No Values, No Democracy: The Essential Partisanship of a Civic Engagement Movement

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The past several decades have witnessed increasing efforts to advance universities as institutions supporting democratic civic education in the United States. Unfortunately, civic engagement initiatives frequently are framed as apolitical, which I argue is either under-theorized or disingenuous. In this article, I first review perceptions of values, partisanship, and political agendas in the contemporary university. Second, I turn to the historic role of democratic values within the American educational system. Third, I provide a conception of civil society useful for considering the ways in which democratic values must be continuously nurtured in the face of countervailing pressures from the market and the state. Fourth, I employ that lens to consider national trends in understanding of and support for education and related issues. Fifth, I move on to assert, drawing on Rorty (1998) and Schwartz (2008), that universities have surrendered their historic roles as civil society supporters of democratic values. Sixth, I consider implications for service-learning and community engagement before demonstrating how the human rights scholarly community offers a helpful model of continuously critical values commitment. And finally, I close with a vision of universities taking clear positions in support of democratic values.

An audience member asked a question following a panel at the October 2012 Eastern Region Campus Compact Conference:

> We've been doing civically engaged work through Campus Compact and other organizations for twenty to thirty-some odd years. How come we're losing? Why is it that we're a more socially unjust country than we were? We have higher levels of inequality, there's a return of segregation and racism, a new attack on women's rights, why are we actually—seemingly—losing this battle?

Uncomfortable laughter throughout the room was followed by a panelist's response:

> We do have this long history of providing service, but I actually think there's been this disconnect between service and civic action…To be honest it's a new area for our work with regard to working with faculty. We worked with faculty on how to get service into a syllabus; how do you re-orient a class that was always held in our classroom building to working with community partners?…[When challenging, contested values questions arise] the majority of faculty members that I know, including myself, I'd much rather head for the door. It's scary stuff. We don't necessarily know how to do that. And I think when we start talking about the kinds of work we're doing in the community we get into this tricky thing, tricky position of saying you are part of a democracy here. And because of that it's not just

about working with a community and understanding its issue. You also got to think about the policy that's behind this issue, the structures that are supporting homelessness, the structures that are supporting hunger.

This exchange implies that negative social phenomena are on the rise in America today and these phenomena are matters the civic engagement movement might address. Are national-level increases in inequity, a resurgence of racism, an increase in poverty and homelessness, and an attack on women's rights[1] causes for concern when evaluating the efficacy of the civic engagement movement? I argue that they are, and I further argue that the ability to demonstrate why these phenomena are inimical to democracy is one avenue toward seeing the difference between *educating for democracy* and *encouraging civic engagement*. The former calls the question of equal rights and treatment for all Americans, while the latter asserts the importance of civic participation without necessarily considering a national community or connection to overarching policy structures. Democracy requires a broad national community of other-affiliation, where all citizens recognize one another's inherent dignity and community membership. Recognition of that common membership and community calls for policies that ensure each citizen experiences democratic rights that, at an absolute minimum, provide equal opportunity to participate meaningfully in democratic life.

The civic engagement movement arguably has existed on the uncomfortable edge between addressing pressing community issues and maintaining a kind of political or partisan neutrality in classroom discussions. This edge is imaginary and unnecessary. Identifying and grappling with the historic and contemporary meaning of democracy will draw attention to necessary democratic values, improve the quality of classroom discourse, and increase our ability to address our most challenging social ills.

Values commitments are central to democracy. This realization will at times put democracy's supporters at odds with other contemporary political players. It follows that any university attempting to educate students to become democratic citizens—or serve as an institutional citizen itself—must wrestle with and address the implications of these values commitments in the classroom and in public life. While I will not precisely define democracy in this article, I will call attention to a few essentials of democracy (moral equality, other-affiliation), raise the question of other components of democracy (equal access to public education), and demonstrate how attentiveness to the characteristics of democracy involves values discussions and choices that must be central to any civic engagement movement that intends to support American Democracy.

This article proceeds through a series of observations and arguments, the philosophical and historical underpinnings of which are clarified in the body of the text. It develops as follows. First, contemporary suspicion of political agendas and partisanship in the university is contrasted with a review of the historical role the American educational system has played in consciously promoting and nurturing democracy and democratic values. Second, attentiveness to the relationship between civil society, the state, and our capitalist economic system suggests that robust popular support for democratic values will wane if we do not explicitly advance the values—such as basic moral equality and the existence of a strong system of public education—essential to building the grand historical project that is democracy. Third, for the past half century, the academic community has steadily and quietly surrendered its formerly robust role in supporting and advancing democratic values against overbearing market and state structures. Fourth, the human rights community offers an example of how we could advance specific democratic values in higher education while simultaneously supporting the essential university (and democratic society) commitment to robust, open, and critical discourse. The article closes with a clear articulation of the possibility for democratic values commitments in the classroom, for institutional leadership, and in national discourse.

Contemporary Views of Values and Nonpartisanship in Higher Education

In a March 2012 article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Peter Wood, President of the National Association of Scholars, criticized the Obama administration's efforts to build more and better citizens. The entire effort, he wrote, makes "higher learning a hand maiden to ideology. It is an approach that has little patience for colleges and universities as an independent and autonomous part of civil society, and instead makes them subordinate to political aims." Wood believes that the proper role of universities is "the scientific pursuit of truth." Scholars such as Wood and Stanley Fish argue that the university is not a place for addressing social issues or developing values, while activists such as David Horowitz insist on "academic diversity" to balance the documented left-leaning of the professoriate (Butin, 2010).

