Social Class and Social Action: The Middle-Class Bias of Democratic Theory in Education

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Background: *This article examines the emergence of the middle and working classes in America and describes key characteristics of these cultures as they manifest themselves today. It then explores the effects of social class on our conceptions of democracy.*

Purpose: *To help educators understand the relationship between social action strategies and social class in American society.*

Conclusions: *Middle-class educators tend to prefer a form of "discursive democracy" that focuses on the enhancement of individuality within group activity. In contrast, working-class people are more likely to embrace a strategy of collective action that I call "democratic solidarity," which responds to the limited resources and cultural practices specific to working-class life.*

Recommendations: *Educators who seek to support working-class students in their efforts to resist oppression must better understand the limitations of our tendency to focus on discursive democracy to the exclusion of forms of democratic solidarity.*

"From the beginning the American intellectual had chosen a paradoxical vocation: a social critic committed at once to the whole of the people and an elitist whose own mores and life situation proved somewhat alienating from the very public he or she had chosen to serve."
— Fink, 1998, p. 5.

Not many educators or education scholars focus their pedagogy or scholarship on democratic education anymore (although there has been something of an upturn in interest over the last decade). As Kahne and Westheimer (2003) and others have noted, this retreat from democracy is a relatively recent phenomenon in American education history. As late as the 1960s, schools were still seen by educators and the public as key pillars of a democratic society—regardless of how vaguely or problematically this may have been framed. Since then, however, an increasing focus on individual achievement and on the relationship between education and economic growth has pushed questions of democracy far into the background.

Nonetheless, a significant number of education scholars and educators remain committed, at least rhetorically, to the democratic potential of schooling. The particular practices most of us look to for fostering democratic empowerment in schools is quite limited, however. This article examines how a model of what I call "discursive democracy" evolved primarily within middle-class contexts in America in response to the specific challenges of middle-class life. As exemplified by John Dewey's writings, this vision of democratic engagement foregrounds the participation of unique individuals in fluid collaboration. In working-class settings, however, contrasting forms of "democratic solidarity" have predominated. These working-class practices give less emphasis to individual expressiveness, pragmatically stressing the importance of speaking in a collective voice. In fact, this article argues that middle-class approaches to democratic engagement, by themselves, hold only limited relevance to the life conditions of working-class children and families. Thus, our tendency to focus on discursive democracy to the almost complete exclusion of democratic solidarity limits our ability to foster effective practices of democratic social action among working-class children.

OVERVIEW

I begin with a discussion of theoretical issues relevant to the concept of social class. Then I describe how middle- and working-class cultures emerged in the latter half of the 19th century, cultures that slowly evolved and in some cases fragmented throughout the 20th century. I show how two relatively distinct models of democratic empowerment developed in parallel with these class differences that I call *discursive democracy* and *democratic solidarity*.

These class differences have important implications for education theory, helping to explain how and why visions of discursive democracy became ascendant among academics during the same period that

bureaucratic models increasingly dominated the daily life of schools. This ascendancy, I argue, resulted directly from the increasing dominance of middle-class ways of being in academia.

I conclude by arguing that middle-class academics must grapple with the challenges of building intellectual bridges across the gulfs of social class, becoming more conscious of the ways that our milieu often blinds us to non-middle-class ways of being.

THEORIZING ABOUT SOCIAL CLASS

The constellation of conceptions of social class has grown vast over the last two centuries. Of necessity, only a small fraction of this work informs my analysis. From the quartet of theorists who have most influenced our views of class in the Western intellectual tradition—Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Bourdieu (see Giddens, 1971; Wright, 2005)—I look almost exclusively to Bourdieu. The first three tend to focus on the ways that class and the economic structures of capitalist society are interrelated. While many of their basic assumptions about capitalism necessarily form the background of the story I tell here, my central interest is in the sociocultural effects of these developments. For these purposes, Bourdieu's work seems most relevant.

Most important, for this article, is Bourdieu's (e.g., 1998) general conception of "cultural capital." Bourdieu argued that social practices in society represent a form of capital different from, and yet in some cases as important as, economic capital.[1] Capitalist society, then, is stratified not only in terms of the "material" resources of different groups but also in the relative value of the different cultural practices that these groups tend to embody.

His conceptualization of a relationship between what he called "habitus" and "field" provides the foundation for his vision of cultural capital. A habitus is the set of social practices and dispositions associated with a particular social position. One way to think of a habitus is as a bundle of interrelated strategies for responding to a group's "conditions of existence" (Swartz, 1997, p. 109).[2] And every habitus is designed to respond to a particular social "field." For example, a person with a middle-class habitus at the turn of the 20th century would have had little understanding of how to act appropriately in a working-class saloon, whereas a manual worker might feel just as lost in a lawyer's office (Blumin, 1989).

Informed by Bourdieu's general ideas about culture, this article maps out key characteristics of middle- and working-class culture as they have emerged in the United States. In contrast with Bourdieu's rich, multifaceted models of class structures (see Bourdieu, 1984), and unlike many

other scholars working on the structure of class in postmodern or postin-dustrial societies, I discuss only two class positions here—the middle and working classes.[3] Of course, such a simple binary cannot hope to capture the full complexity of different socioeconomic positions and cultural groups in the United States. Even during the decades around the turn of the 20th century, when these distinctions probably held the most explanatory power, many people did not easily fit within these categories. The situation today has become even more complex, especially with respect to the fragmentation of the working-class. And, of course, specific groups always transform, select among, add to, or simply ignore aspects of these traditions in a range of ways (see Heath, 1983; McCarthy & Apple, 1988).

Because middle- and working-class cultures exist nowhere in the world in any "pure" form, I employ these terms as what Weber (e.g., 1949, 1978) called "ideal types." An ideal type draws together a set of related social tendencies into a coherent model that exists nowhere in reality (see Albrow, 1990; Hekman, 1983). Scholars synthesize different ideal types in response to particular questions. If one is interested in the distri-bution of different kinds of "occupations" in a society, for example, one may end up with a large number of "class" categories (Milner, 1999). For the purposes of this analysis, the binary formulation has seemed most productive, reflecting what emerged through my examination of the evi-dence as two relatively coherent historical strands of practices (habituses) and social contexts (fields).[4]

Today, only a limited segment of society seems to embody these class traditions in any substantial sense. What I am calling middle-class cultural patterns remain most prominent among members of the "upper" middle class: managers, analysts, and professionals who retain significant inde-pendent power within and outside the corporate entities that rule much of our economic life (Lamont, 1992). Working-class traditions, in con-trast, seem most evident today in the daily practices of labor unions and among manual and direct-service workers who remain deeply rooted in long-term relationships with local communities and extended families (Fantasia, 1989; Leondar-Wright, 2005; Lubrano, 2005).

My analysis is indebted to prior writings on education and social class. Classic works by Apple (1990), Anyon (1981), Bowles and Gintes (1976), Carnoy and Levin (1985), and Giroux (1983), for example, informed my general thinking. Over the past few decades, however, a focus on social class in the education literature largely disappeared in favor of a broad range of discussions of postmodernism. A few education scholars, includ-ing Apple (1990) and Brosio (1994), fought with limited success to main-tain and extend on our understandings of social class during this fallow

period. More recently, questions of social class seem to be returning to prominence, as evidenced by a range of attacks on postmodernism from a Marxian perspective (see Hill, McLaren, Cole, & Rikowski, 2003). Contemporary scholars like Brantlinger (2003) and Lareau (2003) have also conducted powerful empirical analyses of the affects of class culture on schools and family life. All this work influenced my efforts to understand how class-based practices might inform education scholars.

SOCIAL CLASS IN THE UNITED STATES: A BRIEF HISTORY

To understand the traditions of social class that have evolved in America, it is crucial to have a sense of the historical trends and social/material conditions that helped produce them. I begin with a brief summary of the history of the emergence of the middle and working classes in America in the 19th century. I then turn to a discussion of how these cultural trends have in some cases intensified and in other cases fragmented and blurred during the 20th century.

   Importantly, a clear distinction between the middle and working classes did not emerge in America until the last half of the 19th century. Before then there were, of course, laborers without significant property and what Blumin (1989) called "middling" folk: small farmers, skilled workers or artisans, and shopkeepers who did both manual work and the basic paperwork to keep their concerns going. As firms grew in size and complexity, however, they began to separate manual laborers from "clerks" and other "nonmanual workers." This distinction between manual and nonmanual labor became the key indicator of 19th-century class status.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

For the emerging middle class, rapid urbanization in the latter half of the century fragmented the "personalized networks" that had tied the relatively privileged together, eroding their ability to transfer their "status from one place to another" (Mahoney, 2005, p. 361). Partly in response to the loss of these networks, the middle class developed more objective standards and qualifications for particular jobs. Increasingly, "one had to forge a self-reliant, confident, and independent sense of identity cut free from reliance on the approbation, support, or referencing of friends, for such contacts were short-lived and less reliable through time" (p. 363). There was increasing criticism of the nepotism and cronyism that had been standard practice previously. At the same time, the new middle class began to alter their parenting practices, initiating their children into "'traits of character deemed essential to middle-class achievement and

respectability,' values and traits not of the aggressive entrepreneur but of the 'cautious, prudent, small-business man'" (Blumin, 1989, p. 187). An increase in the formal schooling that children received was a central part of this change.

