CENTERED DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION: PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS CIVIC CENTERS

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Introduction

Changes to the landscape of "public" education in the United States, particularly the proliferation of charter and other non-traditional public schools and shifting forms of school governance, have motivated some philosophers of education to reconsider the form and function of public schools in a democracy.[1] This article is largely sympathetic to such efforts but aims to develop this work in a more radical direction by (re)considering the potential for public schools to serve as "social"—or, as I will prefer, following Boyte, "civic"[2]—centers. I argue, in the first section, that the current political climate—one marked by a crisis of democracy and the rise of "civic deserts"—demands this more radical re-conception of the "public" nature of public schools, especially with regard to their democratic purpose and function. The emerging literature in political philosophy of education falls short of meeting this demand, however, because it tends, ultimately, still to conceptualize public schools too narrowly, that is, as institutions that primarily (and often exclusively) educate or otherwise serve children and that the (adult) public simply helps to design, govern, and hold accountable. To make this critical point and to begin drawing out its implications, I engage, in the second section, with what I take to be an important and representative example from this literature, namely, Stitzlein's *American Public Education and the Responsibility of Its Citizens*.

More constructively, I draw in the final sections on an historical example from the Progressive Era's schools-as-social-centers movement to outline a conception of public schools as civic centers—as sites for what I ultimately call "centered democratic education." This conception posits public schools as intentionally sites of civic and political engagement and education for the *public as a whole*. Understood in this way, public schools support in myriad ways the civic-political functioning and learning of the entire democratic citizenry. Thus, I intend the term "centered" to have two meanings here: first, it

[1] See, for example, Sarah Stitzlein, *American Public Education and the Responsibility of Its Citizens: Supporting Democracy in an Age of Accountability* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) and Kathleen Knight Abowitz, *Publics for Public Schools: Legitimacy, Democracy, and Leadership* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2013).
[2] Harry Boyte, "John Dewey and Citizen Politics: How Democracy can Survive Artificial Intelligence and the Credo of Efficiency," *Education and Culture* 33, no. 2 (2017): 13–48. My thinking on these matters owes a significant debt to Boyte's own work in thinking about the contemporary potential for the social-centers movement.

suggests a centering of democratic education—that is, democratic education is given a central role—in our public school system and in our society more broadly; second, and more importantly for this article, it suggests that public democratic education should happen in schools conceived and operated as civic centers.

Democracy in Crisis

Writing in *The New Republic* in October of 1922, Dewey called that time an "era of bunk and hokum."[3] Dewey was not, of course, arguing that bunk and hokum were new in human affairs. Instead, his argument was that it was circulating more quickly and in higher volume and being swallowed more "eagerly and indiscriminately than ever before."[4] Not surprisingly, Dewey thought the most troubling consequence of this state of human affairs was its deleterious effect on democracy, the "quality" of which, he argued, "is inseparably bound up with the quality of the ideas and information which are circulated and to which beliefs adhere."[5] Dewey recognized, in other words, that in order to engage intelligently in social action citizens needed a clear and discerning view of political conditions and their political environments. This has always been one of the great challenges of democracy, namely, how to bridge "the gap between the limited capacities of the citizen and the complexity of his [sic] environment."[6] But it has, of course, been a greater challenge at some points in history than at others. The early twentieth century, Dewey made clear, was one such time.

It seems uncontroversial to suggest that democracy is again facing unusually challenging times—particularly because we are in the midst of another era of bunk and hokum, perhaps one that can now be better labeled as an era of "bullshit" in the sense in which Frankfurt developed the concept.[7] The rise and increasingly nefarious uses of social media platforms like Facebook have led to extraordinarily high levels of bullshit being spread and consumed at alarming rates, especially relative to "real" news and factual information.[8] It is almost as uncontroversial to suggest that this has continued to have a deleterious effect on democracy, particularly on citizens' abilities to participate in it effectively, that is, with a clear and discerning view of political conditions or, increasingly, even the facts of any given matter. Equally alarming are the troubling erosion of

[3] John Dewey, "Education as Politics," *The New Republic*, October 4, 1922: 139.
[4] Dewey, 139.
[5] Dewey, 139.
[6] John Dewey, "Practical Democracy," in *LW* 2, 216. See also Tony DeCesare, "The Lippmann-Dewey Debate Revisited: The Problem of Knowledge and the Role of Experts in Modern Democratic Theory," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 43 (2012): 106–116.
[7] Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton University Press, 2005).
[8] Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31, no.2 (2017): 211–236.

citizens' trust in government,[9] our on-going distrust of one another, especially across racial lines,[10] and, by some accounts, growing disaffection with democratic norms and institutions.[11] All of this points to a growing crisis of democracy.