As the examples below will demonstrate, perhaps in part as an attempt to side-step some of the controversies mentioned above, service-learning and community engagement are often framed in terms suggesting they are apolitical. After the Campus Compact Presidents' Declaration (1999) identified current poverty and unemployment rates, it reads:

> Higher education—its leaders, students, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni—remains a key institutional force in our culture that can respond, and can do so *without a political agenda* [emphasis added] and with the intellectual and professional capacities today's challenges so desperately demand[2]. (Campus Compact, p. 2).

In a similar vein, the major online discussion space for Learn and Serve America stipulates, "The email discussion list is supported with federal funding. Therefore, messages that are political in nature, partisan, or could be considered lobbying are prohibited" (Hardison, 2012). Conflict exists between those who position community-engaged practices as apolitical methods that merely increase appreciation for the participatory civic arts, serve communities, improve student learning, and/or better demonstrate the connections between academic ideas and civic application, and those who assert that service-learning may or should be oriented toward building justice-oriented citizens (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), activists, or students who appreciate and advance racial understanding (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000).

Individual scholars also defend nonpartisanship. Butin argues partisan activity is inevitably limiting (2010), while Feigenbaum (2010) expresses one civic educator's concern with the expression of partisanship in a recent book review essay:

In his most recent book, *Gravyland*, Stephen Parks expends little space arguing *why* progressive politics should be central to the work of writing programs, preferring instead to examine *how* like-minded academics can most effectively promote progressive causes in collaboration with community partners. (p. 89; emphasis in original)

Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011) recently edited a volume explicitly dedicated to reclaiming the democratic purposes of civic engagement. Refreshingly, it focuses on numerous values they see as essential to re-energizing what they consider to be the "stalled" civic engagement movement. They advance the importance of inclusive and reciprocal community partnerships, collaborative knowledge development, relational and de-centered epistemology, and community change resulting from the co-creation of knowledge. The chapters offer models of best practices, awareness of institutional incentives, a suggestion regarding higher education's potential strengths in developing democratic dialogue skills, and an articulation of the democratic importance of student-centered civic engagement. But the volume does little to expand upon the editors' assertions regarding the political dimension of civic engagement.

The present article may be partly seen as further developing Saltmarsh and Hartley's explicit suggestion that the civic engagement movement needs to advance values consistent with what they call democratic civic engagement which "facilitates an inclusive, collaborative, and deliberative democracy" (p. 2). The lens they employ suggests that "Civic engagement in the democratic-centered paradigm is intentionally political in that students learn about democracy by acting democratically" (p. 21) in relation to one another and to community members. As will be developed more completely below, I am uneasy with their assertion that "academics are not partisan political activists" (p. 21) because academics advancing education for democracy necessarily are or should be partisans for democracy—a lens that may at times require explicit values commitments in the classroom and in the public sphere rather than simply encouraging better discursive practices among undergraduates and within institutions.

The issue of values commitments that are central to American Democracy has at times arisen in the civic engagement dialogue. Considering other-affiliation and the historic project that America has undertaken, Barber (1992) asserts:

Any careful reader of American history cannot help but notice, America has always been a tale of peoples trying to be a People, a tale of diversity and plurality in search of unity…That unity ultimately took the form of the civil religion that

republicans like Rousseau and Tocqueville dreamed of—what Sanford Levinson, following Justice Hugo Black, has aptly called 'constitutional faith' and what Jurgen Habermas, in search of a German equivalent, has dubbed 'constitutional patriotism.' (pp. 41-43)

Applying these insights to civic education, Battistoni (1997) writes, "service-learning should be valued as a method of developing in students an other-regarding ethic appropriate to democratic citizenship" (p. 151). Barber and Battistoni each remind us that the development of a national democratic community comes only through continuous human effort to construct that community and nurture other-affiliation within it. These values commitments are muted in contrast to some of the arguments that will be explored below. Yet even these most basic commitments seem absent in *The New Student Politics* (Long, 2002), a Campus Compact publication developed at a gathering of 33 undergraduates representing 27 different institutions of higher learning across the country:

The students at the summit defined democracy less in terms of civic obligation than in terms of the social responsibility of the individual. There is a significant emphasis on inclusion—the ability of all to participate—as a cornerstone of democracy. Students make choices about participation associated with certain social issues based upon personal interests or experience… Their participation is not tied to any agreed upon or widely shared goal—on the contrary, the highly individualized nature of participation means that their efforts are highly fragmented. (pp. V-VI)

Indeed, at times this document reads more like a laundry list (albeit compelling and important) of personal voluntary and engagement interests than a platform from which one might accomplish the work of nurturing a vibrant democratic polity:

Student civic engagement has multiple manifestations, including: personal reflection / inner development, thinking, reading, silent projects, dialogue and relationship building, sharing knowledge, project management, and formal organization that brings people together. Cultural and spiritual forms of expression are included here, as are other forms of expression through the arts such as guerilla theater, music, coffee houses, poetry, and alternative newspapers. (p. 1)

Long recognizes that "an obvious problem is that without a coherent national identity it is hard to embrace one national agenda" (p. 5). As Barber and

Battistoni intimate, in other words, without a national commitment to the value of other-affiliation, there will be no democratic project. Fortunately, history is on the side of those who would like to see the educational apparatus support and advance democratic life. Though the incursion of values in the classroom is sometimes framed as a uniquely contemporary plague (Fish, 2008; Wood, 2012), specific democratic values have always infused the American school and university curricula (Harkavy, 2006), even during the founding of our nation.

