

Phantom Conflict: Lippmann, Dewey, and the Fate of the Public in Modern Society

Sue Curry Jansen

Contrary to the prevailing view in media and cultural studies, philosopher John Dewey and journalist Walter Lippmann did not represent different schools of thought. They were not adversaries in a great public debate about the fate of the public in modern democracies in the 1920s. Rather, their exchange about the “phantom” public was reframed as a conflict in the early 1980s, a reframing which has achieved broad interdisciplinary acceptance even though it rests on a casual rhetorical trope, not historical documentation. The reframing provides a salutary but inaccurate origin story for American media and cultural studies, illustrates the hazards of relying on secondary interpretations of historical sources, and deflects attention away from realistic assessment of the problems confronting democracy today. Dismantling this disciplinary folklore is essential to the integrity of the emerging “new history” of media and communication.

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It is easier to start a legend than to prevent its continued circulation.

—John Dewey¹

In recent years, scholars searching for ways to revitalize participatory democracy have turned to history for insight and guidance. An exchange of ideas that took place in the 1920s between the philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) and the journalist Walter Lippmann (1889–1974) has attracted exceptional interest. At issue in the exchange is the role of publics and public opinion in modern democracies. The relevant texts are Lippmann’s *Public Opinion* (1922); Dewey’s 1922 review of the book

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in *The New Republic*; Lippmann's *The Phantom Public* (1925); Dewey's review of that book in *The New Republic*, also in 1925; and a series of lectures Dewey gave at Kenyon College in 1926, which were revised and published in 1927 as *The Public and Its Problems*.²

Contemporary interest in the exchange is evident in virtually all of the social sciences, most of the humanities, applied studies such as law, journalism, education, and even computer science; it has been incorporated into analyses of publics in Europe, China, Korea, Canada, and Iceland. Accounts of the exchange have now generated a bibliography too large to fully track.³ Clearly there is something about the exchange that resonates closely with our own collective anxieties about the viability of participatory democracy under neo-liberalism.

In this essay, I argue that most of the recent renderings of the Dewey–Lippmann exchange actually resonate *much too closely* with our own concerns. In our eagerness to recover and affirm Dewey's hopeful vision of participatory democracy, we have reinvented and mythologized the exchange with accounts that are unfaithful to the original. We have reframed the exchange as an intellectual cause celebre, a great debate, pitting highly charged adversarial positions against one another.

Despite its wide acceptance, this reframing is recent—little more than twenty-five years old. Although the reframing has attracted some criticism, its validity has been widely accepted, reified, and canonized into textbooks.⁴ By 1999 the reframing was so firmly in place that Eric A. MacGilvray could refer to the exchange as a “great set piece in American political thought.”⁵

In endorsing the reframing, we are deceived by hindsight. We know how the story ended so we assume we know how it began: Dewey endured into his nineties as a faithful champion of progressive causes while Lippmann became an establishment insider. Although their paths did diverge later, Dewey and Lippmann were not “embattled” in the 1920s and there is no evidence to support the claim that Dewey was “appalled” by Lippmann's *Public Opinion* or *The Phantom Public*.⁶ To the contrary, at the time of the exchange, the two men were allies committed to a common project: to reform democracy in light of modern conditions, which included the emergence of mass communication. They recognized the unprecedented powers of propaganda and publicity to “manufacture consent,” powers that both governments and corporations actively exploited.⁷ Their respective appeals to “disinterested” expertise, and to news and educational reforms were attempts to counter these new powers.

Dewey and Lippmann were pluralists. Forcing their ideas into binary frames, which they explicitly rejected, does grave injustices to both men. In arguing for more historically nuanced renderings of the exchange, I am not advocating Lippmann's views per se, but rather a discursive framework that supports faithful renderings of them. To that end, I argue that in recovering and affirming Dewey's hopeful vision of participatory democracy, the reframing: (a) oversimplifies Lippmann's position to the point of caricature; (b) exaggerates Dewey and Lippmann's philosophical differences; (c) frequently ignores the broader historical and biographical contexts in which the exchange was situated; (d) represents it in polarizing terms that were absent from the

original exchange; and (e) obscures the fact that neither Dewey nor Lippmann offer a solution to the crisis of democracy. There are many explanations for the reframing: perhaps none is more salient than the simple fact that interest in Dewey's work, not Lippmann's, drives the inquiries.

To support these claims, I briefly summarize the exchange, review older accounts of it including all known reviews of *The Public and Its Problems*, trace the origins of the polarized reframing, critique the reframing, and consider what Dewey actually said about Lippmann's work.

This inquiry necessarily takes the form of a bibliographic essay. As such, it provides some insights into the sociology of academic knowledge, especially the politics of citations and the fragile underpinnings of the authority of interdisciplinary knowledge. It demonstrates that this authority is vulnerable to the "butterfly effect," whereby slight variations in complex systems can have major consequences, e.g., the flutter of a butterfly's wing can, in theory, "cause" a volcano to erupt centuries later. In this case, a small rhetorical flourish by a scholar in one field gains currency and traction, is cited, amplified, and adopted by scholars in other fields. As the claim migrates across disciplines and up the academic status hierarchy, adopters, rather than the originator, are cited; the rhetorical move acquires the patina of historical evidence and its accuracy is assumed rather than demonstrated. The result is a vast international interpretive edifice constructed upon a rhetorical flutter.⁸

This inquiry should not, however, be understood as a quest for historical certainty, which neither Dewey's own philosophy nor contemporary approaches to historiography would support. Rather my bibliographic digging is a more pedestrian enterprise, best characterized as a strenuous form of journalistic fact-checking.

Why It Matters

This may appear to be an esoteric exercise. What does it matter, the reader may ask, if some academics find solace in identification with what they view as the losing, but salutary "side" of an historical exchange? Is it not "just academic" in the pejorative sense, a harmless, if impotent ivory tower indulgence?

I think that it does matter. Valorizing a romanticized interpretation of Dewey's vision may be morally edifying, but it substitutes "nostalgia for what never was" for the critical realism that we urgently need to understand and resist the constraints that neo-liberalism is now imposing on our own democratic horizons.⁹ That is, mythologizing the progressive agenda is not just flawed history; it also promotes escapist politics. It allows contemporary neo-progressives to ignore the fact that the successes of the original progressives, not just their defeats, helped shape the problematic present.

Romancing the past also avoids engagement with the thorny issues of race, gender, sexual identity, and global social inequalities—issues that those who are serious about constructing a twenty-first century public sphere cannot avoid. Yet, a curious thing happens when the Dewey–Lippmann exchange is reframed and elevated to a "great set piece in American political thought." Thorny issues disappear. The subject is

changed, both literally and substantively, by transporting interlocutors back into a textual realm where the racial and gendered constituents of the hegemonic subject and the concept of the public remained unmarked. In effect, this move ignores the last four decades of critical research on race and gender—an ironic turn since Dewey and Lippmann, like most progressives, supported the feminism of their day and were advanced in their thinking about race (which is not to say that they were free of sexism or racism). The escapism is blatant here. It ignores the public as it is presently constituted, domestically and globally. Yet, in contrast to feminist critiques of Habermas' gendered "public," it remains unchallenged.¹⁰

Finally, the cavalier dismissal of Lippmann undervalues both his contributions to the historical development of media studies and the insights his work can still offer in confronting democratic challenges. Although there are indications that a reassessment of his legacy has begun, to most contemporary media studies scholars Lippmann remains a figure of marginal interest.¹¹ His *Public Opinion*, a modern classic that defined the field of media studies, is seldom read by media students today. This neglect is symptomatic of a much larger problem—the a- or anti-historical character of the field, which has led to charges that it is superficial, even anti-intellectual.¹² The reframing is an especially potent illustration of how the neglect of historical sources can lead to a Vesuvius of interpretive errors. It demonstrates why history matters even to a field that is primarily present and future-oriented.

Dewey–Lippmann Exchange

The reframing has gained greatest traction within the social sciences, especially in media and cultural studies, but also in political science and to a lesser extent sociology. It functions as an ideological line in the sand, which positions Dewey and his latter day partisans as robustly democratic, philosophically reflexive, and ethically sensitive, and Lippmann as representative of, if not responsible for, much of what went wrong in the development of twentieth-century American social science.