One way to understand this crisis is with reference to the move from what Ryan has called "meeting-place democracy" toward the "politics of publicity."[12] In the late nineteenth century, Ryan notes, "the communication and opposition so essential to democracy were increasingly conducted not through public meetings but through publicity. The most obvious venue of publicity was the city press."[13] The focus of politics, in other words, "had moved from mass participation to publicity directed at isolated individuals" and "public life became structured around dualities"—black and white, male and female, rich and poor—resulting in more division and distrust.[14] In the first decades of the twenty-first century, venues of publicity have increased exponentially and with them the damaging effects of such politics. The manipulation of public opinion, for instance—always a threat to democracy and the formation of collective public judgments—has become far easier and more incessant in light of new technologies that have multiplied the means and actors involved. Thus, at the same time that we have seen a decline in what Putnam called "social capital" (understood "as networks, norms, and social trust"),[15] we've also had to deal ("alone," as it were) with the volume of "bunk and hokum" being spread more quickly and through multiple, technologically complex sources.

All of this has made it far more difficult—and made us far less willing—to embrace a democratic idea put forth by Allen, namely, the idea that talking to strangers—as potential "political friends"—can, among its other values, be an important means to gaining "wisdom about the world."[16] Lacking physical spaces where such friendships can be cultivated—and where, more generally, meeting place democracy can moderate the ever-increasing effects of

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[9] Pew Research Center, "Trust and Distrust in America," July 2019, https://www.people-press.org/2019/07/22/trust-and-distrust-in-america/; Pew Research Center, "Public Trust in Government Remains Near Historic Lows as Partisan Attitudes Shift," May 2017, https://www.people-press.org/2017/05/03/public-trust-in-government-remains-near-historic-lows-as-partisan-attitudes-shift/.

[10] Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since* Brown v. Board of Education (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[11] Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Danger of Deconsolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 5–17.

[12] Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[13] Ryan, *Civic Wars,* 309.

[14] Donald J. Ratcliffe, "*Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City in the Nineteenth Century*. By Mary P. Ryan," *History* 84, no. 276 (1999): 676.

[15] Robert D. Putnam, "America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995): 65.

[16] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 167.

the politics of publicity—we leave ourselves and our democratic communities more susceptible to the reign of propaganda, to ignorance, and to civic isolation. Making matters worse, the lack of such spaces seems increasingly more prevalent in some areas than others, thus potentially exacerbating historical inequities and oppression. Kawshima-Ginsberg and Sullivan have recently demonstrated the rise of "civic deserts"—communities "characterized by a dearth of opportunities for civic and political learning and engagement."[17] They report that approximately 60 percent of rural youth in America and 30 percent of urban and suburban youth "perceived their own communities to be civic deserts."[18] Apparently—and rather tellingly—none of these young people perceived the schools in their communities to be places for civic learning, opportunity, or engagement. This should motivate us to continue reexamining the nature of our public schools and the roles they are and are not playing within our communities, particularly with regard to our civic and political life.

Increasingly, new scholarship is available to guide such a reexamination as scholars in education, in particular, have sought to reconceptualize public schooling as one means to promoting more—and more effective forms of—civic or democratic education and participation. Some of the most promising and original of this work has been done by philosophers of education who aim to rediscover and redefine the idea of the "public" in relation to "public schools" and generally to reaffirm the democratic purpose of such schools.[19] This work has been timely and has made important contributions to political philosophy of education as well as other academic fields and to educational practice.

