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RAISING SMALL CITIZENS:
SCHOOLING AND THE PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION PROJECT

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To Josie

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It was a chance encounter with a short newspaper clipping about pupils governing their own school that led to this dissertation. I was in the middle of writing a much different paper—for a seminar in legal history at Northern Illinois University—when I first learned about Wilson Lindsley Gill and his effort to transform schools into civic laboratories. It was intriguing, and the idea of reformers encouraging children to act like grown-ups in ersatz cities and states at the same time other reformers were working hard to prolong childhood attracted me long after the seminar paper had been filed away. In other words, I was fortunate to have discovered the topic of the dissertation years before the prospect of writing it appeared on the horizon.

Turning an intriguing subject into a passable piece of scholarship is a complex process though, and I have also been fortunate to have received advice and support from many wonderful people along the way. First thanks go to the members of my dissertation committee: Amy Dru Stanley, Jim Sparrow, Tara Zahra, and Kathleen Conzen. Jim, Tara and Kathy did much to help make the scholarship that follows what it is—pointing out connections and relevancies that were obscure to me and helping me to recognize important threads in the narrative that I might have otherwise missed. As the chair of the committee, Amy did this and more, guiding the project as it took shape and always urging me to think more critically and more precisely about the work and its meaning. In asking me to look closely at my own writing—challenging me, one chapter at a time, to consider carefully what specific words and phrases meant—she imparted a lesson in intellectual rigor that will last a lifetime.

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In the final analysis though none of it would have been possible without Josie, my love, to whom I dedicate this work. Our plan—built on the simple notion that between her work supporting our family and the flexible schedule I would enjoy as a graduate student we had a recipe for raising a child and managing a household—was perhaps overly optimistic. Certainly, it failed to take into account my persistent doubts about whether I belonged at the University of Chicago or the nagging, sometimes paralyzing feeling that I was "making a dog's dinner" of

what, in more competent hands, would have been a meaningful piece of scholarship. Through it all, her patient reassurances that I was better than I thought I was kept me on track—and brought me back on track when self-doubt had me derailed. Thus, I cannot emphasize enough that while the ideas in the pages that follow are mine, credit for bringing them into the open belongs to her and her alone.

Introduction:

Seeking the True Spirit of Democratic Government in the American School

In early 1903 New York City reformer Richard Welling attended a meeting where discussion focused on the condition of streets and parks in a crowded East Side neighborhood. What might be done, those present asked themselves, to improve the environment for children and their families? An attorney by trade, Welling was a prominent advocate for all forms of civic improvement and the subject at hand would certainly have been familiar to him; what made this event particularly noteworthy in his eyes, however, was the fact that all the participants were adolescent boys. In an address delivered that summer to the annual meeting of the National Education Association, Welling explained that he had been especially impressed by how astute the young activists appeared to be. Although “they were foreigners and the sons of foreigners” they demonstrated a “splendid zeal” and “familiarity . . . with the workings of City, State, and National government” that he suspected would have surprised most of his countrymen. As evidence, he described being “struck . . . to hear a youngster of sixteen, born in Russia, without affectation and with a fervor that was unmistakable, in quoting from the United States constitution, repeatedly say: ‘*Our fore-fathers in their wisdom provided*.’” After acknowledging that “in some quarters . . . there is the deepest distrust lest the type represented by this youth was altogether unfit for American citizenship,” he assured his audience that “the country is safe indeed if we can only have enough young men like this lad . . . only ten years in the country, and yet so imbued with the true spirit.”[1]

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[1] Richard Welling, “The Teaching of Civics and Good Citizenship in the Public Schools,” *National Education Association, Journal of Proceedings and Lectures* 42 (1903), 99.

Embedded in Welling's description of a young immigrant adopting familiar political rhetoric was a lesson for newcomers and old-stock Americans alike: the best preparation for democratic self-rule was democratic self-rule itself. Active involvement gave one the opportunity to take part in the public life of one's community—to make mistakes, perhaps, but also to learn from those mistakes. "The way to acquire civics and good citizenship is to engage in those activities that in themselves constitute good citizenship," Welling advised. Indeed, the very reason for his presence on the NEA program was to advocate for practical civics instruction—a superior alternative, he argued, to book-learning that, as important as it was, did little to prepare future citizens for substantive civic activity. Noting that here and there throughout the country, schools were already recasting themselves as little polities for instructional purposes, he encouraged teachers to introduce systems of student self-rule.

Hands-on civics instruction through self-rule in schools—the pet-project of a handful of reformers such as Welling—benefited from the support of innovative educators while drawing the attention of journalists, good-government crusaders, and progressive politicians, whose fascination with school "cities" and "states" began with the inception of the first school municipality in 1897 and lasted through the late nineteen-teens. Over the course of these two decades thousands of American children—boys and girls of all ethnicities, in urban areas and rural districts, in both affluent and impoverished neighborhoods—managed the affairs of their schools by role-playing citizenship. Their experiences included campaigning for office, voting, making laws, and interacting with scaled-down civic bureaucracies that often replicated the administrative and regulatory apparatus of real cities and states in detail. Election boards were tasked with ensuring honest polling, police departments with enforcing school city laws, fire departments with helping to maintain fire safety equipment and oversee drills, and public works

departments with helping to maintain school buildings and grounds. In other words, while the functions of these ersatz governments were tailored to meet the unique requirements of school communities, they functioned, insofar as was possible, like governments in the grownup world, providing students with a hands-on experience with civic machinery. The story of these little polities—their genesis as a political reform initiative and how they functioned as agents of civic indoctrination—is the subject of this study.

Those who were involved with this experiment—from the reformers who lobbied for civic role-play, to the educators who implemented it, to the children who took part in it—wrote at length about their experiences. Drawing on their testimonies, along with the observations of journalists and civic leaders, "Raising Small Citizens" tells the story of an effort to recast everyday life in American schools as a dress rehearsal for vigorous, thoughtful political citizenship. The notion that schools should be incubators for good citizens was, of course, not new and scholarship that addresses the relationship between schooling and democratic institutions in the United States often begins with the assumption that the two are intrinsically linked.[2] Indeed, it is something of a truism in American political culture that building an effective body politic is a responsibility of American schools and that for better or worse the fortunes of democratic self-rule in the United States are determined in classrooms. Yet, the impulse to reimagine everyday school-life as literal preparation for civic life was a far-cry from the character-building function that political rhetoricians typically assigned (and indeed continue

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[2] As intellectual historian Rush Welter put it, "American democratic theory has often been identical with a theory of education, and even where Americans have not reduced their theory of politics wholly to educational terms, they have blended the two areas of social thought so closely as to make it impossible to understand our political thinking without also understanding its educational elements and assumptions." Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 1.

to assign) to American education. According to self-government enthusiasts, while textbooks and lectures were adequate for teaching future citizens how government worked, and theatrical demonstrations were useful, to a point, for stimulating patriotic or nationalistic sentiment, all these methods fell short of the mark when it came to building the habits of an active citizenry.

For enthusiasts like Welling, recasting schools as miniature polities was first and foremost a civic reform. In their view, it was all well and good if children enjoyed the role-play experience (which many did) or if democratization of school routines helped make classroom management less onerous for teachers (which was often the case), but these benefits were incidental to the aim of the movement, which was to fashion an active, responsible body politic. In some cases, the denizens of these little polities began to identify themselves as citizens and took their civic responsibilities quite seriously—more seriously, some came to believe, than their elders—while anticipating how they would carry their newly developed civic habits with them into adulthood. "Whereas, in state government some corruptness exists, our school city is pure, and has taught me the value of being an honest citizen," declared New Jersey eighth grader Max Robser, who explained how being a member of the body politic in his schoolhouse had given him "an independence of feeling and action" and had taught him to "examine all matters closely."[3]

Action and the capacity to examine public matters carefully were precisely the kind of virtues that political reformers found lacking in the grown-up world, where, according to the prevailing narrative, the masses let corrupt politicos do their thinking for them while a better-

[3] Max Robser, Pupil Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 81, Folder 1, National Self-Government Committee Records, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library (Hereafter, NSGC)

educated but equally docile middle-class chose indifference in public matters, in order to devote its full attention to the pursuit of individual success. Thus, to the extent that civic role-play encouraged youngsters like Max Robser to see a connection between upstanding citizenship and thoughtful, active participation in the democratic process—and to imagine themselves as foot soldiers in the fight to restore power to the people—the impulse to transform school-life into a simulacrum of adult public life reflected what historian Michael McGerr has described as the fundamental idealism that drove fin de siècle reformers of all kinds—their "optimistic faith in remaking individuals and creating utopia." Yet, as McGerr notes, together with idealism came an intolerance of those who refused to be remade; coercion and manipulation, he points out, were important strategies in campaigns to transform a dissonant population into a people. These less-than utopian elements of the Progressive Era reform impulse were evident in civic laboratories too, as children who failed to comport themselves as expected in the new democratic order—who failed, that is, to be good school citizens—found themselves marginalized by their peers, subject to a kind of collective intimidation that alarmed some observers. Those who fell into line and those who did not left detailed descriptions of their experiences in the artificial civic milieu, in responses to questionnaires distributed by Welling's National Self-Government Committee and these papers are compelling evidence of the dualism that, I argue, defined the project. Indeed, when one of Robser's comrades in the eighth grade noted that it was "fear of their classmates' displeasure" that kept pupils in line and helped make things run smoothly, he hinted at this darker side of the idealized polities that self-government advocates attempted to create in American classrooms.[4]

[4] Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), xvi, 317; Frank Hegedus, Pupil Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC.

The drive to transform school-life into a simulation of adult civic life was a microcosm of what Richard Hofstadter called "a good-natured effort" to revitalize American democracy, the underpinning, he suggested of Progressive reform projects generally. At its heart, he wrote, was the desire "to restore a type of economic individualism and political democracy that was widely believed to have existed earlier in America and to have been destroyed by the great corporation and the corrupt political machine; and with that restoration to bring back a kind of morality and civic purity that was also believed to have been lost."[5] It was just this kind of forward-thinking nostalgia that fueled enthusiasm for democratized schools, for even as they introduced children to new mores for engaging in democratic activity—progressive innovations such as the initiative, the referendum and the recall figured prominently in many civic laboratories, while in the classroom "girl suffrage" was the order of the day long before the 19th Amendment—boosters for practical civics instruction looked back as well, drawing parallels between self-governed schools and imagined New England villages where self-reliant colonials took the first steps toward self-rule.

While historians since Hofstadter have come to no consensus about who the Progressives were, or whether the multifarious reform movements of the age constituted a unified Progressive Movement, most suggest that this kind of shaping, or reshaping figured prominently in the zeitgeist of the Progressive Era. Whether they were championed by McGerr's discontented bourgeois visionaries looking to perfect a middle-class republic, displaced small-town elites struggling to refit their "island communities" for a cosmopolitan modern nation, or Protestant idealists apprehensive about their declining influence and hoping for a spiritual renaissance,

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[5] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 5-6.

movements to effect change shared the goal of recapturing something that was slipping out of reach while at the same time establishing new conditions for holding on to it. A common theme of declension emerges from these different interpretations as well—from the devolution of Protestant values into celebrations of militarism and empire to the calcification of middle-class voluntarism into the kind of collective authoritarianism that found its apotheosis on the home front in the First World War—and these dystopian characteristics are apparent in the self-government project too, where demonstrations of ostensibly good citizenship included pressuring disagreeable classmates to cooperate.[6] Indeed, when considered in the context of this scholarship, the testimonials of the New Jersey eighth graders (which echo the accounts of juvenile citizens throughout the United States) demonstrate the paradox of hands-on civic education—a paradox that made it possible for youngsters to invoke "independence of feeling and action" and fear of collective disapproval, together in the context of citizenship—and thus, the arc of Progressivism writ small.

Viewed against the backdrop of this arc, and as a method of civic instruction, these miniature polities have received little attention from scholars. Jennifer Light's monograph *States of Childhood* discusses the civic practicum in the context of a longer American interest in what she calls "virtual communities" for youth. Her focus, however, is on the role that these communities played in helping to isolate childhood from adulthood, creating a liminal public space, rather than as a tool for realizing a democratic public to occupy that space. Elsewhere civic laboratories and pupil governments have been interpreted in the context of both progressive school reform and child welfare initiatives—as a mode of social control, for example, realized

[6] Robert H. Weibe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920,* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967.); Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009.)

through the superficial democratization of school discipline, or as a kind of instructive play, aimed at socializing urban youth.[7]

Assessing the fascination with self-rule while keeping the aims of its supporters in mind, the dissertation contributes to scholarship on the history of Progressivism and education in three ways. First, acknowledging that role-play in classrooms was promoted as a method of civic identity building in these decades expands the rubric for interpreting the relationship between Progressive Era schooling and citizenship—a relationship that has been carefully examined through several lenses, including Americanization, state-building, and the reinforcement of racial, class, and imperial hierarchies.[8] The resulting narrative has produced an image of schools in which civic education is essentially an amalgam of superficial flag-worship, benign social studies, and "community civics" instruction that de-politicized the meaning of citizenship.[9] In

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[7] Jennifer S. Light, *States of Childhood: From the Junior Republic to the American Republic, 1895-1945* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2020); Joel H Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 113-120; Judith Kafka. *The History of 'Zero Tolerance' in American Public Schooling* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 36-37.

[8] David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Paul Violas, *The Training of the Urban Working Class* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1978); James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Richard J. Ellis, *To the Flag: The Unlikely History of the Pledge of Allegiance* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Jeffrey E. Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism: Americanization Education and European Immigrants* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Ellen L. Berg, "'To Become GOOD MEMBERS OF CIVIL SOCIETY and PATRIOTIC AMERICANS': Mass Education in the United States, 1870-1930," in Laurence Brockliss and Nicola Sheldon, eds., *Mass Education and the Limits of State Building, c. 1870-1930* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 177-201; Tracy L. Steffes, *School, Society, & State: A New Education to Govern Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Cliff Stratton, *Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and the Paths of Good Citizenship* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

[9] David Warren Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools: A History of the Early Years* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991; Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) Chapters 9 and 10: Cody Dodge Ewert, "Schools on Parade: Patriotism and the Transformation of Urban Education at the

the pages that follow, I demonstrate how a band of enthusiastic and vocal civic reformers enlisted schools into a unique political socialization project with the aim of creating citizens who would be genuinely interested in public life and fully engaged in the political process. Their aim, I suggest, was profoundly different from the aims of the contemporaries who figure prominently in the existing scholarship—contemporaries whose points of view with respect to civic education put a premium on conventional demonstrations of patriotism and a commitment to what two assimilationist organizations described in 1915 as "a social ideal based on the use of the English language, a regard for American citizenship and American standards of living."[10] Activists in the self-government movement believed that such things were of little consequence if citizens were not equipped to think critically while acting with purpose in the political arena. What mattered to Welling as he observed the Lower East Side youngsters was not their command of English but the fact that in gathering to solve a collective problem, they were, it seemed already, mastering the language of democratic government.

Second, studying the civic practicum agenda together with the experiences of pupils in schools where this agenda was realized, sheds light on the connection between evolving notions of citizenship and civic responsibility and progressive visions of democratic renewal. More than one historian has suggested that at the dawn of the twentieth century, visions of meaningful self-government hinged on education and that schooling was nothing less than the essence of Progressivism—in Lawrence Cremin's words, that "[t]he Progressive mind was ultimately an educator's mind . . . that of a socially responsible reformist pedagogue" while schooling itself

Dawn of the Progressive Era," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 16 (January 2017), 65-81; Julie A. Ruben, "Beyond Politics: Community Civics and the Redefinition of Citizenship in the Progressive Era," *History of Education Quarterly* 37:4 (Winter, 1997), 399-420.

[10] Quoted in Mirel, 75.

represented an effort to extend "the promise of American life" to all people.[11] Welling and his colleagues in the self-government movement certainly exemplified these characteristics and were indeed vocal about their hopes for the prospects of democracy. However, when it came to tapping the power of schooling in order to improve those prospects, they were also eminently pragmatic. If their interest in education made them part of the effort that Cremin described, it was because they ostensibly wished to see citizens make use of their power to solve tangible challenges. What they sought, in other words, was not the realization of some abstract good citizenship but rather, concrete reform realized through the actions of citizens themselves. Indeed, those who advocated for civic role-play in schools saw it as a practical, long-term solution to concrete issues such as civic apathy and declining voter turnout at elections—issues have already been examined by historians, who have emphasized the transformation of civic activity into a middle-class pursuit or recasts citizenship as an economic identity. Examining civic role-play as a political reform (one offered as a solution to specific political problems) contributes to this scholarship as well.[12]

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[11] Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), vii, 89. More recently, Leon Fink has written that, "belief in the power of education more than any other single factor defined Progressive Era intellectuals' hopes for a democratic future." Leon Fink, *Progressive Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Democratic Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 25.

[12] On the middle-classing of civic activity, see, Liette Gidlow, *The Big Vote: Gender, Consumer Culture, and the Politics of Exclusion, 1890s-1920s* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). On the emergence of economic citizenship in this era, see, Charles F. McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006). For economic citizenship on either end of the Progressive Era, see, Rosanne Currarino, *The Labor Problem in America: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011) and Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Post-War America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004). Also see, Mark Lawrence Kornbluh, *Why America Stopped Voting: The Decline of Participatory Democracy and the Emergence of Modern American Politics* (New York: New York University

Finally, contemplating the influence that civic role-play had on young people in schools—the civic language it introduced and the civic habits it helped to instill—provides insight into how progressive activists sought to reconcile democratic ideals with ambivalence about a mercurial body politic. A recurring theme in the historical narrative of progressivism and the Progressive Era is the pursuit of what scholars have described, variously, as a form of classless civic identity or restrained civic voluntarism—the pursuit, that is, of a "democratic public" in which an amorphous "people" might be counted on to act together as a rational body politic.[13] Those who advocated for pupil self-government shared this goal. Indeed, one of the aims of practical citizenship instruction was to wean future citizens from what political reformers criticized as a primitive form of civic life—a rough-and-tumble political world that characterized participatory democracy for their elders. In the words of one Boston reformer and school city advocate, the point of the exercise was to guide the young away from the "peanut politics" they might pick up on the street. In this respect, self-government crusaders shared the goals of progressive activists generally, who talked about returning power to "the people" but who, as Daniel Rodgers has put it, "stripped the radical veneer of Populism" off the term. This stripping, moreover, was part of a dramatic reorganization of the political order in the United States—described by political historian Joel Sibley as a process whereby power "started to move from the hustings and smoke-filled rooms to, over the course of the next generation, board rooms, committee chambers, civil service offices." Although they were worlds apart from these sites of

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Press, 2000); Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[13] Shelton Stromquist, *Re-Inventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Kevin Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public: The Struggle for Urban Participatory Democracy During the Progressive Era* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

adult political activity, classrooms where youngsters were given an opportunity to experiment with their civic identities in facsimiles of these spaces played an essential part in making this move seamless. In the pages that follow I demonstrate how young people were taught to embrace a new definition of democratic government, in which, Rodgers suggests, "unity of purpose was the desideratum: not the devolution of sovereignty into the hands of Jackson's common folk, but the concentration of power in governments efficient and powerful enough to affect the common will."[14]

How were schoolchildren prepared for political citizenship that diverged from the kind of political citizenship that their fathers and grandfathers had practiced? What role did schools play in preserving continuity in the idea of participatory democracy and consent of the governed at a time when political reformers sought to establish new boundaries for participation and consent? How did classrooms help define what constituted legitimate civic activity for prospective citizens, establishing parameters and delegitimizing other behaviors while continuing to work the notion of independence and freedom into civic identities?[15] These are the questions that this dissertation attempts to answer. Ultimately, I argue that civic role-play represented an effort—the kind of "good natured" effort that Hofstadter perceived across Progressivism—to lay the groundwork for an energetic body politic and that in "school cities" and "school states" reformers sought, insofar as was possible, to create model publics that reflected their vision for

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[14] James P. Munroe, "The Real Trouble With the Boy of the Present," in Wilson L. Gill, *A New Citizenship: Democracy Systematized for Moral and Civic Training* (Philadelphia: American Patriotic League, 1913), 235; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 183; Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 238-239.
[15] On establishing the boundaries of consent in political identity-building see, James E. Block, *The Crucible of Consent: American Childrearing and the Forging of Liberal Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

the democratic public of the future. However, in aiming to duplicate the activities of a model public, these little polities emphasized commitment to an imagined common interest while simultaneously brooking no substantial dissent among young citizens, thus helping to create an atmosphere of civic conformism. This atmosphere, I contend, anticipated what political scientist Bob Taylor has described as a major paradox of Progressive civic thinking—namely, the assumption that "a democratic social order creates unprecedented harmoniousness" and that "a democratic community . . . is at its core, ideologically defined . . . a fraternity of citizens united . . . not by their shared public world but by their common (and correct) system of beliefs."[16] Assuming a commitment to democratic institutions that transcended disagreements about what constituted a public good or how those institutions might best serve it, hands-on civics instruction helped to limit the civic imaginations of soon-to-be citizens.

This is not to suggest that the drive to transform schoolhouses into civic boot-camps was undertaken as an alternative to more prosaic approaches to the study of civics and social studies or that those who advocated for hands-on civics instruction took issue with the idea of teaching young Americans how government was organized or instilling patriotic sentiment. However, they did believe that in and of themselves these hallmarks of Progressive Era civic education did not constitute either substantive patriotism or good citizenship. In their eyes, the only meaningful demonstration of true commitment to American principles was habitual engagement in the political life of the state. As one self-government enthusiast explained, civic role-play made the difference between the pupil who, upon exiting a patriotic assembly filled with enthusiasm for his or her country, would almost immediately, "proceed to forget the noble sentiments and busy

[16] Bob Pepperman Taylor, *Citizenship and Democratic Doubt: The Legacy of Progressive Thought* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 1.

themselves about the ordinary things of life," and the child properly prepared for citizenship, who, "when the assemblies are adjourned . . . will crystalize into action the zeal for public service which has been generated by these patriotic exercises."[17]

Yet, while the intention to help create an empowered public was genuine—to "crystalize into action" the embryonic citizen's commitment to democratic mores—civic role-play in schools also encouraged a complaisant civic morality, manifest in the lesson that good citizens always cooperated with the state, and informally enforced through a kind of surveillance mindset. Moreover, these characteristics mirrored the ambiguities that troubled thoughtful observers about American democracy's real-life prospects in the early twentieth century. Having observed the emergence of a decidedly anti-democratic atmosphere in the United States as it threw itself into a war meant to make the world safe for democracy, Walter Lippman, for instance, pointed out on the eve of the Armistice that "We are peculiarly inclined to suppress whatever impugns the security of that which we are inclined to give our allegiance."[18] This dynamic certainly played out in civic laboratories, where children, having been taught to view democratic government as the definitive arbiter of their own best interests, and to align their loyalties accordingly, did not hesitate to marginalize or shame classmates who in failing to demonstrate the appropriate "school spirit" were deemed to be "bad" citizens, insufficiently committed to the putative public will.

Lippman, of course, was famously skeptical about whether a public will could even be said to exist in an increasingly complex and heterogeneous society. As he saw it, the public was in fact a phantom—nothing more than a theoretical construct that made the idea of democracy

[17] Undated Typescript, Box 3, Folder 3, NSGC.
[18] Walter Lippman, "The Basic Problem of Democracy," *The Atlantic Monthly* (November 1919), 616.

possible—its opinion something that was manufactured under the influence of the mass media. What was more, because it presupposed a degree of competence and understanding beyond the reach of individuals and communities, this imagined community was in fact, incapable of substantive self-rule; at best it might be equipped for superficial self-government under the guidance of expert administrators whose role was to guide collective opinion toward beneficial ends. Lippman's bleak assessment prompted a response from John Dewey, who offered a more hopeful prognosis. Although acknowledging that industrial capitalism had exacerbated economic inequality and class divisions that were incompatible with democratic principles—and that as a result there were unprecedented obstacles on the path to popular government in the modern world—Dewey insisted that political democracy was achievable, nevertheless. Democracy, he argued, was not just a system that societies used to manage their political affairs, it was also a philosophy for guiding social relations. Working toward democracy in the latter advanced the cause of democracy in the former.[19]

Where do these contending visions of democratic prospects intersect with the experiences of children playing at citizenship? I suggest that although they expressed their divergent views approximately a decade after interest in civic role-play was at its height—Lippman in his *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925) and Dewey in his *The Public and its Problems* (1927)—the miniature polities where pupils were introduced to the ground rules of civic life were prophetic microcosms of the multifarious publics posed in the debate between these two intellectuals. How much true self-government occurred in school "cities" and "states" varied, of course, from institution to institution; indeed, the record shows that quite a few principals and

[19] Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922); Walter Lippman, *The Phantom Public.* New York: MacMillian, 1925; John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, (New York: Holt and Company, 1927).

teachers made a real effort to give their pupils substantive control over their own affairs in the classroom. Insofar as it emphasized the need to teach citizenship as a collection of shared responsibilities, the impulse to teach civics through role-play was a tangible step toward the reaffirmation of the public function in governance that Dewey called for. Yet the very fact that they were pupils meant that whatever power they held as presumptive citizens was contingent on the approval of the adults who oversaw their education. Like the members of Lippman's chimerical public who participated in the democratic process but did not have any real influence over the directions taken by their governments, child-citizens were subject to the influence of educators who spoke openly and enthusiastically about guiding public opinion in classrooms, in order to ensure the best interests of the school might be met.

This, then, is an investigation into a pedagogical experiment, aimed at guiding the development of an embryonic public—of harnessing civics instruction to the cause of making, not just good citizens, but rather, citizens who generally conformed to progressive notions of what a good citizen ought to be. To be sure, while I locate enthusiasm for civic role-play within the broad context of Progressivism, I make no argument for a unified progressive movement, nor do I propound that pupil self-advocates shared any singular progressive identity.[20] However, I do suggest that the progressive nature of the experiment is revealed, both in the terms that self-government advocates used to describe their goals and, just as tellingly, in the language that

[20] Scholarship devoted to understanding who the Progressives were, exactly, and what constituted the Progressive Movement—and, in fact, whether there was a true movement at all—is vast. According to historians, Progressives might be members of an increasingly marginalized middle-class, experiencing the throes of "status anxiety" or, conversely, the vanguard of a new professional hierarchy, aiming to enlist rational, corporate methods into the service of a new, democratic society. As middling professionals hailing from diverse fields, self-government activists fit into these categories, as did the educators who they counted as allies, and who cited their willingness to experiment with new pedagogical methods as evidence of their competence.

children adopted as their own through experience in politicized schools.[21] Thus, the self-government booster who claimed that role-play discouraged the young from becoming "splendid individualists," the Port Townsend, Washington principal who saw government as a means of "raising standards of efficiency" among his pupils, and the Connecticut nineth-grader who wrote about the value of social cohesion—claiming that in her school democratic government made it seem "as if all the class was one person" working toward a communal goal—all used a progressive vocabulary that put a premium on social responsibility and rationalized democratic systems. Evidence, I assert, that role play was intended to give future citizens a model for thinking about both their collective relationship to each other and the civic machinery available to them as citizens to solve their collective problems.[22]

It was a matter of faith among self-government crusaders that if the laboratory approach to teaching citizenship were to work, school governments would have to be real governments, with authority to execute the will of the school's citizenry. In practice, the degree of authenticity varied widely from school to school but the impulse to give students a substantive civic experience was genuine—as evinced by the efforts that so many teachers and principals put into ensuring that their cities and states bore some resemblance to the real thing. Yet, even as reformers and reform-minded educators strove to establish civic laboratories everywhere, long-standing assumptions about young people and their competence—to work alongside adults, to be

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[21] The search for progressivism and a progressive identity, Daniel T. Rodgers has argued, leads not to a coherent ideology but rather, to three distinct social languages of antimonopolism, social bonds, and efficiency—languages which, I will demonstrate in the following pages, can be discerned in the civic laboratories that children occupied. Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10:4 (Dec. 1982), 113-132.

[22] Frank Kiernan to Edith M. Haydon, April 2, 1912, Box 3, Folder 1, NSGC; A.N. French, Principal Survey Response, September 1911, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC; Annie Goucher, Pupil Survey Response, December 18, 1912, Box 85, Folder 1, NSGC.

held accountable for their behavior according to the same set of standards as their elders, to move in public spaces and participate in public activities without adult supervision—were losing ground to a more circumscribed understanding of what children were capable of. Redefining childhood and adolescence as stages of immaturity meant favoring schooling over experience, organized recreation and curated activities over unsupervised play, and a prolonged period of carefree time over the slow accumulation of adult responsibilities. To allow boys and girls to grow-up properly meant preserving the supposed innocence of youth before its inevitable fade into imperfect adulthood. The drive for self-government in schools then, gained momentum just as opportunities for young people to self-regulate were narrowing.[23]

Paradoxically, those who supported the idea of hands-on civics instruction did not reject this view of childhood. Like most reform-minded people of the era, adults who saw civic role-play as a vehicle for creating a more competent citizenry agreed that children needed to be sheltered from the world because they were not equipped either emotionally or intellectually to grapple with grown-up responsibilities. Yet in a twist of this logic, they also argued that some of these child-like qualities made them ideal citizens. After visiting a civic laboratory in Boston, the journalist Frank Parsons for instance, declared that "the ten-year-old judge and twelve-year-old

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[23] Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Dominic Cavallo. *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Viviana A. Zeilizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Harvey Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing up in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); David Macleod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America 1890-1920* (New York: Twayne, 1998); Alice Boardman Smutts. *Science in the Service of Children 1893-1935* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Howard Chudacoff. *Children at Play: An American History* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); James D Schmidt, *Industrial Violence and the Legal Origins of Child Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Susan J. Pearson, *The Rights of the Defenseless: Protecting Animals and Children in Gilded Age America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011)

mayor are absolutely incorruptible" and wondered if there wasn't "more real self-government in these school cities than in most of our larger cities." In other words, it wasn't wisdom beyond their years or notable civic acumen that made these youngsters upstanding citizens—better citizens, in fact, than their elders—but rather, their generally good-natured spirit and intuitive desire to do right by one another. "Habits of good citizenship are formed when the mind is plastic," Parsons wrote, "open to the full force of considerations of right and justice and free from commercial motives and other motives that in later life so often interfere with the duties of citizenship."[24] The implication was that young people were already progressive in their way of looking at the world—were indeed, "natural born reformers" with a well-developed sense of integrity—and that simulating citizenship in school was a way of cementing these such qualities into their civic identity. Tragically, the reasoning went, old-fashioned pedagogy beat the best civic virtues out of the nation's young people.

The chapters that follow are organized to align the path of the self-government movement with the rise and declension of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century pursuit of a democratic public. Chapter One explores a state of civic awareness that existed among school children prior to their imagined existence as an embryonic public. While civic role-play enthusiasts routinely described the autocratic schoolhouse as a *raison d'être* for introducing self-government into American classrooms, the logic that led them to conclude that old-fashioned school-keeping rendered children passive was questionable. Indeed, progressive era children were not at all reluctant to assert themselves collectively against adult authority in the schoolhouse when they felt wronged—by walking out of classes and sometimes protesting in the

[24] Parsons, Frank." The School City: A New Experiment in the Self-Government of the Young," *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (January 1906) 496.

streets. Some of these outbreaks of collective, organized disobedience could be quite large—a 1905 pupil strike in Chicago, for instance, involved hundreds of children from schools across the city—and Chapter One considers this phenomenon. Here, I make the distinction between childish misbehavior and organic, purposeful action as a group. The juvenile predilection toward organized rebelliousness in the service of justice was, I suggest, evidence of a nascent and indeed, energetic, civic identity.

The impulse among children to revolt against perceived injustices in schools dated back to the early republic when the practice of "barring out the master" was a common occurrence in small schoolhouses. A raucous, occasionally bloody act of public theatre, the barring out—essentially a refusal to allow the teacher physical access to the school—was understood by parents (as well as some teachers) as an important rite of passage, in which boys and (occasionally) girls were given an opportunity to show defiance toward tyrants, thereby demonstrating that they had the makings of good republican citizens. In this chapter, I examine the school strikes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries— events that could be just as dramatic and violent as their antebellum forerunners but have received almost no attention from scholars—in the context of their "revolutionary" precursors. These strikes, which occurred both in schools that served children of affluent parents as well as schools in working class neighborhoods, can be grouped into two broad categories: those called in conjunction with events outside of the school (to show solidarity with striking workers in the community) and those precipitated by some perceived injustice within the school—unusually harsh discipline, for example, or the sacking of a popular teacher. As was the case with the typical barring out, these pupil walkouts were theatrical events, with boys and girls parading through streets banging pots and pans and disrupting traffic. However, they were also sincere efforts to draw attention to

grievances and while striking children borrowed the language and conventions of labor action, their activities, I argue, were more akin to political protests. Focusing on the initiative which children demonstrated in these protests—their capacity to self-regulate through organizing classmates, marshalling support, articulating their grievances in manifestos and in conversation with reporters and local political leaders—suggests that turn-of-the-century children came to classrooms equipped with a degree of assertiveness that was not mediated through the school.

Chapter Two examines the genesis of the self-government movement, starting with early experiments in hands-on civics instruction. The pet-project of a Philadelphia businessman named Wilson Lindsley Gill, instructional civic role-play made its debut in 1897 in New York City. Gill called it the laboratory method of teaching civics and its success garnered attention from journalists, educators and political reformers throughout the United States and overseas. As a result of the publicity, countless teachers and principals were motivated to try municipal or state government in their own classrooms and schools. The chapter explores his work in this capacity and considers his role in establishing the link between civic education and civic reform in the public imagination.

Notwithstanding the notion advanced by self-government boosters that American schools had up until that point discouraged children from democratic practice, the record shows that from the mid-nineteenth century on, some American educators had advocated for permitting pupils to exercise limited autonomy in the schoolhouse. Chapter Two continues by scrutinizing the pedagogical antecedents of Progressive Era self-government advocates. The consensus among educators in this earlier period was that in order for self-government to be an effective learning experience, it needed to arise spontaneously from pupils themselves; the idea of providing pupils with a facsimile of adult government so that they might role-play citizenship would have struck

these nineteenth century self-government advocates as ludicrous and the elaborate regulatory apparatus of the school city would have been rejected wholesale—as the author of an 1872 text on school management did when he declared that "the teacher who resorts to such a method of school government ought to have his chair legs sawn in two, ought to be 'barred out' most effectually."[25] Nevertheless, as reformers spread their message of democratic renewal through practical civic education other progressives threw their support behind the idea. Among these was Welling, who formed the School Citizen's Committee (later the National Self-Government Committee) in 1908 to serve as a clearing house for information on pupil self-government and a lobbying organization to advance the cause. Unlike Gill, who insisted that replicating the machinery of adult government in schools was the best way to organize a civic practicum, Welling was not committed to the school city as the only path to active citizenship. Over time, this willingness to include pupil governments of all kinds under the umbrella term of self-government meant that his organization began to challenge Gill's role as voice of the movement and against the backdrop of this schism that the chapter considers fading interest in civic laboratories and the prominence of student councils and committees.

Chapter Three looks inside the schools themselves and explores how teachers applied self-government methods in their classrooms and how pupils interpreted their experiences as they managed their own cities and states. Whether they were elaborate or quite simple, civic laboratories often generated a great deal of enthusiasm among the citizens of the school. Children wrote about the activities of their legislatures and courts and about their encounters with student officials of all kinds—from police officers to sanitary inspectors to city clerks. The matter-of-fact way they drew on civic terminology to describe prosaic classroom matters—like

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[25] Holbrook, Alfred. *School Management* (Lebanon: Josiah Holbrook, 1872), 145

the Wisconsin seventh grader who attributed a decline in "whispering and candy eating" to the institution of "a commission form of government" in his school—is evidence of how civic role play affirmed progressive conventions of government for a rising generation of citizens.[26]

In addition to helping them become conversant in topics relating to municipal and state administration and modern jurisprudence—in some schools, teachers reported that pupil judges wrote to their adult counterparts requesting guidance on difficult cases—the opportunity to govern their own affairs also seemed to improve student's behavior. Those who visited self-governed schools regularly commented on how orderly and quiet they were—nothing at all, they said, like a typical schoolhouse. The chapter considers this transformation of schoolchildren into law-abiding citizens in the context of the progressive idea of "the public" and examines how students used this term to describe how they viewed their collective responsibilities. Among these responsibilities, supporting the collective will—or, in the parlance of the politicized schoolhouse, backing up "public opinion" in the classroom—loomed large. Some children, in fact, explained a newfound willingness to cooperate with teachers and one another as an expression of their support of the "public interest" or the "common good" thus demonstrating how civic laboratories taught them not only how the apparatus of government worked but how to visualize their place in relation to that apparatus. For example, when a Connecticut boy argued that he and his classmates deserved more freedom to determine how to manage their school city he asked, "What was this self-government brought about for, to have adults do all the governing of the people?" Then he crossed out "people" and in its place scratched the word "pupils," a

[26] Dahl, Arthur, Pupil Survey Response, 23 January 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, National Self-government Committee Papers, New York Public Library Archives.

small correction that hints at his burgeoning, if still fluid understanding of himself as a member of a unified public.[27]

Yet order in self-governed schools was not just an expression of public responsibility. In most self-governed schools striving to duplicate a progressive civic machine—whether it was simple or elaborate—meant handing some regulatory responsibilities of government over to pupils. Among these were pupil police officers, pupil sanitary inspectors, and public safety inspectors, all of whom had some substantive authority to monitor and correct the behavior of their citizen-classmates. Chapter Four examines the emergence of a surveillance mentality in self-governed schools—what William Chandler Bagley, a prominent educational theorist, described as "a mutual system of espionage." It was this monitorial aspect of the civic practicum that parents and some educators found most troubling, and the chapter explores their arguments against legitimized "tattling" as both bad pedagogy and bad citizenship, while examining the testimony of children, who seemed less concerned about the "watching" authority of their governments. In their matter-of-fact reports of surveillance, pupils pointed toward the way schoolhouse self-rule made natural the panoptical functions of the state; acclimating them to the idea that it was in the public interest for citizens to act as both observers and subjects of observation.[28]

Finally, the dissertation discusses the metamorphosis of training for active, democratic citizenship into a rehearsal for cooperation between the public and the state. As educators began, in the mid-nineteen-teens, to shift their attention away from the substantive civics lesson that had

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[27] Brady, John, Pupil Survey Response, 20 March 1912, Box 85, Folder 2, National Self-Government Committee Papers, New York Public Library Archives.
[28] Bagley, William Chandler, *School Discipline* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1915), 106; Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

been embedded in role-play (discarding both the civic apparatus of their school cities and states along with empowering ethos of the self-government movement) pupil self-government itself devolved into a largely superficial advisory activity. The notion that young people might learn, through practice to govern themselves collectively—by engaging in thoughtful debate about real issues and coming to rational consensus—lost traction. Gone was talk of "militant" citizenship; what adults expected youngsters to learn through doing was how to help back up policies established by teachers and principals who managed the school for them. This process of habituating youngsters to an enfeebled idea of self-rule occurred in tandem with a profound decline in democratic prospects more broadly, as Progressive hopes for a revitalized civil society were swept away in the nationalistic fervor precipitated in 1917 when the United States entered the First World War. Against the backdrop of such fervor, historian Jonathan Hansen notes, "a commitment to civic vigilance . . . withered in a political atmosphere impatient with civil liberty and democratic deliberation." [29] This kind of impatience, I suggest, was incorporated into practical messages about civic engagement transmitted through schools, where whatever educative deliberation took place was relegated to the realm of school spirit, with self-rule recast as complaisance and civic engagement reimagined as participation in a predictable, rather than dynamic, political process.

[29] Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 157. Also, on the impact of the war, see Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Chapter One

Militant Citizens in the Schoolyard

In May of 1905, in the midst of a prolonged and violent teamster strike, four Chicago schoolboys appeared in Juvenile Court, charged with assault, specifically with stoning the crew of a coal wagon as it attempted to make a delivery to their south-side school. The incident, which was widely reported in the local and national press, was nothing if not sensational, for within minutes the commotion the boys caused in the school-yard had precipitated a complete breakdown of order in the building as their classmates abandoned desks to join them. What was more, news of the disturbance had spread rapidly to other neighborhoods, prompting thousands of children from public schools citywide to walk out of classes to protest the presence of "scabs" and "unfair" coal on school grounds. Among the authorities present in the courtroom was William Bodine, Superintendent of Compulsory Education, who had spent several days attempting to end the rash of pupil strikes, his over-worked truant officers augmented temporarily by a contingent of police men. The case against the boys was ironclad. The principal of the school had witnessed everything and had testified against the four, all of whom admitted that, yes, they had participated in the attack by pelting the crew from the cartage company with rocks and chunks of coal, ultimately forcing them to withdraw. Prompted by his teamster father to explain to the judge *why* he had participated in such an astonishing act of violence, thirteen year-old Harry Kerlin, the accused ringleader of the group, said, simply, "Because they're strikebreakers." At that point, Bodine interrupted the proceedings to harangue the elder Kerlin.

"Have you put these ideas into his head? If you were responsible for his acts I'll swear out a warrant for you at once."[1]

Regardless of whether or not Kerlin *père* had actually broken the law by passing the values of organized labor on to his son, Bodine's threat was not an idle one; that very day he had obtained warrants for the arrest of seven parents who, by permitting their children to remain at home during school hours, had shown overt support for the walkouts. Moreover, he declared that he expected to have an additional 100 such warrants in hand by the end of the week. Thus, even as working-class men and women engaged in a bitter struggle to claim civic and economic autonomy over their lives, authorities challenged their power to act autonomously as political mentors for their own children.[2]

The object lesson brought to the courtroom was clear: young people were to leave their homegrown knowledge of politics and the political values of their parents at the schoolhouse door.[3] At a time when state authority to compel school attendance was increasing—and, indeed, as the state expanded its power both to criminalize juvenile misbehavior and to regulate family life and the parameters of childhood more generally via courts and social welfare agencies—this

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[1] "Leave Books for Mobs in Four More Districts—Patrol Wagons Run All Day," *The Inter Ocean*, May 16, 1905, 1; "3,000 More Pupils Get 'Strike' Fever," *The Inter Ocean*, 17 May 1905, 2; "Blow for School Strike," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 18, 1905, 2; "Parents Arrested; Pupils Sentenced," *The Inter Ocean*, May 18, 1905, 2.

[2] On strikes and labor conflict as instrumental in establishing the parameters of democracy in industrial America see, Andrew Wender Cohen, *The Racketeer's Progress: Chicago and the Struggle for the Modern American Economy, 1900-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[3] Even as they noted with approval the number of warrants issued during the weeks of "wholesale truancy" that shook city schools, editors at one progressive journal warned that even seemingly conscientious parents, "may have been as much, if not more, to blame than their youngsters, *for the talk at home*, which emboldened, if it did not incite, the children to lawlessness" [Emphasis mine]. "A School Children's 'Strike'," *The Commons* 10:6 (June 1905), 329-330.

lesson had far reaching implications, both for the political socialization of children at the time and, ultimately, for the transmission of ideas about what constituted legitimate expressions of civic agency throughout the twentieth century and beyond.[4] Nowhere was this more apparent than when youngsters defied school government collectively.

This chapter examines the phenomenon of the pupil strike in the three decades that bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—from the mid 1880s through the mid 1910s approximately—a period during which children across the United States participated in close to one hundred acts of cooperative rebellion against school authority. Insubordination in American schoolhouses was not intrinsically remarkable: early nineteenth century schoolmasters were quite familiar with the problem of cooperative classroom insurgencies, and many had firsthand experience with mutinous children. While the evolution of teaching and school management into solidly middle-class professions in the late nineteenth century somewhat bolstered the school's mandate to enforce obedience, disputes about the limits of the school's power continued well into the Progressive Era in litigation over issues such as compulsory attendance and corporal punishment and in confrontations involving individual teachers, students, and parents.[5]

Pupil strikes, however, were not merely expressions of juvenile antagonism toward schoolmasters or schoolhouse discipline, nor should they be interpreted as reactionary response to the expanded regulatory influence of modern school administrations. Rather, when young

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[4] Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Clapp, Elizabeth Jane Clapp. *Mothers of All Children: Women Reformers and the Rise of Juvenile Courts in Progressive Era America* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Anne Meis Knupfer. *Reform and Resistance: Gender, Delinquency and America's First Juvenile Court* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Tanenhaus, David S Tannenhaus, *Juvenile Justice in the Making* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[5] James D. Schmidt, "Willful Disobedience: Young People and School Authority in the Nineteenth Century United States," in James Martin ed., *Children and Youth During the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 125-144.

people joined forces to engage in acts of mass disobedience as a form of collective protest they demonstrated a budding awareness of the power they shared to self-advocate. Youngsters almost always took these rebellions quite seriously, making schoolhouse insurgencies substantive if admittedly inchoate acts of civic agency—evidence of the vital element of robust democratic culture that historian Lawrence Goodwyn called "collective self-confidence."[6]

Only a handful of these pupil strikes were on the scale of the Chicago uprising, and the grievances that provoked them were not always dramatic. Schoolhouse complicity in strikebreaking and physically abusive teachers were among the more compelling causes for rebellion, but children also left their desks to protest such prosaic hardships as shortened recess periods and onerous homework. Regardless, however, of the impetus for mass disobedience, the motivation to act was based on the same assumptions about the right to act. In every case, youngsters unhesitatingly took the position that challenging authority was a legitimate course of action for wronged constituencies in any democratic system of government—expressing this position not only in the collective acts of rebellion, but in interviews with newspaper reporters and in written justifications of disobedience. Only a few weeks prior to the trouble in Chicago, for example, teens in Superior, Wisconsin resolved to stay away from classes at the high school until the local school board fired their detested principal, insisting that as future citizens they had license to act autonomously, and describing their strike as a "last resort" and "the only way we could make ourselves heard."[7]

When young people sought to justify such defiant behavior on the grounds of defending their rights or (as evinced by Harry Kerlin's casual explanation of the attack on the scab

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[6] Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978)

[7] "Keep Up Their Daily Parade," *Duluth Evening Herald,* May 4, 1905, 2.

teamsters) out of loyalty to familial or class values, they implicitly refused to be written off as mere schoolhouse delinquents. Instead, they took for granted the freedom to seek redress for grievances through concerted protest, and they often justified their actions on moral grounds—as opposition to injustice, or to the arbitrary abridgement of their liberties. While the use of language such as Kerlin's does not by itself indicate any sophisticated understanding of the principles it invoked, it does suggest that these children appreciated the effectiveness of collective action and, perhaps more importantly, that they believed such action to be entirely consistent with American civic traditions and values. Yet, as responsibility for transmitting these traditions and values migrated from homes and workplaces to classrooms, the notion of what constituted legitimate civic agency was ambiguous.

