A Fatal Drifting Apart

Democratic Social Knowledge and Chicago Reform

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To Darel, Henry, and Jacob
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Preface

American democracy was in question in the 1890s. The pressures of industrial capitalism, the anonymity of urban life, the social dislocations of migration and immigration, the corruption of business and politics, the promises of the new social sciences led reformers to ponder the nature of democracy and work toward new means of fostering it in America’s cities. This book examines the democratic aspirations of Chicago reformers at the turn of the twentieth century. It focuses on a particular vision of democracy as a set of social practices and epistemological commitments that emphasized deliberation, interaction, proximity, sympathetic understanding, and mutual relationships. Together these composed a democratic social knowledge that was inclusive, socially mediated, and offered a methodology for social action. Though its proponents believed it would revitalize political practices such as voting, such democracy extended beyond procedural, formal politics into the realm of everyday practice.

My work on this project began as my friend Annjie moved into Karen House, a Catholic Worker project in North St. Louis. Through her, I learned of the Worker Movement which since the 1930s has offered hospitality to the poor, not as a welfare agency or connected to any church, but as a home shared by our society’s neediest people and those who choose to live their lives in relationships with them, in witness to their struggles. Though many of the culturally middle-class people like Annjie who move into Worker houses are activists, this is not the primary vision of the movement. Instead, it focuses on the radical transformations that accompany a life committed to fostering close and equitable relationships with and recognizing the dignity of every individual who comes through the door—even those our society rejects: the drug abusers, mentally ill, and chronically homeless people, who are frequent guests at Karen House. Annjie’s reasons for moving into Karen House are her story to tell, but in the twelve years that she has lived there—twelve years during which I have been an observer and occasional interloper into the community while writing this book—I have been struck by parallels between the democratic practices of the reformers whose stories I tell here and the life my friend lives. In important ways it has helped me to understand the similarities and differences in past struggles for social justice and those of the present, the possibilities and limitations of radical democratic social relationships, and the ways that we have in the past and continue in the present to award (or deny) political and epistemological legitimacy to certain people, viewpoints, and groups. My friend’s struggles
to share in the lives of people so different from her and to take seriously their ideas and the lessons these marginalized people's experiences offer us about our society, echo an earlier commitment to a vision of democracy. This vision was one of mutual relationships in which shared experiences and engagement with community problems rendered a new form of democratic social knowledge that included a wide variety of experiences and perspectives and helped shape political discussions.

As I finish this project, we seem to take the meaning of democracy for granted, and it is a very different conception from the one outlined here. Pressure for elections in other parts of the Middle East receive a great deal of attention as evidence of growing democratic commitments in nations usually characterized as undemocratic. Elected government appears synonymous with democracy, though even dictators have held elections from time to time. This view is not entirely without precedent. The right to vote has been sacred in this country and much sought after by those to whom it was denied. One need only study the women's suffrage movement or learn how African Americans put their lives in jeopardy throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries to cast a ballot to recognize that participating in elections holds great meaning for Americans. But during the Progressive Era, Chicago reformers worked toward a vision of democracy that encompassed much more than voting rights.

Several types of democratic thought emerged by the 1890s. Not surprisingly, one focused primarily on voting—expanding suffrage to women and disfranchised African Americans, revising voting and party practices, wielding direct, as opposed to representative, democracy. Another focused on shaping a new liberal regulatory state capable of providing a modicum of social welfare. Still another was more reactionary; believing that the ills of American democracy were rooted in the immigrant political machines and the votes of newly emancipated African Americans, nativists and racists sought to limit their political participation. Another looked to a framework of participatory democracy that foregrounded deliberation in the public sphere and engaged interaction in voluntary associations as a way to enact democracy. Each of these, tied as they were to Progressive reform, was intertwined with the others and responded to the social, economic, and intellectual problems that attended a nation in rapid transformation. We know the outcome of that transformation: By the 1920s women had gained the suffrage, some states had passed direct democracy laws, and many more had expanded the regulatory role of a new liberal administrative state working in concert with bureaucratic experts. However, in the early 1890s the direction of American democracy was yet unknown. It was a moment of great possibility.

This book explores that possibility from the vantage point of a group of Chicago social reformers who took the city as their laboratory for democracy. Though many varieties of democratic thought pervaded their efforts, it focuses
on the specifically social and interactive ways they envisioned democracy. The democratic ideals they espoused were a set of practices, habits of mind that encouraged mutual relationships built on knowledge and sympathetic understanding of one’s neighbors—be they the people next door or in the imagined civic community that made up the city—and on deliberation among people positioned differently throughout the city. Process, rather than outcome, was their primary concern, for they believed that through democratic praxis—of discussion, of interaction with people very different from one’s self, of shared experiences—one learned to regard others as equals and to work for a public good that was collectively defined. Democracy, then, was social, cultural, and psychological, as well as procedural.

Key to their vision of democracy was the development of a democratic social knowledge. By social knowledge I mean the ideas, beliefs, information, and observations communities use to describe, explain, and understand social reality and shape social institutions. Social knowledge structures the collective narratives we tell about our lives. Though they did not describe it in such terms, reformers sought a democratic epistemology (theory of knowledge and how we know) as the basis of the social knowledge they created. Seeking to understand the problems of their society and formulate solutions, reformers tried ways of including a variety of perspectives and experiences of community members as they forged new social explanations and cultural meanings. This book thus looks to the efforts of Chicago reformers to better understand the nature of processes to build democratic social knowledge—how this knowledge was created; the frameworks of meaning it provided; its potential to offer recognition and epistemological status to community members on the margins; its ability to reshape dominant social narratives and thus inspire political and social change—and its limitations.

Since reformers worked out their ideas about democratic praxis (defined as the intersection of theory and everyday practices) in the context of reform, they also engaged with prevailing collective narratives that functioned as a type of social knowledge to order institutions, policies, and cultural meaning and status. Because the United States was in the midst of tumultuous change, these narratives—about the economy, about responsibilities of the state, about class, gender, race, and ethnic relations—were fragile, and much of the struggle over social reform was not just about creating social welfare institutions but also about determining the cultural authority to interpret, explain, and shape the dominant narrative. Thus the book not only explores social knowledge as a process; it also examines its content—the explanations and cultural meanings and values of multiple narratives—that gave rise to reform impulses in the first place. Competing and contesting forms of social knowledge—as both process and content—at times were at odds, suggesting that one of the fundamental
challenges was (and remains) confronting questions of epistemological authority and status. In a democracy, who has the power to define social problems and offer solutions? Whose experience and knowledge are legitimate?

While I did not set out to write a book that offers a past usable in the present—indeed, there is far too much that is different between the world of the Progressives and our own circumstances to think we can find in the past easy solutions to the challenges democracy faces today—I have been repeatedly struck by the continued traces of issues revealed by the analytical lens of democratic social knowledge I employ. I hope that its small contribution to a larger and still growing body of writing on the democratic aspirations found in the Progressive Era will help us think about the meaning of democracy in our own day.
Acknowledgments

The support and encouragement of many teachers, colleagues, friends, and family have made this book possible. This project grew out of my interest in the Progressive Era and changing meanings of democracy, nourished long ago as an undergraduate student in Bob Wiebe’s history classes at Northwestern University. Bob’s generous oversight of an independent study my senior year set me down the path that has led to this book. As a graduate student at Washington University, I had the privilege of working with two wonderful advisors, Iver Bernstein and Mary Ann Dzuback. Iver helped me to understand nineteenth-century cultural history, which ultimately proved so important in my interpretation of the Progressive Era, and ever pushed me to find just the right word or phrase. Mary Ann encouraged my early interest in the social production of knowledge and my very broad understanding of the history of education. I am grateful for the mentoring and friendship both have offered through the years. Other members of my dissertation committee were invaluable. Howard Brick asked the kind of difficult questions that help turn a dissertation into a book. Andrea Friedman’s insight and support of the project proved immensely helpful when the dissertation was in its home stretch and I began working in earnest on the book manuscript.

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offered me their unfailing confidence. They have made my family’s life easier in so many concrete ways—offering a hand to clean the house, cook a meal, watch a sick child when I had to teach, go to a meeting, or had a deadline. Without their help from the very outset, this book would have remained only a dream. I am grateful that they are able to offer my children the example of love and support they have given to me.

This book is dedicated to my boys, Hank and Jake Shelton, and my husband, Darel Shelton. Hank inspires me every day. Diagnosed with autism six years ago, he struggles daily to make sense of his world and to communicate with us. His courage, hard work, and frustrations in expressing even his most basic desires have helped me keep my bouts of writer’s block in perspective. Jake’s creativity and enthusiasm are infectious, as is his excitement about pirates, superheroes, and guitars. He makes me laugh and reminds me to look for lightning bugs. Both boys are a reminder of why finishing this book mattered so much to me. Perhaps some day they’ll ask me about it. My husband likes to tell people that I’ve been working on this project longer than he’s known me (which is almost fifteen years now!). His patience with me is the ultimate reason this book is done. His sacrifice, his willingness to let me work far too many evenings, weekends, and vacations, to do more than his share of housework and child care, have afforded me the opportunity to finally finish this book. Only he knows what it has cost, and it is a debt I can never repay. For this and for so many other reasons, he is the love of my life.
Introduction

On December 3, 1891, two years after Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr opened Hull House social settlement on the near west side of Chicago, Addams spoke to fellow members of the Chicago Woman’s Club. She was gaining local notoriety for her work with the city’s poor and ethnic populations, and her talk that day highlighted the maladies accompanying late nineteenth-century urbanization. Citing the political corruption, economic inequities, and moral malaise that gripped the modern city, Addams asserted that “the social organization has been broken down.” Residents “live for the moment side by side, many of them without knowledge of each other, without fellowship, without local tradition, or public spirit.” Addams identified the problem as one of democratic social knowledge—understanding of social organizations and relations enacted in fellowship, commonalities, and engagement—in short, democratic practices. She feared a “fatal drifting apart, the dividing of a city between the rich and poor,” and, given her experience in settlement work, she might well have added immigrant and native-born men and women, black and white.¹

The “fatal drifting apart” that Addams described is an apt metaphor for understanding the anxieties and motivations of Chicago reformers in the 1890s. It captured the cultural and psychological fragmentation that historians recognize as a significant aspect of late nineteenth-century American life.² It also pointed out the dangers to democracy posed by the major economic transformation from proprietary to corporate capitalism, by the circumscribed racial, ethnic, and gendered boundaries around full citizenship, and by the political corruption that plagued U.S. cities. These dangers left reformers struggling over the shifting meanings and practices of democracy. This book explores their contributions to the Progressive Era battle over democracy as the intersection of social knowledge and democratic practices.

