POWER AND TRUST IN THE PUBLIC REALM:
JOHN DEWEY, SAUL ALINSKY, AND THE LIMITS OF PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT. Throughout the twentieth century, middle-class progressives embraced visions of democracy rooted in their relatively privileged life experiences. Progressive educators developed pedagogies designed to nurture the individual voice within egalitarian classrooms, assuming that collective action in the public realm could be modeled on the relatively safe small-group interactions they were familiar with in their families, schools, and associations. Partly as a result, they remained blind to (and often denigrated) the democratic aspects of working-class organizations, such as unions and community action groups, which found strength in solidarity. In this article Aaron Schutz argues that progressives must integrate into their models the often brutal lessons about power learned by those with less privilege. Until they do so, their approaches to democratic education will continue to have limited capacity to support social transformation and empowerment in the world *as it is*.

Aspirations for a more democratic public realm still simmer deep in the psyches of progressive educators and educational scholars. As David Labaree notes, even today, in the basic skills achievement era of No Child Left Behind, most educational scholars remain intellectually and emotionally committed to a conception of ''the school as a model democratic community.'' There is still hope among progressive educators that that ''the reform of education'' can be ''a means for the reform of society as a whole around principles of social justice and democratic equality.''[1] In this essay, however, I argue that the actual models of democratic practice that progressive educators have promoted over more than the last century have been quite limited in their capacity to support such a transformation.

As historians like Michael McGerr and Shelton Stromquist have shown in detail, the growth of a new middle-class professionalism in America was an integral part of the progressive movement that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.[2] Progressives developed visions of democracy that reflected their experiences of restrained dialogue in the new middle-class realms of the college seminar, professional associations, and emerging forms of childrearing in nuclear families. In fact, as McGerr noted, democratic progressives ''intended nothing less than to

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1. David F. Labaree, *The Trouble with Ed Schools* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004), 142.

2. Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing ''The People'': The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Note that I do not discuss in this article administrative progressives who sought to control society more centrally through a scientifically grounded bureaucracy. I also do not discuss the social reconstructionists who emerged in the 1930s, since their focus was less on democracy than it was on forms of indoctrination.

transform other Americans, to remake the nation's feuding, polyglot population in their own middle-class image."[3]

Some progressives at the turn of the twentieth century developed strategies for enhancing participatory citizenship in a world they feared was increasingly dominated by elites and powerful institutions. What I call "collaborative" progressives believed that authentic democracy emerges when people are given opportunities to participate as relative equals on common efforts to improve their society. In this essay, John Dewey serves as the key representative of this branch of progressive thought because his work captures core aspects of this vision across the last century.

Middle-class, progressive approaches to democracy diverged from more working-class forms. Less privileged workers generally had less time for extended democratic dialogue, faced more immediate needs for power through solidarity, and were more dependent on a hierarchy of leadership. Their approaches to democratic action were grounded not in extended community-wide dialogues, but in the work of relatively small numbers of leaders who, at their best, were deeply rooted in their communities and understood the desires and beliefs of their followers.[4] In this essay, the work of Saul Alinsky, who developed a model of community organizing in the 1930s that remains influential today, provides the paradigmatic example of the working-class vision in this article.

Despite changes in the makeup of the middle class and a fracturing of working-class communities over more than the last century, sociologists such as Paul Lichterman, Fred Rose, Annette Lareau, and others have shown that core aspects of early patterns of class culture remain visible today, still influencing preferences for social action strategies.[5] Rose, for example, studied recent efforts by working-class unions and middle-class professional environmental groups to work together. He found that participants in the middle-class groups often felt oppressed unless they were allowed to say what they thought regardless of the context. In contrast, while union leaders engaged in sometimes quite contentious dialogues within settings they controlled, they demanded conformity to the "party line" in more

3. McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, xiv.

4. See McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*; Clayton Sinyai, *Schools of Democracy: A Political History of the American Labor Movement* (Ithaca, New York: ILR Press, 2006); and David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

5. Paul Lichterman, *The Search for Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Fred Rose, *Coalitions Across the Class Divide: Lessons from the Labor, Peace, and Environmental Movements* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000); and Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

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public settings. Not surprisingly, these attempted collaborations often foundered or fell apart.[6]

My overarching argument in this essay is that progressive democrats have failed to pay sufficient attention to the experiences and practices of labor and community organizers. Almost universally, progressives have treated public engagement as if it could embody aspects of what organizers would call idealized visions of trusting, ''private'' relationships. As a result, generations of educators and educational scholars have mostly avoided dealing with the challenges created by the painful, messy, dirty, conflictual, interest-driven, and antagonistic realities of what I call the ''power public.''

I do not mean to imply, however, that the organizing tradition has solved all of the challenges of power and inequality in America today. If organizing was as effective as it should be, we would see a lot more of it, and more people would actually know something about it.[7] Nor is it the only model for engaging effectively in social change in the power public.[8] Nonetheless, the neo-Alinsky tradition represents the most sophisticated approach to empowering impoverished people in the United States, informing nearly all efforts to build power and solidarity in marginalized communities today.[9] It provides, therefore, a crucial starting point for thinking concretely about how progressive educators might contribute more effectively to social justice.

John Dewey and the Collaborative Progressives

Progressivism emerged at the end of the nineteenth century at a time when America was riven by labor struggles that sometimes seemed to threaten the

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6. Rose, *Coalitions Across the Class Divide.*

7. Those interested in more detailed critiques of neo-Alinsky organizing should look to my series ''Core Dilemmas of Community Organizing'' on the blog *Open Left*. The entire series can be found, in order, at http://www.educationaction.org.

8. For alternatives see, for example, Benjamin Shepard's work on play and social action, and the example of the AIDS activist group ACT UP. Theda Skocpol also writes about the now largely defunct national membership groups that once dominated the American civic scene. Today, groups operating on a wider scale than local organizing groups, such as the Sierra Club or the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), have such a vast membership that they have by necessity largely jettisoned any relation with individual members beyond providing services. Also see work on broader social movements within which organizing groups often play a part, such as Terry Anderson's book on the 1960s. Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Benjamin Heim Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure, and Social Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); and Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

9. See Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1971); the documentary *Democratic Promise: Saul Alinsky and His Legacy*, directed by Bob Hercules and Bruce Ornstein (Seattle, Washington: Indieflix, 2007); Kimberley A. Bobo and others, *Organizing for Social Change: Midwest Academy Manual for Activists*, 3rd ed. (Santa Ana, California: Seven Locks Press, 2001); Michael Jacoby Brown, *Building Powerful Community Organizations: A Personal Guide to Creating Groups That Can Solve Problems and Change the World* (Arlington, Massachusetts: Long Haul Press, 2006); and Lee Staples, *Roots to Power*, 2nd ed. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004).