Historical Commitments to Popular Education for American Democracy

The American Founders clearly believed that if democracy was to take root as a political tradition, popular education for democracy was essential (Jacoby, 2009; Rury, 2002; Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 2013). As Rury explains, it is important to consider the Founders' commitment to primary, secondary, and university education as a democratic commitment broadly speaking. This is particularly interesting in an era when proposing public schooling at any level was a radical, egalitarian idea. During the American Revolution and after its conclusion, Thomas Jefferson proposed to the Virginia legislature a "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge." While the bill focused on primary education, it included stipulations for secondary schooling and even university scholarships for ten of the state's most exceptional poor students. Though Jefferson's specific plan was never adopted, the vision and his arguments supporting it reflect the extent to which he saw explicit democratic purposes in educational institutions. And Jefferson was not the only one to advance this notion. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence who later founded Dickinson College, called for establishing schools across Pennsylvania, dedicated to the creation of "republican machines," by which he meant citizens fully prepared for participation in the democratic governance of a republic. Noah Webster, sometimes referred to as the Father of American Scholarship and Education in part for the work that later made his name synonymous with the American Dictionary, called for universal free education to foster national unity (Rury; Webb et al.). National unity is a value central to the development of other-affiliation in this great experiment to develop an imagined community—The United States of America (Barber, 1992). According to historian Frederick Rudolph, "A commitment to the republic became a guiding obligation of the American college" (Hartley, 2011, p. 27).

Connecting public and university education to the vision of a national democratic project was not unique to the Founders. Erected in 1901, Harvard's Dexter Gate is famously inscribed with a message from then-President Charles William Elliot: "Enter to Grow in Wisdom; Depart to Serve Better thy Country and Thy Kind." Beyond Harvard's gates, other institutions and their leaders have taken explicit roles in advancing the values and practices of democracy. For example, President William Rainey Harper, who recruited John Dewey to the University of Chicago in 1894, had this to say about the appropriate role of the University:

> The University, I contend is the prophet of democracy—the agency established by heaven itself to proclaim the principles of democracy. It is in the university that the best opportunity is afforded to investigate the movements of the past and to present the facts and principles involved before the public… The university, I maintain, is the prophetic interpreter of democracy. (Harkavy, 2006, p. 7)

While the above referents demonstrate the commitment of several Founders, historical figures, and past university presidents to fostering a national project with educated citizens committed to a democratic republic, the 1947 Truman Report offers an even stronger connection between universities and the nurturance of democracy. The report concluded with, "The first and most essential charge upon higher education is that at all levels and in all its fields of specialization, it shall be the carrier of democratic values, ideals, and process" (President's Commission on Higher Education, 1947, p. 102).

The above brief review reflects a longstanding commitment to encouraging democratic values through the nation's educational apparatus. As discussed in the next section, pressures from the state and the market regularly threaten these democratic values, requiring their continuous defense.

Civil Society, State, Market, and Democratic Values

Cohen and Arato (1994) define civil society as networks of individuals, families, and groups representing the values and interests of social autonomy in the face of both the modern state and the market economy. These networks, groups, and associations are the spaces through which people organize to push back against the power-maximizing logic of the state and profit-maximizing logic of the market economy. According to Cohen and Arato, the state perpetually aims to grow its power to control, while the market perennially pursues profit. Civil society, the state, and the market are in continuous interaction with one another, exerting pressures, demands, and arriving at compromises. For example, market expansion

throughout the Gilded Age and through the roaring twenties met with populist organizing that demanded state regulatory controls in the form of minimum wages, workplace safety, and a social safety net. These guarantees through the state resulted from civil society responses to a market demanding too much.

While Cohen and Arato (1994) ultimately aspire to the "self-limiting revolution" of a "highly articulated, organized, autonomous, and mobilizable civil society" (p. 32), their rendering of the interaction between the state, the market, and civil society is instructive, particularly when one extends their analysis to consider the location of the university within that portrayal. Depending on the power of the market, the state, or the public imagination via civil society organizing, we will see universities being more or less dedicated to creating workers focused on economic success, unreflective nationalists, or self-reflective citizens engaged in the centuries-long emancipatory project of expanding human freedoms within the human community. These three components of social life—the state, the market, and civil society—are continually interacting, at times appearing independent of one another and at times influencing change in one another.

Trends in national discourse and public policy suggest the American public has lost any sense of commitment to democratic education in both public schools and universities. Nussbaum (2010) observed that the U.S. Department of Education's 2006 report on the future of higher education focused exclusively on education for national economic gain. The more recent report from the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) did strike a different tone by explicitly embracing a position that sees higher education as preparation for modern workforce development and civic education. Yet even the authors of that report recognize their pronouncement enters a national discourse increasingly dominated by the notion of universities as vocational, job preparation institutions. As one example, they cite a report from the National Governors' Association that suggested higher education's purpose and future funding is and should be exclusively dedicated to workforce preparation, economic goals, and competitive advantage (Nussbaum, 2010). This sentiment is not limited to governors and policy elites.

Across the socio-economic spectrum, parents and students frequently perceive any purposes of education other than preparation for economic success as non-utilitarian and therefore unimportant. At the Laboratory School in Chicago, an elite school where John Dewey began his work with democratic education and where President Obama's daughters spent their early years, teachers express frustration that parents are impatient with democratic education or crit-

ical questioning and are far more concerned with whether the school will produce young people on a trajectory for financial success (Nussbaum, 2010). It is not only elites suggesting schools should better prepare their children for competition; our neoliberal discourse also influences how universities operate and how the public evaluates them.

A 2010 study by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education indicates that roughly 60% of the public believes universities increasingly operate like businesses, more concerned with the bottom line than with student experiences. As many educators will profess, students are often far more concerned with job preparation and training than anything else. This point was systematically demonstrated in a recent article in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012) in which researchers differentiated generational cohorts' attitudes toward life goals: Millennials seek money, image, and fame to a greater extent than self-acceptance, affiliation, and community, separating themselves from generations surveyed earlier and providing data supporting the assertion that they are the "me" generation.