Reduced to a bare-boned summary, the exchange consists of the following. In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann examines the structural and cognitive constraints on how and what citizens in modern democratic societies can know, and profoundly challenges the classic Liberal conception of the "omnicompetent" citizen who can render informed judgments on all public issues. Lippmann maintains that the modern world is so complex, its communication systems so powerful and deeply flawed, and citizens' time commitments and attention spans so fragmented, that informed public opinion, especially about distant "unseen" events, is not possible. Introducing the concept of stereotyping into the vocabulary of social science, Lippmann claims that conception precedes perception: we tend to see what we expect to see and to ignore contradictory evidence. As a result of these structural and cognitive limits, public opinion, as it is conceived in Liberal democratic theory, is a fiction—"a phantom." Given this contradiction between theory and practice, Lippmann contends that "method" is democracy's best hope. Approaching science from a Peircean rather than a positivist perspective, Lippmann conceives of method as a means to control and partially

counter the effects of stereotyping, propaganda, publicity, and public relations.¹³ Lippmann proposes creation of “intelligence bureaus” or “observatories,” which would use scientific methods to generate “disinterested” information about public affairs: The purpose of these research centers is to provide reliable knowledge resources for governance, business, and journalism. Dewey agrees with Lippmann’s diagnosis, but is deeply troubled by its implications. Correctly noting that “the critical portion [of *Public Opinion*] is more successful than its constructive,” Dewey seeks to amplify the constructive aspects of the argument in *The Public and Its Problems*. He calls for improving the press and civic education, but he provides no concrete proposals for achieving these objectives beyond the hope, expressed in his review of *Public Opinion*, that “when necessity drives, invention and accomplishment may amazingly respond.”¹⁴ Dewey shares Lippmann’s commitment to method, but is more optimistic about prospects for democratizing enlightenment.

Early Framings of the Dewey–Lippmann Exchange

No single scholar can adequately survey the vast literatures on progressivism, pragmatism, liberalism, public opinion, and participatory democracy produced since 1922. Even covering all that has been written by and about Dewey or Lippmann would require a lifetime commitment. To date, however, I have been unable to locate any examples of polarized framings of the exchange by scholars before the 1980s. Furthermore, I have found no accounts prior to that date which characterize it, as it is characterized today, as a great debate about the viability of participatory democracy. It may be that such moments can only be retrospectively identified and proclaimed; if so, there should nevertheless be substantial contemporary evidence to support a later verdict.

The polarized view is not only of recent vintage; but so is serious and sustained scholarly interest in the exchange. To be sure, Dewey scholars have always recognized Lippmann’s role in the genesis of *The Public and Its Problems*, but they have generally accepted Dewey’s own framing of the exchange as an affirmation and amplification.¹⁵ Conflict frames were reserved for descriptions of the two thinkers public differences on other issues—the League of Nations, outlawing war, the New Deal, moral theory, and natural rights.

Non-Academic Reviews

Six reviews of *The Public and Its Problems* appeared in the general interest literature of the day where presumably a great public debate would have left its mark.¹⁶ Four reviews directly relate Dewey’s effort to Lippmann’s diagnosis of the eclipse of the public. The *New Republic* review (August 24, 1927) would likely be most telling since Lippmann was a founding editor and both men were frequent contributors to the publication; moreover, Dewey’s reviews of *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public* were published there. R. M. Lovett, a Dewey admirer, who in a later issue offered *New Republic* readers a celebratory synopsis of Dewey’s life work,

acknowledges in his opening sentence that *The Public and Its Problems* is “undoubtedly the result of [Dewey’s] interest in the questions raised by Mr. Walter Lippmann’s well known studies.” Lovett does not, however, interpret Dewey’s response to Lippmann as adversarial. In his view, both men maintain that the modern age does not have viable democratic structures; and as a result, Dewey agrees with Lippmann that (in Dewey’s words) “the democratic public is still largely inchoate and unorganized.” Lovett claims that incomplete democratic development accounts “for ‘the eclipse of the public,’ which Professor Dewey, like Mr. Lippmann, deploras.” The mission of Dewey’s book, in Lovett’s view, is not to provide “a recipe for organizing the community into a democratically effective public,” but to identify the preconditions that must be met before that objective can be attained.

Harold Laski, who also had personal connections to both men, reviewed Dewey’s book in the *Saturday Review of Literature* (October 15, 1927). Laski begins by noting the “revolution in our conception of democracy” brought about by Lippmann’s *Public Opinion*, and sees Dewey as adding to that work by advocating for improvements in social science method. Laski expresses doubt about the efficacy of Dewey’s solution.

The third major review appeared in *Survey* (November 1, 1927). Here, reviewer Henry Neumann sees Dewey’s book as a plea for a “realistic, pragmatic approach to the problem of the functions of the state.” He writes: “The technique for enlisting insight, loyalty and energy on the side of the public, Professor Dewey, like Mr. Lippmann, reminds us is deplorably deficient still; but he is not without hope.”

R. L. Duffus’ review in *The New York Times* (October 23, 1927) refers to Lippmann to affirm what he takes to be Dewey’s claim: “The Phantom Public,” as Walter Lippmann called it, must be found in those interchanges of daily living which no one can avoid—communication between one neighbor and another, between householders and grocers, between motorists and pedestrians.”

Without mentioning Lippmann’s name in his review in the *New York Herald Tribune* (November 27, 1927) Sterling P. Lamprecht contends that Dewey “finds the key to our present social ills in ‘the eclipse of the public.’” Quoting Dewey’s claim that “the public seems to be lost; it is certainly bewildered,” Lamprecht notes that Dewey “does not boast of being able to list sufficient conditions of the desired rediscovery of the public.”

An anonymous short review in the *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 12, 1927) maintains that Dewey believes the public “is a body without ‘diffused and seminal intelligence,’ and as such has little or no voice in the proceedings in which popular fallacy believes it takes part.” The reviewer concludes that “the function of the book seems that of clarification, rather than stimulation.”

In sum, the reviews in the general literature follow Dewey’s lead and frame *The Public and Its Problems* as an affirmation and amplification of Lippmann’s diagnosis of the eclipse of the public.

Academic Reviews

A review of academic journals of the period indicates that sociology paid the most attention to the exchange in the 1920s.¹⁷ The influential sociological journals of the

day regularly reviewed books by Dewey and Lippmann, including *Liberty and the News*, *Public Opinion*, *The Phantom Public*, and *The Public and Its Problems*.¹⁸ Robert Park (Dewey's former student) reviewed both *Public Opinion* and *The Public and Its Problems*; significantly, however, he did not link the two books.¹⁹ If the two thinkers were "embattled," Park was ideally positioned to chronicle the action. None of the sociologists makes any reference to a controversy. One reviewer, Malcolm M. Willey, does mention Dewey in his review of Lippmann's *The Phantom Public* to support his (Willey's) claim that Lippmann is not anti-democratic but rather seeking "to make the democratic principle a workable reality not simply an idealistic catchword."²⁰ It is accurate to conclude that sociologists in the first half of the twentieth century, unlike political scientists, displayed proactive interest in the work of the two men; but if the Dewey–Lippmann exchange rose to the level of a great public debate, sociologists left no record of it in their journals.

Only the review by philosopher T. V. Smith comes close to anticipating today's framing of the exchange; Smith does not mention Lippmann by name, but he does maintain that Dewey was "aroused" to write his book by prevailing views that "at best leave the public a 'phantom,' at worst an ass." Smith's "at best" means just that, because "at worst an ass" surely refers to a favorite salvo of American democracy's "Great Debunker," H. L. Mencken, who stood far to the right of Lippmann.²¹

Detecting reverberations of the exchange in the intervening period after the 1920s and before the "renaissance" of pragmatism in the 1980s is like trying to give voice to silence. I have found no visible traces of it. The following snapshots of scholarly works, which would have been likely repositories for such traces, are indicative although not definitive. Virginia Rankin Sedman published a comprehensive analysis of approaches to public opinion in *Social Forces* in 1932; she devotes more attention to Lippmann than any other theorist, but Dewey is among the many thinkers she considers. Sedman clearly articulates the differences between Dewey and Lippmann's views, but she does not directly relate the two thinkers to each other or pit them as adversaries.²² If the Dewey–Lippmann exchange was an intellectual cause celebre, Sedman also failed to notice.

Floyd Allport's 1933 book, *Institutional Behavior*, devotes an entire chapter to analyzing *The Public and Its Problems*, but never mentions Lippmann.²³

In 1939, sociologist William Albig published his influential book, *Public Opinion*, a massive inventory of public opinion research. Lippmann's influence is apparent throughout. There are 36 direct references to Lippmann and Dewey (21 and 15, respectively) but no references to a debate between them about publics or public opinion. The ideas of both men are marshaled to support Albig's claims.²⁴ The same year, in an article, "Political Parties and Public Opinion" in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Joseph R. Starr links Dewey and Lippmann's work on public opinion, but sees the two men as making common cause—a cause Starr heartily disapproves. He describes Dewey and Lippmann along with Graham Wallas and President Lowell of Harvard as "destructive critics" who "were little concerned with the improvement of public opinion."²⁵ In fact Starr singles out Dewey for special chastisement in this regard.