In heated school board meetings, courtrooms, and in newspapers and magazines, adults who found this particular strain of juvenile rebelliousness alarming scolded the parents of militant children for "encouraging the wicked and un-American practice of conspiring to strike" or described pupil walkouts as "monstrous . . . preposterous and atrocious" and "repellant to the most primitive instincts" of decent Americans, nothing more than "a dismal burlesque" of grown-up lawlessness, and argued that children who struck or demonstrated openly against policies they disagreed with were "training themselves to be bad citizens." In the eyes of such critics, pupil strikes were worse than the transgressions that teachers routinely faced in classrooms, because unlike individual acts of disobedience, collective challenges to authority were flagrant acts of dissent—something that seemed especially disturbing in the schoolhouse,

where children were supposed to taking their first steps toward becoming orderly men and women.[8]

Conversely, defenders of striking students insisted that when insurgent young people took it upon themselves to leave classrooms *en masse* as an act of protest, they were, rather, demonstrating courage of the highest order. In this view parents whose children challenged school authorities were to be praised for raising girls and boys who were “heroic” and “courageous” or for “inciting . . . progressive discontent” in their offspring. The *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung* for example, argued that adults (especially those who hesitated to stand up for their own rights) would do well to follow the example of the militant young. According to this logic, the reflexive obedience taught in schools was no virtue; in refusing to be cowed by imperious officials and in standing together for what they believed in, children were in fact demonstrating admirable civic initiative and thus, training themselves to be *good* citizens. What was more, in demonstrating the wherewithal to organize their protests, and to articulate their grievances, proved themselves to be worthy of having a voice in the civic arena.[9]

Evidence of cooperative assertiveness among so many youngsters—not just in schools that served the children of working-class families, but in private institutions that served affluent families, and small rural schoolhouses—suggests that children growing up in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to school already prepared to demonstrate a formidable degree of initiative. Strikes—a product of that initiative—gave them a dramatic lesson in collective empowerment. Indeed, the words used by contemporary observers

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[8] *Wilkes-Barre Times*, September 13, 1902, 4; “Clayton Mark and the School Strike,” *The Inter Ocean,* May 27, 1905, 6; “A Children’s Strike,” *The Charleston Daily Mail,* September 14, 1916, 7.
[9] *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung*; Livshis, Peter. “The Chicago Suburban School Strike, *The International Socialist Review* 16:9 (March 1916), 548-549.

to discuss the problem of classroom insurgencies suggests that regardless of whether they were outraged or encouraged, most were in agreement on this: that whenever girls and boys defied teachers and other officials to work in concert in mass protests and demonstrations, they were not only disrupting order in and around the schoolhouse but were also experimenting with a militant civic identity.[10]

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Educators, journalists, and other observers who pointed to a proclivity for striking among school children as evidence that seditious talk around working class dinner tables was corrupting American youth, or who denounced schoolhouse militants as embryonic anarchists or revolutionaries--terms that projected turn-of-the-century anxieties about a growing immigrant population and urban disorder onto the future body politic--ignored a long history of collective disobedience in American classrooms. Although schoolmasters in early American society are often depicted in literature and art as formidable, switch-wielding characters, up until the end of the nineteenth century they were often problematic figures in the communities they served—minor autocrats whose authority, while absolute in theory, was often more tolerated than respected.[11] This was especially the case in rural districts, where, typically, teachers had little if any formal training and were sometimes scarcely older than their charges. As agents of both state and parental authority, these supposed despots faced a difficult task. For them to lose control of the classroom was to allow the government of the school to descend into intolerable chaos. The teacher who resorted too often to brute authoritarianism in order to maintain order, however, risked provoking outrage in both pupils and parents, who had little tolerance for the misuse of

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[10] Livshis, 549.
[11] On the paradoxical place of the schoolteacher in nineteenth century American culture, see Robert H Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), 117-118.

power. In 1837 a European visitor to the United States summed up this ubiquitous strain of schoolhouse republicanism, writing that, "There is as little disposition on the part of American children to obey the uncontrolled will of their masters, as on the part of their fathers to submit to the mandates of kings."[12]

Among the many challenges to the authority faced by nineteenth century schoolteachers, the practice of "barring out" was the most disruptive, as pupils would seize control of the schoolhouse and resist, sometimes violently, any attempts to restore order. These dramatic displays of shared insubordination had origins in sixteenth century Scotland and Northern England, where "barring out the master" from the classroom and demanding food, drink, or a break from work as the price of readmission was a holiday custom among schoolboys. Transplanted into British North America, the barring out remained a somewhat formulaic event; a temporary upending of the social order that scholars have compared to European traditions such as charivari or carnival.[13] After the Revolution, the custom remained common, particularly in smaller schools across the United States as a rough-and-tumble ritual that would come to figure prominently in nineteenth century memoirs and narratives of child-life in the early republic. Yet, while the conventions of the event changed little (extorting treats, liquor, or shortened hours at Christmas and Easter were enduring pretexts for rebellion), narratives of nineteenth century school-life also suggest that soon after the Revolution the typical barring out

[12] Francis Joseph Grund. *The Americans in Their Moral, Social, and Political Relations* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1837), 229.
[13] Janis De la Mer, "Popular Insurgency and Childhood: How Children Appropriated Adult Political Dissent in the Antebellum Southern Highlands," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 6:1 (Winter 2013), 129-150. David Hackett Fischer. *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 724-726.

began to reflect the attitudes of a less deferential society, one that was openly hostile to authoritarianism in all shapes.

Armed with sticks, rocks, and other makeshift weapons, defiant children (typically boys, but sometimes girls as well) would barricade themselves into the schoolhouse or ambush the hapless master as he headed to work, while parents and other adults stood by to observe the mayhem in a Fourth-of-July-like atmosphere and to cheer on the insurgents. One nostalgic 1897 account, for instance, describes a father encouraging a band of discouraged boys to redouble their efforts during a particularly hard-fought battle with a stubborn schoolteacher, praising the bloodied children as "young Washingtons" and extolling them to live up to their revolutionary heritage. In the story, invoking the name of the great general has a "talismanic" effect on the warriors who ultimately emerge victorious, and the narrative concludes with a reflection on the difference between the valor of these youngsters who, like the men who followed Washington, were willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause of freedom, and "the ruffle-shirted little darlings of the present day" who, it is implied, lacked the fortitude to fight for anything. The glorification of defiant independence and soldierly courage in this and other barring out tales suggests how the schoolhouse coup d'état served to demonstrate mastery of an important lesson: citizens needed to be militant champions of their own liberties.[14]

[14] In a recent monograph on the place of the schoolhouse in nineteenth century American literature, Allison Speicher suggests that the barring out, in both fact and fiction, served a purpose similar to the traditional exhibition day—an event in which children demonstrated their academic aptitude in front of parents. Allison Speicher, *Schooling Readers: Reading Common Schools in Nineteenth Century American Fiction* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016), 70. Jean Baker, in her study of the political culture of Northern Democrats, writes that nineteenth century American classrooms were miniature political theatres, where children rehearsed their civic roles. Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998). Josephus Conn Guild. *Old Times in Tennessee: With Historical, Personal, and Political Scraps and Sketches* (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman & Howell, 1878), 330; Cochran, John Salisbury.

The traditional barring out was often a boisterous and bloody affair—a civic ritual rich with martial and patriotic symbolism. Whether the schoolmaster was truly a tyrant was beside the point; indeed, it was vital for the teacher, even one who *was* respected or well-liked, to make a good showing of himself in battle with his pupils, both to validate, through the bruises he inflicted the courage of the insurgents, and, just as importantly, to demonstrate the resolve that made him fit to rule in the classroom. Yet, it was not unheard of for truly cruel or otherwise unpopular schoolmasters—men, that is, who were literal rather than figurative tyrants—to face truly savage insurrections, mounted by children who claimed, sometimes with parental support, an absolute right to remove those whom they deemed unfit to govern the schoolhouse. "Violent termination" of instruction was a widespread problem in late 1830s Massachusetts, for instance, where Horace Mann, the Secretary of the State Board of Education, reported that "a rebellious spirit on the part of the scholars" was responsible for subverting the authority of teachers in hundreds of schools each year. As Mann saw it, there was more to the "alarming and unnatural spectacle" of youngsters physically deposing teachers than a mere breakdown of discipline. More troubling, he argued, were the civic ramifications of these uprisings. Typically, he noted, insurgent scholars were the oldest boys in the classroom who, just as they were about to assume the duties of citizenship, embraced not restraint but "practical lessons in resistance to rightful authority." Indeed, so vexing was the problem that Mann addressed it regularly in his annual reports and, having made "suppressing the spirit of insubordination" in schools a priority, was

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Bonnie Belmont: A Historical Romance of the Days of Slavery and the Civil War (Belmont County: Wheeling News Lithography Company, 1907), 33-37.

able to declare that by 1843 the number of juvenile insurrections in the state had dropped to about forty.[15]

After the Civil War, the theatrically militaristic barring out with its undertones of republican masculinity became more infrequent. An increase in the number of larger schoolhouses (where authority was disbursed among several teachers) along with the gradual feminization of the teaching force, altered the conditions that precipitated juvenile insurgencies. To be sure, the custom persisted in its ancient form as a holiday fête late into the nineteenth century, especially in rural areas. In 1881 the Superintendent of Schools for Northampton County, Pennsylvania, for example, noted that it remained a common *Fastnacht* tradition in German communities where, he wrote, "I am sorry to report that it is sometimes encouraged by parents and citizens."[16] As late as 1896 another county superintendent suggested that while barrings out were now rare occurrences compared with olden times, they still disrupted schools often enough to warrant state legislation prohibiting them once and for all.[17] Yet, even as the barring out lost much of its symbolic civic meaning, school children continued to engage in acts of collective insubordination, explaining their behavior in terms which suggested that, like the "young Washingtons" who preceded them, they were continuing to enter the schoolhouse armed with an inchoate but decidedly assertive public identity.

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[15] Thomas Mann. *Fourth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education* (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, State Printers, 1841), 86-91; Thomas Mann. *Fifth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education* (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, State Printers, 1842), 24; Mann, Thomas. *Sixth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education* (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, State Printers, 1843), 37-39. For an account of spontaneous collective resistance to an abusive teacher in a frontier classroom see, Beall, Loulie Ayer. "A Webster County School," *Nebraska History* 33 (July-September 1942), 200.

[16] *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction, 1881), 137-138.

[17] *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Clarence M. Busch: State Printer of Pennsylvania, 1896), 57.

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In April of 1886 students (ranging in age from five to their early teens) in at least twenty-nine schools in eleven states rebelled against teachers for some of the same reasons that children of earlier generations barred masters from schoolhouses. Insurgent boys in Joliet, Illinois, for example, "demanded shorter hours in school and longer hours out, both at noon, recess and at night."[18] Other pupils in Baltimore, Boston, Brooklyn, St. Louis, Detroit, and Columbus made similar demands, while those at the Primrose School in Minneapolis insisted not only that time in the classroom be shortened but also that teachers desist from sending home reports on student progress on the grounds that these reports strained otherwise good relations between children and parents.[19] Like antebellum youths who claimed license to bar out the master, these Gilded Age rebels rationalized disobedience, arguing that in organizing to defy teachers they were simply defending their rights. They demonstrated this nascent militancy, however, not by assuming the martial posture of stout young republicans but by adopting the language of class-consciousness and going on strike.

The outbreak of collective disobedience in so many schools that spring—mostly involving youngsters in the elementary grades—was concurrent with a wave of railroad and industrial strikes, galvanized in part by the growing influence of the Knights of Labor and by concurrent agitation in support of an eight-hour workday—a synchronicity that was not unnoticed by journalists. The rash of schoolhouse uprisings, wrote one, was an "isothermal line"

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[18] "The Kids Strike at Joliet," *The Pantagraph*, April 28, 1886, 1.
[19] "The Primrose Strike," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 13, 1886, 12; "Schoolboys on Strike," *New York Times*, April 13, 1886, 2.

that seemed to follow exactly the broader pattern of labor troubles afflicting the country. Exactly how much Gilded Age children understood about industrial unrest and social conflict in the United States is impossible to say; what is clear however, is that youngsters who proclaimed the benefits of solidarity among schoolchildren, or who chose to organize (as the Minneapolis rebels explained) for their "mutual ade and pertecshun" were influenced by what they heard, read, and observed about social and economic conflicts in the adult world. On April 12 for instance, when the Primrose pupils declared their intention to "boycott the school business" until their demands were met, they did so on the grounds that the school belonged to those who toiled within, reasoning that without children to do lessons there would be no need for classrooms or teachers. "Skollars," they declared, in the manifesto they issued announcing the strike, "make the school," and, thus, it was only right that they should have a say in determining its policies.[20] The argument, with its echoes of militant producerism, suggests that these children—a few of them as young as ten years old—had at least some exposure to late nineteenth century labor ideology. Indeed, it is perhaps no coincidence that the boycott at the Primrose School came soon after a surge in organizing by the Knights of Labor in and around Minneapolis (where the school was located in a predominantly working class neighborhood) at the high point of the KOL fortunes nationwide. Thousands of local workingmen had attended speeches (one in each of the Twin Cities) by Knights leader Terrance Powderly the previous summer, and in the fall the Knights had sponsored a massive picnic for workers and their families where regional officials of the organization addressed an audience of three thousand.[21] It was in an atmosphere of working class assertiveness, then, that these self-described "Nites of Laber" challenged school authority. In

[20] Ibid.
[21] George B Engberg, "The Knights of Labor in Minnesota," *Minnesota History* 22:4 (December 1941), 370-372.

organizing themselves they deliberately appropriated the language they likely heard at labor gatherings and around the dinner table.

The Primrose School strike was not an isolated incident. On the same day that the Minneapolis youngsters delivered their ultimatum to their schoolmistress, approximately two hundred children between the ages of 5 and 14 from predominantly working-class families, walked out of classes at the Eleventh Ward School in upstate Troy, New York, after teachers ignored a petition asking for less time in class. Within 24 hours this strike sentiment had spread to another city school in the First Ward, another working class district, where pupils sabotaged locks on schoolhouse doors, established picket lines, and threw mud and rocks at a janitor who attempted to disburse them. "You can't kid us," one of the insurgents was reported to have exclaimed when a member of the school board attempted to coax them back to their desks with the offer of a longer lunch break. "We know our rights and we'll have them." As adults watched, children gathered in two open air meetings to elect officers and to coordinate efforts between strike committees from their respective schools—giving one observer the impression that "the lower portion of the city [was] swarming with truants."[22]

Unlike the children who initiated the Primrose strike, the youngsters in Troy—about three quarters of those enrolled at the afflicted schools—do not appear to have been interested in emulating the formal structure of adult labor organizations, and they made no attempt to borrow any high-flung rhetoric from their elders in order to justify insubordination; there were no formal declarations of grievances, no badges or buttons signifying "union" membership. Furthermore, there was no hint of ideological pretense in the claim that they knew their rights. The reason for

[22] "The School-Children's Strike—Requests of Insubordinate Pupils," *Troy Daily Times*, April 13, 1886, 1; "Troy School Boys Strike," *New York Herald*, April 14, 1886, 4.

their discontent, as one strike leader explained, was simply that children in nearby Albany spent less time in the classroom then they did, a disparity that seemed to them unfair. Nevertheless, in taking steps to rectify this inequity—first by petitioning and then, when that failed, by refusing to attend school—they demonstrated a posture of collective assertiveness, learned, no doubt, from their iron-worker fathers and their mothers, who provided much of the labor force for Troy's large garment industry.

At a time when violent confrontations between labor and capital were common, Gilded Age Troy was renowned for its fiercely independent working people. An important center of iron production—one of the largest in the country outside of Pennsylvania—as well as the largest manufacturer of shirts and collars in the United States, the city was home to a thriving network of working class political, cultural and labor organizations, including the first long-standing all-women's labor union in the United States, the Collar Laundry Union. The aggressiveness and dependability of the women who labored in Troy's garment plants, and who routinely coordinated efforts with ironworkers to secure better wages and working conditions across trades, were cornerstones of class solidarity in the city. Indeed, at the same time unrest was breaking out in the Troy schools, laundresses and seamstresses were in the opening stages of what would become a contentious dispute with employers over hours, while local ironworkers (husbands, fathers and brothers of these same women) were striking over wages.[23] Given the shared convictions of so many workingmen and women in the city, there can be little doubt that

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[23] Organized twenty years earlier, the CLU had, by the mid-1880s, affiliated itself with the Knights of Labor as the Joan of Arc Assembly, which, with a membership of four thousand, was the largest of thirty-eight KOL assemblies in Troy and the largest exclusively female assembly of Knights in the nation. Carole Turbin, *Working Women of Collar City: Gender, Class, and Community in Troy, 1864-1886* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Daniel J. Walkowitz, "Statistics and the Writing of Working Class Culture: A Statistical Portrait of the Iron Workers in Troy, New York, 1860-1880," *Labor History* 15:3 (Summer 1974), 416-460.

the children who walked out of classes at the Eleventh Ward and First Ward schools—many of them young girls who assumed leadership roles in the strike and who were, according to witnesses, among the loudest and most aggressive protesters outside school buildings—came from families where at least one but likely both parents set strong examples of active self-advocacy and were firm believers in collective action.[24]

Over the next week schools in five other cities would experience similar disruptions, as groups of discontented children adopted names intended associate the seriousness of their causes with those of organized labor—names such as "The Knights of Schoolboys" or "The Baltimore Association, Schoolboys' Knights of Labor"—and declared work stoppages, and paraded through streets.[25] In Boston, Brooklyn, Columbus, and St. Louis, rebellious youngsters blocked entry to school buildings, nailed shut gates, or plugged keyholes to schoolhouse doors, armed themselves with sticks, rocks, and other makeshift weapons, and physically threatened adults who sought to restore order, as well as "scab" classmates who failed to honor picket lines. Notably violent was the strike by children in St. Louis, where just one week after a confrontation between striking switchmen and railroad detectives in nearby East St. Louis had deteriorated into a bloody riot, insurgent children from three schools manhandled classmates who refused to join them and clubbed and stoned a principal who attempted to break up a picket line. In all of these

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[24] "Strikiana," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 13, 1886, Pg. 1. In her analysis of working-class households in Troy, Carole Turbin estimates that for slightly over thirty percent of families in the First and Eleventh Wards both fathers and mothers were employed in iron mills and garment factories respectively.

[25] "Striking Schoolboys," *Baltimore American*, April 18, 1886; "The School Boys' Strike," *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1886, 9.

cases, authorities were sufficiently alarmed by the menace of violence to call for police support in bringing disobedient children to heel.[26]

Newspapers were unanimous in condemning children who destroyed school property or who resorted to strong-arm tactics. The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, for example, urged that pupil strikes be "summarily suppressed by a prompt application of the slipper to the basement of every little pair of pants that gets its shine from the school bench." However, apart from concerns about violence, many of these reports also emphasized, largely for comic effect, the way insurgent children everywhere mimicked adult behavior, describing them for instance, as they left schoolrooms "in a body, boys and girls alike walking out with the dignity of adults who were carrying terrible and heartrending grievances with them," gently mocking a diminutive "grand worthy master workman" with a rosette in his lapel, bearing an ultimatum peppered with misspellings and sealed with "wax of the kind generally used in canning tomatoes" to an "astonished" teacher, and intimating humor in the formulaic way that the Baltimore pupils struck "after swearing themselves to secrecy, passing the usual resolutions against their oppressor, etc." Wrote one editorialist, "The little folks' strike is all the funnier on account of the seriousness which is at the bottom of it."[27]

Like the emphasis on imitative aspects of these strikes—the theatrical duplication of adult titles and organization—dismissing these demonstrations as the work of "little folks" was a way of denying their legitimacy. In the eyes of children, however, the seriousness behind these acts of disobedience was no laughing matter. It was "not for the sake of making a stir" or "having fun"

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[26] "The Kids Strike at Joliet;" "Schoolboys on Strike," *New York Times*, 13 April 1886, 2; "One Session or Strike," *Boston Daily Globe*, 15 April 1886, Pg 1; "Another Schoolboy's Strike," *New York Times*, 16 April 1886, Pg 3; "Not Encouraging at East St. Louis," *The Chicago Tribune*, 22 April 1886, Pg 1
[27] "The Primrose Strike," "Imitating Their Elders," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 21 April 1886, 8; "Striking Scholars," *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, 16 April 1886, 2; "Striking Schoolboys," *San Francisco Chronicle,* 9 May 1886, 2.

that boys rose up against teachers, explained one of the leaders of a walkout that disrupted South Boston schools that month, but because they had substantial grievances. Adults who dismissed pupil strikes as a misguided form of playacting failed to see that children who asserted themselves against authority were not simply aping the behavior of their elders but were, rather, demonstrating what they, the youngsters, understood to be an appropriate and indeed admirably mature response to injustice and repression. "When the men work too long or get too small pay they strike and all the people are glad and say they have got spunk," another Boston student told a reporter, adding that although he and his friends weren't quite big enough to "fight the cops . . .wait until we grow up and see what we will do." In a letter to the editor of *The Boston Daily Globe* yet another boy rebuked adults who seemed to have nothing but "rough" words for militant children, writing that, "If we were men they'd . . . call us brave fellows and tell us to stand up for our rights."[28]

To be sure, not all of the children involved in these walkouts were as ideologically motivated as those who spoke to reporters or who took the time to write to newspapers; descriptions of the school strikes that spring suggest that the very young in particular were often caught up in the excitement of the moment more than anything else, and some accounts intimated that it was only with the encouragement of a few rabble-rousers among them that most found the motivation to walk out of classes *en masse* or parade through the streets with homemade banners and placards while banging pots and pans. Nevertheless, a common observation was that youngsters seemed quite ready to answer the call to organized rebellion. "The children take as naturally to striking as their fathers have taken to it," wrote one newspaperman, who pointed out that when boys and girls organized against school authorities

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[28] "Striking Schoolboys," *Boston Daily Globe*, 26 April 1886, 8.

they did so “in the same way and on the same principles as old strikers conduct their movements.” Another reporter covering the trouble in St. Louis suggested that recent outbreaks of violence associated with strikes on western railroads had caught the imaginations of youngsters, declaring that, “Even children are getting up movements that are in the same line of thought and action with the great struggle now going on along the Gould system between labor and capital.”[29]

Although school authorities were apt to dismiss these pupil strikes as little more than indiscriminate eruptions of disobedience, the pupils who “got up” such movements appeared to have no interest in playing hooky for hooky’s sake; rather, they sought to appropriate for their own ends what they understood to be the conventions of organized protest. When, for instance, boys in South Boston abandoned classrooms because the long school day left them little time for baseball, they did not merely skip out of class in order to regroup on the diamond. Instead, they assembled to demonstrate in neighborhood streets. Similarly, when teachers at the Barston Public School in Detroit rejected a request for a longer recess period, angry children refused to return to their desks at the end of their allotted five minutes, defiantly remaining outside for precisely the fifteen minutes they felt they deserved—not playing, but listening to what one journalist called the “incendiary and anarchic speeches” of classmates.[30] There is evidence, then, that youngsters were learning—indeed *had* learned—to view collective disobedience as legitimate method for bringing pressure on authorities in order to resolve grievances; and, moreover, that this lesson reflected not only the household politics of individual children but was a product of the cultural zeitgeist as well. “The principal and teachers have always advised the pupils to read the

[29] “Imitating Their Elders,” “Striking Scholars.”
[30] “News and Schoolboys,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 20 April 1886, 5.

newspapers," wrote one journalist of a strike that disrupted several schools in Brooklyn, "and the success of recent labor movements left a strong impression on their minds." Another reporter surmised that when South Boston children walked out of classes it was because they had been following in the press stories of schoolhouse rebellions elsewhere that month, while yet another suggested that mutinous schoolboys had been influenced by sensational accounts of strikes they were reading in the *Police Gazette*.[31]

Altogether 1886 saw at least twenty-nine such insurrections—more than enough for one almanac (which tallied only six) to add schoolchildren to its comprehensive list of trades that had been disrupted by strikes that year.[32] Newspapers described outbreaks of "strike fever" in schools as far south as Arkansas and as far west as Wyoming, in both public and Catholic Schools.[33] Although most of the disturbances were clustered in urban areas, smaller, rural communities were not immune to outbreaks of the fever. Not surprisingly, most of these rebellions collapsed, although there were scattered victories for children in a few communities—in downstate Salem, Illinois, for instance, where children managed to have dismissal time moved up one hour, and in rural Lancaster, Wisconsin, where a principal's decision to hold classes on Decoration Day, prompted strike talk among angry boys and girls—rumblings that eventually gained the attention of the school board, which intervened to grant them the holiday.[34]

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[31] "Schoolboys on a Strike," *Boston Daily Globe*, 14 April 1886, 1; "Little Puritans Striking," *Boston Daily Globe*, 21 April 1886, 8; "A Kid's Strike," *Deseret Evening News*, 20 May 1886, 4.
[32] *Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1889), 750.
[33] "Throwing Off the Yoke," *Fort Smith Daily Times*, 16 April 1886, 4; "A Kid's Strike," *Deseret Evening News*, 20 May 1886, 4. A strike at another Catholic School in Brooklyn in March had come to a similarly ignominious end, although, the *New York Times* noted, "The strikers were not punished, the humor of the affair being so thoroughly appreciated as to save them." "A Burlesque on Strikes," *New York Times*, 18 March 1886, 8.
[34] "A Successful Strike," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 April 1886, 3; "Wisconsin—Pupils Strike for a Holiday and Get It." *Chicago Tribune*, 1 June 1886, 6.

Win or lose, however, collective challenges to authority mounted by Gilded Age schoolchildren were a departure from the symbolic import of past schoolhouse rebellions. Unlike youngsters of preceding generations who, in barring out the master reaffirmed the vitality of republicanism by reenacting the dramatic narrative of the American Revolution, children who went on strike claimed to be engaging in—and indeed *were* engaged in—substantive acts of organized protest. In walking out of classes, demonstrating in front of school buildings, and skirmishing with police—and, just as importantly, in defending these actions on the grounds that they were standing up for their rights—they demonstrated a collective assertiveness that would erupt again and again in American schoolhouses for the next thirty years.

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Following this surge in episodes of mass disobedience by American schoolchildren, the number of pupil insurgencies in the United States dropped precipitously. Of the nearly 100 classroom walkouts that took place in the three decades beginning in 1886 the incidents that year alone account for some thirty-percent. Yet, while there would be no single wave of pupil strikes quite so large again, organized acts of rebellion mounted by children in schools continued to occur, year in and year out, with what a 1914 *New York Herald* editorial would describe as alarming regularity.[35] Acts of collective disobedience in schools, some critics insisted, were indicative of a festering problem with the nation's youth. As one columnist put it, among children "this strike mania the country over has become a disease, it is contagious and malignant and ought to be quarantined against." Every so often a journalist or a public official suggested

[35] "School strikes are almost weekly events now," the *Herald* declared—an exaggeration, to be sure, but nevertheless, indicative of how common the phenomenon was. "School Strikes," *New York Herald*, 20 March 1914, 8. For a chronological list of pupil strikes in the United States during this period, see the appendix.

that the tendency for American children to join together in open rebellion against school authorities was a self-perpetuating problem. Exposure to news about pupil strikes normalized pupil strikes, this argument went, thus creating a climate in which the young perceived militant protest as acceptable. Indeed, there was little to tie these incidents together except an apparent inclination among children to protest.[36]

The record after 1886 shows youngsters protesting grievances of all kinds, sometimes in staggering numbers, with the largest disturbances in urban areas—in Chicago (1905), Pittsburgh (1913), Boston (1913), and New York City (1915 and 1917)—involving thousands of children each. Together with smaller strikes, collective challenges to adult authority in classrooms were enough of a problem for school boards to issue written guidance to administrators on how to handle walkouts, which, according to some observers, were a particularly noxious habit among American youth. Typical was the editorialist who, writing in the wake of the troubles in Boston and Pittsburgh, warned readers that pupil strikes in the United States "have ceased to be novel, although their perniciousness never abates." Some of the issues that stirred children to act—the offenses committed by physically or verbally abusive instructors, for example, along with unpopular policies on everything from dress codes to homework—were organic to school life. Others, such as the use of "scab" coal in school buildings, were echoes of conflicts, which, while external to the school, reverberated in classrooms, where children interpreted them in the context of household and street-corner loyalties.[37]

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[36] "Saying and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, 25 September 1903, 5; "The Pittsburgh Strike," *The Survey*, 30:7 (17 May 1913), 237.

[37] "Teacher Bounced, Pupils Strike," *New York World*, 28 May 1903, 1; "Schoolboys Riot and Threaten to Strike for Shorter Hours," New York World, 28 May 1903, 1; "Passing of the School Strike," *The Inter Ocean*, 12 October 1904, 6. "Parental Wisdom," *The Daily Post-Standard*, 6 October 1913, 2.

Strikes and protests that fell into the first category—provoked, that is, by grievances organic to the school—were the most common. In much the same way that nineteenth century children seized upon real or metaphorical tyranny in the classroom as a reason to bar out cruel masters, Progressive Era youngsters sometimes chafed under authoritarian teachers and when they found conditions intolerable they took action. In the autumn of 1899 for instance, in the copper mining town of Anaconda, Montana, some twenty small boys quit the schoolhouse when a new teacher (a less sweet-tempered woman, in their view, than her predecessor) assumed responsibility for their class. After organizing and electing a president and a secretary, they marched to the office of the school superintendent to express their discontent. Then, having explained the problem, they returned to the school building, where the principal encouraged them to go back to work "like gentlemen" while he investigated the complaint and interviewed the offending instructor. Apparently satisfied with this, the boys—described in one account as a "good natured" lot—returned to their desks "as though nothing had happened."[38]

The trouble at the school in Anaconda arose out of a rather mild grievance; what the boys found intolerable about their schoolmistress was that she was simply "too cross" with them, and the gentle intervention of the principal was enough to resolve the problem. On other occasions, however, young people struck to protest particularly egregious misuses of power, and in these instances rancor ran much deeper. This was certainly the case in early 1902 when high school students in Rome, New York, went on strike—outraged that Principal H.W. Harris had physically abused a classmate. Immediately after the incident (in which Harris allegedly seized an inattentive boy by the collar—choking him, according to one account, until his face went blue) the teens formed an ad hoc committee to demand an apology. When none was forthcoming,

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[38] "Pupils on Strike," *The Butte Daily Post*, 4 October 1899, 6.

some 150 boys and girls—approximately half the student body—took to the streets demanding justice. In another even more violent case in Hanover Township, Pennsylvania, trouble came in the form of a brawl between a student at the local high school and principal Fredrick Neyhart close to the end of the 1914 academic year. Incensed that their classmate John Evans had been summarily suspended for assault while no action at all was taken against Neyhart (who reportedly struck the first blow and bit Evans in the arm and gouged his face and eyes), nearly 100 students declared a work stoppage.[39] It is noteworthy that both Harris and Neyhart were upheld in their behavior by school officials and that it was this apparent administrative indifference to brutality as much as the violence itself that prompted students to walk out of schools.

Of course, the kind of abuse that children encountered at the hands of teachers—and that sometimes drove them to walk out of classrooms—did not always rise to such extremes. In some cases youngsters were provoked by what were for the time otherwise unremarkable examples of corporal punishment. In 1904 for instance, when Kansas sixth graders walked out of school and declared a boycott against a teacher who singled out girls for humiliating punishments, "slapping their faces and otherwise mistreating them" in front of classmates. Other examples include a small California school where, in the Spring of 1909, boys and girls abandoned desks en masse to express displeasure with a teacher who they deemed excessively vigorous in spanking a classmate, and a 1912 walkout in Anna, Illinois, where irate youngsters, after leaving their school to protest one too many "old fashioned whippings" threatened a "general strike" if the

[39] "High School Students Strike," *New York Tribune*, 10 January 1902, 6; "School Students Strike," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 12 May 1914, 7.

violence against them continued.[40] Nor did mistreatment have to be physical in order for it to constitute an "outrage" in the eyes of assertive youngsters; a principal's disrespectful comment about a female pupil's hairstyle and another's attempt to regulate the length of dresses, censorship of a school newspaper, the sudden enforcement of old but long-neglected rules prohibiting male and female students from interacting between classes, and the belief that school authorities had favored "swells" over "plebs" when reassigning children to a new, better-equipped building, are just a few examples of incidents which drove young people to organize boycotts, strikes, and demonstrations.[41]

Other protests—falling into the second category, of those prompted by matters not directly related to school life—were expressions of familial and class loyalties rather than dissatisfaction with conditions in classrooms. Streetcar strikes, for example, were common catalysts for organized juvenile misconduct in and around school buildings. In Chicago during an 1888 strike, children in at least three schools close to afflicted lines, ignoring attempts by teachers to maintain order, abandoned their desks to jeer "scab" drivers as cars passed, while pelting passengers with rocks, clots of mud, and rotten vegetables and terrifying them by setting off fireworks under a car. Youngsters in another neighborhood left the schoolyard during the noon lunch hour and, according to a witness, "rolled a wagon over the State Street track near Pierson . . . loaded it with ashes, sand, and stones, tied the wheels together, and run [sic] planks between the spokes, and nailed them to the blocks of the street." Then, after erecting a gruesome totem pole over the barrier—festooned with the decayed carcasses of a dog, a cat, and a rat—

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[40] "School Children Strike," *The Topeka State Journal*, 1 November 1904, 6; "Spanked Pupils Strike," *Wausau Daily Herald*, 23 November 1912, 1; "For Three Months She Runs School With No Pupils," *Oakland Tribune*, 9 June 1909, 4.

[41] "Indignation Meeting Held," *Buffalo Review*, 15 March 1901, 6; "Schoolboys Strike Because they are Forbidden to talk to the Girls," *The Owensboro Messenger*, 31 March 1901, 2; Girls Talk Strike," *Evening Star*, 8 December 1910, 8; "No Curls! 600 Strike," *Washington Post*, 27 January 1915, 4.

they climbed into nearby trees and onto fences and roofs in order to "pour forth volleys of scorn" on the motormen and police officers who struggled to clear the track.[42] The involvement of school-age children in demonstrations during streetcar strikes was common. Young boys in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, for instance, joined adults in harassing strikebreakers in 1902, and in Richmond, Virginia, a newspaper reported that children "urged on by their mothers and grown-up sisters" were responsible for "great mischief" during a 1903 streetcar strike.[43]

Transit strikes erupted frequently in urban areas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the presence of children in unruly crowds was not unusual. Yet, while such juvenile shenanigans appear to have been part-and-parcel of the typical street demonstration, youngsters on occasion also imported protest into the schoolhouse. When a music teacher in Wheeling, West Virginia took a trolley to work during an 1899 strike, her indignant pupils retaliated, some refusing to sing for her, while others taunted the woman with a serenade of "Baa-Baa Black Sheep" during their lessons. Teachers who crossed picket lines to ride cars during strikes were taking their chances—particularly if their pupils came from working class families. In Scranton, Pennsylvania (1901 and 1902), Terre Haute, Indiana (1902), Chester, Pennsylvania (1908) and Evansville, Indiana (1909), children boycotted teachers who had been seen patronizing "scab" streetcars. In some instances youngsters waited for offending instructors to leave school buildings, harassed them as they made their way home and demanded apologies or guarantees that in the future and for the duration of the strike they would eschew public

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[42] "Policemen Obey Orders," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 October 1888, 1; "Both Sides Determined," *The Inter Ocean*, 12 October 1888, 1.

[43] "A Strong Force of Military is Now Guarding Property Here," *Times Dispatch*, 24 June 1903, 1. For other instances of juvenile participation see: Louisville Streetcar Strike "Strikers Picketed at All Car Barns," *Courier Journal*, 11 March 1907, 3; Wheeling, WV "Streetcar Strikes," *New York Tribune*, 12April 1899, 3; "Street Car Strikes and Hoodlums," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 July 1899, 6; "Strike Spreads; May Cover all Lines in City," *The Inter Ocean*, 14 November 1903, 2.

transportation and walk. Noted the observer of one such pupil protest: “cries of ‘we won’t work for a scab’ worked the children into the highest pitch of excitement.” At a gathering of principals in 1903, a Chicago educator expressed his apprehensions about the frequency of incidents like these, evidence, he believed, of “a great mass of anarchists” in American classrooms—children who were unafraid to “go into a school and say that one of their teachers must not ride on street cars run by non-union car men during a strike.”[44]

Another issue that provoked children to leave their desks was the perception that school authorities were coming down on the wrong side of local labor disputes. Typical was an incident that occurred in the autumn of 1902 during a Pennsylvania coal strike, when boys and girls at schools in Scranton—most of them children of striking miners—walked out of classes in the belief that fresh coal (and thus mined presumably, by non-union strikebreakers) was being delivered to the schoolhouse. Officials in this case were hardly insensitive to the backgrounds of youngsters in their classrooms, yet even assurances that the coal had *not* been purchased, but had, rather, been scavenged, were not enough to mollify the pupils.[45] Indignation over “unfair coal” was also the cause of the 1905 pupil strike in Chicago, although in this case it was not the coal itself that provoked the wrath of insurgents but rather, the willingness of the Board of Education to contract with non-union cartage companies to have coal delivered in the midst of a teamster strike. Informed by family and community ties, a similar form of class solidarity was also apparent when youngsters, some as young as six or seven, refused to attend school alongside

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[44] “Boys Boycott Teacher,” *The Saint Paul Globe*, 24 April 1899, 8; “School Children Strike,” *Wilkes-Barre Times*, 22 November 1901, 5; “Indiana School Children Strike,” *Duluth News-Tribune,* 5 March 1902, 1; “Apologize to Children,” *Chippewa Herald-Telegram*, 10 May 1908, 1; “Boycott Teachers,” *The Washington Times*, 8 June 1909, 8; “Anarchy in Schools Says W.H. Campbell,” *The Inter Ocean*, 6 December 1903, 3.

[45] “More Pupils Go On Strike,” *Scranton Republican*, 1 October 1902, 5; “Said it was Scab Coal,” *Scranton Tribune*, 20 September 1902, 6.

classmates from "scab" families—classmates, that is, whose fathers took work during strikes—during a 1902 walkout at a coal mine in Wilkes-Barre, a 1905 strike at a packinghouse in Omaha, Nebraska, and a 1910 strike at another coal mine in Denver.[46]

Whether they were intended as rebukes to individual teachers who patronized non-union streetcars, or were demonstrations of a nascent class-consciousness, such protests suggest a decidedly assertive posture, vis-à-vis authority, in children as young as seven or eight. This was certainly the position taken by contemporary observers who saw pupil strikes of all kinds as evidence that children were bringing the militant working-class values of their parents into classrooms—the Chicago principal, for instance, who told a researcher from the University of Michigan about one student, a "bright" boy in the fourth grade, who had been "well-behaved ordinarily" until getting mixed up in a school strike. "His father is a rabid unionist," the principal explained, "and he [the boy] seems to have caught his ideas." As the author of a 1903 editorial in a Buffalo, New York newspaper wrote, one had only to glance at a recent front page—where multiple reports of pupil walk-outs appeared, sprinkled among other stories of widespread industrial unrest—to understand that even in schools, "the strike sentiment of labor organization prevails."[47]

However, while "the strike sentiment" might have been on display in many working-class schools it was by no means exclusive to working class youngsters, and children from more affluent families were not above engaging in walkouts as form of protest. In the winter of 1889 for instance, students at the Lawrence Academy, an exclusive boy's school in Groton,

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[46] "No 'Scab' Schoolboys," *Allentown Leader*, 13 September 1902, 8; "Return to Studies," *Omaha Daily Bee*, 19 April 1905, 5; "Striker's Children Strike in School," *Daily People*, 7 November 1910, 1.
[47] Chester Sherman Carney, *Truancy in the Tenement Districts of Chicago* (University of Michigan: 1905), 74; "The 'Head-Line' Man," *The Buffalo Times*, 31 May 1903, 20.

Connecticut, believing their headmaster to be incompetent, declared a strike and refused to attend classes until the man was replaced. Elsewhere, and throughout the Progressive Era, young people who organized protests in public schools included "the sons of some of the best families" along with the daughter of a school board member in Madison, Wisconsin (1903), boys "from many of the prominent families" of Superior, Wisconsin (1905), and "the cream of the debating teams, dramatic club, athletic club and pupils from some of the most prominent families in the city" of Independence, Missouri (1917). That the adult strikes which young people took as their models were an expression of working-class discontent seemed not to matter; the notion that collective disobedience was both a useful and legitimate means of challenging unpopular policies found purchase among young people regardless of how well-off they may have been. A strike in Oak Park, Illinois is a case in point. When the restive "intellectual set" at the high school in this prosperous Chicago suburb walked out of classes in 1911 to protest an increase in the length of the school day a local reporter noted that "every well-tailored lapel" was adorned with a tag identifying its wearer as a "union" man.[48]

Apparently unperturbed by the spectacle of high school boys parading through the streets, officials in Oak Park in this instance attributed the protest to a "natural youthful longing" for excitement. A more common response, however, was to write off organized acts of rebellion such as these as evidence of dangerous immaturity—and of the age-old hostility between teachers and students. It mattered little whether students were following in the footsteps of their parents or, like the boys in Groton and Oak Park, simply appropriating the language of

[48] "School Boys on Strike," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 January 1889, 6; "High School Boys Strike," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, 8 April 1903, 1; "200 High School Boys Strike," *Wisconsin State Journal*," 8 April 1903, 1; "School Children Strike," *Decorah Republican*, 28 February 1917, 4; "School Boys Strike," *Oak Park Leaves*, 6 October 1911, 19.

insurgency, the problem was the same, as far as critics were concerned: the claim that one had the right to defy authority was as much a threat to order, and perhaps more, as the act of defiance itself. In a sharp rebuke of juvenile strikers in Hanover, for example, the Wilkes-Barre *Evening News* dismissed them as nothing more than "hair-brained and impulsive youths." It was a timeless matter of fact, this editorialist declared, that young people grew restive under the rule of schoolmasters and the Hanover troublemakers (who, the writer intimated, were proxies for school strikers everywhere) were no different. "In the minds of scholars the teacher is always a specially constituted enemy to make the life of the school pupil miserable and almost unbearable. The school teacher can do no right and the pupil can do no wrong, according to the ethics of the scholars." The assumption was that behind every schoolhouse mutiny there existed, as another editorialist put it, "only some childish grievance." Thus, to take such protests seriously was pointless.

In trivializing the very idea of pupil strikes, critics like these drew on the notion that children were innately hostile to teachers and to the discipline that teachers enforced; therefore, the argument went, it mattered not what the pretext for any given rebellion was, because when young people protested a *perceived* injustice or indignity it served only to "reveal the absurd workings of the juvenile mind." Yet, it would be quite wrong to assume that "the ethics of the scholars" were always aligned against the order and discipline of the well-managed classroom. Indeed, an almost surefire way to stir up discontent in schoolchildren—and next to increasing the length of time they were expected to sit behind desks, the one most likely to provoke widespread outrage and collective rebellion—was to dismiss or transfer a popular teacher. An early example of this kind of "sympathy" strike took place in January 1887 in Philadelphia, where, when Mary Spallen, the supervising principal of Philadelphia's George B. McClellan School, was fired for

insubordination, it took less than twenty-four hours for her disgruntled pupils to organize a boycott in her support. Calling themselves the "Knights of McClellan," the entire student body—approximately 400 boys and girls between 5 and 14 years old—left their desks and gathered for a demonstration outside the school building, at which they denounced the authorities responsible for cashiering their long-time teacher and head of school, threatened to "pull the whiskers" of a school board member who had arrived to break up the strike, and gleefully thwarted the efforts of police to restore order until, to their great excitement, Spallen was reinstated.[49]

The almost immediate response on Spallen's behalf indicates how strongly children felt about the loss of a teacher they loved—one Philadelphia newspaper described "big fourteen-year-old boys boo-hooing as vigorously as the five-year-old youngsters," upon hearing the news that she was to be replaced—but it also illustrates what can be best described as a disposition to take collective action in the interest of the common good. While the McClellan children were ultimately backed by mothers and fathers (some of them former Spallen pupils themselves, who were on hand to cheer the strikers and jeer police during the rally outside the school), the impulse to walk out of classes in protest was, according to newspaper accounts, entirely their own. In striking they claimed collective authority to advocate for themselves—and suggested as much a note they sent to the school board, in which they explained, "By your action you have deprived us not only of a principal, but of a thorough education, which we were receiving from one whose teaching we will never forget." Moreover, while the physical threat to the bewhiskered school board member and the game of cat-and-mouse with police officers might suggest childishly indiscriminate disobedience, this was hardly the case. Indeed, when Spallen's replacement

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[49] "A Revolt in a School," *The Times*, 26 January 1887, 1. *Sixty-Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Public Education* (Philadelphia: Burke & McFetridge, Printers, 1886), 322

expressed concerns for her safety, protesters assured the woman that in so far as their grievance was not with her she had nothing to fear; the sole target of their ire, they explained, was the anti-Spallen faction on the school board.[50]

Schoolhouse insurrections like this one in support of favorite instructors, were not uncommon. They happened in Chicago in both 1902 and 1904 and in Detroit in 1903 when the dismissal of an assistant principal at the Cass School sparked a protest and confrontation between police and a crowd of about a hundred students of the eighth grade that left one officer injured. In each these cases—Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit—youngsters stubbornly refused to be coaxed or coerced back to their studies, a problem that vexed New York authorities on an even larger scale in 1913 when a shakeup of principal assignments motivated some 1300 pupils in two schools to leave their desks and organize an impromptu protest that disrupted traffic in their Manhattan neighborhood until police intervened.[51] Nor were such acts of collective disobedience an exclusively big-city phenomenon; smaller communities too, witnessed the spectacle of children boycotting the schoolhouse rather than standing by silently when popular teachers were fired or transferred. P3eppered throughout Progressive Era newspapers were reports—from Clinton, Iowa (1895), LaPorte, Indiana (1897), Neenah, Wisconsin (1900), Boonton, New Jersey (1903), Barrington, Illinois (1907), Maysville, Kentucky (1908), Savannah, Georgia (1914), and Butte, Montana (1915), to name just a few—that described youngsters who "gathered up their books and marched out of the school building in a body" or who defied school authorities to

[50] "A Revolt in a School;" "The Children Victorious," *The Times*, 27 January 1887, 1.
[51] "School Children on Strike," *The Inter Ocean*, 7 Nov 1902, 1; Wm. Stocking, *Detroit in Nineteen Hundred and Three: A Chronological record of Events* (Detroit: Evening News Association, 1904) 75; "Striking Pupils in Detroit Create Riot," *The Saint Paul Globe*, 23 September 1903, 1; "Doors of 260 Schools Open to Admit 225,000 Children," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 September 1904, 5; "1,300 Pupils Strike in Two Big Schools," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 23 Sept 1912, 1.