very structure of society. At times it seemed like ''the United States faced a mass rebellion.''[10] Progressive democrats rejected the conflictual stance and mass solidarity of labor unions. They were also repelled by the greed and lack of social responsibility exhibited by the ''upper ten.''[11] Both sides seemed like children, unable to get along the way an emerging middle class had learned to do. Even a progressive as sympathetic to working-class culture as Jane Addams chided both sides for their inability to engage in reasonable dialogue about their differences.[12]

Drawing from their own experiences in an emerging middle-class professional culture, collaborative progressives developed models of democratic practice that they believed could transcend these battles, allowing citizens from all walks of life to join as equals in common projects that would contribute to the betterment of their society. Truly democratic communities and worksites, progressives imagined, would create a tremendous web of conscious interdependence in which ''numerous and varied . . . points of shared'' interest would bring people together in joint efforts.[13]

The most sophisticated and influential of these models was developed by Dewey, who was especially informed by his work in the Laboratory School that he created and directed at the University of Chicago from 1896 through 1904. In the school, Dewey and the teachers experimented with different strategies for making their progressive democratic dream a reality. From the earliest grades, children learned ''to accommodate themselves to each other'' and that the best answers to the challenges they faced could be found through ''group thought.'' Throughout their time in the school, in situations carefully managed by the teachers, students came together to solve problems by ''get[ing] from and exchang[ing] with others'' their ''store of experience'' and ''range of information.''[14] The core activity of the school involved collaborative projects that were carefully facilitated by the teachers. Through extensive practice, students learned to coordinate their actions with those of their classmates.

As a pragmatist, Dewey understood that some participants would sometimes need to take more central leadership roles, and that hierarchy was sometimes pragmatically necessary to accomplish specific tasks. But, to the extent possible, decisions in the school were made through democratic dialogue.

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10. See Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 40.

11. As Stromquist noted in *Reinventing ''The People,''* for example, ''in the short run, as many historians have shown, progressive reform of the political process narrowed rather than expanded the circle of citizenship'' (p. 7), and this was by design, not an inadvertent result. Also see McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent.*

12. See especially Addams's essay ''A Modern Lear,'' in *The Jane Addams Reader,* ed. Jean Bethke Elshtain (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 163–176.

13. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 57.

14. Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, *The Dewey School: The Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, 1896–1903* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1936), 71, 79.

Like other progressives, Dewey cherished individuality, arguing that ''the intellectual variations of the individual in observation, imagination, judgment, and invention are simply the agencies of social progress.'' With his colleagues, however, he worried that in an increasingly bureaucratic society individuals would become ''imprisoned in routine.''[15] His model of democratic education was meant to counteract this tendency by nurturing each individual's unique perspective. Through collaboration, children learned to find potential value in the contributions of even the most unlikely participants. At one point a group of children even ''wrote a song which [was] saved from monotony by the final phrase given by a boy almost tone-deaf.''[16]

In voluminous writings in the years after he left the Laboratory School, Dewey expanded on the basic model of democratic practice that he had developed, seeking to understand how collaboration might guide the development of an entire society. His most comprehensive analysis of the challenges involved in creating a democratic public in the modern world appears in *The Public and Its Problems*.[17] As in the Laboratory School, in this book Dewey acknowledged the need for some level of hierarchy and bureaucracy to administer modern society. But he emphasized that administrators should only be allowed to make decisions about issues on which there was no significant disagreement in the larger community. If they began making decisions about more controversial or unsettled issues, they would appropriate decision-making power that legitimately belonged to ''the people,'' thereby defeating the very idea of democracy. Dewey struggled to explain, however, how a broad mass of participants across the scale of a city, a nation, or even the world could coordinate their activity. Near the end of *The Public and Its Problems*, he acknowledged that he did not know how to solve this problem.

Dewey understood, then, that in the world as it *was*, the progressive vision of a democratic collaborative society seemed unworkable. But he had faith that the power of science would lead someone, some day, to figure it out. And even though he never solved this problem, he sustained a commitment to this vision of a society grounded in a ''flat,'' broad-based collaborative democracy for the rest of his life.

DEMOCRACY AND TRUST

Beyond the issue of scale, another key challenge to progressive visions of democratic engagement such as Dewey's is that such spaces require extensive trust among participants. Participants in a common effort must have faith that everyone will respect each other's different abilities and ideas. Without trust, individuals are likely to hide their unique and unexpected (and perhaps dangerous or taboo) ideas.

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15. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 297.

16. Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 358.

17. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Columbus, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1954).

Public spaces, Dewey understood, are strangled by conformity. Unless people are willing to honestly reveal their individual perspectives, these spaces necessarily collapse. Instead of distinctive contributions, one will only get more of the same from each participant. Inequities of power, widely divergent interests, and other forces that might reduce the collaborative spirit of participants, then, must be kept to a minimum. This challenge of trust is one that progressives and political theorists have generally avoided until recently.[18]

This need for participants to trust each other restricts the potential for using progressive collaborative strategies in the contentious world outside the doors of protective progressive schools. In fact, two Laboratory School teachers, Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, who maintained contact with a number of the Laboratory School children, discovered just this. They reported that "society brings both shock and conflict to a young person ... trained [to collaborate]....His attempts to use intelligent action for social purposes are thwarted and balked by the competitive antisocial spirit and dominant selfishness in society as it is."[19] In other words, Dewey's model of collaboration worked well within a social context that was carefully managed to ensure that all participants would respond to each other as they should. It fell apart when this situation was no longer assured.

Public Engagement in Community Organizing: It's About Power

A People's Organization lives in a world of hard reality. It lives in the midst of smashing forces, dashing struggles, sweeping cross-currents, ripping passions, conflict, confusion, seeming chaos, the hot and the cold, the squalor and the drama [of life].[20]

What I call the neo-Alinsky tradition of community organizing frames democratic public action much differently than progressivism in the Deweyan vein. Organizers like Alinsky would not have been surprised by the shock experienced by the Laboratory School children. They have always known that the public realm is rife with inequality and danger.

Over the last few decades, organizers have developed a conceptual distinction between public and private relations that helps them make sense of key aspects of the operation of power. In the ideal, organizers differentiate private relations, best understood as based on loyalty, love, and mutual support, from public relations that are, at best, grounded in respect, accountability, and self-interest.[21] (They

18. As Mark Warren notes, political theorists have tended not to address "the complex relationship between democratic politics and trust." See Mark E. Warren, ed., *Democracy and Trust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2.

19. Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 439.