In 1941, C. Wright Mills completed his PhD at the University of Wisconsin, writing his dissertation on Peirce, James, and Dewey (*Sociology and Pragmatism* published posthumously in 1964). He refers to Lippmann twice in conjunction with Dewey's political activism but does not mention *Public Opinion* or *The Phantom Public*; Mills does, however, devote several pages to an analysis of *The Public and Its Problems*. If the Dewey–Lippmann exchange had risen to the status of a great controversy in the 1920s, it is hard to imagine that Mills, of all people, would not have explored it. Moreover, in *The Power Elite* (1956) Mills endorses Lippmann's description of the public as “a phantom” and strongly praises *Public Opinion*. In short, Mills approaches Dewey and Lippmann as amenable to synthesis, not as adversaries.²⁶

In 1957, Frank J. Sorauf briefly considered Lippmann and Dewey's views on the public and the public interest, citing them in a synthetic mode, seeing them as casting illumination on a common problematic from a progressive/liberal perspective.²⁷

Two sources prior to the 1980s do anticipate some aspects of the later reframing. Published in the immediate aftermath of the appearance of Lippmann's most conservative book, *The Public Philosophy* (1955), both authors cite *The Public Philosophy* as retrospective affirmation of their interpretations of young Lippmann's views.

In a 1956 reexamination of *Public Opinion*, Heinz Eulau rereads Lippmann's 1922 work as “the book of a deeply troubled soul.” Eulau claims to discover “the emotional roots of its author's despair” in Lippmann's ambivalence toward his Jewish identity, which according to Eulau made Lippmann a lonely, marginal man, and a perennial outsider. Eulau acknowledges that most reviews of *Public Opinion* were positive, and avers that even he finds it “acute and relevant.”²⁸ To support his psycho-historical case study, however, Eulau culls what reservations he finds within the general critical acclaim for *Public Opinion*, including Dewey's. Eulau cites and seems to endorse Dewey's argument for news reform and faith in an enlightened public. In Eulau's view, it is somehow symptomatic of Lippmann's personal pathology that, unlike Pareto and Michels who embraced elitist solutions, Lippmann “did not exalt authority, but once more appealed to reason.”²⁹ Eulau projects his diagnosis of Lippmann's alleged personal problems onto the larger screen of history, seeing the failure of liberals and modern liberalism as the inability to refute Lippmann's analysis because “Dewey's prescription has never sunk sufficiently deeply enough into liberal consciousness.”³⁰

In “Social Engineers as Saviors” (1956) Stanley Kaplan sees “Technocracy, New Deal, and the current dilemma of atomic scientists” as outgrowths of earlier progressive thought—the work of Dewey, Weyl, Croly, Bourne, Lippmann, Veblen, and others who viewed social engineers as “saviours.”³¹ Critical of “the pragmatic technique of social change” generally, and Dewey and Lippmann specifically, Kaplan nonetheless draws a sharp contrast between the two thinkers.³² Kaplan regards Dewey's pervasive influence over the progressive generation as the Achilles' heel of modern liberalism: The “fatal flaw” in Dewey's thought is “precisely the absence of a usable politics.”³³ Pointing out that Dewey always urged others to deal with politics “realistically,” Kaplan charges Dewey with evading that responsibility himself by

refusing to be pinned down. This evasion allowed Dewey to remain the lifelong champion of an inclusive democratic public. In contrast, Lippmann quest for realistic political solutions to the problems of modern democracy made him “the Hamilton of post-war normalcy”—a normalcy that Kaplan considers elitist and authoritarian.³⁴

Eulau and Kaplan’s analyses are, however, atypical. With the exception of Edward Purcell’s fine examination of the influence of pragmatism and scientific naturalism on twentieth century American thought in *The Crisis of Democratic Theory* (1973), the major histories of progressivism written before 1980 follow a template similar to those of sociology and political science by making no mention of the exchange. Morton White’s *Social Thought in America: the Revolt Against Formalism* (1949, 1957) extensively chronicles Dewey’s thought but gives no account of the Dewey–Lippmann exchange of the 1920s. In the revised edition, however, White calls attention to Lippmann’s 1955 *The Public Philosophy* because it deviates from Dewey’s position; this seems to indicate that White saw the two thinkers as allied until then. Richard Hofstadter’s *The Age of Reform* (1955) gives some consideration to both Dewey and Lippmann, but makes no reference to any controversy between them over public opinion and participatory democracy. David W. Noble’s *The Paradox of Progressive Thought* (1958) essentially ignores both Dewey and Lippmann, making a single minor reference to each of them. Charles Forcey chronicles the activities of Lippmann and Dewey extensively in *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann, and the Progressive Era* (1961) and does attribute elitist implications to *Public Opinion*, but he does not mention Dewey in that context. Christopher Lasch makes no mention of the Dewey–Lippmann exchange in *The New Radicalism in America* (1965) although both Dewey and Lippmann figure prominently in that work.³⁵ Significantly, however, in Lasch’s later works, *The True and Only Heaven* (1991) and *The Revolt of the Elites* (1995), analyses of the exchange are not only present but assume fairly prominent positions.³⁶

Purcell does, however, discover a “strong elitist strain” in *Public Opinion*, which he characterizes as a “consistent mark of Lippmann’s thought.” Moreover Purcell briefly cites (one sentence) what would become the *prima facie* evidence for the later reframing of the exchange as a great debate, a crucial phrase in Dewey’s positive review of *Public Opinion*: In Purcell’s words, “John Dewey ruefully acknowledged [that Lippmann’s book] is ‘perhaps the most effective indictment of democracy as currently conceived ever penned.’”³⁷

In sum, the cumulative bibliographic evidence strongly suggests that the Dewey–Lippmann exchange transmogrified into a great debate of the twentieth-century several decades after it took place. For three of those decades, scholarly interest in pragmatism was largely dormant. By the time of Dewey’s death in 1952, pragmatism had been eclipsed by analytic philosophy and the philosophy of language, which not only usurped pragmatism’s place in American philosophy but was also critical of its “intellectual sloppiness.”³⁸ It appears that the Dewey–Lippmann exchange was also ignored during that time.

Reframing the Exchange: The Butterfly Effect

Even though the exchange took place before the Great Depression, New Deal, World War II, the Cold War, and the Nuclear Age, Jeffrey C. Goldfarb maintains that Lippmann and Dewey “seem to speak directly to us.” I would add that many of us seem to feel compelled to respond to them—to declare ourselves.³⁹ Accounts of the exchange have been stated and restated, with only minor variations, so frequently and by scholars in so many different disciplines during the last two decades that the ubiquity of the narrative itself warrants inquiry. These repetitive avowals resemble secular prayers that not only declare where the narrators stand but also affirm what many of us long for in a democratic polis.

To my knowledge, there have been no systematic efforts to determine who released the genie from the bottle, who initially placed the old exchange on the agenda of contemporary scholarship and reframed it as a definitive moment in the history of twentieth century democratic discourse. With some exceptions, scholars who revisit the exchange tend to reference sources in their own disciplines. As a result, transfers across disciplines are sometimes unacknowledged, so a complete genealogy of the reframing probably cannot be established. To their credit, however, most scholars avoid lethal interpretive moves by returning to the primary sources to launch their engagement with the exchange, albeit usually with current framing devices in their backpacks.

When political scientist Terrence Ball revisited the original reviews of *Public Opinion*, for example, he was dismayed to find that political scientists generally praised the book and failed to share Ball’s view of what was at stake (the public) when they embraced Lippmann’s analysis. Further, Ball found no acknowledgment of *The Public and Its Problems* by political scientists in the 1920s.⁴⁰ Building on Ball’s discovery, James Farr undertook a comprehensive bibliographic inventory of Dewey’s influence on the field. He found that until the 1960s “political scientists, with a few noteworthy exceptions, overlooked or barely acknowledged Dewey; and the exceptions included those who seriously misrepresented, selectively used, or roundly rejected him.”⁴¹ Farr concluded that recent attempts by political scientists to claim Dewey as a founder of the field are wishful thinking based upon freshly minted folklore.