"stay out all day parading in the streets" as a show of support for instructors who they believed had been treated unfairly.[52]

That protests like these could create substantial problems for authorities is nowhere more evident than in the case of a strike to support Jane McKeon, a Chicago public school teacher who in November 1902 was suspended without pay for insubordination. McKeon, a favorite of pupils and parents in the west side neighborhood where she taught, had booted a pupil from her room at the Andrew Jackson School for disrupting lessons with foul language; when the school's principal inexplicably ordered her to allow the offender back in his seat, she refused, and within days found herself out of a job. What appeared to be a straightforward dispute over whose authority was final in the classroom, however, was complicated by the fact that McKeon—by all accounts an exemplary educator—was also a vocal advocate for the Chicago Teacher's Federation. In a public statement issued through her attorney, she suggested that this was the real reason that she had been suspended; school authorities, she claimed, had simply found in her refusal to readmit the disruptive student into her class a convenient pretext for getting rid of an outspoken employee.[53]

The superintendant of the Chicago school system immediately denied McKeon's charge; however, when it became known that her supervising principal had privately discussed the case

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[52] "High School Children Strike," *The Penny Press*, 8 February 1895, 6; "Pupils to Strike," *Denver Evening Post*, 30 April 1897, 8; "Pupils Walked Out With Principal," *The Oshkosh Northwestern*, 27 November 1900, 1; "Teacher 'Fired' Pupils Strike," *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2 June 1903, 14; "Pupils Strike When Teacher Ordered to Quit; She Holds Fort, *The Inter Ocean*, 15 October 1907, 1; "Schoolboys Strike," *Hopkinsville Kentuckian*, 23 April 1908, 4; "Pupils Strike When Teacher is Suspended," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 18 March 1914, 5; "School Children Strike," *Idaho Daily Statesman* 6 May 1915, 2; "Pupils Strike When Principal is Ousted," *Oakland Tribune*, 24 January 1912, 4; "Wichita Pupils Strike," *The Dickinson County News*, 23 November 1911, 6.

[53] "Calls Teacher a Victim of Plot," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 November 1902, 16; "Miss M'Keon Sees Plot," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 November 1902, 8.

with board members before discharging her, the suggestion that the board's contentious relationship with the Federation was a factor in his decision seemed more plausible. Founded in 1897 the CTF was already, at the time McKeon was removed from her post, one of the most influential teacher's organizations in the country, and its agenda—which included fair compensation for teachers and smaller class sizes—was often at odds with policies favored by school trustees and administrators. Moreover, the very week that McKeon was butting heads with her principal, the Federation was taking steps to affiliate itself with the Chicago Federation of Labor, a move that alarmed some civic and business leaders. Nevertheless, the suspension of one CTF partisan might have passed mostly unnoticed, buried in the back pages of the city papers if covered at all, had it not been for the response of her pupils, who immediately walked out of classes, declaring that they would never return until "one of the best teachers in the Andrew Jackson School" was given back her job.

Within days, the strike was receiving much attention in the press. Images of youngsters, gathered in the streets or on the steps of the school building, appeared in the dailies, along with flattering photographs of Miss McKeon. In one picture, two children pose affectionately with their deposed teacher, their heads resting on her shoulders, while in another, dozens of youngsters crowd together before a school door, McKeon's portrait superimposed in the corner above them. Elsewhere, in a photo spread that appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, the leaders of the strike—two girls with ribbons in their hair and two sturdy looking boys in knickers—assume defiant stances for the camera, undeterred (according to the accompanying text) by news that the Superintendent of Compulsory Education had warrants for their arrest in hand. Indeed, one of the agitators, a girl named Maggie McNally, dismissed the idea that she or her classmates were

susceptible to intimidation by truant officers or police. "What, go back to school on Monday?" McNally was quoted as saying. "Not until Miss McKeon is put back."[54]

The vigor with which the pupils at the Andrew Jackson School defended their teacher helped turn the McKeon affair into a cause célèbre among working class families. Neighborhood parents, who appreciated McKeon's work on behalf of their children, and who sensed anti-labor sentiments in the board's decision to punish her, sided with the insurgents and demanded that elected officials launch an investigation.[55] As a result, an administrative decision to fire one teacher became a subject of debate on the city council floor, while injecting what the *Tribune* described as "an undercurrent of bitterness" into the meetings of a school board that was not accustomed to such intense public scrutiny. The local alderman provided a particularly influential sympathetic ear for the protesters, receiving a delegation of youngsters in his home and agreeing to take up the role of arbitrator in the dispute. Although he encouraged the children to return to their desks, he publically declared their grievances to be legitimate and suggested that thoughtless school authorities were to blame for inflaming the passions of the youngsters, and, as a consequence, their fathers and mothers, his constituents.[56]

Eventually, under pressure from irate parents and labor leaders, embattled officials offered to reinstate McKeon, with the stipulation that she would be transferred to another school—an arrangement that she refused to accept. At first, this lead to an impasse: McKeon, citing stress, declared her intention to give up teaching, while striking pupils insisted that in offering her a position at another school the board was attempting to avoid addressing their demands. In a statement to reporters McKeon called it "the most pathetic thing" to see her pupils

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[54] "Parents Side With Suspended Teacher" *The Inter Ocean*, 15 November 1902, 3.
[55] "Novel Strike in Chicago," *Labor World*, 15 November 1902, 1.
[56] "Cooley Under Fire in M'Keon Contest," *The Inter Ocean*, 16 November 1902, 5.

protesting in the streets, and she feared that "the spectacle of what looks to them like a case of absolute injustice [might] leave an indelible impression on their minds." At her urging, the youngsters agreed to end the protest and go back to their lessons. [57]

While the result of the strike at the Andrew Jackson School was likely unsatisfying for those children who took part in it, the incident illustrates how experience with direct action provided them with a practical lesson in the power of collective self-advocacy. To begin with, in so far as the strike *made* McKeon's dismissal an issue, the insurgents *were* successful. Read in this way, it was a message of empowerment; if one made enough noise, one might influence the terms (if not always the outcome) of the debate. Indeed, to the dismay of authorities, the strike fever persisted among city children, as boys and girls organized walkouts over grievances in at least three other schools before the close of the first term.[58] What was more, over the course of the next several years, Chicago youngsters walked out of classes regularly—leading a local journalist to observe that for many Chicago public school children going on strike was as much an autumn ritual as receiving a new pencil case. "The Chicago schoolboy learns the power of the 'strike' from the time he begins to observe what is going on about him," complained the *Inter Ocean*, which suggested that such a child, "born into an atmosphere of industrial unrest" where "in and out of his home the 'strike' is almost a daily topic" of conversation, would inevitably come to believe that organized insubordination was a legitimate means of expressing dissatisfaction. "So in a spirit of emulation he decides upon a 'strike' when the methods of the board of education do not meet his approval."

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[57] "Trustees in Plot, Says Miss M'Keon," *The Inter Ocean*, 14 November 1902, 5.
[58] "School Children's Strikes, Police Called to Stop," *The Inter Ocean*, 20 November 1902, 1; "Haynes School Near a Strike," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 November 1902, 13; "More Pupils go Out on 'Strike,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1902, 4.

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In a photograph taken for the *Chicago Daily News* during the McKeon strike, a group of young protesters stands gathered outside the Jackson School, where broken windows on the lower floor of the building attest to the enthusiasm of demonstrators. Eyewitness descriptions of other strikes suggest that scenes like this were typical. Strikes involving young people, who might be anywhere from five to eighteen years of age, were generally high-spirited events; contemporary accounts describe children shouting, singing, and waving homemade flags and banners as they marched or picketed school buildings. Yet, youthful displays of exuberance notwithstanding, the evidence also suggests that children who boycotted schools or otherwise defied school authorities understood collective disobedience as a substantive act of self-advocacy. It was outrage over incidents of physical abuse or disrespect, or anger at the cavalier way school boards deprived of them of *their* teachers that inspired them to mutiny. Indeed, when children went on strike it was very often as part of a larger campaign of public protest, for in addition to engaging in acts of insubordination, youngsters petitioned school boards, actively sought the support of mayors and city councilmen, and pled their cases to local journalists. "It was an orderly crowd of boys who came to *The Times* office," a Philadelphia paper reported in the spring of 1900 as a pupil strike loomed, "and they meant business." Incensed that the superintendent of their school had been forced to resign, they had dispatched a delegation to the board of education office, hoping to make a case for retaining "the man who made the school what it is." Rebuffed in this good-faith effort, they now sought to avert a full-blown confrontation with authorities by making their grievances public. Nevertheless, *The Times*

explained, “They were, each and every one of them, determined, and they declared that unless Superintendent John Crawford . . . was put back in his position they would leave their classes in a body.”[59]

Young people who participated in these walkouts might express regret for turning to disobedience as a last resort, but never doubt as to the legitimacy of what they were doing. “We appreciate fully the gravity of the action we are now taking,” declared striking high-schoolers in the town of Deer Lodge, Montana, in a 1912 petition addressed to the school board, “and assure all the patrons of the Powell County high school and all the taxpayers of the county that we do it voluntarily and from our own initiative and after mature deliberation.”[60] The firm, but deferential tone of the Deer Lodge petition—in which students justified disobedience while “respectfully” calling upon “the honorable county superintendent and the honorable school board” to reinstate an instructor who had been dismissed for insubordination—was typical of such documents. “We realize that we are not competent to pass judgment upon the motives and legality of your action,” declared another group of teens, in a 1912 letter to their local school board; nevertheless, they defended their decision to boycott the school on the grounds that by “depriving us of a principal highly esteemed and a teacher of more than ordinary value” the board had done them “a great injustice.” In emphasizing how the loss of instructors had harmed them, the students who drew up and signed petitions and letters sought to claim the moral high ground vis-à-vis their relationship to school authorities; moreover, public statements were meant to distinguish the

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[59] ”School Boys Strike For Favorite Teacher,” *The Times*, 7 April 1900, 1. For other examples of this kind of measured self-advocacy, including petitions and attempts to enlist the help of the press and local politicians, see, “San Jose’s High School Up In Arms,” The San Francisco Call, 3 June 1898, 5; “Girl Pupils’ Protest Heard,” *The Evening World*, 3 October 1902, 3; “After the Principal,” *Detroit Free Press*, 25 September 1903, 1; “H.S. Strikers May Go Back to School If They Wish Today,” *The Times Recorder*, 25 January 1912, 10.
[60] “Pupils Strike,” *Detroit Free Press*, 22 September 1903, 1; “Powell County Pupils Strike,” *The Anaconda Standard*, 7 February 1912, 1.

responsible decision to aggressively seek redress for grievances from mere juvenile troublemaking. Following the unrest in Detroit during the Cass School strike, for instance, a delegation from the strike committee sought out a sympathetic reporter in order to explain that the disorderly conduct of some of their classmates in no way reflected the sentiment behind the protest itself. In spite of the violence and property damage—the regrettable work, they emphasized, of a few renegades—the fact remained that their cause was just and that most of the protesters "had always been and will be peaceable."[61]

The pains that some young people took to distinguish their actions from simple lawlessness suggests that they came to school already equipped with a belief that under certain circumstances, disobedience was a legitimate form of civic action; in most of these cases children seem to have taken for granted the right to engage in "mature deliberation" about matters that concerned them, and then to act collectively on such deliberations. Such assumptions, however, were no guarantee that youngsters would be well behaved. This was certainly the lesson that Samuel Smith of the Freeport, New York school board took away from an encounter with angry teens one afternoon in 1912, shortly after sacking a popular principal. Smith, the president of the board, was waiting for a train when he found himself suddenly surrounded by irate boys and girls, who, having delivered a polite letter to authorities earlier that day explaining why they had gone out on strike, now gathered on the platform to harangue him in less delicate terms. According to one account, the young people excoriated Smith—who, according to witnesses, was quite unsettled—even after he had boarded his car and continued shouting until the train was out of earshot. A year later, the school board president in Elmsford, a

[61] "Striking Students Meet With Support Of Alumni," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 9 January 1912, 3; "Police Had To Be Called," *Detroit Free Press*, 23 September 1903, 1.

village in Westchester County, New York had a similarly disquieting confrontation with pupils at his home, when nearly one hundred striking children marched to his doorstep to complain about the firing of their principal and broke several windows when they were turned away.[62] Whether militant children expressed their displeasure by disrupting school board meetings, hanging authorities in effigy, or by pelting school officials with eggs or rocks in the street, there was no mistaking the menace they posed when assembled in large numbers; during the protests at the Andrew Jackson School—where children placed most of the blame for the sacking of Jane McKeon on the principal—it required several uniformed police officers (along with their sergeant and three detectives) to escort the nervous man to his street car through a crowd of some five hundred jeering pupils.[63]

Stories such as these seemed to confirm what many found to be the most disturbing implication of classroom uprisings—that regardless of what motivated children to strike and, indeed, whether their protests were orderly or not, collective disobedience in the schoolhouse was a harbinger of civic unrest and revolution. Anarchy in the schoolhouse, the argument went, was political anarchy writ small and it was essential, if children were to become responsible civic actors, that they be purged of the notion that there existed some inherent right to challenge authority. The *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, warned that, "boys and girls who rebel against municipal school government and are then backed up by their parents are not learning lessons

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[62] "Principal's Dismissal Causes Student Strike," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 8 January 1912, 8; "Principal Out; Pupils Strike," *New York Tribune*, 10 April 1913, 3. For another example of children confronting a school board official at home (in Berwyn, Illinois) see, "Pupils Strike to Retain Instructor," *The Inter Ocean*," 28 May 1912, 5.

[63] "Pupils Refuse to Return to School," *The Courier-Journal*, 22 April 1908, 2; "Principal Guarded From Angry Pupils," *The Inter Ocean*, 8 November 1902, 2; "After the Principal," *Detroit Free Press*," 25 September 1903, 21; "The School Board's Hearing," *The Post-Standard*, 6 October 1913, 4; "Public School Strike Grows Embarrassing," *The Cornell Daily Sun*, 23 April 1913; "5,000 Pupils Strike; Fight Police Here in Gary Protest," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19 October 1917, 1.

that will make them steady, reliable citizens." A cartoon which appeared on the front page of the paper during the height of the McKeon strike drove home this point; in it, two scowling, petulant-looking children—a boy and a girl brandishing "union" buttons—stand astride a desk, books and papers scattered about the floor, while a bust of President Jackson, the school's namesake, observes in horror. Not satisfied with reading, 'riting, and 'rithmatic, youngsters like these, the caption explained, had added the fourth "R" of rebellion to the traditional list of classroom staples.[64]

In condemning schoolhouse insurgencies, the *Tribune* emphasized that it was no advocate for unthinking authoritarianism in education—what it called "the unflinching brutality" of the English system; nevertheless, it suggested, "the petticoated schools of this country" needed "a little starch" lest these small-scale rebellions establish precedents for more dangerous rebellions to come. "We have irreverence and lawlessness enough now. The next generation ought to draw back from our mark, not go us one better." This was the fundamental critique of pupil protests throughout the Progressive Era—that collective disobedience in American classrooms was potentially a rehearsal for political insubordination in the adult world. The spectacle of children organizing and boycotting teachers for riding non-union streetcars "would be amusing if it were not an indication of a very serious state of affairs," cautioned a 1908 editorial in *The Outlook*, which suggested that such protests were, in fact, evidence of a nascent affinity for mob rule. Even as it declared strikes to be a "necessary and legitimate weapon . . . in the hands of adults," a New York paper insisted that combined with "the immature and exuberant impulses of excited or mischievous children" it was quite dangerous, noting that, "no boy who has not learned to obey

[64] "Like Parents, Like Children," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 November 1902, 12; "Nuthin' to Arbitrate," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 November 1902, 1.

authority before he learns to criticize it is likely to grow into a useful citizen." Another critic—this one a Catholic priest from Davenport, Iowa—drew a comparison between striking public school children and the kind of girls who came to class "in short dresses without any sleeves to speak of" to socialize in secret with boys—explaining that like sexual promiscuity, open dissent in the schoolhouse was evidence of moral decay that would, over time, undermine American institutions. Elsewhere, apprehensive commentators described pupil strikes as, among other things, symptomatic of "disrespect for law and for established authority," a corrupting influence on impressionable immigrant children, and evidence that "we are training right here in our public schools future anarchists," while cartoonists depicted striking youngsters as thugs and harridans in the making.[65]

Anxiety about the long-term civic ramifications of strike fever in schools came hand in hand with discussion about who was responsible for fostering the insurrectionary spirit in American school children, and parents, predictably, received much of the blame. One line of reasoning suggested that fathers and mothers had simply become too permissive. In what was a typical invective, a 1903 editorial in the *Detroit Free Press* bemoaned the fact that only a few years earlier, "before the days when the parent had been taught that discipline was destructive to the sweet young life of the child," a pupil strike would have been swiftly "arbitrated" with a liberal application of the harness strap to rebellious bottoms. Somewhere along the line, the argument went, the need to be understanding had replaced a "sound thrashing" as the best

[65] "Anarchy in Schools," *The Scranton Tribune*, 4 October 1902, 2; "Gave Warm Rebuke to School Frats," *Quad City Times*, 3 September 1907, 10; "An Intolerable Tyranny, *The Outlook* (23 May 1908), 134-135; "A Children's Strike," *The Tampa Times*, 14 April 1913, 4; "When Schoolboys Strike," *The Evening World*," 8 May 1913, 22; "Proper Reverence for Law," *The News Palladium*, 23 August 1916, 3; "Pupils' Strike," *The Charleston Daily Mail*, 14 September 1916, 7. For examples of how insurgent youngsters were depicted in editorial cartoons see *The Indianapolis News*, 18 May 1905, 1; *Wilmar Tribune*, 7 February 1912, 3.

corrective to insubordination—a notion that regularly found expression in opinion pieces that either looked back nostalgically on a time when parents were generous in doling out physical punishment or congratulated those who had (as one writer put it) discovered that the "spanking remedy" was "the simple and straightforward way of dealing with the 'school strike' fever" and in editorial cartoons, which depicted responsible adults as "strike breakers" who had no qualms about taking juvenile agitators over their knees or boxing their ears.[66]

Other commentators suggested instead that recurring episodes of collective disobedience in schools constituted evidence that adults were actively corrupting the nation's youth. It was not surprising that youngsters formed unions and went on strike, a Chicago clergyman declared in a 1902 sermon that perfectly distilled this view, explaining that the only reason a "spirit of discontent" had displaced discipline and obedience among schoolchildren was because it already prevailed among their elders—men and women who had grown restive under a host of social and economic grievances. "These things have been discussed before children and incendiary utterances made in their presence." It was reasonable to conclude that after this "long period of sowing," organized rebellions in schools were simply the first of many bitter harvests to come. This view was echoed a few years later at a 1904 banquet for Chicago businessmen. What did it mean, one of the featured speakers asked, that local children habitually walked out of classes to protest policies with which they disagreed? The answer, he suggested, revealed the "appalling situation" faced by authorities. "It means that talk of rebellion and revolt against the law is the

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[66] "To Be Arbitrated With a Trunk Strap," *The Detroit Free Press*, 23 September 1903; Conrad, J.F. "My Views," *The Des Moines Register*, 4 October 1914, 28. For examples of "strikebreaking" adults in editorial cartoons see, *Duluth News Tribune*, 4 May 1905, 1; *Anaconda Standard*, 25 January 1912, 12; *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19 October 1917, 1.

talk of the father and the brother at the fireside at home and that the parents encourage children to disregard the law."[67]

Another line of thought held that inflammatory talk around the hearth was only part of the story and that professional educators were to bear some blame, too, for the persistence of strike fever in American schools. The no-nonsense schoolmaster (who did not hesitate to administer swift beatings to troublesome scholars) was a thing of the past, critics noted sourly, replaced by reform-minded teachers—practitioners of the "new education" one paper called them—who neglected old-fashioned discipline in order to focus on the "feelings" of disobedient youngsters. Never before was the phrase "spare the rod, spoil the child" more appropriate, the argument went, for misguided tenderness only reinforced the notion that under certain circumstances collective insubordination in the form of strikes and protests was both warranted and effective, thus contributing immeasurably to the problem. There was no underestimating, a 1905 editorial warned, "to what extent the schools might be injured by temporizing with mutinous pupils."[68] Even more troubling, according to some, was the fact that teachers were organizing and even going so far as to claim the right to strike for themselves—something that was likely not lost on their impressionable charges. In the wake of the disturbances at the Andrew Jackson School an opinion piece in the *Chicago Eagle* made just such a case, suggesting that while the immediate result of CTF militancy was "school teachers in subordinate positions

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[67] "School Strike as Text," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 November 1902, 15. A two-panel cartoon published in the *Chicago Tribune* during the 1905 pupil strike captured this sentiment exactly. In it, a father is seen handing a rock to his young son, encouraging the boy to join an attack on a wagon in front of a school while the rest of the family—mother, little sister and brother look on approvingly. The next frame depicts the same family, some years later, visiting the boy, now an adult, in prison. "Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined," reads the caption.
[68] "The Pupil Strike," *The Windsor Star*," 22 September 1903, 2; "Discipline the Great Necessity," *The Sacred Heart Review* 34:16 (14 October 1905), 4; "Shall School Discipline Be Maintained?" *The Inter Ocean*, 13 September 1905, 6.

rebelling against the authority of their superiors," the ultimate and more disturbing consequence was, "the extraordinary spectacle of pupils going on strike to compel the Board of Education to retain these same subordinate teachers." One had only to connect the dots, as more than one observer did, to see how Miss McKeon's insubordination, her support of the CTF, and the school strike fiasco were interrelated. As the *Chicago Tribune* put it, "Riotous, contumacious teachers will mean riotous, contumacious pupils."[69]

Arguments like these popped up again and again in the wake of pupil strikes, both as explanations of juvenile enthusiasm for striking and in polemics against teachers unions. In Chicago, a school board member denounced CTF members as either actively or passively complicit in encouraging children to break the law. It was a matter of record, he declared, that many teachers were allies of militant workingmen and that these same teachers, "if they did not openly sympathize with the [pupil] strikers, did not oppose them." There could be little doubt, critics insisted, that as educators throughout the United States aligned themselves with organized labor, radical ideas about the right to protest, and to engage in collective action against authority would migrate into classrooms everywhere, which, one progressive magazine opined, made teachers "morally, if not actually responsible," for large-scale disturbances in schools. "The tactics of organized labor have already caught on with the rising generation," warned a 1913 editorial in the journal *American Industries*, which went on to predict, rather smugly, that educators were setting an example that they would come to regret in the long term. "With the teachers of various cities headed for recognition such as is now 'given by employers associations to trades unions in closed shops' there will presently be some 'jurisdictional' fights between the

[69] "The Force of Example," *Chicago Eagle*, 15 November 1902, 4; "Enforce the Decision," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 November 1902, 12

pedagogues and the youthful exponents of what is 'fair' and what is 'unfair' that will make the old time union clawing matches look like a pink tea."[70]

Were parents actively corrupting their offspring or were they merely indulgent? Were teachers too lenient or had they allowed their own views on the labor question to influence impressionable boys and girls? For contemporary observers there seemed to be no clear answer to the question of just who was responsible for cultivating a protest mentality in American school children; what was certain though, is that when they perceived valid grievances behind school strikes, quite a few adults were willing support defiant young people. Occasionally, men and women acted as outright *agents provocateur* in schoolhouse rebellions, encouraging children to challenge school authorities, rather than simply supporting them in their efforts after the fact—instructing pupils to boycott classes in an attempt to force officials to change policies, or as a way of compelling parsimonious school boards to address health and safety issues in classrooms.[71] In most instances however, grown-up involvement recalled the crowds that came to observe the old-time barring out—with parents gathering on streets near school buildings to cheer boys and girls, or to mock the harried police officers detailed to restore order or rough up truant officers who were scouring communities for pint-size strikers.

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[70] "Seeks Origin of School Strikes," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 May 1905, 2; "The Pittsburgh School Strike," *The Common Welfare*, (17 May 1913), 237; "Unions in Schools," *American Industries* 13:12 (July 1913), 9-10.

[71] In Alton, Illinois, for instance, African-American parents directed their children to walk out of classes in 1908 to protest discriminatory policies in local schools. "Alton Negro Pupils Strike," *Chicago Eagle*, 19 September 1908, 9. For other examples of parents taking an active role in encouraging strikes over health, safety and policy issues see, "School Pupils Strike Till House is Fumigated," *The Anaconda Standard*," 21 May 1907, 2; "Call School Strike on Unsafe Buildings," *The Spokane Press*, 12 March 1908, 1; "Citizens Write Strong Letters About Heeter," *The Pittsburg Press*, 27 April 1913, 2; "Pupils on Strike," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 January 1916, 5; "Mothers Battle Police When Pupils Strike in 4 Schools," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 17 October 1917, 3.

When parents sided with children who engaged in walkouts or who demonstrated for the reinstatement of respected teachers or stood with them as they organized against brutality or other "outrages" in the classroom, they demonstrated a sensibility not unlike that of nineteenth century men and women who assembled around embattled schoolhouses, urging offspring to find stand up for what was right; in both cases, the impulse to encourage youngsters involved in classroom rebellions suggests that supportive adults viewed this kind of public assertiveness as a virtue. Moreover, when they backed insurgent children in disputes with instructors or school administrators, they implicitly endorsed not only the objectives of the protesters, but also the legitimacy of the strategies that children chose to achieve those objectives. A pupil strike in Philadelphia is a case in point. Among the "remarkable" aspects of this walkout, according to one account, was "the presence of a large number of women who [resided] in the neighborhood, encouraging boys and girls in the strike and advising them to stay out" until their demands were met. For these women, the righteousness of the cause—youngsters were demanding that a cashiered principal be returned to his post—validated insubordination. This is not to suggest that acts of mass disobedience were something that parents took lightly; criticisms about coddled youth notwithstanding, mothers and fathers were quick to put an end to strikes that they deemed frivolous. However, when grown-ups believed children had valid grievances, they often approved of walkouts and demonstrations. Explained the proud father of one striking child, parents threw their support behind youngsters who defied school officials because "the young ones seem to know their business."[72]

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[72] "The Strike is Still On," *The Times*, 4 May 1892, 1.

To colleagues who expressed concern about the "anarchistic" tendencies of school children who went on strike, Chicago principal John H. Stehman had this advice—let us not get ahead of ourselves. After all, he reminded them, they had each and every one been anarchists at some point in their lives. Implicit in his observation was the notion that to some degree rebellion was natural—that the impulse to flaunt burgeoning independence, or to willfully challenge authority, was a timeless, albeit sometimes exasperating, rite-of-passage. It was a position, however, that most of his fellow educators were unwilling to entertain. Stehman made his comments in 1903 in the midst of a heated discussion at a gathering of principals, during which other speakers fumed about the hubris of boys and girls who warned teachers not to ride streetcars during transit strikes and proposed a number of solutions to the problem of unabashedly mutinous pupils—ranging from expanding the mandate for corporal punishment in the classroom to enacting laws prohibiting marriage among "weak minded" adults. At a meeting where attendees compared defiant children with murderous gangsters and supported draconian methods for suppressing schoolhouse dissent, Stehman's was a notably moderate position.[73] However, in suggesting that his peers might want to consider episodes of rebellious behavior in their own pasts before dismissing militant youngsters as potential threats to the civic order, he also underscored how conventional attitudes toward child-development had changed since his own generation had traversed childhood.

The language they used suggests that Stehman's fellow principals—like so many other adults—found the very thought of pupil protests outrageous. For children to go out on strike and for their elders to support them was "a base prostitution of childhood" according to a spokesperson for the National Association of Manufacturers—words that caught precisely the

[73] "Learn Anarchy in City Schools," *Chicago Tribune*, 6 December 1903, 2.

tenor of this sentiment. However, it was not just the challenge to order in the schoolhouse that stoked outrage; it was also the assumption that the young were by definition immature and inexperienced and rather than a period of growing competence childhood was to be protected as a time of incompetence. This sentimental view of the maturation process, which had come to make up authoritative commonsense about child development and education by the end of the nineteenth century, left little room for the possibility that "young ones" might "know their own business" or even that in the absence of such knowledge the independent expression of collective self-confidence might in any way be a useful exercise. The suggestion that left to their own devices children without adult oversight were a danger to both themselves and to others was the first step in rendering juvenile misbehavior of every kind socially and developmentally aberrant, and organized protest—even when it was the result of careful, autonomous deliberation—was no exception.[74]

Among the accomplishments of late nineteenth and early twentieth century reformers was the strengthening of the state's authority to enforce laws regulating the lives of its youth. In the process of trying to make childhood safe for children—protecting them from the hazards of the adult workplace, seeing to their health and ensuring access to an adequate education—social activists, child-welfare advocates and educators built an administrative system with expanded power to, among other things, monitor school attendance, regulate behavior in school rooms, and to fine parents or prosecute them along with their offspring when they failed to comply with compulsory education laws and school rules. As a result youngsters who went on strike or who

[74] On the introduction of sentimental, middle class norms into American childhood see Graff, Harvey. *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Mintz, Stephen. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004). For a discussion of how notions of competent youth were displaced by the assumption of incompetency in childhood see Schmidt, James D. *Industrial Violence and the Legal Origins of Child Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chapter 4.

engaged in protests and demonstrations outside of school buildings increasingly found themselves subject to regulations and statutes which were meant to keep them off the streets, in classrooms and towing the line.[75]

The strike that disrupted Chicago schools in 1905 is a case in point. In spite of having otherwise good records, the three boys accused of starting the trouble over the matter of "scab" coal were punished severely, expelled from classes and given sentences in local juvenile institutions. Harry Kerlin, whose straightforward justification for his actions so incensed the city's chief truant officer, was committed the John Worthy School—the juvenile department of the municipal house of corrections. His two comrades were turned over to the Department of Education's Parental School, which had been established five years earlier by the Chicago Board of Education as a closed campus where children who were habitually absent could be kept in long-term detention. It is worth noting that strictly speaking none of the accused were problem children; all of them had acceptable attendance records and "were doing well in their studies until the strike fever seized them" according to one report. Yet, municipal officials were able to interpret the definition of delinquency quite broadly while exercising extensive power to punish youngsters. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the case of the latter two boys, who, in spite of their records found themselves "enrolled" indefinitely in a quasi-military boarding school where the most incorrigible truants and classroom troublemakers in the city were brought to heel.[76] The severity of the sentences passed without comment in local newspapers, which lauded school and municipal authorities for the sending a message to all rebels and would-be rebels that

[75] Steffes, Tracy L. *School, Society, and the State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)

[76] Since the Parental School was ostensibly a school (albeit a special one) run by the Chicago Board of Education youngsters were simply transferred from their neighborhood schools, an administrative process that was somewhat insulated from the limitations of due process and that left the duration of a child's residency open-ended.

obedience to the law was paramount. “It is for the future good of the boy and of the community,” Judge Julian Mack of the juvenile court declared, “that any youngster who throws coal or stones or starts a riot or a strike be disciplined.” Other children were punished for taking up positions on picket lines and for posting placards on buildings giving notice that schools were closed, while parents who kept youngsters at home were fined heavily.[77]

In the wake of the crackdown on schoolhouse insurgencies, the *Chicago Tribune* praised authorities for seeing the light when it came to suppression of pupil strikes, noting that when children first started walking out of classes to protest this or that, city officials seemed dumbfounded—unsure of how to respond. They now, however, understood that subjecting children and parents to “the machinery of the law” was the best was to cure the strike fever in classrooms.[78] Elsewhere, other newspapers echoed these sentiments whenever youngsters disrupted classes, demanding that boys and girls who defied school boards or who questioned the orders of municipal officers should be punished “as severely as the law will permit” or insisting that “too frequent manifestations of youthful disregard for authority call for . . . strenuous repression.” These arguments for cracking down hard on rebellious pupils were two-fold. The primary intent of bringing legal machinery to bear was, of course, to break strikes in progress; the sooner children were forced back to their desks, the better, most critics agreed, for the longer insurgents held out the bolder they became. Implicit in justifications for harsh penalties however, was the suggestion that breaking young people of the *habit* of protesting was equally important. As a California editorialist explained, youngsters who collectively questioned authority were “too young to realize the seriousness of their offense” and thus, were at risk for being

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[77] “Blow for School Strike,” *Chicago Tribune*, 18 May 1905, 2; “Strikes at City Schools End When Parents are Fined,” *The Inter Ocean*, 19 May 1905, 2.
[78] “Enforce the Law*,”* *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 May 1905, 6.

radicalized—a prospect which had long-term civic implications. “The true spirit of insurrection is being fostered in them,” he warned, “and in later life it is sure to make itself manifest in a way that will be inimical to the good of the community.” This alone, he suggested, justified the punishment of rebellious children and their parents to the greatest extent allowed by law.[79]

Over the next decade authorities turned more and more to administrative methods for penalizing insurgent children and discouraging would-be protesters. As schools assumed a greater role in the lives of young people generally—as a hub of social experience as well as a place of learning—isolating fractious students became increasingly effective method for maintaining order. The student athlete who joined protesters ran the risk of loosing his eligibility to participate in school sports; for the youngster who was active in clubs and committees walking out of classes raised the prospect of being cut off from a social life centered in school activities and organizations. Subject to expulsion, young people who presumed to go out on strike found themselves barred from attending all schools in their communities; parents, who faced increasingly harsh penalties for failing to help keep their offspring in line—ranging from jail-time to stiff fines—now grappled with the prospect of appearing before magistrates and school boards to plead for readmittance.[80] To be sure, schoolhouse protests by pupils continued for several decades. There were a few sizable incidents involving clashes between young people and police or truant officers in New York City as late as 1918 and walkouts occurred periodically throughout the country well into the Great Depression. Yet, if the language adults used to describe them is any measure, by the 1920s pupil strikes seem to have generally lost their power

[79] “Punishing the Right Party,” *The Evening Sentinel*, 6 June 1905, 4; “Youthful Anarchists,” *Grand Forks Herald*,” 5 October 1910, 4.
[80] Mintz, 198-199; Schmidt, “Willful Disobedience,” 126, 143.

to provoke, in large part because teachers and municipal authorities refused to treat them as anything other than exhibitions of juvenile misbehavior.[81]

Claims that children who engaged in collective dissent were exhibiting a form of anti-American behavior surpassing mere delinquency lingered. After the United States entered the First World War in 1917, for instance, journalists accused schoolhouse insurgents of pro-German sympathies. In the 1920s and 1930s, others intimated that children who walked out of classes were exhibiting the first stirrings of bolshevism. However, aside from these occasional projections of anxiety, reporting on strikes, along with public discussion of rebellion in schoolhouses, no longer even entertained the notion that striking boys and girls might be apprentice anarchists or younger versions of militant parents. Educators and journalists stopped describing pupil strikes and demonstrations as scaled-down versions of adult protests. In doing so, they recast what children (along with supportive adults) took to be an act of civic self-advocacy as simple insubordination.

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[81] "Pupils Still Strike 5000 Out Here; Face Charge of Truancy," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 22 October 1917, 2; "Madison H.S. Pupils Strike; 8-Hour Day Spoils Fun, they Say, *Palladium-Item*, 8 October 1919, 7; "Teacher Nips Pupil Strike in the Bud, But—," *The Tennessean*, 19 October 1919, 1.

Chapter Two

School City on a Hill: Classrooms as Civic Laboratories

In the summer of 1897 teachers and pupils at Public School 75 in Norfolk Street on the lower east side of Manhattan participated in what was, by all accounts, an exciting experiment in civic education. Here, members of the student body—approximately twelve hundred boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 15 from a neighborhood of predominantly Eastern European immigrants—were declared by school officials to be *citizens* of the school-house, organized into boroughs and wards, and granted the right of self-rule under a system of government modeled after the municipal government of Greater New York City. In the first week of classes, the pupils held caucuses, primaries, and conventions followed by a school-wide general election to choose a mayor, a controller, judges, and a board of aldermen, who, along with a host of youthful clerks, commissioners, and civil servants, would govern the school for the duration of the term under the careful supervision of faculty. "The 'school city' is a serious matter for them all," the *New York Daily Tribune* explained when the summer session ended, "and a brighter, more quick-witted set of youngsters would be hard to find." The *Tribune* highlighted the fact that although the pupils hailed "from the worst quarters of the city," the enthusiasm they displayed in front of visiting dignitaries at closing ceremonies "would have done justice to a political meeting, instead of only an 'exhibition day.'"[1] A multitude of journalists would trek to P.S. 75 that summer to observe

[1] Gill, Wilson. *A New Citizenship: Democracy Systematized for Moral and Civic Training* (Philadelphia: American Patriotic League, 1913), 54-55; Gill, Wilson. *The Gill System of Moral and Civic Training* (New Paltz: The Patriotic League, 1901), 20-21; "The Patriotic League and The Gill School City," *The School Journal* 55:9 (September 11, 1897), 247; "The 'School City,'" *New York Daily Tribune*, 18 August 1897, 5; "Mimic Cities in Schools," *New York Sun*, September 12, 1897, 4.

the workings of the little municipality—describing approvingly, the experience of watching children engaged in an elaborate civic practicum.

Over the next two decades, the notion that school-buildings might be transformed into political incubators—recast, that is, into workshops where future citizens would not only receive a civic education but rehearse the roles they could expect to play as members of the body politic—became a topic of debate in newspapers, magazines, and pedagogical journals. Notably, the Norfolk Street experiment found a receptive audience among urban reformers, social gospelers, woman suffrage activists and good-government crusaders—along with thousands of educators sympathetic to progressive causes. Claims for the efficacy particularly of the principle of self-rule in the classroom struck a nerve with this reform-minded audience. In the twenty years that followed the Norfolk Street experiment, tens of thousands of American children found themselves cast into roles as citizens of their schools, subject to governments that they themselves administered, and that replicated, often in great detail, the organizations and bureaucracies of actual state and municipal governments. As one principal, looking back in 1919 noted, "There is probably no community of considerable size in the United States today that cannot point with pride, or the reverse, to its 'school city' or 'school republic' or tell the story of its experience with such."[2]

As a method of civic instruction, these miniature polities have been interpreted in the context of both progressive school reform and child welfare initiatives—as a mode of social control, for example, realized through the superficial democratization of school discipline, or as a kind of instructive play, aimed at socializing urban youth.[3] For movement stalwarts, however,

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[2] McClure, Worth. "Morals by Rote?" *The School Review* 27:6 (June 1919), 458-464.
[3] Light, Jennifer S. "Building Virtual Cities, 1895-1945," *Journal of Urban History* 38:2 (August 2011), 336-371; Spring, Joel H. *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston: Beacon

child-welfare and the mechanics of schooling were ancillary concerns: those who lobbied most energetically to see self-rule established in the classroom did so with unambiguously political ends in mind. As the originator of the Norfolk Street experiment, Wilson L. Gill explained, "In *school* politics . . . there are not the temptations to swerve from rectitude, there are no pulls bred of money transactions, there is no possibility of loss of bread and butter or of position if one does not carry out the behests of boss or of party. Hence the School City affords opportunity to develop a purity of civic purpose and habits of political honesty that are alarmingly deficient in the adult city and state organizations."[4] Endorsements such as this one were typical. Their attention fixed on the corruption, voter apathy, and partisanship troubles within the civic arena, self-government advocates inverted the rationale embraced by most school reformers that education should be above politics, insisting instead that politics could rise no higher than the standard established in the classroom.

This chapter examines the Progressive-Era preoccupation with child-managed school governments, tracing how it evolved as a movement, and focusing on the relationship between that movement and the progressive aim to create a democratically empowered public. An important ideological element of the progressive crusade to remake American politics, this aim grew out of a conviction shared by political and social reformers that freeing government from the grip of special interests and adapting democratic institutions to the realities of twentieth century life depended in large part on refining the body politic—on transforming a volatile, partisan people into a rational collective.[5] This viewpoint found expression in the writings of

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Press, 1972), 113-120; Kafka, Judith. *The History of 'Zero Tolerance' in American Public Schooling* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 36-37.
[4] Gill, *The Gill System*, 117-118.
[5] Among many progressive thinkers, Leon Fink suggests, it was widely understood that "the people in the rough . . . schooled in a sense of civic duty" would constitute the most effective

self-government enthusiasts, who posited childhood itself as an opportunity to expose future citizens to a prolonged, immersive lesson in applied civics. As the progressive journal *The Arena* explained, it was "not surprising that the [self-government] movement appeals with compelling force to the best minds of our age . . . [for] . . . children who are thus instructed will not go forth indifferent to the grave duties of citizenship . . . they will be independent alert citizens impressed with the moral responsibilities imposed upon them."[6]

Unlike their progressive contemporaries who approached schooling and school administration as politicized objects of reform, self-government partisans saw the school as a *medium* through which substantive and long lasting political reform would be realized. As Gill put it, "Civic awakenings, brought about from time to time . . . are of great value; but as they do not rest upon fixed habit . . . conditions soon afterward decline." The result was an endless cycle of corruption followed by reform followed by a period of complacency out of which new corruption arose. Thus, "permanent, right civic conditions must rest on the right civic habits of all the people." According to the logic of the movement, establishing such habits meant shaping citizens-to-be into exemplary civic actors while they were still young. Self-government advocates believed that. reimagined as a miniature republic, the schoolhouse was the ideal space for such a project, offering a means of perfecting the democratic process through a program of systematic political socialization for American youth.[7]

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body politic. Fink, Leon. *Progressive Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Democratic Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13. On social and cultural efforts to shape such a body politic, see, Mattson, Kevin. *Creating a Democratic Public: The Struggle for Urban Participatory Democracy During the Progressive Era* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998)

[6] "The School-City Movement as a Factor in Civic Development," *The Arena* 34:190 (September 1905), 311-314

[7] Gill, *A New Citizenship*, 28-29.

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The School City was the brainchild of an energetic but unlikely pedagogical innovator named Wilson Lindsley Gill. The son of a successful Ohio industrialist, Gill held degrees from Dartmouth University and Yale University School of Law and had pursued multiple careers prior to his foray into the field of civic education: as an entrepreneur, a civil engineer and as the manager of the family business, a profitable if modest operation in Columbus that fabricated railroad cars and car parts.[8] It was in this latter role, of locally prominent businessman, that he first recognized a connection between education and reform, when in 1887 he sought to establish a program of manual instruction in the public schools. To his dismay, he met with strong resistance from tradesmen, who with the help of local politicians led the ouster of his allies on the school board. Stung by this defeat, he was indifferent to the views of the workers who believed his initiate would strip them of the power to govern education and advancement within their own trades. As he saw it, his plan had been undone by "a few low, selfish ward politicians" who misled tradesmen with the argument that "the trades are crowded enough" and that it was a "mistake to have thousands of boys in schools taught to crowd in too" to pursue their own interests. Thus, he determined that his industrial education scheme had been undone at the polls because the citizens who rejected it—a "mass of unthinking voters," he called them—had been easily manipulated by his opponents. For Gill, the immediate lesson was clear: without "a nucleus of citizens in each community who could easily understand and intelligently back" school reform, efforts to provide the young with a useful education faced an uphill battle.[9]

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[8] "Wilson L. Gill," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 29 (1920), 158.
[9] Gill, *The Gill System*, 17, 35.