20. Saul Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (New York: Random House, 1946), 132–133.

21. Good discussions of the public/private distinction can be found in Edward T.D. Chambers and Michael A. Cowan, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice* (New York: Continuum, 2003); Harry Chatten Boyte, *CommonWealth: A Return to Citizen Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989); and Aaron Schutz and Marie Sandy, *Collective Action for Social Change: An Introduction to Community Organizing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

understand, of course, that many "private" relations do not approach this ideal.[22])
Outside of a limited private realm where your family and close friends are at least
supposed to support and care about you despite your imperfections and mistakes,
we increasingly encounter a world where we cannot expect this kind of safety.
Politicians, used car salesmen, agency administrators, bosses, and others perform-
ing institutional roles are not acting as your friends. When you forget this, you are
likely to be misled. In the words of the Mark Almond song, you are "looking for
love in all the wrong places."

The public sphere, organizers argue, is a realm of conflicts over power and
resources. The central aspect of public relations is not trust but *accountability*.
Because public relations are based on self-interest (broadly understood), there is a
much greater chance that, if you are not paying attention, someone you are dealing
with in public will do something underhanded. "We trust more than we should,"
the organizer David Liners said, "then feel betrayed when others [in public] show
no loyalty to us."[23]

Organizers have learned through experience that powerful people often inap-
propriately use private forms of interaction to get what they want from people
who do not understand this distinction. For example, a billboard advertising a
bank in my town reads, "It's not just business, it's personal." No, organizers
say, it's not personal, it's business. If you have money, they will be nice to
you; if you become homeless tomorrow, they won't let you in the door. If they
think you may threaten them, powerful people will sometimes invite you out
to lunch, chat with you about your family and theirs. When you are about to
do something that makes them uncomfortable, they are likely to protest, "Hey,
I thought we were friends." Organizers argue that you may be friends with
them — in private — but when you are addressing them in their public role, it is
your job to hold them accountable. If someone doesn't want to deal with pressure,
then they should leave their public role, and the organizing group won't bother
them.

From the perspective of organizers, the idea that one could act in public in the
trusting, open manner that Dewey recommended is a dangerous fantasy. And it is
a fantasy most often clung to by the relatively privileged, by those who have never
really experienced the iron fist of power.

In their trainings, organizers generally frame this distinction between public
and private in fairly stark terms for pedagogical reasons. They don't want to
give people room to slide back into trusting when they shouldn't. Furthermore,
they want their leaders to hold each other accountable for their actions
within their organizations instead of making excuses for colleagues based on
misplaced feelings of friendship. For the moment, I will stick with this simple

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22. The focus of this conceptual framing is on the condition of the public, and not so much on the
private. It is also important to note, however, that organizing groups in this tradition often work on
issues such as domestic violence and child abuse.

23. David Liners, personal communication with author.

public/private dualism. Later in this essay, however, I complicate it, exploring what I call the ''civic'' realm that allows us to treat this distinction more as a continuum.

Teaching the Reality of Power to Mousy Middle-Class People

The excerpts in this section are taken from an unpublished paper by Richard Harmon (much of the best writing on organizing is unpublished). Harmon worked with Alinsky and codirected the training and organizing support institution that Alinsky created, the Industrial Areas Foundation, after Alinsky's death. The language is a bit more direct and gritty than readers will be used to in an academic setting. I include extensive excerpts because they do a good job of laying out the core vision of organizing.

Note the focus on education in Harmon's story. Experienced organizers such as Harmon see organizing as a fundamentally educational process. In fact, the educational content of an action is often more important than what is achieved on any concrete level (although, of course, an organizing group that does not achieve anything is destined for dissolution). While organizing groups do have formal training programs, organizers generally agree with Dewey that the best education happens through experience, as people plan for action, act, and learn from what happens in response.[24]

Harmon describes how an organizer can help a novice group of middle-class organizing leaders learn about how power operates through the story of an imagined meeting with a local alderman that he calls ''Joe Cullerton.'' Because middle-class people ''tend to be mainlined with massive doses of politeness,'' Harmon notes, members of this new organization will likely want to start by just sending an individual delegate to Cullerton. ''Especially if it's middle class, someone in the group . . . will even say, 'Now, we don't want a confrontation. That is not the way we do things in this city.'''[25]

''With inexperienced groups,'' he argues, ''it's usually fatal for the organizer to throw down the glove and demand, 'What's wrong with confrontation?''' Leaders need to learn the importance of confrontation and conflict through their own experience. Instead, Harmon recommends that an organizer in a situation like this help participants understand that, because of their inexperience, they really need the support of the group. The organizer might say, '''I don't want a shouting match any more than you do, but we should all see what he has to say. That's the democratic way of doing things. Of course we can be polite, but we should all go in, so we all know what is going on.''' Harmon notes that ''this step is essential

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24. See Chambers and Cowan, *Roots for Radicals.*

25. Richard Harmon, *Making an Offer We Can't Refuse* (Chicago: Industrial Areas Foundation, 1973). This work will be cited in the text as *MO* for all subsequent references. Note that I have deleted a number of sections where Harmon talks about the need to make the issue with the alderman ''personal.'' What Harmon means by personal is different from what we mean when we are talking about a private relation. He means personal but public. Delving into an analysis of this issue, however, would take us away from my core argument in this essay.

because . . . Cullerton's reaction to the group will teach them some basic lessons, and the more people who are there to experience that reaction the better'' (*MO*, 5).

Harmon asserts that this approach ''separates the business agent or social worker from the organizer . . . [because] the business agent or social worker is fundamentally interested in solving problems'' with their expertise, even though this ends up making

> the people dependent . . . just like the prostitute is dependent on her pimp. The organizer, on the other hand, knows that the problems won't really get solved without the people being in on every stage of the process; and further, he is fundamentally committed to the developmental process of people increasing their public skills and experience. Solving problems . . . is one-third to one-half of what's important. The rest is the political education, in action, of the group he is working with. (*MO*, 7)

Harmon emphasizes an important moment in this political education in the following excerpt:

> The organizer works to draw from the group the admission that institutions of power are made up of persons . . . and therefore, if the group really wants to get rid of its hurt, then it has to identify Joe Cullerton — the responsible decision-maker to negotiate with. This step is crucial [and emerges] . . . naturally and easily out of their own experience and common sense. (*MO*, 5–6)

To prepare for the actual meeting, Harmon recommends that the organizer help the group develop a fairly simple set of instructions for the spokespersons chosen to represent them. The organizer should just tell participants to ask Cullerton for a ''timetable for a response'':