Reframing the Dewey–Lippmann exchange is a closely related move: Both the origins and interdisciplinary resonance of the reframing are linked to the struggles for paradigmatic pluralism within the disciplines that began in the 1960s. Footnotes, the DNA of good scholarship, reveal some patterns of influence within and across disciplines. Describing the exchange as “a classic, a key debate between two intellectual giants,” Goldfarb relies heavily on the original sources, but he refers readers to Robert Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (1991) “for an account of the exchange as it informs an understanding of institutional problems of American society” and to Christopher Lasch’s *The Revolt of the Elites* (1995) “for an account of the significance of the exchange in the understanding of populism.”⁴² Bellah et al. borrow their title from a 1937 book by Lippmann (*The Good Society*); and their

volume does examine facets of both men's work, including Dewey's conception of publics. Like Mills before them, however, Bellah et al. conceive of the work of the two thinkers as amenable to synthesis rather than locked in contest.⁴³

Lasch's reappearance in our bibliographic quest is more telling, but he arrives too late (1991) to have released the genie. He does, however, emerge as a crucial figure in disseminating the contemporary reframing of the Dewey–Lippmann exchange as a historically significant adversarial encounter. Moreover, he leads us directly to an earlier source. In both the 1991 and 1995 books, Lasch acknowledges that he relies on communication scholar James W. Carey's *Communication as Culture* (1989) for his reinterpretation of the Dewey–Lippmann exchange. He contends that "Carey's gloss is quite consistent with the general direction of Dewey's philosophy." However, deep in an endnote in the 1991 book, Lasch adds a qualifier. "If this is what Dewey meant" Lasch laments, "it is too bad he did not say so, in this particular book [*The Public and Its Problems*], more clearly and emphatically." By 1995, however, Carey graduated from Lasch's notes and is quoted repeatedly, authoritatively, and without qualifiers in the main text of *The Revolt of the Elites*. By then the revised frame was firmly in place.⁴⁴

The reframing actually began at least a decade earlier, but dramatically accelerated in the 1990s. Although Carey had earlier (1978 and 1980) described Dewey and Lippmann in collaborative terms, sharing a common agenda of "preserving democracy," by 1982 he began characterizing their relationship in adversarial terms, describing the exchange as a "debate" and a "conflict" in his essay "Mass Media: The Critical View," which was first published in a communication yearbook with a limited, discipline specific target audience.⁴⁵ That essay was republished seven years later in *Communication as Culture*. Carey went on to revisit the Dewey–Lippmann exchange on multiple occasions, and thereby exercised considerable, possibly even decisive influence in the reframing process.⁴⁶

The timing of the reframing and Carey's pivotal positioning can be more firmly established by examining biographies of Dewey and Lippmann. With one exception, biographies published before the 1990s make little if anything of the exchange.⁴⁷ If they do take note of it, they interpret Dewey's rejoinders as affirming Lippmann's diagnosis but seeking more radical cures for the ills of modern democracy. The exception, Alfonso J. Damico's *Individuality and Community* (1978), does not depart substantially from this interpretation, but Damico does offer an extensive (full chapter) and nuanced treatment of the exchange, which carefully marks the differences in Dewey and Lippmann's positions.⁴⁸ His work appeared right at the cusp of the reframing; and it may well have influenced Carey's revision, but there is no direct evidence to support this speculative claim.⁴⁹

Biographies published after 1990 invariably revisit the exchange. Robert B. Westbrook's *John Dewey and American Democracy* (1991), which Richard Rorty described as "far and away the best book on [Dewey] yet," may have helped inaugurate the tradition.⁵⁰ Westbrook's book has become an essential touchstone for all subsequent Dewey scholars and for anyone seriously interested in the Dewey–Lippmann exchange. Westbrook was Lasch's colleague at the University of Rochester;

and by virtue of its wide influence his book has played a significant role in instantiating the Carey–Lasch reframing of the exchange. Nevertheless, Westbrook’s careful rendering of the exchange itself actually cultivates some of the seeds of skepticism about the reframing that I harvest here. Lippmann’s most recent biographer, Barry D. Riccio (*Walter Lippmann—Odyssey of a Liberal*, 1996), also departs from the previous practice by foregrounding the exchange. By 1996, it was unavoidable: The Carey–Lasch–Westbrook bridge across time was firmly in place although Riccio rightly notes that “Lippmann fares less well in Lasch’s book than he does in Westbrook’s.”⁵¹

The politics of citation are also illuminating: Carey’s original article was without citations. Lasch cited Carey; subsequently Lasch was widely cited without reference to Carey. Westbrook cites Lasch, but as Westbrook’s influence has grown, recent interpreters of the exchange tend to cite Westbrook but not Lasch. With each of these moves, the reframing of the exchange acquires more authority but less transparency; and so the bibliographic version of the butterfly effect gains momentum.

Glossing the Gloss

In the chapter that has had such wide resonance, “Reconceiving ‘Mass’ and ‘Media,’” Carey does not pretend to offer systematic historical exegesis of Dewey and Lippmann’s work. He states this directly, “I will draw out just enough to focus Dewey’s conflict with Lippmann and to set the stage for the argument I wish to advance.”⁵² The argument Carey is referring to is his own Deweyan “ritual” theory of communication. Carey’s stage-setting occupies only eight pages in a chapter without notes, which includes a long quote from *The Public and Its Problems* but no direct textual references to Lippmann’s work. In subsequent publications, Carey refers back to this chapter to develop his interpretation of Dewey more fully, but he does not significantly expand his profile of Lippmann. In the reiterations Carey does, however, impute greater agency to Lippmann’s analysis. In 1996, he writes, “Lippmann, in effect, took the public out of politics and the politics out of public life. In a phrase of the moment, he depoliticized the public sphere.”⁵³ The latter is, of course, a reference to Habermas’ work. By 1996 Carey could consider his earlier claims verified. They had received broad interdisciplinary acceptance and assimilation—the de facto stamp of wide ranging peer review. Affirmation by Lasch, one of the foremost historians of the progressive era, would have been especially significant.

In Carey’s first articulation, upon which so much depends, Dewey and Lippmann function textually as tropes or foils. In Carey’s own words, they are “stage setters.” He positions them at opposite points in a fateful fork in the road of early twentieth century thought. Within the economy of Carey’s narrative, each carries the full weight of entire philosophical traditions, and Dewey represents the road not taken by media scholarship. Lippmann is positioned on the dark side, Cartesian, utilitarian, objectivist, atomist, positivist, instrumental reason, scientism, and pushed to the extreme limit the road to totalitarianism.⁵⁴ Carey wisely does not push Lippmann to that extreme, but some others who paint with similarly broad brushes do. For

example, Noam Chomsky equates Lippmann with Lenin.⁵⁵ When it comes down to disciplines—which was Carey’s original destination—Lippmann becomes the historical precursor and philosophical standard-bearer for the tradition in media research known as the “effects” approach, a tradition that Carey views as less productive than the ritual approach that he embraces.⁵⁶ Conversely, Dewey represents pragmatism, democracy, community, and communication as a humane and humanistic/hermeneutic practice in which everyone gets to participate in making meaning.

Dewey and Lippmann did not represent different philosophical traditions. Both were pragmatists and progressives during the period in question; they were both direct heirs to William James’ intellectual legacy and allies, not adversaries, in most progressive political and intellectual struggles. To be sure, they sometimes differed sharply on issues; however, they did so during the 1920s as democratic pragmatists.⁵⁷ They did move in different directions later. During his “controversialist” stage in the 1930s, when Dewey sought directly to provoke public debates with uncharacteristically fierce criticism, Lippmann was not spared; but to read later criticism back to the 1920s is a mistake.⁵⁸

Biographical evidence affirms this point. The archival evidence is limited.⁵⁹ Both men lived in New York City during the period under consideration; and Lippmann generally favored the telephone or face-to-face interaction with his important local contacts. Dewey and Lippmann did, however, exchange a few formal but friendly letters. More telling is the fact that just a few years after the Dewey–Lippmann exchange, a national celebration was planned to honor Dewey on the occasion of his seventieth birthday in 1929. Lippmann was one of a small number of prominent public figures invited to serve on the committee organizing the event.⁶⁰ This would indicate that Dewey’s closest associates regarded Lippmann as a Dewey admirer, not an adversary. Even two decades later, Lippmann is identified as one of a small circle of Dewey’s “associates in thought” in Dewey’s 1952 obituary in the *New York Times*—also an unlikely designation for a known antagonist.⁶¹

What really matters, however, is what Dewey actually said—how he framed his own response to Lippmann’s work. Scholars who use the adversarial reframing as the launch pad for a trip to the primary sources are usually surprised by what they find.

