Public Work: Civic Populism versus Technocracy in Higher Education

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Public work as democratic citizenship involves the sustained, visible efforts of a diverse mix of people who create things (material or cultural) of lasting civic significance, whose value is determined by public conversation. Understood in these terms, public work expands concepts of the citizen, democracy, and the engaged institution. It also suggests a strategic reconfiguration of social, cultural, and political energies. Higher education has a critical role to play.

Public work posits the citizen as the responsible and foundational agent of democracy—democracy's cocreator, not simply a voter, volunteer, customer, or protestor who demands his or her fair share of the goods. Democracy is not mainly elections, laws, and institutions but a society, a lived cultural experience, "not just out there in the public sphere," as Barbara Cruikshank has put it, "but in here, at the very soul of subjectivity." Government is best conceived not as prime mover but as catalyst and resource of citizens, neither the problem nor the solution. Democracy is, in fact, a kind of work. Its labors occur in multiple sites, enlist multiple talents in addressing public problems, and result in multiple forms of common wealth. The public works of democracy create an environment of equal respect.

Higher education takes on many roles in such a democracy. Our institutions are its "agents and architects," as Elizabeth Hollander and I put it in *The Wingspread Declaration* on the civic mission of research universities. They are not simply its researchers, critics, service providers, or the educators of its future leaders. Scholars, in turn, are engaged public figures, part of the world. Their work is not only to analyze and critique but also to stimulate conversations, to expand the sense of the possible, and to activate broader civic and political energies.

> *"There are immense obstacles to democracy being taken seriously . . . in higher education. . . . The trend has been toward career preparation, specialized knowledge based on the model of science, and what might be called expert system-maintenance. This has a 'public service' aspect, but it is technocratic."*
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> ("Public Work: An interview with Harry Boyte," *HEX*, 2000.)

Redefining higher education's role in these terms is crucial in the early 21st century. Higher education is the premier knowledge institution in an era of exploding knowledge and knowledge technologies. It creates knowledge and it also credentials knowledge. It generates and diffuses conceptual frameworks that structure practices of all sorts, from global finance to parent education. It trains and socializes professionals.

Higher education is thus a theater for action of high strategic significance if it takes up a robust democracy-building mission and identity. As Ira Harkavy and Nick Longo have observed, there are rich traditions to draw upon. William Raney Harper, for instance, first president of the University of Chicago, envisioned universities as prophets of democracy. "The university, I maintain, is the prophetic interpreter of democracy," he declared. "[It is] the prophet of her past, in all its vicissitudes; the prophet of her present, in all its complexity; the prophet of her future, in all its possibilities."

If our institutions become infused with a renewed sense of democratic prophetic purpose, they will also help build flourishing democratic societies. The chief obstacle, in my view, is an opposing technocratic politics rooted in higher education. Technocratic politics —domination by experts removed from a common civic life—has spread throughout contemporary society like a silent disease. It is largely a politics without a name, presenting itself as an objective set of truths, practices, and procedures. Technocratic politics turns groups of people into abstract categories. It decontextualizes "problems" from the civic life of communities. It privatizes the world and

creates cultures based on a philosophy of scarcity. It profoundly erodes the subjective experience of equal respect.

Public work counters the impersonal, abstract, decontextualized culture of technocracy and its associated left versus right politics. At the molecular level of everyday experience, public work brings back a view of politics as about negotiating the plural, grounded, sometimes conflicted but also relational qualities of the human condition in order to solve problems. At a somewhat larger level of analysis it recasts professional work as a public craft, with experts "on tap, not on top," to use the organizing phrase. At the largest level of analysis, public work is an important ingredient in a strategic reconceptualization that emphasizes movement-building alliances to advance democratic society. Such movement building reaches far beyond elections, ideologies, and formal institutions of government to advance democratic values like equality, openness, participation, respect, and the commonwealth in many arenas, in a time when such values face enormous threat.

The features of this approach, what might be called civic populism, have rich antecedents, but to draw on them effectively requires a sharp strategic shift in emphasis. Although the reference point for today's politics continues to be the cultural and political wars of the 1960s, the more relevant period to look at for direction is the 1930s.