Even beyond what it suggested about provincial school politics the skirmish over manual training led Gill to another more sweeping conclusion about Gilded Age democracy, that while Americans were technically self-governing and free to express their beliefs at the ballot box, their involvement in the democratic process had to a great extent been rendered meaningless by chronic civic ignorance, which made most of them little more than pawns for bosses, demagogues, and other political mischief-makers, men who he characterized as "low, selfish ward politicians." Ultimately, what the school-board fiasco revealed to Gill was the need for a more substantive form of civic education, one that went beyond a rudimentary grasp of the structure and history of political institutions—the purely academic approach the subject of government that he concluded did little to develop admirable civic behavior—to encompass a true appreciation for the active, thoughtful practice of citizenship in a democratic republic. Energized by the revelation, he made it his mission to champion the cause of such an education.[10]

As he pursued his project, Gill found himself competing with a host of patriotic organizations, also concerned with matters pertaining to civic education. As Gill took up the cause of civic instruction, the largest veteran's group in the United States, the Grand Army of the Republic, was underwriting a campaign to provide a flag to every schoolhouse in the land—on the premise that children should learn to revere the stars and stripes as they would a holy relic—while as of the late 1880's educators generally were well on their way to becoming influential agents of a muscular American nationalism, introducing oaths of allegiance into their classrooms and incorporating patriotic music and pageantry into daily school routines. After abortive attempts to enlist support from existing patriotic organizations—both the Sons of the American

[10] Ibid.

Revolution and the Daughters of the American Revolution turned down his requests for financial backing—Gill concluded that a new organization dedicated to the advocacy of applied civic education was necessary, and in 1891 he established the American Patriotic League, whose object was "the promotion of the cause of a healthier, nobler, and more intelligent citizenship."[11]

In calling attention to the link between civic instruction and the collective character of the body politic, Gill spoke to what was already something of a commonplace in the late nineteenth century United States—that given the steady increase in the number of immigrants arriving on American shores, and in light of growing disparity between economic classes, a commitment to long-standing social and political mores among the majority of American people could no longer be taken as a cultural fait accompli; rather, such reasoning went, the times seemed to call for a more deliberate approach to civic identity building. This understanding of citizenship education as a rationalized process found expression chiefly in programs to foster loyalty and unqualified love of country in the masses and was nowhere more evident than in the ritualization of patriotic sentiment in public schools. Though a relative latecomer to the discussion that spawned enterprises such as these, Gill was hardly alone in advocating for a more systematic approach to rearing good citizens in schools; his understanding of civics as an *applied* discipline, however, led him to seek something other than the kind of demonstrative nationalism that passed for civic instruction in many late nineteenth century American classrooms. Even more than reverence for the flag, he insisted, what the nation desperately needed was *practical* patriotism, embodied in habits of steady, thoughtful political participation.[12]

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[11] O'Leary, Cecilia Elizabeth. *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 150-193; Gill, *The Gill System*, 19.
[12] Gill, Wilson L. *Young People's Society to Promote Practical Patriotism* (New York, 1891)

Over the next six years Gill devoted much of his energy to promoting the League and its agenda, making connections with educators and public officials throughout the country and gathering endorsements from prominent Civil War veterans and political and religious leaders. Among those who lent early support to the organization as advisory committee members were Ohio governor William McKinley, well-known civil service reformer Dorman Eaton, the social gospel advocate Reverend Josiah Strong, and former Freedman's Bureau Chief, General Oliver O. Howard. Within four years the League boasted chapters in almost every state. Through its magazine *Our Country*—whose contributors included such intellectual luminaries as Edward Everett Hale and John R. Commons—it provided members with a curriculum covering a host of topics from history and political theory to economics and international relations. What distinguished the League from the many "fashionable" patriotic organizations of the day, explained Chicago's *Inter Ocean*, was that unlike most groups, which mistook superficial nationalism for love of country, this "thriving association of American boys and girls" sought, through education, to make truly public-spirited citizens out of impressionable youngsters."[13]

Notwithstanding such largely favorable responses to the League and its work, however, it was hardly the breakthrough in civic pedagogy that its founder aimed for. The *Inter Ocean* likened it to a juvenile Chautauqua Plan—an accessible lecture series focused exclusively on history and public affairs and tailored to a younger audience. Typically affiliated with local schools or churches, chapters were essentially extracurricular study groups, where, under the guidance of a dedicated teacher or pastor, children discussed readings from *Our Country* or listened to lectures on subjects of civic interest. To be sure, members were expected to take an active part in running chapter meetings, and the curriculum featured lessons in basic

[13] "Patriotic League Army," *The Inter Ocean*, June 30, 1895, 34.

parliamentary procedure to help them do so; still, as Gill himself acknowledged, the work remained purely academic. “All the time,” he wrote, “we were searching for ways of having the children learn citizenship by performing the duties of citizenship.”[14]

In February of 1897, Gill found what he had been seeking. This happened during a conversation with a New York City teacher named Bernard Cronson, who was at the time struggling to establish order at a notoriously troubled school in the Bronx where he had recently assumed duties as an assistant principal. A long-time member of the Patriotic League who had managed a successful chapter at his previous post in Manhattan, Cronson was an experienced educator and his frustration was compounded by the fact that nothing in his career thus far had prepared him for the kind of unruliness he encountered at his new post—a school where the recurring presence of a police officer on the grounds testified to a complex, endemic problem. Discouraged, he expressed his frustrations to Gill who offered what seemed to be a counter-intuitive solution: if the children resisted his attempts to govern them, why not give them some responsibility for governing themselves? Already at his wit’s end and apparently with nothing to lose, the beleaguered schoolmaster decided to take Gill’s advice and introduce his disorderly pupils to a modified form of self-rule. Under his careful supervision, the children were allowed to elect a president and officers from among the student body. These young “officials” were then assigned responsibility for assisting teachers with keeping the peace in classrooms and on the school grounds. Miraculously, in less than a week Cronson noted a marked improvement in discipline and, having reestablished order, he soon breathed easier, as the patrolman in the schoolyard became nothing but an unpleasant memory.[15]

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[14] Gill, *The Gill System*, 20.
[15] Gill, *The Gill System*, 20; Stowe, “School Republics,” 939.

For Gill, the apparent transformation of Cronson's pupils was an epiphany: given the opportunity to exercise a small degree of autonomy, the children had apparently risen to the occasion, discarding their recalcitrant ways in order to embrace responsible membership in their little community. The lesson, he believed, was that allowing young people to participate in governing their school had made them good school citizens—pointing them, presumably, in the direction of more responsible citizenship as adults. "In fact," he wrote, "a great part of the one great problem of moral and civic training which had been waiting through the ages was solved in that apparently unimportant experiment."[16] Within a few years, he set his business interests aside completely in order to devote himself full-time to developing and promoting what he described as a "laboratory method" for teaching citizenship to American youth. In the process, he soon became the leading voice of a movement to transform schools into child-governed "cities" or "republics" and schooling itself into nothing less than an apprenticeship for vigilant, aggressive citizenship.

Inspired by the accidental success in the Bronx, Gill went to work refining the improvised approach that had been so effective there. He based his new system on an " ideal American city" and reimagined the schoolhouse as a fully functioning polis. Each room would be designated a ward or borough, and conventional school management under the direction of teachers was to be recast as a simulacrum of rationalized self-rule, in which the children themselves would hold legislative, executive, and judicial offices, as well as supporting administrative posts. Under this system, and in every facet of school life save academics, citizen-pupils would be empowered to regulate their own affairs while teachers would give up their traditional claim on absolute authority in order to help youngsters navigate the dilemmas of

[16] Gill, *A New Citizenship*, 52.

applied democracy. As Gill explained in a 1901 text for educators—the first book-length treatment of the civic laboratory approach—it was "a democratic-republican form of school government . . . modeled on the plan of the government of the city and state in which it [the school] is located, or of some better form of municipal and state government."

Gill called his system the "School City," but the beauty of the method he suggested was that it was infinitely adaptable to the size of the institution and the requirements of educators. A one-room schoolhouse might assume the shape of a relatively uncomplicated political unit—a small village, for example. On the other hand, schools with hundreds of children or more in attendance might be configured as large cities or even states depending on the needs of the institution. In any case, whatever form teachers chose, Gill expected that remaking a school into a democratic polity and allowing young people to take an active role in determining the fortunes of that polity would have a transformative effect. In such a school, he explained, "The child is led to govern himself and to take an interest in government and the welfare of his fellow citizens," and as a result, "a civic conscious and healthy public opinion will be developed through the children's constant co-operation for the general good."[17]

Nowhere in these early writings in which he laid out the rationale behind the School City approach did Gill attempt to ground his ideas in current pedagogical thought; nevertheless, his suggestion that by treating the schoolhouse as a community in its own right adults might train children to work together democratically for the "general good" appeared to share a sensibility similar to that of John Dewey, who had just begun to establish his reputation as a leading theorist in the field of education. In 1897, the same year that Gill began refining his vision of the school as civic training ground, Dewey published *My Pedagogic Creed*, in which he outlined his vision

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[17] Gill, *The Gill System*, 14.

of a holistic approach to education, based in part on an understanding of schooling as a social experience. “I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child’s powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself,” Dewey wrote. “Through these demands he is stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling, and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which he belongs.” If Gill was aware of or influenced by Dewey’s work, he left no record of it, although for a time their names appeared together in articles and on conference programs that focused on alternatives to traditional methods of school management. Yet, there were fundamental differences in what the two men hoped to accomplish.[18]

In emphasizing the important role which schooling might play in the development of a cooperative consciousness, Dewey articulated what would later become a key element of his political theories. “A democracy,” he declared some two decades later, “is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.” As he saw it, a democratic education should nurture in children an appreciation for the diverse experiences, opinions, and talents of their fellow citizens while recognizing the value of collective effort toward common goals. These lessons, Dewey believed, were vital to building a democratic culture and essential for the success of any democratic political system. At the time *My Pedagogic Creed* appeared in print, he had been testing his theories for nearly a year, in his Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, where each child was welcomed into a cooperative learning environment—in his words, as “a member of a community life in which he feels that he participates, and to which he contributes.” It was not the strictly systematized form

[18] “The Chicago Women’s Club Discusses Self-Government in Schools,” *Kindergarten Magazine* 15:5 (January 1903), 309-313.

of political self-rule that would be modeled in School Cities, but, rather, an approach to school management aimed at creating on an intimate scale what his friend Jane Addams called, "a democracy in social terms."[19]

This premise that a truly democratic society was of necessity an interdependent one figured prominently in Gill's thinking as well. "The practice of the Golden Rule is absolutely necessary for the successful conduct of *any* popular government," he wrote, and he spoke again and again of the need to nurture in youngsters an appreciation for the obligations they owed to one another as members of a commonwealth. However, while these convictions were vital to how he conceptualized both citizenship and citizenship education, Gill began with the premise that such democratic reciprocity was fully legitimized *specifically* in the context of the American political process. It was through this process, he argued, that citizens influenced the state which saw to the common good, and he insisted that instilling democratic values in children was indistinguishable from the process of instructing them in how an effective democracy should be managed. Without all the trappings of grown-up government, even the most conscientious attempts at instructive self-rule in the classroom would be ineffective, he warned, "and in so far as any ideas and habits of American government are given, they are harmful, principally because they are false." In his eyes, it was imperative that the school function as a democracy in *civic* terms—its aim, to teach future citizens that the accountability they shared for the general welfare was best expressed in responsible civic behavior, based above all on thoughtful commitment to, and participation in, a rationalized political order.[20]

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[19] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916), 87.
[20] Gill, *The Gill System of Moral and Civic Training*, 23.

To civic reformers convinced that partisanship and boss rule were elemental threats to democracy, a plan for inculcating children with a set of virtuous habits and convictions vis-à-vis their future roles within the body politic could not have been more appealing, and Gill capitalized on this interest, securing an opportunity to test his theory from wealthy New Yorker (and early Patriotic League supporter) R. Fulton Cutting. A member of a number of good government groups and charitable organizations, Cutting was at that moment serving a term as President of the New York Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor, which, among other things, operated a network of vacation schools for tenement children. Although they utilized public school facilities and employed city teachers, these summer programs were privately funded and thus were not subject to Board of Education oversight—perfect conditions for an unorthodox experiment in pedagogy. Intrigued by the civics laboratory scheme, Cutting offered Gill the opportunity to establish a model democracy in the Norfolk Street School for the 1897 summer term.[21]

With support from Cutting, and the endorsement of a formidable contingent of politically influential New Yorkers, including Mayor William Strong and former Mayor Abram Hewitt, Gill "chartered" the Norfolk Street vacation school in July of 1897 as the first School City. After explaining their responsibilities and the organization of their government, Gill guided the newly enfranchised school citizens through the intricacies of holding primaries, followed by a convention to elect candidates for citywide offices. "The children were delighted with the whole system," reported *The School Journal*, and "so enthusiastic . . . that several of the boys made a

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[21] Gill, *A New Citizenship*, 53-57; Stead, William T. "How to Teach Civic Duty to Scholars: A Capital Hint from New York," *Review of Reviews* 16 (October 1897), 382-383. Kenneth M. Gold, "From Vacation to Summer School: The Transformation of Summer Education in New York City, 1894-1915," *History of Education Quarterly* 42:1 (Spring 2002), 28-29. On Cutting's views see, McFarland, *Mugwumps, Morals, and Politics,* 103-104.

house-to-house canvass for votes." Soon they had elected a mayor, a city council president, and council members—one boy and one girl from each classroom or ward—judges, and a sheriff, and had filled a host of clerkships and administrative positions, including commissioners of police, sanitation, and health. These officers, a teacher told the *New York Tribune*, were far more diligent in their duties than she or any of her colleagues would have thought, adding that they had practically universal support from their classmates.[22]

For six weeks the child-citizens of the Norfolk Street School City governed themselves under the watchful eyes of teachers and, as word of the experiment spread, increasingly curious members of the press, making it both a pedagogical triumph and a public relations coup. "There seems little doubt," *The New Education* predicted, "that the plan is destined to be a power in the future." Echoing this assessment, the reform journal *Municipal Affairs* praised it as an "eminent success," as well as reassuring evidence that schools were moving beyond "the sharpening of intellect" to "shape the character of children." There was no mistaking the import of the laboratory method, the editors of *Public Opinion* concluded, noting that, "certainly the children of the east side have shown themselves capable of self-government." While some professional educators questioned the day-to-day practicality of the method—primaries, general elections, city council meetings, court sessions, committee hearings— "*When* is all this to be done?" one incredulous teacher wanted to know—observers were unanimous in praising its potential. On returning home to England after a sojourn in the United States, journalist and social reformer William T. Stead pronounced it, "Quite the most original and promising project I came across in

[22] Gill, *A New Citizenship*, 54-55; Gill, *The Gill System of Moral and Civic Training*, 20-21; "The Patriotic League and The Gill School City," *The School Journal* 55:9 (September 11, 1897), 247; "The 'School City,'" *New York Daily Tribune*, 18 August 1897, 5; "Mimic Cities in Schools," *New York Sun*, September 12, 1897, 4.

my hurried visit to the New World," and he commended the idea to those on both sides of the Atlantic who understood the "urgency . . . for quickening and educating public interest in the careful and continuous discharge of civic duty."[23] Excerpts of Stead's essay, along with other equally enthusiastic reports, were reprinted in both educational journals and progressive political reviews, while the story appeared in dozens of popular magazines and newspapers nationwide. As a result, even as the Norfolk Street experiment ended some observers began to talk about the School City not simply as a unique pedagogical technique but as a particularly promising innovation in civic reform.

No sooner had the first School City dissolved—its "citizens" becoming mere pupils once again as the summer ended—than the New York City board of education began exploring the feasibility of introducing the Gill system into a handful of public schools for the regular academic year on a permanent basis. At the same time, educators across the United States—in, among other places, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Columbus, St. Paul, and Buffalo—expressed interest in the civic laboratory idea, and Gill found himself much in demand, as both a speaker on the subject of school self-government generally and as a consultant to teachers and principals looking for advice on how to manage "cities" and "republics" in their own classrooms. From his perspective, the response was astounding; the well-publicized success at Norfolk Street, he would later write, "resulted in the adoption of the plan by many schools in every direction, and of course there was no way of keeping track of them."[24]

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[23] "The Gill School City," *The New Education* 11:3 (March 1898), 51; "Vacation Schools," *Municipal Affairs* 2:2 (June 1898), 318; "The Gill School System: A New Educational Idea," *Public Opinion* 23:9 (August 26, 1897), 278; "Mimic School Cities in New York City," *Primary Education* 5:10 (December 1897), 415; Stead, "How to Teach Civic Duty to Scholars," 382-383;
[24]"New York's School Cities. Pupils in Schools to be Taught Rules of Government upon an Original Plan," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 19, 1897, 26; "Gill School City Rules," *New York Tribune*, March 31, 1899, 7; Gill, *The Gill System*, 23.

What was perhaps the most important boost to Gill's School City crusade, however, and instrumental in providing it with the momentum of a nation-wide movement, came three years later, by way of an invitation from Major General Leonard Wood of the United States Army, who had been reading stories about Gill's work in the news. Newly appointed as Military Governor of Cuba, Wood had come to the conclusion that reforming Cuban education was an important step toward creating a stable, republican form of government on the island, and toward that end he asked Gill to help establish a program of civic instruction, similar to the School Cities that had been gathering attention in the states. "I know how to clean Cuba and clear out the yellow fever," Gill recalled Wood saying, when they first met, "and I believe that with the process you worked out with the immigrant children in New York City you can take care of the citizenship question." It was an opportunity for Gill to test his method on a large scale and in late 1900 he arrived in Cuba to assume the office of General Supervisor of Moral and Civic Training.[25]

His tenure in Cuba was short, but by the time Gill returned to the United States in late 1902 he had helped Cuban teachers to establish some 50 School Cities in Havana alone, as well as several smaller communities across the island—work that received much favorable press at home. As a result, he was able to resume his campaign to see practical civics instruction installed in American classrooms, capitalizing on his now enhanced reputation as an agent of civic education reform and armed with a stack of testimonials that testified to the benefits of his method. "I can say without reserve that the experience in Cuba justifies the strong endorsement of the School City plan," wrote General Wood in a typical statement. "It tends to develop the child's idea of his civic responsibility and, I believe, will send him out from school much better

[25] Gill, *A New Citizenship*, 60.

fitted to assume the duties of a citizen of a republic." The aim of this invaluable approach to civic training, explained the Secretary of Public Instruction, Enrique José Varona, "is to wake up, in the children, the conscience of solidarity, that is, not only a personal, but a community conscience, and not only a knowledge of the importance of cooperating for the general good, but a knowledge of *how* to do it." These testimonials, along with other equally positive assessments of his efforts in Cuba, soon appeared in promotional literature that Gill published under the Patriotic League imprint as part of what was still a largely personal crusade for self-government in schools, but which had, by the time of his return, gained a momentum of its own. [26]

During the months that Gill was abroad, interest in the civic laboratory method and in self-government for schoolchildren generally had continued to grow. A year before he began his assignment with the army, *The American Monthly Review of Reviews* pointed to new School Cities in Omaha and Denver, along with a number of smaller communities, as evidence of particularly strong enthusiasm for the movement among educators west of the Mississippi—a phenomenon still evident when Gill came home and that one Idaho teacher attributed to the independent spirit of Westerners on the whole. Young men and women who had been raised to self-reliance in open spaces had less tolerance for the "absolutism" of the school-house than their eastern peers, she surmised, and thus, were particularly susceptible to "the charm of organizing, legislating, and executing laws for themselves." On the other hand, the idea made less headway in the South where educators gave it a lukewarm reception. "I doubt the advisability of placing the serious duties of government, in so great a measure, into the hands of immature pupils,"

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[26] "The School City," *Proceedings of the Chicago Conference for Good Government and the Tenth Annual Meeting of the National Municipal League* (Philadelphia: National Municipal Leagie, 1904), 290; Varona, Enrique Jose. Extract From Report to the Military Governor, in Gill, Wilson L. *A Social and Political Necessity* (New Paltz: The Patriotic League, 1902), 25.

School Superintendent H.C. Gilbert, of Florence, Alabama declared at the 1901 meeting of the Southern Educational Association. "By my method *duty* is the covenant word . . ." Nevertheless, even in the South, there were pockets of interest in urban areas and civic laboratories appeared in cities like Norfolk and Birmingham.[27]

"The Gill School City is already in successful operation all over the country," reported the June 1902 issue of *Gunton's Magazine,* a political journal, which predicted that given its practically universal appeal, "it . . . will, without question, be eventually a part of our future education." In a follow-up to its 1897 piece on the Norfolk Street School City, *Public Opinion* noted that since that first experiment, "this movement has been steadily developing in many cities," and suggested that reports of "most satisfactory results" in Cuba were indicative of its great potential. While in Havana, Gill had been keeping abreast of these developments and once home again, he threw himself back into the cause, beginning in Philadelphia, where he arrived, in the winter of 1902-1903 to "do some missionary work" with school officials. A civic laboratory had been operating in the city for some four and a half years and there had been talk on the school board about expanding the program. To that end, Gill met with the board president and offered his services as consultant, with the result that Philadelphia had a resolution allowing for the introduction of self-government into all its school-buildings before the winter was out. Over the next few months Gill made several follow-up visits to the city, and by July, the number of self-governed schools there had risen to twenty-two—each, according to the *Philadelphia*

[27] Shaw, Albert. "The School City—A Method of Pupil Self-Government," *The American Monthly Review of Reviews* 20:6 (December 1899), 684; Slocum, Jane M. "Good Results in Idaho," in Gill, Wilson L. *A Social and Political Necessity: Moral, Civic and Industrial Training* (New Paltz: The Patriotic League, 1902), 71; Gilbert, H.C. "Pupil Co-Operation in Government—Benefits and Limitations," *Southern Educational Association: Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Tenth Annual Meeting* (Richmond: Southern Educational Association, 1901), 172.

Inquirer, a "complete [duplicate] of a model municipal government with its variety of officers, from the Mayor and judges to constables and tipstaffs."[28]

Illustrated with a photograph of a School City court in session, the *Inquirer* account was typical of the reporting on self-government in classrooms, which focused on the faithful duplication of civic apparatus in schools. In stories with titles such as "Practical Politics for Infants" or "Cities Ruled by Tots," newspapers, popular literary journals, and digests emphasized the novelty of juvenile "mayors" and "tipstaffs" as well as the goings on in legislative sessions, committee hearings, and election campaigns.[29] The complexity of these early School Cities varied widely; the shape of child-managed government in any given school depended largely the aims of individual educators and the resources on which they could draw. The Superintendent of Public Instruction in Denver, Colorado, for example, noted with satisfaction that in some of his schools "great municipal organizations are imitated by practice," while on the opposite end of the spectrum, the School City at the Snohomish Indian School near Everett, Washington was, according to an administrator there, "a small and tentative" undertaking.[30] However, whether ambitious or simple, the civic practicum as envisioned by Gill was meant to affect a real transference of power from teachers to the "citizens" of the schoolhouse.

"The school city is not a mimic government," Gill insisted, "but a miniature government." To those who argued that it was impossible for children to actually administer

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[28] "School Children Experts at Running Little Cities," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 13, 1903, 2.
[29] "Practical Politics for Infants," *The Saturday Evening Post* 172:42 (14 April 1900), 941; "Cities Ruled by Tots," *The Washington Post* (10 September 1905), 124.
[30] Aaron Gove to SCC, May 25, 1903, Box 76, Folder 3, National Self-Government Committee Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library; Charles M. Buchanan to SCC, August 10, 1903, Box 1 Folder 1, National Self-Government Committee Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. (*Hereafter, NSGC Papers*)

these miniature polities given the statutory authority that teachers held in the classroom, he suggested that the relationship between the government of a School City and the faculty was similar to the relationship between a county or town and the state, or between a state and the Federal government. In the same way that local officials were answerable to state legislatures, or that the autonomy of the states was circumscribed by the Constitution, students, through their own governments, might see to their own affairs while remaining accountable to school authorities. Thus, the point of the exercise, as one educator explained, was not to give schoolchildren "supreme power" but to give them "real power and, consequently, real responsibility."[31]

A few months after wrapping up his work with the Philadelphia Public School Board in 1903, in a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Municipal League, Gill made a passionate case for this approach to civics instruction. "A practical method," he began, "which may be used in a wholesale way in all schools, for students of all ages, which makes it possible and easy for teachers to lead their pupils to cultivate a good conscience, to govern themselves wisely and to cooperate for the general good, will do for the cause of morality, education and human welfare, what the steam engine and electrical apparatus have done for the cause of manufactures and human comfort." Hyperbolic language notwithstanding, the paper made a strong impression, with audience members praising Gill and his ideas—he had "put his finger on the weak spot . . . in the American public school system," suggested one listener—and the League, an influential forum for progressive political activism, unanimously passed a resolution

[31] Gill, *The Gill System of Moral and Civic Training*, 129.

calling for its Committee on Instruction in Municipal Government to devote increased attention to secondary and elementary schools.[32]

The paper—the first on the topic to be delivered at a national venue—outlined in concise terms the logic behind the movement for self-rule in classrooms. American democracy, Gill declared, was in crisis. Hijacked by party bosses and special interests, and riddled with corruption, democratic institutions were largely ineffective because the American people were no longer in control of the political process. What was more, citizens themselves had been, by-and-large, complicit in creating this state of affairs, for, as Gill explained, "a great mass of the educated people do not go to the primaries, and they neglect their municipal duties. That leaves the effective political voting power in the hands of those who are comparatively uneducated. They, in turn, are organized and manipulated by men who make a business of municipal politics."[33] In juxtaposing the political apathy of the "educated" against a relatively "uneducated" population in the thrall of political bosses, Gill made use of tropes that were commonly deployed throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to justify the disenfranchisement and political marginalization of citizens based on race or social status or, conversely, as a rationale behind compulsory voting laws and get-out-the-vote campaigns, aimed at "civic slackers" and calculated to increase upper and middle-class presence at the polls. Here, however, he implicitly rejected the notion that the majority of citizens were either culpably indifferent to their civic

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[32] *Proceedings of the Detroit Conference for Good City Government and the Ninth Annual Meeting of the National Municipal League* (Philadelphia: National Municipal League, 1903), 15; Gill, Wilson L. "The School City," in *Proceedings of the Detroit Conference*, 236-246.
[33] Gill, "The School City," 238-239.

duties or congenitally incapable of carrying them out, arguing instead that blame for declining civic virtue across the social spectrum rested squarely with the schools.[34]

The problem, Gill insisted, lay not in the curriculum *per se*, but in the authoritarian methods that teachers typically used to manage their pupils. A relic of the pre-revolutionary past, this "vestige of monarchy which lurked in the government of the little country school" had made its way into the modern American educational system, and as result, American children from all backgrounds were *socialized* in classrooms to submit without thinking to higher authority—ultimately, to act as subjects of a government that was as far as they were concerned an abstraction, rather than as free citizens of a republic. "From the primary school till the man graduates from the university, he is made to feel and know that he has simply to obey and nothing further to do with the government of himself and his fellows," Gill wrote. "Old-fashioned school government is monarchy in which the teacher endeavors to rule by means of his conscious and arbitrary authority, and the political results are as we see them in the municipalities of the United States." None of this, he explained, had been a problem in years past, when "boys and girls went to school only two or three months of the year" and "the American citizen's character was built in the open country under the influence of their parents, the heroes of the Revolution." Now, however, children spent significantly more of their time, "in

[34] Sven Beckert, "Democracy and Its Discontents," *Past and Present* 174 (February 2002), 116-157; John G. Sproat, *The Best Men: Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics. The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 184-205; Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1914,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Liette Gidlow *The Big Vote: Gender, Consumer Culture, and the Politics of Exclusion, 1890s – 1920s,* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

great swarming buildings, under the weight of a heavy, crowded, intellectual curriculum" under the influence of "masters who themselves have been trained as subjects, not as free men." This, he concluded, "is what has made government by the bosses possible, and has, in large measure, already wrecked the republic, so far as the municipalities are concerned." Having thus drawn a direct connection between authoritarianism in the classroom and feeble civic spirit in the body politic, Gill then assured his audience that, "the recognition of the cause of the evil is almost a declaration of the only remedy, which is to systematically train the individual to wisely cultivate his own conscious and be governed by it, rather than that of the teacher; to cooperate with his fellows for the common good, rather than for mischief; to form the habits of law and order, rather than those of anarchy."[35]

The notion that despotic schoolmasters had unintentionally nurtured an impotent citizenry, and that the systematic practice of self-rule in the classroom would revive virtue in the American body politic while purifying the democratic process, was *the* key element of pupil self-government ideology—a touchstone that Gill would return to again and again as he preached the benefits of the democratized school, and that would become a common refrain in contemporary endorsements of the self-government agenda. At a 1904 banquet held in Gill's honor in Philadelphia, one speaker described the School City as a dramatic move to "clear up" the problems presented by partisanship and machine politics "not by the slaughter of bosses or the disintegration of parties but by the education of the citizen," declaring that, "the whole effort is in line with a great movement by which the seat of authority has been slowly shifted in the state from the monarch to the people." Similar interpretations appeared in progressive journals. *City and State*, for example, suggested "that this sort of training would speedily prove fatal to the

[35] Gill, "The School City," 240, 244.

assumptions of political autocrats," while the monthly *Social Service* praised the Gill system, concluding, "If our public schools generally should organize the 'School City' the problem of municipal government would be solved in a single generation."[36] Even those who were less effusive with their praise were supportive of the spirit behind the self-government movement. Innovations in education were hardly in short supply, another reform journal pointed out, and evaluating the merits of the civic laboratory idea—which was well on track to becoming "the thing" in contemporary pedagogy—called for a conscientious effort to "distinguish sharply between what is plainly genuine and valuable and what is merely attractive, entertaining or diverting." Nevertheless, the editors were confident in predicting that, "if by means of these mimic cities the boys and girls, now in school, can be trained up to a higher standard of civic virtue and responsibility than now prevails, the republic will have cause to bless the memory of the man who first devised them."[37]

Nourished by positive press and cultivated carefully by Gill, enthusiasm for the civic laboratory method grew steadily in the half decade following his return from Cuba. According to a 1905 report published by the New York City Board of Education "some form of school government by pupils" had become the "vogue" among teachers everywhere.[38] In addition to New York and Philadelphia, new School Cities materialized in Boston, Syracuse, and

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[36] "The School City Movement as a Factor in Civic Development," *The Arena* 34:190 (September 1905), 312; *Social Service* 11: 3 (July 1905), 82

[37] "School Cities," *The Intelligence* 17:15 (October 1, 1897), 589-590.

[38] "Mimic Cities in Schools," *The Intelligence* 17:15 (October 1, 1897) 593-594. At one New York City school, for example, elections for mayor, city attorney, aldermen and three judges were held every three months. The mayor then appointed two chiefs of police—one boy and one girl, who, in turn, selected their deputies—and a Health Commissioner, who likewise appointed his deputies. Judges appointed a clerk of the court and Aldermen elected a President of the board. "Democracy in Education: or The School City in Practical Operation," *The Arena* 35:198 (May 1906) 516-517; *Seventh Annual Report of the City Superintendent of Schools* (New York: Department of Education, 1905), 451.

Minneapolis, as well as in smaller communities such as Worcester, Massachusetts and Sonoma, California. A tireless worker with a talent for self-promotion Gill embraced the part of missionary, travelling throughout the United States, addressing civic organizations, women's clubs, and educators—often combining these speaking tours with school visits and teacher consultations that almost unfailingly produced new "cities" and "republics" in classrooms wherever he went.[39] In the summer of 1905 he formalized these efforts under the auspices of a new organization, which he dubbed the National School City League, recruiting former *Social Gospel* editor Ralph Albertson as Secretary and political reformer George H. Shibley as Treasurer.

In his capacity as president of the League, Gill remained chief spokesman for the School City; however, the fact that he was able to enlist the help of Albertson and Shibley—the former a clergyman with a penchant for utopian ventures, and the latter a co-founder and president of the National Federation for Majority Rule and a man who wrote prolifically on the subject of good government—points to the widely appealing idealism of his hypothesis, which linked democratic vitality to systematic political socialization. Almost a decade later, looking back on the evolution of his idea, Gill would describe it as, "the inviting threshold of an era of new political morality." His assessment echoed the views of many observers, who believed that the real value of this approach to civic instruction could be found in its potential to catalyze a democratic renaissance

[39] In the autumn of 1905, for example, Gill helped teachers organize model governments at 15 schools—in Hartford, Connecticut; Maynard, Salem, Boston and Haverhill, Massachusetts; Staten Island; East Willis, Long Island; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; and Norfolk, Virginia, and he addressed the Pennsylvania Federation of Women's Clubs, which subsequently issued an official resolution to "appoint a School-City Committee . . . to cooperate with Mr. Wilson L. Gill for the introduction and efficient supervision of moral and civic training into all the schools of the state." "Progress of the School-City Movement," *The Arena* 35 (Feb. 1906), pp. 202-203; "New Jersey 'Fed'," *New York Tribune*, May 9, 1907, 4.

in American politics. “One generation of boys thus trained to self-government under conditions free from commercialism,” declared *The Outlook*, “would, when they become men, banish political corruption and civic apathy.” Similarly, at *The Arena*, which endorsed the School City as “the perfect flower of democracy in methods as applied to the expanding mind of childhood,” the consensus was that nothing “promises to so successfully meet and overcome civic indifference and subservience to bossism.”[40]

The suggestion that Americans might be able to fully rehabilitate the promise of popular government—that nothing more than thoughtless school-keeping had weaned the general public away from the habits of militant republicanism that had served it so well in the past, and that these habits could be reestablished through a process of systemic political socialization—had wide appeal, due in no small measure to its attractive essentialism. In 1906, publisher B.O. Flower praised Gill as an “apostle of democracy in education” who, gifted with a “statesman’s vision,” perceived clearly the “supreme problem” confronting democratic government in a modern nation: namely, that even if they provided a solid intellectual foundation, schools “failed to develop the civic spirit, or to make the young self-governing, independent, and initiating forces . . . in public life.” After visiting several School Cities in late 1907, writer Lyman Beecher Stowe came to much the same conclusion, writing that Gill’s insight was akin to that of a “great physician and prophet” who, “while scholars, statesmen and reformers throughout the world are dealing with the symptoms . . . has seen the very root of civic disease.” A decade after the success at Norfolk Street, the School City was no longer an experiment. “The enfranchisement of the children is only a little less important than the enfranchisement of their elders,” insisted

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[40] Flower, B.O. “Wilson L. Gill: The Apostle of Democracy in Education,” *The Arena* 195 (February 1906), 176-182.

journalist Frank Parsons, another convert to the self-government gospel who, like Stowe, had witnessed firsthand the wonders of the "true public spirit" as practiced by youngsters and who predicted that, "the future historian may rank the school city as one of the most important developments of republican institutions." Enthralled by the notion that an active, vigilant polity was being shaped in classrooms, observers like Parsons and Stowe saw in the civically literate schoolchild a reason for optimism regarding the future of democratic practice in the United States.[41]

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For all the interest that his laboratory method of civics instruction generated, and for all the praise that he received as a prophet of self-government, Gill was not the first to suggest that for better or for worse, the classroom was an inherently powerful influence on the political acculturation of the nation's youth. Nearly fifty years earlier, in words that would have fit easily into most any progressive endorsement of the civic laboratory idea, the great advocate for the common school, Horace Mann, had argued that "as the fitting apprenticeship for despotism consists in being trained to despotism, so the fitting apprenticeship for self-government consists in being trained to self-government," a sentiment that reverberated through much of the pedagogical literature of the nineteenth century.[42] Not always the unthinking autocrats that Gill claimed them to be, nineteenth century American educators were quite alert to the possibility that childhood encounters with authority in the shape of the schoolmaster might influence how young

[41] Flower, B.O. "Wilson L. Gill" 176; Stowe, Lyman Beecher. "Youths' Republics," *Normal Instructor* 17:4 (February 1908), 7-9; Parsons, Frank. "The School City," *The Century* 71:3 (January 1906), 496-497.
[42] Massachusetts. Department of Education, and Massachusetts. Dept. of Education. Ninth Annual *Report, Together With the Report of the Secretary of the Board*. (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, 1846), 95.

people would come to understand both their relationship to civil authority as adult citizens and the roles they would be expected to play in the future as independent political actors.[43] What made Gill's method novel, however, was that it called for recreating in detail, the workings of adult civic life

On the subordinate status of the pupil, earlier pedagogues were largely in agreement; there was no question that the schoolmaster's authority should be absolute. Yet, while they rejected unequivocally anything that smacked of full-blown self-rule in the schoolhouse, they were hardly advocates for indiscriminate autocracy, and the notion that school life might serve as a practicum in democratic civics was not without precedent.[44] In an 1856 treatise on classroom management, for example, schoolmaster Jacob Abbott insisted that to allow children some degree of self-regulating autonomy was to cultivate in them an essential aptitude for independent thought and action, and he suggested that the instructor who undertook such a project would witness an astounding transformation. "In a short time," Abbott wrote, "his school will become *regularly organized, as a society, or legislative assembly*. The boys will learn submission to the

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[43] For contemporaneous examples of this awareness see, Ira Mayhew, *Popular Education For the Use of Parents and Teachers and for Young Persons of Both Sexes* (New York: Daniel Burgess & Co., 1852), 326; L.W. Savage, "Address Before the Girard Teacher's Institute," *Pennsylvania School Journal* 12:2 (August 1863), 64; "The Ideal School is not a Monarchy," *The Educational Weekly* 2:2 (January 12, 1884), 8-9. Of antebellum educators Jean Baker notes that, "most recognized that the internal environment of the nation's schools inculcated public behaviors along with supplying factual information about the political system." Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 89.
[44] Frederick S. Jewell, *School Government: A Practical Treatise, Presenting a Thorough Disscussion of its Facts, Principles and Their Application* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1866), 51; N.W. Taylor Root, *School Amusements; or, How to Make School Interesting* (New York and Chicago: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1885); 187. See also, Jacob Abbott, *The Teacher: Moral Influences Employed in the Instruction and Government of the Young* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), 53; James Block *The Crucible of Consent: American Child Rearing and the Forging of a Liberal Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 224.

majority . . . they will learn system and regularity; and everything else that belongs to the science of political self-government." It was a position at odds with what Gill would later insist was the politically problematic wisdom of old-fashioned school-keeping; nevertheless, it was not unique, and nineteenth century pedagogical texts were peppered with injunctions to "incite . . . pupils to efforts of self-government," or to manage one's classroom as if it were an "embryo republic." Yet, while a number of nineteenth century educators preached what would become a fundamental conviction of the civic laboratory philosophy (that given the opportunity to practice praiseworthy civic behavior in the classroom, children would almost inevitably mature into praiseworthy citizens) their vision of the schoolhouse as an incubator of democratic consciousness was based on different assumptions about what constituted meaningful instruction in self-government.[45] Absent from these endorsements is any suggestion that such an approach should equate to an imitation of, or an initiation into, the world of adult politics. Appreciation for the "system and regularity" of democratic government, along with the capacity to take a meaningful part in such government, were, rather, evidence of self-actualization and, as Abbott implied, if indeed the school took on the characteristics of "a society, or a legislative assembly" it was a process organic to the emergence of an independent, rational intellect in children themselves.

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[45] Abbott, *The Teacher,* 58; Root, *School Amusements,* 176. For contemporary accounts of how self-government philosophies were applied in schools, Enoch C. Wines, *How Shall I Govern My School?* (Philadelphia: W.C. Marshall & Co., 1838) and MacMullen, John. *Self-Government in Schools* (New York, 1880). More than theorists, Wines and MacMullen, it should be noted, were well-regarded educators, both headmasters of schools where they put their theories to the test. Carl F. Kastle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 80-81; Block, Chapter 9. Howe, Daniel Walker. *The Making of the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 9, 159-160.

This understanding of the school as a site of democratic socialization was informed by the conviction that fully realized civic maturity should combine self-restrained agency with an understanding of the need for informed consent to legitimate authority. The aim of any classroom exercise in self-rule then was to nurture rational, disciplined citizens—obedient to be sure, but also intellectually equipped to assume responsibility for their obedience, fully prepared to distinguish between the authority of institutions which made and enforced laws and their own constitutive authority upon which the legitimacy of those laws and institutions rested. To that end, educators argued that it was the task of the teacher to furnish pupils not with a structure to govern their own affairs but, rather, with opportunities to impose, as rational individuals, structure upon themselves.

Under a well-managed system of classroom democracy, explained N.W. Taylor Root in an 1885 book on school keeping, "there is, perhaps, as *little* of the *form* of government as is possible." Indeed, details of organization mattered little; what was important was that the teacher, once he or she had made the decision to allow children some latitude in governing themselves, "treat them as beings capable of judging, to some extent, between right and wrong . . . [entrusting] to them the power of deciding . . ." The object in giving youngsters the opportunity to wield such power, Root suggested, was that in doing so they would learn to grapple with questions of justice and to reconcile conflicts between individual rights and the collective good—in other words, they would learn first-hand about the real dilemmas faced by a self-governing people. Another advocate for this autonomy-under-instruction approach, Emerson Elbridge White, cautioned readers of his 1893 text on school management not to confuse any regulatory system of "prohibitions, bristling with penalties" for substantive self-government. In so far as the former was little more than a method of "hedging the pupil's conduct," it did

nothing from either an individual or a social perspective to prepare children for fully realized self-rule. Rather, White argued, "the discipline of the school must call into play self-restraint and self-direction . . . the pupil must be made, as fully as possible, a law unto himself," not, he explained, to "act each according to his 'own sweet will,'" but in order to be brought to a mature understanding that "there are common rights and interests in a school which call for self-denial and mutual cooperation."[46]

In suggesting that day-to-day school-house life might serve as an exercise in communally responsible independence, or that the child of the well-run classroom should be, practically speaking, a "law unto himself," these educators intimated an understanding of self-rule based on the assumption that political self-government was ultimately a collective expression of individual virtue. To groom the young for the civic responsibilities of citizenship, then, was to develop this virtue—what White represented as an aptitude for "self-denial and mutual cooperation" in the service of the "common rights and interests" of one's fellow citizens. The implicit lesson of this approach to applied civic instruction was that self-rule encompassed more than the opportunity to participate in an abstract political process; rather, it was, by definition, a demonstration of substantive authority, vested in the body politic and made possible by the independent, self-regulating capacities of the citizens themselves. The aim of such an education was to encourage the development of democratic virtues, which was to be distinguished from promoting familiarity with organizations and institutions through which these virtues were realized collectively.

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[46] Root, *School Amusements*, 174-175; Emerson Elbridge White, *School Management: A Practical Treatise* (New York: American Book Company, 1893), 167-168

The notion that school-life served as a rehearsal for political life was hardly new to American educators. Indeed, similar visions of a kind of schoolhouse republicanism informed the work of a few of Gill's progressive contemporaries. In the mid-1890s, for example, Chicago Principal John T. Ray concluded that his elementary school pupils would benefit from some form of hands-on experience with self-rule. Aiming for a method by which they might "be taught their duty to each other, and their duty to the school," Ray eschewed the administrative system of self-rule that characterized the School City—young children, he insisted, were "too immature in their judgment, and too inexperienced in deliberative action" to understand, much less operate "the machinery of government" in any meaningful way—and looked instead to "more dignified old Roman terms" of simple civic responsibility. To that end, children in each room at his John Crerar School elected a classmate to be their "tribune," an ombudsman-like officer who fielded complaints and reports of misconduct, arbitrated disputes and acted as an advocate for the class in dealings with teachers. Thus, under the guidance of a leader they had chosen themselves, children were encouraged to solve on their own the problems they faced in their classroom "communities" before appealing to the authority of their instructors. In keeping with the Roman model, citizenship implied both privilege and responsibility: citizens were chosen "from among those who exert a constant influence for the best welfare of the school" and "accorded all possible liberties about the school."[47]

While Ray acknowledged the civic implications of his methodology, he described his approach to self-government not as a tool for introducing the young to political citizenship *per se*, but rather as a means to help them become conscientious, reliable human beings. The child,

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[47] Shaw, Albert. "The School City—A Method of Pupil Self-Government," *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 20:6 (December 1899), 682-684; John T. Ray, "A Plan for Pupil Government of Schools, *Popular Educator* 16 (April, 1899), 346-347.

he explained, was "to be a citizen of a democracy where the people are self-governing and self-regulating, and he should therefore be educated in a school democracy that he helps to regulate and govern." However, he continued, "pupils cannot learn to be self-governing if never to be *trusted*." At the nearby Hyde Park High School, Principal C.W. French—an admirer of Dewey—adopted a similar philosophy, and although the system there *was* modeled after a municipal government he emphasized that the exercise was not "for the sake of keeping order from day to day but for the more important purpose of developing the right qualities of . . . social character." According to both Ray and French, nurturing civic-mindedness in the young was ultimately a matter of encouraging them to exercise socially responsible self-restraint.[48] As principals of large urban schools, both men believed that some formalized, democratic structure was necessary in order to foster an aptitude for self-rule in their students. Yet, while the emphasis they placed on systems was a departure from earlier thinking on juvenile self-rule that called for "little of the *form* of government" in classrooms, their assertions—that granting limited autonomy to a student body was not simply a tool for maintaining day-to-day order, that practical instruction for self-government would be ineffective if children were not to be trusted—echoed the nineteenth century view, which equated civic maturity above all with self-mastery.

The successful "city within a city" at Hyde Park and the idealized quasi-Roman system that Ray had developed at his John Crerar Elementary (both of which predated Gill's Norfolk Street experiment by a year) inspired other Chicago educators, and by 1899 a dozen schools in the city described themselves as self-governing. Meanwhile, an even more elaborate enterprise was underway just east of Ithaca, New York, at a self-governing reformatory known as the

[48] Ray, "A Plan for Pupil Government," 346; Shaw, "The School City," 683; "The Chicago Woman's Club Discusses Self-Government in Schools," *Kindergarten Magazine* 15 (Jan, 1903), 310.