What Dewey Said

Dewey’s reviews of *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public* are positive, even extravagantly positive. Moreover, Dewey’s review of *The Phantom Public*, which is today regarded as the more anti-democratic of the two books, is even more uniformly positive than his review of *Public Opinion*. Indeed, it is because Dewey was so impressed with the two books that he decided to pursue the topic further in the Kenyon lectures and *The Public and Its Problems*. He directly announces this intention at the close of the review of *The Phantom Public*. What author could hope for more? America’s most famous living philosopher reviews two books in succession, offers effusive praise for both and claims the author has set an important new agenda for inquiry and democratic reform, and then continues the work himself.

The most often quoted line from Dewey's review of *Public Opinion* by those who frame the Dewey–Lippmann exchange as a conflict is Dewey's assertion that the book "is perhaps the most effective indictment of democracy as currently conceived ever penned."⁶² It is, however, important to note that this line comes at the end of the first paragraph, which is filled with praise for the book's "brilliancy," "illumination" and objectivity.

Dewey describes the first chapter, "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads," as "a more significant statement of the genuine 'problem of knowledge' than professional epistemological philosophers have managed to give."⁶³ He contends Lippmann "paints a beautiful picture" of the way politicians secure dramatic identification, and provides "one of the best criticisms I have ever read of the doctrine of the economic determinism of interest."⁶⁴ Dewey finds Lippmann's analysis to be so effective that it "shivers most of our illusions, and this particular Humpty Dumpty can never be put together again for anyone who reads these chapters with an open mind."⁶⁵ Dewey endorses as "inherently desirable" Lippmann's proposals to create intelligence bureaus to generate more reliable information for administration as well as his call to educate citizens so they can guard themselves against manipulation.⁶⁶ Dewey is, however, more optimistic about the possibilities of reforming the press than is Lippmann, the journalist and press analyst, who has direct experience with news production. Arguing that Lippmann's prescriptions are not daring enough to meet the crisis that he has diagnosed, Dewey calls for a "more thoroughgoing education than the education of officials, administrators and directors of industry," but he offers no guidance for achieving this general enlightenment.⁶⁷

In addition to his public praise for the book, Dewey also wrote Lippmann a cordial letter on May 4, 1922 (the day after the publication date of Dewey's review of *Public Opinion*). While some of the handwritten letter is illegible, Dewey says he is "glad" the book "is having the sales it needs," indicates he appreciates Lippmann's "reserve" in the "constructive part of the book," and concludes, "There is no book I've read in a very long time from which I learned so much or rec'd so many suggestions."⁶⁸

Dewey's review of *The Phantom Public* is cited less often than his review of *Public Opinion* in current chronicles of the Dewey–Lippmann exchange, although Dewey partisans are much more critical of *Phantom*. Yet, Dewey himself is even more positive describing *Phantom* as "if possible, even more pregnant" than *Public Opinion*, especially when it comes to "The Public itself."⁶⁹ Dewey's interpretation of *Phantom* differs sharply from the meanings that are imputed to it today. He sees Lippmann as restoring the public to a creative role in democracy. Moreover, Dewey even anticipates and attempts to disarm others' hostile readings: "While one might cite passages which, if divorced from the context, would give the impression that Mr. Lippmann was permanently 'off' democracy, Mr. Lippmann's essay is in reality a statement of faith in a pruned and temperate democratic theory, and a presentation of methods by which a reasonable conception of democracy can be made to work, not absolutely, but at least better than democracy works under an exaggerated and undisciplined notion of the public and its powers."⁷⁰ Dewey describes *Phantom* as a "constructive" contribution because it tempers romantic notions of public

participation: “To be workable,” Dewey contends, “democracy demands allayed passions and clarified understanding.”⁷¹ He also defends Lippmann against charges of elitism by describing the journalist’s concept of “insiders” as a realistic recognition of how things actually work “whether or not we like it.”⁷² Further, Dewey attributes what can be read as anti-populism in *Phantom* as Lippmann’s reaction to populism’s influence in two major controversies of the day—prohibition and the campaign of Christian fundamentalists to outlaw teaching evolutionary theory in public schools (the Scopes’ Trial).⁷³ The review is positive throughout. As James Gouinlock notes, in the introduction to the volume of Dewey’s collected papers that contains the review, “Dewey appears to have no quarrel with Lippmann but regards *The Phantom Public* as a beginning to the rethinking of democracy.”⁷⁴ Even the title of Dewey’s review, “Practical Democracy” conveys Dewey’s view of *Phantom* as a plea for democratic reform; and his concluding comment seems to express interest in collaborating in the reform.

The Public and Its Problems is Dewey’s attempt to do just that. Space prohibits full analysis of the book: For thorough and rigorous analyses, readers are referred to Damico, Riccio, and Westbrook. My account is limited to aspects of the work directly relevant to the exchange. Dewey openly acknowledges his debts to Lippmann. Affirming, with Lippmann that “the Public seems to be lost; it is certainly bewildered,” Dewey cites *Phantom* in a footnote and adds, “to this as well as to his *Public Opinion*, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness, not only as to this particular point, but for ideas involved in my entire discussion even when it reaches conclusions diverging from his.”⁷⁵ Throughout most of the book, Dewey affirms, amplifies, and develops Lippmann’s diagnosis. The most significant addition is Dewey’s hope that the Great Society can evolve into a “Great Community.”

Dewey considers Lippmann’s focus on institutional politics too narrow, and argues that democracy must pervade all institutions and relationships. Dewey is surely right that human emancipation cannot be realized in the political sphere if it is not nourished by the wider culture; elsewhere Lippmann makes similar claims.⁷⁶ In developing this broader line of reasoning (promising though it may be), Dewey shifts the terms of engagement and leaves aside Lippmann’s more limited and grounded concern. In effect, Dewey affirms Lippmann’s realist diagnosis, but then turns to the more speculative philosophical question: How might the modern social order be reformed so that democratic publics would be possible? This shift may contribute to reading Dewey’s effort as adversarial rather than as amplifying.

For Dewey, face-to-face deliberation—talking, listening, and collective deliberation—is *democracy*. How this kind of deliberation can be built into political institutions and have meaningful impact on political decision making in the Great Community is never specified. The nearest Dewey comes is to identifying specific institutional criteria for the formation of the Great Community is to claim: (1) citizens must have “the intelligence [knowledge] needed, under the operation of self-interest, to engage in political affairs” and (2) there must be a combination of broad suffrage, frequent elections, and majority rule, and that these processes must function in ways that can ensure that elected officials will be responsive to the desires

and interests of the public.⁷⁷ In Dewey's Great Community, experts will still stock the data banks with reliable information; however, citizens (along with Lippmann's administrators, businessmen, and journalists) will be equipped by a new form of inquiry-based education to access these data banks and talk about what they find in them when it is in their self-interest to do so.

Dewey accepts Lippmann's view that public opinion is currently part of the commodity system and therefore amenable to manipulation; his solutions diverge from Lippmann's in ways that reflect his own evolving theories of knowledge and educational reform. Dewey would reform education to produce autonomous critical thinkers capable of identifying and intelligently pursuing their own interests. He would reform the press by permitting reporters "to work freely."⁷⁸ Because "presentation is fundamentally important, and presentation is a question of art," Dewey maintains that reporters must be artists, even "sensationalists," in some as yet unrecognized good sense of the term, who "break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness" and reach an audience at the deeper levels of their being as the great novelists do.⁷⁹ Conversely, Lippmann regards sensationalism, as it was actually practiced by journalists, as the heart of the problem. Indeed, Lippmann even claims that dry and boring presentation of the news might be therapeutic to a body politic satiated by a steady diet of lurid crime stories and political scandals.⁸⁰

Who would not prefer Dewey's hopeful offerings of communication, community, and communion to Lippmann's austere menu of method, asceticism, and skeptical realism? Lippmann functioned as a sociologist analyzing existing evidence and describing *what is*. Dewey was at one with his philosophy—an artist and ethicist envisioning *what could be* in the interest of moving us closer to a better world. To be sure, real differences separate Dewey and Lippmann, but they are degrees of difference between two men standing under a shared philosophical umbrella.

Conclusion

What Dewey actually said about Lippmann's position directly contradicts many of the claims made by contemporary adversarial framings of the exchange. He unambiguously affirmed Lippmann's diagnosis, anticipated and even tried to counter charges that Lippmann's position is elitist and anti-democratic. Dewey may have erred on this last point depending on how "elitism" is defined, but so do those who so readily dismiss Lippmann as anti-democratic. William Graebner may come closest to getting it right when he claims that elitist readings of Lippmann are incomplete: "To define *Public Opinion* as an antidemocratic book is to fail to understand how committed Lippmann was to a system of social engineering based on the forms and processes of democracy."⁸¹ Lippmann saw institutional reform, grounded in democratic rules and transparent procedures, as democracy's best defense.