Technocratic Politics

Technocracy—control over significant portions of life by detached, formally credentialed experts—is a pattern and philosophy of governance with particular force in a knowledge society. The characterization of our country as a knowledge society grows from the work of theorists like Raymond Aron and Daniel Bell a generation and more ago. Bell and others drew attention to the increasing role of knowledge creation as a source of power in its own right. Energy generated by steam and electricity transformed preindustrial societies into industrial societies. Money replaced raw materials as the main strategic resource. Today, data-transmission systems and the theoretical knowledge required to organize information are the driving forces of innovation, strategic resources and power, shaping a

world economy, changing the pattern of human relationships. "The industrial era was characterized by the influence of humankind over things, including Nature as well as the artifacts of Man," wrote Harlan Cleveland, an astute analyst of knowledge-as-a-resource. "The information era features a sudden increase in humanity's power to think, and therefore to organize." Such a process, in turn, puts those who do the conceptual organizing in a particularly powerful position. One does not have to subscribe to the most extravagant claims that we are entering a qualitatively new world, or that the forms of organization, social, and class structure associated with capitalist society are rapidly dissolving, to note the profound changes in patterns of power and politics that the growing centrality of knowledge and its use are bringing about.

Many theorists of the knowledge society assume the ascendance of technocracy, that a "knowledge elite" of scientists, mathematicians, economists, engineers, and professionals of all sorts is progressively replacing traditional governing groups of managers, capitalists, and business executives. Even if they exaggerate this shift in power, their observations point to another key feature of the knowledge revolution as it has developed. Despite the democratic potential of knowledge, the explosion of knowledge and knowledge producing institutions has reinforced existing hierarchies and created new ones.

Technocracy's political qualities are hidden behind a stance of being "apolitical." Indeed, such concealment is sometimes promoted by champions of more engaged institutions. "Intellectual work that is driven by political forces is not intellectual at all," writes William Massy in *Honoring the Trust: Quality and Cost Containment in Higher Education*. Such politicized work, in his view, "seeks simply to win arguments and influence the distribution of power." He calls on the academy to rise above politics.

Values associated with this objective stance such as attention to method, respect for evidence, self-reflexivity, the need for diverse views, openness to feedback, and aspirations to excellence are important. Yet these are far better realized by conceiving of knowledge production as a relational public craft than by pretending detachment

from politics or objectivity about the world. And of course, anyone who knows higher education knows how bizarre is the claim that it "rises above politics."

Massy's stance of apoliticality is the culmination of long-term trends that render technocracy at once invisible and omnipresent. These trends produced detachment as the characteristic stance in academia. They also are inextricably tied to the ways in which formal politics today functions as highly charged ideological warfare.

Technocratic patterns developed over many decades. "We all have to follow the lead of specialists," wrote Walter Lippmann at the end of World War I, who set much of the tone of intellectual life. He argued that a growing body of opinion "looks to the infusion of scientific method, the careful application of administrative technique." Science was the model for liberal thinking; technocrats the model actors. An editorial in *The New Republic* argued, "the business of politics has become too complex to be left to the pretentious misunderstandings of the benevolent amateur."

This pattern came to mean that academic knowledge produced by credentialed experts is what "counts," and the authority of those without formal credentials is systematically undermined. It detached professionals from the life of communities and eroded the civic cultures of organizations they direct. As citizens became clients and consumers, the process hollowed out the civic muscle of mediating institutions, from local unions to civically grounded schools, businesses, and voluntary associations. This dynamic has been a key reason for citizens' feelings of powerlessness.

In the early 1950s, Baker Brownell, a philosophy professor at Northwestern who had been involved in rural extension projects, described this pattern in a polemic against the academic world from which he came, decrying its role in spreading technocracy. "Truth is more than a report," he said. "It is an organization of values. Efficiency is more than a machine; it is a human consequence." Captivated by technique, procedure, method, and specialization, Brownell argued, the educated professional classes had lost sight of face-to-face relations. "It is the persistent assumption of those who

are influential … that large-scale organization and contemporary urban culture can somehow provide suitable substitutes for the values of the human communities that they destroy," he declared.

> For want of a better word, I call these persons "the educated"—professionals, professors, businessmen, generals, scientists, bureaucrats, publicists, politicians, etc. They may be capitalist or they may be Communist in their affiliations, Christian or Jew, American, English, German, Russian or French. But below these relatively superficial variations among "the educated" there is a deeper affiliation. They are affiliated in the abstract, anonymous, vastly expensive culture of the modern city.

Brownell missed the multifold potential contributions of "the educated," when civically oriented and grounded, to a democratic society, but he had reason for targeting higher education as a cause of detachment and the erosion of communities. In *Academic Cultures in Transformation*, edited by Thomas Bender and Carl Schorske, leaders in four disciplines—economics, political science, philosophy, and English—document the growing detachment of academia from public life. Such detachment has shaped professional education, from business and engineering to ministry and teaching, resulting in the loss of interactive, horizontal ties to local civic life. As Bender put it in *Intellect and Public Life*, "In [the] largely successful quest for order, purity and authority, intellectuals severed intellectual life from place." A number of scholars and leaders in higher education have recently made similar points about the growing detachment of academic cultures over the last half-century.