George Junior Republic. Established as a summer retreat for needy youth, the Junior Republic was the pet-project of William R. George, a New York City businessman who spent his spare time haunting the tenement districts and studying the street children he encountered. Hoping to help rehabilitate the hardest of these youthful hard cases—and recalling fondly his own rural upbringing—he hit upon the idea of bringing them to the country for a few weeks each year and in the summer of 1890 the first cohort of about fifty children arrived outside the village of Freeville, where George had obtained the use of a dilapidated farmhouse to serve as a dormitory. Over the next few years and with the support of charitable institutions in New York, George was able to increase the number of youngsters he brought to The Freeville Farm each summer. However, in spite of this success he was dismayed to find that open spaces and wholesome activities alone were not enough to transform his charges into responsible young men and women as quickly as he had hoped. Indeed, he began to wonder if the carefree atmosphere he offered them, combined with the abundant supply of food and second-hand clothing provided by local farmers and churches, was doing more harm than good, writing that, "I felt certain that [the children] were claiming charity as a right; that each day they lived under that system they were being pauperized." The solution to this problem, he decided, was to make them earn at least a portion of their keep, and in the summer of 1894, he instituted a new policy, which required them to work for any clothes they received.[49]

The notion that aid to the needy might be harmful if not secured through some form of service in return, was not particularly original; late nineteenth century philanthropists and reformers had been worrying about the corrupting effects of charity, long before George recast

[49] Jack M. Holl, *Juvenile Reform in the Progressive Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971); William R. George, *The Junior Republic: It's History and Ideals*, (New York: Appleton & Company, 1910) 15.

digging ditches and laying down roads as character building exercises. However, in demanding that the children work in order to enjoy all the material benefits of membership in the little community, George did more than transform an act of altruism into an economic exchange; rather, his policy was the first step in recasting The Freeville Farm as experiment in self-rule. Believing both that his strategy had stirred a latent work ethic in the youngsters and that the desire on the part of some to get ahead of their peers by working harder made them proto-capitalists, he decided to create an independent "economy" for the farm. Soon, only the most basic necessities (the plainest meals and simplest lodging) were provided free of charge; anything beyond this, residents were expected to earn. Moreover, the farm began issue its own scrip so that instead of simply exchanging work for goods, the boys and girls would be paid wages, and allowed to decide for themselves how best to invest or spend their earnings. To facilitate this, George established a bank where children were encouraged to deposit these earnings and where ambitious ones might borrow funds to set themselves up in business; the entrepreneurially minded among them, George suspected, would make fine merchants. Imagining life on the farm as an extended lesson in commerce and economics led him at last to a somewhat Lockean conclusion: that as the children developed an appreciation for hard work and began to recognize the connection between effort and the capacity to accumulate wealth and property, they would inevitably come to understand that a strong, effective government was the best means for protecting the fruits of their labor. He called this his "God-given idea" and when boys and girls arrived for the 1895 season, the farm—renamed The Junior Republic—had a new government. The enterprise was so successful that before the summer ended George decided to keep it operating year-round.[50]

[50] George, *The Junior Republic*, 64.

Within a year observers declared that the seasonal colony for wayward youths had evolved into an almost perfectly realized example of civic responsibility expressed through democratic government. Washington Gladden, for example, returned from an 1896 visit pleased to report that citizens of the Junior Republic (most of whom, he pointed out, hailed from strongholds of boss rule and patronage) had embraced the value of hard work and good government in Freeville; these youngsters had "caught the idea—quite a number of ideas" that had escaped so many prominent citizens in the republic of grown-ups. The following year in *The American Journal of Sociology*, John R. Commons suggested that ultimately, the Republic was an answer to "the most fundamental practical problem of sociology—the education of personal character for both individual and social responsibility." Although Commons believed that the economic realities of citizenship at Freeville—the need to earn wages in order to support oneself—amounted to "a system of indirect coercion" his assessment of the civic situation was overwhelmingly positive.[51]

For Commons, evidence of effective self-rule at Freeville was to be found in the orderliness of its citizens; impressed with how easily children (many of whom, he noted, had been written off as perennially delinquent) took to being regulated by a government in which they felt a stake, he was apparently prepared to overlook the imperfections of that government in practice. "Here," he explained, "the youngsters apprehend the inside rationale of police, courts, and law, namely, the protection of the community." As a result, it was "difficult to see how anything but a true sense of the dignity and responsibility of citizenship can be fostered by it." The author of an article appearing in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and*

[51] Washington Gladden, "The Junior Republic at Freeville," *The Outlook* 54:18 (October 31, 1896), 781; John R. Commons, "The Junior Republic," *The American Journal of Sociology* 3:3 (November 1897), 281, 294.

Social Science was also taken with these more authoritarian elements of civic life—necessities, he suggested, in a community whose citizens were "of the most unfavorable parentage, education, and environment." Managed by the youths themselves, this disciplinary apparatus exemplified "the governmental parts" of the model Republic and, moreover, illustrated the utility of the enterprise. "The experiment is a most interesting one in the direction of applying the American idea of self-government to the control of boys and girls, many of whom have been pronounced incorrigible; and because the success met with in the enforcement of good conduct affords much encouragement to those who believe in the truth and efficiency of that idea."[52]

Observers like Gladden and Commons excused the Junior Republic's emphasis on the coercive functions of government as a logical outgrowth of its mission to reform young people who had been identified as troublesome. In doing so they seemed willing to accept *ipso facto* the forfeit of older approaches to practical instruction for civic virtue—typified by White's 1893 injunction not to confuse self-government with a self-administered regulatory system—making little distinction between an education in applied civics and a practical exercise in law-abiding behavior. It was this that enabled them to equate "the dignity and responsibility of citizenship" specifically with an appreciation for the rationale behind the police power of the Republic and made it possible to describe "the American ideal of self-government" as an efficient means of "control" that, when replicated among children might produce well-behaved citizens.

Critics of this approach pointed out that whatever its strengths as a system for reforming troubled youth, the Republic was pedagogically flawed as a method for teaching civic responsibility. In a 1908 treatise on education, for instance, the head of the Psychology

[52] William I. Hull, "The George Junior Republic," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (July 1897), 79.

Department at the Boston Normal School, Colin Scott, reminded his readers that giving young people an opportunity to administer the machinery of a democratic republic did not inherently produce an understanding (or any real appreciation) of democratic principles. It was not that the authoritarian aspects of the juvenile state were troubling in and of themselves, Scott argued, it was that all forms of government commanded powers of coercion. What distinguished a true republic, however, was that in theory at least these powers were expressions of genuine public authority. Thus, what was troubling about the experiment in self-rule at Freeville was that while they were indeed being exposed to applied instruction in American government, youngsters at the Junior Republic were not being taught how to govern themselves democratically but were simply learning to exchange their collective compliance for the opportunity to participate, on a limited basis, in democratic theatre. As Scott explained, "in so far as the coercive aspects of the George Junior Republic are concerned, it is an illusion to suppose that it has evolved either a government of the people or by them." An exercise in political self-rule such as the one devised by George might teach children how government worked, and even that such a government could be helpful but, "without the substitution of something more educative than its exaggerated economic and legal features, [it] does not form a good model for the democratic American school to imitate."[53]

Having outlined his misgivings about attempts to duplicate the civic atmosphere of the Junior Republic in the schoolhouse, Scott pointed to both the Gill plan and the Ray system as evidence that this was precisely what *was* happening. It mattered not whether they were based on the administrative machinery of the contemporary state or the trappings of a quasi-Roman hierarchy; in either case, he warned, "the focus of attention is still occupied with government

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[53] Colin A. Scott, *Social Education* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1908), 74

functions rather than with broad social activities." Other educators expressed similar misgivings about the emphasis on regulations and law-enforcement. "It might work well in a reform school of boys or young men," wrote one skeptic of the civic laboratory, "but to make police out of little girls and boys and attempt to govern a school by the methods of city government does not commend itself to my judgment."[54] In a letter to the Citizen's Committee the principal of a Manhattan grammar school expressed similar reservations. It was troubling, he wrote, that formal systems of co-operation in schools equated the idea of government itself to an "organized force" to which citizens were expected to answer.[55]

Fiercely protective of his brainchild, Gill often bristled at this kind of criticism, insisting that any similarities between the School City and juvenile self-rule at Freeville were superficial. Where skeptics like Scott observed a shared preoccupation with conformity and the regulatory functions of government, Gill saw two very different approaches to socialization for civic life, arguing that the economically competitive ethos that informed the idea of citizenship in the Junior Republic was far removed from the cooperative behavior he hoped to encourage through his civic laboratory method. Yet even as Gill sought to differentiate his vision of the democratized schoolhouse from self-government as practiced in the Freeville colony compared to the carefully moderated republicanism advocated by nineteenth century educators, what he called for suggested a comparatively circumscribed notion of political self-rule.

It was a commonplace among teachers like Abbott and Root that socializing the young for civic life meant helping them to mature into thoughtful civic actors; given the opportunity to become self-regulating individuals—each child a "law unto himself" as White would have it—

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[54] Scott, 75.
[55] C.D. Fleming to Frank Kiernan, April 16, 1912, Box 2, Folder 9, NSGC Papers

youngsters, they argued, would invariably learn to govern themselves collectively. This was what Abbott was driving at when he described the spontaneous transformation of thoughtfully empowered schoolboys into an informal legislature. As Gill saw it, however, there was no development of true civic consciousness without acculturation to the conventions of an indisputable political order. "There are many devices for getting the attention of children to right ideas," he acknowledged, "but when it comes to the matter of teaching right moral practice, including citizenship, there can be one right way, and only one right way . . ." Unlike other methods of instructive self-rule, he explained, the civic laboratory provided an ideal indoctrination to "pure democracy" precisely because it "paralleled" a grown-up government and was, therefore, an introduction to "correct civics."[56]

While not all self-government enthusiasts shared Gill's commitment to replicating the organizational machinery of real-world cities and states in classrooms, most were comfortable with his civic arithmetic, in which legitimate civic agency—what he called "pure" democracy—was assumed to be the analog not of cooperation *among* autonomous citizens who made up the body politic but cooperation *between* the body politic and an autonomous government whose authority over its citizens was absolute. As one supporter explained it, self-rule in the classroom would "manifest to him [the pupil] the interdependence of citizen and office-holder." Establishing such a foundation for civic engagement would, "root out all forms of selfish citizenship and supplant instead a more wholesome regard for the general good."[57]

In so far as he posited self-government as a tool for introducing children to the idea of collective responsibility in democratic action, Gill echoed the theories of educators who had

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[56] Gill, *A New Citizenship*, 85.
[57] M.A.C. to Frank Kiernan, September 1910, Box 1, Folder 7, NSGC Papers.

earlier recognized how classroom experience might contribute to the development of civic virtue. Yet, the movement that had coalesced around his ideas was not, strictly speaking, focused on helping children to mature into self-regulating republican citizens; rather, its aim was to lead the young to embrace something akin to a code of respectable civic conduct, becoming, as one self-government partisan put it, "habituated to performing the legitimate duties of the citizens of a democratic state." As more and more schools adopted some form of self-government, the question of what these duties were precisely was left for teachers and principals to determine. Few expressed interest in helping children to develop the kind of civic virtue espoused by republican pedagogues—a virtue, that is, which presupposed a mature capacity to judge for oneself where one's legitimate responsibilities lay. Rather, intent on inculcating children with praiseworthy civic habits, self-government advocates gradually displaced a nineteenth century concept of civic socialization, focused on nurturing individual initiative and democratic voluntarism in favor of a method that aimed principally to make future citizens into orderly civic actors.

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Among those who approved of William George's work at the Junior Republic was Richard Welling, an anti-Tammany crusader whose fascination with the news coming out of Freeville was largely informed by his own struggles against boss-rule in New York City. The son of a prosperous Philadelphia merchant, Welling, like his college friend and classmate Theodore Roosevelt, had enlisted in the cause of good government soon after leaving Harvard, settling in Manhattan to practice law while serving a mugwump apprenticeship of sorts with such influential figures as newspaperman E.L. Godkin and reformer Carl Schurz. A founding member of the City Club and a leader in campaigns for Civil Service reform and ballot reform, Welling

had a reputation as a fierce opponent of political machines and special interests. If his years of work in this arena had taught him anything, however, it was that the crusade for honesty in government was not merely a battle against urban bosses and dirty money, but a seemingly endless struggle against widespread public indifference as well; corruption in late nineteenth century New York politics, he would recall in his memoirs, was "almost like a machine gifted with perpetual motion," so little resistance did it meet from majority of citizens.[58]

In Welling's view, political corruption was simply a symptom of a complacent body politic. Only working men and immigrants could be counted on to vote, turning up at the taverns to take their marching orders from the heelers. Too absorbed with his own affairs to devote much time to his civic duties, Welling believed, the educated man was not much better since he typically turned a blind eye to the activities of the bosses and heelers and was less likely to vote than his social inferiors. Inspired by the reports of a thriving democratic government managed by youngsters at Freeville, Welling began, early in the century, to think about the public schools as a means of disrupting this civic complacency. What he saw in the success of the Freeville community was a means of purging civic life of corrosive self-interest. In the spring of 1903, he began a systematic canvass of school superintendents throughout the country, asking them to describe the state of civics instruction in schools under their purview. Making good use of his reputation as a reformer, he also wrote to several prominent New York educators, looking for input on civic education generally and on the usefulness of self-government as an instructional

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[58] Richard Welling, *As the Twig is Bent* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), ix, 54; Welling, Richard. "Pupil Self-Government as Training for Citizenship," *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting* (Winona: National Education Association, 1911), 1006; McFarland, *Mugwumps, Morals, & Politics,* 88-89. Kevin P. Murphy, *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, & the Politics of Progressive Era Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 67.

tool; in his diaries he recorded meetings with men who he had identified as experts in the field—and described himself as being "filled with enthusiasm" for a new project, aimed at shaping schools into instruments of political reform. That summer, in an address to the annual meeting of the National Education Association—just a few months after Gill's paper was presented to the National Municipal League—he made his case for the widespread adoption of hands-on citizenship training in American schools.[59]

Established in 1857 as the National Teacher's Association, the NEA was an influential forum for discussions about school management and curriculum. Welling had maneuvered his way onto the agenda with the help of Harvard President Charles W. Eliot, who he knew from his own undergraduate days and who was at the time was serving as president of the organization.[60] In his paper, Welling began with the suggestion that while he had no credentials as a professional educator, he had, nevertheless, a compelling reason for being there. "It may be presumptuous for one who is not a teacher to prescribe for teachers the proper method of instruction in a subject so important as civics and good citizenship," he said, "but we who take part in political campaigns have a long-standing quarrel with you, the instructors of youth, because in this great department your work is not better done." Most educators, he complained, approached civics as "merely teaching the rules that govern the organization and form of government," and the result was typically a citizen who could do little more than "state glibly the functions of various officers" but who possessed almost no inclination to *act* in the political arena beyond casting a perfunctory ballot. "The politicians plow and sow and harrow and fertilize and look after the crops throughout the year," he told them, "and on election day the citizen voter bears a hand with the

[59] Welling Diary, Richard Welling Papers, New York Public Library
[60] Charles W. Eliot to Richard Welling, March 5, 1903, Box 1, Folder 1, NSGC Papers; Eliot to Welling, March 27, 1903, Box 1, Folder 1, NSGC Papers.

reaper and assists at the gathering of such crop as the politician has left to be gathered. This, of course, is the crux of the whole situation."[61] As Welling saw it, the only antidote to widespread civic lethargy was to socialize the young for active engagement with the political life of the community. "The new generation must be imbued with a new spirit of civic patriotism," he declared, and the members of his audience and their colleagues, "above all others," were uniquely equipped to accomplish this. Citing the Junior Republic and the School City as examples of successful juvenile self-rule, he urged all educators to "teach the machinery of government by some form of applied civics."[62]

In calling for a program of hands-on civics instruction, Welling echoed the thesis of Gill's Municipal League paper—that the root cause of dysfunction in democratic institutions could be traced back to a detached body politic, and that only a renewed commitment to civic vigilance on the part of all Americans could correct the slide into complacency. Whether the people had failed to execute their civic responsibilities because they had been rendered passive in autocratic classrooms (as Gill argued) or they were (as Welling suggested) simply too absorbed in their individualistic pursuits to attend to their civic duties, the ultimate cause of political malaise in the United States, according to both men, was that the public itself had become indifferent to public affairs, and the two were in complete accord on what they described as the self-evident solution—to inoculate the public against civic apathy by providing future citizens with a substantive lesson in the value of participation.

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[61] Welling, R.W.G. "The Teaching of Civics and Good Citizenship in the Public Schools," *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-Second Annual Meeting* (Winona: National Education Association, 1903), 98, 101
[62] Welling, "The Teaching of Civics and Good Citizenship."

Attendance for his session at the NEA meeting was poor but before the summer was out both the *Journal of Education* and *The School Journal* had reprinted his paper—publicity that brought letters from educators across the country, expressing enthusiasm for his applied civics agenda. Encouraged by this response he began to shift more of his attention to the issue and in 1904, with the support of other prominent New York reformers, including publisher George H. Putnam and sociologist Samuel McCune Lindsay, he established the School Citizens Committee (later renamed the National Self-Government Committee) to research and promote hands-on civics instruction.[63]

Welling's vision for the organization was that it become the "recognized clearing house for all matters relating to pupil self-government." Work on the ground would be carried out by "a force of expert field agents" deployed "to cover every county in the United States" while the New York office would handle policy, finances, and "a vigorous publicity campaign, through the press and the magazines."[64] To a limited extent, he accomplished much of what he set out to do and before the decade was out the committee was a driving force for the movement, which, up until that time had drawn its momentum solely from Gill's efforts to promote the School City method. Although the proposed network of "field agents" never materialized, Welling cultivated relationships with a small group of sympathetic teachers and administrators—mostly based in New York—who gradually coalesced into an informal stable of public advocates for pupil self-government. Much of the day-to-day proselytizing work of the committee, meanwhile, fell to a few dedicated staff members, along with Welling himself, who in his capacity as chairman of the committee became second to Gill the most prominent spokesperson for the cause.

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[63] *Journal of Education* (58:4), 16 July 1903, 81-82; *The School Journal* (67:10), 19 September 1903, 265-266; Welling, *As the Twig is Bent*, 92-93.
[64] Undated Typescript, Box 1, Folder 3, NSGC Papers.

For the next several years, Gill and Welling worked in parallel, toward what was, for all practical purposes, much the same goal—the former travelling around the country, addressing teachers and organizing school cities, while the latter focused on fundraising, promotion, and surveying educators in order to compile data on self-government in schools across the United States. Beginning in 1909, however, Gill began to take issue with what he saw as an aloof stance on the part of the School Citizen's Committee, his correspondence suggesting that he had begun to feel sidelined. In a letter written that July to journalist Lyman Beecher Stowe (who, two years earlier had pronounced Gill a "prophet of democracy in education" but had since joined Welling's organization), he complained that the Committee had gained the backing of "a large community of business and professional men, to raise money to promote the cause," yet, "with a thousand dollars or more in the bank . . . cannot use a hundred or even one dollar of it, to assist the originator and leader in the movement . . . the result of whose work is the foundation on which the work of the committee is based." Indignant, he pointed out that in spite of the considerable resources the committee had at its disposal, he himself remained the only one doing work on the ground.[65]

These expressions of discontent make it clear that he had become alarmed by the way the School Citizens' Committee—which was, from its inception, a more active organization than his own School City League—was taking ownership of the self-government agenda. His concerns were not without merit. In the summer of 1909 for instance, he learned that the Committee was underwriting a series of lectures at the New York University on self-government in schools and had failed to include him on the program. "I think the least we can do for him is to inject him into that course for one lecture at least," Stowe told Welling, after a meeting with the indignant

[65] Gill to Stowe, July 6, 1909, Box 1, Folder 3, NSGC Papers.

Gill. What was more, Welling seemed indifferent to the fact that Gill was expending a sizable part of his own fortune—more than $25 a week—in the service of a cause they were both passionate about. "I may be glad some time in the future should your committee help me carry my expenses," Gill wrote in a letter to Welling that year, noting that he had, since the previous fall, spent well over a thousand dollars on his work—which prompted Welling, who was "not making any promises" regarding money, to chide him for being "very rash" in spending such a sum.[66]

In keeping Gill at arm's length, Welling was not merely being parsimonious. Indeed, when one self-government enthusiast offered to provide financial backing specifically to underwrite Gill's work through the School Citizens' Committee—Welling showed no interest. Rather, his reluctance to enter into a full partnership reflected his ambivalence about Gill's claim that there was "only one right way" to bring applied civics into the classroom. His feelings on this matter were apparent in a 1909 opinion piece he wrote for *The Outlook*, in which he described the aim of the committee to have pupil self-government adopted throughout the United States. He and his colleagues, he explained, had chosen to focus their efforts on promoting the School City method, "from no desire to limit the movement we wish to initiate to a particular device but because it appeared to us after investigation as best embodying the basic principles of self-government and supervision." The committee believed that "theoretically" the best way to teach children the basics was to expose them to the civic machinery they would encounter as adults. "We desire, however, to be open-minded in the matter, and should be glad to espouse any

[66] Gill to Welling, June 9, 1909, Box 1, Folder 2, NSGC Papers; Gill to Welling, March 3, 1909, Box 1, Folder 5, NSGC Papers; Stowe to Welling, July 9, 1909, Box 1, Folder 5, NSGC Papers.

method could it be shown better to apply these fundamental principles than does the School City."[67]

This lukewarm endorsement captured the tenor of the committee's ongoing correspondence with educators. Incoming letters and survey responses made it clear that while many teachers, principals, and school superintendents were interested in self-government, they were, on the whole, less committed to duplicating the administrative apparatus of adult governments—a key element of the Gill method. In fact, shortly before Welling's essay appeared in *The Outlook*, the Dean of the Columbia University Teacher's College wrote to one of Welling's colleagues on the committee to say that while he supported the committee's agenda he had reservations about endorsing any one system of self-government over another. "I am confident," he explained, "that the School City can be made effective just as I am sure that other devices can be made effective." In a letter to Welling sent just weeks after the essay was published, the Associate Superintendent for the New York City Department of Education, Andrew W. Edson, offered an even harsher assessment. "I know you are interested in the work," he wrote, "and I do not wish to see a mistake made in endorsing any plan that has the objectionable features that Mr. Gill's plan has." Most troubling, he believed, was the preoccupation with politics and government machinery, which was characteristic of the civic laboratories he had observed.[68]

Edson was no hidebound critic of practical citizenship training and, indeed, insisted that he admired Gill personally and respected his motives; he was, however, skeptical of those who touted the School City as a panacea for civic malaise. As he saw it, student government was

[67] "School City Methods," *The Outlook* 91, (April 3, 1909), 777-778
[68] Jason E. Russell to Leonard McAneny, January 20, 1909, Box 1, Folder 4, NSGC Papers; Andrew W. Edson to Welling, April 5, 1909, Box 1, Folder 2, NSGC Papers.

above all a useful strategy for bringing order to the classroom—more effective than physical coercion because it taught children to happily cooperate with their teachers. "It seems to me that the principle aim in school government is to train pupils to self-control and to prompt and willing obedience," he explained in a 1908 *Journal of Education* article. The point of allowing the child to participate in school government was to bring his or her sympathies into harmony with the aims of the schoolmaster, he argued, making self-rule a more palatable (and ultimately more enduring) means of imposing order than whipping or humiliating disobedient scholars, and indeed, he posited, pupil self-government as a step toward rendering corporal punishment obsolete. Having made a careful study of several self-government methods, he supported the Ray Plan precisely because it eschewed the complex apparatus of "cities" or "republics" and, unlike the Gill method, claimed no overt civic purpose. "All that business . . . is tomfoolery, from my point of view," he wrote, in a 1910 letter to Welling's executive secretary. [69]

Edson's endorsement of the Ray system, on the grounds that, "its keynote [was] pupil cooperation in school government in which self-government is the prominent feature—moral suasion the governing force," echoed the sentiments of many of his fellow educators who seemed to view exposure to self-rule in the classroom as more than anything a useful strategy for establishing a culture of collective self-regulation. In letters and reports teachers and principals described their experiences "disciplining with student government" or praised self-rule as a "well-developed plan for school discipline" and for its effectiveness in teaching children "obedience to authority without regard to its instrument." After observing a half dozen "fairly representative" institutions in 1909 a California principal noted that in spite of their many

[69] "Corporal Punishment Crusade," *Journal of Education* 88:15 (April 9, 1908), 395; Andrew W. Edson to Frank Kiernan, March 30, 1910, Box 1, Folder 7, NSGC Papers.

differences self-governed schools shared two common aims: first, to help children become responsible moderate adults and, second, to give them a practical exercise in government and good citizenship. "Of these," he wrote, the character aim should by all odds be called the primary or more important one, and the other the secondary aim."[70]

More so than Gill (who saw tradition-bound intransigence wherever teachers failed to acknowledge the advantages of his civic laboratory method), Welling was disposed to give credence to the opinions and experience of professional educators.[71] Among the things he learned from them was that the idea of self-rule continued to meet with resistance in some quarters because in the eyes of many teachers, the kind of systematic civic socialization that Gill endorsed (and which remained synonymous with pupil self-government) came at the risk of making classrooms unmanageable. As a Berkley, California principal explained to the Citizen's Committee, the greatest hazard of introducing youngsters into any system of self-government, was that "unless the whole problem is carefully managed, the students will finally come to feel that they are a law unto themselves."[72] Overcoming these concerns depended upon convincing skeptics that teaching children to become militant citizens was in no way the same as legitimizing dissent or endorsing a presumptuous attitude vis-à-vis authority; even some of his

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[70] Edson to Kiernan, March 30, 1910; Brewer, John M. "Some Plans for Student Cooperation in School Government," *Educational Review* 37 (May 1909), 519-525; Madeline Brazer Survey Response, ND, Box 82, Folder 2, NSGC Papers; "State School News," *Northwest Journal of Education* 24:8 (April 1912), 373; Frederick B. Thompson Survey Response, ND, Box 82, Folder 2, NSGC Papers.

[71] One indication of his appreciation for teachers as *professional* stewards of civic training was that seeking to enhance his own credibility as a civic reformer addressing questions of pedagogical practice, Welling enrolled at NYU and graduated with a Master's degree in education.

[72] G. Walter Monroe, January 1910 Survey Response, Box 79, Folder 3 NSGC Papers. For other examples of this viewpoint among educators, see, Abbie C. Knight, 1912-1913 Survey Response, ND, Box 81 Folder 1; Charles F. Lodor ,1912/13 Survey Response, Box 85 Folder 6; William Kottman, 1912/13 Survey Response, ND, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC Papers.

staunchest supporters within the teaching profession, Welling would recall some time later, had first to be persuaded that allowing children to have a voice in school government did not produce youngsters who were "forever talking about their rights" but rather, that it helped them to become "serious and orderly" people.[73]

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Although newspapers and popular magazines continued to depict school cities and civic laboratories as curiosities, by the early 1910s student government was no longer a novel idea; rather, it had gained significant traction, both among professional educators who found it useful as a classroom management technique and among civic and social reformers who saw it as a potentially powerful tool for influencing the development of future citizens. Indeed, according to the May 1909 issue of the *Educational Review* the only thing on which pupil government boosters differed was the question of to what extent student government should replicate the forms of government that prevailed in the adult world. Wilson Gill, predictably, continued to be the most vocal proponent for meticulous reproduction of a full-fledged political system. Without the framework of a recognizable *American* government, he argued, children "became accustomed to practices which unfit them for correct practices in adult life." Other approaches to participatory civics instruction taught "false ideas of American citizenship and government" thus "depriving the children of the pleasures and benefits of learning to govern themselves as American citizens."[74] As we have seen, most educators were less committed to the machinery that figured so prominently in Gill's vision. However, the language used both by educators and

[73] Welling, *As the Twig is Bent*, 98.
[74] Gill, *The Gill System of Moral and Civic Training*, 20, 23-24, 127; Gill, *A New Citizenship*, 84; Brewer, "Some Plans for Student Cooperation," 520.

civic activists used when describing the school as civic laboratory suggests a shared understanding of student government as an instrument of socialization.

From the start, Gill had criticized alternative approaches to teaching the principles of self-rule, arguing that these other systems were "but a poor means for maintaining order in a school, without the incentive of its being in imitation of a grown people's government." However, Gill's intransigence on the matter of organization begged the question: what exactly might a facsimile of "a grown people's government" look like at a moment in history when the very nature of democratic participation and civic power in the United States—the influence of political parties, for example, the administrative authority of government, and the nature of popular politics—was in flux? A speaker at the 1904 Meeting of the National Municipal League—the Reverend Thomas Slicer—seemed to offer an answer, when he suggested that ideally the civic laboratory anticipated the progressive government of the future rather than duplicating government as it existed. "The charter of the School City is apt to be better than the charter of the city in which the child lives," he explained, and indeed, "accomplishes at once what the National Municipal League has sought to accomplish, by making a model charter which should . . . be a body of law for any city." In another speech, to the New York City Board of Education, Slicer suggested that it was the equivalent, of training horses—noting that, "In the past colts were broken in one day by being hitched to a wagon. Nowadays colts are educated to the harness by being taken young. This same principle is applicable to our schools."[75] The child-citizen in other words, was being groomed for a new kind of civic adulthood.

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[75] Thomas R. Slicer, "The School City as a Form of Student Government," *Proceedings of the Chicago Conference for Good City Government and the Tenth Annual Meeting of the National Municipal League* (Philadelphia: National Municipal League, 1904), 284-285; "School Heads Approve Pupil Self-Government," *New York Times*, April 18, 1906,

Reverend Slicer was one of many self-government enthusiasts who believed that introducing some form of hands-on civic instruction into schools might serve not simply as a method for introducing young people to specific democratic processes—the conventions of casting an American ballot, for example, or the elements and procedures associated with the recall—but also as a way to establish these processes, and these alone, as normative. As early as 1901 John Commons had praised the civic practicum as above all a technique for instilling in youngsters a distinctly progressive understanding of what taking part in the political process meant. With this in mind, he outlined a plan for incorporating the referendum, the initiative, and a system of proportional representation into school city governments. Moreover, he suggested that educators might maximize the effectiveness of the exercise by introducing these innovations for only part of the school term, explaining that in this way, "the students can by practical experience learn the present unsuccessful method of arriving at the will of the people, and later in the year have practice with this more practical and satisfactory way." The logic behind the suggestion was clear: exposed in the school first to the outmoded style of civic participation familiar to their fathers and grandfathers and then to a rationalized progressive model, children would, Commons assumed, gravitate unquestioningly toward the latter.[76]

The notion that introducing progressive models of good government to schoolchildren would help remake American political culture soon figured prominently in arguments that emphasized the civic efficacy of pupil self-rule—as both a practical method for teaching youngsters the principles of responsible citizenship and a means of preventing them from taking up the undesirable political habits of their elders. "By actually participating in their own

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[76] Commons, John R. "Referendum, Initiative and Proportional Representation," in *The Gill System of Moral and Civic Training*, 28.

government the pupils become early habituated to performing the legitimate duties of the citizens of a democratic state," surmised one member of the Citizen's Committee in a 1910 letter, making hands-on civic education, "a potent antidote for the social unrest which shows itself in wasteful battles between capital and labor, visionary socialistic propaganda and destructive anarchism." A 1913 essay endorsing the Gill method suggested that an ideal pupil government, modeled along the lines of a progressive local or state system, was essential, not simply for instructing children in the fundamentals of citizenship, but for supplanting "the distorted atmosphere of 'peanut politics,'" that they inevitably encountered in the street, a position echoed by a Cornell University professor who, speaking before an equal suffrage group in upstate New York that same year, endorsed the civic laboratory ideal, declaring, "[n]o one can question, that it is far superior to the training in parties our youth received a generation ago by shouting in processions, tooting horns and sending up skyrockets."[77]

In praising the civic laboratory as a potentially useful tool for guiding the young away from the influence of "peanut politics" and the noisy theatrics of old-fashioned democratic participation while immunizing them against radicalism, self-government boosters identified what was most appealing about pupil self-rule. Filled with a rising generation of citizens who were still in the impressionable stage of youth, the schoolhouse, they realized, was the ideal site for an ideological intervention. No one saw this more clearly—or embraced classroom self-government more openly as a means of challenging established political mores—than those who sought to extend the franchise to women. "We as suffragists," wrote Mary L. Talbott, in

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[77] Typescript Draft of Letter, July 15, 1910, Box 1, Folder 7 NSGC Papers; "Junior Municipalities Mean Equal Suffrage," *The Cornell Daily Sun* (November 8, 1913), 7; James P. Munroe, "The Real Trouble With the Boy of the Present," in A *New Citizenship*, 235; James P. Munroe, *New Demands in Education* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1912), v.

reference to the alliance between the District of Columbia Suffrage Association and the Washington School City Federation, "heartily endorse its efforts because of its tendency toward equality of interests in our government. Beginning where all great reforms must necessarily begin, with the children and preferably in our schools; teaching them that equal suffrage goes hand in hand with good citizenship." High on the agenda of the National American Woman Suffrage Association Committee on Education was encouraging members to serve on school boards and to organize mothers clubs or parents clubs, specifically in order to agitate for the incorporation of civic laboratory methods into their local classrooms. "In these school cities, girls as well as boys vote and hold office," a committee pamphlet noted, which made them, "splendid preparation for the future, encouraging as it does, a feeling of equality between the sexes, which cannot but bring about woman suffrage." Indeed, among the resolutions of the 1906 NAWSA Annual Convention was an appeal to "the friends of equal rights," encouraging them "to secure the introduction into the public schools of the system of self-government known as the 'School City,' since this not only trains boys and girls to become good citizens, but also educates them in the practical exercise of equal rights."[78]

Although they were personally supportive of the suffrage movement, neither Gill nor Welling were quite so open in making the connection between gender-blind school governments and extending the franchise. Referring to equal political rights for women, Welling acknowledged that, "[t]he state may deny them a vote—I do not propose to discuss that question—but their influence is needed." This alone, he implied, was reason enough to see the

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[78] "Aims and Purposes of the Committee on Education," Pamphlet published by The National Woman Suffrage Association, Box 1, Folder 8, NSGC Papers; *Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Annual Convention of the National Woman Suffrage Association* (Warren: Wm. Ritezel & Co., 1906), 78, 91

value of the self-governed school as the best way to ensure that all citizens, male and female, spoke the same language of civic responsibility. It was a view shared by Gill, who (in words that resurrected the eighteenth-century construct of Republican motherhood) described politically indifferent women as a lingering civic problem, which might easily be corrected "by training all girls as later they should train their sons." Thus, he wrote, "whether or not the right to vote, equal to that which men now enjoy is ever given to all women, it is of vast importance to the whole people, that girls should be trained in all civic matters the same way that boys should be trained." Their reluctance to align the self-government movement with the cause of women's rights notwithstanding, both men in their preaching the self-government gospel regularly noted the ease with which girls assumed the burdens of political citizenship. Indeed, for Gill, who routinely addressed women's organizations on the benefits of his method, emphasizing the equality that prevailed in school cities and school republics became a key element in his speaking repertoire: at a 1907 meeting of the New Jersey State Federation of Women's Clubs, for example, one remark in particular, that the girl-citizens of school cities were often elected mayor "was received with cheers," after which, he found himself "besieged by delegates, who wanted him to address their clubs . . ."[79]

To be sure, not all were as eager to embrace the civic laboratory method as Gill's New Jersey audience. Among the skeptics, some, like Principal Ida Lindheimer of New York, rejected out of hand, the prospect of encouraging a political mindset in schoolgirls. "I thoroughly believe in this idea," she told Welling's Executive Secretary flatly, "for boys schools." Others found the lesson in equality to be substantively problematic, given the realities of the adult world. It was

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[79] Welling, R.W.G. "The Teaching of Civics and Good Citizenship in the Public Schools," 100; Wilson L. Gill, Copy of Letter to British Schoolboys, March 23, 1909, Box 1, Folder 4, NSGC Papers; "New Jersey 'Fed'," *New York Tribune*, May 9, 1907, 4.

not uncommon, particularly in grammar or elementary schools, for female teachers to outnumber their male colleagues; excluded from voting in all but a few states, these women oversaw the activities of many a school city—monitoring elections, guiding children in the legislative process and instructing future citizens on the working of their government—an irony that some equal rights advocates found hard to stomach. It was on this account that suffragist Ida Husted Harper called Gill to task specifically, for "the utter incongruity of requiring women teachers to inform themselves of politics and train their pupils in the civic duties from which they themselves are rigidly barred."[80]

Yet, among those who did view the self-government movement as contributing to the crusade for equal rights, it was the prospect of changing the civic paradigm for a new generation of citizens rather than the democratic practicum itself that was most appealing. As Gill explained, while he had not specifically intended to promote the cause of universal suffrage, children's experiences in school cities had the potential to move it forward, by helping them to see the "absurdity" of denying political rights based on gender. "I hope, among other things," he wrote in 1912, "that the school city will teach girls that some rights are being withheld from them, and that it will bring boys to recognize the same thing." What Gill anticipated was a deeply transformative lesson: the very notion that women should be denied the vote would, he suggested, be rendered incomprehensible to citizens raised in the crucible of gender-blind school politics. "I am a strong advocate of adult suffrage," wrote one hopeful activist, echoing this vision, "and believe that the School City System, when once widely organised (*sic*) in our schools, will, more than any other single method, tend in a practical way to remove all the

[80] "Report of School Citizen's Committee Activities for Week Ending March 22, 1912, Typescript, Box 3, Folder 2, NSGC Papers; Ida Husted Harper, "The Advance of Woman," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 31, 1903, 42.

ancient prejudices against the enfranchisement of women. When it is optically demonstrated in our schools that boys and girls rank, vote, legislate, and administrate equally, and equally well, how can the adult children in the larger school of the world dare to contend that men alone are competent to rule . . ."[81]

In much the same way that suffrage activists saw pupil self-government as a means of undoing the prejudices that barred women from full citizenship—and thus, as instrumental in the production of a new set of political mores with respect to gender—activists who were focused on civic reform recognized in self-rule an opportunity to uproot outmoded beliefs about the political role of the citizen in an modern democratic state. Quoted in an article on citizenship training which appeared in *The Southern Educational Journal*, Gill described this as a two-pronged process, arguing that through the civic practicum "the child will be made accustomed to perform duties in the prescribed and legal way" while also suggesting that "it should be part of the aim of school government to acquaint the people through the children with new and improved methods rather than to perpetuate old forms." A carefully mentored system of pupil self-government, situated within the broader civic curriculum, would, then, help fix within the public imagination a new definition of praise-worthy political behavior—an argument echoed by civic education boosters throughout the Progressive Era. As Leo S. Rowe, of the American Academy of Social and Political Science, explained, it was the responsibility of American educators to "create a fruitful discontent" in pupils, that when these pupils grew to adulthood they would "hold up a definite civic ideal to which our conduct must conform."[82] In linking a potentially subversive notion—that an effective civic education should validate the right of citizens to confront the

[81] "Cities Ruled by Tots," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 10, 1905, 1.
[82] "Citizen-Training in Public School," *The Southern Educational Journal* 11:2 (December 1897), 395-397; Gill, *A New Citizenship*, 252.

sources of discontent within their communities by taking action to correct them—with the ideal of conformity in civic conduct, Rowe summed up the appeal of the self-government project. Early exposure to acceptable civic behavior in school would lead children away from the rough-and-tumble practices of a less enlightened age—the "peanut" partisanship of their parents—while introducing them to sober forms of political participation.

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In spite of the ongoing dispute over how best to organize effective civic practicum, self-government advocates agreed that giving children some kind of voice in school management was the best way to teach them the scope of their civic responsibilities —ultimately, to confine their civic activities to those "legitimate duties" that had been fixed in the schoolhouse. In a short endorsement of the School City method, one anonymous commentator explained that young people "want things to go right: to be better," and indeed, that they were ideal subjects for a civic practicum precisely because "their sense of justice is keen; their integrity of a high order." However, the writer went on to suggest that these virtues alone were not enough, explaining that what the self-governed school brought to the equation was a method of teaching citizens-to-be that they needed not only "initiative" and "the wherewithal to proceed," but also "an organization back of them to give sanction and dignity to their work."[83] The *implicit* message of the self-governed school, in other words, was that to be an effective member of a democratic collective supposed not only the intellectual capacity to identify for oneself what was in the public interest, and the right to act in support of the common good, but also—and perhaps more importantly—the obligation to do so only with the approval and under the aegis of a sanctioning higher power.

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[83] "Training Reformers," in *The Gill System of Moral and Civic Training*, 118.

Even educators who cared not to speculate explicitly on the civic implications of pupil governments—beyond perfunctory references to boys and girls learning to become "good" or "loyal" Americans—pointed to this lesson as a reason to adopt some kind of participatory system in schools, citing from experience how it "increase[d] respect for teacher control" or made it "easier to reach the refractory child" in the classroom, transforming all but the most incorrigible troublemakers into law-abiding citizens. In a typical endorsement one schoolmaster described how "cooperation creeps in quietly and unawares" when pupils were granted a limited degree of autonomy, while another noted how establishing a pupil government in his school had created a culture in which youngsters scarcely realized that they were cooperating with teachers.[84] To be sure, many of these educators also acknowledged that the transformation of children into agreeable citizens was no spontaneous by-product of pupil government; results like these, they explained, depended on instructors shepherding the young through the democratic process in order to ensure they made sound decisions—decisions, that is, which confirmed the teacher's wisdom. As a Massachusetts principal warned, "Experiments in this matter are very dangerous unless there is careful supervision." Nevertheless, again and again in survey responses and in letters to Welling's committee, educators suggested that student government—with a "firm hand" to guide it—was an effective tool for softening resistance to school discipline.