During these decades, the middle class became an odd kind of class, maintaining a coherent collective identity through a kind of studied independence. This "brings us face-to-face with a central paradox in the concept of middle-class formation, the building of a class that binds itself together as a social group in part through the common embrace of an ideology of social atomism" (Blumin, 1989, pp. 9–10). A "new character ideal" emerged in this impersonal world: "the team player" able to constantly shift relational ties and work closely with relative strangers.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE WORKING CLASS

> "Woe unto the man who stood alone in this pitiless struggle for existence." (Montgomery, 1988, p. 88)

Similar processes of industrialization also molded a new working class. At the beginning of the 19th century, an enormous class of wage laborers had been almost unthinkable. But by the end of the century, "wage labor emerged . . . as the definitive working-class experience" (Trachtenberg, 1982, p. 88). In factories, the holistic skills of artisans were systematically broken down into separate operations, allowing the hiring of much less skilled workers, holding wages down, and threatening workers' independence on the worksite. By 1886, 65%–75% of the paid labor force was semiskilled or unskilled. And in contrast with the clean offices of the non-manual class, working-class labor "was often dirty, backbreaking, and frustrating" (p. 88). Factory workers at the end of the 19th century worked under the "clock," laboring in settings ruled by "compulsion, force, and fear" (Braverman, 1974, p. 66).

The uncertain existence of manual workers was made even more difficult by the fragility and unpredictability of the economy of the 19th century as the nation stumbled from depression to depression. As has always been the case, those on the bottom suffered the most as wages in real terms for manual workers fell (Rayback, 1966). By the end of the 1880s, about 40% of industrial workers lived in abject poverty (Trachtenberg, 1982).

Workers throughout the century responded to these challenges with expressions of solidarity. They fought in firms for wages and other concessions, and in the political realm for favorable legislation. Despite some successes, however, labor mostly faced defeat. Even so, at times an

incipient working-class consciousness sometimes seemed to be emerging. But a sense of common cause did not ultimately coalesce in America. Manual workers remained fractured by racism, sexism, and a range of ethnic, religious, urban/rural, immigrant/"native," and skilled craftsmen/unskilled laborer conflicts (see Montgomery, 1988).

   In contrast with an emerging middle-class culture of domesticity, individualism, and restrained association, the working class necessarily depended on very different forms of collective solidarity. "The constraints and uncertainties of working-class life . . . made individualism at best a wasteful indulgence and at worst a mortal threat" (McGerr, 2003, p. 13). Under these conditions, workers developed "a culture of mutualism and reciprocity," teaching "at home and at work . . . sometimes harsh lessons about the necessity of self-denial and collective action" (p. 13). Whereas the middle class increasingly lived in a world of acquaintances and strangers, then, workers depended on their embeddedness in long-term relationships, extended families, and closely knit communities for survival.

SHIFTING FORMS OF SOCIAL CLASS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The 20th century brought vast changes in the structure of the national and global economy and increasingly complex, overlapping layers of social diversity. For the working class, the most important shift, as Braverman (1974) noted, was probably the growth of a broad range of non-middle-class service jobs whose work embodied many characteristics of working-class labor but looked very different from manual labor in factories and elsewhere. Initially most visible as a vast increase in low-level office workers (mostly women), a vast army of low-pay positions emerged in sales, food service, hospitals, janitorial services, and, more recently, call-centers (Benson, 1986; Kanter, 1993; Leidner, 1993; Newman, 1999). Braverman argued that these new positions were clearly working class, subjected to the process of "deskilling" familiar to earlier manual workers.[5] The recent explosion of new kinds of positions with a range of different job requirements (like technicians and a complex proliferation of health care jobs), however, has clearly complicated and blurred any simple binary distinction between middle and working classes.

   Throughout the 20th century, fairly strict hierarchical control has remained much more evident at the lower levels of firms than at the top, and capacities for control have been magnified by new systems of "scientific management" instituted after the turn of the century, and intensified recently by sophisticated information technologies. In recent years there has been some effort around (or at least rhetoric about) providing

opportunities for more individual discretion and collaboration among nonmanagement workers. Many have questioned whether these efforts have substantially altered the work environment of low-level employees (see Estey, 2002; Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996). Nonetheless, this new focus on encouraging teamwork at all levels of a firm may also contribute to a progressive blurring of clear distinctions between middle- and working-class jobs and discursive practices.

Although the experience of work among lower level employees has fragmented to some extent, evidence indicates that the importance of middle-class practices of teamwork for managers and professionals has only increased. Because these workers are relatively autonomous, organizations cannot set strict guidelines and are forced to depend on social "norms . . . that facilitate control from a distance . . . together with structural policing mechanisms such as committee work (where 'colleagues' police one another)" (Brown, 1995, p. 56). As the "postmodern" workplace advances, it seems likely that these pressures for self-guided collaboration at the higher levels will continue to intensify (Gee et al., 1996).

Outside the realm of work, a range of social/material changes in our increasingly postindustrial world have also complicated the structure of social class in America. For example, the strong local working-class communities that provided an important grounding for earlier working-class cultures have largely disappeared in many areas. This loss of community is especially evident in the impoverished, segregated areas of our cities. Despite these challenges, the social survival traditions of the working class still represent important potential resources for a broad range of impoverished groups in America. Ultimately, the poor and marginalized seem to have little choice but to cling to local relationships, however weak, as one of their few supports in a world where independence may be desired but is rarely realistically achievable (Schutz, 2006).

For managers and professionals, the growing fluidity of postmodern life and their progressive loss of connections to particular places and communities of people seem, for most, to have largely magnified cultural trends already visible at the end of the 19th century.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE- AND WORKING-CLASS CULTURE IN AMERICA

I want to stress again that the bundles of social practices that I describe as middle class and working class are "ideal types." They represent only tendencies abstracted from the fluidity of the cultures and histories of real groups. It is also important to emphasize that people from specific class backgrounds are not trapped somehow in particular ways of being.

Instead, the point is that people's life histories tend to prepare them to engage more skillfully in the practices more common in their milieu or social field (Bourdieu, 1998; von Trotha & Brown, 1982). Finally, one culture is not necessarily better than another in some simple sense.

Nonetheless, as my brief historical introduction indicates, the two strands of tradition that I describe reflect real tendencies long visible in our national culture. In fact, a range of research has consistently found that, regarding the particular characteristics I focus on here, social class generally seems to be a more important influence than other characteristics (see Benson, 1986; Hart & Risley, 1995; Heath, 1983; Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Lamont, 1992, 2000; Lareau, 2003).[6]

PATTERNS OF MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE

A wide range of studies have shown that the parenting practices of the middle class are significantly different from those of working-class families. Middle-class children learn at an early age to monitor themselves and make their own judgments about the world. In fact, these children are often encouraged to participate in adult life as if they were "mini" adults themselves. They are frequently asked for their opinions and are allowed (and even encouraged) to express disagreements about adult directives (for recent examples, see Hart & Risley, 1995; Lareau, 2003; Tudge, Snezhkova, Kulakova, & Etz, 2000). These families celebrate children's unique characteristics and capabilities, helping them develop a sense of themselves as discrete and unique individuals. At the same time, these children often begin to feel an "emerging sense of class entitlement" (Lareau, 2002, p. 777). Over time, because of parents' desire to "cultivate" their children's potential, the lives of middle-class children have become increasingly structured and scheduled, providing limited time for child-directed play (Lareau, 2003).

In their discursive interactions with children and each other, middle-class parents tend to prefer forms of relatively abstract reasoning. Hart and Risley (1995) found, for example, that professional parents "seemed to be preparing their children to participate in a culture concerned with symbols and analytic problem solving" (p. 133). As many have noted, these discourse patterns fit well with the kind of institutional and employment situations that these children will participate in throughout their lives (see Anyon, 1981; Hart & Risley, 1995; Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Wright, 2000). In our increasingly information-driven world, middle-class managers, symbolic analysts, and other professionals are increasingly focused on the manipulation of relatively abstract data. Even when middle-class workers engage more directly with the contingencies of the real

world—think of surgeons or engineers—their work is generally deeply embedded in a broad milieu of abstract data and symbolic relations.