I worry, however, that this work has continued to conceptualize public schools too narrowly in that it tends still to understand them as primarily (often exclusively) open to and directly serving children; the broader (adult) population, on the other hand, is given greater responsibility for and democratic control over schools—helping, for instance, to design, govern, and hold them accountable—but largely enjoys only indirect benefits of public schools (e.g., the benefits of having an educated citizenry and capable workforce). These are all clearly important pieces of a conception of public school, and the historical record marks even these as progress. But the notions of *openness* and *service* that inform such conceptions of public schools are insufficient in the face of our democratic crisis and declining civic opportunity and association. I wish, therefore, to supplement

[17] Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg and Felicia Sullivan, "60 Percent of Rural Millennials Lack Access to Political Life," *The Conversation*, March 26, 2017, https://theconversation.com/study-60-percent-of-rural-millennials-lack-access-to-a-political-life-74513.

[18] Matthew N. Atwell, John Bridgeland, and Peter Levine "Civic Deserts: American's Civic Health Challenge," (2018), https://www.unr.edu/Documents/student-services/student-activities/CLDE/Civic_Deserts_Health_Challenge.pdf.

[19] Stitzlein, *American Public Education*; Kathleen Knight Abowitz, *Publics for Public Schools*.

these conceptions of public schooling by defending an idea of "public schools" that are designed to directly benefit (serve) the public, particularly in its civic and political functioning. What I have in mind, in other words, are not just schools directed "by" the public, but schools "for" the public—by which I mean schools that are more intentionally open spaces for civic and political engagement and learning for the *public as a whole*, including but not limited to children.

Before I flesh out that idea more thoroughly—and point to a useful historical example—I want to indicate more clearly the ways in which current scholarship might pull up short in this regard. In the following section, I focus on Stitzlein's *Public Education and the Responsibility of Its Citizens* because of its important contribution to this emerging body of literature on the public nature of public schooling and its particular focus on the broader democratic educational project that has long been part of the historical motivations for public schooling in the United States.[20]

"Public" Education in Times of Democratic Crisis

Stitzlein does important conceptual work aimed at helping us to define public schools more clearly and precisely in light of relatively recent changes to school governance structures and funding mechanisms. She begins with an important distinction between the "real" and "ideal" aspects of public schools and writes rather movingly about how they would "ideally function" in a democratic society. She reminds us, for instance, that (ideally) "the physical space of the school as one that is held in common and open to the people is an important element of public schools," and she notes that (ideally) public school buildings would be used more frequently for public meetings, recreation, and leisure activities.[21] Furthermore, she suggests that (ideally) public schools would be "places where people come together to deliberate, learn, celebrate, and solve problems."[22] There seems, then, in this ideal conception of public schools a rather expansive and potentially radical understanding of what it could mean for public schools to be "open" to the public and for them to "serve" the public.

And yet, this ideal seems at least partially lost or moderated when Stitzlein finally arrives at her "functional definition of public schools aimed at serving democracy and the common good."[23] She notes five key elements in this definition:

> First, they should be *open to the public*. This means that all citizens are welcome, even if their education may be more

[20] Parts of this discussion of Stitzlein's book are drawn from my co-authored review of the book. See Tony DeCesare and Lyndsay Cowles, "*American Public Education and the Responsibility of Its Citizens* by Sarah M. Stitzlein," *American Journal of Education* 124, no. 4. (2018): 516–520.
[21] Stitzlein, *American Public Education*, 45.
[22] Stitzlein, 47.
[23] Stitzlein, 49.

> costly than average, such as that of students with exceptionalities. Second, they should *serve the public*, by meeting societal needs like preparing active citizens to maintain the government and economy. Third, they should be *responsive to the public*, enabling citizens to vote out education officials or change school policies through meaningful and viable avenues like elections, referendums, and open school meetings. Fourth, they should be *creators of publicness*, meaning that they cultivate citizens who know how to collective-mindedly exchange ideas and respond to the ideas of others, while tolerating and working across differences. Finally, they should *sustain democracy* by developing skills and dispositions within children for participating in it and enacting democratic, just, and freedom-oriented decision making.[24]