While those who saw pupil government as a purely civic initiative generally found teacher endorsements encouraging, they were not entirely comfortable with the way some educators seemed to equate participation with complaisance. One instructor, for instance, who

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[84] T. Knapp Survey Response, 1911, Box 86, Folder 2, NSGC Papers; A. Hall Burdick Survey Response, ND, Box 87, Folder 5, NSGC Papers; H.J. Kirchner Survey Response, January 1912, Box 81, Folder 4, NSGC Papers; C.V. Hayworth Survey Response, ND, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC Papers; Minnie Walter, Survey Response, ND, Box 86, Folder 1, NSGC Papers.

described how simple it was for him to influence juvenile voters and legislatures and thus direct the outcome of elections and legislative decision-making "missed the point of self-government entirely" according to a member of the Citizen's Committee, who penned observations in the margin of a questionnaire, while in a letter to a principal who cited improved marching and silence in lines as proof that self-rule was a success in her school, Committee Executive Secretary Frank Kiernan gently suggested that there were more important things for future citizens to master than following orders.[85] Nevertheless, even as they invoked the idea of assertive or militant citizenship, they made it clear that the lesson they wanted children to take away from the exercise was that *legitimate* civic self-confidence was an expression of obedience and devotion, to both the state and its institutions. Welling, in the August 1911 issue of *The American School Board Journal*, explained that the ultimate purpose of introducing self-government into schools was to "make apathetic citizenship militant" through experience. Given an opportunity to take part in the governing process, "each child feels a responsibility for the common welfare and feels free to 'speak up' to correct a defect or suggest an improvement." Encouraging youngsters to assert themselves in this particular way, he wrote, was more than likely to produce orderly, law-abiding citizens, because, "Where [children] are trained to a rational respect for authority through a realization of the necessity of it and a participation in the exercise of it . . . respect and loyalty become unshakable."[86]

For reformers like Welling there was nothing inconsistent in the argument that a good citizen should be both militant *and* manageable, and they saw validation in stories about difficult children coming to terms with discipline—miraculously becoming "responsible" citizens—when

[85] Frank Kiernan to Laura MacArthur, January 21, 1913, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC Papers.
[86] Welling, "Pupil Self-Government as Training for Citizenship," 28.

given a part to play in school affairs. In journal articles and in correspondence with the Citizen's Committee, educators noted how introducing democratic practices into classrooms "holds disorderly pupils in check" or how it taught children that "helping the principal maintain the reputation and good name of the school" was a collective responsibility. Others pointed to "a better and more loyal spirit toward the school community" or a refreshing tendency to "pull with the teachers for the school instead of against them" as evidence that youngsters who fully embraced the principles of "good citizenship" were especially cooperative in their dealings with teachers and other school authorities.[87] In questionnaires submitted to the Citizens Committee, children, too, suggested that doing one's part to ensure the success of the government was the take-away from their lesson in civic involvement: a New Jersey eighth grader, for instance, who described "the necessity of [our] (c)o-optional (*sic*) government" or the Berkley, California schoolgirl who expressed enthusiasm for the democratic system but acknowledged that "our present system of self-government is not perfect" largely because "everybody does not cooperate with the officers and officials."[88]

Talk of nurturing a vigorous body politic notwithstanding, teaching the young to "pull with" authority was in no way the same as preparing them for assertive citizenship. At best, it recast civic engagement as exercising the right to be heard—what Welling defined as the freedom to "speak up" and take part in a democratic process—while at the same time remaining mindful of the deference one owed to "rational" authority. This distinction was not lost on educators, who preferred to think of practical civics in terms of nurturing *helpful* relationships

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[87] H.C. DeGroat Survey Response, ND, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC Papers; J.E. Pierce Survey Response, ND, Box 88, Folder 1, NSGC Papers.
[88] Herbert Freiliart, Grade 8 / 13th Avenue School, January 13, 1913, Box 82, Folder 1, NSGC Papers; Elsie Simmack, McKinley School, ND, Box 86, Folder 6, NSGC Papers

between pupils and their schoolmasters—a process, they suggested, that would ultimately produce cooperative citizens. In a questionnaire submitted during the 1912-1913 School Year, for example, a principal from Port Townsend, Washington, explained that while he believed that his own experience introducing democratic conventions into the classroom had been a success, he was in fact uncomfortable with calling it self-government, and preferred to think of the undertaking as building a "co-partnership" with students. "I do not believe in 'student government' because lack of maturity . . . would prevent its being efficient government," wrote another schoolmaster, who suggested that organized systems of student *cooperation* might be a more useful way of helping future citizens "come to understand and sympathize with the purposes of government."[89]

As student-teacher cooperation became the benchmark for nurturing engaged citizenship in schools, the distinction between civic assertiveness and participation grew cloudy; those who supported practical civics instruction in schools frequently spoke of it as a way of building a battery of habits that would define their behavior as political actors. "Children are taught to do so-and-so with regard to their mother, their father, their brothers and sisters, their servants," wrote author Charlotte Perkins Gillman, in an essay that appeared in *Marsh's Magazine*, "but children are not taught what they should do with regard to the State, or city, or country." Citing it as one of the "magnificent steps taken here and there" to correct this type of civic illiteracy, Gillman endorsed the idea of hands-on civics for developing "the idea of citizenship . . . by actual practice—the children being formed into different groups and practically drilled in lines of service connected with the government." For Gillman, the proof of the effectiveness of this approach could be found in the fact that youngsters in self-governed schools had "a regular

[89] A.N. French Survey Response, ND, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC Papers;

organization and are taught their responsibility," and that through this organization, "they are expected to keep the law and they do it." [90]

The notion that shepherding the young to civic maturity should be the equivalent of drilling them in "service connected with the government" was a far cry from the unselfconscious development of civic virtue sought by thoughtful nineteenth century schoolmasters. Missing was the belief that a capacity for collective self-rule sprang from an understanding of one's responsibility to one's fellow citizens, generally developed through experience, and that the best course of action for the teacher who hoped to encourage such development was to create conditions in the classroom where pupils learned on their own terms how to govern themselves and how to justly manage the affairs of their communities. Instead, reformers and educators who shared Gillman's views on the civic potential of organized democracy in schools emphasized how it helped the young to understand political engagement as an obligation *to the state*—what an Austin, Texas principal called "the right habits with respect to a government that governs."[91]

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In a 1913 address to a gathering of New England educators, Professor Horatio Knox of the Rhode Island Normal School endorsed pupil participation in school government as an ideal way of encouraging constructive citizenship both in and out of the schoolhouse. According to Knox, a true apprenticeship in self-government began with an understanding that taking part in sanctioned civic processes—or, as he put it, to "consciously enlist in the service" of the commonwealth—was the noblest way of expressing "civic righteousness" in the public arena. It

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[90] Charlotte Perkins Gillman "Woman and the Ballot," *Marsh's Magazine* 1:3 (October 1908), 10.
[91] J.E. Pierce Survey Response, Box 88, Folder 1, NSGC Papers.

was, he declared, "through 'home rule' in the schoolroom," that the young would come to "a proper realization of their relation to the state."[92]

Even as Knox spoke, opportunities for young people to "enlist" in the service of their schools abounded. To be sure, for Wilson Gill—who continued to write and speak well into the 1920s on the need for replicating real government in American classrooms—none of these could rightly be called civic instruction, but as far as most movement stalwarts were concerned the trend was proof enough that children were getting a sufficient introduction to the responsibilities of political citizenship. In a lecture at Adelphi College in 1912, Lyman Beecher Stowe acknowledged that despite its persistence, the term pupil self-government was "unfortunately a misnomer." The problem was that "it has been used so long that it has become a trade-mark. We probably could not change it now if we wanted to. It is not Self-Government but Pupil Cooperation." Educators increasingly pointed to cooperative extra-curricular activities—exemplified by clubs, pep-organizations, and school-sports—as *de facto* preparation for civic responsibility and exemplified by such virtues as "good school spirit" or "loyalty and pride." As a high school principal in Montclair, New Jersey, explained, civic life among his charges was "a cooperative sharing of responsibility for a good and efficient school" realized through "a 'Student Council' representing the student body and active in the social and institutional life of the school, its assemblies, special events, care of buildings, grounds, school spirit, flag, paper, school bank, athletics, elections, etc, etc."[93]

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[92] Horatio B. Knox "Education for Civic Righteousness," *Proceedings of the Seventy-Sixth Annual Meeting of the American Institute of Instruction* (Boston: American Institute of Instruction, 1906), 333.
[93] H.H. Garretson Survey Response, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC Papers; Unsigned Response Card dated Spring 1913, Box 90, Folder 3, NSGC Papers; H.W. Dutch Survey Response, No Date, Box 2, Folder 9, NSGC Papers.

In the spring of 1919, an article on practical civics instruction in *The School Review* pointed to classrooms in the city of Seattle as evidence "of the effect that the self-government movement has had upon the country at large," noting that while "only two schools were still adhering to a form of self-government, practically all were employing one or more types of pupil cooperation or participation," such as "boys' and girls' clubs, pupil advisory committees, etc." It was important to understand, the *Review* suggested, that "these devices have been found to afford excellent opportunity for the exercise of real self-control, while they were less cumbersome than the school republic or school city, were therefore less susceptible of abuse, and consequently were more efficient in training for *good* citizenship."[94] Talk of encouraging children to become militant civic actors had at this point given way to the idea that "real self-control" was the quality most desirable in future citizens.

Yet the suggestion that politically savvy youngsters would mature into militant citizens was not merely a hyperbolic expression of enthusiasm; rather, it reflected a vision of militancy tamed in the classroom and harnessed to the aims of government. The suggestion that schools might prepare children to "serve" the state—that each citizen had responsibility to participate in the political process presupposed a consensus, not on specific problems or how best to resolve them, but on the fundamental objectivity of progressive political conventions themselves. To take an active role as a member of the polity, and thus to fulfill the role of the servant-citizen, was to support a just civic order. Beneath the appealing claims—that a practical education in civics would gradually lessen the influence of special interests; that it would bring to an end, once and for all, the problem of corruption in politics—was the expectation that an experience with self-rule in the classroom would make clear to future citizens what kinds of service they

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[94] McClure, 463.

owed to a political system that acted on their behalf, while ensuring in the process that these civic behaviors became habit. One kept abreast of the issues. One accepted as a matter of faith that it was the prerogative of an administrative state to make policies and the right of citizens to weigh in with opinions. Given the opportunity, one might run for office or, if so inclined, one might participate in political campaigns or movements, keeping within the bounds of acceptable decorum. At the very least, one *always* voted. These were the core lessons of practical civics instruction as it developed in Progressive Era classrooms throughout the country. It was in the school then that the young would learn, both where ultimate authority (and power) rested—in the state apparatus that bestowed dignity to democratic action—and, that the only legitimate political role of the citizen was to work *in concert* with government, cooperating through sanctioned channels of civic expression, to help realize the common good.

Chapter Three

Small Citizens in Action

Among the highlights of commencement exercises for the eighth-grade class of 1900 in the town of Prosser, Washington was a salutatory address delivered by Miss Elizabeth Carey, who had chosen to speak about student government and its influence on her understanding of citizenship. Standing on a platform decorated with wildflowers and trimmed in the school colors, crimson and cream, the thirteen-year-old schoolgirl described how over the past year she and her classmates had gained a valuable education in applied civics through self-rule. Granted a substantial degree of latitude to manage their own affairs as citizens of a simulated "city" within the schoolhouse, the children of Prosser, she explained, had learned how to exercise their civic agency in a practical way—choosing a "mayor, council, and other officers" in democratic elections, assuming duties as policemen and as clerks in a fully functioning administrative bureaucracy, and engaging in a host of civic activities, from enacting laws to "empaneling juries [and] conducting trials" to providing systematic oversight for the "arrest and punishment of offenders." Thus, Carey assured her audience, local youth had taken their first steps toward becoming responsible members of the body politic.[1]

The Washington schoolgirl's account of her experience with applied citizenship instruction is worth noting for what it suggests about the impulse, ubiquitous in turn-of-the-century America, to transform schooling itself into a civic apprenticeship. It had been less than three years since progressive educators had first tested the School City idea in an immigrant neighborhood on Manhattan's lower east side; impressed by what they saw in this little polis,

[1] "Commencement Program," *The Yakima Herald*, June 7, 1900, 9.

journalists and other observers praised the “laboratory method” of teaching civics extensively in print. As a result, interest in the practice swept rapidly from New York across the United States and the impression it made on Carey and her classmates in a remote corner of the Pacific Northwest corroborates assertions made by Wilson L. Gill, the reformer behind this approach to civic education, who claimed that stories about his work inspired “hundreds if not thousands of teachers” at “schools in every direction” to introduce the method into their own classrooms.[2] Furthermore, the success here indicates that the size of a school factored less in determining where these laboratories of citizenship might thrive than did local convictions about the importance of civic education and, equally important, the willingness of teachers to experiment with what were patently unconventional methods. With a population of just over 200 residents, Prosser was no doubt among the smallest of the many communities where schoolchildren experienced some form of immersive civic instruction in “cities” or “states” of their own; what mattered more though was that its leading citizens had an ambitious vision for the town—anticipating the day when it might become a “seat of learning” in the region—and had hired an innovative young principal to help them achieve it.[3]

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[2] Gill, Wilson L. *The Gill System of Moral and Civic Training*. (New Paltz: The Patriotic League, 1901), 20-23; Gill, Wilson L. *A New Citizenship*. (Philadelphia: American Patriotic League, 1913), 58.

[3] The 24-year-old schoolmaster, John Adams Kingsbury, appears to have been the kind of open-minded educator most likely to introduce this method civics instruction into the curriculum. Although he was relatively inexperienced when he took up his position, Kingsbury was praised by local officials for his accomplishments and would go on to become a prominent voice in both local and national reform circles for the next half century. Arnold S. Rosenberg, “The Rise of John Adams Kingsbury,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 63:2 (April 1972), 55-62. On the importance of finding “wide awake, progressive, young energetic principals” in order to make self-government in schools a success, see Frank Kiernan to Ora Taylor, June 6, 1912. Box 3, Folder 3, National Self-Government Committee Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. (*Hereafter, NSGC Papers*)

As much as it tells us about enthusiasm for hands-on civics instruction at a local level though, Elizabeth Carey's description of her experience is also valuable for what it suggests about the lessons youngsters themselves carried away from their experiences as "citizens" of these laboratories—something that received little close attention from contemporary observers. Written by adults, published reports about model governments in schools took the didactics of civic role-play at face value, emphasizing how children were building the kinds of practical skills one might *expect* them to develop in a simulation of civic life: the habit of voting, for instance, of interacting with the bureaucratic apparatus of the state on a regular basis, or of thinking and debating intelligently about matters of public interest. A short item with the title "Practical Politics for Infants" was typical; published in the *Saturday Evening Post* just a few weeks before the Prosser graduation ceremony and picked up for reprint in newspapers throughout the United States, it described a school in which "urchins [were] being taught the mysteries of election day" as they assumed the duties of "poll clerks, watchers, candidates, and so-on." To be sure, Carey invoked similar images, but she appears to have been especially impressed with the way providing opportunities for her fellow pupils to participate in the process of governing had transformed them into orderly, law-abiding citizens, concluding her address with an observation—that, "by means of the 'School City' profanity, vulgarity, [and] marking and defacing school property" in Prosser had, in the course of one academic year, become "a thing of the past."[4]

This chapter examines the experiences of children like Carey and considers how the effort to recast schooling as an apprenticeship in political self-rule shaped children's understanding of civic agency. The reformers who championed teaching civics through student

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[4] "Commencement Program."

government were keen to replace the patriotic indoctrination that passed for citizenship instruction in the late nineteenth century—what Gill dismissed as mere flag-waving—with a method meant to promote habitually vigorous civic engagement, a virtue that they expected children to carry into adulthood. Indeed, its advocates insisted that hands-on civics instruction was above all a cure for political indifference, and they asserted that young people who enjoyed a robust civic experience in school would inevitably grow up to become what one supporter described as "wide awake, militant and forceful members of their communities." Establishing some form of democratic government in American classrooms was, according to another, "a scheme which promises to give us a more rational and more aggressive citizenship."[5] Yet the notion that schools were ideal places for future citizens to develop these kinds of civic habits begged the question of what form such habits might take. What did qualities such as "wide-awake" or "militant" mean to products of democratized classrooms? How did these children learn to demonstrate behaviors that were at once rational <u>and</u> aggressive as they strove to become responsible citizens?

In choosing to end her paean to the Prosser School City with a nod to the way her fellow citizens had abolished foul language and vandalism, Elizabeth Carey implied that, ultimately, the best evidence that their civic education had been effective was to be found in their improved conduct. This viewpoint was hardly unique. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, as educators experimented with different forms of student government, grown-ups and children alike often observed how the introduction of democratic practices into classrooms brought about a remarkable metamorphosis—turning rebellious youngsters into well-behaved

[5] Frank Kiernan to Edith M. Haydon, April 2, 1912, Box 3, Folder 1, NSGC Papers; Walker, P.A. "Self-Government in the High School," *The Elementary School Journal* 7:8 (April 1907), 451-457.

boys and girls. Indeed, so clear was this correlation that it was not uncommon for teachers to endorse self-rule as a classroom management technique that just happened to have collateral benefits as a pedagogical tool for teaching citizenship. “Discipline and Practical Instruction in Civics Secured by the Same Means,” ran a headline in an Alameda, California newspaper, which touted the achievements of a School City there.[6] Adults often attributed this new found love of order among youngsters in self-governing schools to a kind of civic epiphany; given opportunities to make and enforce the law, the reasoning went, children soon came to appreciate on their own terms the need for communities of all kinds to have rules. Extrapolating out from this cause-and-effect argument, others suggested that fostering experienced-based respect for the legitimate objectives of government helped children to understand that governments themselves were honest and responsive only to the extent that virtuous citizens kept them so—one advocate going so far as to argue that while improbable, instances of “graft” or “malfeasance” among juvenile officials in democratized schools might nonetheless be instructive, insofar as “seeing and feeling” the effects of corruption would teach children to “recognize it and brand it and hate it as poison.”[7]

There was, to be sure, some merit in these assumptions; asked to give concrete examples of what experience had taught them, youngsters offered compelling answers, writing, for example, that office holders should be qualified, that it was important for government officials to be held accountable to the same laws as private citizens, and that bad governments thrived wherever voters tolerated ignorance.[8] Moreover, while they were eager to showcase their

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[6] “Self-Governed Pupils,” *Alameda Daily Argus*, February 1, 1900, 1.
[7] “Elections in ‘School Cities’,” *New York Times*, February 29, 1912, 10.
[8] Weltman, Sally. Survey Response, May 12, 1911, Box 78, Folder 2, NSGC Papers; Shay, Frances, Survey Response, ND, Box 78, Folder 2, NSGC Papers; Connolly, Wm. Survey Response, ND, Box 78, Folder 2, NSGC Papers.

sophisticated understanding of civic life, they were impressed most of all by the sense of empowerment that came with citizenship; if they found reason to boast about the improved behavior of their classmates—or about cleaner schoolyards or straighter lines during fire drills—it was largely because they had seen to these "reforms" themselves. However, while children were comfortable describing themselves as emerging civic agents it was not a citizenship of republican virtues they aspired to, but rather, one based on progressive civic conventions such as consensus, cooperation, and commitment to a loosely defined public welfare.

Like their counterparts across the gamut of Progressivism, those who advocated for hands-on civics instruction tended to see the fight for reform generally as part of a larger conflict between private and public interests—between self-serving agendas and the commonweal. As one such supporter put it, turning school life into an extended civic practicum, would "root out all forms of selfish citizenship and supplant instead a more wholesome regard for the general good." These boosters shared with Progressives of all kinds the belief that whether it be social or political, substantive reform depended on the support of an active, informed body politic—an imagined "democratic public" that historian Leon Fink has characterized as "the people in the rough . . . schooled in a sense of civic duty."[9] Thus, even as they insisted that democratized schoolhouses would make autonomous civic actors of children and even as they touted civic laboratories as the antidote to lawless, selfish interests, they were apt to emphasize order, discipline and collective virtue, rather than principled action or respect for the rule of law *per se* as the foundation of responsible citizenship. Commenting on how the introduction of a little democracy into the classroom appeared to improve student conduct, Dr. Oswald Schlokow of the

[9] M.A.C. to Frank Kiernan, September 1910, Box 1, Folder 7, NSGC Papers; Fink, Leon. *Progressive Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Democratic Commitment*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13.

New York City Department of Education—a vocal proponent of the civic laboratory method—made the distinction clear, noting that, "[w]here you have self-government, disobedience becomes defiance of group consciousness."[10]

Whether they learned it in fictitious cities or in schools where teachers believed in a more elementary introduction to democratic practice—by way of councils, committees, and other student-led activities—children who came up through democratized classrooms were likely to equate good citizenship with Dr. Schlockow's collective consciousness. In their writing, this understanding of citizenship vis-à-vis the public interest appeared under the rubric of "school sentiment" or "class loyalty" or what some pupils described as "public opinion" in the school. Indeed, their accounts indicate that in addition to giving the young a working knowledge of political institutions, self-regulated schools served as a vehicle for creating polities *attuned* to public opinion—some two decades before thinkers such as Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays posited opinion-making as an essential, if problematic step in manufacturing consent among the citizens of a modern democratic state.[11] Regardless of how they chose to describe it, these citizens-in-training routinely wrote about their experiences in such a way as to suggest that, as far as civic duties were concerned, they had learned to see themselves as agents of a kind of civic *esprit de corps*. Noting that teachers in his school had been "almost wholly relieved of [the] burden of discipline" a Connecticut schoolmaster attributed this to what can best be described as a realignment of childhood loyalties—the organic, rough-around the edges self-regulation of the school-yard—in which "enforcement of self-made rules through self-elected officials . . . greatly reduced . . . [the] spirit of antagonism . . . shown in matters of deportment." Indeed, if giving

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[10] Welling, Richard. *As the Twig is Bent* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), 114.
[11] Jonathan Auerbach, *Weapons of Democracy: Propaganda, Progressivism, and American Public Opinion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015)

children a voice in public matters led to discipline and comity in classrooms it was not, as progressive political reformers would have it, because they were learning to govern themselves but rather, because they had learned to embrace government.[12]

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"In fact," wrote reformer Frank Parsons in the June 1905 issue of *The Century* magazine, "there is more real self-government in these school cities than in most of our larger cities." Having had the opportunity to observe children at work in such a school, he found it especially striking how youngsters had managed to realize for themselves the kind of engaged, independent-minded citizenship that eluded adults, noting that among these political novices, "there [was] no apathy . . . no stay-at-home vote, no political machine or boss." An educator and a prolific author on a host of matters relevant to progressive agendas—from monetary policy to direct democracy to municipal reform—Parsons declared the hands-on approach to civics instruction as a potentially powerful pedagogical tool for advancing the cause of good government, suggesting to his readers that "the enfranchisement of the children is only a little less important than the enfranchisement of their elders."[13]

Parsons was not alone in being swept up with enthusiasm for the activities of pint-size citizens. Beginning in the final years of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, newspapers and magazines would routinely wax lyrical about self-governed schools, where youngsters flocked "with great excitement" to the polls, where juvenile legislators "conferred upon high matters" while demonstrating "the dignity of Roman senators," and where stern-faced little judges with "firmness of . . . manner" and a "perfect grasp . . . of the facts" deliberated on cases like experienced jurists. Occasionally, even seasoned political operators were impressed.

[12] Warden, S. Watson, Principal Questionnaire, December 23, 1912, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC.
[13] Parsons, Frank. "The School City," *The Century* 71 496-497.

After watching the mayor, aldermen and other officials of a Brooklyn school city conduct legislative business with “unusual unanimity” a former New York City Controller, for example, came to the conclusion that “the boys had a better idea of city government than half the voters.”[14]

There was a whimsical side to student government that these adults often found appealing, especially when it attempted to replicate grown-up government in all its bureaucratic complexity. However, the emphasis on make-believe in most reports belied what many observers described as a deeper more significant truth: that given the opportunity, youngsters were astonishingly passionate civic actors. “The children are deeply in earnest,” wrote one Philadelphia principal, who, in a letter to Gill, reported “interest has become more solid and serious now that the organization is no longer a novelty.” Another principal credited nuts-and-bolts citizenship training for turning civics into “a live wire” among pupils at his Memphis, Tennessee grammar school. Indeed, what impressed Frank Parsons the most was not that boys and girls were adept at mimicking the political activities of adults but that in some respects, they were even more conscientious than their grown-up counterparts. “There is no graft in the school city,” he declared, “no boodle in the council, no ‘understanding’ between the police and wrongdoers. The ten-year-old judge and the twelve-year-old mayor are absolutely incorruptible.”[15] Journalists, civic leaders, and educators alike offered equally optimistic assessments, describing schoolchildren who in their earnestness to be good citizens brought an

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[14] Stowe, Lyman Beecher. “School Republics,” *The Outlook* 90:17 (December 26, 1908), 939-948; “The McCabe School State,” *School* 79:14 (2 December 1920), 225; “Schoolboys Entertain,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 12, 1910, 7.

[15] Jacobs, Emilie V. to Wilson Gill, June 29, 1903, Wilson Gill Papers, Dartmouth Library Archives & Manuscripts, Dartmouth University (*Hereafter, Gill Papers*); Ford, T.E. Survey Response, ND, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC Papers; Parsons, “The School City,” 496.

admirable rectitude into their classrooms. As the author of one endorsement explained, "children and adolescents are natural born reformers . . . [who] . . . want things to go right; to be better."[16]

Hyperbolic language aside, those who supported practical civics instruction were not just projecting their own idealism onto children. Asked to describe their experiences, youngsters often expressed similar sentiments—evidence that regardless of whether or not their taste for reform was "natural" they were learning to equate reform with the prerogatives of government. Brooklyn schoolgirl Angie Letts, for instance, endorsed her school city on the grounds that "it helps pupils thro' actual practice how (*sic*) to recognize shortcomings in public life and reform them as much as possible." Similarly, a student from Austin, Texas, felt that the government at his school had become "an incentive for right" among his peers, bound to "discountenance bad practice."[17] Such comments, in which youngsters embraced the democratic process as—*ipso facto*—a force for good, underscored the connections that they were learning to make, between civic engagement, state authority, and the public interest. It was because her student government had facilitated the purchase of a new "Graphinola" machine, a Louisville, Kentucky eighth grader wrote, that pupils were able to enjoy recorded music in school. In much the same spirit, Percival Spencer of the Northwest School in Hartford, Connecticut attributed a number of helpful social interventions to various departments of his school city government, including, "the public works commission" which had "improved greatly the appearance of the school property and the surrounding property" and "the department of public safety" which had "reduced greatly the number of accidents which occur in and on the recess grounds." Testimonials like this were not unusual, with children from across the United States offering concrete examples of how *their*

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[16] *The Gill System of Moral and Civic Training* (New Paltz: The Patriotic League, 1901), 118.
[17] Letts, Angie. Survey Response, February 1, 1913, Box 81, Folder 5, NSGC Papers; King, Lawrence. Survey Response, ND, Box 88, Folder 1, NSGC Papers.

governments were improving life for pupil-citizens. Summing up his experience with citizenship instruction a boy named Raymond Madsen wrote, "[a]s a result of pupil cooperation in our school government . . . new pupils are made to think that this school is the best possible place to live in and are just as glad to go to school as to stay home and play."[18]

The claim, that under student-led government school classes had become as appealing as play might at the very least suggest that when asked to give their views on civics training, some children tailored their comments to please teachers. If this occurred to any of the adults who read Madsen's paper at the time, however, they left no record of it. Indeed, for student government boosters (who frequently described imitative citizenship in schools in unabashedly utopian terms) testimonials like this were encouraging. In any event, regardless of whether or not Madsen's sentiment was sincere his enthusiasm was hardly universal; while he was not the only student in his school to leave behind a favorable impression of practical civics instruction some of his classmates were equally vehement in expressing their discontent. "Half of the children if you should ask them would tell you they did not like the school city," wrote one boy, who, addressing the principal directly, concluded, "Mr. Jones I am answering the truth. I do not think much of your school city and many others agree with me." Another pupil, Ethel Reardon, lamented, "I think the school was happier and better off when we had no school city," while yet another hoped to see "a different system . . . adopted," noting that, "I do not care for the school city." The problem, youngsters implied, was that under the pretext of encouraging good citizenship, virtually everything related to student life had become an extension of civic instruction ". . . [taking] up to (sic) much time during school lessons" or ". . . [infringing] on the

[18] Evans, Edna. Survey Response, March 4, 1912, Box 85, Folder 7, NSGC Papers; Spencer, Percival H. Survey Response, December 20, 1912, Box 85, Folder 1, NSGC Papers; Madsen, Raymond. Survey Response, ND, Box 85, Folder 1, NSGC Papers.

work of the school." Particularly frustrated with how their conduct was scrutinized through the lens of civic responsibility some also suggested that school city politics had a polarizing influence on routine activities both inside and outside of the classroom—aligning privileged "authorities" against "private" citizens. As one girl put it, "[w]e have not as much self-government as we had before the School City was organized."[19]

Opinions varied widely among pupils almost everywhere as to whether or not the new approach improved or diminished school-life. Some students at the San Diego High School, for instance, described their government as "very great" and a "benefit to the pupils" while others felt that it was "very faulty" or "a farce" or saw "no advantage to having a legislative body, either to the pupils in general or to the members of said body . . ." There can be little doubt that the way individual teachers guided (or failed to guide) students influenced these opinions. Where educators made a good faith effort to let youngsters exercise responsibility, sentiment tended to be favorable; however, if students felt that talk of democratic government and self-rule in the classroom was disingenuous, opinions were generally negative. A case in point was the high school in Birmingham, Alabama, where interest in school government waned as teachers interfered with polling and insisted that elections be held over and over until the "right" students were voted into office.[20] Yet, if the testimony of these young people suggests that their

[19] Ricketson, Gerald Bradford, Survey Response, March 22, 1912, Box 85, Folder 3, NSGC Papers; Reardon, Ethel. Survey Response, March 21, 1912, Box 85 Folder 2, NSGC Papers; Goodrich, Ruth. Survey Response, ND, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC Papers; Samo, Willis. Survey Response, March 22, 1912, Box 85, Folder 3, NSGC Papers; Burroughs, Edith. Survey Response, ND, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC Papers.

[20] Carter, Margaret. Survey Response, ND, Box 87, Folder 5, NSGC Papers; Corkill Ada. Survey Response, ND, Box 87, Folder 2, NSGC Papers; Jensen, Oscar. Survey Response, March 26, 1912, Box 87, Folder 1, NSGC Papers; Edits, Eldred. Survey Response, March 25, 1912, Box 87, Folder 1, NSGC Papers; Fleming, Mac. Survey Response, March 25, 1912, Box 87, Folder 1, NSGC Papers; School Citizen's Committee assessment of pupil self-government at the Birmingham, AL High School, ND, Box 86, Folder 8, NSGC Papers.

impressions of practical civics instruction varied widely—both from school to school and from student to student—it also shows how the conventions of democratic practice had become routine in American schools hardly ten years after Wilson Gill's experiment with the first school city. As discussed in Chapter Two, those who advocated for applied citizenship instruction sought to recast schooling itself as a rehearsal for the civic responsibilities of adulthood—a place where, as Gill was fond of saying, children would develop *habits* of useful citizenship. In doing so, they made student government an integral part of school-life. For children this was revealed in countless ways—from the introduction of recorded musical "entertainments" to the implementation of recess safety measures to the routinization of explicitly civic activities like school elections or sessions of student legislatures or student courts. Thus, in schools that were nominally democratized and politicized, everyday experiences served as both a means of reinforcing a textbook education in civics and as a way of legitimating specific kinds of civic agency.

In a letter describing his own experience using student-government as a pedagogical tool, William McCluskey, principal of the public school in Papaikou, Hawaii, hinted at the dualistic nature of applied civics instruction—a method which, he suggested, exposed his pupils to the practicalities of parliamentary and democratic procedure while, at the same time, introducing them to notions of civic right and wrong. Writing in late 1908 McCluskey noted with satisfaction that in his school "children from the fourth grade upwards can talk intelligently about the election or appointment and duties of executive officers and legislators," and that "they can easily see the difference between absolute rule and democratic government." As a result, he explained, "history is easily taught and newspapers and cablegrams become intelligible." What was more, however, was that insofar as his pupils were required to apply this civic knowledge on

a regular basis, he believed that "the difference between the conduct of public and private business becomes apparent." In other words, beyond the nuts-and-bolts skills typically associated with civics—the ability to explain how one's government is organized or the capacity to keep up with current events—children also acquired a sense of what constituted respectable public, or civic behavior, making "the system," as McCluskey described it, "an opportunity for broad teaching in social and political ethics."[21]

In boasting about the precociousness of his pupils "from the fourth grade upwards" McCluskey sounded like educators from all over the United States, who often described self-governing pupils as unusually mature, and whose testimonials suggested that role-play was an effective method for introducing boys and girls to the some of the more prosaic exercises of adult civic life—from "the constant practice of judging and voting for those best fitted for an office," to casting ballots that "were remarkably free from mistakes both as to marks and folding" in "booths and other appliances of the Australian . . . system," to getting "valuable experience in written and oral expression by way of clerical duties, in keeping records, making reports and in engaging in business meetings requiring the practice of parliamentary usage." Hands-on civics instruction was "of much practical scholastic benefit," opined one journalist, in a 1905 account describing the activities of pupil-citizens at Alameda, California's Longfellow School, "giving the children a clear idea of the forms of civil government they are required to study in textbooks." Indeed, building on the basic school city model, the young principal at Longfellow, Henry Suzzallo, used simulation or role play as the framework for a comprehensive introduction to political citizenship, in which, over the course of four successive terms, the civic laboratory was cast and then recast using models of municipal, county, state and national government. As a

[21] McCluskey, Wm. to Jas. C. Davis, November 29, 1908, Gill Papers.

result, “two years in the grammar grades [gave] every [child] and exact practical knowledge of the four great forms of government under which the self-governed citizens of the United States actually live.”[22]

The ambitious, ever-changing system Suzzalo used at Longfellow, aimed at familiarizing students with multiple tiers of political-administrative organization, was, of course, atypical; as a rule, most civic laboratories had fewer moving parts. Nevertheless, wherever educators utilized role-play in a deliberate manner to reinforce citizenship education, pupils would find themselves immersed in sometimes elaborate simulacrums of adult civic life. The “politics” of a full-blown school city or school state, for example, might include nominating conventions, campaigning for office, elections (both primary and general), and the ritualistic spectacle of installing new administrations. In the name of verisimilitude a few teachers even went so far as to assign pupils to artificial political parties—at one school in upstate New York, for example, candidates appeared on a ballot as “Conservatives” or “Expansionists” while at another, in Omaha, Nebraska, they ran as “Rights” or “Lefts.” Although some worried about introducing potentially unpleasant aspects of partisan politics into their civics lessons (the Ohio teacher, for instance, who made “say all the good you can about your candidate, but not one word against his opponent” the guiding rule of electioneering) others suggested that the realities of factionalism were integral to any lesson in civic life. One principal, for example, who suspected that it would be “undesirable for the children to be divided . . . along the same lines as their fathers,” but who felt it necessary to establish some system for choosing candidates for office and organizing her

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[22] Austin, Ella L. to J.C. Davis, November 29, 1908, Gill Papers; Craft, M.C. “The School City a Success,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 5, 1901, 9; Davis, James C. to W.H. Babbitt, December 20, 1908, Gill Papers.

elections, resolved the dilemma by establishing two parties and then encouraging “each child [to] vote for the candidate he considered best, regardless of party.”[23]

Some proponents of pupil government drew the line at such elaborate make-believe and, as discussed in Chapter Two, dismissed it as mere window-dressing. Explained associate superintendent of the New York City Department of Education, Andrew W. Edson—a self-declared admirer of Gill and a supporter of classroom self-rule generally—attempting to simulate the administrative apparatus of cities and states was “tomfoolery, from my point of view.” Educators who shared this opinion preferred forms of participation that were unencumbered by the trappings of grown-up civic life and leaned toward “government” that was more organic to the schoolhouse—student councils, student committees, and the like.[24] Others, however, were committed to the idea of providing children with an authentic experience and went to great lengths to duplicate the bureaucratic and organizational characteristics of real-life governments. Indeed, journalists and educators alike often emphasized the realism of full-blown civic laboratories. Typical was the Irving School in Dayton, Ohio, which boasted what a member of the School Citizens Committee described as a “flourishing” government. Here, notwithstanding the principal’s claim that they were “working on a small scale,” children held a host of offices, from mayor, councilman, treasurer and city clerk to more specialized positions, including Police

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[23]“Election for School City,” *Berkeley Gazette*, August 20, 1906, 1; “Hot Election is on in School Republic,” *The Sun*, December 20, 1913, 6; Jones, Frank O. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 85, Folder 1 NSGC; Unsigned note from LaGrange School, Toledo, Ohio, ND, Box 80, Folder 3, NSGC; “School Nation is Planned,” *The Omaha Sunday Bee*, March 23, 1902, Section 3, Page 1.

[24] Edson, Andrew W. to Frank Kiernan, March 30 1910, Box 1, Folder 7, NSGC; Dutch, H.W. to NSGC, April 26, 1912, Box 2, Folder 9, NSGC; Birch, Robert L. to NSGC, October 18, 1912, Box 3, Folder 3, NSGC.

Commissioner, Fire Chief, Commissioner of Public Improvements, and Street Commissioner, to say nothing of their corresponding deputies and assistants.[25]

What exactly were the responsibilities of "governments" and "authorities" in these miniature polities? Everyone involved—adults and children—understood that pupil self-rule was by no means intended to give youngsters the last word on how their school cities and school states were regulated; regardless of how the experience was packaged, duplicating civic institutions in classrooms was not the equivalent of allowing children to be autonomous civic actors, and teachers always retained supreme executive and judicial power over "citizens" in the schoolhouse—advising neophyte legislators on the limits of their power under the Constitution of the United States and, as one principal explained it, "act[ing] as supreme court to which all dissatisfied with sentences pronounced by the [pupil] judges may appeal." Nevertheless, the testimony of adults and children suggests that in most civic laboratories there was some attempt to ensure that government was a meaningful exercise. Thus, elected representatives debated and took steps addressing issues that had substantive bearing on the "public good" in schools—including, among other things, provisions to provide space for citizens who lived far from the school building to eat lunch without having to return home, a bill mandating measures meant to help classmates who had no friend or family-member to attend a school-wide "visitor's day" feel included, and petitioning in the name of public health for adult administrators to replace shared drinking water cups with disposable paper cups. Likewise, pupil magistrates adjudicated cases

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[25] "School Children Run a Real 'City'; Idea is Spreading," *Dayton Herald*, April 29, 1910, 14; Davidson, C.C. Principal Survey Response, ND, Box 82, Folder 5, NSGC; Unsigned Note on Irving School Pupil Papers, ND, Box 82, Folder 5, NSGC.

that were very much part of everyday school life, ranging from "marking books" and "fooling on stairs" to disrupting classes or "shouting . . .during a fire drill."[26]

True-to-life civic role-play was more than mere play-acting. Those who favored hands-on civics instruction were adamant that insofar as was possible, children should take a substantive part in seeing to the public good in their classrooms. As Wilson Gill put it, if children were going learn how to participate in a political system "that vitally concerns their welfare and happiness," it was essential that educators treat "this form of government as a real, not a mimic one." In an unpublished 1911 manuscript he explained what this might look like in practice, describing how civic laboratories might create an authentic civic environment while staying relevant to child-life the schoolroom. "For instance," he wrote, "[each morning] the pupils could all march in . . . and the [health] officer with book in hand could write the name of the person who had not given proper time and attention to his personal appearance, sending the pupil back . . . to have the buttons sewed on or to blacken shoes, to wash his neck and ears or to do whatever may be necessary. These health officers then hand their reports over to the commissioner of health. He, as all the other head officers, should have a book in which to keep the year's record . . ." Similarly, "police officers" might, "after roll call in the morning . . . go around and inspect the books, desks, and other property to see that there are no scratchings nor markings on the same." Using additional examples, Gill pointed to the many ways in which the influence of a model government might be felt in the school routine and he suggested that treating these activities as serious served two purposes: first, in the immediate sense, by improving the quality of life of citizens in the school—encouraging cleanliness for instance, or respect for school property—and

[26] "They Make Laws," *Grand Forks Daily Herald*, February 3, 1901, 3; Chase, Frank W. Principal Survey Response, ND, Box 86, Folder 2, NSGC; Stowe, Lyman Beecher. "School Republics," *The Outlook*, December 26, 1908, 939-948; Johnson, Charles, "The School Republic," *Harper's Weekly*, September 23, 1911, 13.

second, in the long term, by laying the groundwork for a relationship with the state (as embodied in the health inspector or the policeman) and thus helping children to learn the "duties of the citizens to one another and their officers."[27]

Embedded in this description of a well-organized school city was the assumption that a practical education in civics should teach school children not simply how to participate in the democratic process but also to accept progressive mores and institutions as the epitome of democratic practice. Indeed, beginning with the establishment of the very first school cities, the emphasis on replicating specific ways of governing, in detail, especially the regulatory apparatus of grown-up states and municipalities, reflected a belief that children should be taught to view the state and its agents—*their officers*—as characteristic of a distinctly American approach to self-rule. In the words of General Leonard Wood, "school children participating in this system of instruction . . . little by little obtain correct and sound ideas of our method of government." Wood, who as Military Governor of Cuba had recruited Gill to help establish civic laboratories in Cuban schools, lobbied for pupil self-government on behalf of the New York based School Citizens Committee, arguing that this approach was the best way to teach civics to young people, in particular the offspring of "newly imported citizens . . . who do not understand the spirit of

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[27] Gill, *The Gill System*, 117; Typescript, Annotated "Rapid City, SD, 1911," Gill Papers. In fact, the governments of several school-cities engaged in precisely these kinds of activities. A principal at a grammar school in Des Moines, for instance, reported on the duties of a long roster of officials, not only elected authorities and a Commissioner of Public Safety and a Chief of Police, but also a Commissioner of Public Health, whose responsibility it was to "look to the temperature of the rooms . . . to see that we have clean hands, finger-nails [and] teeth" and a Commissioner of Streets who oversaw a team of deputies and superintendents (one for every room) each of whom "looks after the floors, desks, etc." At another school in New York pint-size health department officers not only inspected the bodies and clothing of classmates but issued citations to those who violated cleanliness statues, who were then expected to appear before the school's municipal court for a public hearing. Walter, Minnie. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 86, Folder 1, NSGC; "Miniature City Government Conducted by Public School Pupils in New York," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 1906, 54.

American institutions."[28] To this end, in addition to duplicating the mechanics of electoral politics, educators went to great lengths to make encounters with these institutions a part of everyday life in classrooms—not only where an embryonic public practiced voting, but where school police departments maintained quiet in halls between classes and ensured that citizens conducted themselves in an orderly manner at recess and dismissal, school fire departments watched for hazards and enforced safety codes, and school public works departments saw to it that public property was maintained.[29]

As a pedagogical method, civic role-play offered the creative educator virtually limitless possibilities for introducing youngsters to "sound ideas" of all kinds. In Philadelphia, for instance, a boilerplate charter for civic laboratories encouraged teachers to introduce school city citizens to "improvements in government" such as "the initiative, referendum and proportional representation." Elsewhere (in Manhattan and in Richmond, Virginia), children who were appointed to offices by elected officials were required to sit for modified Civil Service Exams before assuming their posts, while in Superior, Wisconsin and Hartford, Connecticut boys and girls learned first-hand about new, progressive initiatives in municipal management such as government by commission or the recall. The value in all of this, a 1905 editorial in *The Arena* opined, was to make these kinds of innovations "clear and explicit" to future citizens; mandating specific models of government and government conventions in school city charters, the writer

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[28] "Gill School City Rules," *New York Tribune*, March 31, 1899, 7; Wood, Leonard to F.W. Roebling, June 5, 1909, Box 1, Folder 2, NSGC; Wood, Leonard to Margaret O. Sage, June 9, 1909, Box 1, Folder 2, NSGC.
[29] "Portland School News," *Oregon Teacher's Monthly* 19:4 (December 1914), 248; Peckham, Edith M. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 82, Folder 6, NSGC.

suggested, "necessarily amplifies and explains some provisions at length in order that a child might clearly grasp their import."[30]

Whether or not the opportunity to experiment with such innovations helped schoolhouse citizens to "grasp" them in any depth is unclear; youngsters who practiced citizenship in civic laboratories rarely wrote about the experience in the abstract. What it did accomplish, however, was to teach them to equate the initiatives themselves—and the language of progressive political reform broadly—with collective empowerment and communal well-being. A Connecticut boy, Karl Maercklein, for example, suggested that government by a board of commissioners in his school city had helped his classmates become more self-sufficient, explaining that he and his fellows "did not like teachers watching them," and that introducing this form of management into the classroom had been a great help in that respect. "It is not necessary to have adult directors for the pupils," he concluded, "when they learn to take care of themselves." Similarly, Wisconsin eighth-grader Esther Hawkins suggested that this particular model of self-rule in her school brought increased independence because, "Before we had the commission form of government the teacher signed all the passes." In both examples, youngsters described their newfound ability to govern themselves not in terms of their own competence but rather, as evidence that a way of governing—in this case, the commission—had rendered them capable. Elsewhere, children cited the recall provision in their school city charters as a reason not to worry about the possibility of electing officious or inefficient officers, and they tended to associate progressive civic innovations generally with genuine democratic government. As one

[30] "Bulwarking Democracy Through Practical Education," *The Arena* 33:186 (May 1905), 540; "A School City in Virginia," *Juvenile Court Record* 8:2 (February 1907), 11; Kottman, William A. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC; Jones, Frank O. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC; Gittleman, Berdie. Survey Response, January 16, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC.