When national government education reports focus exclusively on economic competitiveness, when parents and students perceive universities as institutions more concerned with the bottom line than with student education, and when academics aspire to values-free inquiry, it should not surprise us that students are more educationally-myopic and economically-motivated than generations past. It does beg the question, however, of how we got to this point, and what we might do to address it.

Before examining those questions, however, I will clarify the extraordinary effects that that discourse may have on tangible opportunities to build democratic life by considering a few indicators of the quality of the national project in the United States. The current state of public education, I suggest, is only possible in a context where the public no longer shares John Dewey's conviction that: "The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated" (1916, p. 87).

In the shadow of former President Harper's University of Chicago, only 8% of Chicago's public schools' graduates are college-ready. To put this into more glaring perspective, that's 8% out of the mere 57% of the high school population who actually graduate (Fischer, 2011). Both K-12 schools and universities are grappling with a lack of public funding support with dire implications for equity of opportunity in a broad national public. Jonathan Cole, a pro-

fessor and former provost at Columbia University, in a December 2011 forum at New York University (NYU) on the future of higher education, suggested U.S. universities face greater threats from their state legislatures than they do from overseas competition, saying: "It's infinitely harder to rebuild greatness once it's been dismantled" (Fischer, 2011). Former Mexican Foreign Minister and current NYU Professor of Politics Jorge Castenada (2011) asks whether the U.S. will, in his words, "go Latin American?" He highlights the growing inequity in American life and the destabilizing and anti-democratic forces that come with that pattern:

> The United States — that epitome of the middle-class society, of the egalitarian dream that pulled millions of immigrants away from Latin America — has begun to go Latin American. It is in a process of structural middle-class shrinkage and inequality expansion that has perhaps never occurred anywhere else. (p. SR9)

Recent research corroborates Castaneda's concerns—the gap in educational opportunity between high- and low-income families now far exceeds the gap between white and black students (Ladd & Fiske, 2011). In each case, of course, the inequity or insufficiency relates to public education—the social right Dewey once assumed as a familiar fact. Despite the democratic implications, we know it is now nothing of the sort. If the crisis in public education results, at least in part, from loss of collective belief in other-affiliation and moral equality as part of achieving American Democracy, then how did this occur?

The Demise of Democracy's Prophets: The Contemporary University

In this section, Rorty (1998) and Schwartz's (2008) arguments regarding the diminishing voice for democratic values in American philosophy and political theory are considered. These writers are concerned with the loss of other-affiliation, belief in moral equality, and support for social rights among Americans. Rorty and Schwartz find fault with the community that Rorty refers to as "the cultural left" and that Schwartz gathers under "post-structuralists." These authors' criticisms suggest that an obsessive focus on critique has distracted the academic community from its necessary role in advancing the experiment that is the best known form of recognizing and enacting equal moral dignity—the democratic state.

Rorty (1998) is concerned that academic critique has become such a powerfully dominant narrative within higher education that "a contemporary American student may well emerge from college less convinced that her country has a future than when she entered" (p. 10). He contrasts what he sees as the unimaginative condition of contemporary students and the American political discourse with the writing of John Dewey, Walt Whitman, and James Baldwin. Rorty uses text from Baldwin's The Fire Next Time to demonstrate the thesis that "We raise questions about our individual or national identity as part of the process of deciding what we will do next, what we will try to become" (p. 11). I quote Rorty's celebration of Baldwin's simultaneous historical critique, contemporary grounding, and imaginative possibility:

> Baldwin says, 'This is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it.'…as Baldwin's narrative of self-creation unfolds, we watch him combining a continued unwillingness to forgive with a continuing identification with the country that brought over his ancestors in chains. 'I am not,' he writes, 'a ward of America; I am one of the first Americans on these shores.' In another passage Baldwin says, 'In short, we, the black and the white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become a nation—if we are really, that is, to achieve our identity, our maturity as men and women.' He ends his book with…'If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world.' (pp. 12—13)

What Rorty (1998) wants to revive in American Philosophy, the American academy, and the American popular imagination is that capacity to envisage and work toward a more beautiful tomorrow held together by a common historical narrative and contemporary collective effort. Rorty sees the distance between imagination and collective work in Whitman's sense that "the Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" (p. 22).

Rorty (1998) pins this loss of collective poetical capacity on three inter-related developments. First, the emergence of the new left, by which Rorty means, "people—mostly students—who decided, around 1964, that it was no longer possible to work for social justice within the system" (p. 43). This disposition encouraged a kind of infantile dichotomizing when it comes to political analysis—there is no hope absent total revolution; in other words, the historical lesson of change as dynamic interactive process over time, resulting from human effort, imagination, and compromise, was lost.