> Asking Cullerton for a timetable — ''When do we get your answer?'' or, ''When will you act on what we want?'' — is the single most effective way to cut through the problem of politeness. For if the organizer can keep the spokespersons focused on the specifics of the agenda, and on the timetable for an answer or an action from Cullerton, Cullerton will react. (*MO*, 8)

Once they get into Cullerton's office, Harmon notes, ''the spokespersons do not have to be impolite, just persistent. All they have to do is to keep repeating, 'When do we get it?' until Cullerton either caves in and gives them a victory, or blows up and makes himself the enemy.'' It is critical that as many group members experience Cullerton's response as possible, because

> in middle class organizations, the heart of the educational process occurs when people discover they have real enemies. . . . That discovery is a rite of passage into the real world. That is why the organizer prays, not for rain, but for defecation. When Cullerton throws the bucket of shit in the group's face, they are forced to start grappling with the real relations of power between themselves and Cullerton's institution. . . . And they have to decide whether they're willing to fight for what they want from him. (*MO*, 9)

Comments on Harmon

Despite limitations (which I will discuss later in the essay), Harmon's story is a good introduction to the way organizers think about education, action, and the nature of the public realm. Organizers ''pray for defecation'' because they believe significant changes in the status quo do not happen without conflict. Significant social changes generally involve shifts in who controls what, who gets particular resources, and more. Some people nearly always lose something that seems important to them in this process. In fact, organizing groups tend to avoid

nonconfrontational efforts because they do not provide opportunities to educate members about these realities of power.[26]

Also note how, in the story he tells, Harmon plays a role quite similar to that of a Deweyan teacher. He sets up a situation in which his leaders will encounter problems, try to solve them, and then learn through this experience. While it is their experience, he is in the background managing the situation in order to ensure that it teaches the lessons that he thinks are most important. Furthermore, Harmon goes on to note in his account that after every action, an organizer always facilitates an evaluation session to help participants make sense of what has just happened and place it in a framework that can then inform future actions. In this way, organizing maps quite well onto what many readers may know as Dewey's experimental method: encountering a problem, coming up with options for action, trying something out, experiencing the results, and evaluating these results in preparation for future action.

The Mask of the Public Actor

> I say that there is no ''Mike Gecan, individual'' in the public arena. That person doesn't exist. I don't think of myself that way. I don't believe that journalists, corporate leaders, or political figures relate and respond to the singular, wonderful me. No, they relate to me, to the extent that they do, often grudgingly, because they understand the ''corporate me'' — the ''me'' that has relationships with leaders.[27]

> As an organizer I start from where the world is, as it is, not as I would like it to be. That we accept the world as it is does not in any sense weaken our desire to change it into what we believe it should be — it is necessary to begin where the world is if we are going to change it to what we think it should be.[28]

If organizers are generally right about the harsh nature of the public sphere — and I think they are — what are we to make of the very different approaches to public action proposed by Dewey? From the perspective of this essay, the key difference between the descriptions provided by organizers and those provided by progressives such as Dewey is that organizers are talking about the world *as it is* while progressives are talking about the world as they would *like it to be*. While Dewey could point to examples of the kind of spaces he sought, he acknowledged that they are quite rare. Even when he did cite actual examples, as in *The Public and Its Problems*, these were often more dependent on wishful thinking than on reality.

In fact, as Harmon's story makes clear, it is very difficult to imagine how engagements in a public realm rife with power inequalities could ever approximate in any substantial and reliable way the characteristics required by progressive visions of democratic engagement. Anyone who trusts Cullerton to collaborate

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26. ''Win-win'' solutions, in the experience of organizers, are sometimes possible, but rarely get you anything you really need. It may be true on some abstract level, in some rationalistic space, that the change will be ''win-win'' for everyone, but it will rarely be possible to convince those on the ''losing'' side that this is the case.

27. Michael Gecan, *Going Public* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 38.

28. Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1971), xix.

with them is simply going to be taken for a ride. As a result, from the perspective of organizing at least, those who take progressive descriptions of idealistic public spaces as reflective of any kind of existing or even achievable reality are confused. They will be ill prepared for any kind of real public engagement.

Most fundamentally, the public arena is no place for people to attempt to (nonstrategically) reveal what organizers refer to as their "private" selves, to seek a unique identity with respect to a common effort. Partly, as I have noted, this is because any information that is revealed is likely to be used against one by others in that space who are not so naïve. But a more important reason is that any group that seeks to operate effectively in this realm must act in solidarity. To generate collective power, the rich diversity of any group must be collapsed into a single voice. In other words, the public space of organizing is not the place for me to appear as *myself*; instead, it is a space where, to be effective, I must appear in roles and wear masks. This is, if you will, a *pragmatic* requirement.

In his magisterial *The Fall of Public Man*, Richard Sennett writes of the importance of masks in the public realm and the danger brought by treating the public as a space for intimate relations. Sennett's core worry is that we are seeking the *wrong kind* of "expanding associated relationships" in public in the modern age. Dewey wanted the public realm to be a place where one can contribute one's unique perspective to shared efforts. Sennett, in contrast, maintains that "the private realm, not the public one, is the appropriate locus for self-disclosure . . . [because] issues of power and the allocation of resources" cannot "be dealt with in terms of trust."[29] The public, he argues, is not the place for us to attempt to be "genuine."

The point is not that we are necessarily false to each other in public. As Sennett noted, "we can be honest and 'authentic' in both realms."[30] In fact, people are often judged by the way they play the role that they have agreed to take on in the public space. As the political philosopher Hannah Arendt similarly noted, our uniqueness inevitably "sounds through" a "persona" or "mask": "sounding through it, as it were, . . . something else manifests itself, something entirely idiosyncratic and indefinable and still unmistakably identifiable, so that we are not confused by a sudden change of roles."[31]

This mask metaphor is especially useful for those without much power as individuals. If you are a poor person who works cleaning other people's houses, you have little public power. The only way that those whom Alinsky called the "have nots" get power is through solidarity. The only way they get power is by

29. Sennett summarized by Harvey Cox in his "Introduction," in Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1978), xvi–xix. Despite — or perhaps because of — the beauty of his writing, Sennett is rarely as clear as Cox is in the introduction about the aims of this book. Interestingly, I did not really understand what Sennett was talking about in this book until I came back to it after working in organizing for a while.

30. Sennett summarized in Cox, "Introduction," xvii.

31. Hannah Arendt, "Sonning Prize Speech" (Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress, 1975), 14.

wearing masks that identify them as representatives of a larger group. While one does not leave one's individual personality behind when one plays the role of spokesperson or leader, neither can one simply express one's personal opinions in that guise. A spokesperson's job is to represent the perspective of the group. You cannot be "you." As Michael Gecan notes in the quotation that opens this section, it is the "corporate you" that matters in this space. Bringing the full multiplicity of opinions that underlie the masks of group members would destroy solidarity and power. Cullerton would love that. Sadly enough, however, it is those without much significant power who generally understand the least about how power works. These are not lessons that Cullerton (or Bill Gates) needs to learn.