These elements of functionally public schools, Stitzlein contends, "represent the responsibilities of public schools toward fulfilling the promises of democracy and sustaining it as a political system and way of life."[25] Surely they could be interpreted as aligning with the ideal vision for public schools that Stitzlein notes in the preceding pages. But there is enough ambiguity here to suggest that Stitzlein has narrowed that ideal vision quite sharply. Consider again, for instance, the first element of "functionally public schools," namely, that they should be "open to the public"—that they should welcome "all citizens." This could be interpreted as a radical vision for schools—one that would ostensibly open them not just to a broad and inclusive range of students but to *all* citizens and to a wide variety of public uses that would intentionally and directly serve the community or citizenry *as a whole*. And yet the idea is followed by an apparent narrowing of that vision to the more traditional idea of public schools as spaces where all "students" (which seems here to have a traditional meaning of school-aged children and youth) are educated at public expense regardless of their potentially costly "exceptionalities." Thus, one could reasonably wonder *how far and to whom and for what purposes* Stitzlein thinks we should open schools in order for them truly to be functioning as "public" schools in a democratic society.

Consider, too, the (related) second element of her conception of functionally public schools, namely, that they should "serve the public," meaning they should "meet societal needs like preparing active citizens to maintain the government and economy." Surely this is an important service that public schools should (and largely do) embrace; they have long been an essential institution for ensuring that children (as future citizens) are able to contribute to maintaining the government and economic structure. But there is also a long

[24] Stitzlein, *American Public Education*, 49–50.
[25] Stitzlein, 50.

history (some of which Stitzlein notes) of public schools more directly and more robustly serving the public (e.g., by offering sites where citizens can engage in recreational activities, hold public meetings, pursue continuing education, etc.) and offering social-welfare services to the members of their surrounding community (e.g., health clinics, food pantries, and laundry services). It is not clear whether or to what degree such things are (or are not) part of this element of functionally public schools or of the definition more broadly. One could reasonably wonder, therefore, *who is the public that is to be served* by functionally public schools *and in what ways—directly and indirectly—are they served*.

My sense is that in negotiating the ideal and the real aspects of public schools—and in developing her conception of "functionally public schools"—Stitzlein has left us with a rather narrow conception of public schools that leaves much of their democratic potential untapped. In particular, it seems to delimit the "services" that public schools provide and the "public" they serve. If this is right, then this moderated ideal seems insufficient for helping us to address the crisis of democracy and the weakening of civic association outlined earlier. For one thing, it would seem that functionally public schools would continue only to prepare school-aged children for future democratic participation and that they would not have any similar preparatory function for adults. Yet there are, as we will see in the next section, historical precedents for supporting a conception of public schools that serve "all citizens" by providing opportunities for both children and adults to be educated for democracy.[26] And we would do well to remember that *all* citizens who compose the public are continually learning and re-learning democracy.[27] While the label "future" citizens can be accurately applied strictly to children (i.e., those under the age of eighteen in the United States), similar labels—for instance, citizens "in the making" or "maturing," "growing" or "developing" citizens—are reductive when applied uniquely to children. We are not simply *becoming* citizens one minute and *being* citizens the next, and especially not according to some generally arbitrary marker like age. Nor are schools of any type—even in an ideal democratic form—equipped to educate children *once and for all* for democracy. Our current democratic crisis and the rise of "civic deserts" demand that public schools do more than provide democratic learning and opportunities for civic association to school-aged children. They must provide these *continuously* to the *public as a whole*.

Furthermore, in relation to Stitzlein's important argument about citizens' responsibility to public schools, it is important to remember that we tend to be far more willing to support institutions that do or might serve us directly and in ways we deem to be meaningful to our lives. The secondary and indirect services and social benefits all citizens would derive from functionally

[26] The same can be said for other "societal needs" like those related to maintaining the economy, but the focus here is obviously on the democratic goals of public schooling.
[27] Gert J.J. Biesta, *Learning Democracy in School and Society: Education, Lifelong Learning, and the Politics of Citizenship* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011).

public schools might not be enough for citizens to embrace fully the level of responsibility Stitzlein envisions. The hardest case Stitzlein has to make, of course, is that even citizens who have no formal or direct connection to public schools have some responsibility—"driven by relationships and care of others"[28]—to support such schools as part of their broader "responsibility to ensure that democracy is maintained and improved."[29] Gathering support for public schools—and before that "common schools"—has been a historically challenging task, especially when appealing to citizens who benefit only indirectly and secondarily from such schools. Appeals to our responsibilities as democratic citizens might move some to take up this responsibility more fully and consistently. Moving the (or a) public to do so, however, would likely require that public schools find ways truly to serve and be open to all citizens, so that all would have a more personal stake in—and stand to benefit more directly from—public schools.