Second, the intellectual tradition that emerged in tandem with the new left, which saw critique and abstraction as ends that precluded action. Rorty (1998) writes that it is

> the difference between people who read books like Thomas Geoghegan's *Which Side are You On?*—a brilliant explanation of how unions get busted—and people who read Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. The latter is an equally brilliant book, but it operates on a level of abstraction too high to encourage any particular political initiative. (p. 78)

Third, there was—again for important reasons—an intellectual and cultural focus on otherness at the expense of any common narrative, particularly that narrative that did exist about the injuries of classism:

> Whereas top-down initiatives of the Old Left had tried to help people who were humiliated by poverty and unemployment…the top-down initiatives of the post-sixties left have been directed toward people who are humiliated for reasons other than economic status…To be other in this sense you must bear an ineradicable stigma, one which makes you a victim of socially accepted sadism rather than merely of economic selflessness. (Rorty, 1998, p. 80)

Schwartz (2008) advances similar concerns about the effects of politics of difference and post-structuralist theorizing. While Rorty (1998) was particularly eloquent about the imaginative importance of social theory, Schwartz makes his case with sharper attention to clear data on contemporary class struggle as well as keen analysis of deliberate political efforts to harness identity movements into a divisive politics of difference that undermines any potential for social solidarity. Schwartz is alarmed by the emergence of a new universal that "triumphed within the popular imaginary: the fair treatment of each and all through competition in the unregulated market" (p. 1). This is the same market that expands to condition and control our expectations and interactions. We are not citizens held in common by an equalizing, democratic project nor are we independent civil society actors advocating for one vision of a better tomorrow (World Social Forum, 2011); rather, we are colonized, conditioned, and controlled by market assumptions and expectations.

Drawing on a long tradition in political theory, Schwartz (2008) sees basic moral equality as foundational to any democratic experiment, but as a self-identified leftist he also sees social rights as central to that experiment. He therefore worries that:

> The social rights that underpin the equal ability of each individual to fulfill their capabilities can-
> not be achieved absent a majoritarian belief in social solidarity—a belief that all of us are in this social endeavor together and must be treated with equal respect. (p. 4)

More than 225 years after the founding of the republic, this sounds extraordinarily similar to the earliest calls for conscious construction of national identity and the progressive democratic experiment in building normative commitments to other-affiliation and equality.

Part of Schwartz's argument is that the academic left simply watched as the Reagan administration stepped forward to invent politics of difference even before political theory had canonized the term, associating the Democratic Party with affirmative action, welfare mothers, abortion, and gay and lesbian rights—and connecting Democratic government action with undeserving groups and, particularly, the undeserving poor. What made the expansion of market rationality and growing economic inequality even more possible was the omnipresent argument that those processes were an inevitable result of globalization rather than deliberate political choices to support corporate deindustrialization, downsizing, and deunionization. And finally, the unfortunate path-dependent decisions early on in the U.S. political relationship with social rights that advanced means-tested welfare programs for which only the poor were eligible provides a strong contrast with the more universal European social welfare rights programs which treat every citizen equally. Means-tested programs, politics of difference, and deliberate political choices masquerading as globalization provide for Schwartz the triumvirate of reasons for rapidly increasing inequality in the U.S., but it would still not have been possible without the acquiescence of the academic community. Schwartz (2008) writes:

> To put it starkly: allegedly 'anti-establishment' political theorists have failed to make a public dent against the mass media's near-universal proclamation that 'there is no alternative' to deregulated capitalism as a form of efficient economic organization. Students in advanced political theory classes often learn to articulate the value of 'diversity' for a democratic polity or even to 'deconstruct' the fictitious 'coherent subject' yet few could advance an elementary critique of the ludicrous contemporary orthodoxy that 'the market equals democracy.' As Karl Polanyi taught long ago, the market is not natural; it is created and sustainable by state regulation—its origins often lie with the brutal use of force by the state. (p. 52)

I have three differences with Rorty (1998) and Schwartz (2008). First, while they are respectively concerned with social theory and political theory, I

am interested in how their analyses relate to holistic university efforts—or claims—to support democratic life. Second, while they each write to revive the involvement of the left in a historic political project, I am concerned that their insightful analyses demonstrate not only the loss of progressive political organizing but more strikingly the loss of any popularly-held understanding of democracy as an ongoing effort toward an idealized state, perhaps never reached, but central to our collective traditions and greatest achievements in advancing rights, equality, and the steady spread of realized human dignity. Third, I think they overstate the extent to which the critical community may be held accountable for the loss of this important and proud democratic narrative. While it is likely little help to democracy that isolated critique can earn one a dissertation, publications, and a tenure-track faculty line, it seems to be the case that the effort to make the social sciences more scientific and philosophy more analytic also distracted from this grand democratic project. Or in Zlotkowski and Boyte's telling:

> The legacy of positivism acts as a powerful brake on our attempt to develop a more civically engaged academy. Positivism, [Boyte] notes, 'structures our research, our disciplines, our teaching, and our institutions, even though it has long been discredited intellectually' (Zlotkowski, 2011, p. 223).

Democracy is the implementation of an idealized egalitarian assumption; it is ultimately part art, part theory, and part desire—none of which fit especially well within isolated academic departments beholden to specific academic/research methods.

Might the Civic Engagement Movement Move Us toward Democratic Values?

Moving from Schwartz's (2008) academic community to the service-learning/community engagement community, many ask why the civic education movement has stalled (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Several offer plausible explanations: institutional incentives that keep professors isolated in individualized faculty work (O'Meara & Braskamp, 2005), institutional architecture that militates against democratic education (Strum, Eaton, Saltmarsh, & Bush, 2011), and graduate school norms that push students away from community commitments (Stanton & Wagner, 2006). Still others advance increasingly critical approaches (Johnson & Green, 2013; Mitchell, 2008; Steinman, 2011; Stewart & Webster, 2010) that risk falling to the critiques advanced by Rorty (1998) and Schwartz if (*and only if*) they neglect to demonstrate a connection to the basic democratic principles of moral equality and other-affiliation.

If the service-learning/community engagement community simply goes to the academic-institutional safe space of perpetual problematization and parsing meaning, it distracts from the stated, national democratic purposes from which much of this community claims to take its lead. What absolutely remains interesting—from a normative democratic standpoint—is critical questioning as part of academics' civil society roles to expose state and institutional hypocrisy and half-truths whenever basic human rights that ought to accompany democratic life are subverted or violated. Academics might also propose alternative possibilities for democratic (or undemocratic) social organizing, but they do so independent of the political project of American Democracy if they do not pay attention to moral equality, other-affiliation, and the national experiment.