¹ Though she spoke specifically of London’s East End, she did so to illustrate Chicago’s problems. Jane Addams, “Outgrowths of Toynbee Hall,” 3, Jane Addams Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Reel 47 (hereafter cited as JAP).
As Addams surveyed Chicago, she found ample evidence of a drifting apart. Ethnic and class tension had exploded in the Haymarket Affair five years earlier, and violent skirmishes were typical between striking workers and police. Neighborhoods increasingly separated by class, race, and ethnicity were built in the wake of the Great Fire of 1871. The boundaries defined the city’s cultural geography as well, leaving residents not only spatially but also psychologically distanced from one another. As one observer remarked, “We are getting to be a community of strangers. No one expects to know ... half the audience at the church or theater, and, as to knowing one’s neighbors, that has become a lost art.”

This observation of the lost art of knowing others was not just a lament about the passing of small town America into an industrialized, urban nation. It also suggested a significant political and social problem for a nation in which the democratic ethos depended not only on the freedom occasioned by proprietary capitalism, in which individual ownership of productive resources was a prerequisite for political independence, but also on the ability to forge sympathetic bonds with others. Indeed a moral language of sentiment and sympathy had pervaded the work of Scottish Enlightenment theorists, early American novelists, Romantic thinkers, and political leaders as prominent as Thomas Jefferson. Adam Smith suggested that sympathy provided the affective tie that held society together and created the boundaries of an imagined ethical and political community. In his 1801 inaugural address, Thomas Jefferson urged Americans to put aside a decade of conflict. “Liberty and even life itself are but dreary things,” he wrote, without “harmony and affection” undergirding the political community. Horace Bushnell, the Romantic minister, wrote in an 1846 sermon, “beholding, as in a glass, the feelings of our neighbor, we are changed into the

same image, by the assimilating power of sensibility and fellow-feeling.\textsuperscript{8} Democratic society, then, seemed predicated on a way of knowing others that was relational and that emphasized familiarity and sympathy. Conversely, without social understanding, sympathetic identification was rendered impossible and civic bonds threatened—a fear that haunted many reformers. By century’s end, finding a basis for democratic social relations seemed increasingly urgent as classical political economy and republican government had clearly failed to bring about the harmony of interests that Jefferson’s generation anticipated.

During the 1890s the eyes of the world turned frequently to Chicago as it struggled with the promises and challenges of urban democracy. Local government was limited in its ability to meet the problems of sanitation, housing, and transportation. Its relationship to county government, which also provided some services to city residents, was complicated, and its ability to raise revenue, either through taxes or bond issues, was strictly constrained by state law. Plagued by extensive corruption and antipathy from downstate legislators, city government was ill equipped to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding city as the population doubled to one million between 1880 and 1890; ten years later it had grown to 1.7 million.

Annexation of surrounding townships and immigration primarily from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Russia, and other Eastern European countries accounted for the growth. Between 1887 and 1893 the city annexed several townships, expanding its area from 35 to 190 square miles. Three-quarters of the residents in this metropolis were foreign born or the children of immigrants, drawn by the city’s rapidly expanding economy. Industrial, craft, and commercial economies comprising the Pullman Palace Car Company, Illinois Steel, McCormick Reaper Works, meat-packing companies such as Swift and Armour, garment and building industries, and retail companies such as Montgomery Ward, Sears and Roebuck, and Marshall Field and Company provided a robust economic infrastructure. Along with immigration and economic expansion came the growth of a strong and frequently radical labor movement, as unions enjoyed strong support in the city.\textsuperscript{9} Events like the Haymarket Affair and the subsequent execution of anarchists blamed for the deaths of several policemen, as well as the Pullman strike and boycott that spread across the United States—and the government injunction used to break the strike—were not just national but indeed


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worldwide symbols of industrial class conflict and the growing alliances between capital and the state. Indeed, the city was a hotbed of social activism.

These challenges made Chicago emblematic of the difficulties confronting other cities undergoing rapid urbanization and industrialization. Its symbolic importance, standing between the commercial, “civilized” East and the wilderness of the West and encapsulating all of the problems of urbanization and industrialization—and all of the aspirations and opportunities of innovative technological and economic growth—captures historical attention. It offers us a vantage point from which to explore the struggle to define the future of American democracy. The backdrop of industrialization, emerging classes, and ethnic and racial pluralism set the stage on which Chicago reformers took up the seemingly impossible challenge of enacting democracy.

This book examines the efforts of local reformers as they collectively experimented with ways to foster democracy built on mutual respect, trust, and sympathetic understanding—traits that were important components for political deliberation and social cohesion and ultimately activism. This was no small undertaking in a city that comprised primarily foreign immigrants and migrants from other parts of the United States and increasingly riven by class conflict. They tried to overcome these barriers and to know one another and negotiate ways to explain their city’s problems and shape its future. A Fatal Drifting Apart examines the Chicago reform community as it wrestled with the meaning of democracy and forms of democratic practice in the urban environment.

The book argues that Chicago reformers offered a democratic social knowledge that helped transform American liberal democracy and political culture at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond. By “democratic social knowledge” I mean a way of knowing that privileges experience, proximity, interaction, and sympathetic understanding and that encourages negotiation of multiple perspectives and community participation in defining the narratives and various types of knowledge that shaped widely accepted social meanings. In contrast

10. For example, Lessie Jo Frazier notes that, as late as the 1990s, labor activists in northern Chile still celebrated as martyrs the men executed in connection with the Haymarket Affair. See Lessie Jo Frazier, Salt in the Sand, forthcoming, Duke University Press.

11. I use the terms “reformer” and “reform community” throughout this work to refer to people who sought change in the existing conditions of the city. While this definition at times makes strange bedfellows of conservative, moderate, and more radical men and women, it speaks to the fact that this period witnessed a great deal of conversation and cooperation among them. It also highlights the difficulty of categorizing reformers during the Progressive Era. For example, Maureen Flanagan has demonstrated the difficulty of the term “reformer” by illustrating how the designation was appropriated by businessmen as a strategy to marginalize the working classes and ethnic societies who offered different visions of urban reform. Maureen Flanagan, Charter Reform in Chicago (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), ix–x.

12. My use of “proximate” as an aspect of democratic social knowledge builds on the work of
to earlier a priori formal knowledge and emerging academic expertise, such ways of knowing become a form of democratic induction in which experience and observation were shared and mediated in public and used to challenge and redefine prevailing cultural assumptions. Efforts to promote democratic social knowledge could be found in a wide variety of reform efforts and communities such as social settlements, cross-class civic organizations, cross-race alliances, labor arbitration, the narrative styles of reform literature, and the visual culture of media forms like public expositions and movies. Reformers’ emphasis on interactive ways of knowing further offered a democratic praxis (theory and action) that promoted mutuality, trust, and respect in order to invigorate public engagement and to overcome the tendency toward a “fatal drifting apart.”

The reformers who promoted such practices eschewed the atomistic and abstract natural laws of classical political economy; they sought to expand the democratic polity by extending sympathetic understanding built on recognition of common humanity. They frequently wrestled with the role of government, envisioning it as an agent of redistributive justice whose priority was to meet social needs and not just to fulfill a limited social contract in which the state’s primary function was the defense of private property.

As we see in chapter 1, a liberal republicanism built on classical political economy served as a powerful narrative emphasizing a unity of interests that had grown up along with the city and as a natural and divine justice operating through the free market. It described as universal a style of rationality that privileged calculated exchange, self-interest, and formal laws of nineteenth-century economic and legal systems. As civic elites extolled the economic opportunities available in Chicago and argued for the supremacy of free labor as the source of discipline necessary to maintain social order, they rendered suspect those who did not share in Chicago’s material success or who held conflicting ideas. The conception of rationality found in classical economic and free labor paradigms thus functioned as a measure of legitimacy in public debate. In this chapter we see the power of dominant narratives of social knowledge to frame public debate and social institutions. But by the 1890s the liberal republican narrative was under extraordinary strain, and, as we see in subsequent chapters, reformers outlined an alternative way—in the form of democratic social knowledge—to conceive of the democratic polity and the practice of democracy by drawing on Chicago residents’ experiences and ideas.

Shannon Jackson, who describes a “proximate epistemology” as the basis of “participatory fieldwork in the early stages of American sociology, social work, and social reform.” She emphasizes its roots in domestic discourse and its similarities to pragmatism. Proximate epistemology, as it was practiced at Hull House, drew primarily from the discourse of domesticity, privileging women as interpreters of experiences of private and ordinary routines of living. Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 6.
To understand how reformers promoted democratic social knowledge, its possibilities and limitations, and its implications for the practice of democracy and the role of the state, the book examines select individuals, groups, and events prominent in Chicago’s social and political reform movements in the period between 1890 and 1919. In chapter 2 we explore the Civic Federation of Chicago (CFC), which comprised a diverse group of businessmen, unionists, middle-class and elite women, social scientists, and religious leaders. The organization was at the forefront of political reform for fifteen years, spearheading efforts to create a new city charter. It espoused the idea that social knowledge was the result of constant negotiation among multiple perspectives, and it brought residents from different sectors together to facilitate that debate, search for common solutions to social problems, and promote political action. However, early on the CFC was torn between its hope that a more open-ended and inclusive process of creating this knowledge would reconcile division and its anticipation that the group’s promotion of social science expertise would serve as a means of bringing order and rationality to the city. While these processes were not necessarily mutually exclusive, they became so as many members increasingly privileged an elitist model of expertise based on social science. Competing views of reason and justice manifested in debates over poor relief, gambling, and school reform were constituent with these tensions and resulted in a gender and class split within the organization. This chapter thus illustrates competing ideas about democratic social knowledge and foreshadows their struggle in the arena of formal politics.