Complicating Power

The excerpts from Harmon discussed previously framed public engagement as a simple agonistic conflict between two camps, with discrete winners and losers. But organizing groups rarely encounter situations where they can simply force the opposition to do what they want. Instead, a core aim of most organizing is to become recognized as a force to be reckoned with. Power, in this sense, is a precursor to being taken seriously and invited to participate in a real negotiation. Only after Cullerton recognizes Harmon's group as a substantial force will he be willing to move beyond "throwing shit" to actual dialogue. Gecan frames it this way:

> Without power there's no real recognition. They don't even see you. They never learn your name. Without recognition, there's no reciprocity; there's not even a "you" to respond to. And without reciprocity there's no real relationship of respect. Without power, you can only be a supplicant, a serf, a victim, or a wishful thinker who soon begins to whine.[32]

In the power public, getting people to hear what they do not already want to hear requires that one be recognized as a power player.[33] Only then can one begin to engage in a productive negotiation, speaking through the mask of your collective voice.

Because the aim is some form of dialogue over the long term, organizing groups generally do not seek to destroy their opposition — even if they could.[34] If you attack a target too strenuously during one campaign, you may poison your relationship to the point that a group or individual is much less willing to deal with you in the future. In fact, a core organizing motto is "No permanent friends. No permanent enemies."

32. Gecan, *Going Public*, 36.

33. See Aaron Schutz, "Education Scholars Have Much to Learn About Social Action," *Education Review Online* 10, no. 3 (2007): 1–32. The ability of the powerful to choose what they will hear, by the way, is a key problem with nearly all efforts by powerful institutions or individuals to collect community input or hold "listening" sessions.

34. Sometimes you do want to destroy an opponent, at least with respect to their public role — in an election, for example. There are few better ways to demonstrate your power than unexpectedly dethroning a politician. All of the politician's colleagues will treat you much more respectfully after such an event.

As the organizer Liners emphasizes, an important moment comes when "the target has agreed to do the right thing." At this point, it "is immediately time to 'de-polarize.'" Now we are back in the world of negotiation: it is no longer "us" (the outsiders) demanding justice from "them" (the people in control of things); it is "'all of us' working together as partners."[35] Of course, at any time there is the option of returning to a more conflictual stance. It is only the existence of the "stick" (or a "carrot," if you have one to offer) that allows a productive dialogue to continue.

While reason of the Deweyan kind is usually one part of such "power" discussions, it is rarely the driving force. In most cases, mask-wearing participants engage with each other around their self-interests (or the self-interests of the groups they represent). However, organizers frame self-interests more broadly than is commonly understood. From the organizing perspective, a self-interest can be anything that motivates someone to take a particular stance. Self-interests can involve one's personal history (my brother was a drug addict so I care about drug treatment), key relationships (my mother supports this group so maybe I should too[36]), or a deeply held ideology. With respect to significant social changes, however, organizing campaigns are usually centrally concerned with disagreements over the distribution of limited resources.

There is not space here to discuss the range of strategies that organizing groups use to pressure the powerful to take them seriously. In general, organizers are often quite creative in using the media, mass action, sophisticated legal analyses, and more in order to demonstrate to the powerful that it is less costly to bring an organizing group to the table than to leave them out in the cold.[37]

Private-Civic-Public

My point is not that progressive visions of collaborative democracy are useless. Once one gets to "the table" — sometimes even before — some of the characteristics of Dewey's vision of democratic public engagement become important. Truth does matter — it just doesn't usually matter that much unless backed up by power. Further, in the relatively protected spaces *inside* community organizing groups, participants may also engage in forms of dialogue that resemble those valued by progressives such as Dewey. Finally, in the realm of pedagogy there is clear evidence that progressive approaches to dialogue can positively affect

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35. Liners, personal communication with author.

36. For example, the fight for women's right to vote in America was finally won when a state legislator from Tennessee received a letter from his mother telling him to vote for ratification, giving the "yes" vote the majority: "It seemed certain that the final roll call would maintain the deadlock. But that morning, Harry Burn — who until that time had fallen squarely in the anti-suffrage camp — received a note from his mother, Phoebe Ensminger Burn. . . . In it, she had written, "Hurrah, and vote for suffrage! Don't keep them in doubt. . . ." She ended the missive . . . imploring her son to "be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt put the 'rat' in ratification." This gave him the courage to vote in favor of his core belief instead of for what he thought his constituents probably believed. Interestingly, he was easily reelected. See "The Mother Who Saved Suffrage," *The History Channel* (2011), http://www.history.com/topics/19th-amendment-mother.

37. See Schutz and Sandy, *Collective Action for Social Change.*

participants' wider civic and public engagements.[38] The problem is that Deweyan progressives have argued that practices of this sort are or could become the core action orienting practice beyond narrow classroom settings, in the unprotected public realm.

At this point, it is useful to move beyond the simple dualism of private versus public that dominates discussions in organizing to a broader conception of a continuum between public and private. What I call the "civic" serves as a transitional space between increasingly private engagements on one side and increasingly power-dominated public engagements on the other.[39] If we think of the private (again, in idealistic terms) as made up of spaces where one is either alone or together with people one can fully trust (family, close friends, and the like), and of the public as an arena where no one should be trusted and where people are motivated by self- or group-interests (broadly understood), then the civic represents the gray area between these two poles. In fact, this conceptualization helps us acknowledge that there is, in fact, no such thing as a "pure" public or private realm.

In the sense I mean it, the civic ranges from extremely informal spaces where closely connected people chat casually with each other, to small groups where people work together on common projects (at different times perhaps resembling Dewey's vision of "public" engagement), to more formalized contexts, such as meetings of organizations with elected officials conducted under Robert's Rules of Order.

Some common characteristics of the civic include the following:

- It is somewhat but not completely safe.
- Members can generally but not entirely trust each other.
- It generally only includes people with some common cause or shared interest that holds them together.

To some extent, aspects of the civic map onto what Sara Evans and Harry Boyte call "free spaces" in which groups often develop what James Scott calls "transcripts" of resistance.[40] Parts of the civic provide spaces where groups can

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38. See, for example, Walter C. Parker, "Public Discourses in Schools: Purposes, Problems, Possibilities," *Educational Researcher* 35, no. 8 (2006): 11–18. See also the range of research collected by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), http://www.civicyouth.org/?page_id=246.