There isn't space in this article to do justice to recognizing the many important and diverse insights post-structural, post-modern, and critical studies have brought the civic engagement movement. In my own field of development studies, Arturo Escobar's (1995) use of discourse analysis to shed light on power relationships and absurd assumptions within early and contemporary development theory is one among many excellent examples of texts that have satisfied Said's (1978) sense of the public intellectual's responsibility to defamiliarize that which is familiar and to question what is taken for granted.

To be clear, I am suggesting that insufficient attention to the implicit or explicit democratic values of service-learning and community engagement, therefore, is coupled with a strong theoretical movement toward greater emphasis on critical questioning of meta-narratives or totalizing projects of any sort, right or left, religious or humanistic. While such critical approaches cited above bring significant insights for service-learning as well as for a host of related fields, such as study abroad (Johnson, 2009; Ogden, 2007-8) and international development (Escobar, 1994; Esteva & Prakash, 1997), they also can increase fractures and divisions within conceptual communities, undermine senses of shared identity, and atrophy notions of common purpose (Rorty, 1998; Schwartz, 2008). If we wish to nurture democratic life we must be conscious of the common commitment that that entails and we must always remain acutely aware that the forces of the market and even the state[3] will undermine democracy absent a civil society continuously supporting democratic life and advancing democratic values. If our efforts, as they so often rightly do, expose inconsistencies, hypocrisies, and insufficiencies within the American Dream narrative (Seider, Gillmor, & Rabinowicz, 2010), are we coupling that important and essential challenge with a bolder vision about a more democratic, more consistent, more broadly-experienced American Democratic Dream?

Human Rights Scholars offer a Model of Continuously Critical Values Commitments

I have demonstrated that major leading national civic engagement and service-learning organizations purport to advance apolitical democratic education. I have also shown that the American Founders believed that educational systems were necessary to build democratic life and culture, and that schools and universities have always been infused with values implications. I then shared Cohen and Arato's (1994) articulation of civil society to draw attention to the continuously contested nature of our institutions, from state apparatuses to market structures, and the role that civil society plays in continuously (re-)creating what we experience as reality. Then I moved to Schwartz (2008) and Rorty's (1998) explanations for the loss of other-affiliation, social solidarity, and the pursuit of the democratic dream. Implicit in the consideration of Schwartz and Rorty is that if the imaginative capacities or values commitments necessary to support democratic life subside, the market, the state, and/or other forms of human organizing will claim the space. I shared several current indicators relating to the educational system in the United States that reflect that this has occurred.

To remedy this, to support democratic engagement, to truly and authentically advance democratic life in America, I suggest universities articulate and express explicit commitment to democratic values. Those of us who believe in civic engagement and the democratic ideal, who believe in the American experiment, are—contra-Fish, contra-Wood—profoundly partisan. We are not aligned with Democratic or Republican partisanship, but we are deeply aligned with democracy. And to be deeply aligned with democracy requires a commitment to democratic values. There is no apolitical avenue that leads to democratic solidarity and civic commitment. Standing for democracy expresses firm values while at the same time, paradoxically, ongoing open discussion.

As Schwartz (2008) writes, open discussion is not enough:

> By assuming that the pre-eminent democratic value is that of leaving all issues as permanently open to question, post-structuralist 'democratic theory' eschews the theoretical and political struggle over what established institutions and consensual values are needed to underpin a democratic society …. a democratic society cannot leave as totally 'open' the minimal institutional basis of democracy—a democratic society cannot be agnostic as to the value of freedom of speech, association, and universal suffrage. (p. 57)

Nor, I would argue, can a democratic society be agnostic with respect to quality universal public education. While the specific value of supporting quality public education is open to question, discussion, and debate—suggesting values commitments does not mean closing conversation—it does improve the honesty of the dialogue if it is true that we do not have democracy absent democratic values.

Fortunately, the human rights community gives us an example of how tentative commitment and ongoing open discussion can work practically and side by side, while reason and the history of higher education show us how this could be helpful for universities committed to democratic values. Human rights scholars embrace an understanding of rights as "contingent moral aspirations" (Donnelly, 2003) that are tentative and open to change (Donnelly; Ignatieff, 2003). Just as with democracy, there are no human rights without values. This articulation is therefore simultaneously honest about essential values commitments while also explicitly maintaining receptivity for critical questioning and change.

One objection to this notion of strengthening the clarity of values commitments for those institutions purporting to advance democracy will be that this kind of disposition could devolve into unreflective flag-waving. Yet as numerous scholars have clarified, one of the strengths of a rights articulation is that it invites participation and adaptation. Ignatieff (2001) notes, "once articulated as international norms, rights language invited both the colonial revolutions abroad and the civil rights revolution at home" (p. 6). Rorty (Voparil & Bernstein, 2010) asserts the numerous and important critiques of human rights practice or policy remain compatible with the overarching conception of a legal framework and set of cultural assumptions rooted in the notion of equal human dignity and respect. And while discussing the relationship between group rights and the international human rights regime, Donnelly (2003) argues that rights practice need not be characterized by "extreme or corrosive individualism" (p. 204) and, perhaps even more importantly, that "human rights are not considerations overriding all other considerations" and that they "are, sometimes, in the end, 'trumped'" (p. 205). They are emergent from and held within a community that prizes critical discourse and ongoing inquiry.