When Edwin Fogelman and I interviewed senior faculty at the University of Minnesota in 1997 and 1998, we heard both about this detachment and its consequences. Leading faculty, from different disciplines, said that they consciously avoid mention of their public interests—what had led them into academia in the first place—for fear it might jeopardize their reputations for "rigorous scholarship." They feel increasingly cut off from local communities, or even their departmental communities, focused more on disciplinary or subdisciplinary reference groups. "I talk to 50 colleagues in my subfield by Internet far more than I talk to anyone on the hall," said

one leading social scientist. Their discontents take shape in a silent politics whose authority comes from hiding interests and suppressing attachment to living communities.

In overt political terms, technocracy produces not only detached expertise but also a culture of critique and estrangement from middle-class Americans as the characteristic stance in higher education. The stance of critic, with its penchant for abstract and ideological categories, also has roots in the social movements of the later 1960s, with their sweeping posture of alienation from mainstream America, its symbols, stories, images, and traditions. Today, the stance of alienation is reflected in the labels that dominate on campuses —"corporations," "Christian fundamentalists," "Republicans," "whites," "males," and the like, on the side of oppressors, and categories like "oppressed minorities" and many others as innocent victims. More generally, the culture of critique generates a pervasively critical stance toward American society as a whole, with an implicit and almost entirely unreflected working assumption that "consciousness raising" about injustices and problems will somehow motivate young people to act constructively. When talking with students about what they have learned about broad American democratic traditions as sources of inspiration or what can be learned for constructive action from even failed efforts to address the failings of American society, we regularly hear enormous frustration about their lack of positive experiences. Many say they have rarely encountered positive views about American society from faculty members.

The politics of critique informs the work of leading definitions of "public scholarship" or "public intellectual" in higher education, as Scott Peters has shown. Moreover, as Dana Fisher demonstrates in *Activism, Inc.* a Manichean, "good-versus-evil" politics also structures the ways young people are introduced to political activism through techniques like the door-to-door canvass. In the door-to-door canvass, tens of thousands of young activists each year act out such politics in highly scripted ways. Canvassers are commanded like vast armies by groups like the Public Interest Research Foundation.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said, "The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of

a society," capturing how culture impacts politics. Moynihan also offered a redemptive alternative about politics' power. "The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself." What does a culture-shaping politics look like? How can it be fostered?

The Politics of Public Work

Public work emphasizes what it is that citizens do, not only who citizens are, the *what* as well as the *who* of citizenship. It holds in tension the *is* and the *ought*; it brings together the human interests described by Jürgen Habermas—gritty, practical problem solving with communication and liberation. To effect such integration, the politics of public work poses three challenges to today's technocratic politics. First it explicitly counters expert takeover of politics and manipulations of mass sentiments by recovering citizen-centered politics attentive to the plurality and relationality of the human condition. Second, it challenges the distributive definition of politics by emphasizing the generative work of solving public problems and the catalytic role of professionals. Third, all this requires shifting the conceptual frame from the highly ideological politics of sweeping categories and Manichean sensibilities [1960s] to a strategic approach that excavates and builds on the democratic currents and values in communities and in the American society as a whole. The 1930s, especially the period of what was called the "Popular Front" to defend and deepen democracy against the dangers of fascism and cultural catastrophe, offers rich lessons for such a strategy.

In the first instance, the politics of public work builds on a tradition of theory and practice that has sought in recent decades to retrieve citizen-centered politics against the appropriation of politics by experts. Hannah Arendt pioneered in this retrieval. In *The Human Condition,* she describes public life as an environment of "innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised." It is a world of visibility and disclosure. "By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave no perishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality

notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a 'divine' nature."

Today, intellectuals inside and outside the academy have begun to challenge technocracy with citizen-centered politics—Sheldon Wolin, David Mathews, Gerald Taylor, Mary Dietz, Rom Coles, Ernesto Cortes, and others. In citizen-centered terms, politics is primarily the free, horizontal interactions among equal citizens, and only secondarily their vertical relationships with politicians or the state. Citizen-centered politics disputes the expert takeover of political life. It differs from the manipulative mass politics of sweeping categories and clear-cut enemies that shape citizen activism, from Michael Moore movies or America Live radio to door-to-door canvassing and Internet mobilizations. Around the world, modern technologies of communications and mobilization whip up frenzied waves of activism, whether leftist protests against the World Bank, Arab protests against the pope, or right-wing protests against the removal of life support from Terri Shiavo. Public work politics is urgently needed to complicate every kind of abstract, categorical, idealized mode of thought. Such politics is rooted in the gritty soil of human plurality—the irreducibly particular stories, interests, and outlooks that each person brings to the public world.