In chapter 3 we journey to Hull House social settlement, where Jane Addams and female residents laid out a framework of democratic social knowledge different from that which ultimately shaped the CFC. It emphasized proximity and experience, mutuality, public deliberation, sympathetic understanding, and aesthetic knowing while offering a (gendered) activist social science that sought to wed new forms of expertise with local participation. They built on the personal relationships they had developed living in their multiethnic, working-class neighborhood to turn their settlement house into an arena for public deliberation, social inquiry, and political and social experimentation. Addams’s work in the settlement, which pushed her into a multitude of reform endeavors throughout the city, suggests the potential of interaction across class and ethnic lines to yield a fuller social understanding and redefine the boundaries of the state to promote social justice. The chapter further shows the centrality of everyday interactions in the formation and practice of democratic social knowledge.

Chapter 4 uses the Pullman strike and debates over labor arbitration to more closely examine the class dilemmas confronting democratic social knowledge. In an environment where class and urban boundaries meant that workers and owners were largely unknown to one another and where industrial capitalist economic transformation bred class hostility, some reformers looked to arbitration
to encourage democratic character traits among both capitalists and workers. Many reformers believed arbitration served simultaneously as a deliberative forum for resolving disputes in a way that built mutual recognition and respect, trust, and understanding. It also served as a process that promoted the formation of democratic social knowledge built on the collective knowledge of the work process held by workers and businessmen alike. Following these issues into the Hart, Shaffner, and Marx trade agreements and joint arbitration boards in the 1910s, we see a transformation in the attitudes of a few capitalist elites toward labor arbitration. Similarly we find a new willingness among Chicago's labor leaders to use the state to advance and protect their agendas; hence we see the foreshadowing of an expanded role for the state as the arbitrator of conflicting concepts of social claims and economic justice.

Further testing the possibilities and limits of democratic social knowledge to mediate social justice claims and secure cultural agency, chapter 5 investigates instances and strategies that African Americans and their white allies employed to bring the races together. Believing that interaction between and proximity of the races would help overcome racial division, race reformers built the Frederick Douglass Club, an interracial social settlement, and encouraged interracial cooperation on a variety of reform measures. Using an embodied knowledge, one that posited social knowledge in public representations of themselves as respectable, hard-working, and worthy citizens, African Americans pressed their cultural agency, countering popular and social scientific racism in antilynching texts, social interactions, and public displays of an alternative (middle-class) black body legible to (middle-class) white Americans. Yet we also see in this chapter the racialized limitations of democratic social knowledge, limitations that suggested a larger tension between democratic social knowledge and the conflation of prejudice and subjective viewpoints with knowledge.

The book concludes in chapter 6 with a brief examination of the struggle over democratic social knowledge in the arena of formal politics. As was apparent in the charter campaign of 1906–7 and in debates over direct democracy in

the years following, the ultimate failure of reformers to reach a new consensus about democratic social knowledge would have significant consequences for the course of liberal democracy in the twentieth century. Desires for legitimization of experience and viewpoint, not only self-interest defined by a market model of exchange in economics, motivated women's organizations, ethnic societies, and labor organizations to oppose the charter. Holding fast to a classical political economic view of the autonomous individual as the universal political and economic actor, the conservative members of the CFC and business elites were outraged at the stance of what they called interest groups, whose activism ultimately defeated the charter. Some were further disheartened that citizens rejected the expertise of the businessmen, political scientists, and legal scholars who helped write and stump for the charter. Here we will see the resilience of liberal republicanism and its consequences for constraining the possibilities of democratic social knowledge.

These key examples of democratic social knowledge in formation—Jane Addams and Hull House, the Civic Federation, labor arbitration, interracial activism, and charter reform—together point to three fronts on which democratic social knowledge battled. The first front was the emerging discourse of reason and expertise, which businessmen and social scientists sought to claim for themselves. Yet we also see that the language of expertise was flexible; it was employed by people like Jane Addams and Ida Wells-Barnett and by unionists seeking to secure a voice in industry, who all claimed their experience with and proximity to social problems as a basis for their own logic and authority in matters of reform.14

The cultural terrain served as a second front, as reformers noted that social knowledge was shaped by and through drama, reform literature, public exposi-
tions, and movies. Efforts by African Americans to exercise cultural agency, for example, were important means to ensure that the input into social knowledge about race was more inclusive. Finally, democratic social knowledge battled on

14. For example, Robin Bachin explains that "emerging faith in the power of experts and social science to transform knowledge and shape urban growth forced a reexamination of the power of religious leaders, genteel elites, and ward bosses," while, at the same time, a language of expertise was used by a variety of groups. She juxtaposes the epistemological concerns of the University of Chicago and the University of Chicago Settlement to illustrate the differences between the distanced, formal epistemology represented in the former and the interactive social inquiry encouraged by the latter. Similarly, historians have demonstrated that female reformers appropriated the rhetoric of expertise to expand women's role in public life. Robin F. Bachin, Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civic Culture in Chicago, 1890–1919 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 7. Kathryn Kish Sklar, Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830–1900 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Camilla Stivers, Bureau Men, Settlement Women: Constructing Public Administration in the Progressive Era (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2000); Robyn Muncy, Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890–1935 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
the terrain of formal politics, particularly in the form of struggles over political
knowledge—that is, knowledge of how to make the political process work. For
example, in debates over the charter campaign, we see competing ideas about the
nature, responsibilities, and mechanisms of city government.

Taken together, these examples of democratic social knowledge in formation
and the fronts on which they battled illustrate the extent to which public debates
over social and political reform reflected widespread tension over pluralist con-
ceptions of knowledge. Such pluralism served to challenge a nineteenth-century
republican paradigm of a singular public good and classical liberal political
economy’s privileging of self-interested economic behavior. The examples of
democratic social knowledge thus offer new ways to think about the goals and
practices of democracy and the purposes of the liberal democratic state. By the
end of the book, we see that the democratic praxis—the intersection of knowl-
edge and everyday practices—emerging from the lessons of Chicago reform
requires democratic social knowledge in a dual sense. It is both inclusive pro-
cesses of input into shaping pervasive cultural, social, and political attitudes and
institutions and the framework of knowledge that result from those processes.

The men, women, and their organizations that constituted the Chicago
reform community played important roles as mediators of democratic social
knowledge. Primarily members of a civic elite and an expanding and fluid mid-
dle class that included petite bourgeois proprietors, union leaders, college-edu-
cated women, as well as professionals, these reformers found that they occupied
strategic positions within Chicago’s social, moral, and political economies.

15. Philip Ethington has suggested the importance of the role of pluralist conceptions of knowl-
edge in the modern city. See, for example, Philip J. Ethington, The Public City: The Political Construc-
tion of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850–1900 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and
“The Metropolis and Multicultural Ethics: Direct Democracy versus Deliberative Democracy in
the Progressive Era,” in Progressivism and the New Democracy, ed. Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M.

16. Burton J. Bledstein, The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development
of Higher Education (New York: Norton, 1976); Stuart Blumin, The Emergence of the Middle Class:
Historians have struggled to identify the “middle class” with much precision. See, for example,
Burton J. Bledstein, “Introduction: Storytellers to the Middle Class”; Sven Beckert, “Propertied of
a Different Kind: Bourgeoisie and Lower Middle Class in the Nineteenth-century United States”;
and Robert D. Johnston, “Conclusion: Historians and the Middle Class,” all in The Middling Sorts:
Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class, ed. Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D.
Johnston (New York: Routledge, 2001). See also Robert D. Johnston, The Radical Middle Class:
Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive-era Portland, Oregon (Princeton,
NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). Johnston argues that historians should more carefully attend
to the contributions of the middle classes to American political culture. Though it is not the purpose
of this book to engage a thorough analysis of class and class formation, I have found Johnston’s
suggestion valuable in helping to identify the ways that Chicago reformers were instrumental in
promoting political engagement that not only was shaped by but also transcended class identity. In
understanding the role of reformers as mediators, I suggest that they were engaged in a process of
Aligning with more marginalized members of Chicago society—workers, poor people, recent immigrants—they were able to use their newfound social capital to bring their allies’ concerns into important conversations about the democratic polity and the role of the state. Moreover, they were able to create counter public spheres in which to freely deliberate alternative social narratives. Seeking to broker greater understanding among Chicago’s disparate sectors and more extensive knowledge about Chicago’s problems, their reform efforts were not simply calculated to secure the status quo, which increasingly privileged a middle class cohered around proprietary ownership, professional occupations and expertise, and a cultural rhetoric of respectability. As they translated the experiences and perspectives of different groups, they also offered a model of the middle-class mediator as one able to take different perspectives, negotiate among various interests, and form alliances with those below to put pressure on those above. Given the cultural expectations of the time, the people with whom one interacted and built relationships was indeed political.

These mediators were able to exercise significant influence in reform debates since government at the local, state, and national levels did not yet play an active role in matters of social welfare or economic regulation. Reformers stepped into the vacuum created by the weak state, and indeed many of them, women and African Americans in particular, were disfranchised. Closed off from access to formal political power, they responded creatively to the social needs around them, sometimes by forming voluntary associations to address those needs and sometimes by pressing social claims on the state to take more forging relationships across class that did not simply seek social control. Rather, their efforts suggest a deeper commitment, shared with people across the class spectrum, to engaging issues of justice and the responsibilities of individuals and the democratic state. For Johnston’s discussion of the political role of class in modern politics, see Radical Middle Class, 257–78. For an articulation of the political potential of viewing the social agent as encompassing multiple political identities, not just single or totalizing interests defined in terms of gender or class, see Chantal Mouffe, “Feminism, Citizenship, and Radical Democratic Politics,” in Feminists Theorize the Political, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, 369–84 (New York: Routledge, 1992).


18. For an alternative view of Progressive reformers, one that argues they ignored real class divisions in claiming to speak for a broader “public,” see Shelton Stromquist, Reinventing “The People”: The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005). Similar to my argument that reformers sought to prevent a drifting apart, Stromquist emphasizes their efforts to promote social harmony, though he emphasizes the ways that their reform language masked class divisions and ultimately undermined labor Progressives. His analysis clarifies one of the limitations of Progressivism, though my concern with democratic social knowledge emphasizes something different—an intersection of democracy, knowledge, and politics—which, as we will see in chapter 4, also had class limitations.
responsibility for ensuring the public welfare. Nevertheless, although their role in state building is well documented, some reformers who acted as mediators also offer us an alternative way to think about democracy as relational. As these historical actors formed relationships that were mutually educative and transformative, they sought to understand and explain various worldviews and to legitimate perspectives in the hope that a democratic social knowledge would help equalize power both in formal politics and in a broader, informal negotiation of cultural politics.