Donnelly's (2003) characterization of the relationship between social construction and human rights demonstrates additional parallels for any population wishing to live within a democratic reality. He writes:

> Human rights theories and documents point beyond actual conditions of existence—beyond the 'real' in the sense of what has already been realized—to the possible, which is viewed as a deeper human moral reality. Human rights are less about the way people 'are' than about what they might become. They are about *moral*

[emphasis in original] rather than natural or juridical persons. (p. 15)

He goes on to say, "Human rights ultimately rest on a social decision to act as though such 'things' existed—and then, through social action directed by these rights to make real the world that they envision" (p. 21).

We will not enact democratic life if we forget to imagine the possibility of its existence, if we drop it as a values commitment, or even if we fail to give it the time required to continuously push it from imagined ideal to implemented reality in the communities we inhabit. Precisely what democracy is will be the subject of ongoing debate, but upon reflection there are certainly components that most of us can agree upon, such as universal suffrage, free and fair elections, and perhaps even the importance of a good public education.

Rediscovering Commitment: Universities advancing Democracy

What if universities committed clearly to democratic values? Doing so would have some important advantages. First, taking a clear stance on values commitments would quite simply be more honest. In philosophy, in religion, in the social sciences, and in communication studies, few scholars believe there is such a thing as an objective space for neutral values inquiry[4]. As the communitarian critique recognizes, we all bring values to the table—we are embedded within our social realities, products of our discourse communities, and acting independently or objectively only to the extent that those fundamentally inescapable frames of reference permit (Etzioni, 1993). We should simply be more honest about this frame of reference, and admit that our inquiry, institutional histories, and national project have deep roots in philosophy and literature that bias us toward a democratic rights tradition.

Second, as a matter of practice, this deeper embrace of our values and—I suggest—our honesty, would actually sharpen our and our students' critical analysis skills. It is challenging to do serious analysis when it is built upon a foundation that—if ever investigated or questioned—is widely understood as an impossible construct—that fictitious space of objective, value-free inquiry. Our students regularly hear messages suggesting academics are hopelessly liberal or biased and unfair. If they enter the classroom with that suspicion and we are continually guarded about our own positionality in relation to the questions we investigate, we have a conversation between suspicion and subterfuge within a fictitious discourse space of imagined objectivity. It would be better to begin with a suggestion about where the instructor sees herself or the institution sees itself in relation to

human rights and democratic values. Such an honest orientation does not, as Fish (2008) would have it, subvert the possibility of critical analysis or 'academicizing.' Indeed, the U.S. Supreme Court offers regular examples of a community of applied intellectual activity rigorously examining a pressing question from multiple perspectives—a community 'academicizing' an issue with nonetheless profound political and values implications.

Third, while clarifying a values orientation seems to have more immediate ramifications for disciplines and courses in which democracy and democratic life are part of the regular conversation, I believe it has broader ramifications that become clearer when examining whether this association with democratic values could perform an evaluative function, by which I mean that if we take democracy as an idealized national goal, we could consider classroom questions, policy issues, and university commitments through the lens of whether they advance or retard democratic life. Discussing core values also provides the opportunity to explicitly clarify when another value—such as efficiency or sustainability—is held in higher regard than democratic equality.

I have come to think about democratic rights through the paradigms of development as freedom (Sen, 1999) or development as human rights (Nelson, 2008), by which I mean a bias toward a rights-experience for each and every individual. I will briefly provide several disciplines that could, if they so wished, examine relevant policy issues through this lens. The relevant questions are always: How does this policy, innovation, or approach impact the rights experience of every affected individual? Does that impact undermine the effort to continue to be or become a democracy?

In economics and business, microenterprise has been all the rage in economically-marginalized communities. How does the emergence of small businesses, in spaces with soft or sometimes corrupt states, relate to the development of individual rights and related opportunities for the business owners and the people in their communities? In literature, Nussbaum (1997) has long suggested that stories develop our empathic capacities, something confirmed in a recent research study examining the effects of literature on readers' brains (Murphy-Paul, 2012). How might we employ literature, public reading programs, or K-12 English curricula to expand the conversation about the basic rights all Americans should experience? In education, we are currently engaged in significant debate over the value and efficacy of charter, private, and magnet schools, and other variations on the theme of market innovations within the public school system. The democratic lens I have suggested prompts us to evaluate these reforms based on their potential to

improve educational experiences for each and every American child. Being honest about democratic values commitments shifts the terms of this debate from efficacy for some children to the potential to positively impact all young citizens. That is, it shifts that debate to the extent that U.S. citizens recognize one another as participants in a common project. We do not achieve that project without insistence on equal treatment.

This insistence also could provide university leaders who believe in the value of democracy with some parameters for their inevitable public engagement. This commitment to democratic values would have several positive public effects. First, it would give institutional leaders an honest leg to stand on when the topic of values in the classroom arises. Claiming neutrality and objectivity is disingenuous. Demonstrating we are active members of a long tradition of American civil society committed to democratic values despite the sundry state and market forces that will inevitably militate against it has cachet. Second, it would move institutional leaders toward the occasionally uncomfortable but incredibly important public utterances on matters that affect the future of our democracy. When legislatures systematically defund public school districts, they are not only sending us students who are underprepared, they are not only undermining purported American efforts to compete economically, but they also and most fundamentally are crippling our efforts to build a nation that will move ever closer to enacting the ideals of equal treatment and moral worth. Our presidents and chancellors, honoring an important tradition of university leadership and American rights development, should say so. And finally, if our institutions are committed to advancing democracy, this provides students, faculty, staff, donors, trustees, and the public a lens through which to evaluate university budgets, priorities, and actions. Advancing democratic life is not the only university value, but if it is to be a university value, then it suggests that a critique relating to university support or negation of democratic values is legitimate. A stronger articulation of values commitments, in other words, leads to deeper and better civil society discourse.