39. I draw here, of course, from wider discussions of civil society. The best discussion of the concept of civil society that I know of in this context is John Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). Of course, a linear "continuum" is too simple to really capture the complexity of the relations between public and private. But this limited conception helps clarify my argument in the context of this essay.

40. Sara M. Evans and Harry Chatten Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990).

come to some level of agreement about public action and where they can learn some of the skills they need in order to play their more fully public roles. Depending on the specifics, the relative safety of civic spaces allows participants to try out different ideas and ways of being; at the same time, different levels of risk introduce actors to the kinds of sanctions and problems that these different actions can lead to. In civic spaces, people may not have to constantly watch each other in order to make sure everyone is doing what they should; yet a failure to hold others accountable for their actions can bring about the failure of any but the most deeply shared communal efforts.

The kind of open collaborative engagements described by Dewey embody only one possible form that associational structures can take within the civic. In fact, different aspects of this progressive collaborative model could infuse separate levels of the civic realm in distinct ways.

From my perspective, then, what Dewey described as democratic "public" action really represents situations closer to the center of this "civic" continuum. Progressive models of democracy are best suited for relatively safe spaces where people seek to develop the common vision that must emerge as a single voice in the realm of the power public that organizers describe. These models are unlikely to help participants develop other key public action skills, such as the mask wearing described earlier. They embody only part of the toolkit that is required for successful public engagement.

As a result, it is quite dangerous for scholars to tell educators and students that Dewey's model adequately describes the kinds of engagements one can have outside of protected spaces that are sufficiently removed from the power public. In fact, the fantasy that the power public can be made "safe" may prevent (and clearly has prevented) us from looking farther afield for the broader skills and knowledge necessary to undertake effective action in the realm of power. The desire to believe in a world where Dewey's vision of the public is possible leads us to misinform others about the real conditions and challenges of effective social action. This is especially problematic for students who belong to groups with little established access to cultural capital, financial resources, or institutional control. For these groups, solidarity is one of the only realistic forms of public power available.[41]

Schools as Limited Civic Spaces

If one accepts the organizing definition of what I am now calling the power public as an arena where different powerful groups clash, it seems fairly clear that schools rarely prepare students effectively for action there. Certainly schools include powerful individuals who make what often seem to students like unfair

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41. Semantics matters here. In nearly all of its generally accepted definitions, the term "public," as *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* notes, for example, describes an activity that involves the general society in the broadest sense. Attempting to colonize "public" to describe an activity limited to fairly bounded civic spaces is likely to backfire and create confusion. (It already has.)

decisions. But because students are not taught how or given opportunities to represent themselves in solidarity, they do not learn how to generate the power necessary to make themselves heard beyond fairly protected civic spaces (such as classroom discussions or club meetings). In schools, students are mostly the chaff that is blown about by institutional forces. They inevitably resist in creative ways, of course, through the kind of ''underlife'' discussed by Kris Guttierez and her colleagues.[42] But because students lack solidarity, they have no collective ''voice.''

Of course, students do sometimes rebel as a collective. And sometimes they learn a great deal about public action in the process. The administration of the University of Michigan, where I worked on diversity issues for the president's office, lived in fear for many years after a series of student uprisings in the late 1970s and 1980s protesting the lack of diversity on campus — and this fear kept administrators very attentive to these issues.[43] But lacking much knowledge of strategy, without the hard lessons learned by the many groups that have come before them, students' efforts are often ineffective. A more recent student rally at my university organized to protest tuition increases, for example, quickly turned into a fiasco for the students involved. Apparently lacking much coherent understanding about what they were doing, they seem to have been easily manipulated and scapegoated, even though the administration itself was pretty clumsy and ham-handed in its response.

The fact is that schools have no incentive to encourage students to act in solidarity against powerful forces in their lives. The last thing an institution (or even an individual teacher) wants to do is empower its clients to resist it. As anecdotal evidence of this, I offer the response of my students to a question I pose every time I teach my Introduction to Community Organizing course: I ask them to tell me of a time when some teacher or other school staff member encouraged them to come together in solidarity to deal with some problem. Almost no one ever offers an example, even when the question is framed in this very general way.[44] Schools are perfectly happy, of course, with service efforts that have nothing to do with dealing with power — recycling projects, helping the homeless, and the like.

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42. Kris Gutierrez and Betsy Rymes, ''Script, Counterscript, and Underlife in the Classroom: James Brown Versus *Brown v. Board of Education*,'' *Harvard Educational Review* 65, no. 3 (1995): 445–471. As I have noted elsewhere, however, this resistance often simply plays into the overall goals of the system. See Aaron Schutz, ''Rethinking Domination and Resistance: Challenging Postmodernism,'' *Educational Researcher* 33, no. 1 (2004): 15–23.

43. I used to say that they should have rebellions every four years to teach students to be real leaders. They thought I was joking. For a good overview of these events at Michigan, see the *Frontline* documentary ''Racism 101,'' produced by Tom Lennon and Orlando Bagwell (Boston: WGBH-PBS, 1988).

44. And the ones who do offer an example usually cite very unusual circumstances. For example, older students sometimes talk of their experience in the 1960s movement era. One student told about a time when an administrator encouraged her to get others together to go after a teacher, only to find out later that the administrator did not like the teacher and wanted to get rid of her.

Learning to collaborate in school could be extremely useful as a *subset* of practices in a broad toolkit for engaging with power. But without any understanding of when it is appropriate to use these practices in public, *by themselves* they seem unlikely to lead much of anywhere in terms of collective empowerment.

Why Don't Educational Scholars Get It?

I think there are a range of reasons why educational scholars (and academics more broadly, actually) have found visions like Dewey's so compelling as adequate descriptions of public engagement for so long. We find these models convincing because they embody key aspects of

- the culture of most middle-class professional families and lives;

- the world of classrooms that we spend much of our time in;

- the "public" activity of academic publishing; and

- the dreams and ideals embodied within these activities and spaces.

Let me extend on these bullet points a little. As I noted in my introduction, the culture of middle-class families embodies many characteristics also found in Dewey's descriptions of public action. As Annette Lareau and others have shown, for example, children in middle-class families are constantly asked for their opinions, participating in ongoing dialogues about all kinds of issues.[45] Theirs is a world of negotiations, not orders; uncertainties, not established traditions and mores. They live fairly hectic lives, forming relatively weak connections with a wide range of relative strangers, learning to move from situation to situation and to deal with other middle-class people in a wide range of more or less discursive settings. In these and many other ways, the children of middle-class professionals, who will eventually become the vast majority of professors, learn the "right" way to be. And this is only magnified as these "pre-professors" enter college and then graduate school. As many scholars from non-middle-class groups have noted, the ability to act "middle class" is increasingly vital for survival as one advances through these settings.[46]

Similarly, the classrooms that we work in and write about represent one of the places in society where engagements such as those described by Dewey are actually feasible. Of course, rich collaboration does not happen that much in K–12 settings, but it *can* if a skilled teacher facilitates, making sure that students engage with each other as they should. Engagements of this sort are likely more common in college settings, and (hopefully) fairly common in graduate school. So professors

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45. Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*.