Secondly, the politics of public work confounds the separation of work from political life and professions from civic culture. The stress on participation, central to activist or radical democratic theory, is an insufficient account of politics; participation can consign citizens to the role of consumers of government benefits, rather than emphasize their roles as producers of public goods and cocreators of civic life. Participation generally becomes channeled through participatory structures that do little to build living cultures. Public work highlights the productive, world-building aspects of politics, the need to solve public problems by bridging different interests and perspectives. It also suggests a generative understanding of power, not only power *over*, the dominant view, but power *to*, power that comes from creating public relationships, tapping new talent and imagination, and creating democratic cultures.

This brings into view a different concept of the role of professionals, shifting from a service-delivery model to catalytic and organizing roles. The tradition of democracy in the United States, understood as a way of life not simply formal institutions, has rich traditions in this vein. The distinctiveness of democracy in the United States, indeed, has been its tie to work. Democracy had resonance because citizens helped to make it, in its social, cultural, economic, as well as governmental, forms. In what David Mathews has called "the sweaty and muscular tradition of citizenship," citizens created civic communities full of public things, towns and town halls, schools and libraries, infrastructures, philanthropies, and cultural institutions. In the process they often gained an experience of equal citizenship.

> *"The emergence of a more robust concern with democracy recently reflects the effort to find a deeper rationale for institutions of higher education as actual places, living communities where people interact with each other in complex, multidimensional ways over time."*
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> **("Public Work: An interview with Harry Boyte,"** *HEX*, **2000.)**

These traditions became translated into the contemporary world in a myriad of ways. As the nation industrialized, civic populist intellectuals, such as Jane Addams, Liberty Hyde Bailey, James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, and others, played important roles in translating older ideas of productive labors to the new society by emphasizing the training of professionals for catalytic, energizing public work. Land-grant institutions made distinctive contributions to this process by explicit attention to the integration of practical with liberal education. Their robust sense of their civic role led to the designation of land-grants as "democracy's colleges."

Nick Bromell, professor of English at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst has well described the experience of positive freedom, equality, and abundance in public work. "It is through our work together that we most powerfully experience our equality with one another," Bromwell says.

>Whether you are co-editing a volume of essays or organizing to keep a waste incinerator out of your neighborhood, cooperative labor means respectfully negotiating your differences and then collectively putting your shoulders to the wheel. It means listening and doing. It means allowing for the fullest possible play of individual ideas, methods, goals, and desires in order for the best of these to be selected without alienating your co-workers.

Creating relationships through real work of significance counters patterns of scarcity and isolation and credentialed expertise that dominate institutional life today.

Thirdly, a public work politics points toward a basic shift in the strategic framework of civic, social, and political alliances. Today's politics are set by the "left-versus-right" language and the sensibilities of the cultural and political wars of the 1960s and the subsequent ideological bent of disciplines structured around the intellectual roles of critic and outside expert. A more useful period to look at is the 1930s, for differences but also for lessons.

"No theory of the state is ever intelligible save in the context of its time," Harold Laski, the great theorist of the British Labor Party, began the fourth edition of *The Grammar of Politics*, in 1938. Laski and British Laborites shared the views of most American progressive intellectuals: democracy had external and internal enemies, alike. The rise of extremist forces in Europe and Japan threatened worldwide calamity. Internally, democracies faced economic crisis, the power of big business, and the loss of citizen confidence. All required unprecedented public

> *"I think the current emphasis of volunteerism 'dumbs down' citizenship by highlighting personal traits like caring and individual acts of kindness and eclipsing questions of power, collective action, the cultures and functioning of institutions, and larger systemic problems."*
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> ("Public Work: An interview with Harry Boyte," *HEX*, 2000.)

action. In a striking example of this, the New Deal involved a renegotiation of the compact between citizens and government, in which "the American Way of Life" came to include many new social programs and governmental initiatives. Liberals in the United States as well as in Europe had enormous faith in government's capacities to advance social progress.

As in the 1930s, the nation today faces not only external threats like the growth of Islamic fundamentalism but also internal challenges. Real wages of nonsupervisory workers have stagnated for 30 years, while social benefits—most important, employer-based health insurance—have declined since 2000. We are surrounded by growing inequalities, huge technological transformations, fraying social ties, widespread feelings of powerlessness, and a materialistic, consumerist, hedonistic mass culture that celebrates dog-eat-dog competition.

Unlike the 1930s, intellectuals and the general public are far more skeptical about state action as the solution. Multiple studies, in the United States and around the world, have shown how expert-driven government action inattentive to local cultures can devastate communities. Republicans have had great success in charging, "I trust the people; my opponent trusts the government," as George W. Bush put it in 2000. It is unlikely that progressives in the 21st century will revive Laski's belief that government is "the keystone of the social arch." A more promising approach is a model of democratic governance in which the state is less a prime mover and more a catalyst for multiple social actors.