The individuals, groups, and reform issues in this book are all familiar to students of Chicago history and of those years between 1890 and 1920 known as the Progressive Era, but they appear here through a new analytical lens that helps us see democratic social knowledge and its possibilities and limitations. Well known for its Progressive Era social reform and the activism of its intellectuals, Chicago has been the subject of several studies of new methods of social inquiry and their connection to the nascent field of social work and to the welfare state, as well as their effect on the emergence of the modern university and its role in the city. Such studies have contributed to interpretations of the Progressive Era that emphasize a burgeoning middle-class culture of bureaucracy, professionalism, and efficiency, as well as an intellectual reorientation toward scientism and expertise. In contrast, by placing them side by side here, I offer a different window onto conflicts of the period through which we see multiple arenas of reform in which local residents wrestled with the intersection of epistemology (theory of knowledge and how we know) and democratic politics (conceived not just in procedural terms, such as the working of government mechanisms or formal political acts such as voting, but also as negotiations over cultural meanings and everyday practices). The democratic praxis this intersection inspired offered a methodology for social action, where the primacy of personal interactions and


shared experiences served as a basis for mutual understanding, for social explanations that incorporated multiple perspectives, and for political engagement. This praxis, reformers hoped, would lead to an inclusive and just democracy.

Chicago reformers were wrestling with one of the enduring difficulties of democratic government—balancing group interests and individual rights against an idea of the public good, which was increasingly identified with social order. The narrative of liberal republicanism that shaped stories of Chicago’s phenomenal growth and the responsibilities of its government was one response to this conundrum. It posited a myth of civic harmony in the pursuit of city building, a myth that, not incidentally, secured the cultural position of the capitalist elite. This civic myth used the grammar of natural or universal rights and reason growing out of liberalism to mask its underlying contentiousness. Indeed, as scholar Wai Chee Dimock has argued, the “triumph of rights is, above all, an epistemological triumph, one that confers reality on one claim, one body of evidence and lone lines of reasoning, over that of its opponents.”

Thus, the triumph of the right holder must never appear as anything other than the triumph of sole and objective truth. Taking Dimock’s argument further, we can see that the winners in such arguments must make such claims to an absolute, objective, and neutral reason since to do otherwise would be to admit their assertion of power over others—an assertion that is odious in a democracy that professes equality. As communications theorist David Allen has argued, the problem with such an approach to politics and epistemology is that it undermines the deliberative dimension of democracy as a process. Instead, the liberal marketplace of ideas becomes a place not for forging understanding “where ideas are exchanged for the sake of deliberation but a way to assure that an idea becomes dominant.”

However, reformers engaged in promoting democratic social knowledge sought different ways to resolve this tension. When we begin in 1890 with chapter 1, political economy had long since rendered market exchange a natural and impersonal process, ostensibly devoid of meaning and feeling. Furthermore, rational, self-interested market exchange suggested that economic gain could “be attained only by an attitude involving a distinctive antagonistic relationship between the partners.” As the fear of a social harmony permanently disrupted

by class, ethnic, and racial conflict haunted Chicago reformers, their lens of democratic social knowledge encouraged identification with—not advantage over—others. Such an imaginative exchange was personal and intimate, as it was often located in the physical and emotional experiences of individuals and groups, but it had consequences for democratic politics. In trying to “add the social function to democracy,” as Jane Addams put it, Chicago reformers argued for a broader idea of democracy than that simply of the suffrage. While some historians have noted that the culture of consumerism attendant to the transformation to corporate capitalism opened up new ways of thinking about democracy as a mode of freedom in creating one’s subjectivities and identities, the Chicago reformers herein experimented with methods and spaces outside those of the market to enact democracy, to recognize others’ similarities, and to resolve the implicit contentiousness of reason and rights.24 By reformers’ standards, the measure of democratic practice lay not only in voting and political participation but also in the degree to which their community fostered the means to overcome barriers and connect individuals in a common pursuit of the public good. They saw the multiple perspectives of various communities as resources to be recognized and incorporated into public life.

The democracy that many reformers envisioned was thus rooted in praxis and had important implications for the formal political arena. They hoped that by bringing diverse groups together for the purposes of discussion of shared experiences and relationships, city residents could more easily move beyond their personal and group perspectives to understand others and pursue an inclusive vision of democracy based on social justice. Many Chicago reformers assumed that the ability to cultivate sympathy for others’ experiences offered a way to overcome an epistemological divide often caused by disparate cultural experience and to build the foundation for collective social and political action. They believed that the intermixing of classes, races, and ethnic groups would help break down social division while generating a broader knowledge of their community and its problems. The purpose of such civic interaction was not only to impose social control (though this, for some, was clearly a factor) but also to better create democratic social knowledge and, in the process, foster a firmer basis for democratic praxis.

While at times reformers met with success, their ultimate effectiveness was limited by problems of power and prejudice (especially regarding class and race) and by epistemological differences that worked to privilege their different ideological positions.25 But far from contributing to a simple reorientation of knowledge

24. Livingston discusses the culture of consumerism and corporate capitalism in Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution.

25. My use of the term “epistemology” is informed by social theory that recognizes the socially constructed nature of knowledge. As such, what counts as knowledge and legitimate ways of
that ushered in a culture of expertise, Chicago’s reform struggles emphasized the fluid nature and significant intersections between democratic social knowledge and the practice of democracy. Exploring them on such terms helps deepen our understanding of the ways in which individuals and urban communities struggle over knowledge and the meaning and practice of democracy.

**Democracy and the Politics of Knowledge**

This story of democratic social knowledge draws our attention to a broader politics of knowledge played out in the Progressive Era, its connection to the practice of democracy, and its treatment in the historiography. In this section I situate my book within those discussions, but first let me further explain my use of the term “social knowledge.”

The term “social knowledge” came into usage in the late 1800s, during the professionalization of the social sciences. Though today the term primarily describes the product of academic and professional social science investigations, in the nineteenth century it referred to collective practices that ordinary individuals and communities used to describe, explain, and understand social reality. Reacting against formal, a priori knowledge and seeking to illuminate the social knowing—epistemology—is closely tied to matters of power. I mean to explore these issues without suggesting that the rationale for any historical actor’s particular claim to knowledge (that person’s epistemology) was the “correct” one. Rather, they offer us important ways to think about knowledge and democracy. I find it important, however, to recognize that historical actors have an epistemology, even if they themselves do not characterize it as such. Despite the wide body of literature supporting this use, some scholars will find it problematic and prefer to maintain stricter boundaries around what constitutes epistemology and epistemological claims and to reserve the term to denote a branch of philosophy. These differences have important implications for historical interpretation and methodology, in that the latter reserves epistemology to elite social actors and intellectuals, thus rendering non-elite social actors less visible and denying their intellectual agency and the framework of logic and rationality undergirding their ideological positions. Much of this debate comes down to a question of which social actors can have overarching worldviews and political projects. Works in cultural studies and feminist theory contend that subaltern actors have larger political projects and visions and that these are informed by epistemological frameworks different from, not just in reaction to, those of elite intellectual and political actors. My work speaks directly to these issues, in that it explores the ways that non-elite actors offered political projects built on alternative frameworks of knowing. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977); Joan Wallach Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Summer 1991): 773–97; Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). For discussion of debates over knowledge and historical methodology, see Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994).
bases of knowledge, Progressive Era social theorists offered a nascent articulation of social knowledge as a theoretical term, pointing to the social processes by which widely shared ideas, beliefs, and values shaping common explanations of society are forged.

In *Democracy and Education* (1916), John Dewey suggests that individuals incorporate a variety of frameworks of meaning into their everyday lives. These include the more familiar scientific or rationalized knowledge, but some frameworks might be called commonsense or second-hand knowledge. He contrasted “empirical knowing,” which “is connected with everyday affairs, [and] serves the purposes of the ordinary individual who has no specialized intellectual pursuit,” with “rational knowledge,” which “touches reality in ultimate, intellectual fashion . . . [and is] not debased by application in behavior. Socially the distinction corresponds to that of the intelligence used by the working classes and that used by a learned class remote from concern with the means of living.” In characteristic pragmatic fashion, he rejected this dualism, seeing all knowledge as a combination of sensation, emotion, and thought.

In a similar vein, William Graham Sumner, the widely read Yale professor of social and political sciences, described “folkways,” the “habits of the individual,” the “customs of society,” and “mores” as “simply folkways with the added sanction of ethical value and an added imperative to obey” that normatively structured society. Albion Small, a University of Chicago sociologist considered to be the founder of American academic sociology, sought to provide a foundation upon which to study such frameworks. “Social knowledge,” Small wrote in his 1894 textbook, was “something other than the mere addition of the impressions of individuals; . . . the standards of conduct of a given community are peculiar combinations of personal codes, which may vary widely from the former.” Together they function to shape norms and social institutions.

More recently, scholars have defined categories of social knowledge. Mary Furner and Michael Lacey articulate at least three different kinds of knowledge, all useful for helping us understand it as a theoretical term: “(1) disciplinary and professional knowledge; (2) informed opinion of the sort necessarily possessed by elites in politics, government, the media, and active interest groups; and (3) those general forms of cultural beliefs and values, widely shared, that shape civic culture, providing a sense of propriety and impropriety that is called on

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27. Sklansky, *Soul’s Economy*, 134. This discussion of Sumner follows from ibid., 132–34. The quote is from William Graham Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* (Boston, Ginn: 1907), 77.
in evaluating the nature of social problems and proposed remedies to them.”

Each of these comprises assumptions about human nature, economics, religion, family, race, gender, politics, and the state that shape social institutions, although the third form calls attention to the way in which social knowledge is hegemonic and consequently barely recognized as a social construct. Feminist theorists, anthropologists, and sociologists of knowledge further point out that everyday, embodied experience, common sense, and sympathetic understanding often provide the fabric of meanings that constitute social explanation.