The frenetic existence of middle-class childhood, with its shifting cast of characters, fosters mainly "weak" social ties. Children learn to interact with a wide variety of relative strangers and are less likely to be embedded in tight networks of extended family relationships (Lareau, 2003). This tendency is magnified by the relatively high mobility of middle-class people, who frequently leave home for college or employment and never return (Leondar-Wright, 2005). Despite the weakness of their ties, the connections made by the middle class generally give them access to more resources than the less privileged. Because they share the discursive and cultural practices of these people, they can interact with them as relative equals (Lareau, 2003).

Finally, collaboration and teamwork have become increasingly central characteristics of middle-class life over the 20th century. Group success often requires managers and professionals to work closely with people they have no long-term relationship with. Each individual in these contexts is expected to independently contribute his or her own particular knowledge and skills to an often weakly defined common project. Collaboration in these groups is facilitated by the relatively abstract, elaborated discourse predominant in middle-class settings (Bernstein, 1971; Brown, 1995; Gee et al., 1996; von Trotha & Brown, 1982).[7] For the rest of the article, I refer to this particularly middle-class form of joint action as *discursive collaboration.*

Higher education institutions are central places for nurturing these middle-class dispositions. In fact, the paradigmatic experience of upper-middle-class late adolescence is leaving home to attend a residential college with an established reputation. The structures of the laboratory, the seminar, and even the didactic lecture embody the abstract, dialogic practices of middle-class managers and professionals (Brown, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). It is in part for this reason that a college degree is a core requirement for most middle-class jobs, regardless of major. Professors and students at 4-year institutions live in a social world dominated by middle-class values and practices, a world that actively excludes and marginalizes manifestations of working-class ways of being but that rarely acknowledges this exclusion. As students move through higher and higher levels of education, success requires ever more fluency in middle-class forms of discourse and interaction. At the highest levels, in doctoral programs, only middle-class ways of framing problems and issues or of presenting the results of research are generally legitimate (Lubrano, 2005; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993).

PATTERNS OF WORKING-CLASS LIFE

Lareau (2002) found that "in working-class and poor homes, most parents did not focus on developing their children's opinions, judgments, and observations" (p. 763). Instead, their families were structured to a much greater extent around an established hierarchy between children and adults. Some have argued that these patterns are partly a result of the hierarchical conditions of working-class labor (Ellis & Petersen, 2002; Kohn & Schooler, 1983). More pragmatically, because working-class parents lack time to constantly monitor children, hierarchies and limited tolerance for "back talk" make more sense than constant negotiation.

Although working-class parents seem less focused on encouraging individual expression among children, in part because adults have less time to attend to them, working-class children often have more frequent opportunities for child-initiated play than children in middle-class families. Other aspects of working-class childhood and culture provide alternate avenues for individual expression, including forms of dramatic storytelling that express both individuality and the ways that individuals are embedded in long-term relational ties with others (Gee, 2000; Heath, 1983). Access to an audience is not simply given to children in working-class settings, however. As Miller, Cho, and Bracey (2005) found, "working-class children had to work hard to get their views across; [they] had to earn and defend the right to speak" (p. 131). There is little entitlement here.

"Working-class people in the United States are more likely to live where they grew up, or to have moved as a family and not solo. They are more likely to live near extended family and [are] . . . likely to have been raised and socialized by traditionally rooted people" (Leondar-Wright, 2005, p. 22). Even though the old ethnic enclaves of the 19th and early 20th century have largely disappeared, Lubrano (2005) found that a "core value of the working class" still involves "being part of a like-minded group—a family, a union, or a community" (p. 20). As at the end of the 19th century, today this tendency to value deep connections with families and communities is partly driven by the material conditions of working-class life. Many workers have no choice but to depend on a web of links with others to get them through hard times, and, as I have noted, the impoverished, especially in the central cities, suffer greatly to the extent that these relationships have fractured or lack significant resources (Schutz, 2006).

Some have argued that working-class labor is relatively simple compared with that of the middle class (e.g., Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Wright, 2000), but the evidence indicates that this issue is more complex.

Although employers have sought throughout the 20th century to reduce workers' discretion and skills, a range of studies have shown that many seemingly basic fast food, data entry, industrial, and other working-class jobs actually require extensive learned capacities (e.g., Hull, 1993; Leidner, 1993; Newman, 1999). In fact, von Trotha and Brown (1982) argued that the strict guidelines characteristic of many working-class jobs, which cannot hope to capture the subtlety of actual work, actually end up forcing workers to "incessantly focus on the cues and clues of specific situations to discern, or invent ad hoc, the meanings and actions that might be appropriate" (p. 382). "Generally speaking," they conclude, "the lower class person considers a wider range of imponderables, and can take less for granted, than does the middle-class actor" (p. 382). In other words, while managers and professionals may face a higher cognitive load in realms of relative abstraction, workers are more likely to face more (but equally complex) challenges in their local environment. A key tendency of working-class labor, therefore, is not its relative simplicity but instead its relatively embodied and tacit nature. Even when extensive abstract thought is required (for a carpenter, for example), this is likely to be deeply embedded in material requirements of a specific job. Cashiers and call center operators do not read reports about customers; they serve them one by one. Fast food cooks don't read about hamburger production, they actually make them (Benson, 1986; Kanter, 1993; Leidner, 1993; Newman, 1999).

Given the contrasting conditions of their lives, the working class has developed different practices of interpersonal engagement and strategies for orienting group activity. On the most basic level, workers tend to prefer a different set of values in their coworkers and friends than members of the middle class. Relatively flexible middle-class attitudes about morality and reverence for unique individuality contrast strongly with working-class tendencies to stress the importance of tradition, personal integrity, personal responsibility, sincerity above flexibility, and the quality of interpersonal relationships (Lamont, 2000). They are more likely to prefer "straight talk" and "resolving conflicts head on," as opposed to placating and long discussions (Lubrano, 2005, p. 10; see Rose, 2000).

Operating in situations in which embodied knowledge dominates and in which coordination requires mutual adjustment amid an ongoing flow of work, the working class depends less on discursive collaboration than on what I will call *organic solidarity*.[8] In contrast with the focus on individuality characteristic of middle-class settings, then, working-class groups are more likely to operate as a collective unit.

It is important to emphasize, however, that these rich "communalized roles" are "strikingly inconsistent with a picture of lower-class" groups as

relatively simplistic reflections of "'mechanical solidarity'" (von Trotha & Brown, 1982, p. 381). In important ways, organic solidarity is itself a form of collaboration that can be as responsive to individual capacities and interests as the more explicit forms of discursive collaboration preferred by the middle class. Lacking time for extensive negotiation and dialogue, it should not be surprising that this approach to joint action is generally grounded in established, if sometimes informal, hierarchies.

Although lower level workers often seem invisible to the relatively privileged, the working class constantly deals with the power of managers and professionals to affect their lives in profound ways (Collins, 1990). In fact, in their interactions with middle-class institutions beyond their private spheres—especially in schools and work sites—working-class people often feel relatively powerless (Lareau, 2003). They often "resent middle-class language . . . and middle-class attitudes" (Gorman, 1999, p. 104; see Sennett & Cobb, 1972). At the same time, however, those on the lower rungs of America's economic ladder often feel extremely dependent on the middle class, especially for the advancement of their children.

The tensions between middle-class and working-class ways of being can become especially intense when working class people go to college. College can involve "a massive shift . . . requiring an internal and external 'makeover'" (Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine, 2003, p. 285). In fact, in Kaufman's (2003) study, the most successful working-class college students were those who were most able to disassociate themselves from their old friends and their old community. Completing a residential 4-year college degree away from home, then, is both the best way to become middle class and one of the most powerful ways to alienate oneself from one's home community. Successfully entering the middle class often requires working-class people to embody a "split and fragmented subjectivity" that can allow them "to cross back and forth across the divide" (Lucey et al., p. 295). Such bicultural fluency is difficult to achieve and sustain, however (Lubrano, 2005).

DISCURSIVE DEMOCRACY VERSUS DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY

Two different approaches to democratic social action are associated with each of these two class cultures. The first, arising from the penchant of the middle class for extended rational dialogue, its focus on the importance of individual expression, and its love of teamwork, I call *discursive democracy*. The second, emerging out of working-class commitments to solidarity and tradition, the embodied nature of its work, and limited resources of time, I call *democratic solidarity*. In important ways, these democratic practices represent transformative versions of the daily

practices of each group: what I described above as the discursive collaboration of the former, and the organic solidarity of the latter. In this section, I turn back to history, exploring how these different approaches to social action seem to have emerged in each class, and looking to the key theorists who have conceptualized these most fully. With respect to the middle class, I focus on the progressive era and on the writings of Dewey, the most important American theorist of collaborative democracy. For the working class, I look to the work of Saul Alinsky, the dominant conceptualizer of community-based democratic solidarity, and the writings of those influenced by him. In the next major section, I discuss case studies showing how these different approaches often interact and conflict with each other in actual contexts of social action.