Conclusion

This paper has oscillated between the discourse of the service-learning/community engagement scholarly community, broader academic discourse, historic and contemporary national discourses on education, the importance of civil society voices to promote and protect democratic values, and how the human rights literature offers an example of strong values commitments coupled with ongoing critical discourse. In considering these many perspectives, I have tried to demonstrate the impossibility of an apo-

litical democratic civic education. Democracy is at its core an expression of ideals; its very presence expresses values. It is never neutral.

I have deliberately avoided attempting to define democracy precisely within this paper. Rather, I have called attention to some essentials (moral equality, other-affiliation), highlighted a few plausibly necessary components (equal access to education, a degree of economic equity), and alluded—via Schwartz (2008)—to a few common claims about what might be necessary for a modern democratic society that are, nonetheless, highly contested in the United States (e.g., broad social rights). This discourse about the necessary components of democratic life must be occurring regularly within any educational process that purports to advance democratic ends.

Our university webpages and our presidents' pronouncements frequently call attention to institutional roles in supporting and advancing American democratic life, so this analysis has taken a national focus. Elsewhere, Nussbaum has advanced global citizenship theorizing (1992, 1997, 2002) by embracing the democratic or rights-oriented liberal assumption of moral equality while also engaging in critical questioning regarding the rationale for bordered understandings of justice and equality premised on state-centric assumptions. Along with several colleagues (Hartman, 2010; Hartman & Kiely 2013; Hartman, Kiely, Friedrichs, & Boettcher, 2013), I agree with Nussbaum's critique and argument. I mention it here again to demonstrate how criticality and values together will continue to upset staid institutions in efforts to build a world that better recognizes values such as human dignity.

It is difficult to act in concert, as a unified society, without common values or common vision. This simple realization, when considered in relation to Schwartz (2008) and Rorty's (1998) poignant observations, may help us to better understand the frequently-observed, Generation-Y and Millennial tendency to engage in service absent political involvement (Long, 2002; Putnam, 2000)—and beyond that to be less interested in social issues than previous generations (Twenge et al., 2012). While our students have certainly experienced more than their share of militaristic nationalism, they have not been repeatedly exposed to an American discourse imagining cooperative effort toward building a better country, together, across classes and ethnicities.

Instead, they have been repeatedly told that their civic contribution will be to serve, and frequently they even have been passive agents in the selection, scheduling, and assignment of those service experiences, leading community organizers to wonder whether such passive service could be the means to end all activism (Serio, 1998). Alternatively, they

have received the messages sent by Rorty's (1998) cultural left indicating there is no hope for change within this guilt-ridden neocolonial state with doubtless blood on its proverbial hands, despite the liberal democratic tradition's legacy of steadily increasing human freedoms. Our students still rally to engage with incredible and compelling service, but it is frequently disconnected from the national democratic project (Long, 2002).

Service-learning faculty, directors, and community organizers regularly bemoan the juxtaposition of students' commitment to direct service and simultaneous lack of engagement with democratic political life. There is often an eagerness for direct community service participation, but a lack of excitement for conventional political activity and organizing (Long, 2002). Excitement will come, however, when students realize they are part of ongoing efforts to build a country more in accord with justice, as part of a common, transcendent civil religion (Barber, 1992; Bellah, 1967) that calls us to move to enact ideals that pre-date us by building a public sphere that will long survive us (Arendt, 1958). Centered within the Jeffersonian/Lockean tradition, the civic engagement movement can build a better tomorrow.

Notes

[1] Whether and to what extent these phenomena are clearly on the rise is a question for another paper. While each of these concerns has been documented by many contemporary sources, the precise empirical status of each issue is not the important question here.

[2] The Presidents' Declaration does assert the values of "commitments to the democratic ideal" and "justice and dignity for all," but to include the phrase "without a political agenda" in a document that is merely a page and a half long suggests a strong commitment to nonpolitical methods and begs the question: How else will our national community and democratic project be achieved if not through political effort? Are we to imagine that the astounding rates of child poverty (one in five) and urban unemployment ("One in six central cities has an unemployment rate 50% or more above the national average") cited in the declaration will be resolved without significant political commitment and related structural change?

[3] As Donnelly (2003) indicates, the state is both the guarantor and the greatest historic violator of human rights. In the United States we have not faced the scale of state-led abuses perpetrated elsewhere during the last century, but we still require vigilant citizens and robust civil society to advocate for rights provided through the state and to push back against an overreaching state. The decline of basic privacy rights through the "library provision" of the PATRIOT Act, the FBI's expanded National Security Letter, and PATRIOT Act amendments that allow government agents to spy on citizens provide contemporary examples of the battle to continue to enshrine specific democratic rights despite the state's efforts to curtail them. In another area, Northwestern Law School has demonstrated its power as a civil society advocate for due process. The efforts of its Center on Wrongful Convictions have led to the exoneration of thirty-six innocent men and women in Illinois since 1998.

[4] "As sociologists of knowledge such as Thomas Kuhn and Jurgen Habermas had shown, the ideal of scientific or philosophical objectivity cannot obtain in its pure form in a world where knowledge is always about (among other things) power, and where truth always reflects (among other things) somebody's interests" (Barber, 1992, p. 85). "Positivism, [Boyte] notes, 'structures our research, our disciplines, our teaching, and our institutions, even though it has long been discredited intellectually" (Zlotkowski, 2011, p. 223). For more recent reflections on the theme outside of the civic engagement literature, see Charli Carpenter's (2012) "You Talk of Terrible Things so Matter-of-Factly in This Language of Science," in the mainstream publication of the American Political Science Association, *Perspectives on Politics*.

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