My use of social knowledge is thus emergent from the Progressive Era itself—a period during which social scientists were preoccupied with and contested the methods used to understand society—while also drawing from more recent articulations. Although the term was not widely used outside of academic circles during the era, we find an attentiveness among social reformers and activists to what we would today call the intersection of knowledge and power, as well as its implications for democracy. In this book I theorize social knowledge and use it as an analytical lens to explore a variety of deeply rooted coexistent and competing frameworks that gave meaning to individual and collective experiences. Here it reflects frameworks of meaning—the content of civic narratives such as liberal republicanism or democracy—as well as processes through which those frameworks of meaning developed and competed.

Social knowledge, as some have cast it and as I use it here, has few of the standards or strictures of formal definitions of knowledge that emerged within social scientific communities. It is different from academic knowledge in that it is primary and accessible to all members of a society and emerges from their experiences; it is taken for granted, not theoretical nor distanced from the experience of ordinary individuals.

Social knowledge, whether the distanced, academic version or a more informal sort, entails the exercise of power to include or exclude and to distribute


the community’s material resources and psychological censure or support. As such, in times of social upheaval and change, it is highly contested as reformers seek to expose and challenge its assumptions and effects and to expose its power dynamics and reshape its political consequences.

Several sometimes contradictory frameworks of meaning were available to Chicago residents, and these structures shaped the boundaries and terms of public debates. In addition to the liberal republicanism I discuss in the first chapter, reformers drew from Romanticism, a discourse of domesticity, social gospelism, socialism, and pragmatism and social psychology. These offered different ways to think about the democratic polity, social justice, and the basis of expertise. While details of these discourses varied, they shared an underlying framework of sympathy and proximity. As commitment to cooperation and sympathetic identification developed in these multiple discourses, they undermined the liberal narrative of self-interested Economic Man. As epistemological and political commitments, sympathetic understanding and interaction offered an important transformation in nineteenth-century society. Collapsing the divide between self and others, sympathy for others’ physical, emotional, or material situations offered a basis for understanding, inquiry, and knowledge. Sympathy rendered not just psychic comfort for the suffering but also a starting point from which to mobilize political action to bring about material changes in the circumstances of others.32

Furthermore, proximity was a related critical factor within several of these epistemological frameworks. As a way of knowing, proximity privileges nearness to and even engagement with experience. Reformers who were promoting processes of democratic social knowledge thus assumed that the nature of one’s experience and knowledge was contingent on one’s location in the social order, the geography of the city, and one’s relationship to the market and industrial production. Democratic social knowledge thus had to draw upon the diverse experiences of different members of society to reconcile multiple perspectives in a fuller knowledge of society.

Of course, Chicago reformers who were engaged in practical work rarely invoked specific frameworks of knowledge directly. But such frameworks were implicit in their activities, strategies, and rationales. For example, the Civic Federation, Jane Addams and the women at Hull House, and Ida Wells-Barnett

drew from social science methods to legitimize their methods of inquiry. However, they all also argued for the importance of shared experience, cooperative action, and proximity to justify their expertise on reform matters. As historian Dorothy Ross demonstrates, Addams drew from an ideology of domesticity, as well as pragmatist and Romantic thought, in forging an alternative version of sociology.33 Wells-Barnett also employed sympathetic strategies and proximal justifications to argue for the psychological and political dangers of lynching. Workers claimed their experience in the production process and their social location as a basis for specialized knowledge of the effects of laissez-faire economics. Reminiscent of pragmatic explanations of experience as the basis of knowledge, workers asserted that their experience awarded them epistemological status in the community. Such a position, which argued for the importance of incorporating multiple perspectives in social debate, upset the usual hierarchy of reform, in which the working classes and poor people were the objects—not the agents—of social change. In a culture increasingly marked by social scientific expertise, the reformers’ position constituted an important strand in Progressive Era democratization.

Though it speaks to intellectual historians and historians of education concerned with the genealogy of ideas and the transmission of culture, as well as to urban historians interested in the way cultural ideas and social and political reform shape cities, this book is primarily about politics as a vision of democratic praxis. In this work I use the term “politics” in an expansive way to include both the negotiations and actors in the formal political arena and the formal political practice of voting, as well as the struggle over cultural meanings and everyday practices and relationships—and the actors, both group and individual—who engage in them. Even though we may not recognize the efforts of reformers as political in a traditional sense, the ways that they struggled over intersecting and overlapping frameworks of understanding suggest that their work reflected competition over power to define what counts as knowledge.34


34. The book is ultimately about politics conceived broadly as encompassing power dynamics present in everyday practices. In his now classic formulation of power and knowledge, Michel Foucault reminds us that power is dispersed in the modern world; it involves not just outright demonstrations of might but also the shaping of people’s ideas and values. As Antonio Gramsci explains in his formulation of hegemony, power operates at a cultural level but is also inscribed into formal institutional structures as ideas and values shape the practices of those structures, which in turn act on individuals and whole sectors of society. Second-wave feminists have thus further pointed out that the personal is political, meaning that private matters are frequently construed as matters of state concern and cultural contest. Thus, politics means not only formal practices associated with the mechanisms of government but also the way that everyday practices shape power dynamics in the lives of both individuals and collectives. In this book we see that social knowledge is intricately...
Indeed, social knowledge is not only marked by wide consensus; because it also embodies values, moral assumptions, and various cultural frames of reference, it also connotes a sense of struggle as various groups compete and compromise to have their versions of social reality inform collective narratives, as well as social and governmental institutions and policies.

Let me turn now to the broader context in which this politics of knowledge was played out. The last decades of the nineteenth century bequeathed a growing interest in knowledge of others (and the Other) and new methods for creating such knowledge. Across the nation, study clubs and amateur social science organizations attracted thousands of members. Formal social science disciplines emerged as university departments and professional organizations defined economics, political science, anthropology, sociology, and history as distinct branches of knowledge. Literary realism attempted to capture unadorned the raw experience and details of life; in so doing, it influenced investigative journalism, produced a new genre of fiction, and highlighted narrative ways of knowing that used stories to raise consciousness and spark action. Social surveys, statistics, and the investigations of governmental bureaus reflected the cultural hunger for new ways to understand unfamiliar social groups and urban problems. Popular interest in these new forms of inquiry suggested widespread hope that they—and with them, the disinterested, objective knowledge of experts—would provide the antidote to problems of social and political alienation.  


However, while the amateur and professional social sciences provided some research methods, mixed in with these increasingly popular modes of knowing were even less formal means of interaction and inquiry. Women’s groups read novels along with social science studies; settlements brought social classes and ethnic groups together to provide firsthand experience of others’ lives and engage in political action; social gospelists emphasized Christian sympathy along with social science as a basis for knowledge of social ills and remedies. Labor organizations published newspapers and journals, and workers met to discuss both regular union business and strike-related matters. The forms of inquiry that mobilized reform-minded citizens thus ranged from social science methods and distanced observation to participatory social inquiry, informal and personal interaction, intuition, and sympathy.

In this milieu, growing numbers of reform-minded men and women, social scientists, and civic and labor leaders in Chicago worked toward greater understanding of the problems their communities faced. These reform communities were not ones engaged in the formal processes of verification required of empirical knowledge. Rather, they were civic actors whose frameworks of knowledge were often rooted in firsthand experience and local traditions and who sought verification through political and social reform processes. While many historians depict the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century as marked by a steady growth of scientism and bureaucracy, the cultural and political significance and the range of reform communities involved in this process suggest that multiple forms of local knowledge coexisted, competing and colliding with one another as they gave rich texture to reform endeavors and political debate. By framing these conflicts as a struggle over democratic social knowledge and thus the practice of democracy, I suggest that epistemological dimensions of reform projects can serve as a way to understand political conflict both in the Progressive Era and in our own day.

Sklar, eds., The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880–1940 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Jackson, Lines of Activity, 271–82.

My focus on “democratic” social knowledge complicates the usual story of the Progressive Era as the period in which rational and objective social science emerged as the dominant or privileged method of knowing about society. A number of scholars of the Progressive Era have explored the political implications of the shift in intellectual life when social science disciplines, universities, and state bureaucracy emerged as the privileged locations of knowledge production. During the 1870s and accelerating through the 1880s and 1890s, the social science disciplines and their professional organizations claimed as their own the task of exploring social questions and argued that their methods, standards, and disinterested expertise justified their authority. The model of social understanding they advanced emphasized empirical methods that distanced the investigator from the object of study. It emphasized that theoretical assertions could be verified by a community of inquirers. And the process of professionalization narrowed that community to a body of experts who shared commitments to scientific methods and disinterested objectivity. As the social sciences emphasized that truths were empirically observed and discovered rather than revealed, religion as an explanatory tool was displaced. Other claims one might make to knowledge, such as literary insight, common sense, emotion, or personal, practical, everyday experience were similarly disregarded as subjective and thus illegitimate forms of social understanding. Scientism, marked by an effort to establish prediction and control of human behavior and social institutions, took center stage in American intellectual life and was connected to the logic of liberalism.

In these familiar stories of Progressive Era reform, an increasingly positivist social science was variously used to promote humanitarian goals and social control of immigrants and the working classes and to provide a new organizational basis for American life. In corporate liberal models of reform, bureaucratic experts drawn from businesses and universities provided orderly and rational social

39. Origins of American Social Science; Ross, 472; Mark Smith, Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate over Objectivity and Purpose, 1918–1941 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994). Lustig exemplifies such a position in his Corporate Liberalism, explaining that “the knower began to be seen as a person guided in his or her judgments by the verdicts of institutional experimental procedures” (173). For a similar interpretation, see Allen, Democracy, Inc. As I argue throughout, such interpretations neglect other democratizing strands of Progressive Era social thought.
planning that modernized city government and addressed the worst effects of industrial capitalism. These versions of social reform helped refashion a negative, laissez-faire conception of liberalism into a positive, “new” liberalism that buttressed the creation of the capitalist welfare state. The state, along with universities and social science professional organizations, became an important source of social knowledge through sponsorship of investigative and regulatory agencies and legislative inquiries. Women’s historians have used a gendered lens of analysis to move beyond implicit associations of state-sponsored reform as a masculine domain, yet their work has continued to focus primarily on expert rationalization and the state’s role in social reform. By World War I, these histories of social reform suggest that a burgeoning culture of expertise offered a new form of authority to replace older religious and economic orthodoxy. In this view of the reorientation of knowledge, politics as a process for exploring and reaching consensus on social knowledge and public policy was de-emphasized or was replaced with elite experts working within the insulated confines of government bureaucracy and academic institutions without connection to the polity.