Before I move on, it seems important to stress, again, that as "ideal types" abstract conceptions of "discursive democracy" and "democratic solidarity" do not exist in any pure form in the real world. Perhaps most importantly, these class-based models of social action are always cut across by other sources of identity and culture, including gender, race, ethnicity, history, geography and more. Gender seems to be an especially important complicating factor in this case. As Stall and Stoecker (1998) among others have pointed out, democratic solidarity tends to be associated with male-dominated contexts, while discursive democracy draws more from women's traditions of collective engagement in America. I do not have space to explore the implications of these added complications, here.[9]

PROGRESSIVISM AND MIDDLE-CLASS UTOPIANISM

As the 19th century ended, the middle class suffered from a discomforting sense of uncertainty in a world that seemed increasingly morally and materially adrift. Old cultural commitments, old understandings of the economy—everything seemed unmoored. These general fears were magnified by the titanic struggles between labor and capital that waxed and waned throughout the last three decades of the 1800s and, at times, seemed to threaten the very fabric of social stability in America. At first the wrath of the nation and of the middle class fell mostly on workers. Although violence in the labor struggles of these years was often initiated by employers, it was workers who suffered the most profound loss of credibility. Years of conflict led to "the impression that the nation's labor elements were inherently criminal in character: inclined to riot, arson, pillage, assault, and murder" (Rayback, 1966, p. 168). In response came decades of brutal antilabor campaigns by employers, the courts, and the state.

Over time, however, large sections of the middle class, along with much of the rest of the country, became almost equally uncomfortable with the enormous wealth and dominating power of the captains of industry and their expanding corporations. They were repelled by the tendency of the "upper 10" to treat their workers like machines, and especially roused to anger by child labor and the incredible poverty of growing slums in the cities (see Curtis, 1991; McGerr, 2003).

Together, these conflicts and concerns produced a revulsion on the part of many middle-class people for both owners and workers. Both sides seemed like children: unable to get along, to cooperate as rational people should—as the middle class did. A central goal of progressive reforms, then, was finding a resolution to what they perceived as an unnecessary and destructive war between labor and capital (McGerr, 2003; Stromquist, 2006).

Two relatively distinct approaches to social reform emerged among middle-class intellectuals and policy-makers at the turn of the century: what I call *bureaucracy* and *discursive democracy*. These two visions reflected a split, widely recognized in the literature, between managers embedded in the hierarchical structure of social institutions, and more independent professionals who often found their strength in association (e.g., Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, 1979).[10] The differences between these two (loosely defined) groups did not constitute a fundamental fracture of the middle class, however. Managers and professionals were often raised together in the same families, imbibing the same middle-class practices. In the simplest sense, bureaucrats sought methods for managing recalcitrant workers, while relatively independent professionals were more inclined to envision a social democracy that embodied the more collaborative practices of their associations and daily work.

Bureaucrats

The bureaucratic vision was best embodied in Taylor's (e.g., 1911/1998) influential writings on "scientific management." In Taylor's vision, management and technical experts would lay out exactly how a job was to be done, so that the only task of the worker would be to do what he or she was told (see Kanigel, 1997). In its most basic form, scientific management involved little "science"; workers were simply pushed as hard as possible to determine the minimum time in which a particular task could be completed, and then others were pressured to achieve that speed (Kanigel, 1997). This model appealed to capitalists, who wished to eliminate worker discretion and reduce the cost of employment, and to

middle-class managers and technicians because of the respect it gave to their formal knowledge.

More sophisticated progressive bureaucrats emphasized, however, that bureaucracy in a complex world could not simply consist of a static system of rules. It must embody constantly "fluctuating harmonies" in response to "fluid social process[es]" (Wiebe, 1966, pp. 152, 146). This, of course, required the constant intervention of experts. Thus, bureaucrats often resisted strict guidelines and rules when these restricted the scope of *their* judgment. "The fewer laws the better if those few properly empowered the experts" (Wiebe, p. 169). From this perspective, then, the key characteristic of managerial life was the *discretion* that the middle-class increasingly gained to alter the systems that they supervised.

On the surface, this seems like a recipe for oppressive domination of the working class, and it often took that form both on the job and in society. However, it also provided the foundation for an increasingly popular middle-class utopian ideal. The hope was that through benevolent planning and management, disinterested experts could make the world better for everyone. For some, at least, bureaucracy was not simply a tool for social control; it could potentially enhance the freedom and satisfaction of all. In fact, a number of former democrats became proponents of such a bureaucratic, expert society, especially after World War I, as they confronted the apparently unredeemable ignorance and gullibility of the mass of humanity (Lippmann, 1947; Westbrook, 1991). None of these writers ever figured out, however, how one was to identify people who were truly objective and benevolent.

Discursive democrats

A separate group of progressives, overlapping in complex ways with the first, sought a model for a harmonious society informed by the collaborative characteristics of middle-class culture. The crucial model was the associational form of the emerging professions through which professionals controlled access to knowledge and jobs. If the bureaucrats' solution to the crisis of social order was to benevolently control those from the "less civilized" (both upper and lower) classes, the goal of the discursive democrats was essentially to make everyone in society middle class.

It is important to emphasize that what the democrats sought was not middle-class culture as it currently existed. In fact, many were unhappy with the increasing atomization of middle-class communities and with what some perceived as their own culture's "enervating" banality (Trachtenberg, 1982). They also began to associate uncontrolled individualism with the rapacious greed of the "upper 10." Although a small

number dallied with socialism, most rejected its revolutionary implications; the fact was that the current social structure of society served members of their class quite well, despite its limitations. Thus, "the great majority of the middle class wanted something in between" liberal individualism and socialism (McGerr, 2003, p. 65). In response, prominent intellectuals developed a vision of a society grounded in what I am calling discursive democracy.

The most sophisticated conception of this democratic ideal was developed by Dewey, the preeminent theorist of his age, but in its general outlines his vision closely resembles models presented by many other progressive intellectuals, activists, and religious leaders (Curtis, 1991; Kloppenberg, 1988; McGerr, 2003; Stromquist, 2006). It is important to note that, like most progressive intellectuals of his time—with the limited exception of a few, like Jane Addams (discussed below)—Dewey had little extended contact with working-class people throughout his long life.

In Dewey's (e.g., 1916) conception, authentic democratic practices were those that encouraged individual distinctiveness amidst collective action. Participation in group action should nurture individual perspectives, not suppress them, as long as they served the shared aims of society. In Dewey's famous Laboratory School, for example, middle-class students were given many opportunities "to get from and exchange with others his store of information," and "conversation was the means of developing and directing experiences and enterprises in all the classrooms" (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, pp. 79, 339). In good middle-class fashion, the children learned to collaborate by engaging in dialogue with each other and consciously planning their activities, drawing from the unique capacities of each participant. Dewey consistently emphasized the importance of allowing individuality to express itself within collaborative action with others. (For a more extended discussion of Deweyan democracy along these lines, see Schutz, 2001a, 2001b.) This, then, was the utopian vision of middle-class democrats: a society in which citizens might maintain their unique individuality and yet escape social isolation, overcoming the banality of their lives by working together to create a better society.