Here there are traditions of catalytic public action to draw on from the 1930s, parallel to the traditions of public professional work. Post offices, local schools, soil conservation districts, public work projects like the CCC and the WPA, and a host of other government bodies and initiatives played roles as civic catalysts and embedded civic centers of community life. As the research of civic scholars, such as Carmen Sirianni and Scott Peters, has demonstrated, these work-centered professional, land-grant, and governmental practices continue as vital subterranean traditions to recover and build upon in the making of a different paradigm of public action.

There are also important strategic lessons from the larger 1930s civic movement which we need to recall to counter the highly ideological patterns of today's politics. The New Deal electoral coalition played a role in meeting the nation's crisis, and government efforts were important, but the tone of the nation's collective response to the Great Depression was set by a larger movement, sometimes called the "Popular Front," against the dangers of fascism, that aimed at mobilizing civic energies across parties to meet the challenges. The Popular Front included a myriad of activities, from unionization of the auto industry and civil rights struggles to cultural work in film, theater, and journalism. It advanced democratic values like diversity, tolerance, equality, and the commonwealth, weaving "justice," the leitmotif of left-wing politics, into a broader repertoire of themes and practical projects. The "people," seen by intellectuals in the 1920s as the repository of crass materialism and parochialism, was rediscovered as the source of civic creativity. "The heart and soul of our country," said Franklin Roosevelt, "is the common man."

This 1930s civic renewal movement was infused with the spirit and practices of public work. And it depended on a shift in progressive thinking, which is parallel to the shift that needs to take place today on college campuses and in society. The unproductive "struggle for socialism" of the early 1930s had led to ferocious fights between radicals and moderates that bore resemblance to the divisions between leftists and centrists today. In the latter 1930s, the call for a Popular Front to *defend democracy* meant that broad alliances replaced demands to choose "which side are you on?" America's democratic heritage came to be understood as a treasure trove of cultural resources. Even the Communist Party claimed "Jefferson, Paine, Jackson, and Lincoln."

The Popular Front gave birth to a broad democratic aesthetic, illustrated by Martha Graham's 1938 dance masterpiece, *American Document*. It emphasized American folk traditions, multiethnic heritages, and ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address. "What is an American?" she asked. She answered, not only Anglo-Saxons but also blacks, immigrants, and

workers. All were needed for democracy. The appeal of Earl Robinson's great song on the same theme and with the same message, "Ballad for Americans," showed the reach of this democratic aesthetic. Made famous by Paul Robeson, in 1940 it was sung at the conventions of both the Republican and the Communist parties.

We need a similar reconfiguring of cultural and political energies and strategic thinking if we are to advance the civic mission of higher education and locate that effort in the larger movement for democratic revitalization. There are fledgling signs of such a movement, described in a new Case Foundation study, *Citizens at the Center*, by Cindy Gibson, charting promising trends that regenerate a civic ethos or culture of citizenship. *Citizens at the Center* does not explicitly address the role of higher education in this movement. But it is possible to do so from a public work perspective.

Public Work in Higher Education

> The world is deluged with panaceas, formulas, proposed laws, machineries, ways out, and myriads of solutions. It is significant and tragic that almost every one of these proposed plans and alleged solutions deals with the structure of society, but none concerns the substance—the people. This, despite the eternal truth of the democratic faith that the solution always lies with the people.
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> *Saul Alinsky,* Reveille for Radicals, *1946*

Alinsky here gave a vivid description of the way technocratic politics replaces "the democratic faith" with "myriads of solutions." His alternative was drawn from the experiences of Popular Front organizing. Indeed, his first book, *Reveille for Radicals*, can be seen as a powerful statement of such organizing. For example, in his chapter on community traditions, Alinsky argues that the task of the organizer in any community is not to "convert" or divide along ideological lines. Rather, the organizer must engage in a deep process of listening to community values, traditions, mores, and habits. Organizing is about bringing forth the democratic potentials that exist in any community. I experienced this democratic politics rooted in the Popular Front directly as a young man, working as a

field secretary for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. SCLC's strategic frame was set especially by Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin, with roots in the 1930s. Its politics—full of alliance building and efforts to mine the symbols, images, and cultures of diverse democratic and religious traditions—was sharply different than the politics of caution typified by the NAACP, or the politics of alienation in the left wing of the movement.

The challenge today is to revive the organizing skills, the professional sensibilities, and the larger strategic framework of the 1930s and their continuing legacy in SCLC and broad-based community organizing. We also need to adapt these for a radically different age. There is no quick fix but there are many things to build on in higher education.