43. The State and Social Investigation in Britain and the United States, Furner and Lacey, eds.


45. Weinstein, Corporate Idea in the Liberal State; Lustig, Corporate Liberalism; Thomas Bender, Intellect and Public Life: Essays on the Social History of Academic Intellectuals in the United States (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Allen, Democracy, Inc.; Morton Horwitz has argued in a similar vein that transformations in U.S. law over the course of the nineteenth century sought to develop nonpolitical criteria for legal principles. See Morton Horwitz, Transformation of American Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), especially, 262–63; Ross, Origin of American Social Science. Jürgen Habermas has argued that such a trajectory in public life, in which knowledge to run society cannot be comprehended by the public, robs citizens of “the meaning
Democracy and the Progressive Era

While interpretations of Progressive Era reform emphasizing the rise of expertise have been valuable in outlining its possibilities for and its impact (usually assessed as negative) on American democracy and the growth of the national state, this emphasis has largely obscured important efforts at democratic reform, particularly at the local level. This book contributes to a newly emerging historiography of democracy in the Progressive Era. It joins a number of works that focus on the city as an arena for democratic struggle but offers a new lens of democratic social knowledge through which to view it. In this section I outline several democratic themes emerging from recent historiography on the Progressive Era to indicate both how my work is connected to this scholarship and where it diverges from it.

An understanding of the reorientation of knowledge has underpinned many of the studies of democratic reform on the local level. Historians such as Robert Westbrook and James Kloppenberg chart how the decades surrounding the turn of the century occasioned a shift in intellectual life away from the use of abstract logic, deductive reasoning, and a British utilitarian empiricism that had little use for the study of history and culture. Instead, intellectuals such as Dewey, William James, and Albion Small turned their attention to historical circumstances and cultural context as a basis for the social sciences. Pragmatic philosophers and social thinkers increasingly argued that knowledge did not grow exclusively out of abstract principles or formal logic but was both intertwined with culture, language, and experience and also socially constructed. This “radical theory of knowledge,” as James Kloppenberg has called it, emphasized that knowledge and ethics resulted from empirical observation and inquiry, as well as the processes of human interaction and interpretation that gave meaning to personal and collective experience.

The pragmatists’ call for empirical study through the use of the scientific method helped lend authority to the social science disciplines. However, their insistence that knowledge was grounded in experience and was social in nature had great democratic potential; it offered a philosophical rationale for more inclusive ways to investigate urban problems and mediate social experience.


Emphasizing that values, experience, and experimental action were integral parts of knowledge, pragmatism offered Chicago reformers and social scientists a framework for synthesizing their scientific methods with more interactive, participatory means to create social knowledge. This vision belied the equation of expertise with distanced observation and instead illustrated a tension between localized, interactive social science and the consolidation of intellectual life in the modern university.49

Though not an intellectual history, this book uses the crisis of knowledge to explore the tangled connections among social knowledge, reform, and politics. I argue that urban reform was not only an arena for the application of new social science expertise but also the site of intersecting, competing, and indeed colliding frameworks of knowledge. Democratic social knowledge offers an analytical lens that allows us to examine the ways in which democracy is tied to open-ended and inclusive processes of explaining social reality and shaping social institutions and how it fosters collective political action.

Situated within a historiography seeking to recover the democratic potential of Progressive Era reform, this book expands upon it by drawing our attention to the intersection of politics, knowledge, and everyday practices. It encourages us to understand democracy as praxis and a method for social action. Several works have helped lay the groundwork for this interpretation. Attentive to the potential of new urban arenas to foster democratic politics, a number of scholars have explored another important democratic theme: efforts to encourage participatory, deliberative politics.

Historical works, such as those of Robin Bachin, Kevin Mattson, and Philip Ethington, that tend to see this trend remind us that the Progressive Era was a moment of opportunities to redistribute power and reshape the state. Such historians have emphasized the expansion of the public sphere through a variety

49. Julie Rueben emphasizes that the intellectual transformation of this era has overstated the conflict between “advocacy and objectivity,” arguing instead that late nineteenth-century intellectuals produced a complex discussion of the nature of scientific inquiry, one that might have allowed more room to reconcile a variety of ways of knowing. Rueben, Making of the Modern University; Westbrook, John Dewey and American Democracy; Kloppenberg, Uncertain Victory. As Robin Bachin has demonstrated, this tension was apparent at the University of Chicago. William Rainey Harper, president of the young university, encouraged its engagement in public life. He developed a large university extension program that offered college courses at locations throughout the city, as well as by correspondence. The university contributed its knowledge and research to the public sphere, thus making it available to people who did not have access to a traditional college classroom. But “the transmission of knowledge, according to this view, was centrifugal, emanating from the campus and moving out into various arenas of public life.” This view stood in contrast to those of faculty and reformers influenced by pragmatism, who saw the extension classroom as “a chance for intellectual and civic exchange, in which workers, professionals, middle-class women, and academics could come together and better understand social conditions in the city and together learn a variety of approaches for bettering them.” Robin F. Bachin, “Cultural Boundaries: Constructing Urban Space and Civic Culture on Chicago’s South Side, 1890–1919” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1996).
of means, both by the expansion of voices and perspectives within civil society—as Ethington describes in his emphasis on journalism, political parties, and voluntary associations—and by the struggles over urban space and commercial culture—as Bachin argues in her discussion of Chicago’s southside parks, baseball stadiums, and jazz and vice districts. Though Mattson also recovers a Progressive Era concern with deliberation as the foundation of participatory democracy, his work also implies that democracy must build on habits of mind. Thus he argues that, through deliberation, men and women educated themselves and each other into “an understanding of human beings’ interconnectedness” and a “sense of fairness and inclusion, values utterly necessary for democracy.”

Thus they came to a deeper understanding of the meaning of political equality. Mattson suggests, as do some contemporary political scientists, that voting is not the only act that defines democratic behavior.

A third theme emanating from the newer historiography is the Progressive Era as the transitional moment in U.S. history when new political subjectivities become possible, leading to the emergence of interest-group politics. Historians concerned with democracy generally see such politics in a positive light, as opening up the political system to more players and providing the basis for collective action. Shut out of access to formal electoral politics, many of the social and political reformers appearing in historical studies built powerful networks that used methods of lobbying, mass meetings, and voter-education campaigns to gain access to political power. Bachin suggests that new civic identities served to “diffuse power and reshape municipal government through coalition building and the multiplication of actors on the political stage.”

What emerges from the historiography is a vision of expanding democratic politics marked by pluralistic interest groups. This was a significant shift from the autonomous (white male), individual political actor of classical liberalism, and it offered significant democratic potential for the redistribution of political power.
power and social claims. The shift to interest-group politics made possible collective action against power structures woven into the state, the economy, and even private practices; over the course of the twentieth century, it has brought new laws, new rights, and new freedoms to previously marginalized groups. Those participants introduced new forms of activism and also helped develop a new vocabulary of needs and rights that has contributed to twentieth-century contests over state responsibilities. In so doing, they contributed to a pluralist liberalism in which the state mediates among conflicting interests.

While this shift to interest-group politics has been vitally important for the history of U.S. politics in the twentieth century, the historiography has not focused enough attention on the fact that interest-group politics that posits the state as mediator was an unintended consequence of the democratic aspirations of many reformers. I argue that, while we can understand the value of interest-group politics in opening up the public sphere, it was not at all the model of democracy or vision of the state that reformers proposed. Indeed, they sought to transcend and unify differences among groups. The ways in which they went about this work was at times problematic, as we see in the chapters that follow. But I also point to their successes as a way to think about the basis for collective, democratic politics. This interpretation of interest-group politics seems all the more important today as we see the way that the language of this type of politics has served to deflect claims by particular groups—“women” or “labor” or “environmentalist”—as those of a “special interest,” not as claims that offer benefits to the broader society. As we see in chapter 6, the roots of this logic are visible in the Progressive Era.

In arguing for historical attention to a more complex view of collective politics in the Progressive Era, I join the work of other historians such as Glenda Gilmore and Robert Johnston. Their works underscore the fluidity of racial and class boundaries in reform coalitions and suggest that we pay closer attention to how historical actors overcame social divisions to work together, as well as how groups, which were frequently politically marginalized, exercised more power and worked toward different visions of democracy than historians have generally recognized. Furthermore, a few works on Chicago have begun to sug-

55. Two important works that explore the transition to interest-group politics as an expansion of democratic power are M. Elizabeth Sanders, Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), and Elisabeth S. Clemens, The People’s Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890–1925 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). These books are particularly helpful in understanding agrarian politics, a topic outside the scope of my book.

56. Clemens, People’s Lobby; Ethington, Public City; Eldon J. Eisenach, The Lost Promise of Progressivism (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994).

gest that, despite strong attachments to racial, ethnic, or class groups, men and women worked across those boundaries. In this book I point not only to the power of those men and women who forged common political visions but also to the possibility for collective politics to cut across categories of difference.

Building on these themes found in historiography—a reorientation of knowledge; attention to participatory, deliberative politics; the rise of new political subjectivities and its consequences for interest-group politics and the state—this book employs a framework of democratic social knowledge both to understand an important aspect of democratic thought in the Progressive Era (the focus on praxis) and to illustrate an epistemological and methodological dimension of democratic politics. Finally, in recognizing the role of sympathetic understanding as one aspect of democratic social knowledge, the book suggests a new direction for historiography: the role of affective ties in democratic politics. A lens of democratic social knowledge helps make visible emotional dimensions of reform while also helping us to see the limits and possibilities of sympathetic ties among political partners.