Functionally Public Schools as Civic Centers

How, then, might we develop Stitzlein's conception of "functionally public" schools in ways that address the limitations (or, at least, ambiguities) of the concept and serve us better in the current political and civic climate? To put it simply, we can push this conception closer and more explicitly toward the Progressive Era ideal of public schools serving as social (or civic) centers. In a 1902 lecture titled "The School as Social Center," Dewey argued that "the school, as a place of instruction for children, is not performing its full function—that it needs also to operate as a center of life for all ages and classes."[30] For Dewey, public schools as social centers would meet their full function by offering, for instance, opportunities for the "mixing up of people with each other," for "amusement and recreation," and for adult and continuing education (particularly for the purpose of re-skilling workers). He concluded that "the conception of the school as a social center is born of our entire democratic movement.[31] Though Dewey would only revisit the topic in his writing one more time—in a chapter in *Schools of Tomorrow*—the idea received significant uptake from activists and reformers of the Progressive Era. The most significant of these was Edward J. Ward, who recognized the explicitly political (democratic) potential of the social-centers vision and pioneered the effort to implement the idea in schools across Rochester, New York from 1907–1911.

Importantly, while Ward was clearly influenced by Dewey's thinking on social centers, he also went beyond Dewey. Boyte has criticized the "apolitical" conception of community life that informs Dewey's conception of the schools as social centers, noting, in particular, Dewey's overly broad and

[28] Stitzlein, *American Public Education*, 135.
[29] Stitzlein, 111.
[30] John Dewey, "The School as Social Center," *The Elementary School Teacher* III, no. 2 (1902): 73.
[31] Dewey, 86.

social conceptions of society and citizenship.[32] In "The School as Social Center," Dewey defined society in terms of "the less definite and freer play of the forces of the community," but insisted that such forces "have nothing to do with politics or government."[33] Thus, Dewey "took the political edge off of citizenship."[34] Ward, by contrast, operated with more explicitly political conceptions of community and citizenship and with a more clearly political-democratic purpose in mind for the social centers. Writing about the Rochester social centers—which numbered eighteen at the height of the short-lived movement—Ward cites verse from a "young man of one of the social centers": "Did you ever stop to figure out / What 'social center' means? / Here you will find democracy."[35] The first identifying feature of the social centers, at least for this young man, was that they were democratic spaces—places where democracy could be found. Civic clubs formed quickly in the social centers. They were composed of citizens of all ages and were especially oriented toward "the development of an intelligent public spirit by the open presentation and free discussion of public questions."[36]

Jane Addams's work with Hull House also influenced Ward (as, of course, it did Dewey's own thinking on social centers). But here, again, there is an important contrast to be made, this time between the Rochester social centers movement and Addams's Hull House: "the centers," as Mattson notes, "were supported by public institutions and taxation, not by private wealth as was Hull House."[37] Nor were the centers organized just for the poor and immigrant populations in Rochester. Rather, as George Forbes, president of the Board of Education, put it, the movement was "for the community, it [was] social, it [was] democratic and [was] generally patronized."[38] Thus, the centers became meeting places for the "free discussion of public questions" between individuals of different political parties, ethnicities, nationalities, and social classes, all of whom were expected to share their perspectives and deliberate on equal terms. For example, Mattson notes a discussion on the commission form of government in which "a Polish washwoman and the president of the W.C.T.U. [Women's Christian Temperance Union] were opposed by a day cleaner and a college professor."[39]

Thus, the Rochester social centers embodied a decidedly more "political" vision than the social centers as theorized by Dewey. Their advocates stressed political conceptions of community life and of citizenship—in all their

[32] Boyte, "John Dewey and Citizen Politics."
[33] Cited in Harry C. Boyte, *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 31.
[34] Boyte, 31.
[35] Edward J. Ward, "The Rochester Civic and Social Centers," in *National Society for the Study of Education: 1907–1911*, ed. S. Chester Parker (University of Chicago Press, 1911), 55.
[36] Ward, 51.
[37] Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public*, 54.
[38] Mattson, 54.
[39] Mattson, 59.