For instance, service learning over the last two decades has spread across the landscape of higher education because it creates democratic practices and more engagement—relational cultures, pedagogies, and approaches to knowledge; alternatives to academic norms; and practices of detachment. Many faculty whom I have interviewed describe service learning as a life-changing source of rejuvenation of public purpose. Because it focuses on integrating disciplinary knowledge with real-life experiences far beyond faculty control, service learning creates alternatives to detached one-way pedagogies. Service learning is tied to new views of public scholarship such as community-based or participatory action research in which community knowledge is understood to be valuable and students are coproducers of knowledge. Imagining America, the consortium of schools dedicated to promoting the public work of faculty in humanities, arts, and design fields, explicitly is taking up the theme of organizing for culture change in higher education and beyond.

Other trends also suggest the signs of what might be called a paradigm shift. In social theory, the concept of "social capital," with its relational, communal associations has replaced an individualist and economic emphasis on "human capital." In experimental psychology, new research emphasizes humans as unique agents of their own development. Thus, for instance, the late child-development

scientist Esther Thelen pioneered in developing a "grand unifying theory" of the field. Her approach was based on a relational, interactive, emergent understanding of complex systems and how to theorize them. In her view the scientist herself is part of the equation. Theory grows not only from use of the scientific method but also from a rich and interactive set of plural relationships, with "amateurs" as well as other scientists. Thelen's theory has challenged views of infants as passing through predetermined "stages" of development to understanding infants to be experimental and self-realizing agents, profoundly relational and interactive with their context. In development work, new theory challenges technocratic, one-size-fits-all interventions. Thus, the recent volume edited by Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton, *Culture and Public Action*, drawn from UN and World Bank experiences around the world, is a case in point. Through case studies and cultural theory, contributors develop an overwhelming critique of technocratic and ideological approaches that have dominated. They call for work that is respectful of, knowledgeable about, and skilled in negotiating with local cultures in development literature and practice.

This shift is from "structural thinking" to "citizen thinking," and from ideological politics to broad alliance building politics. Structures and institutions are neither the solution to complex public problems nor our enemies, but rather our tools. Citizens need to be at the center. And today's categories like "conservative," "liberal," or "left" are far less useful than a detailed mapping, as Alinsky once put it, of what makes for "constructive democratic action" and what impedes or opposes such action.

Building on positive developments, here are three ingredients for transforming the technocratic and ideological politics that stifles democratic energies in higher education and the larger society: we need political education that challenges abstractions and teaches work attentive to context and particularities of interests and backgrounds. We need organizing for cultural change in our professions and institutions to reground them in living contexts. And we need a broader political and strategic framework that

shifts scholarly attention from what is wrong to the primary question, what solves problems in ways that build democratic society?

Unfreezing politics. The first shift needed is from politics as highly professionalized, ideological warfare to an understanding of politics as the interplay and negotiation of diverse interests to create a common civic life and to advance democratic values and tendencies. Developments in higher education suggest possibilities for bringing such citizen-centered politics into our institutions. These draw on what is called "broad-based citizen organizing," in large citizen networks like the Industrial Areas Foundation, the Gamaliel Foundation, and PICO.

Building substantial power for ordinary people—the core mission of these organizations—involves a molecular organizing process of empowerment that requires people learning how to form public relationships with others who are profoundly different. This means creating cultures of a different kind of politics.

For 18 years, the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs' Center for Democracy and Citizenship and its collaborators have developed initiatives that show the possibilities for spreading democratic populist politics in varied settings, especially in schools and higher education itself. In Public Achievement, a youth civic engagement pedagogy developed by the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, teams of young people, ranging from elementary to high school students, work over months on a public issue they choose. They are coached by adults, who help them develop achievable goals and learn political skills and political concepts. Teams address a large range of issues, including teen pregnancy, racism, violence, and school curriculum. A variety of studies show often-remarkable accomplishments. In 2004 to 2005 about 3000 young people were involved in Public Achievement in more than 80 sites in a number of American communities. It has also spread to a dozen other countries, including Turkey, Scotland, Palestine, and Poland.

The pedagogies of Public Achievement have also been translated into other settings with students and professionals. The leadership minor at the University of Minnesota and James Farr's political science course, organized around Public Achievement, has

spawned a student initiative, the Student Committee on Public Engagement, SCOPE, dedicated to culture change at the university, "producing citizens not partisans," as one student put it, developing far deeper emphasis on public engagement, community, and public work. We are now seeing considerable interest among these students in the earlier, buried history and strategic lessons of the 1930s, as an alternative to the Red-Blue warfare that dominates on campuses today.