Newark schoolboy put it, “Whereas, in state government some corruptness exists, our school city is pure.” Asked to describe the advantages of pupil government in her school eighth-grader Madeline Jukes wrote simply that, “we have the iniative (sic) and the referendum,” an answer that seems to have been, as far as she was concerned, a *self-evident* endorsement. Statements such as these then, illustrate how role-play influenced the way the young thought about democratic government, leading them to conceptualize it as an amalgam of conventions that worked toward the public good and to think about their own responsibilities in terms of their relationship to those conventions.[31]

Nowhere was this process of normalizing new conventions more evident than in the opinions which youngsters expressed regarding woman’s suffrage. As discussed in Chapter Two, adults who advocated for hands-on citizenship instruction in schools insisted that all children—boys and girls—should be allowed to take part in civic role-play. Even though they claimed to have no desire to push a suffrage agenda *per se,* prominent voices in the self-government movement acknowledged that allowing girls to exercise the rights of political citizenship in civic laboratories would likely help accustom soon-to-be citizens to the idea of granting the franchise to women—an opinion shared by suffrage activists who embraced Wilson Gill’s ideas enthusiastically, encouraging mother’s clubs and parent organizations to advocate for them in their local schools. Educators seem to have been largely in agreement and descriptions of children engaging in civic role-play suggests that as members of the body politic boys and girls were on an equal footing, voting together and running for office with an even chance of winning

[31] Maercklein, Karl. Survey Response, ND, Box 85, Folder 3, NSGC; Hawkins, Esther. Survey Response, January 16, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Muller, Consuelo. Survey Response, ND, Box 87, Folder 1; Robser, Max. Survey Response, ND, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Jukes, Madeline. Survey Response, April 22, 1912, Box 86, Folder 6, NSGC; Gittleman, Birdie. Survey Response, January 16, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC.

elections. In a few schools, teachers experimented with forms of gender-based power sharing—mandating equal representation (one boy and one girl from each classroom) in school legislatures, co-office holding, or bicameral systems in which one chamber was reserved for boys and one for girls. In most schools, however, boys and girls campaigned for the same positions and appeared together on the same ballots. Indeed, observers sometimes noted that girls were favored over boys by most of the electorate for some positions, especially as judges and police officers, where their supposed capacity to be both merciful and fair made them an appealing choice for classmates.[32]

For children, who knew that adult women were largely barred from full participation in civic life, the brief experience with simulated political equality could be eye-opening. This was evident in a Brooklyn school, for instance, where Gill watched boys struggle with the notion that gender might have no bearing on citizenship. "I do not know why women aren't allowed to vote," one thirteen-year-old reportedly said, hypothesizing only that "our country must have some reason." In response, a classmate suggested that those reasons, if indeed there were any, might be flawed, pointing out that, "[i]n the western part of our country are several states where women have the same civic rights as men." Moreover, he noted, "In those states, I hear that men attend to their civic duties much better than the men do in the eastern states and that the women attend to their civic duties as faithfully and intelligently as the men do." For girls, on the other hand, civic role play seems to have inspired enthusiasm for public life and for the prospect of gaining rights that were denied to their mothers. "I don't see any advantage in our school government unless we're all going to be suffragettes (that is the girls) and take part in our state

[32] Tritt, W.W. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC; Wilson John J. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC; Stowe, "School Republics," 942; "The Gill School City," *New Education* 11:3 (March 1898), 1898.

and national government," wrote eighth-grader Florence Mackinnon. "If so, it might be the beginning of our voting and etc." It was essential that girls make their voices heard in their school cities, declared Elizabeth Thomas of Louisville, Kentucky, who suggested that, "[t]he time is fast coming for woman suffrage, and school government teaches girls as well as boys to be good citizens," an opinion shared by a Connecticut pupil who believed that it was important to participate in the pupil government because "we might have woman suffrage before long." Somewhat more circumspect was Wisconsin schoolgirl Bessie Cohen, who expressed gratitude for having the chance to learn about primaries, general elections and counting ballots, writing, "Altho I am a girl of twelve I may vote some time. Maybe women (sic) suffrage will win and if it does not I'll know that much anyway." The opportunity to vote, as well as to run for and hold office, seems to have inspired some youngsters to see these activities as perfectly reasonable pursuits for a woman, even if the thought had never occurred to them before; asked if she believed in woman suffrage Annie Denn of Manhattan told a reporter from the *New York Tribune*, "I didn't used to but have to now, I've been elected."[33]

In offering children the chance to experiment with multiple facets of civic life, role-play helped to establish the terms of civic engagement for these soon-to-be citizens, while normalizing values associated with those terms—whether it was the superiority of innovations such as the recall or the commission form of municipal management that they had experienced first-hand in their own classrooms, the utilitarian nature of helpful government made manifest in a Graphonola machine or improved playground safety, or the logic of allowing women to

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[33] Gill, *A New Citizenship*, 118-119; Mackinnon, Florence. Survey Response, December 9, 1912, Box 81, Folder 3, NSGC; Bauer, Beatrice. Survey Response, ND, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC; Thomas, Elizabeth. Survey Response, March 3, 1913, Box 85, Folder 7, NSGC; Cohen, Bessie. Survey Response, January 16, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; "How to Convert and Anti," *New York Tribune*, December 15, 1910, 10.

participate on an equal footing with men in the civic arena, which was demonstrated for them whenever female classmates voted or carried out the duties of the offices to which they had been elected. Treating everyday school life as a civic apprenticeship had given them not only some practical knowledge—what principal William McCluskey had described as the ability to decipher a cablegram or to talk intelligently about public matters—but also a schema for thinking and talking about the democratic process generally and about what it meant to be a responsible member of a democratic community. One can see evidence of these more intangible lessons in a 1911 letter, addressed to Frank Kiernan of the School Citizen's Committee, from the mayor of a Manhattan school city, Antonio Cammorata, who described "with pleasure" some of what had been achieved "during my short administration." Among the reforms on his agenda, Cammorata reported, were "to have the boys . . . come to school every day as clean as possible . . . have all the walls and corridors and staircases free from pencil and ink marking, have the yards cleaned from paper and the neighborhood around the school clean from garbage and rubbish." What role teachers might have had in encouraging such policies is impossible to say but it is not difficult to see adult influence here. What is most important, however, is that these youngsters (who presumably had been a grubbier, messier set prior to his election) appeared to have become more agreeable, with respect to cleanliness at least, under a government they understood to be their own and when their own classmates were making the rules and enforcing them. "After one month of fighting for sanitation," Cammorata declared, "I had it so it looked somewhat like an uptown school in the Bronx."[34]

There can be little doubt that Cammorata—who, in his inaugural address, had declared his intention to "do all in my power to carry out the promises I made while I was running for

[34] Cammorata, Antonio to Frank Kiernan, October 29, 1911, Box 2, Folder 8, NSGC.

office" and who told a *New York Tribune* reporter that his idea of government was to do "right" by the citizens—was genuinely proud of leading an effort to improve his school; yet, his letter also suggests that experience with practical civics led him to take for granted the notion that as mayor he had both an executive mandate to "fight" for sanitation and a right to expect collective cooperation, and that, to this end, "imposing an orderly system" on citizens "with the aid of patrolmen" was part and parcel of seeing to the public good. He was, moreover, not exceptional in this regard; some of his classmates exhibited a similar enthusiasm for consonance and the rule of law, as did youngsters from other schools—like a Chicago boy who described a successful campaign to end "disorder on the stairs, talking in line, playing tag in the basement, snowballing, ice ponds, fighting . . . [and] . . . chalk marks" on walls and sidewalks as clear evidence that "good government" prevailed among his classmates, or the Newark pupil who declared that citizenship in his civic laboratory "taught me how a city should be and ought to be governed . . . that a government could not be a good government unless it had discipline." Antonio Cammorata's description of his success illustrates how treating school as a simulacrum of civic life helped lay the groundwork for creating a collective conscientiousness. This is not to suggest that democratizing classrooms school transformed children overnight into believers in hygiene and tidiness; indeed, Cammorata's account suggests that at first, it took considerable policing on the part of his officers to ensure compliance. However, as was the case in Prosser a decade earlier, recasting ordinary school day activities as opportunities to publicly demonstrate civic virtue appears to have gradually suppressed some of the rough-and-tumble characteristics of his constituency, facilitating the transformation of his classmates into dutiful citizens—a process that occurred in schools throughout the United States. It was no small wonder then so many progressive-minded adults saw democratic role-play in classrooms as an elemental civic reform;

in the words of the principal at Cammorata's school, its "object lessons" were "perfect," making youngsters "amenable to orders" and training them to "cooperate" with government while at the same time "giving thought to things that improve conditions."[35]

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Early in the spring of 1911, James T. Gardiner, a prominent civil engineer in New York City, had the opportunity to visit three large schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn to observe civic laboratories first-hand. In a letter to Lyman Beecher Stowe, Gardiner described his experience, noting that he had been most impressed at "the unusual discipline and order" demonstrated in the classrooms at all three institutions. Observations like this were not uncommon. Educators who experimented with civic laboratories reported that granting children even nominal autonomy seemed to result in orderly, more predictable student bodies. Indeed, regardless of how they felt about it as a method for increasing civic literacy, most teachers agreed that pupil-government was a model for enlightened classroom management. Self-rule, they wrote, made maintaining discipline "simpler" or "easier" and resulted in "increased respect for teacher control." The benefits of practical civics instruction with respect to maintaining order, declared a Tennessee principal, were "too numerous to enumerate," while another reported that out of eight classes in his New Jersey school the one operating under a system of self-government was "the most strictly disciplined room in the bldg."[36]

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[35] Unsigned Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 78, Folder 4, NSGC; "Mayor of School City In," *New York Tribune*, December 7, 1910, 8; Rostron, Arnold. Survey Response, May 15, 1911, Box 82, Folder 5, NSGC; Webb, Harold R. Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC.
[36] Gardiner, James T. to Lyman Beecher Stowe, April 26, 1911, Box 2, Folder 3, NSGC; Lodor, Charles, Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 85, Folder 6, NSGC; Walter, Minnie, Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 86, Folder 1, NSGC; Ford, T.E. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC; Knapp, T. Principal Questionnaire 1911, Box 86, Folder 2, NSGC.

Throughout the first two decades of the century, most educators would have agreed with Gardiner that it was "discipline, of a very high order" which distinguished the self-governed school—even more than the political theatre that occurred within. The principal of the Cos Cob School in Greenwich, Connecticut, for example, reported a measurable improvement in the behavior of his pupils soon after adopting Gill's methods, describing how in a single month the number of youngsters appearing before the school court declined steadily from just over one hundred per week to eight per week, eventually reaching an average of three per month. Others reported chaotic schoolhouse corridors becoming comparatively quiet and rough-and-tumble schoolyards becoming civil, while more than one teacher found that introducing their students to a system for self-rule made it possible to step out of the room for a moment without courting mayhem in the class. Changes like these led many to the conclusion that however useful it might have been as a method of teaching civics, what role play was, ultimately, was a system for shaping character. As Philadelphia principal Anna McCormick put it in a 1903 letter to Gill, while "the children learn a great deal of . . . government, of the manner of conducting elections, and of the duties of the several offices . . . I have always felt that the greatest good accomplished by the 'school city' was through the moral atmosphere it creates." Writing to Frank Kiernan of the School Citizen's Committee, Alameda principal Henry Suzzalo offered much the same view—surprising, perhaps, given the effort he put into making hands-on citizenship instruction in his school as practical as possible. "The vital work of self-government is the building of character," he wrote, "the civics teaching side is negligible as compared with the moral phase of [pupil self-government]." Others attributed its usefulness to the fact that it "help[s] in the development of real character" or that it "appeals to the moral and patriotic side of the child's nature" and claimed that it "increased the interest in morals [and] manners," as well as in civics.

"Character building is my aim," wrote principal Cecelia Boudimot, who noted with pleasure that less than a month after establishing a civic laboratory in her New Brunswick, New Jersey grammar school, there had been "an improvement in the decorum of the citizens."[37]

When teachers reported that role-play was a positive influence on behavior, they seemed to corroborate what Gill and his colleagues in the self-government movement had been claiming ever since he had taken up the cause of civic education—that both inside and outside the schoolhouse good citizenship was really evidence of a properly calibrated moral compass, made manifest in upstanding civic habits. In so far as it allowed children to practice sober, responsible citizenship, the School City—and indeed, all forms of active citizenship education—represented a breakthrough in teaching both ethics *and* civics. "It is not a question of textbooks and recitations," Gill said of his method, "but of practical character." Other self-government advocates concurred, suggesting, as Kiernan did, that "in the necessary absence of religious instruction as such in the public schools" this kind of civic socialization constituted a "much needed means of moral inspiration and training." As far as most self-government enthusiasts were concerned, in order to be useful, hands-on civics training needed to provide future citizens with an introduction to the technicalities of civic participation and an appropriate frame for understanding what constituted constructive, praiseworthy civic engagement—what a 1908 monograph on *Moral Training in the Public Schools* defined as "civic righteousness." Having seen for himself how giving youngsters a voice in government influenced their behavior, Gardiner surmised that "the effect [of introducing student government into schools] on the pupils

[37] Fry, John J. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 82, Folder 4, NSGC; McCormick, Anna to Wilson L. Gill, June 19, 1903, Gill Papers; Suzzalo, Henry to Frank Kiernan, ND, Box 1, Folder 7, NSGC; Tritt, W.W. Principal Questonnaire, ND, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC; Kennedy, Annie J.F. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC; Knoght, Abbie C. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 80, Folder 1, NSGC; Boudimot, Cecelia, Principal Questionnaire, March 4, 1912, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC.

is to stimulate the moral sense; develop the power of self-control and fit them for the duties of future citizenship."[38]

Yet for all their talk of moral education—of individual accountability and thoughtful democratic habits—self-government advocates were more concerned with reforming the body politic than they were with nurturing principled citizens *per se*. In a letter to the Superintendent of Schools in Concord, Massachusetts, for example, Frank Kiernan suggested that from the perspective of civic education, integrity alone was of little value. "There are self-government plans in schools that I know of in and about this city where the highest kind of personal morality is developed and yet in some of these schools very little is done that specifically and definitely calls into play the community conscious of the individuals," he wrote, emphasizing the distinction between collective and personal conscientiousness. "Are not out cities filled with righteous men and women who lead the most perfect kind of lives and yet from the standpoint of the body politic their force is nil?" When civics reformers praised the character-building potential of student government it was with the understanding that civic principles were praiseworthy only insofar as they contributed (and conformed) to a collective notion of the common will. As Gill put it, the development of both "a civic conscious" and "a healthy public opinion" depended on encouraging "the children's constant cooperation for the general good." How, exactly, one might define "the general good" was left unsaid, but self-government boosters made it clear that they saw order in the school as a rehearsal for order in the republic and that in

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[38] Kiernan, Frank. Typescript Draft of Letter, July 15, 1910, Box 1, Folder 7, NSGC; Mowry, Don Ensminger. *Moral Training in the Public Schools* (Boston: New England Publishing Company, 1908), 9.

classrooms filled with law-abiding, complaisant schoolchildren, they saw their ideal public character writ small.[39]

What was the connection between student government and more obedient boys and girls? Educators and civic reformers alike often suggested that simply treating youngsters as if they were responsible citizens led them to act accordingly and that school-citizens were simply more prone to embrace order if they felt they had a role to play in creating it. As one Manhattan principal explained, "Offenses decrease because children know they themselves have helped make the laws." Providing his pupils the opportunity to exercise a little civic autonomy made them "more appreciative of order and method," reported a schoolmaster from Bellows Falls, Vermont, while another principal, Ella L. Austin, found that "the influence of this method has really been remarkable," noting that "the children appreciate the laws which they have made themselves and this makes them appreciate all law." American teachers, the argument went, had long relied on autocratic methods to maintain order in their classrooms, which inevitably led to resistance and disobedience; in a self-governed school, on the other hand, children made and enforced laws themselves and, embracing the ethos of good republican citizens, they happily complied with them.[40]

As appealing as it might have been to reformers, the claim that experience with genuine self-rule made orderly, conscientious citizens out of young people largely ignored the reality that grown-ups remained in control. Indeed, educators seemed to find nothing incongruous in praising students for their capacity to govern themselves while at the same time describing subtle ways of guiding the democratic process toward desirable ends—a cognitive dissonance that was

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[39] Kiernan, Frank to Wells A. Hall, January 6, 1913, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC; Gill, Wilson,
[40] Kottman, William A. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC; Tuttle, A.E. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 88, Folder 5, NSGC; Austin, Ella.

quite plain to some children. A Berkeley, California boy named Bennie Stoddard, for instance, argued that “it comes down to the bare fact that the pupils have no power.” He complained that “usually the adult influences the minds of the pupils,” and that as a result, “the advantages to the pupils [of self-rule] are not very great.” Although she had held several offices in her school city, Helen Stearns of Connecticut came to much the same conclusion, writing, “There isn’t much advantage in having pupils . . . make the laws only that it makes it easier for the teachers and principal.” Yet far more came away from role-play believing that the opportunity to participate in a civic process obviated the privilege of questioning or disagreeing with one’s government. Typical was a boy from San Diego, who suggested that “the practice of voting” made the average student feel “that he is represented in whatever movements (sic) are taken hence he will obey and stand by them.” Likewise, a Chicago seventh grader claimed that “if the pupils are satisfied with an officer they elected they will obey them better.” Other children expressed similar attitudes, writing, for instance, that “When the laws are made by their own representatives the pupils should willingly obey them” or that “it is nothing more than right to obey the laws made by their student body” or that “their [sic] can be no improvement [to self-government] for we all think it is worth having and should do just as we’re ordered to do.” Testimonials such as these were not uncommon, as children wrote about their encounters with hands-on civics instruction in such a way as to suggest that they understood an amiable, cooperative attitude, with respect to the state, as the *sine qua non* of civic virtue. Explained one twelve-year-old boy, being a citizen meant that “I have no right to find fault with the laws.”[41]

[41] Stoddard, Bennie, Survey Response, ND, Box 86, Folder 6, NSGC; Stearns, Helen, Survey Response, ND, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC; Good, L.H. Survey Response, March 25, 1912, Box 87, Folder 5, NSGC; Millard, Irene, Survey Response, May 15, 1911, Box 82, Folder 5, NSGC; Pupil Essay, No Name, ND, Box 88, Folder 5, NSGC; Klitsch, D. Survey Response, ND, Box

In suggesting that the privilege of participating in a democratic process foreclosed one's "right to find fault" with government policies, or that it came with an obligation to "do just as we're ordered to do" children revealed how civic agency was taught in virtual cities and states. Vigorous citizenship, they learned, was an amalgam of good civic habits—the habit of voting, for instance, or the habit of staying informed about important issues, or of giving support to government officers who saw to the public welfare. In short, effective citizens exercised their civic responsibilities in a sober manner along cooperative lines of action. What was more, this view of self-rule was delivered in the context of a tautological truism, that honest, effective government reflected the collective virtue of the people and that therefore, in as much as they practiced proper civic habits, virtuous citizens could have no legitimate reason to question authority or be discontented with government. As a New York City principal explained, "a desire to be good citizens of the school prevents any serious breach of good order."[42]

Striving each day to be responsible citizens in their schools, children learned to equate conscientious civic behavior with teamwork—something that they described as a shared attitude of helpfulness brokered *through* government. Newark eighth-grader William Raab, for example, explained that "participating in school government . . . helps us to know the needs of the great city and what we could do to help it along." Thus, in directing the energies of his classmates toward a collective good, "the government of the schools prevents many personal uprisings and shows the foolishness of lawbreaking." Mabel Larson of West Duluth, Minnesota, expressed it differently, starting with an observation. "About two years ago our teachers stood like policemen in the halls and by the cloakrooms," she wrote. "Now we have boys and girls do that work."

82, Folder 3, NSGC; Keeler, Christine, Survey Response, March 25, 1912, Box 82, Folder 3, NSGC; Locker, Anthony, Survey Response, April 2, 1912, Box 82, Folder 2, NSGC.

[42] Clark, John King, Principal Questionnaire, March 1913, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC.

Describing the results of their democracy as “wonderful” she explained that even without supervision “everybody marches in the school just as nicely” with “no noise whatever.” Working together with their government, Larson felt, meant “we are helping the teachers just as much as we are helping ourselves” and that therefore, this was a way for her fellow citizens to express thanks for the “many privileges” their government had given them.[43]

Opportunities for demonstrating the kind of a helpful attitude that Mabel Larson described were countless. As the impulse to experiment with different forms of pupil government spread, educators and journalists, as well as children themselves, documented how boys and girls were working “to correct a number of little abuses” in their schools—many of which, observers also noted, had been almost impossible to eradicate using old, autocratic classroom management methods. The principal of the Northwest School in Hartford, for instance, noted that prior to organizing a school city he and his teachers “had striven for three years with little success to keep pupils off the grass which grows on each side of a gravel walk.” The problem, he explained, was that the children “did not like to walk on the gravel and naturally walked on the grass unless a teacher was with them to remind them.” However, “Since this matter was placed in the pupils’ hands they have felt their responsibility and have remembered to keep on the walk. Formerly it was ‘up to’ the teachers, and the pupils left it to them; now it is ‘up to’ the pupils and they attend to it.” Elsewhere, budding citizens helped to stamp out “profanity and the use of bad language, writing on walls, throwing of papers, pretzels, hats, bananas, apple or orange skins or mud” to stop “chewing gum [and] eating anything in school” and to do away with a host of schoolhouse

[43] Raab, William, Survey Response, Jan 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Larson Mabel, Survey Response, Survey Response, December 6, 1912, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC.

sins, from whispering and sneaking candy into classrooms to talking in line and getting up snowball fights in playgrounds.[44]

Educators of course had been battling against all kinds of schoolhouse mischief since time out of mind, their task made more difficult, some claimed, because children were loyal to one another to such a degree that it undercut the influence of school authorities. In the eyes of self-government advocates, traditional methods of classroom management distorted the child's sense of communal responsibility; Gill for instance, argued that in American schools "secret opposition and disloyalty to constituted authority is constantly fostered." Anyone who had struggled to correct juvenile ideas about right and wrong, the argument went—who had tried to disabuse youngsters of their aversion to tattling, for instance, or to help them overcome what appeared to be a visceral dislike of teacher's pets or other peers who got too cozy with authority figures—knew the frustration of trying to break through the child's unwritten code of honor in order to instill respect for authority. In the eyes of civic reformers this code constituted what Lyman Beecher Stowe described as "a kind of inverted *esprit de corps*" that put good government (in the form of the teacher's informed influence) at odds with the people (those children who made up the classroom community) whose best interests were the aim of government. "All this," Stowe declared, "the School City turns right side up." Allowing children to take part in a democratic process realigned their sympathies *with* government; treating them like citizens and giving them some responsibilities for communal well-being helped them to become "as interested in having things go right as are the teachers." It was a way, Stowe

[44] Chapman, Elwood B. to Frank Kiernan, Nov 13, 1912, Box 3, Folder 4, NSGC; Jones, Frank O. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC; List of "Rules for Grade 6, Room 2 School 11, Passaic, New Jersey," ND, Box 85, Folder 6, NSGC; Dahl, Arthur, Survey Response, January 23, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Rostron, Arnold, Survey Response, May 15, 1911, Box 82, Folder 5, NSGC.

concluded, of putting them—teachers and students, government and the governed—on what he described as "the same side of the disciplinary fence."[45]

Reformers posited this kind of fence-jumping as profound—the harbinger, Stowe suggested, of a new civic spirit. For children who experienced it in the context of everyday school life, the ramifications were more prosaic. Pupils at P.S. 109 in New York City, for example (described by Frank Kiernan as a "fine self-government school" with a busy court and an active legislature) wrote about the "privilege" of citizenship or the "great advantages in taking part in school government." For eighth-graders Celia Epstein and Pauline Gutny this meant supporting a law prohibiting girls from wearing ribbons in their hair, regardless of how they felt about the matter personally. Although they suggested that this particular regulation did not reflect the opinions of citizens in their school—rather, it seemed to reflect their teacher's disapproval of "fancy things, which in other schools are allowed" as Epstein wrote—both described it as reasonable and just, given that it had been imposed upon them not by the teacher in question but by their own legislators. As one of their classmates explained, part of participating in "school government . . . [is] . . . carrying out what they tell me is necessary to do." Or, as another wrote, responsible citizenship was a matter of learning "to honor my school as I would honor my country."[46] Boys and girls at the Northwest School used similar language to describe how the tidiness of the grounds had boosted pride in the school and the efficacy of its government—thus confirming their principal's belief that they had made the injunction "keep off

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[45] "Self-Governing Schools," *The Literary Digest*, 27:6 (8 August 1903), 159; Stowe, "School Republics," 948.

[46] Kiernan, Frank to A.J. Demarest, April 11, 1912, Box 2, Folder 9, NSGC; Goldberg, Hyman, Survey Response, December 13, 1912, Box 81, Folder 3, NSGC; Epstein, Celia, Survey Response, December 17 1912, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC; Gutney, Pauline, Survey Response, December 17, 1912, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC; Shifrin, Annie, Survey Response, December 17, 1912, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC; Londonsky, Celia, Survey Response, December 17, 1912, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC.

the grass" their own. Similar paradigm shifts took place in Bellingham, Washington and Wyandotte, Michigan where pupils described ordinances against previously chronic offences like "throwing paper, apple cores and orange peels about the yard" or "running across the lawn" as evidence of "improved" public sentiment in their schools.[47]

Prosaic though they may be, examples like these illustrate just how successful educators and reformers were in teaching children to view participation in civic life as a *pro forma* endorsement of democratic mores. It was clear to all involved—adults and children alike—that the civic power possessed by school citizens was nominal; as Celia Epstein observed, it was all well and good to elect representatives, but it was "Mrs. Ledwidth" and her views on appropriate hairstyles for young ladies that drove the legislative agenda. Yet, taught to believe that the system of government they shared with one another gave them a voice in civic matters, children readily embraced cooperation as the appropriate posture for citizens to take, *vis-à-vis* their government. All of this is not to suggest that things such as litter-free playgrounds were without value, or that adults had no legitimate reasons for wanting children to be clean and attentive when attending school. However, the laws passed by student legislatures and administered by pint-size civil servants reflected what teachers thought best rather than any real consensus about reasonable public goods among the presumptive citizens themselves. With adults guiding the democratic process, neophyte citizens learned to understand government as an arbiter of public sentiment rather than as a tool of public power.

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[47] Feely, Irene, Survey Response, Dec 13, 1912, Box 81, Folder 3, NSGC; Hallman, Irene, Survey Response, Jan 7, 1913, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC; Brannick, Marguerite, Survey Response, Jan 7, 1913, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC.

In 1911 a correspondent for *Harper's Weekly* took his readers inside a school city courtroom where a trial was underway. The defendant, identified as "Citizen Leskowitch," stood accused of disturbing the peace—specifically, of "fightin' in the corridor and hittin' Citizen Jacobs." After a brief trial, during which witnesses testified that following a verbal altercation Leskowitch had indeed struck his classmate, the 15-year-old presiding judge issued a guilty verdict and sentenced Leskowitch—who had produced no witnesses of his own—to one week of hard labor, instructing him that "he must see to it that no pieces of paper . . . crusts or banana peels littered the floor of Class-room Seven or its contiguous corridors." The upshot of all this, the writer suggested, was that "all his fellow citizens realized his offense and spurned it by reflex in themselves, so that order and discipline were notably strengthened in the School City."[48]

Scenes like this one played out often in schools across the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century, with the youthful lawbreaker standing before classmates who, acting as magistrates or juries, passed judgement in the name of the collective. "A unique spectacle," was how the progressive journal *The Arena* described it; student-officers "rounding up truants, trying and punishing offenders, enforcing discipline . . . leaving to their teachers only the actual work of teaching." The court, it declared, was "the most striking feature of the School City, for its decisions are obeyed without question, though the prisoners are often great hulking bullies, and the judges are only three winsome little girls." Most adults who witnessed civic role-play firsthand came away with a similar impression. In one Brooklyn school, for instance, the activities of a court struck a visitor as the "more dramatic side" of practical civics instruction, where "a big hulky boy was haled (*sic*) into court" and after "trying to summon up a defiant spirit" visibly withered under the power of the bench, "hung his head, confessed that he had

[48] Johnson, Charles. "The School Republic," *Harpers Weekly* 55:13 (September 23, 1911), 13.

broken a school law, gulped and received his sentence in silence." Much the same thing took place at the Prescott School in Syracuse, New York, where the principal described how a problem that most of his colleagues were familiar with—that of the perennial troublemaker—had been "settled at once" in the children's own tribunal, as the recalcitrant student "came before the judge a most humble penitent." Another observer described a classroom trial in a Cincinnati school as "quite solemn," noting how "twelve young jurors," along with, "the judge, the prosecuting attorney and clerk of the court on the platform," while "the young prisoner, arrested for swearing and using foul language in the school yard, stood white and trembling before the court."[49]

Although adults who observed civic laboratories often made references to the serious atmosphere that prevailed at such events—projecting, perhaps, their own notions of what constituted an appropriate degree of gravitas for court officials and civil servants—it was not just an aptitude for pretend on the part of children that impressed them so. While severe little judges and businesslike court-clerks were, in their eyes, evidence of a healthy schoolhouse polity so too were the expressions of shame and regret on the faces of wrongdoers. Indeed, most observers found the regulatory activities of these artificial polities especially noteworthy because they seemed have a real and substantive influence on the behavior of pupil-citizens. In the case of the Syracuse troublemaker, for instance, one encounter with the student-government authorities was apparently enough to have him mend his ways; in the terse words of his principal, "He always caused trouble. Now he causes none." To be sure, the power of pupil courts to punish or correct citizens in democratized schools was, like the power of pupil legislatures to pass law, nominal;

[49] "Moral and Civic Training," *The Instructor* 17 (December 1907), 13; Murphy, Caroline M. "Report of the School City Committee," *The American Monthly Magazine* 29:2 (August 1906), 416;

no one—least of all the typical schoolhouse scofflaw—was under any illusions about where those three winsome jurists derived their authority, and teachers were quite clear that they alone had the legal power to discipline. Yet, they also admitted that introducing a simulacrum of the democratic process into school-life precipitated a level of complaisance that had always been elusive, commenting on how student governments were often successful not just in keeping boys and girls off the grass but also in bringing more restive school citizens to heel. As we have seen, reformers liked to attribute this phenomenon to a kind of civic *quid pro quo*, in which giving youngsters a voice in government inevitably led them to take their collective responsibilities more seriously and to honor rules which were at least superficially democratic. However, while role play clearly motivated some youngsters to do their best to be good citizens, the transformation of troublesome members of the body politic—children, that is, who adults had often written off as incorrigible—into "humble" penitents suggests that there was more at work here than building a positive feeling about government.

How did democratized schools make well-behaved citizens out of class bullies and schoolyard toughs? Although he was described as something of a ruffian who stood "a full head taller" than the "authorities" he confronted, Citizen Leskowitch appeared to wilt at his trial—a reaction, the *Harper's Weekly* correspondent surmised, not to the formalities of the court but rather because he felt himself losing the support of his classmates. During the trial he "rubbed his nose uneasily, fidgetted (*sic*) from one foot to the other [and] looked at the body of his fellow citizens . . . as if seeking inspiration or canvassing public opinion" and after sentencing "slouched back to his desk abashed, realizing that the unanimous voice of the City had gone against him." A similar dynamic was at play in the Cincinnati example, where the defendant "was allowed to speak for himself but broke down and pleaded guilty." Noting that "the trial was

held in a school room, with all the pupils sitting at their desks with folded arms, silent but deeply interested," the observer there suggested that "the ordeal the boy endured, rather than the punishment he received, will help to cure him of swearing." In both cases, role-play involved not just a theatrical recreation of adult institutions but also marshaling what amounted to communal support for such institutions, expressed through pressure to conform. Whether it came in the shape of the "unanimous" disapproval of fellow students or the silent (but apparently unnerving) gaze of classmates this pressure was an essential element in socializing *good* citizens. As the Syracuse principal explained it, the troublesome citizen in his school mended his ways because ultimately "he found it impossible to withstand public opinion."[50] Shame, of course, had been a part of the schoolteacher's disciplinary toolkit since colonial days; now, however, it was being rehabilitated as "public opinion" and drafted into the service of good government.[51]

Not just an interesting side-effect of classroom democratization, the rise in pressure to conform among the children themselves was a significant factor in the success of civic role-play—something that became apparent to many observers soon after the first school cities were established. As early as 1901 a newspaper reporter in Grand Forks, North Dakota, for instance, noted of the school city, "so powerful is the force of public opinion here that no one ever thinks of evading a penalty. The scorn attendant on it would be too high a price to pay." A year later, a correspondent for the progressive political journal *Gunton's Magazine* echoed this assessment, explaining that in self-governed schools "public opinion was the supreme law" and that "children are quick to recognize its justice, and themselves insist upon its strict enforcement." Citing the example of a child who for a time refused to obey a summons to appear before his school city

[50] "The School Republic," 13; "Report of the School City Committee," 416; "Moral and Civic Training, 13.
[51] Peter N. Sterns and Clio Sterns, "American Schools and the Uses of Shame: An Ambiguous History," *History of Education* 46:1 (2017), 58-75.

court, the *Gunton's* correspondent described how the defiant citizen had discovered that "public sentiment was so against him that his presence was not suffered in the company of the rest of the school" eventually concluding "that not to appear would ruin his school life." Testimonials such as these made it clear that as educators began to treat school life as an apprenticeship for civic life the embryonic public within the school internalized the kind of cooperative attitude (with respect to authority) that teachers had long sought. As another observer explained, "The 'school city' is not a system of punishments, but a method of avoiding the necessity of punishment by putting the children on their honor and creating a public opinion among them which compels that honor to be respected."[52]

In an enthusiastic article on the topic, progressive editor Albert Shaw wrote that common schoolhouse problems were being solved quickly under democratic regimes, not simply because pupil-citizens were passing and enforcing laws aimed at reform but because when children were included in the governing process they became invested in its success; as in the adult world, nurturing order in the classroom, he surmised, was a matter of ensuring that the measures taken by authorities to maintain order be backed up by collective sentiment. Using bad language on the playground as an example, Shaw thus suggested that "the public opinion of the school . . . would do more to abolish profanity in ten days than the best teacher could probably do in a year." In emphasizing public opinion as a factor in facilitating reform Shaw obliquely suggested that given an opportunity, well-trained citizens would demonstrate the "group consciousness" that Oswald Schlokow had described as the key to democratic self-rule. In a letter to the School Citizen's Committee, Chicago principal John T. Ray emphasized this lesson as fundamental to the field of

[52] "They Make Laws," *Grand Forks Daily Herald,* February 3, 1901, 3; White, James T. "The Gill School City," *Gunton's Magazine*, 22:6 (June 1902), 535-543; Curtis, William E. "May Plant it Here," *Evening Star*, May 7, 1909, 11.

practical civics, noting that while his young citizens often struggled to master the nuts-and-bolts facts about how government works "they do [know] how to keep order—create public sentiment—and enforce obedience 'of all, by all, and for all.'"[53]

In the eyes of those who advocated for democratized schools, fabricating a public opinion and sensitizing youngsters to its influence were essential parts of preparing them for political citizenship. Indeed, when children expressed a preference for the unambiguous rule of adults or a distaste for the more theatrical elements of civic role play, observers took it as evidence that these youngsters were "very conservative" or "immature" or that "they do not seem to have caught the self-government idea" and had difficulties thinking for themselves. "There does not seem to be much feeling of independence among the children," commented a staff member at the School Citizen's Committee, after reviewing survey responses from students at a Lexington, Missouri school, noting that "the force of public opinion in the enforcement of laws and in punishment for the enfringement (*sic*) of them is not very clearly felt." By the same token, self-government enthusiasts dismissed skeptical adults as blind to how harnessing the *vox populi* served to bolster the authority of civic institutions. In a 1912 essay Richard Welling gave an example of such thinking, describing one educator who believed that young people suffered from a surfeit of independence; thus, Welling wrote, he "was unable to grasp that punishment by a young judge backed by a unanimous public opinion of the peers of the accused had more terrors than the same punishment meted out by the Faculty (*sic*) or headmaster without regard to public opinion." As Welling saw it, "the mechanism of government" used in any given school—be it a simulacrum of a grown-up city or state or, conversely, some form of student council or advisory

[53] Shaw, Albert. "The School City: A Method of Pupil Self-Government," *The American Monthly Review of Reviews* 20:6 (December 1899), 678; Ray, John T. to Frank Kiernan, May 20, 1911, Box 2, Folder 3, NSGC.

committee—was less important than the goal, which, he wrote, was "socialization" and "the development of public opinion" in future citizens.[54]

Much like the civic "sentiment" that helped to maintain order in John Ray's Chicago school, the well-developed public opinion that Welling admired had a noticeable impact on everyday school-life—not just when pupil citizens found themselves answering for themselves in courts staffed by peers, but also in routine activities, in classrooms, corridors and playgrounds. A teacher in a Philadelphia school, for instance, told how a problem student—a boy who had made it a habit to slip away from his desk early whenever her back was turned—was detained one day by the chief of police, who directed him back to his place. After settling into his seat, the youngster "took a hasty survey of the room and decided that public opinion was on the side of the chief and so quietly went on with his work." What was more, his teacher—saving "the most remarkable" part for last—noted that he "never again attempted to leave . . . and has completely changed his careless ways." Thus, like the pupils who were shamed in court, the would-be truant had been reformed, not through the intervention of the officer but because of the collective pressure to follow the rules of his school city.[55]

The Philadelphia schoolteacher's anecdote nicely illustrates the substance of Welling's suggestion, that practical civic education depended on aligning public opinion with the aims of government, thereby ensuring that citizens (who contemplated "more terrors" in the disapproval of fellow citizens than in formal punishments) would remain more-or-less predictable as civic actors. As a California principal put it, "crowd psychology is the underlying factor. If that can be

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[54] Notes on Pupil Survey Responses from the Whittier School, Des Moines, IA, ND, Box 86, Folder 1, NSGC; Notes on Pupil Survey Responses from the Lexington Missouri High School, ND, Box 86, Folder 7, NSGC; Welling, Richard. "Owen Johnson Prize Essay," in *Self-Government Miscellanies* (N.P.) 1903-1915, 18.
[55] Gill, *A New Citizenship*, 125-127.

handled, the results are sure." Indeed, to this end, educators became quite adept at leveraging collective sentiment in democratized schools. For instance, in a 1912 letter to the School Citizen's Committee, Frank Jones, the principal of the Northwest School in Hartford, Connecticut, recounted his experience with one sixth grader "who did not enter into the spirit of self-government with the other children" and who "persisted in misbehaving" despite every attempt to discipline him. "I presented the case to his classmates," Jones explained, and, after some debate, this *ad hoc* jury recommended that the troublemaker be whipped. To Jones' surprise, "the boy who had appeared perfectly indifferent and callous when his teacher had recommended the same punishment, now broke down and begged piteously for another chance." At the behest of the same classmates (who viewed his pleading as evidence that he had learned his lesson) the boy was spared the whipping. Nevertheless, Jones noted that once settled back into his classroom, the previously incorrigible child was from that point forward well-behaved. Madeline Brazier, a teacher from Morristown, New Jersey who believed that her pupil government "served to reinforce the idea of student control in all things," had a similar experience with one of her eighth graders, who she described as "a most disagreeable, non-attentive and entirely bad girl." Although this problem child was apparently a "hard case" much like the one that troubled Jones, Brazier was able to report that, "through the efforts of the entire class she lost her desire to be so thoroughly bad, became more attentive and did G work in everything."[56]

For youngsters, the obligation to conform along with the implied obligation not to tolerate non-conformism in others was a key element of practical socialization for civic life.

[56] Weinland, H.A. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 86, Folder 6, NSGC; Jones, Frank O. to School Citizen's Committee, April 8, 1912, Box 81, Folder 1 NSGC; Brazier, Madeline, Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 82 Folder 2, NSGC.

Indeed, as far as pupil-citizens in democratized schools were concerned it was axiomatic that, insofar as good government was the work of a responsible polis, a responsible polis would suffer no aberrant behavior. As Brooklyn schoolgirl Angie Letts explained it, she and her classmates were in an ideal position to "handle serious cases of theft, insubordination and truancy because the public sentiment of a wrong-doers (*sic*) own friends against him is the best kind of punishment." A seventh grader from Santa Clara, California named Anita March expressed much the same point of view, insisting that giving children the power to compel obedience made sense because for boys and girls the disapproval of one's peers was a more serious matter than the disapproval of a teacher. A school citizen who broke the law, March wrote, "would be more ashamed to get up in front of a great many pupils and . . . wouldn't be so lible (*sic*) to do it again as they would if the teach (*sic*) punished them," a sentiment shared by a Minnesota schoolboy who wrote that "if a boy does anything wrong he is given a trial and sentenced by his school mates and they do not like this so they behave pretty well" and by another boy from Pennsylvania who believed that when fellow students received correction at the hands of a teacher "they are just hardened, while if they are before their own fellow students it is more likely to effect (*sic*) them."[57]

Accounts like these suggest that most children would have agreed with Angie Letts that it was "the shame of being criticized by the masses" that led troublesome citizens to mend their ways. In one New Jersey school tardiness dropped to its lowest level in years, according to an eighth grader, who noted that "children come to school on time for fear of their classmate's displeasure if one should come late." The pupil who persisted in being unpunctual, explained

[57] Letts, Angie, Survey Response; March, Anita, Survey Response, May 16, 1911, Box 86, Folder 6, NSGC; Connelly, Robert, Survey Response, 6 December 1912, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Houck, Russell, Survey Response, ND, Box 86, Folder 3, NSGC.

another boy from the same school, "loses the friendship of his school-mates." Another eighth grader, Hilma Haglund of West Duluth, Minnesota, described how before the student government became established at her school "there was much fighting" after class each day and that this "made a lot of trouble for everyone." However, now, she wrote, "we have a Judiciary Department, and it is felt a disgrace to be sentenced by it, so that prevents wrongdoing." To be ostracized for failing to demonstrate loyalty to the school and its government was the greatest deterrent to nonconformism, regardless of whether nonconformism itself warranted formal punishment—so much so that several pupils at the Union School in Emphona, Kansas, believed wholeheartedly that it was appropriate to deprive uncooperative classmates of their citizenship rights for even the smallest infractions.[58]

While the influence of juvenile public opinion can be seen most clearly in cases like these, where children misbehaved to greater or lesser degrees, group consciousness made itself felt in democratized classrooms under the guise of school spirit or class loyalty as well. Los Angeles student Rush Martin for instance, suggested that there was a relationship between civic enthusiasm and pupil government, writing that, "school spirit is encouraged and school undertakings such as athletics, debating and . . . plays are made a success more through student government and student interest in student government than in any other way." Taking much the same position, New Jersey eighth grader Harry Sigman correlated the lessons learned in the civic laboratory with the kind of communal *esprit de corps* that he believed the good citizen should carry into adulthood, writing that self-government had shown him "how to behave and gives me

[58] Hegedus, Frank, Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Raab, William, Survey Response; Haglund, Hilma, Survey Response, December 6, 1912, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Carter, Alice, Survey Response, May 1,1911, Box 86, Folder 2, NSGC; DeYoung, Ethel, Survey Response, May 1, 1911, Box 86, Folder 2, NSGC; Burton, Lloyd, Survey Response, May 1, 1911, Box 86, Folder 2, NSGC.

a school spirit." Elaborating, he equated good behavior with a noble spirit, explaining that "the laws of the school city must be abeied (sic) and I must be governed by them. The school city makes a better man from a boy when he is older by giving him the ways the city is governed and the results if you break the laws of the city." Other youngsters made similar connections—arguing, for example, that exemplary citizenship was demonstrated through self-control and that therefore "any one who has . . . School Spirit will always try to have self-control that the good name of the school shall not be disgraced for lack of self-control," or that "a person who takes part in the government and wants it to advance and . . . does all he can to make it advance has the right spirit," or that "through the school government the pupils are greatly inspired with a good school spirit."[59]

While youngsters cited obedience and a cooperative attitude with respect to government and its officers as indicative of the *right* spirit these were hardly the only signifiers. As Lillian Rissland, a student at the 13th Avenue School in Newark, New Jersey explained, citizens also demonstrated a "splendid school spirit" through teamwork in general—in "the manner in which they perform their school duties, lessons, and sing their school songs." Likewise, after acknowledging how his experience with practical civics instruction had taught him "the value of good men in office" and of "private ballot voting" eighth grader Harold Frolich noted how spirit engendered through the democratic process had also produced a number of social benefits, including, "large . . . profits in school sales of peanuts and chocolate." If a successful fundraising effort was evidence that school citizens supported the welfare of their communities, so too were such things as high attendance at athletic events or enthusiasm for musical and theatrical

[59] Martin, Rush, Survey Response, December 12, 1912, Box 81, Folder 2, NSGC; Levin, Louis, Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Rissland, Lillian, Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC

productions or other extracurriculars or the goal of getting one's name in the yearbook—activities that were becoming increasingly common markers of school life in the early twentieth century, all of which were cited by children as evidence that classmates had caught the spirit of self-government.[60]

"More . . . pride in maintaining the good name of the school," was how one Berkeley, California principal described this realization of democratic esprit de corps. Just as one might expect an upstanding citizen to want only the best for the country, the logic went, it was reasonable to expect the citizen-in-training to demonstrate the same sentiments when it came to his or her polis. Likewise, a Portland, Oregon principal suggested that the citizens of his school city had come to realize that ultimately, when they approached civic life in the right spirit, they were helping him to "maintain the . . . reputation of the school" and that as a result "they naturally soon begin to talk about our school and pull with the teachers for the school." This was not to imply that hands-on civics training transformed all children into model citizens; even in the best civic laboratories "misdeeds are still to be found" lamented the *Oregon Teacher's Monthly*, which noted that nevertheless, the civic practicum did ensure that *most* of the pupils in every school learned to be "helpers not hinderers" in public affairs.[61]

As far as practical civics instruction went, a vigorous public in the school—demonstrated, for example, when pupil-citizens supported athletic teams or when they threw their energies into fund raising drives—anticipated the robust democratic polities that figured in the progressive

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[60] Rissland, Lillian, Survey Response; Froehlich, Harold, Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Gould, Celia, Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1; On the connection between supervised school activities and the gradual circumscription of childhood freedoms see Stephen Mintz. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, 2004), 198-199.
[61] Monroe, G. Walter. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 79, Folder 3, NSGC; "Portland School News," *Oregon Teacher's Monthly* 19:4 (December 1914), 244, 248.

vision of a democratic public. By recasting participation in civic life as a process of "pulling with" school authorities, self-government advocates ensured that novice citizens learned to think about civic agency as a matter of helping rather than hindering *their* government and its policies. Indeed, children used this language to equate things like spirit or class loyalty with the general welfare of the school—manifest in its good name or reputation. What was more, even as they wrote about the pride they took in their democracies, they suggested that those who failed to demonstrate the right spirit were backsliders when it came to supporting the collective good. Thus, when contemplating civic responsibility in terms of teamwork and a cooperative attitude, those who fell short ran the risk of being labeled as *bad* citizens. "Every once in a while, new scholars come from different schools, where there (sic) rules are not up to the standard," complained Newark eighth grader Helen Van Duyne, who suggested that this made things difficult for everyone—a position shared by classmates who hoped that the hard work of the best citizens would "not be spoiled by some children" or claimed that most problems in the school city could be attributed to "the small children in the lower classes, who haven't any class feeling." Like breaking the law, demonstrating a lukewarm civic spirit was characteristic of an outlier; as Wisconsin schoolgirl Sarah Cohen put it, "School government by the pupils is a very good thing except in some rare instances where the pupils are very cowardly."[62]

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In the same 1912 essay where he suggested that as far as practical civics instruction was concerned developing a healthy public opinion was, in the long run, more important than mastering an understanding the mechanisms of government, Richard Welling explained that it

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[62] Van Duyne, Helen, Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Dukiet, Harry, Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Wendcowski, Helen L. Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Cohen, Sarah, Survey Response, January 16, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC.

was ultimately the "stigma" of being labeled an outlier among one's fellow citizens that kept a lid on dissent and disorder; this model of republicanism, he wrote, worked especially well in classrooms because "the tendency will be to develop rapidly a public opinion *which with proper guidance* will frown upon the player of pranks. Ceasing to be a hero in the eyes of a group of admirers he ceases his horse play." (Emphasis mine.) In suggesting that the pedagogical purpose of student government was to teach future citizens to orient their civic activities to a properly guided public opinion Welling anticipated Walter Lippmann, who a decade later would suggest that "public opinion does not make law" but rather "by cancelling lawless power . . . may establish the condition under which law can be made." For Lippmann, the relationship between democracy and public opinion (which was vulnerable to manipulation) was problematic; on the other hand, for Welling and his allies in the self-government movement the potential to shape notions of civic right and wrong were invaluable.[63]

When citizens of democratized schools expressed their disapproval of classmates who broke the law, or who otherwise failed to join with the rest of the body politic in supporting the civic mores of the new governing regime, they lent the force of their collective spirit to the cause of good government in their classrooms. So too, when troublemakers or would-be civic apostates bent to social pressure they learned a valuable lesson, about the "terrors" of venturing too far off the path of upstanding citizenship. In the words of Austin high-schooler Hazel Edwards, student government raised the overall tone of the school, discouraging "dispisable" behavior because it gave the best citizens the most influence. Explained Edwards, "weak pupils who are not strong

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[63] Welling, "Owen Johnson Prize Essay," 18; Lippman, Walter. *The Phantom Public* (New York: MacMillian, 1925), 69-70

enough to resist temptation guard against others seeing them and makes it nearly [impossible] for them to do anything wrong."[64]

According to Edwards, one needed to look no further than the improved characters of her classmates to see how seriously they took their civic duties; like the youngsters who had eradicated bad language and vandalism in the Prosser School, she and her peers had been given an opportunity to act like responsible citizens and had risen to the occasion. It was much the same story in democratized schools elsewhere, as citizens-in-training managed the affairs of their schoolhouse communities. The idea that schools should serve as nurseries for budding citizens was, of course, as old as the republic itself. However, tapping into collective consciousness and influencing public opinion to make it "impossible" for citizens to do much wrong was far cry from both the republican model of civic virtue and he kind of militant citizenship that self-government activists claimed to be seeking.