Like other progressive democrats, Dewey saw "the emerging and professional elements of the middle class as the preferable historical agent" of social change (West, 1989, p. 76; see Feinberg, 1975). Although the practices of everyone in society needed to be improved, it was the middle class that was closest to the ideal. Even the "radical" writings of pre-WWII "social reconstructionists" like Counts (1932), which went the furthest in acknowledging the problematic positioning of middle-class intellectuals vis-à-vis the working class—promoting socialist solutions to economic inequality and accepting the necessity of conflict in wresting resources

away from the privileged—contained only hints of a coherent critique of Dewey's fundamentally middle-class vision of democratic engagement (see Bowers, 1969; Feinberg, 1975; Hlebowitsch & Wraga, 1995).[11]

Whereas the bureaucrats at least implicitly accepted divisions between classes, the democrats rejected social classes as products of faulty practices and misunderstandings (Curtis, 1991; Kloppenberg, 1988; McGerr, 2003). More generally, underlying the democrats' vision of a collaborative society was the firm conviction that aggressive social conflict (as opposed to restrained discursive disagreement) was unnecessary. Although many supported the right of collective action on the part of aggrieved workers, then, they generally envisioned this on the model of rational cooperation, not, as unions often did, as zero-sum wars. And unlike the bureaucrats, who relied on new systems of control as sources of order, the democrats looked often uncritically to education as the key force for transforming "others" into discursive democrats (Wiebe, 1966).[12]

This aversion to aggressive social conflict was visible even in the work of Addams, an enormously prominent upper-middle-class democrat who was very supportive of the value of workers' traditional culture—a result of her close contact with the poor who frequented her famous settlement house. In fact, she actually allowed unionists to operate out of Hull House. Yet she rejected the necessity for conflict between labor and capital. For example, in one essay, "Addams concluded with a characteristic tinge of middle-class condescension" that "'it is clearly the duty of the settlement . . . to keep [the union movement] to its best ideal'" (McGerr, 2003, p. 135). At the same time as she "praised the 'ring of altruism' in the union movement," she "chided its pursuit of 'negative action,'" emphasizing that "'a moral revolution cannot be accomplished by men who are held together *merely* [italics added] because they are all smarting under a sense of injury and injustice" (p. 134), because they would not be engaging with each other as whole beings in collaborative dialogue. She appealed to capitalists to see their workers as human beings and not just the raw material of labor. In the wake of the Pullman strike, distressed by her inability to arbitrate a solution, she critiqued both Pullman and his workers for not engaging with each other as rational human beings, accommodating each other's needs and perspectives (Addams, 2001). Despite her great familiarity with the poverty and struggles of the poor, then, like other progressive democrats she objected "to that word *class*," emphasizing at one point that "there are no classes in this country. The people are all Americans with no dividing line drawn" (cited in Elshtain, 2002, p. 124). Of course, she understood that these lines *were* currently drawn; her point was that they were unnecessary.

Democratic progressives supported labor initiatives that fit with their core commitments. With the National Civic Federation, for example, they attempted to bring businesses and workers together in dialogue. They also promoted arbitration laws in many different states. In each case, a core blindness of these reformers was to the existence of inequality that made rational collaboration impossible. They projected their experiences as professionals and managers onto the very different realities of working- and upper-class life. As a result, their efforts to democratize American labor relations were largely ineffectual and often counterproductive (Montgomery, 1988).

It should come as no surprise that the bureaucrats largely won the battle over social structure and social reform in the early decades of the 20th century. Much ink was spilled pondering the possibilities of discursive democracy, but these speculations had only a limited effect on American society. These visions still have a powerful influence in academia, however—especially, as we will see, in education.

DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY: A PRAGMATIC RESPONSE TO OPPRESSION

In their unions and in their efforts to gain community power in the cities during the decades surrounding the turn of the century and after, workers developed approaches to social action and social change that diverged radically from those of the democratic progressives. Their visceral experiences of oppression and poverty and their traditions of mutualism made it clear to them that their only strength lay in solidarity. Not surprisingly, many found socialism and other attempts to fundamentally change the structure of the capitalist economy enormously appealing, although these ideas have mostly lost their grip on workers in the last half-century.

It is true that unions, especially, have long struggled with issues of democracy. Workers' preferences for clear leadership and group loyalty, grounded in a chronic lack of time and resources, have frequently short-circuited broad participation. Dependent on leaders to make key decisions and to negotiate for them, the working class has often found that their leaders become detached from the interests of the collective, pursuing their own interests or the interests of a particular faction in opposition to the whole (see Markowitz, 2000; Stepan-Norris, 1997). Nonetheless, distinct and sophisticated models of what I am calling democratic solidarity have been developed. Here, I focus not on unions but on the approach to local community organizing developed by Alinsky and evolved by his followers. [13]

Alinsky is a fascinating figure. Raised in a Jewish slum in Chicago, he eventually became a graduate student who worked with the leading figures of the Chicago School of American sociology in the 1930s. As a part of his graduate work, he conducted ethnographic studies of youth gangs and other aspects of the underside of working-class life. Later on he served an influential internship under John L. Lewis, president of one of the dominant unions of his time, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Thus, Alinsky played what Rose (2000) has called the role of a "bridge builder," someone with one foot in both middle-class and working-class worlds. He could critique each side from the point of view of the other. For example, although he learned a great deal from his mentors at the University of Chicago, he reported with characteristic bluntness (and his usual calculated exaggeration) that he "was astounded by all the horse manure they were handing out about poverty and slums . . . glossing over the misery and the despair. I mean, Christ, I'd lived in a slum. I could see through all their complacent academic jargon to the realities" (Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987, p. 5). Despite his rough demeanor and attacks on "theory," however, Alinsky came to organizing equipped with the best theoretical and research training of the sociology of his time.

Alinsky's model of organizing was explicitly developed in response to the limits of middle-class, "liberal" approaches. For example, he attacked the preoccupation of academic sociology "with the development of consensus" and its avoidance of conflict (Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987, p. 36). And he explicitly rejected progressive visions of discursive democracy, complaining about "liberals who have the time to engage in leisurely democratic discussions" and "to quibble about the semantics of a limited resolution" (Alinsky, 1946/1989, p. 134), who didn't understand that "a war is not an intellectual debate" (p. 133). Liberals had the luxury of adhering to these positions, he argued, because

> fights for decent housing, economic security, health programs, and for many of these other social issues for which liberals profess their sympathy and support, are to the liberals simply intellectual affinities. . . . [I]t is not *their* children who are sick; it is not *they* who are working with the specter of unemployment hanging over their heads. (p. 134)

Instead of seeking a calm, rational consensus, Alinsky pursued essentially the opposite approach. He aimed, first of all, to "rub raw the resentments of the people of the community; [to] fan the latent hostilities of many of the people to the point of overt expression" (Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987, p. 35). He sought to use anger at external oppression as a tool for

breaking up fractures between different groups in the community and for showing people that they had more to gain by working together. With all his talk of war and conflict, however, Alinsky was not a defender of violence, envisioning social action as a kind of aggressive nonviolence. Anger was never an end in itself. Instead, he sought to channel these feelings into a "cold anger" that linked strategy and intelligence to emotions that sustain action (Warren, 2001). He did this by "picking a target, freezing it, personalizing it, and polarizing it" (Reitzes & Reitzes, p. 34).

It is important not to oversimplify Alinsky's vision, however. For example, his attempts to freeze the opposition into the position of an "evil" other were temporary stratagems for coalescing community resentment and action. In fact, a core motto of community organizing groups is that they have "no permanent enemies, no permanent friends." Old enemies can, at particular points, become allies on specific issues depending on the self-interests involved, and vice versa. Furthermore, once a target becomes willing to negotiate, Alinsky-based organizations are fully capable of engaging in nuanced dialogue over specific issues—although their position as relative equals at the table is maintained by the constant threat that they will pull out and polarize the situation again. Thus, participants in actions against oppression are apprenticed into an extremely flexible approach to social change that constantly responds to shifting realities (see Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2001).[14]

Within his organizations, Alinsky (1946/1989) was strongly committed to democratic governance, a commitment that was deepened by those who came after him. His central tool for ensuring that organizations actually represented the interest of the people was to seek out what he called "native leaders." These leaders were not those generally chosen by the middle-class progressives who increasingly dominated institutions in the slums. Instead, they were people who were actually respected and looked to by local people. He sought to ensure that leaders actually followed and were seen by people as following the actual interests of the community.

Facing the dissolution of community ties of ethnic, racial, and religious mutualism that had characterized poor urban communities in the early decades of the 20th century when Alinsky did his most important work, protégés of Alinsky, like Chambers (2004), developed new practices for recreating the web of connections that had been lost. The central tool for creating new relationships has become the "one-on-one." In the one-on-one, a leader has a formal discussion with a community member in an effort to discover her "passions," seeking avenues for engaging her in ongoing campaigns. The goal is to discover whether a person has a self-interest that could link her to the organization and whether she is someone who would be dependable and accountable. At the same time, these

dialogues create a relationship that the interviewing leader can draw on later when she needs support. As Chambers succinctly noted, "a good relational meeting wakes somebody up" (p. 44). In this model, powerful leaders are the ones who have developed a large number of these relationships and bring this collective strength with them to the table (Warren, 2001).