Public work politics has also proven valuable in professional practice. Indeed, complex problems are rarely discrete phenomena around which generic professional interventions can be mounted successfully if one is attentive to overall community well-being. With a focus on organizing for culture change, "problems" come to be understood as interconnected—lead poison in housing may be tied to the jobs that require people to live in certain areas, for instance. They are also woven into the life of civic communities. Thus they are different in every community, requiring distinctive approaches that take account of local cultures, with their unique histories, networks, capacities, and identities.

In Tomah, Wisconsin, in a collaborative project called Communities Mobilized for Change on Alcohol with the University of Minnesota's department of epidemiology on teenage alcohol use, we found that a focus on public work transformed public health practices while developing new approaches to collaboration and public leadership development. The customary approach of public health, in which "evidence-based interventions" focus on policy change to deal with a particular health problem, shifted to strategies based on changing the civic culture.

To accomplish this shift, Jeanne Carls, the organizer in Tomah, created a strategy team with diverse groups and interests who had never worked together and did not agree on the definition of "the problem." Yet all agreed that something was wrong, after several teenage deaths in alcohol-related incidents. Police, bar owners, merchants, church leaders, teenagers, parents, and public-health professionals became involved. "You tell people that there are going to be many different people coming together who you may

have thought would never be at the same table, but can see the need to work on the same issue," Carls recounted. "It was like bringing lions to the table. People would sit across the table and never talk to each other directly, but they all had an interest in youth, and in Tomah." Health-care workers, city officials, and lay citizens worked to define what the problem entailed. What emerged was a view of teenage alcohol use as inextricably tied to the civic culture of Tomah as a whole community. They realized that the annual festival, in which beer drinking was the central ritual for people of all ages, was both a symbol and wellspring of the town's drinking culture. All were responsible for the problem, understood in this fashion. And many different groups would be required to change it. Such a change also entailed a shift in professional practices from one-way policy interventions to collaborative public work. "I bring some specific skills and knowledge, like how things are decided in city politics," said Dave Berner, the city manager. "But many others make contributions as well." Work on teen alcohol abuse resulted in Berner's rethinking his job in far more civic ways.

Organizing for citizen professionalism. An organizing approach in higher education is different than approaches to change based on dissemination of information, service delivery, or moralized protest. It engages people through their diverse interests, builds alliances that take account of power relationships and institutional cultures, and has a strong, relational approach. Maria Avila, a former Mexican American organizer with the Industrial Areas Foundation who directs the Center for Community Based Learning at Occidental College, describes elements of an organizing approach in higher education. "The medicine for our predicament requires efforts to restructure the way we think, act, behave toward each other, and the way we act as a collective to restructure power and resources." Avila argues that organizing focuses on culture change. "Culture changes [come] first, leading to structural changes later."

We have seen the potential of using such an organizing approach and also the conception of "citizen professional" reintegrated into living civic cultures in a number of settings. In the early 1990s, for instance, Project Public Life (the CDC's precursor at

the Humphrey Institute) undertook a Citizen Politics initiative in Minnesota with Minnesota Extension that helped to unearth older traditions of public work and everyday politics in the cooperative extension system in the state and across the nation, creating the background for the pioneering historical scholarship of Scott Peters. The effort also showed that substantial civic renewal initiatives with statewide associations require an organizing approach, not informational or programmatic approaches. Organizing with Minnesota Extension Services meant seeking to build sustained capacities for collective citizen action in and around extension. The effort depended on creating a statewide leadership team led by MES director Pat Borich, a populist who had come up through the extension ranks, as well as local leadership teams. It involved cultivating new capacities for deliberation and public work. It aimed at changing the culture of the bureaucracy so it would be more responsive to local communities, more aware of citizen capacities, and more flexible in giving local extension agents room for innovation.

Other developments in the University of Minnesota also explicitly seek to effect culture changes that counter the detached technocratic biases of service delivery. For instance, the Academic Health Center (AHC) at the UMN has established a new Citizen Health Care Program, building on the work of William Doherty and his colleagues. This is framed by the public work approach, explicitly challenging the technocratic "service delivery" model of health care, aimed at teaching professionals across the country a new model of collaborative work. This means reconceptualizing themselves as citizens working with other citizens. As its founding statement puts it, Citizen Health Care is:

> based on the belief that the greatest untapped resource for improving health care is the knowledge, wisdom, and energy of individuals, families, and communities who live with challenging health issues in their everyday lives. In this approach, health care professionals learn public skills for working with patients who are citizens of health care, builders of health in clinic and community, rather than consumers of medical services.