46. See, for example, Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1990); Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay, *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); C.L. Barney Dews and Carolyn Leste Law, *This Fine Place so Far from Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1995); and William F. Tate, "Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications," *Review of Research in Education* 22 (1997): 195–250.

have relatively extensive experience with spaces in which aspects of the kind of model Dewey discussed are actually used.

As Jürgen Habermas perhaps most famously noted, the world of scholarly engagement through publishing forms a kind of public space of its own.[47] It is at least supposed to represent a broad context in which writers take different positions on common aspects of the world. Significantly, Dewey actually had experience of something like the practices he promoted when he published his ideas and then discussed them with others. Most of the time, however, this academic dialogue has little or nothing to do with actual social change, or even changes in practice. In fact, the academic "public" realm may be another good example of the limitations of the Deweyan vision. As John Kingdon argues, the policy world is driven by engagements between discrete alternatives that are formed in response to political realities providing something like what I am calling shared positions or "masks" for a diverse set of coalitions to get behind.[48] Usually, actual political engagement can only begin after such collective positions are defined. Organizers refer to this process as "issue cutting." Clarity of message and a strong understanding of the program that one is promoting are critically important in any political battle for change.

Finally, embodied within all of the activities discussed previously are the seeds of Dewey's basic model of collaborative democracy. From early on, many progressives understood that what they were seeking was a purified and advanced form of their own middle-class culture. To some extent, I believe that Dewey's vision also grew from this seed of dissatisfaction with our never quite exciting enough middle-class professional lives.

This middle-class professional bundle of practices and experiences also produces revulsion on the part of middle-class people to aggressive conflict (as Harmon observes in his discussion of training activists). We do not want the world to be dirty or ugly or mean. Our failure to think much about the realities and brutalities of power in the public realm within which organizers operate also reflects our general insulation from these forces (this is especially true for those of us who are tenured). As Alinsky noted,

> Fights for decent housing, economic security, health programs, and for many of these other social issues for which liberals profess their sympathy and support, are to the liberals simply intellectual affinities. They would like to see better housing, health, and economic security, but *they* are not *living* in the rotten houses; it is not *their* children who are sick; it is not *they* who are working with the specter of unemployment hanging over their heads; they are not fighting their *own* fight.[49]

You can find aspects of this conclusion in more recent studies of middle-class and working-class social action efforts. Linda Stout has argued, for example, that

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47. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989).

48. John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984).

49. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals,* 134.

the tendency of middle-class social action groups to speak in terms of broad abstractions indicates how little the ''struggles faced by low-income people'' actually impinge on their ''reality.''[50] Similarly, one union leader complained to Fred Rose about his experience working with middle-class environmentalists:

> [They don't] understand that it's a war out here.... The contrast between giving people hell at a bar over the union vote and then going to a [military base] conversion meeting where people sit around and eat cheese and sip herb tea is really frustrating. These people seem like they're from a different solar system.[51]

I believe that this lack of understanding is also linked to the almost complete absence of knowledge about community organizing in America, as indicated by a recent survey, even though we just elected our first president with experience as a community organizer.[52]

Organizing in Education?

Despite the challenges involved in teaching some of the lessons of the organizing model inside schools, I do not believe that we should simply disregard schools as possible spaces for intervention. There are, in fact, a few schools and classrooms where teachers have the freedom (or the chutzpa) to actually engage students with the ideas of Alinsky as well as those of other organizers and activists. Without access to these ideas, however, educators and administrators may not even know that this is an option. If they think that engaging kids in collaborative dialogues *is the same as* public action, they are, like scholars, unlikely to look more broadly afield. Certainly it is more comfortable to be Deweyan than Alinskyan.

In fact, lacking any coherent ideas regarding how to approach teaching lessons about public action, even those few teachers who are interested in trying something Alinskyan are likely to run into challenges they do not know how to solve and subsequently to quit in frustration. I have had this sort of experience myself: A team of graduate students and I tried for two years to engage inner-city high school students in social action projects. Our first year was, in our opinion, an almost complete fiasco. Only in the second year did we even begin to conceptualize how we might go about something like this (or even begin to figure out what ''this'' was).[53]

Furthermore, it may be possible to develop approaches to teaching important experiential lessons about power and solidarity that do not threaten the core structure of traditional schools. It may, for example, be possible to identify targets

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50. Linda Stout, *Bridging the Class Divide and Other Lessons for Grassroots Organizing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 128.

51. Rose, *Coalitions Across the Class Divide*, 58–59.

52. For the results of a survey on public opinion regarding community organizing, see Peter Levine, ''Public Opinion About 'Community Organizing,''' *Peter Levine: A Blog for Civic Renewal* (September 23, 2008), http://www.peterlevine.ws/mt/archives/2008/09/public-opinion.html.

53. Those who are interested can find a rough draft of a paper about this project at http://www.educationaction.org/progressive-democracy-book-extras.html. Also see Darwyn Fehrman and Aaron Schutz, ''Beyond the 'Catch-22' of School-Based Social Action Programs: Toward a More Pragmatic Approach for Dealing with Power,'' *Democracy of Education* 19, no. 1 (2011): 1–9, http://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol19/iss1/3.

within and outside the school that students could address without raising the hackles of school officials. Once we have internalized an understanding of the limitations of progressive visions of public engagement, we will be much better equipped to start mapping out ways to move beyond these approaches in different kinds of contexts — both to neo-Alinskyan and other approaches to empowerment.

The enormous challenges facing efforts to teach organizing inside institutions such as schools, however, indicate that most learning about and collective engagements with power will begin in the community. As a matter of fact, growing numbers of local community organizing groups are becoming involved in education. At the same time, youth organizing on education and other issues has gained increasing attention.[54]

Youth Fighting for Change

Because organizing is most likely to emerge beyond the school walls, I end this essay with a brief story about a youth organizing effort in Los Angeles that is focused on education.