Lippmann was not alone in his youthful embrace of social engineering; most progressives, including Dewey, shared this enthusiasm to a greater or lesser degree. It is important to remember that professionalism, efficiency, and detached inquiry had very different connotations a century ago; they were understood as positive correctives

to waste, ineptitude, paternalism, patronage, nepotism, political corruption, and corporate greed.⁸² Progressives believed that the Great Society posed complex problems that required specialized knowledge and methodologies, and that the scientific method produced the most reliable form of knowledge. Yet, they also believed in social justice and forms of meritocracy, which would democratize access to educational opportunities. The “elitism” of the progressives was based upon talent and initiative, but they balanced it with commitments to strong state protections for the underprivileged and support for industrial democracy. The elitism that recent advocates of the bipolar framing of the Dewey–Lippmann exchange so readily attribute to Lippmann can, in my judgment, be more accurately described as sociological or ethical realism: Lippmann’s position resembles and, in some respects, resonates rather closely with the views of the early-twentieth-century German sociologist Max Weber.⁸³

The issue of elitism does, however, require further contextualizing. The concept of democracy deployed in the Dewey–Lippmann exchange is far more radical and inclusive than the political theories that informed the views of the founders. It is also significantly more egalitarian than the actual practices of democracy in the US today. The public of Lippmann’s *Public Opinion* includes ‘everyman’ (and woman) of all races and stations in life. The role that he ascribes to public opinion and then declares unworkable—direct democracy—is an artifact of late nineteenth and early twentieth century socialist, populist, and progressive *hopes*, not a lineal rendering of the US Constitution’s recipe for representative democracy. Similarly, Lippmann’s heuristic of the omniscient citizen is a projection of what functional governance by public opinion would require of citizens. In short, he erected a model of radical democracy and interrogated its limits. Dewey acknowledged those limits but hoped to find ways to transcend them. Lippmann focused on the challenges the Great Society posed to the ideal of full participatory democracy, while Dewey imagined a better future—the creation of a Great Community in which a new kind of dialogic communication would produce an enlightened democratic public capable of self-governance. Habermas’ vision of a dialogic democracy revisits the problem of the public, and in significant respects reproduces Dewey’s impasse.

Nevertheless there are good reasons why friends of democracy are currently rallying at Camp Dewey. Pragmatism has much to offer and Dewey was its best known proponent. Pragmatism is open, tolerant, and experimental: Its conceptions of fact and truth are fluid and contingent without succumbing to the radical relativism that characterizes most branches of postmodernism.

By forcing us to take sides, the binary framing of the Dewey–Lippmann exchange does a disservice to both men. Understanding Dewey’s response as an amplification of Lippmann’s diagnosis and an unsuccessful search for a way out of the crises of democracy confronts us with more intractable challenges. As even Lippmann’s most ardent critics concede, no one has successfully refuted his analysis of the problem of the public.⁸⁴ Denouncing and dismissing him evades the issues that both Lippmann and Dewey struggled with throughout their lives—how to preserve and expand the forms of democracy that are possible in complex, heterogeneous, technologically

advanced societies. Neither Lippmann nor Dewey found fully satisfactory answers. They did, however, contribute substantially to our understanding of some of the contradictions of modern American democracy and to illuminating the formidable challenges facing social movements committed to advancing strong democracy.

Both Dewey and Lippmann are still worth reading, but not because their classic contributions to American social thought can solve our problems. That is not history's charge. Yet, history still matters. Read critically, history can sometimes help us avoid reproducing our intellectual ancestors' errors; it can also amplify our analytic powers by conserving energy that would otherwise be depleted by reinventing the metaphoric wheel. Too often, I think, enthusiasts rallying at Camp Dewey have spun that wheel with wishful thinking, nostalgically celebrating Dewey's mystic vision of the Great Community rather than mobilizing their considerable intellectual gifts to confront the daunting challenges that currently confront us both as scholars and citizens—diminished democracy secured by globalization, neo-liberal market fundamentalism, American hegemony, neo-imperial warfare, and the multiple forms of violent resistances these forces ignite.

Although it may be “just academic,” a sense of history also matters even to fields of study primarily focused on the present and future. Without it, they cannot appreciate or draw upon the accumulated wisdom of their intellectual ancestors or construct credible theories. As we have seen, even some of our best scholars can be lead astray by eloquent figures of speech when they fail to securely ground their claims in historical research.

As self-selected heirs to the traditions of critical/cultural studies, we incur special obligations to embrace and emulate the strong historical sensibilities that distinguish the work of our intellectual ancestors—Marx, Weber, Adorno, Benjamin, Arendt, Thompson, Williams, Marcuse, Schiller, Habermas, Hall, and many others. I include James W. Carey among these ancestors, despite my critique of the interpretive mischief generated by his much too pregnant trope. With the possible exception of Hanno Hardt, Carey did as much as any contemporary media scholar to foreground the importance of historical inquiry within the field. Those efforts are finally beginning to gain traction with the recent emergence in media studies of a “new,” archival based historiography.⁸⁵

Self-critique—reflexivity—is a principal obligation of critical media scholarship. It is therefore incumbent upon us to take the lead in exposing the interpretive mischief of this misleading trope as well as countering the continued circulation of the legend it cultivates. If we fail to dismantle this “great set piece in American political thought,” the “new history” of American media and cultural studies will only reproduce the disciplinary folklore that it seeks to replace.

Notes

- [1] John Dewey, *Essays in Experimental Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), 330.
- [2] Dewey's review of *Public Opinion* was published in *The New Republic* 30 (May 3, 1922): 286–88. It is also available in *John Dewey: The Middle Works 13: 1921–1922*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston

(Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 337–44. Dewey's review of *The Phantom Public* was published in the *New Republic* 45 (December 2, 1925): 52–54. It is available in *John Dewey: The Later Works 2: 1925–1927* ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 213–20.

- [3] The following selective bibliography includes works that revisit the exchange which are not cited elsewhere in these notes. Eric Alterman, *Who Speaks for America? Why Democracy Matters in Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); and *Sound and Fury: The Making of the Punditocracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). Robert Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Democracy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, 2 (2004): 189–211. Thomas Bender, "The Thinning of American Culture," in *Public Discourse in America*, ed. Stephen P. Steinberg and Judith Rodin (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), 27–34. Dell P. Chamlin and Janet T. Knoedler, "The Media, the News, and Democracy: Revisiting the Dewey–Lippmann Debate," *Journal of Economic Issues* 40, 1 (2006): 135–52. John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Peter Levine, *The New Progressive Era: Toward a Fair and Deliberative Democracy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000). Noortje Marres, "Issues Spark a Public into Being: A Key but Forgotten Point in the Lippmann–Dewey Debate," in *Making Things Public* ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 208–17. David K. Perry, *Theory and Research in Mass Communication* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002). John Durham Peters, "Democracy and American Mass Communication Research: Dewey, Lippmann, Lazarsfeld," *Communication* 11 (1989): 199–220; "Satan and Savior: Mass Communication in Progressive Thought," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 (1989): 247–63. Jay Rosen, *What are Journalists For?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999). Gretchen Soderlund, "Rethinking a Curricular Icon: The Institutional and Ideological Foundations of Walter Lippmann," *The Communication Review* 8, 3 (2005): 307–27. Slavko Splichal, *Public Opinion: Developments and Controversies in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999). Mark Whipple, "The Dewey–Lippmann Debate Today," *Sociological Theory* 23, 2 (2005): 156–78.
- [4] Michael Schudson, "The Public Journalism Movement and Its Problems" in *The Politics of News*, ed. Doris Graeber, Pippa Norris, and Denis McQuail (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1998), 132–49 and "The 'Lippmann–Dewey Debate' and the Invention of Walter Lippmann as an Anti-Democrat 1985–1996," forthcoming. Peter Simonson, "Pragmatism and Communication," in *American Pragmatism and Communication Research*, ed. David K. Perry (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 13–14. Peters (cited above) can also be counted among the dissidents as he subsequently revised his position on the exchange in "Why Dewey Wasn't So Right and Lippmann Wasn't So Wrong," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Montreal, May 1997, and in *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- [5] Eric A. MacGilvray, "Experience as Experiment: Some Consequences of Pragmatism for Democratic Theory," *American Journal of Political Science* 43, 2 (1999): 3.
- [6] Contra the contention of Rich Swift, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Democracy* (London: Verso, 2002), 93.
- [7] Lippmann's descriptive phrase is widely quoted without reference to its context—first used in *Liberty and the News* (1920) and repeated in *Public Opinion*. When it is read in context, there is no doubt that Lippmann intends it as a critique of propaganda, publicity, public relations, and of newspaper owners and publishers who use the press to promote their own political or moral views. Yet some Lippmann critics, including Chomsky, invert the meaning charging Lippmann with advocating the "manufacture of consent." Dewey understood Lippmann's intent and used the phrase, "manufacture of public opinion" as Lippmann intended. Dewey, "A Critique of American Civilization," *John Dewey: The Later Works 3*:

- 1927–1928, 141. Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1991, 1997).
- [8] I thank an anonymous reviewer of this journal for suggesting use of the butterfly concept.
- [9] James W. Carey, “Public Sphere,” plenary address presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Chicago, May 1996.
- [10] The feminist critique of Habermas, to which he has been receptive, is now extensive. Some of the major sources are Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989). Johanna Meehan, ed., *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). Joan B. Landes, ed., *Feminism, the Public and Private* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Feminists have engaged with the revival of pragmatism but, to my knowledge, have not dealt directly with the Dewey–Lippmann exchange. See Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Women, with rare exceptions, are absent from the discussion of the Dewey–Lippmann exchange.
- [11] See Michael Schudson, “The Trouble with Experts—And Why Democracy Needs Them,” *Theory and Society* 35, 5–6 (2006) and “The ‘Lippmann-Dewey Debate’ . . .” (cited above); and Sue Curry Jansen, “Walter Lippmann, Straw Man of Communication History,” in *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories* ed. David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 71–112.
- [12] For powerful pleas for historical approaches to media and communication, see Mary S. Mander, *Communications in Transition: Issues and Debates in Current Research* (New York: Praeger, 1983), 12; and Hanno Hardt, *Critical Communication Studies: Communication, History, and Theory in America* (London: Routledge, 1992). Both maintain that it is impossible to effectively theorize communication without an historical approach.
- [13] Lippmann discusses his conception of science in *Drift and Mastery* (New York: Michael Kennerley, 1914).
- [14] Dewey, Review of “Public Opinion,” 288.
- [15] Dewey states his desire to return to the philosophical aspects of Lippmann’s argument in the final paragraph of his review of *The Phantom Public*; and he again affirms his “indebtedness” to Lippmann in *The Public and its Problems*, 116, n. 1.
- [16] Reviews in non-academic publications were located through *Book Review Digest*. Complete citations are R. M. Lovett, “A Real Public,” *New Republic* 52 (August 24, 1927): 286–88. Harold Laski, “Problems of Democracy,” *The Saturday Review of Literature* IV, 12 (October 15, 1927): 198–99. Henry Neumann, “Can the State Be Useful,” *Survey* 59 (November 1, 1927): 162. R. L. Duffus, “The Public and Its Problems,” *New York Times* (October 23, 1927): 15. Sterling L. Lamprecht, “Philosophy Put in Touch With Affairs,” *New York Herald Tribune Books* (November 27, 1927): 4. Anon, “The Public and its Problems,” *Boston Transcript* (November 12, 1927): 8.
- [17] Although the figures are rough, as they include all entries, articles, reviews, commentaries, indexes, covers in electronic databases, etc., they nevertheless indicate significant levels of interest. *The American Journal of Sociology* lists 696 entries for Dewey and 109 for Lippmann. *The American Sociological Review* lists 499 for Dewey and 75 for Lippmann. *Social Forces* lists 227 for Dewey and 52 for Lippmann. Interest in Lippmann was stronger in all three journals before 1940 when his work could still be viewed as sociological; after 1940 his books and journalism focused more directly on foreign policy. *Social Forces* seemed especially interested in Lippmann who was the lead author of an article in an early issue, “The South and the New Society,” *Social Forces* 6, 1 (1927): 1–5. Despite the title, the article is essentially a brief reiteration of the argument of *Public Opinion*. Conversely interest in Dewey was greater after 1940 in all three journals.

- [18] The reviews by sociologists include Robert E. Park, "Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann," *The American Journal of Sociology* 28, 2 (1922): 232–34. George A. Lundberg, "The Phantom Public by Walter Lippmann," *Social Forces* 4, 3 (1926): 662–64. Harold D. Lasswell, "The Phantom Public by Walter Lippmann," *The American Journal of Sociology* 31, 4 (1926): 533–35. Malcolm Willy, "The Phantom Public by Walter Lippmann," *Social Forces* 4, 4 (1926): 854–58. L. L. Bernard, "The Public and Its Problems," *Social Forces* 7, 1 (1928): 152–56. Robert E. Park, "The Public and Its Problems," *The American Journal of Sociology* 34, 6 (1929): 1192–194.
- [19] Park also wrote a glowing review of Lippmann's *Liberty and the News* in *American Journal of Sociology* 27, 1 (1921):116.
- [20] Willey, "The Phantom Public by Walter Lippmann," 855.
- [21] T. V. Smith, *The Philosophical Review* 38, 2 (1929): 177–80. *The Public and Its Problems* was also reviewed in *The Journal of Philosophy* 26, 12 (6 Jun 1929): 329–35, by William Ernest Hocking, who took the philosophical high road, positioning the work within the long history of Lockean democratic thought and makes no reference, direct or implied, to Lippmann or then-current arguments about publics and public opinion. For an account of Lippmann's location on the liberal–conservative continuum vis-à-vis the elitists of the 1920's and the iconoclast Mencken, see Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980); Steven Biel, *Independent Intellectuals in the United States, 1910–1945* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); and most tellingly Lippmann's own analysis of the elitist/aristocratic basis of Mencken's contempt for American democratic culture in "H. L. Mencken," in Lippmann's *Public Persons* (New York: Liveright, 1976), 77–81.
- [22] Virginia Rankin Sedman, "Some Interpretations of Public Opinion," *Social Forces* 10, 3 (1932): 339–50.
- [23] Floyd Allport, *Institutional Behavior: Essays Toward a Re-interpreting of Contemporary Social Organization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933). Allport indicates he consulted with Dewey in writing this chapter, which reads like a long, analytical review essay. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer of this journal for this reference.
- [24] William Albig, *Public Opinion* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939).
- [25] Joseph R. Starr, "Political Parties and Public Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 3, 3 (1939): 436–48.
- [26] C. Wright Mills, *Sociology and Pragmatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).
C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).
- [27] Frank J. Sorauf, "The Public Interest Reconsidered," *The Journal of Politics* 19, 4 (1957): 616–39.
- [28] Heinz Eulau, "From Public Opinion to Public Philosophy: Walter Lippmann's Classic Reexamined," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 15, 4 (1956): 448. Eulau and Kaplan (cited below) refer to Lippmann's book, *The Public Philosophy* (1955). Lippmann biographer Ronald Steel reports Lippmann preferred the title "Essays in the Public Philosophy" to convey the tentative nature of his conclusions. See Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*.
- [29] Eulau, "From Public Opinion to Public Philosophy," 451.
- [30] Eulau, "From Public Opinion to Public Philosophy," 451.
- [31] Sidney Kaplan, "Social Engineers as Saviors: Effects of World War I on Some Liberals," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, 3 (1956): 369.
- [32] Kaplan, "Social Engineers as Saviors," 348.
- [33] Kaplan, "Social Engineers as Saviors," 348.
- [34] Kaplan, "Social Engineers as Saviors," 368.
- [35] Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, original 1949). Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955). David W. Noble, *The Paradox of Progressive Thought* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958). Charles Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly,*