In the ideal, one-on-ones provide a conduit between the mass of participants with limited time and core leaders who come together in meetings. A common practice is for leaders to pool what they have learned from their interviews to discover what issues their constituency seems most interested in. There is a constant interplay between the interests of leaders and the willingness of their followers to come out in force to support a particular campaign. If leaders pick the wrong issue, they may find that they do not have the support to carry it through. Community organizers, then, have evolved a pragmatic process for helping to ensure consent and input in mass organizations in which members do not have time for extended dialogue.[15]

The most important learning in these organizations happens amidst action. Leaders learn both from the modeling of skilled organizers and from the real events that they encounter in the world instead of speaking or learning about abstractions. The focus, then, is on the kind of "embodied" knowledge so important to working-class culture. Like Alinsky, Chambers (2004) stressed the limitations of "theory": "the knowledge that . . . you get . . . by pulling away from the realities of everyday life." Although theory has its place, he argued that "practical wisdom," "the kind of know-how based on the hard lessons of life experience," was most important for community organizing. This practical knowledge is only "earned . . . in moments of challenge and struggle, on the street—not in the ivory tower" (pp. 16–17). Established organizing groups also usually provide some formal training to their leaders as well, however, teaching a common language and core concepts of organizing (see Warren, 2001).

This community organizing model represents a fairly sophisticated instantiation of what I call democratic solidarity. At least in the ideal it is a thoroughly democratic form of organization designed to foster mass action under the guidance of a relatively small number of leaders who have the time to participate deeply in decision making. It is explicitly designed around core aspects of working-class culture in its approach to action, to power, to social ties, to tradition, and to learning, and in the stark distinctions that it often draws between "us" and "them." Most fundamentally, this model acknowledges the limited resources available to working-class and impoverished people. (For more discussion of

community organizing as well as the lectures from my introductory course on organizing, go to educationaction.org.)

EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN CLASS CULTURES AND SOCIAL ACTION PRACTICES

A small number of recent studies have shown how these differences between middle- and working-class practices can play out in actual examples of collective action. The two most important discussions appear in Lichterman, 1996, and in Rose, 2000 (see also Croteau, 1995; Hart, 2001; Law, 1993; Leondar-Wright, 2005; and Stout, 1996). In both studies, the researchers spent extensive time in groups dominated by both middle- and working-class participants. Lichterman's book looked in detail at a few small groups of middle-class, professional "Greens," and small black and white working-class antitoxics organizations. Rose looked more broadly across a series of different efforts, focusing on environmental and peace organizations composed mostly of middle-class professionals, and on working-class labor unions. Thus, Rose and Lichterman focused on those groups in American society today most likely to embody the dispositions that I have described as middle class and working class.[16]

MIDDLE CLASS GROUPS

Both Lichterman (1996) and Rose (2000) found that organizations dominated by middle-class professionals tend to embody the "values, ideas, expectations, and assumptions" of "successful professionals" (Rose, p. 65). Participants are expected to conform to middle-class discourse expectations: avoiding excessive expression of emotion, depending on reasoned analysis, and making reference to "data" and expert knowledge. To participate equally, speakers need to be "comfortable with theoretical, impersonal discussion." And because they generally lack formal rules for participation, these groups generally expect people to be able to "just jump in when they want to speak," following a format resembling "college classroom[s] . . . familiar to those who are college educated" (Stout, 1996, p. 135).

   In part because the issues addressed by middle-class activists are usually only weakly linked to specific needs in group members' lives, Rose (2000) found that "even the most pragmatic middle-class organizations frame their issues in broad ethical terms, . . . never in terms of advancing the interests of a particular group" (p. 20). This tendency toward abstraction may indicate how little the "struggles faced by low-income people" actually impinge on the "reality" of middle-class people (Stout, 1996, p. 128).

In fact, middle-class groups generally believe that they advance univer-
sally valid goals, not "the interests of their class" (p. 20).

Participants in middle-class, professional organizations are encouraged
to "continue to act very much as individuals" (Rose, 2000, p. 66). All par-
ticipants are expected to "express their own ideas and evaluate argu-
ments for themselves" (p. 67). Groups often allot extensive time for indi-
vidual self-expression and see it as problematic if everyone doesn't con-
tribute (Lichterman, 1996). Like Dewey, they agree that a good commu-
nity is one that can "allow individual identities and political wills to res-
onate loudly within collective accomplishments" (p. 24).

A range of other characteristics of these organizations also seem driven
by middle-class life conditions and culture. Reflecting the often fluid
nature of professional lives, for example, participation is generally under-
stood as an individual choice, and engagement with a particular issue
"may ebb and flow depending on shifts in personal priorities and inter-
ests" (Rose, 2000, p. 65). Because professionals are relatively free of pre-
determined social ties, they are constantly involved in creating "their own
communities." This means that "joining an issue organization" is one of
the best ways "to meet people who have similar concerns" (p. 66).
Individual choice, not group history, "identifies who they are" and "estab-
lishes a community to which they belong" (p. 68). "Middle class politics
is therefore an extension of personal development" (p. 67).

Because middle-class professionals assume that other people operate
(or should operate) in the same individualistic, rational manner that they
prefer themselves, they generally view "social change . . . as the product
of changes in consciousness, that is, a product of education" (Rose, 2000,
p. 19). In fact, middle-class activists often believe that "'if people only
knew about the problems being raised, then they would be more likely to
act'" (p. 19). The point is not that these groups do not often seek
structural changes, especially in laws, but that the mechanism for this
change is often envisioned on a model of reasoned, discursive democra-
tic education.

WORKING-CLASS GROUPS

The approach of most working-class groups to social action is fundamen-
tally different. In contrast with the comparably formless character of mid-
dle-class organizations, worker's groups tend to follow established formal
rules for participation and are generally organized around clearly
defined hierarchies. Rejecting wide-ranging dialogue about the personal
opinions of individuals, they focus on pragmatic questions of action and
on rituals that sustain group solidarity. As one union leader stated, "you

can only think about the issue so many ways, and then you need to kick ass about it" (Rose, 2000, p. 134). Those who are most respected in these contexts are those who most embody the core values of the working class: speaking their minds, contending, often loudly, over their commitments, and expressing the emotions behind their commitments. Eschewing abstractions, they speak from experience, often telling stories that serve to embody their particular perspectives while demonstrating loyalty and connectedness.

   Membership in these groups is not simply chosen but is usually the result of a long-term embeddedness in community and family networks. Identity is something that one has, not something that needs to be found; it "comes from being accepted and known" and "being a member of a . . . community with a good reputation defines who one is" (Rose, 2000, p. 73). Thus, these "close communities" make "a clear division between members and outsiders" (p. 63). Trust is built over time, and newcomers are not easily allowed entry.

   Finally, the issues tackled by groups like unions and local community groups in impoverished areas are usually closely tied to particular community needs. Instead of focusing on universal values (although they may often refer to these), they tend to define their battles in terms of "competing interests," experiencing "their own interests . . . in opposition to the interests of others" (Rose, 2000, p. 18). A problem is rarely seen as the result of a simple misunderstanding that can be rationally dealt with. Instead, power must be wrested from others who will generally not give it up without a fight. Win-win solutions may sometimes be possible, but experience has taught them that conflict generally involves a zero-sum game. In these and other ways, then, these organizations often embody something resembling the model of democratic solidarity outlined above (see also Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2001).

CLASS TENSIONS

It's important to reemphasize that Lichterman (1996) and Rose (2000) focused on groups that especially exemplify the class characteristics I have been discussing. Even in less distinct circumstances, however, differences in approaches to social action frequently create conflicts and tensions between middle-class and working-class groups. In fact, I have frequently watched these dynamics play themselves out in the context of community organizing efforts I have worked in over the past few years (see educationaction.org). Because they have different ways of speaking, when people from different classes meet together, they often find that they can't communicate very well, misreading discursive and social cues

that seem so natural to one group and so alien to the other. Furthermore, the structure of each context tends to alienate and suppress the participation of people from the other class. For example, the quick repartee of middle-class meetings can make it difficult for working-class people to get a word in edgewise, whereas the formalistic and hierarchical structure of working-class settings can seem, to middle-class members, like a tool for suppressing their individual voices (Law, 1993).

Despite these challenges, Rose (2000) argued that when they operate in isolation class-based movements often end up "reinforcing and reproducing [problematic] aspects of society even as they work to change other aspects" (p. 26). For example, as we have seen, middle-class reforms have often "inadvertently served to reproduce the subordinate role of the working class in society and the economy" (p. 27) by placing decision-making power in the hands of experts or by downplaying the effects of inequality on democratic engagement. Working-class approaches bring their own problems, however. A tendency to focus on local interests has sometimes led working-class organizations to downplay more universalistic visions of social transformation.[17] In unions and elsewhere, a dependence on hierarchy often threatens democratic engagement. And because working-class efforts have often depended on exclusion of other, less privileged persons from gaining access to limited resources, they can reinforce social divisions of race, ethnicity, and gender, among others.