Democratic social knowledge as a practice that encourages and takes seriously all perspectives and ideas has potential dangers, too, a feature that Walter Lippman and particularly the elitist H. L. Mencken observed in the 1920s. Thus Johnston describes the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Portland, Ethington suggests the way that marketing specialists and behavioral scientists used their expertise to manipulate voting behavior, and James Connolly argues that Boston’s Irish and party politicians used Progressivism as a language to create a reactionary politics rooted in ethnic identity and circumscribing the power of other groups. In this book, while we find potential for democratic social knowledge to bring more perspectives into political discourse, we also find that it could not always constrain prejudices that limit rather than expand the rights and freedoms of particular groups. The challenge of negotiating legitimacy and seemingly incompatible perspectives and claims proved to be the thinnest of tightropes for democratic social knowledge. The resilience of liberal republicanism, recast in the developmentalist logic of neoliberalism in the twentieth century, also dealt

58. For example, Robin Bachin (Building the South Side) emphasizes the importance of shifting alliances in contests over space in Chicago’s south side. Richard Schneirov points out the significant role Chicago’s working classes played in what he describes as the city’s shift to new liberalism. Working with reformers and civic elites, workers were able to exercise a significant measure of political power. Maureen Flanagan argues that women, organized by gendered concerns, acted across boundaries of race, class, and ethnicity. Lizabeth Cohen describes the coalition building of Chicago’s working classes that ultimately contributed to New Deal liberalism in Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

serious blows to the framework of democratic social knowledge offered by Progressive Era reformers.

In the early 1890s, when this study begins, prevailing conceptions of liberal republicanism and its version of democracy were under tremendous pressure. Drawing upon their collective experiences as members of distinct groups, workers, women, and African Americans challenged the assumptions of classical political economy and atomistic individualism woven into Chicago’s social fabric and shaping liberal republican ideas about public responsibility and the state. When the book ends in 1920, we see that social reformers had impacted the city, although not as dramatically as they would have liked. While the crisis in liberal republicanism and the intellectual reorientation that occasioned the development of democratic social knowledge was reframed during World War I and afterward, it gave rise to underlying questions about democracy that lingered.

Using an analytic lens of democratic social knowledge trained on Chicago reform in the Progressive Era, I find that it poses four overarching questions about democracy that were critical at that moment and are still unresolved today—albeit in different forms. Is it possible to develop epistemological and political models that help reconcile the tensions between democracy and expertise, personal subjectivity and distanced social science models that are limited in explaining and including human agency and experience? How can we (some might say should we) see multiple perspectives as resources and award social recognition and political legitimacy that incorporates both commonalities and seemingly irreconcilable differences? What constitutes justice in a liberal democracy? And finally, what are the dispositions necessary for a healthy and robust public life, and how can we foster them? Each of the chapters herein speak to different aspects of these issues, and they come together in the final chapter and epilogue, where I discuss in brief the charter campaign of 1906–7 to show a key example of how the struggles over democratic social knowledge illuminate these questions and to explore lessons we might find useful today. Indeed, even today, we continue to find examples of practices of democratic social knowledge in the social inquiry methods of participant observation and oral histories, some community organizing, and social activism—practices that cross boundaries of race and class and (frequently) gender to daily live out a democratic praxis.

But if we step back now to the 1880s and 1890s, before these struggles reached an impasse, we see a moment of crisis and possibility. Viewed in this light, Addams’s rather dire description of a fatal drifting apart was not a pronouncement of an irrevocable future but was rather a call to action.
Epilogue

The essential feature of common thought is not that it is held in common but that it has been produced in common.—Mary Parker Follett, *The New State* (1918)

The seemingly pervasive hold of liberal republicanism and democratic realism over the course of the twentieth century suggests that democratic social knowledge failed to offer a viable democratic alternative. Or did it? In the hundred years since the height of Chicago’s Progressive Era social reform, theories of liberal democracy that privileged a scientistic, bureaucratic expertise and downplayed the value of participatory politics have not solved the challenges of corporate capitalism and the tensions surrounding pluralist politics that emerged in the Progressive Era. Indeed, we continue to grapple with similar questions about corporate power, the role of the polity and experts in framing inquiry and policy, and the possibility of a politics that simultaneously recognizes differences and promotes democratic solidarity. Moreover, significant changes throughout the twentieth century—the Civil Rights movement and Second Wave feminism, in particular—have been brought about not by experts working within government bureaucracy and removed from the influence of the polity but by public pressure and alliances of the polity, in some cases together with social scientists. A populist strain of reform, dating back to farmers’ and workers’ movements of the late nineteenth century, has remained part of the political terrain, opposing not the state per se but the bureaucratic state and corporate power.1 Renewed efforts to enact participatory, deliberative democracy have emerged in recent years.2 These point to the possibility of a different kind of democratic politics,


one seeking a more participatory and inclusive framework reminiscent of democratic social knowledge.

In light of this history, we might rethink the story of democratic social knowledge and the moment of struggle over democracy of which it was a part. The methods of democratic social knowledge require us to pose difficult questions about the goals and nature of democracy. To what extent should the power to frame public policy reside within either the polity or a technocracy of social science elites? In what ways might the polity and social science experts work more closely together, particularly on the local level? By fostering grassroots participatory democracy, can we build the kinds of knowledge and social relationships that are important for democratic habits of mind? Does the administrative, regulatory nature of liberal democracy today adequately account for experiences and local knowledge of those affected? Might the particular and collective experiences of diverse groups help forge a democratic solidarity that opposes oppression? As the historical actors in these pages negotiated such questions in the past, they gave shape to a democratic praxis whose methods are well worth reconsidering and whose shortcomings are instructive. If we today are to imagine the possibilities for democracy’s future, we might consider the lessons of Chicago’s reform community more than a century ago as it wrestled with democratic social knowledge.

Recovering a framework of democratic social knowledge reveals the potential for a more participatory and transformative politics along several lines. It helps us envision an alternative both to democratic realism privileging political policy making by technocratic experts and to the challenges and limitations of pluralist liberalism, in which the state acts as arbiter for competing interest groups even as it uses a developmentalist logic to occlude corporate capital as an interest. Instead, democratic social knowledge is a method that emphasizes process, education, and dispositions as a basis for sympathetic understanding, deliberation, and mutuality—for a democratic praxis. Emerging from the early twentieth century, these features inform the methods of democratic practice today. However, since democratic social knowledge frequently fell short of reformers’ democratic hopes, it requires attention to its limitations before we turn to its potential.

Certainly the lessons of the charter campaign and its aftermath, both in Chicago and in the broader context of political culture over the course of the twentieth century, indicate that historical circumstances—war, the resilience of elites, a paradigm of liberal republicanism (today in the form of neoliberalism abroad and neoconservatism at home), and the emergence of a culture of expertise—militated against a framework of democratic social knowledge as a basis for politics. Indeed, even before democratic social knowledge had barely

taken root, civic elites and World War I had begun to undermine it. Some of its problems may be attributed to unforeseen historical circumstances. But as the Chicago reformers employed it, democratic social knowledge had its own inherent limitations as well. As we saw particularly in chapter 5 on interracial reform, one significant problem was the limits of sympathetic understanding both as a method of knowing and as a basis for collective politics.

Strategies of reform geared toward building sympathetic understanding did not adequately interrogate power hierarchies between parties. As we saw in the Half-century Exposition of Emancipation, Ida B. Wells’s antilynching campaign, and the interracial cooperation of the Frederick Douglass Center, both white and black reformers built claims to African American equality by showing how they were like whites, thus exposing the unacknowledged, privileged position of whites, which equated their cultural characteristics and values with those of the universal subject. New media forms like film also lent themselves to more dangerous uses, as Birth of a Nation manipulated sympathies to foster a white racist national identity, even condoning methods of oppression and violence to do so. Such a critique of the limits of sympathetic knowledge would have to wait until the advent of black and “third world” feminism.

Chapter 5 offered several examples of limitations of sympathetic and proximate understanding as a way of knowing. On the one hand, when Mary Plummer refused to accept Ida Wells-Barnett’s explanations of lynchings, we saw that sympathetic understanding, claims of experiential, proximate knowledge, and even social science failed to transform subjective opinions. Despite Plummer’s interactions with and sympathies for African Americans, she held fast to her personal understanding of racial problems, which, on the one hand, was built on her southern friend’s own claims of proximate experience and, on the other, was framed by a widespread racism in white social science and popular culture. Many white parents, as well, rejected integrated schools, maintaining the distinctiveness of the races and the inferiority of blacks. Though such anecdotes reflect the personal limitations of the people involved, they point to the larger problem of whether democratic social knowledge can expose and overcome the subjective opinions of individuals like Plummer, who privilege one claim of proximate knowledge over another. In the face of extensive racism, sympathetic understanding alone proved inadequate.

The collision of opposing viewpoints, like those between Wells and Plummer,

or among participants in the charter campaign pointed to another inherent limitation of democratic social knowledge: It lacked a way to navigate the delicate balance between liberal rights, power, and the open-ended processes it required. Indeed, one of the strengths of a framework of democratic social knowledge in the early twentieth century was its pluralism—it sought to legitimate viewpoints and experiences frequently overlooked or silenced. Yet we are left with the significant question of whether democratic social knowledge requires that we recognize all viewpoints as legitimate. We saw the conundrum it posed when black reformers demanded censorship of Birth of a Nation—a most undemocratic action—in order to better forge a democratic social knowledge that included African Americans. Democratic social knowledge, with its emphasis on mutuality, proximity, and pluralism that legitimized different experiences, had no response to these dilemmas of power and individually based liberal rights. The question it failed to adequately address is one that continually challenges political liberalism: How do we settle irreconcilable differences between equally “valid” perspectives, interests, and frameworks of knowledge? Indeed, some frameworks of social knowledge—natural law or religious fundamentalism, for example—do not open themselves up to the possibilities of pluralism because they reject the idea that social knowledge is a social construction. When the methods of democratic social knowledge failed to negotiate colliding perspectives, it had no other frameworks for understanding power to help mediate differences. Furthermore, democratic social knowledge, with its commitment to process and consensus, had no way of addressing the structural advantages and disadvantages of some groups.

Ultimately, reformers who conceived of democracy in its broadest terms as everyday praxis ironically turned to the state as arbiter of social claims and differences, and they demanded that the state protect their interests. In the meantime, the pluralist politics they helped frame was separated from their insistence on democracy as everyday praxis and as habits of mind promoted through proximate relationships. Instead, democratic theory by the mid-twentieth century posited that citizen disengagement from policy making was desirable. Here, then, we can see that the intertwining of liberal republicanism with a model of interest-group politics shorn of democratic habits has had important consequences for the way that we think about politics and political behavior. As liberal republicanism encouraged capitalist growth as the ultimate, “natural”

goal for the state, it has concomitantly relegated the claims of collective groups as “special interests,” thus delegitimizing the perspectives of those who challenged the individual state-citizen model of rights and claims, offered an alternative vision of social policy, or claimed a different role for the state.