- Weyl, Lippmann, and the Progressive Era 1900–1925 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961). Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America: 1889–1963* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965).
- [36] Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991). Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995). The relevant chapter in the latter book had both a pre- and post- publication history, first as “The Lost Art of Argument,” *Gannett Center Journal* (Spring 1990): 1–10, which was then republished in Gannett Center (renamed Freedom Forum) *Media Studies Journal* 9, 1 (1995): 81–91.
- [37] James Scott Johnson, *Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006): 17.
- [38] I thank Michael Schudson for calling Purcell’s work to my attention. Edward A. Purcell, Jr., *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1973).
- [39] Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *Civility and Subversion: The Intellectual in Democratic Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- [40] Terrence Ball, “An Ambivalent Alliance: Political Science and American Democracy,” in *Political Science in History: Research Programs and Political Traditions* ed. John S. Dryzek, Stephen T. Leonard, and James F. Farr (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41–65.
- [41] James Farr, “John Dewey and American Political Science,” *American Journal of Political Science* 43, 2 (1999): 522.
- [42] Goldfarb, *Civility and Subversion*, 226.
- [43] Robert N. Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992). David Goodman also offers a brief genealogy of recent treatments of the exchange, which include: Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics* (2000), Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals* (1999), Eric Alterman, *Who Speaks for America?* (1998), Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (1998), Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (1998), Kevin Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public* (1998), Schudson, *The Good Citizen* (1998), and Robert H. Wiebe *Self-Rule* (1995). See David Goodman, “Democracy and Public Discussion in the Progressive and New Deal Eras: From Civic Competence to the Expression of Opinion,” *Studies in American Political Development* 18 (Fall 2004): 81–111. These are important sources, which present historically informed interpretations of the exchange; but by the mid-1990s, the reframing of the exchange as a great debate was already firmly instantiated in discussions of the progressive era and deliberative democracy.
- [44] Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 556, and *The Revolt of the Elites*, 171–73.
- [45] I am indebted to Jefferson Pooley for calling to my attention to the fact that in his early work Carey characterized the relationship between Dewey and Lippmann in terms that are largely consistent with the position I support in this paper. To my knowledge, Carey did not explain his rationale for reversing his position anywhere in his published work. Carey expressed the early view in the following publications: “AEJ Presidential Address, A Plea for the University Tradition,” *Journalism Quarterly* 55, 4 (1978): 846–55; “Review Essay: Social Theory and Communication Theory,” *Communication Research* 5, 3 (1978): 357–68; “Comments on The Weaver–Gray Paper,” *Mass Communication Review Yearbook 1* (1980): 152–55. The reframing begins with James W. Carey, “Mass Media: The Critical View,” *Communication Yearbook V* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1982), re-titled and reprinted as “Reconceiving ‘Mass’ and ‘Media,’” in Carey, *Communication and Culture: Essays in Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 69–88.
- [46] James W. Carey, “The Press and Public Discourse,” *The Center Magazine* 20, 2 (1987): 4–32. Carey, “Commentary: Communication and the Progressives,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 (1989): 264–82. Carey, “The Press, Public Opinion, and Public Discourse: On the Edge of the Postmodern,” in *The Press, Public Opinion, and Public Discourse*, ed. Theodore L. Glasser and Charles T. Salmon (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 373–402,

which was republished in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, ed. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 228–57. Carey, “The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communication Research,” in *American Communication Research: The Remembered History*, ed. Everette E. Dennis and Ellen Wartella (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996), 21–38, which was republished in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 14–33.

- [47] Listing all of the biographies of Dewey and Lippmann is beyond the scope of this essay. Both have attracted a vast amount of biographical interest. Ronald Steel’s *Walter Lippmann and The American Century*, which runs close to 700 pages is regarded as the definitive treatment of Lippmann’s public life. D. Steven Blum’s *Walter Lippmann: Cosmopolitanism in the Century of Total War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982) offers the most insightful analysis of Lippmann’s philosophical studies. Barry D. Riccio’s *Walter Lippmann—Odyssey of a Liberal* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994) provides a good historically informed account of both Lippmann’s public life and public philosophy.
- [48] Alfonso J. Damico, *Individuality and Community* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1978).
- [49] Damico is cited by Westbrook but, to my knowledge, Carey and Lasch do not cite him.
- [50] Richard Rorty, “Review of John Dewey and American Democracy by Robert B. Westbrook,” *The New Leader* 74 (May 20, 1991): 13. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Westbrook’s book is widely regarded as the definitive contemporary biography, although there are several other valuable recent intellectual portraits including Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), and Raymond D. Boisvert, *John Dewey: Rethinking Our Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).
- [51] Riccio, *Walter Lippmann—Odyssey of a Liberal*, 76.
- [52] Carey, “Reconceiving ‘Mass’ and ‘Media,’” 79.
- [53] Carey, “The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communication Research,” 23.
- [54] Carey, “The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communication Research.
- [55] Noam Chomsky, *Media Control*. Chomsky is, however, no admirer of Dewey either.
- [56] Unlike some who adopt his ritual approach, Carey does not throw out the baby with the bath water; he acknowledges the value of the body of research produced by the “effects tradition,” which he contends took its inspiration from Lippmann’s *Public Opinion*. Carey, “Overcoming Resistance to Cultural Studies,” *Communication and Culture*, 89–110.
- [57] James Hoopes is critical of both Dewey and Lippmann’s versions of pragmatism, but he firmly establishes both of their credentials as pragmatists. Hoopes, *Community Denied: The Wrong Turn of Pragmatic Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- [58] Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 329.
- [59] The Lippmann archive itself is enormous, but it contains only a small correspondence between Dewey and Lippmann consisting of cordial business letters exchanged from 1917 to 1930 regarding publications and invitations to public events. The correspondence is, however, incomplete as the writers refer to letters or notes that are not in the archive. Dewey’s early letters are handwritten and more informal than Lippmann’s, which appear to have been dictated to his secretary, which was Lippmann’s standard practice. *Walter Lippmann Papers*, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
- [60] Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*.
- [61] “Dr. John Dewey Dead at 92: Philosopher a Noted Liberal,” *New York Times* (June 2, 1952): 1, 21.
- [62] Dewey, “Review of Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann,” 337. Citations from Dewey’s reviews are from the collected works, cited in full above.
- [63] Dewey, “Review of Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann,” 339.
- [64] Dewey, “Review of Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann,” 339.
- [65] Dewey, “Review of Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann,” 340.

- [66] Dewey, "Review of Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann," 344.
- [67] Dewey, "Review of Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann," 344.
- [68] John Dewey, Letter, 4 May 1922. *Walter Lippmann Papers*, Yale University Library.
- [69] Dewey, "Practical Democracy: Review of The Phantom Public . . .," 213.
- [70] Dewey, "Practical Democracy: Review of The Phantom Public . . .," 213.
- [71] Dewey, "Practical Democracy: Review of The Phantom Public . . .," 214.
- [72] Dewey, "Practical Democracy: Review of The Phantom Public . . .," 217.
- [73] Lippmann wrote a book that continues to have resonance today about fundamentalism and evolutionary theory. See Lippmann, *American Inquisitors: A Commentary on Dayton and Chicago* (New York: Macmillan, 1928).
- [74] James Gouinlock, "Introduction" to *John Dewey: The Later Works 2: 1925–1927*, xxiii.
- [75] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 116–17.
- [76] Lippmann maintained that stereotypical thinking infects all areas of life and offered examples of the ways in which it influenced thinking about race, class, and gender; however, the central problematic of *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public* is the gap between modern American theory and practice of politics. See also Peter Bachrach's *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), which recognizes that modern conditions may require strategic decision-making by the few but argues that if decision-making is to be normatively responsive to democratic governance, it must enlist the participation of and remain accountable to the many.
- [77] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 157.
- [78] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 182.
- [79] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 187.
- [80] Lippmann maintained that sensationalism was part of the crisis in journalism in *Liberty and the News* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920) and reiterated this point in *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public*.
- [81] William Graebner, *The Engineering of Consent: Democracy and Authority in Twentieth Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1987), 64.
- [82] Kevin Mattson points out "we cannot so easily dismiss them [the progressives] as technocrats or elitists" because "they did not share our contemporary belief that efficiency and democracy are often antagonistic." See Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public: The Struggle for Urban Participation During the Progressive Era* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998), 11. Prior to World War II, most Americans saw professionalism, with its commitment to technical values and self-regulation through peer review as a counterweight balancing the reductive logic of the pursuit of corporate profit. See Thomas L. Haskell, "Professionalism versus Capitalism: Tawney, Durkheim, and C. S. Peirce on Disinterestedness of Professional Communities," in his *Objectivity is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 78–114. Lippmann lived long enough to experience the results of progressivism's misguided faith in professionalism and to amend his views.
- [83] Kloppenberg examines some of these resonances. See James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
- [84] Eaulau, "From Public Opinion to Public Philosophy . . ." Westbrook conceded the same point in Robert B. Westbrook, "Doing Dewey: An Autobiographical Fragment," *Transactions of the Charles Peirce Society* XXIX (Fall 1993): 506.
- [85] For a long time, historian Daniel J. Czitrom's deeply sourced *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) remained a singular contribution to a serious history of the field. Czitrom acknowledges an enormous debt to Carey for his support and encouragement in developing this project. Daniel J. Czitrom, "Twenty-five Years Later," *Forum, Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, 5 (2007): 481–85. Hardt pioneered the new history in *Critical Communication Studies*:

Communication, History and Theory in America. For a recent collection of the “new history” of media and communication which includes a number of contributions based upon archival sources, see *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memory*; also see Jefferson Pooley’s chapter in that volume, “The New History of Mass Communication Research,” 43–69, for an incisive articulation of an agenda for the “new history.”

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