Overall, the practices of these different groups embody contrasting strengths and weaknesses. Lichterman (1996) found, for example, that because of their loose structures and focus on process over product, middle-class Greens often found it difficult to act collectively or even to decide on shared goals or tactics. In contrast, the focus on solidarity in working-class groups often limits broad-based democratic participation. Both sides have much to learn from each other, if they can find a way to listen.

SOCIAL CLASS AND EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP: HOW SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION BECAME MIDDLE CLASS

To understand how these issues of social class have affected education scholars and schools of education in particular, it seems helpful to look back to the history of the emergence of these positions and institutions. For leading American institutions of higher education, in general, the 19th century was a time of transition from finishing schools for the gentry to training grounds for children of the upper middle class. They

began to shift from a focus on reproducing the classical culture of the upper class toward efforts to increase knowledge, further social/material progress, and teach more practical professional skills. Especially in the research institutions that became dominant forces, laboratories for natural and social-scientific investigation were founded, and the dialogic practice of the seminar began to replace the didactic recitation, especially in more advanced courses (Veysey, 1965). Increasingly, universities became the guardians, developers, and teachers of the expert knowledge and more general dispositions that marked someone as a middle-class professional.

The trajectory of schools of education was somewhat more complex, deeply intertwined with the evolving structure of public schools and conflicts over the social position of teachers. After the Civil War, social class became an increasingly salient issue in the education of educators. As the pressure to provide at least minimal schooling for all children in American society grew, an enormous demand for teachers was created. In response to a growing teacher shortage, a range of options for gaining teaching "credentials" was developed, including teaching tracks in high schools, independent teachers' institutes, and normal schools. Though more sophisticated than the former approaches, the normal schools that became the dominant educators of teachers around the turn of the 20th century were more like today's community colleges than 4-year institutions. The students who attended these schools "shared rather low economic status; they were, for the most part, the daughters and sons of working people" (Ogren, 2005, p. 68), and most were women. The predominance of other working-class students and the fact that teachers were usually only graduates of normal schools themselves meant that these schools had limited capacity for transmitting middle-class practices.

In response to the existence of a broad mass of working-class women teachers teaching working-class children and overseen by middle-class male supervisors, schools at the turn of the century often took on many of the characteristics of factories. Especially in urban areas, forms of "scientific management" became extremely popular. At all levels, administrators and education scholars fought to centralize the system of schooling and to reduce, as much as possible, the discretion of "uneducated" teachers. This process was also driven by a vision of social efficiency that fit with the broader bureaucratic line of progressive thinking during this time. Students, they believed, should be trained for the kinds of jobs they would take when they left school, and for working-class children this meant becoming able to conform to the conditions of these jobs. Fears about working-class immigrants, especially, led them to "create institu-

tions which could bring order into the lives of deviant persons and, per-chance, heal the society itself by the force of example" (Tyack, 1974, p. 72; see Lagemann, 2000).

Within more prestigious universities, however, this social efficiency approach to schooling was contested by a loosely linked group of professors promoting more "democratic," interactive, and individually responsive forms of teaching—among whom Dewey was the most important. As Tyack (1974) and Kliebard (1995) have shown, as in the larger society democrats had little actual impact on the structure of public schools and classrooms. Inside schools of education, however, democratic forms of progressivism became increasingly dominant.

Labaree (2004) has argued that the increasing dominance of child-centered, democratic progressivism in schools of education resulted from the desire of education professors to increase their status and to see themselves as more than simply functionaries, cogs "in the new social-efficiency machine" (p. 156). Child-centered, democratic progressivism, he argued, provides education professors with a sense that they might contribute to the democratic transformation of the larger society, ultimately "making the reform of education a means for the reform of society as a whole around principles of social justice and democratic equality" (p. 142).

Although Labaree (2004) was on the right path, I think he missed the most important contributor to this shift in the focus of education scholarship: the pervasively middle-class and increasingly professional character of academic life in schools of education. And while professors were increasingly embracing democratic progressivism, their students were also becoming ever more middle class. Over the middle decades of the 20th century, the middle class even moved to claim teaching for itself as a kind of "profession." A college degree became a more standard requirement for teachers as normal schools, unable to provide middle-class credentials, either disappeared or transformed themselves into colleges and universities (Ogren, 2005). Within the continuing bureaucratic structure of schooling, teachers have faced and probably will continue to face tensions and contradictions in their efforts to see themselves and act as professionals. Schools of education, however, do not have to deal with the same level of bureaucratic challenges. As their students became increasingly middle class, then, education professors increasingly structured their pedagogy around the practices most familiar to them: the practices of middle-class professionals.

THE DOMINANCE OF DISCURSIVE DEMOCRACY
IN EDUCATION THINKING

All these developments, in addition to those cited by Labaree (2004), led to the dominance in schools of education of "a rhetorical commitment to [child-centered, democratic] progressivism that is so wide that, within these institutions, it is largely beyond challenge" (p. 143). Although most of this rhetoric focuses on the education of individuals, the (often implicit) goal of a more democratic and equitable society is rarely far beneath the surface. And it should be no surprise that when education scholars do speak more specifically about education for democratic citizenship, with few exceptions, they look to the general model of discursive democracy that is so indebted to Dewey (see Fine & Weis, 1997; Fraser, 1997; Goodman, Kuzmic, & Wu, 1992; Gutmann, 1999; Kelly, 1994; McQuillan, 2005; Parker, 2005; Rogers & Oakes, 2005; and Sehr, 1997 to name only a few).[18] What I have described as a working-class democratic solidarity model is almost entirely missing from the field's dialogues about democratic education and empowerment.[19]

Even those few in education today who write out of at least a somewhat Marxian perspective generally look, in the end, to Deweyan democracy (e.g., Apple & Beane, 1995; Brosio, 1994). As Apple and Beane rightly noted, "most of the impulse toward democratic schooling" in education scholarship today "rests on Dewey's prolific work" (p. 16). And although, like many other scholars, Apple and Beane acknowledged that "exercising democracy involves tensions and contradictions," they were convinced that the problem with Dewey's democratic vision is not its "idealized values" but instead our failure to fully live up to these ideals (p. 16). Like nearly all contemporary progressive education scholars, they admitted "to having what Dewey and others have called the 'democratic faith,' the fundamental belief that [Deweyan, discursive] democracy can work, and that it is necessary if we are to maintain freedom and human dignity in social affairs" (p. 96; see Schutz, 2001a).

There are exceptions to this pattern, of course. A few education scholars have begun to acknowledge the limitations of discursive democracy. Critical race theory, for example, provides a promising source of critique because of its focus on the importance of narratives and personal experience, as opposed to abstract reason, as a key source of argument and discursive engagement (see Collins, 1990; Tate, 1997). Other scholars look to a growing collection of writers outside education (especially in political theory) who have been chipping away at and reconstructing the core assumptions of discursive democracy (in education, see Knight Abowitz, 1999; Moss & Schutz, 2001; in political theory, see Mansbridge, Hartz-

Karp, Amengual, & Gastil, 2006; Sanders, 1997; Young, 2000). Like critical race theory, this work often discusses the ways discursive practices and strategies of social engagement differ across cultures, and the ways in which a focus on "privileged" forms of discourse tends to silence those from cultures with less power. So far, however this work remains marginal to the dominant dialogues in the education literature around student empowerment and democratic citizenship.

It seems difficult to deny that the pervasiveness of a rhetoric of discursive democracy in education scholarship and in the classrooms of schools of education today is largely produced by the dominance of middle-class professionals. And because this cultural bias is largely unacknowledged, professional educators and education scholars have generally seemed unable even to perceive the existence of alternative forms of democratic engagement. Thus, we have generally been unable to really critique Dewey's democratic vision even when we acknowledge its limitations. Even in those rare moments when educators and education scholars actually do actively promote democratic forms of education, then, we almost invariably end up embracing practices that have limited relevance, *by themselves*, to the lives of working-class students and their families.

BECOMING BRIDGE BUILDERS: WHAT CAN MIDDLE-CLASS PROFESSORS AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS HOPE TO DO FOR WORKING CLASS STUDENTS?

Gramsci (1992) argued that if different classes were to successfully respond to the larger structural challenges of society, they needed what he called "organic intellectuals" who could help them construct coherent conceptualizations of their world. Gramsci argued that authentic organic intellectuals must act out of the actual conditions and cultural practices of those they seek to support, feeling "the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation" (Gramsci, cited in Sassoon, 1987, p. 124). Without this depth of understanding, he worried that "relations between . . . intellectual[s] and the people-nation" would be "reduced to . . . relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order" (p. 124). He emphasized, therefore, that organic intellectuals must be "active in participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, [and] 'permanent persuader,'" not ivory-tower thinkers (p. 141). With respect to the working class, his description fits labor leaders like John L. Lewis (who apprenticed Alinsky), Mother Jones, and A. Philip Randolph.