messiness and controversy—rather than Dewey's apolitical conceptions. And they were more "public" than Hull House, at least in terms of their financial and other support and their inclusiveness both in terms of participants and issues open for discussion. Indeed, in the centers, one would regularly find discussions around the "key issues of the day," like "local housing conditions," the development of public buildings, education-related issues, immigration and national citizenship, race relations, women's suffrage, labor union politics, foreign affairs, and more.[40] Furthermore, as Mattson writes, "By having citizens themselves set the agenda for democratic discussion, social centers became the truest expression of a democratic public."[41] And their popularity grew quickly—from three schools in 1907 to 17 by 1910, mostly on account of "petitions made to the Board of Education by citizens in neighborhoods."[42]

Ward, himself an "enthusiastic apostle of democracy," conceived the social centers as gathering places for "organized deliberation," for "getting at the facts," and "all-sided hearing and discussion."[43] Importantly, he felt strongly that the schools were the best place for these centers, not only for the sake of efficiency, but also because the school was public and a symbol of the future of the community. It was here—in the schools serving as social centers and as embodiments of meeting-place democracy—that Ward hoped that individual citizens would not only learn "crucial lessons about democracy,"[44] but also come to form "collective public judgment."[45] He recognized that in order for public opinion to be meaningful, information—from politicians, the press, and other citizens—had to be interpreted and vetted before it was put to use in political action. In a public address on the importance of social centers, a member of the editorial branch of the United Press put the point nicely in declaring that,

> [the newspaper] not only cannot take the place of neighborly discussion in the development of public intelligence, but in its character as a privately owned institution deriving three fourths of its revenue from the advertiser it needs the presence of *an institution of free communication of intelligence and exchange of information in every neighborhood* as a corrective

[40] Mattson, 56–57
[41] Mattson, 52.
[42] Mattson, 55. A lot more historical work needs to be done to figure out what, exactly, made the centers so popular among the citizens of Rochester. Gaining citizen support and motivating citizens to show up to social centers seems a far more challenging task in 2020 than it was in 1910. I am grateful to Kathleen Knight Abowitz for raising this issue.
[43] Ward, "The Rochester Civic and Social Centers," 20.
[44] Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public*, 56.
[45] Mattson, 71.

> of its own suppression, distortion or misrepresentation of facts.[46]

For an all too brief time, the public schools—serving as social centers—were these kinds of institutions, and as such they served and were open to all citizens.

Centered Democratic Education

We have good reason to consider whether and to what degree "public schools" can again—in a more sustainable way and on a bigger scale—be these kinds of institutions. Such consideration would require far more historical and philosophical work than what can be undertaken in this space. But the forgoing analysis of Stitzlein's work coupled with a selective historical recovery of the Rochester social centers suggest at least three important characteristics that truly "public" schools must possess to promote what I have called "centered democratic education" and, thereby, to combat the crisis of democracy and the rise of civic deserts. First, they would *serve the whole public directly*, particularly in regard to cultivating *all* citizens' (children's and adults') democratic learning and providing them with opportunities for civic association and action. This means, second, that they are *fully open* to all citizen*s* both during and after normal school hours and for a variety of both political and non-political purposes to be decided upon by the community itself (e.g., recreation, entertainment, public deliberation and decision-making, continuing education). A primary emphasis should be on making schools, in the first place, one essential public space that is open to all and where such decisions can be taken on fair and equal terms; in this sense they are deeply *political* civic centers in the way Ward envisioned. And, third, they would be *publicly funded and supported*—not, as Ward made clear about the Rochester social centers, dependent on philanthropy but rather "based on the politics of democratic initiative and participation."[47]

Ultimately, this is a call for us to move toward the realization of a broader and more radical conception of public schools—one that demands that schools, if they are to be truly "public," operate as places for "centered democratic education." This is one practicable and important means through which we can combat the crisis of democracy and declining civic association and mark off common spaces where we can engage—as political friends—in the work of creating more democratic communities.

[46] Survey Associates, "The Social Center as Mentor of the Press," *The Survey* 30, no. 23 (1913): 676.
[47] Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public*, 54.