Youth organizing has a long history in the LA area, including a famous school walkout of more than 10,000 Latino students from local high schools in 1968 to protest racism, tracking, inadequate facilities, and more.[55] This tradition was reactivated in 1999 by protests against California's vote on Proposition 21, which targeted youth for adult incarceration. While the proposition failed in areas where youth organized, it passed statewide. Nonetheless, a newly invigorated youth leadership came together to create a long-term plan for youth empowerment. In LA, youth activists worked with an organization called InnerCity Struggle. Their goal

> was to build the leadership skills and political analysis of young people in East LA to lead the process for social change in their schools and communities, get others involved, and train them too. The second goal was to promote a youth-developed agenda for educational justice. That agenda would expose the social and economic inequities impacting public education. It would also demand equitable resources together with culturally relevant curriculum that builds critical thinking and promotes civic engagement....
>
> Implementing the vision began at Roosevelt High School, where youth members of InnerCity Struggle established the club called United Students (US) in 2000 [that met at InnerCity Struggle's offices]. US launched a campaign to address the high number of students dropping out and the low numbers going on to college....

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54. Recent work on education organizing includes Kavitha Mediratta, Seema Shah, and Sara McAlister, *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools: Strategies and Successes* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2009); Celina Su, *Streetwise for Book Smarts: Grassroots Organizing and Education Reform in the Bronx* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2009); and Norm Fruchter, *Urban Schools, Public Will: Making Education Work for All Our Children* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007). Recent work on youth organizing includes Shawn Ginwright, Pedro Noguera, and Julio Cammarota, *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Kay E. Sherwood and Julie Dressner, *Youth Organizing: A New Generation of Social Activism* (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2004). For a ''scan'' of the state of youth organizing in the United States, see Alexie Torres-Fleming, Pilar Valdes, and Supriya Pillai, *2010 Youth Organizing Field Scan* (New York: Funder's Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2010).

55. See Francisco A. Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 1996), chap. 10.

They began their fight by surveying 800 students … [and found that] a majority … pointed to the tardy room policy as a major problem because it kept students out of class as punishment for being even less than a minute late.… The results also showed that 71 percent of students surveyed said they had never met with their guidance counselor to discuss college.[56]

United Students came up with a plan for "the elimination of punitive disciplinary policies, implementation of ethnic studies courses, and implementation of policies that ensure all students are college-eligible by their senior year, which included increasing the number of guidance counselors." They presented this plan to students, and

After winning massive student support for the plan, US leaders organized meetings between school officials and Roosevelt students, culminating in a school-wide student forum. US members established a relationship with the *Los Angeles Times* that resulted in supportive coverage. By building student power and utilizing media to put pressure on policy makers, United Students at Roosevelt won significant parts of their demands in early 2003. These included two Mexican American Studies classes, the addition of three more guidance counselors, and elimination of the tardy room.[57]

This "win" gave encouragement to other students interested in collective action for social change across the city. At an extremely overcrowded Garfield High School in 2004, for example, other students came together to fight for more space. "United Students at Garfield gathered over 3,000 petition signatures from students, parents, educators, local Catholic Church members, and leaders urging action by the school district." As a result of these efforts,

In March 2004, InnerCity Struggle, led by both students and parents, mobilized over 400 youth and community members to march and rally in front of county and district offices. All the pressure resulted in the Los Angeles Unified School District voting to build the first new high school in East LA in 80 years.[58]

These youth organizing efforts exemplify many key aspects of the organizing model discussed here. The efforts were catalyzed by a group located outside the control of school officials. They involved extensive research to identify key problems and specific solutions. They built leadership through action, and used whatever (nonviolent) strategies were available for demonstrating collective power by targeting the self-interests of the opposition — in this case, bringing the media in on their side, collecting petition signatures, holding rallies, and more. Small wins led to larger campaigns, with each step increasing the number of people that the organization could mobilize. Engagement with power followed the motion of a pendulum, moving back and forth between confrontation and negotiation. As a result, the organization clearly became a recognized force in the community. Each

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56. Root, "East Los Angeles Youth Movement for Educational Justice," *InnerCity Struggle* (September 1, 2005), 2, http://innercitystruggle.org/story/view/4. Also see Erika Hayasaki, "Schools See an Awakening of Student Activism," *InnerCity Struggle* (May 30, 2003), http://innercitystruggle.org/story/view/17; and "Toward a Fair Chance at College: In East Los Angeles's Giant High Schools, Students Push for Equity," *What Kids Can Do*, http://www.whatkidscando.org/archives/featurestories/yocommunities.html.

57. Root, "East Los Angeles Youth Movement for Educational Justice," 2.

58. Ibid., 3.

step — win or lose — involved learning about how different aspects of the public world actually work (as opposed to how they are *supposed* to work).

The power and potential of efforts such as these seems undeniable. But effective examples are much too rare. For instance, in Milwaukee, where I live, there is very little effective adult or youth organizing going on in comparison with the enormous need for change.[59] Limited funding has been a powerful force behind a decline in community organizing in America. Support for organizing has decreased even more in the wake of the vicious, almost completely illegitimate attacks that destroyed ACORN, once the most well-known and powerful organizing group in this country.[60] But the lack of knowledge about and general support for organizing from key institutions such as colleges and universities is also a key problem.

Some in the field of education have begun to wake up to the potential of community organizing, but the number of knowledgeable scholars remains small. In part, I believe this is a result of our embodied middle-class progressive cultural commitments. In the words of a middle-class organizing leader from Harmon's story, ''Now, we don't want a confrontation. That is not the way we do things.'' But, as I have been trying to argue, what *we* progressives want, what *we* like, what makes *us* comfortable are not the most important criteria. It may be, however, that most progressives will only be able to really internalize the limits of their vision after they actually get their ''hands dirty'' in the messy pragmatic work of ''public'' action in the realm of power. A few buckets of shit, a few broken promises, a few decisions made on the basis of flagrantly mendacious ''data,'' or a few arrogant brush-offs from the Cullertons of the world could do wonders for altering perspectives.

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59. I am currently working to foster neighborhood organizing in our mostly African American north side community because there is not *any* significant grassroots organizing going on in that entire area. Black male joblessness is above 60 percent and there is no outcry. Metaphorical tumbleweeds blow through empty streets that should be filled with angry marchers. There is a quite amazing immigrant rights group, however, as well as a couple of congregational groups.

60. See Peter Drier and John Atlas, ''Why ACORN Fell: The *Times*, Lies, and Videotape,'' *Huffington Post* (March 23, 2010), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/why-acorn-fell_b_510285.html. ACORN did have other issues, including the embezzlement of nearly a million dollars by the brother of its founder and former head as well as challenges created by its sprawling efforts, but, as Dreier and Atlas note, the complaints that actually brought it down were completely unfounded. For a comprehensive overview of these issues, see Heidi Swarts, ''Organizing Through Door-Knocking Within ACORN,'' in *Collective Action for Social Change*, ed. Schutz and Sandy.