Some education scholars would like to see themselves as "organic intellectuals" for the less privileged. The problem is that as one moves up the

scales of power within schools and universities, one increasingly takes on characteristics of the middle class. Even working-class academics generally achieve success precisely *because* they have learned to moderate or even suppress whatever working-class tendencies they might embody. Although there are growing efforts among working-class academics to contest the dominance of middle-class practices within the academy, the embattled tone of most of these critiques indicates how far we are from a situation in which working-class practices and dispositions are widely respected (Collins, 1990; Dews & Law, 1995; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993). Working-class academics often report being caught between two worlds, fully belonging to neither (Lubrano, 2005). In any case, as these accounts repeatedly note, the vast majority of academics come from solidly middle-class, if not upper-middle-class, backgrounds.

Furthermore, we generally only meet members of the working class in middle-class controlled institutions like schools. As I noted above, in situations like these working-class people are almost inevitably placed in positions of inferiority (and often fear). It is not an exaggeration to say that schools are one of the most unlikely places in our society for members of the middle and working classes to meet on equal terms (Lareau, 2003; Schutz, 2006). Given the realities of the contexts we spend most of our time in, it seems doubtful that a significant number of middle-class education scholars and professional educators could transform themselves into "organic intellectuals" for the working class.

This does not mean that middle-class academics can do nothing to transform our relationships with less privileged people. Rose (2000), for example, has argued that even people deeply embedded in one class or another can become what he called "bridge builders." Bridge builders, for Rose, are those who intentionally seek to develop relationships with, and understanding of, institutions and individuals from a different class. As bridge builders build trust with those from a different culture, "each side comes to understand the other's perspective better" and comes "to appreciate its unique contribution" to a common effort (p. 162).

Bridge builders, in Rose's (2000) vision, do not become organic intellectuals for other classes. Instead, they gain the capacity to teach those from their own class about the strengths of others, at the same time that they educate those from other classes about the potentials resident in their own class practices. Their insider work is perhaps most crucial because, as Rose emphasized, "people do not often alter their perception because of the ideas of those whom they consider outsiders. . . . A difference with a friend always remains a potential source of learning, while a difference with a stranger is readily dismissed" (p. 176). Because being a bridge builder often involves challenging deeply held commitments and

the seemingly universal practices of one's own culture, playing this role is inevitably "fraught with difficulties as well as political risks" (p. 178). Through the efforts of bridge builders, however, different groups can learn to work together and also to draw on initially alien practices that may enrich their own efforts to foster social change.

Following Rose's recommendations, as a middle-class scholar myself, I want to emphasize that this article was specifically written as an insider for other insiders—for an audience of other similarly placed education scholars. My central aim, therefore, has not been to tell working-class people how to act but, instead, to trace some limits of the thinking of middle-class professional education scholars. In this way, I am seeking to build the kind of bridge Rose (2000) describes between middle-class educators and working-class people around approaches to empowerment. A range of other scholars have been engaged in similar work to build bridges between educators and working-class students with respect to other issues like teacher education and student achievement (see Finn, 1996; Hicks, 2002; Linkon, 1999; Weis & Fine, 2005). In the end, with Lichterman (1996), Rose (2000), and others, I am increasingly convinced that scholars interested in fostering a more equitable and democratic society have little chance of success unless more of us embrace more of the tensions involved in becoming bridge builders across class.

Notes

1   Actually, he argued that cultural capital can be transformed, in some cases, into material capital, and that in most cases, material capital is dominant. And, of course, Bourdieu was also influenced by Marx et. al.

2   A key limitation of Bourdieu's work is that he "has little to say about what *collective* forms of class struggle look like" (Swartz, 1997, p. 187). And his vision of working-class culture often seems quite limited, focusing less on its creativity and more on how it is "highly constrained by primary necessities" (p. 176).

3   In fact, Bourdieu is uncomfortable with "single-dimensional scales and cumulative indices that locate individuals and groups by position in social structure," preferring "multidimensional analysis" (Swartz, 1997, p. 129).

4   I have selected here a fairly narrow understanding of the rich complexity of Bourdieu's concept of the "field," a choice that he often made in his own work as well (see Swartz, 1997, ch. 6).

5   Despite critiques of Braverman's thesis, there seems to be a general agreement that deskilling remains at least a "major tendential presence within the development of the capitalist labor process" that disproportionately affects those on the bottom (Meiksins, 1994, p. 5; see Gee et al., 1996; Montgomery, 1988).

6   I collapse the different criteria used by scholars to define middle class and working class in this discussion. Although my approach raises some problems of comparison across different studies, in most cases fairly similar sets of criteria were used, usually including at

least one of either education (college or no college) or occupation (usually professional/managerial vs. manual and direct service workers), often including income as well. Because my focus is on the relatively broad general tendencies that are revealed across different studies, however, this generalization is sufficient for my purposes.

7   Bernstein (1971) famously argued that the conditions of working-class life have produced a "restricted" discursive "code" that assumes "that speaker and hearer share a common frame of reference" (p. 119). He claimed that because the restricted code is less explicit about the assumptions that lie behind particular statements, it is less conducive to the kind of abstract discourse and thought prominent in middle-class settings. This argument has frequently been attacked by those who perceived an implicit denigration of working-class thought, even though that is not what he had intended. I think von Trotha and Brown's (1982) analysis of the different (but equally demanding) cognitive demands in working-class and middle-class settings is a better way to frame Bernstein's ideas.

8   I use this phrase differently than Durkheim, who, in a simple sense, was referring more broadly to the distinction between premodern and modern societies, using *organic* to describe the individualism, division of labor and complex interdependence of modern society.

9   I also want to acknowledge the growing collection of social action scholars examining the emergence of deliberative forms of collective action among poor and working-class people outside the United States, especially in Latin America. Some have argued that these approaches to generating collective power and social control could inform efforts oriented around discursive democracy among working-class people in American contexts (see INCITE, 2007, and Prakash & Esteva, 1999 for some good examples). But there is limited evidence about the extent to which this is possible, especially in urban areas of the United States. I have real doubts, myself. In any case, we clearly have much to learn from those working in these different settings.

10   Lamont (1992) referred to a related contrast between "for-profit" and "nonprofit" employees.

11   In fact, one might argue that there was a veiled paternalism in the writings of Counts (1932) and later social reconstructionists (see Bowers, 1969) when they assumed that the traditions of the working class need to be altered by middle-class educators.

12   Dewey became increasingly unconvinced about this position in his later years (Schutz, 2001b). It is also important not to overemphasize the differences between the democrats and the bureaucrats. Even a radical democrat like Dewey accepted that bureaucracy was a necessary aspect of society, and he struggled to understand how "experts" and the people might democratically interact. Both sides wanted to remake society in a middle-class image in which only those who expressed middle-class values and practices would hold full citizenship; in many ways, then, the bureaucrats and the democrats represented two extremes of a continuum.

13   Much of my understanding of community organizing is drawn not from books but from my dialogues with organizers and work with congregational organizing groups.

14   As I noted above, it should be clear that Alinsky's approach, with its metaphors of war, is a thoroughly male model of organizing (Stall and Stoecker, 1998). Warren (2001), however, showed how groups in the Alinsky tradition have increasingly infused their efforts with practices drawn more from women's experience.

15   Alinsky-based organizations generally have a formal yet flexible organization. There is usually a clear hierarchy of elected leaders at the same time that there are many opportunities for leaders to emerge organically in the context of particular campaigns (see Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2001).

16   Rose (2000) distinguished here between broad-based middle-class environmental

organizations and more working-class environmental justice organizations (or antitoxics groups, as Lichterman, 1996, called them). In other work, in progress, I have found that this division between middle- and working-class forms of democratic social action is quite important for understanding differences in the approaches of resistance groups during the civil rights movement in the South. Postel's recent (2007) history of the populist movement provides another rich description of a working-class movement in America.

17   Of course, this has not always been the case, especially in the decades around the turn of the 20th century.

18   The point is not that no thoughtful (as opposed to hatchet job) critiques of Deweyan democracy exist. Instead, the problem is that Dewey's general vision is so deeply embedded in our psyches that alternatives rarely emerge.

19   This invisibility of working-class models of democratic engagement is almost certainly magnified by the fact that, according to Bourdieu, "working-class lifestyles . . . serve as a negative reference point for the dominant class." He argued, for example, that "perhaps their sole function in the system of aesthetic positions is to serve as a foil, a negative reference point" (Swartz, 1997, p. 168; latter quote from Bourdieu).

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