The problems associated with certain aspects of democratic social knowledge or the limitations of those who practiced it should not lead us to dismiss its potential out of hand, however. We might see it instead as introducing a framework of ideas and a set of practical lessons. While unsuccessful in an earlier time and subsequently falling out of favor among political theorists and social scientists in the mid-twentieth century, democratic social knowledge still lingers in a multitude of political and local community projects and thus remains available to us as we consider the kind of democratic politics we seek.

As we reflect on the tensions between democracy and expertise, employing a framework of democratic social knowledge can serve as a way to mediate between local knowledge and expertise, where each must inform the other. As we saw in the Working People’s Social Science Club at Hull House and carried out in similar endeavors in other settlements around the city, at the CFC’s ward councils, and at the Hull House and Frederick Douglass women’s clubs, this vision of democratic social knowledge was aided by deliberative spaces and practices and by mediators who served as translators between communities. Faltering at the time, these efforts suggest a model for democratic engagement that technocratic bureaucracy and scientific specialization diminished during the twentieth century. Indeed, as the needs of an ever more complex society have become increasingly dependent upon expert knowledge, the need for such places, practices, and especially mediators has become even more acute (though these translators must recognize their cultural, economic, and political power in forging knowledge).

The efforts of the Chicago reformers help us imagine ways to address the undemocratic tendencies of positivist social science and to transform people from subjugated objects of study into active subjects in the creation of new knowledge about themselves and their communities. We see such possibilities in the methods of qualitative research and participant-observation to which Hull House contributed. The legacy of the Chicago social settlements’ distinct form of inquiry


and activism has lived on in other ways as well. Studs Terkel, perhaps the greatest oral historian of the twentieth century, grew up in the neighborhood of Graham Taylor’s Chicago Commons, from which he based his work in the WPA Writers’ Project radio division. Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee, drew some of his inspiration from Hull House and his conversations with Jane Addams while he was a graduate student at the University of Chicago. More popularly known as the Highlander Folk School, the Research and Education Center serves as an adult education center. Initially it trained farmers and laborers in economic justice issues and was a meeting ground for civil rights activists. It continues today to train people struggling against injustice to take leadership roles and enact democratic change.

The Chicago Area Project, founded in 1932 by Clifford Shaw, also drew from the community-organizing visions of the settlement houses. Joined by Saul Alinsky in the early 1930s, Shaw envisioned an approach to juvenile delinquency that brought neighborhood members together with delinquents to work toward collective solutions to their problems. The Oregon Health Parliament brought together public policy advocates and healthcare providers with community members statewide to develop a set of principles for the healthcare system. National Issues Forums and the Study Circle Resource Center also reflect the fact that elements of democratic social knowledge still circulate. Designed to bring community members together to discuss common problems of national and local concern, these programs focus on practical models of deliberation in which participants are encouraged to bring their “intuition” and “common sense” to the study of a problem. The process of deliberation helps individuals reflect on their values and opinions and recognize their unwarranted stereotypes. The focus on the common work of addressing—and making choices about—practical issues helps people very different from one another to get beyond stereotypes.

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programs offer us models of democracy as a relational praxis that are open-ended and ever changing and that promote autonomy and individuality realized through social interaction.\textsuperscript{12} Today the growing popularity of character education in K–12 education and civic engagement in institutions of higher education (however embattled and partisan they may be) attests to a continued sensibility that healthy democracy depends on habits of mind and must rest on foundations of social action.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite the limitations of sympathetic understanding and the challenges of located (sometimes irreconcilable) perspectives discussed above, affective ties and differences remain important aspects of democratic politics throughout our history and potential resources for today. However, they require greater historical attention, particularly as some feminist critiques of contemporary politics suggest that our political life has been impoverished by its marginalization of empathy. Theorist Judith Kegan Gardiner, for example, has suggested that the focus on (masculine) individualism has impoverished our ability to foster and mobilize empathy as a basis for politics. The effect has been to maintain traditional social divisions (i.e., class, race, and gender) since these can be “maintained more easily when most people are kept isolated and insensitive to the needs of others.” Indeed, it operates against a politics built on collective experiences. Empathy, in contrast, “potentially serves equality, letting all people understand the sufferings of the oppressed and exploited and so motivating calls for social justice.”\textsuperscript{14}

Similarly, theorists and activists who promote an ethics of care suggest it offers an alternative basis for politics. Care ethics reflect certain aspects of democratic social knowledge in requiring a contextual approach to morality and assuming human connectedness.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, in contrast to liberal republicanism’s emphasis on the market as a mediator of justice, it takes the maintenance of relationships and human needs to be a priority. Though there are limits to affective ties such as sympathy as a basis for collective politics, both the lack of historical attention to the role of affective ties in public life and the recent attention among


\textsuperscript{13} There are of course multiple approaches to character education and civic engagement, each with loyal partisans. See, for example, Ann Colby et al., Educating Citizens: Preparing America’s Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Peter Smagorinsky, The Discourse of Character Education: Culture Wars in the Classroom (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2005). My purpose here is only to point out the recent rise in interest in these subjects, both of which aim to develop a particular disposition regarded as necessary for a democracy.


\textsuperscript{15} Maurice Hamington, Embodied Care: Jane Addams, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Feminist Ethics (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Grace Clement, Care, Autonomy, and Justice: Feminism and the Ethic of Care (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996).
some social theorists to the function of empathy in political mobilization suggest that we might explore more carefully what history has to teach us about the possibilities and limitations of emotion in framing democratic social knowledge and mobilizing democratic politics.  

Even as it is worth recovering the methods of democratic social knowledge that fostered interaction and mediated between expertise and local experience, treated difference as a resource in public life, and encouraged the democratic dispositions of mutual respect, sympathetic understanding, and trust, so too it is important to recall reformers’ attempts to create deliberative spaces in which to enact these methods and practice these traits. Without widespread democratic debate and mutual engagement, however faltering they were at that moment in Chicago, productive social action across racial, class, ethnic, and gender boundaries would have been impossible. More recently, democratic theorists have looked to new arenas of deliberation—in National Issues Forums or on the Internet, for example—to foster public-spirited debate.  

Building on a commitment to a process of democratic social knowledge in which experiences of affected groups are brought to bear, such deliberation may ultimately help foster a radical democratic politics in which differences and a range of particular collective experiences will help us to see the ways that power and knowledge serve to exclude and oppress some groups.  

The lessons of democratic social knowledge at its best emphasize that proximity, shared experience, and interaction are important to inspire the habits of mind that serve as the foundation of democracy. The building blocks of a rich and vibrant local participatory democracy more than a hundred years ago—the principles of democratic social knowledge—continue to animate activists today. The lives of people like my friend Annjie, whose story opens this book, continue to tell of commitments to a radical democracy that extends far beyond voting in one’s self-interest.


18. Discussion of the public sphere is found in Jürgen Habermas’s classic text, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). There is of course a vast literature on how public deliberation unfolds in ways that reinforce and recreate power differentials. See, for example, Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). My suggestion here follows that of Chantal Mouffe, who argues that, despite differences, collective identities might be forged around a radical commitment to equality for all. Seeing the multiple ways in which relations of power are constructed is an important step in such a radical democratic politics. Mouffe, “Feminism, Citizenship, and Radical Democratic Politics,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, 369–84 (New York: Routledge, 1992).
The story of democratic social knowledge told in this book suggests that we might think about democracy differently, both for the Progressive Era and for our own time—as an intersection between various frameworks of knowledge, expertise, and popular sovereignty, as a method for social action, and as public life that views difference as a resource and searches for ways to include multiple perspectives while building consensus for the common good. Such democratic praxis suggests an alternative to the narrowly conceived positivistic scientism that transformed liberal democracy during the Progressive Era. The emphasis on civic interaction and mutual social relationships, sympathetic understanding of the Other, deliberation, and cultural agency illustrate a democracy rooted in relational practices and processes. Ultimately for the Chicago reformers, the practices of democracy were educative and spilled over into formal politics, though these democrats believed that democracy was not only about procedures of voting and governance. Instead they also sought measures to encourage the formation of a democratic personality in which citizens would understand different sides, negotiate and compromise, and be able to change their minds. These skills and habits of mind were most effectively cultivated on the local level through interactions with diverse people, but they also shaped habits of mind that extended to people in distant areas.

The reformers’ efforts to create democratic social knowledge that recognized and legitimized different groups’ experiences and needs meant fostering a vision of democratic equality built on respect, mutuality, trust, and understanding. It meant engaging issues of difference within both civil and political life. As Addams observed in the midst of the charter campaign, “we have fallen into the Anglo-Saxon temptation of governing all people by one standard.”19 This had been the particular failing of Pullman, who was willing to sacrifice his residents’ and workers’ freedoms to fabricate a moral community, and of the CFC, despite its early goal to coordinate different interests. Both used social science in ways that sought conformity and control rather than egalitarian interaction. Instead, Addams suggested that reformers needed “to dissolve ‘humanity’ into its component parts of men, women, and children and to serve their humblest needs.”20 In the embodiment of collective differences and particularities and social needs in public debate, these reformers called for a new conception of democratic justice.21

It was a view of public life that threatened to finally dissolve the civic myths

20. Ibid.
that had grown up with the city—of a liberal republican unity and a natural and divine justice operating through the liberal market. While the failed charter campaign did not herald a widespread end of these beliefs, it did illustrate ongoing tensions within reform thought between fear of a divisive subjectivism and a desire for a more opened-ended democracy. From her vantage point as a prominent participant in Chicago’s political reforms, Jane Addams astutely observed that the extension of democracy would witness more such struggles. “The framers of the carefully prepared charters, upon which the cities are founded,” Addams suggested, “did not foresee that after the universal franchise had once been granted, social needs and ideals were bound to enter in as legitimate objects of political action.” Continued struggle over the legitimacy of democratic social knowledge that seriously engaged the definitions of social needs and democratic ideals would indeed shape the city’s, the nation’s, and—as we look toward the globalization of the twenty-first century—the world’s future. Indeed, in light of the global concerns and possibilities the United States faces in the twenty-first century, we might do well to consider the costs of a fatal drifting apart.

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