At the AHC, cultural change is also sometimes prompted by initiatives from outside. Thus, the Academic Health Center also has a partnership with the Powderhorn Wellness Center initiated by community leader Atum Azzahir. This partnership immerses residents in the cultures and traditional healing practices of a low-income community, as a part of their education. Azzahir describes her own shift more than a decade ago from what she calls the "oppression framework" focused on attacking white racism, to the "cultural reconstruction" approach, based on deep exploration, retrieval, and affirmation of relational and soulful elements in the cultures of people of African descent. Her approach combines a deep grounding in the civic life of communities with an affirmation of the vital role that culture identity plays as a source of strength and healing.

Finally, we have developed organizing efforts at culture change in geographic areas. Thus, the Jane Addams School for Democracy, a learning and public work partnership in the West Side neighborhood of St. Paul with new immigrant communities from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which has involved more than 1000 students from the University of Minnesota since 1997, has a focus on creating a democratic, relational culture across the neighborhood. Students learn to think of themselves as "members" of the Jane Addams School, not as students doing "service projects." The theme is that "everyone is a learner and everyone is a teacher." This creates an experience of colearning, cocreation, and grassroots public leadership development. It also has renewed the idea of education tied to the civic life of places. Jane Addams School has helped to spawn a neighborhood-wide initiative, the Neighborhood Learning Community, in which the whole community and its institutions—from parents to congregations, libraries, businesses, and community organizations—have claimed authority for the education of children. Its mission is to create a neighborhoodwide learning culture. Many new forms of collaboration have emerged. For instance, an apprenticeship program connects teenagers with local employers, with a strong reflective component. All Around the Neighborhood has produced a collaboration of diverse groups to educate children in different topics, from science to neighborhood history.

The Neighborhood Learning Community points toward a sharply different policy approach based on abundance, or the vast untapped energies now frozen by technocratic politics. In Minnesota today, as elsewhere in the United States, progressive reformers in politics, business, higher education, and education use a scarcity frame, defining the problem as growing disparities along lines of income, education, housing, and other public goods.

In fact, the traditional strength of Minnesotan education was the way in which schools were connected to civic life. This tie was in fact enshrined in the state's distinctive policy innovations, such as community education and early childhood family education, run through community boards. The erosion of this connection, with a resulting view of education based on scarcity, dramatizes the need for alternatives.

Advancing democratic society. Technocracy, the expert stance outside a common life, seeking to manipulate the world, sustains academic practices as well as professions as self-referential, abstract, and full of techniques, devoid of public life. Schools, social service agencies, and other civic institutions, whether in Buenos Aires or Minneapolis, are often as detached from local cultures as are fast-food businesses and Wal-Marts. Yet many trends in higher education and other settings challenge the privatizing and scarcity-based dynamics of technocracy. Democratic society, rather than democratic state, entails a fundamentally different conception of the academic and intellectual's role, a shift from critic and outsider to engaged intellectual who helps generate constructive action. See the following chart on the contrast, developed by Marie Ström of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, who has translated public work concepts into the South African context.

To renew democracy in these terms entails creating an alternative politics based on abundance, not scarcity. It means seeing ourselves as intellectuals as part of the world, not detached from it. It involves teaching the habits and skills of democratic citizenship, as well as the skills of organizing for social change. And it requires understanding our institutions not as ivory towers but as engaged in changing the world as well. Our fate is bound up with that of everyone else.

Moving from "Democratic State" to "Democratic Society": Our Work as Intellectuals		
Identity	**Expert/critic/ commentator**	**Intellectual leader/catalyst**
Definition of democracy	Democratic state	Democratic society
Definition of citizen	Consumer, client, voter, individual with rights; spectator of politics	Cocreator, problem solver
Purpose of work as intellectuals	Analyze policy; express opinion; critique existing society	Stimulate a conversation; challenge "the world as it is" in order to help create a new sense of possibility beyond the given
Stance	Detached, objective	Engaged; "part of the mix"
Core work	Gather, analyze, and disseminate information	Build relationships; stimulate public discussion; activate and energize
Responsibility	Highlight injustice and inequality; speak on behalf of the voiceless; promote "fix it" policies	Expand public space; advocate for policies that empower the people and build civic energy
Relationships and sphere of work	Sectoral/disciplinary/ "in-group," self-referential/ "enclosed space"	Strategic partnerships to stimulate and expand discussion; "public space"
Content and outcomes	Activities (statements, interviews, articles, submissions, events, and so on)	Action (strategic interventions in alliance with others to promote system change)
Methods	Reports, studies, Power Point presentations, Web sites, databases	Building relationships, tapping diverse interests, creating alliances
Evaluation	Numbers (events, beneficiaries, and so on)	Impact (shift in discourse; change in attitudes, people, or capacity)

Our broadest challenge of higher education is to advance democratic values and to join in movements to build citizen-centered democratic societies. This is the only real way to bring professionals, who see themselves often as outsiders, back into a common civic life. It is also how, together, we will develop the civic power to guide a world spinning out of control.