultural difference and cultural power. They will have to structure their schools in ways that encourage young people to critically examine their own racial, ethnic and youth cultures, as well as other cultures.

Finally, democratic educators will have to allow students' voices to be heard in school governance. That is, they will have to provide students with opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives in school. If "democratic" schools do not do this, their students will be quick to understand the contradiction. In response, students may organize public actions to attempt to make their voices heard. Such efforts, under the right conditions, can lead to students gaining formal power in school governance. But this is a very complex process. Even successful protest movements do not necessarily lead to formal, institutional power.

If students' efforts to influence school policies and to establish formal student power are unsuccessful, students may simply resort to individual, private resistance, as did the students at Uptown High School in their guerilla war of style against the no hat rule. When this happens, the hegemonic ideology of privatized democracy is reinforced.

In contrast, when democratic schools do encourage students to participate in school decisions that affect them, young people gain important opportunities for experiential learning in the workings of public democracy. Experiential learning in public democratic citizenship should be a central part of democratic schooling.

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