[64] Edwards, Hazel, Survey Response, ND, Box 88, Folder 1, NSGC.

Chapter Four

The Schoolhouse as Panopticon

In the spring of 1899 a long-simmering conflict between parents of children at the Twenty-First Ward School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and principal Robert J. O'Hanlon came to a head when an irate father filed a complaint against O'Hanlon in the municipal court. In a statement given to police, Charles Weider explained how his son Eddie had come home from school badly bruised—the result of a whipping, Weider testified, administered by the principal as punishment for insubordination. O'Hanlon was arrested not long after Weider finished making his statement but after posting thirty-five dollars bond, he was back in his office before classes were dismissed, beginning a drama that held the attention of newspapers in Milwaukee and beyond for several weeks.[1]

There was nothing especially remarkable about the offence or about O'Hanlon's response. Although turn-of-the-century educators were beginning to move away from corporal punishment as the first choice for maintaining order in classrooms the notion that some pupil behaviors warranted "a good strapping" had not disappeared entirely from Progressive Era schools and whether they approved of it or not, most of O'Hanlon's contemporaries would have agreed that paddling a wayward student had been within his rights. Nor for that matter was Charles Weider's reaction unusual; like many parents who found themselves locking horns with authorities in bureaucratized schools and school systems, Eddie's father sought satisfaction

[1] "O'Hanlon Arrested," *The Oshkosh Northwestern*, May 10, 1899, 6.

through the legal system.[2] What made this otherwise minor schoolhouse affair compelling, at least as far as the press was concerned, was that Eddie had been punished, not for violating a school rule *per se* but for defying an officer of the school police force—a fellow student who had been attempting to enforce the rule. The existence of Principal O'Hanlon's school police department was no secret; neighborhood parents had been complaining for months about his pint-size constables, who represented just one facet of an unorthodox approach to citizenship training through self-regulation that quite a few citizens in the ward found objectionable. Indeed, it appears that local outrage over the incident reflected not just parental anger about the beating itself but also a somewhat visceral distaste for hands-on civics instruction in general.

The idea that everyday life at the Twenty-First Ward school might be recast an immersive civic experience—in which pupil-citizens took part in an elaborate simulation of the grown-up civic arena—was not O'Hanlon's but stemmed from the nationwide impulse to manage schools as "cities" or "states" where children might get some practical experience with the responsibilities of citizenship. Indeed, although just two years had passed since the first experiment with this novel approach, these little civic laboratories had become quite common by the time Eddie Weider ran afoul of pupil law-enforcement in his own little polis. Yet, while some saw the democratized school as an opportunity for political reform and for advancing the cause of efficient government, approval of the civic practicum was hardly universal. Those who questioned its efficacy included parents like those in Milwaukee who found the thought of children governing one another to be distasteful, and educators, who were dubious about the elaborate civic charade and worried that, because they emphasized the institutional components

[2] Schmidt, James D. "Willful Disobedience: Young People and School Authority in the Nineteenth-Century United States," in *Children and Youth During the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, James Marten, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 125-144.

of self-rule, civic laboratories might interfere with more organic forms of social and civic development. Such an approach, skeptics insisted, would distort the child's understanding of virtue and loyalty while possibly desensitizing neophyte citizens to the dangers of authoritarianism. Among those harboring such reservations was William Torrey Harris, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, who believed that because they could have no real autonomy in the schoolhouse, and because they lacked the maturity to contextualize their civic activities within the social world, saddling children with ersatz civic roles was bound to corrupt them. "If I wanted a child to be taught the tricks of the demagogue and the devices of unscrupulous politicians," Harris wrote in a 1906 monograph on the civic practicum, "I should by all means place him in a 'school city' as organized by Mr. Gill's plan." Even more strident in his criticism was Professor Barton W. Evermann—a veteran educator with experience as both a teacher and public-school superintendent—who as guest speaker at a 1910 forum for principals condemned the hands-on approach to citizenship instruction as "unnatural" and "vicious" and accused it of having a corrosive effect on civic values.[3]

This chapter examines the viewpoints of critics like these while considering how the realities of practical civics instruction in Progressive Era schools fed such concerns. These realities were at the heart of the backlash against the pupil-government in Milwaukee's Twenty-First Ward. According to parents there, civic life took on an unpleasant character in the day-to-day activities of their children, who had been recast as "citizens" in the classroom—a narrative that was revealed in a public meeting held shortly after O'Hanlon's arrest. Here, irate fathers and mothers strenuously objected to the pupil police force on the grounds that it encouraged children to inform on classmates. Others denounced elections rife with corruption, in which candidates

[3] William Torrey Harris, *The School City*, (Syracuse: C.W. Bardeen, 1906), 6-8; "News From the Capital City," *The New York Age*, April 21, 1910, 3.

saved their pennies "and invested . . . in slate pencils, chewing gum, candy and other things children are supposed to like and peddled them out in exchange for votes" or complained that school magistrates were "not above rendering decisions that were not strictly in conformity to the law" asking how it was that all other things being equal "the boy who could play the strongest game at half back or pitch an outcurve was not dealt with so severely as the boy who knew no football or baseball." The consensus among attendees at the meeting was that O'Hanlon's project taught the inverse of the ideals it claimed to nurture and thus, that a system aimed at impressionable youngsters and designed to help them avoid the poor civic habits of their elders had become, as one reporter put it, "a school for politics in which the pupils . . . are instructed in all that is bad."[4]

The repercussions of the Weider affair provided fodder for newspaper stories for weeks to come. Although the charges against him were soon dropped, O'Hanlon—who made little attempt to conceal the disdain he felt for his critics—found himself demoted. Transferred to a smaller school in a different part of the city he railed against members of the Milwaukee board of education who had overseen an investigation into the matter and who, he claimed, had folded under pressure from parents (all foreigners, he complained) who made "silly" and "untrue" and "senseless" complaints. Alluding to the "anarchistic tendencies" of the naysayers he insisted that it was impossible for a patriotic American to find fault with this approach to civics instruction, which, he reminded a reporter, emphasized law and order. Nevertheless, at the direction of the board his school city was disbanded, and he was directed not to continue his experiments with practical civics instruction in the future. After reading about the incident in a New York paper, the originator of the method, Wilson Gill, wrote to the displaced principal, offering his support

[4] "School City a Failure," *New York Sun*, May 14, 1899, 2.

and encouraging him to fight the decision. "If the matter is allowed to rest where it is it will be a severe blow to the cause," Gill wrote, suggesting that perhaps a petition might be got up urging the reinstatement of the school city. He also wondered if O'Hanlon had indeed thrashed a student for defying a police officer, adding hopefully, "I am sure you did not do it for that reason if you did it at all."[5]

Were the apprehensions of parents like those in Milwaukee's Twenty-First Ward justified? How did repeated encounters with didactic government influence young people's understanding of government and their relationship to it? And what was it that prompted observers like Harris and Evermann to see school cities and school states as a threat rather than a boon to civic virtue? Asked to comment on criticisms, O'Hanlon suggested that it all came down to the fact that his approach to civic instruction was new, "and has met with the opposition that all new movements, no matter how meritorious, will experience from the ignorant." As far as he was concerned, talk about corruption or about an oppressive atmosphere in self-governed schools reflected the opinions of those with "limited knowledge of educational methods" who spun "alarming tales" out of the sensational testimony of children.[6]

Yet, there was more to this talk than either resistance to innovation or overblown accounts of childish piques. In written accounts of everyday life in civic classrooms children described both how they experienced the elements of practical civics instruction that some of their elders found problematic and what they were learning from these experiences—about power, obedience and a citizen's obligation to conform under a democratic government. Wisconsin eighth grader Ethel Latts, for instance, appears to have taken in-stride the kind of

[5] "O'Hanlon Case Settled Today," *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 27, 1899, 2; "Mr. O'Hanlon Will Stay," *The Sentinel*, July 16, 1899, 4; "Teacher Defends School Feature," *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 8, 1899, 3; "Endorsed by Mr. Gill," *The Sentinel*, May 25, 1899, 4.
[6] "Children Rule School," *The Sentinel*, April 9, 1899, 6; "School City a Failure."

pupil-managed surveillance that troubled some adult observers, describing in matter-of-fact terms how, as self -governing citizens, she and her classmates had been taught to monitor each other's behavior; indeed, she explained that among the insights she had gained through immersive civics instruction at her school—where officers were ubiquitous—was that governments were working in the public interest when they observed and corrected the behavior of their citizens. Thus, she wrote with satisfaction that one benefit of self-rule was "we have a guard system all over the building to see that each pupil is in order." Like the Connecticut pupil who wrote that citizenship meant "each boy and girl is his own officer" or the Newark eighth grader who described "a police force to correct the children" as one of the "advantages" of citizenship in his school and noted that the mere threat of being detained and punished by the student government made him a better citizen, Latts explained that through citizenship in the schoolhouse she had learned how to "work so that I will not be watched." In statements such as these, young people intimated how characteristics of a panoptic public culture were integral to civic laboratories and, just as importantly, how participation in that culture was linked to notions of responsible civic behavior in American classrooms. As one schoolgirl explained, making laws for children was best left to adults, but "pupils are better able to enforce the laws because they are where the pupils are all the time, and the teachers are not."[7]

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[7] Latts, Ethel, Survey Response, January 16, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, National Self-Government Committee Records, National Self-Government Committee Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. (*Hereafter, NSGC Papers*). One of Latts' classmates, noted that there were only three elected officials in the school, but a host of appointed guards and monitors, who were responsible for maintaining order in classrooms, halls and lines. Hawkins, Esther. Survey Response, January 16, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC. Miskell, Earl. Survey Response, December 18, 1912, Box 85, Folder 1, NSGC; Hug, Victor. Survey Response, January 29, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; McGuise, Mary. Survey Response, March 20, 1912, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC.

For parents of children in Milwaukee's Twenty-First Ward School, perhaps no aspect of the civic practicum was more odious than the notion that children could and should be allowed substantive authority over their peers. It was a sentiment shared by parents in other communities as well and captured in the story of a Philadelphia man who put his foot down when he learned that his son had accepted an assignment as a school city policeman. Asked why he no longer wished to hold this position—an honorable task, his principal assured him, for a "gentleman" who wished "to . . . keep things right" in the classroom—the boy explained that his father had called him "a sucker" for taking the post and had instructed him to resign. As one reporter explained, a chief complaint among the Milwaukee parents was that "Policemen elected under this system were simply spies upon the other pupils." Why, they demanded to know, were children being given the power to arrest classmates? And why were the arrested parties expected to appear before child magistrates who adjudicated cases and administered sentences (such as being deprived of recess) that violated Milwaukee School System policies? Under the pretext of delivering civic instruction, they complained, O'Hanlon and his teachers were abdicating their responsibilities, putting discipline into the hands of the children themselves and causing day-to-day life for some "citizens" to become an intolerable routine of surveillance, coupled with punishment for the smallest transgressions.[8] It was a criticism that arose again and again as schools throughout the United States recast pupils as agents in a scaled-down public sphere.

A 1908 dispute in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, between a school city police officer and her principal illustrates how parents and educators could come to blows over these matters. The

[8] Jacobs, Emilie V. to Wilson Gill, June 29, 1903, Wilson Gill Papers, Dartmouth Library Archives & Manuscripts, Dartmouth University (*Hereafter, Gill Papers*); "Revolt Against Government," *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 25, 1899, 3; "School 'City' Abolished," *Springfield Leader and Press*, May 11, 1899, 5.

problem arose in March of that year, when Margaret Pauline Jones, an eighth grader in the Ashburnham Street Upper Grammar School, and an officer with the school city there, was assigned a beat in another building, housing the lower grammar school grades. At some point during her assignment an item was stolen from one of the classrooms and the principal of the school accused Jones, who, having been a diligent officer up until that point, expressed outrage that she was now a suspect in a crime. Her father, who according to one local paper, "had never been in sympathy with the school city idea," instructed her to resign her post, which precipitated a standoff with the principal who refused to accept a resignation and suspended the girl when she declared that regardless, she had no intention of fulfilling her police duties if doing so was going to cause such trouble. Like the uproar in Milwaukee, the suspension of Pauline Jones ultimately brought an end to a self-government experiment, as the Fitchburg school board ordered the Ashburnham Street civic laboratory disbanded. Although the experiment had appeared successful up until that point, enthusiasm cooled after news of the conflict between Jones and the principal broke, with some children demonstrating "open defiance."[9]

Proponents of the civic practicum dismissed concerns about pupil policing as exaggerated and insisted that all officers in the school—from executives, legislators and judges to constables and health inspectors—were "helpers" whose job was to assist citizens in protecting the public good. Giving youngsters the opportunity to interact with authorities chosen from among their own classmates was a means of teaching them the importance of cooperating with their government and its representatives—whether at the local, state or federal level. Yes, they conceded, now and then student officials did abuse their power but this was of little

[9] "Suspension Brings an End to School City," *Fitchburg Sentinel*, April 4, 1908, 1; "Demands Reasons For Exclusion from School," Fitchburg Sentinel, April 18, 1908, 1; "Girl Ex-Pupil Sued Fitchburg" *The Boston Globe*, November 18, 1909, 11; "March Sitting Superior Court," *Fitchburg Sentinel*, March 7, 1910, 3.

consequence. A principal from Dayton, Ohio, for example, wrote that after careful observation of his civic laboratory he had only a few "weaknesses" to report, one of them being that it "made some officers officious." Asked if holding a government post made children "arrogant" other educators responded similarly, saying "somewhat . . . in a few cases" or noting "but few evidences of any such feeling." In any case (the counterargument went) if one or two juvenile authorities misused their offices every so often this in no way justified a sweeping condemnation of hands-on civics instruction—a position that self-government booster Frank Kiernan spelled out bluntly in a 1912 letter to *The New York Times*. "Suppose a few monitors do intimidate a few weaklings by threatening to report them if they do not vote for the monitor's friends," he wrote, rebutting a reader who complained that coercion was the order of the day during a school city election. "Does that violate the honest votes of several hundred others who are experiencing the value of the suffrage and being trained in community action?" Others suggested that while unfortunate, the occasional appearance of an overbearing or corrupt civil servant had educational value nonetheless, insofar as it would teach youngsters to consider the importance of character in those who held office. "I have found arising among our citizen pupils many of the same weaknesses that figure in adult politics," one teacher reported, "and it seems to me that this is rather helpful . . . for the appearance of evil now gives the opportunity to prove the educational power of this plan." Noting he never observed questionable behavior of any kind in his officers, a Muncie, Indiana principal guessed that it was because his pupils "exercise good judgement in electing good officers" and had learned through experience not to elect "chesty" boys. "Sometimes there is a tendency on the part of the school policeman to become a 'grafter' but he or she is soon discovered and replaced," explained Meridian, Connecticut schoolmaster S. Watson Warden—an assessment shared by a colleague in nearby Harford, who reported that

citizens in his school made use of the recall provision, provided for by their school city laws, to discourage officers from abusing their power.[10]

To be sure, stories about logrolling and extortion in classroom politics made entertaining fodder for debates about the value of immersive citizenship instruction. Thoughtful critics, however, were less concerned about the potential for graft on the playground than they were about a lesson, which they believed was implicit in every schoolhouse polis, that the apparatus of government—its institutions and offices—were the *sine qua non* of the civic life. "Personally, I regard the 'School City' plan as open to so many objections that it is not worth urging upon the principal of any school," wrote Andrew Edson, Associate Superintendent for the New York City Department of Education, in a 1909 letter to Richard Welling of the School Citizen's Committee. Among these, Edson singled out the "police features and the amount of machinery involved" as being especially problematic. A year later, in a letter to Welling's assistant Frank Kiernan, he reiterated this belief, writing that "the plan must be divested of much machinery." Harvard School of Education head Paul Hanus felt much the same way, criticizing the obsession with verisimilitude in pupil government and noting that while he firmly believed "no school is

[10] Gill, Wilson L. *The School Republic: School City Helps For Teachers and Pupils* (New York: The Patriotic League, 1906), 27-28; Davidson, W.E. Principal Questionnaire, December 6, 1912, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC; Chase, Frank W. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 86, Folder 2, NSGC; Burrough, Mary A. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 82 Folder 3, NSGC; Rabinowitz, Louis, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, February 20, 1912; Kiernan, Frank, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, February 23, 1912; Gill, Wilson L. *The School City* (Philadelphia: National School City League, ND), 33; Fishback, E.H. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 79, Folder 6, NSGC; Warden, S. Watson to Frank Kiernan, December 23, 1912, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC; Jones, Frank O. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC.

properly governed until it is governed by the students themselves . . . I am inclined to think . . . machinery is unnecessary."[11]

In questioning the emphasis on apparatus and process in these classroom polities, those who worried about machinery made a distinction between civics instruction and training for thoughtful citizenship; duplicating grown-up institutions might be an effective method for demonstrating the nuts and bolts of a democratic system, the critique went, but understanding how government institutions worked did not guarantee a competent body politic. As Henry W. Thurston of the Chicago Normal School put it, "Study civics for its own sake. If you want to dramatize the city council or the legislature, do it for its own sake, but do not mix that up with the element of the schools." Speaking at a 1904 conference on good city government, Thurston (who, as an assistant principal at Hyde Park High School in the late 1890s had been among the first to experiment with pupil self-government) cautioned political reformers that there was too much emphasis on form in the civic practicum and not enough on function. Asking his audience to consider about how children organized themselves spontaneously to play games or to carry out everyday routines in their classrooms, he suggested that "there is not a group of boys and girls anywhere that has a genuine function to perform, but has some social machinery for carrying out that social function." When groups of young people found themselves faced with some task or project they instinctively organized to do it, and encouraging this, he insisted, was real training for good citizenship. The problem with recasting school-life as a rehearsal for a place in the grown-up public sphere was that it focused the student's attention on institutions and procedures without really encouraging youngsters to think critically about problems and solutions or to take

[11] Edson, Andrew W. to Richard Welling, April 5, 1909, Box 1, Folder 2, NSGC; Edson Andrew W. to Frank Kiernan, September 19, 1910, Box 1, Folder 7, NSGC; Hanus, Paul H. to Richard Welling, April 12, 1911, Box 2, Folder 3, NSGC.

real civic initiative. “There was a laudable purpose in all of this movement to get the boys and girls to lead an active life together; to co-operate heartily, and that thing is the good of it all,” Thurston said. It was, however, bound to miss the mark, “because we find that when we have to do a thing we must go around to the House of Representatives and the Senate and pass vetoes and all that sort of thing to decide whether we will clean off this board or have a baseball game.”[12]

What critics like Thurston found troubling was that going through the motions of civic life in the classroom appeared to reduce civic virtues to little more than rote behaviors. Instead of giving children the opportunity to decide “we have these things we need to do” and then allowing them to work out for themselves how best to proceed—an approach, he hypothesized, which might encourage young citizens to think critically about the needs of their communities—role-play emphasized conventions (the “all that sort of thing” that he found superfluous and, what was worse, disconnected from reality) thus approaching preparation for political citizenship—and citizenship itself—as a somewhat mechanical exercise. Indeed, another critic of the civic practicum, Secretary of Education William Torrey Harris, compared the myriad activities of citizens in the school city or the school state to “the empty declamation of a speech by Chatham or Burke or Daniel Webster, dramatically adopting the supposed manner and reproducing the situation,” a pedagogical method, he argued, which was “not a process of cultivating the true individuality of the child but of cultivating only the ability to imitate and play a role for the sake of producing an appearance.” Philadelphia school superintendent Oliver Cornman was even more blunt, suggesting that immersive civics instruction was akin to training a dog. “Just as the modern animal trainer can teach his four-footed pupils the most marvelous

[12] *Proceedings of the Chicago Conference for Good City Government and the Tenth Meeting of the National Municipal League.* (Philadelphia: National Municipal League, 1904), 65-66.

tricks," he told an audience at the 1908 meeting of the National Education Association, "the children can be made to play the game more or less well."[13]

Of course, as far as self-government advocates were concerned habit-building was the whole point of the exercise; as we saw in Chapter Two, the impulse to recast schooling as a rehearsal for citizenship was conceived above all as a civic initiative—a means of establishing healthy, permanent patterns of behavior in the body politic and thus, curing the American political system of host of ills once and for all. As these advocates saw it, this was as much a matter of socialization as it was education. Explained Wilson Gill, seeking to reform the government was fine as far as it went, but unless such reform "rest[ed] upon fixed habit . . . of attending to the ordinary civic duties" their impact would short lived. Much like the learning one's multiplication tables, developing an aptitude for carrying out one's civic responsibilities—practicing almost reflexively what Gill defined as "right" citizenship—was a skill not easily forgotten once embedded through practice in the child's mind. Or so the argument went. Indeed, while sitting on the same NEA panel as Cornman, Gill dismissed suggestions that civic role-play was pedagogically flawed, declaring, "[t]here is no possible objection that can be raised against the school city which cannot, with the same reason be raised against the teaching of arithmetic and of any moral precepts or practices."[14]

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[13] Harris, *The School City*, 15; Cornman, Oliver. "Principles and Methods of Pupil Government, School Cities," *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the National Education Association Annual Meeting* 47 (1908), 293. For more on Harris see, Cremin, Lawrence A. *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 14-20.

[14] Gill, Wilson L. "Principles and Methods of Pupil Government, Child-Citizenship and the School City," *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the National Education Association Annual Meeting* 47 (1908), 289.

Yet, it was not just the imitative nature of the method that concerned the critics. To be sure, children performed the roles of competent citizens readily enough. However, the reality was that they had no more power to manage their own affairs than what was permitted to them by adults; the failure to acknowledge this—explaining it away with a fiction, that the teacher's control over the classroom coexisted with pupil government in the same way the authority of the federal government coexisted with that of the states—suggested to children that citizenship itself was a mimetic undertaking. Whether children believed the pretext or not, such an approach was dangerous, critics argued, because unlike arithmetic or unambiguous moral precepts like the Golden Rule (which Gill often cited as the philosophical root of any good government) practicing responsible political citizenship in a democratic system demanded not just an understanding of how things are accomplished but a capacity to assess what things merit attention and to act on those assessments autonomously. Thus, the upshot of what Paul Hanus called "premature attempts at handling civic machinery" was that children learned to participate in the democratic process without ever learning to think critically about their actions and the actions of their governments, making them in the long run no better than voters who took their marching orders from ward heelers. "It is not possible to organize such a thoro-going system of self-government as that contemplated in the 'school city' without its being under such surveillance and control by the school authorities as essentially to negative (*sic*) its self-governing elements," Cornman told his audience. Thus, he explained:

> A merely nominal self-government, strictly supervised and directed by the teacher, such as the 'school city' must inevitably become, approximates only too closely (however unintentionally) the form of government—boss rule under free

> men's charters—by which municipalities are actually controlled. The analogy of the school organization to the city *de facto* government becomes so true under such conditions that the children run the danger of having their habits of thought and conduct trained along the very lines which a true training in good citizenship would lead them to combat.

Even as he praised the motives behind the crusade for practical civics—noting that "the failure of our municipal governments is so lamentable" it was no surprise to see "boards of education, the newspapers, public spirited citizens, in fact the laity in general" embrace education as a tool for political reform—Cornman could not help but express skepticism about what children were actually learning in their civic laboratories, believing that "a frank paternalism is better than a thinly disguised one."[15]

As Cornman suggested, the fundamental problem was that this approach to civic education obscured the reality of teacher control with a pedagogical regime meant to inculcate a democratic mindset. Touted as an opportunity for children to acquire the habits of active, vigilant citizens, recasting schooling as a civic apprenticeship (while failing to acknowledge that adults were choreographing the proceedings all the while) left them with little more than the veneer of competence. There was nothing inherently wrong with active learning, William Torrey Harris wrote, but leading youngsters to believe that the theatrical responsibilities they exercised as citizens of their school cities and school states constituted a true facsimile of adult citizenship left them ill-equipped to participate in public life in any meaningful way. "All phases of self-government in schools . . . require the utmost vigilance of a teacher," he argued, who, in order to

[15] Cornman, 289-290.

maintain the illusion of meaningful pupil-citizenship "secures his control not by immediate authority but by authority vested in elected civil officers. The teacher is obliged to secure the realization of his ideals of organization but at the same time to make them *seem* to emanate from the free impulses and reasonable devices of the pupils themselves. [Emphasis added.]" In the final analysis, such an approach was nothing more than a way of encouraging "the children to behave like puppets, suppressing all their spontaneous impulses." Adopting this as a model for civic education was, Harris warned, "a step toward making those children spiritual parasites."[16]

Harris believed that for civic laboratories to be viable, teachers would end up cloaking their authority with a superficial democratic process. This assumption was not unfounded; one has only to consider the statutes passed by school legislatures and enforced by school police departments to recognize how educators sought to perpetuate the narrative of active pupil citizenship while, at the same time, maintaining control of the putative body politic. In Philadelphia, for instance, the city council of one school municipality passed ordinances against a host of problematic behaviors—including "profanity and the use of bad words" and "writing on walls" as well as fighting and littering, all of which, it appears, had plagued the principal prior to democratization. Another edict mandated "cleanliness in the yard or schoolroom." Without going into much detail on how these matters found their way onto the legislative agenda, a correspondent for the progressive journal *Public Opinion* explained that these laws "have been made from time to time as needs have been recognized." Likewise, at a Connecticut school—where teachers readily acknowledged their influence over the student government—pupil legislators "framed a series of city ordinances and . . . penalties for disobeying the same" that, according to the principal, "improved discipline to a marked degree" and "had a noticeable effect

[16] Harris, 15-18.

on [preventing] absence." Among the nine "Laws for Class" a pupil recorded for the Sixth Grade, Room Six at School 11 in Passaic, New Jersey school, were, "Do Not Speak Out or Speak at All" and "Do Not Rush in the Room" and "Do Not Go to the Desk or Cloakroom Without Permission" while across the hall in Room Two, students voted to adopt a similar code, including a statute prohibiting "chewing gum or eating anything" in the building—a system, their principal suggested, that depended not on pupils governing themselves but rather, on a teachers learning to "divide their authority" in order to delegate a portion to their charges. So great was the influence that teachers exercised over school citizens that Indiana University professor Edward Howard Griggs wondered "if the measure of guidance and instruction from above they [the children] would require in order to carry out the scheme would not mean its practical emasculation."[17]

Educators, for the most part, appeared to see no dissonance in praising pupil governments as a way of building democratic skills in their pupils while at the same time contriving to ensure that the democratic system served their own ends. Indeed, some saw it as an especially efficient method for teaching citizenship, insofar as giving boys and girls a portion of the responsibility for policing themselves also meant more time available to faculty for grading papers or preparing lessons. Teachers reported that "it lifts a great burden from their daily routine" or that "some part of the corridor-patrol duty is lessened" or that it reduced the time spent on maintaining order significantly—up to two and a half hours a day per teacher, according to a schoolmaster from Buffalo, New York. The benefits were quantifiable, wrote a Philadelphia principal named P.A.

[17] "The School City," *Public Opinion* 27:24 (December 14, 1899), 748; Fry, John J. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 88, Folder 4, NSGC; Fry, John J. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 82, Folder 4, NSGC; Handwritten Document, "Laws for Class, Sixth Grade Room 6" ND, Box 86, Folder 6 NSGC; Handwritten Document, "Sixth Grade Room 2," ND, Box 86, Folder 6, NSGC; Lodor, Charles, Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 85, Folder 6, NSGC; Griggs, Edward Howard, *Moral Education* (New York: E.W. Huebsch, 1905)

Walker, who after describing the experience of standing in the corridors of his school and watching pupils head to class "in perfect order" with not a teacher in sight, calculated that "the time formerly spent in duties outside of rooms saved to my teachers amounted in one day to five hours and twenty minutes." Given the size of his faculty and their current salaries the practical value of student government, Walker concluded, was "three hundred and twenty-one days . . . gained, amounting to $963 per annum." A principal from Honolulu, Joaquin Vincent, concurred, writing that "pupil self-government frees the teacher, to some extent, from watching the conduct of his school and thus it economizes school time."[18]

None of this is to suggest that taking steps to bring order into the schoolhouse was wrongheaded, or that there was anything sinister about encouraging children to follow school rules and cooperate with their teachers. These examples, however, illustrate the pith of William Torrey Harris's warning, that practical civics instruction might teach youngsters to accept as democratic, a government that only *seemed* to arise from the "free impulses and reasonable devices" of the public. Educators and political reformers faced a dilemma introducing the concept of engaged citizenship into schools. On the one hand, believing that future citizens needed to experience a substantive civic life in the classroom, self-government crusaders insisted that nothing short of real government would do. To be sure, outside of Wilson Gill (who had no patience with those who tinkered with his school city model) prominent voices in the movement (men like Welling, Kiernan, and Lyman Stowe) were willing to accept practically any kind of organization that provided children an opportunity to participate in school government, and there can be little doubt of their earnestness when they argued that inspiring children to become

[18] Walker, P.A. "Self-Government in the High School, *The Elementary School Journal* 7:8 (April 1907), 453-454; Vincent, J. to J.C. Davis, December 2, 1908, Wilson Gill Papers (*Hereafter, Gill Papers*).

thoughtful, deliberative members of the body politic depended on giving them an opportunity to rehearse their civic skills in a meaningful way. Indeed, after reviewing the list of laws provided by classrooms at School 11 (along with statements from its pupils, most of whom seemed happy with was clearly a repackaging the old rules), Frank Kiernan of the School Citizen's Committee faulted the program for its lack of sincerity, remarking that there seemed to be "no real self-government among the children" and "none of the healthy spirit of criticism that is manifest in a flourishing self-government system." On the other hand, skeptics like Cornman and Harris were correct: there was no getting around the fact that for better or worse, adults were bound to engineer the outcomes of the democratic process. "Unless the whole problem is carefully managed the students will finally come to feel that they are a law unto themselves and will resent faculty regulations or suggestions," warned a Berkeley, California schoolmaster—an opinion shared by an Ohio principal, who wrote that in order to achieve "wholesome" results there needed to be a "master hand back of any organization of this kind." Navigating the space between an open application of the master hand and students who might resent its influence raised the question of just how much "healthy criticism" and "real self-government" was to be tolerated among apprentice citizens.[19]

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Sometime between 1912 and early 1913 editors at *The Outlook*, a popular weekly magazine, learned about a thought experiment, devised by a Mansfield, Ohio principal named Harlan F. Hall. Some years earlier Hall had written to dozens of prominent figures in both the United States and England to ask for their views on an imaginary ethical dilemma and the

[19] Handwritten Commentary on Passaic, New Jersey School 11 Material, ND, Box 85, Folder 6, NSGC: Monroe, G. Walter, Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 79, Folder 3, NSGC; Kirschner, H.J, Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 81, Folder 5, NSGC.

response to his inquiry had been overwhelming. It turned out that Hall had received letters from governors, congressmen, military and religious leaders, explorers, educators, and literary figures—from Jack London to William James (who prior to his death in 1910 had replied to Hall's letter) to Jacob Riis to explorer Ernest Shackleton and evangelist Billy Sunday. Intrigued, the editors decided to run a story on Hall's project and solicit opinions from readers. The problem began with a scenario involving two fourteen-year-old boys, called "Good" and "Bad" who attended the same school. One day, the tale went,

> Bad said to Good, 'I am going to throw a snowball through the window.' Good made no reply. Bad threw the snowball and broke the window, and Good saw him do it. The next morning at school the teacher asked the pupils singly and privately the questions, 'Do you know who broke the window?' and 'Who broke the window?'

Readers were then asked to think about what Good's responses should be to each of the two questions posed by the teacher, whether the teacher was right to ask the questions in the first place, and whether the teacher had the authority to compel Good's cooperation. "It is doubtful," the editors declared in a subsequent article, "whether in the history of this journal any question has elicited more letters than these questions."[20]

That this hypothetical problem generated such interest is not surprising. In laying out a schoolboy's dilemma as one of competing obligations—to the school and the teacher, to a fellow pupil, and to his own 'good' name—the scenario that Hall described, along with the answers he

[20] "Should He Have Told?" *The Outlook* 104 (July 12, 1913), 563-568.

received, resonated with contemporaneous anxieties about child development, socialization and the prospect that parents and educators were encouraging boys to become too cooperative or too timid. According to this disquieting narrative, Americans, in a misguided attempt to purge boyhood of its savage, trouble-making elements, were raising overcivilized youths (the "sissy sort of chap" most likely snitch in the broken widow scenario, according to one writer) who would grow up to be ineffectual men. These anxieties both informed and were informed by burgeoning interest in child-life and the social dynamics of gangs and the speculation that, while often at odds with adult notions of what constituted acceptable behavior, the simple codes of conduct which groups of children used to regulate themselves were an important part of that maturation process. Indeed, some eight years earlier psychologist G. Stanley Hall (no relation to the Mansfield principal) had published his influential *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*, in which he argued that during the passage to manhood young males needed to work through what he characterized as primitive, tribal loyalties. Those who contemplated Good's dilemma—most of them—understood that these were the loyalties he would have betrayed, had he come clean on what he had witnessed. The problem, as William James saw it, was that the protagonist in the story "had two lords to serve—school decency and boy honor" and that given the importance of both, compromise was necessary. Refusing to cooperate with the teacher was an acceptable response, wrote Ralph Henry Barbour, author of popular fiction for boys, who explained that appealing to "honesty and manliness" was an appropriate tack to take with Bad but that it was wrong to pressure Good "to become an informer, which in boy's ethics is cowardly and detestable."[21]

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[21] William Byron Forbush, *The Boy Problem: A Study in Social Pedagogy* (Boston: The Pilgrim

While Harlan Hall's thought experiment did not explicitly address matters of citizenship or civic education, he did note that "systematic instruction in ethics" was "rapidly" finding its way into American classrooms. Given this trend, he asked, "In your opinion, should children throughout the public schools be *taught* that it is their duty to tell the truth about wrong-doing when questioned by competent authority? [Emphasis in original.]" For many, the answer was an unequivocal no. "Anybody who has seen a tale-bearing school in operation knows what a frightfully demoralized and demoralizing place it is," wrote Arthur Twining Hadley, president of Yale University, who opined that "the refusal to tell tales is sound ethics." As was the case with so many adults, the hypothetical teacher failed to "see the evil that would result in the introduction of wrong methods of school government." Like Hadley, most respondents were uncomfortable with the idea of subordinating loyalties based on an intuitive sense of right and wrong to the demands of institutions. Such an approach might serve the needs of the institution in question, but it degraded the individual. As Jack London put it, "It may be that the boy has an ethical conviction that he does right in withholding the information. To compel him by force to violate this ethical conviction is a fearful brutality. The boy is brutalized, truth is brutalized, right conduct is brutalized, and the teacher is brutalized." The majority of those who responded to Hall's inquiry, appeared to agree with London, that teaching an individual to ignore his or her own moral compass in the service of the collective was no benefit—either to the individual or the collective.[22]

Press, 1902); J. Adams Puffer, *The Boy and His Gang* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912); George Walter Fiske, *Boy Life and Self-Government* (New York: Association Press, 1912); Hall, G. Stanley. *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1904).

[22] "Should He Have Told"

Like most of those who grappled with the broken-window problem, self-government advocates took a dim view of "sissy" or "cowardly" behavior and wrote enthusiastically about how hands-on civic education encouraged quite the opposite in all pupils, regardless of gender—reporting, for instance, that self-government made boys "more manly" or that the introduction of a little democracy into the school caused "a spirit of manhood and womanhood" to blossom in pupil citizens. According to Robert J. O'Hanlon, prior to the dissolution of their school city students in Milwaukee's Twenty-First Ward School were taught "that manly exposure of wrong is not idle tattling but an honorable means of preventing the spread of evil," thus, "learning how to share intelligently in the government of which they will soon form a part. What O'Hanlon's endorsement suggests is that as far as self-government advocates were concerned, there was a distinction to be made between the notion of civic responsibility imparted in the democratized school and the collective impulse to self-regulate that informed child-ethics. Indeed, when Manhattan principal C.D. Fleming expressed his misgivings about the system on the grounds that it "does not supply an individual impulse toward right conduct," Kiernan assured him that "[w]e want the boys to be wide-awake, industrious, happy, red-blooded boys as you do, but we also want them to develop a community sense which will in future lead them to take a constant and applied interest in public matters." As Fleming saw it, civic role-play put too much emphasis on both the citizen's relationship to institutions and his or her responsibilities to a vague public interest and thus, failed to develop true public-spiritedness. Giving students an outlet to exercise "individual conviction" was, he believed, a better approach to citizenship training. In attempting to alleviate his skepticism Kiernan side-stepped this critique and suggested instead that building a "community sense" was analogous to teaching right civic conduct. Although he was vague about what such a sense might look like and how having it was compatible with a "red-blooded"

childhood, his meaning was clear—when it came to establishing habits of good citizenship, the child code of conduct, with its arcane notions of right and wrong and almost instinctive distrust of authority, was not a stable foundation on which to erect the ethos of a democratic public.[23]

What civic education crusaders like Kiernan envisioned were schools in which the question of who broke the window produced no ethical dilemma; indeed, by way of endorsement a Pennsylvania schoolmaster explained how he had been unable to determine who had shattered a window in his own school—that is, until he turned to his student government, which "appointed detectives in every room" and "inside of an hour" had the culprit in hand. "Many kinds of disorder which are especially hard for teachers to managed by the student council," he noted. As citizens under instruction, children in self-governed classrooms were taught that their first obligation was to the public welfare, a concept that they learned to equate with *their* government, and which always superseded individual convictions about right and wrong. At the New Paltz demonstration school, for instance, children were allowed to enact an ordinance headed "Duties and Punishments," which defined the penalty for *failing* to report violations of the law as "not less than a reprimand and not greater than withdrawal of the rights of citizenship." Similar legislation was duplicated in many other school cities and the notion of making citizenship itself dependent on supporting the government is also discussed in much school city literature. Unlike William James's hypothetical boy with "two lords to serve," future citizens in such schools learned that they had only one, and that failing to do so was the dishonorable choice. Indeed, as if to dismiss the claim that youngsters who stood against childish behavior were somehow lacking in character, Philadelphia principal Anna McCormick insisted

[23] Knight, Abbie C. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC; Lodor, Principal Questionnaire; The Gill System, 146; Fleming, C.D. to Frank Kiernan, April 16, 1912, Box 2, Folder 9, NSGC; Kiernan, Frank to C.D. Fleming, April 18, 1912, Box 2, Folder 9, NSGC.

that her pupils were "not less gay, happy, and childlike because they themselves put a check upon deception" and "improper language" and "the defacing of public and private property" but quite the opposite. Rather, she wrote, "the boys are more manly and the girls more womanly" and "not in the slightest oppressed by their responsibilities." McCormick's endorsement illustrates how organized government in the classroom not only reinforced prohibitions laid down by adults—against everything from "the mischievous ringing of doorbells" to "hanging on the backs of street cars and wagons" after class—but how it had flipped child-ethics upside down, recasting injunctions against these kinds of escapades as stemming from children themselves who, in supporting them, supported the public interest.[24]

Nothing illustrates the calculated nature of this shift better than the pains that educators and civics reformers took to remove the stigma attached to tattling. As far as teachers were concerned, there was little doubt that telling tales was anathema among children and that in the eyes of most youngsters, nothing was quite so despicable as the classmate who informed on a comrade. "Any person who has anything to do with school work knows that the well-meaning children are passive," explained Charles N. Drum, a principal from Syracuse, New York. "They see wrongs but do nothing to suppress them. Having the thought that to tell is to tattle they even go so far as to shield the offender." What made this behavior hard to eliminate was the fact that it was based on an arcane code of conduct to which even the most well-behaved youngster felt bound. As S. Watson Warden put it, a "false sense of honor—such as protecting wrong doers by refusing to tell tales," was one of the biggest hurdles he faced in governing his students. Recasting the school as a city, "with self-elected officials such as mayor, etc.," had changed all

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[24] Marsh, L. Alden. "A Practical School City," *The School Journal* (January 1908), 571; Gill, *The Gill System of Moral and Civic Training*, 95, 87; McCormick, Anna I. to Wilson Gill, June 10, 1903, Gill Papers; "Moral and Civic Training in the Public Schools," *City and State* (19 February 1903), 153-154.

that, Warden reported, displacing the "false" morality with a "truer one which aids in the discovery and punishment of such pupils" Likewise, principal John T. Ray of Chicago noted how, as result of his own experiment with self-rule, the "old and pernicious idea that pupils should hide from the teacher all misdeeds" had been "uprooted" in his school, as children "learned the distinction between idle 'tattling' and manly exposure of misconduct for the purpose of correcting it." Other endorsements emphasized how civic role play taught students "to discriminate between tattling and giving testimony, between muckraking and righteous exposure of fraud" or how "by means of the police department, the spirit of tattling is checked" and replaced by "insight into . . . grades of doing wrong." To be sure, more pragmatic educators recognized that reining in the inclination to inform on classmates was somewhat more complicated, and that while they contrived to make a distinction between tattling and truthfulness, there was, in practice, little to distinguish one from the other. Even positive assessments included observations that role-play "affords opportunity for those who are inclined to be tale-bearers" or mentioned "tale-telling" as an undesirable effect of school government. Nevertheless, those who acknowledged that the potential for abuse of power existed also suggested that their own responsibility to ensure such abuse was "quickly reprimanded" was a sufficient counterbalance to the problem. Explained a Brooklyn principal, it was incumbent upon the teacher overseeing schoolhouse constables to ensure "the office shall not degenerate into a monitorship and the officer into a tale-bearer."[25]

[25] *The Gill System*, 149; Warden, S. Watson to Frank Kiernan, December 23, 1912, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC; John Thompson Ray, *Democratic Government of Schools* (Bloomington: Public School Publishing Company, 1899); Adams, Margaret J. to Frank Kiernan, January 11, 1913, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC; Davidson, W.E., Principal Questionnaire, December 6, 1912, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC; Olsson, A.M., Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 77, Folder 2, NSGC.

In the eyes of some observers, the transformation of "telling" into a public virtue was dramatic evidence of how effective the civic practicum really was. Not only were youngsters learning to habits of good citizenship, but they were also learning to abandon the provincial moralities of schoolyards and streets to become upstanding citizens, wholly committed to the welfare of the commonweal. As the progressive journal *The Outlook* explained it, "tattling has been eliminated; but pupils who would deem it a disgrace to 'peach' on fellow students come to regard it as a duty to give evidence to their fellow students concerning offenders against the laws of the republic." The editor of *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, Albert Shaw, pointed out that that even the good schoolboy "sees all sorts of misconduct and violation of rules going on about him but it is no part of his business to interfere because he neither directly nor indirectly concerned with the government of the school." However, he went on, "where the self-governing system is introduced and every boy assumes a part of the responsibility for the good order of the institution, the situation is revolutionized at once." The immediate effect, of course, was the discouragement of behavior that had thrived under the cloak of childish ethics—the things that "a teacher under the ordinary system of school government is practically powerless to suppress." More important, however, was the lesson that youngsters would take with them into adulthood, that "law being self-imposed must be maintained by the united effort of all." The genius of the civic practicum, according to psychologist Edgar James Swift, was that it redirected youth's natural capacity for self-regulation toward the greater civic good. "We have seen that children are zealous in the enforcement of laws which they themselves have made," he wrote in his 1912 study *Youth and the Race*. "Boys will report their best friend for a violation of their rules. In

doing this they do not feel like they are tale bearers." The source of this zeal, Swift suggested, was a "common purpose which is vital to all."[26]

Young people, Swift believed, were by nature self-regulating; one had only to use a little imagination to see the rudiments of government in the way they organized themselves into groups to play games, or in the way they sorted themselves out into hierarchies whenever they gathered for any purpose. Even their self-styled strikes, he wrote, were evidence of an inchoate desire "to be consulted in the management of their business." In his eyes, the civic practicum worked because it made use of this desire—along with the child's innate distrust of outliers and belief that it was "treachery" to oppose the group—giving it a structure on which it might be trained to constructive ends. However, what Swift praised as a "complete reversal in the children's views about behavior" was troubling to critics like Oliver Cornman, who suggested that contrary to the rosy picture painted by self-government enthusiasts, boys and girls struggled to reconcile the demands of pupil-citizenship with their own notions of friendship and community. As evidence for this claim, Cornman pointed to his own experience in Philadelphia, where, after learning that after initial bursts of enthusiasm many pupils were reluctant to participate in their democracies in any substantial way, he had conducted a poll hoping to understand why. What he discovered was that that with the exception of children in the early primary grades (who, he suggested, were only just beginning to understand the concept of schoolyard ethics), most found that the responsibilities of citizenship in the school conflicted with their notions of friendship and honor. One could be a either a loyal comrade or an upstanding citizen, their logic went, but never both. Among grammar school children, for example, reasons for declining government offices included "because it makes enemies" and

[26] Swift, 55.

"because you lose friends" and "because I don't like to report others" which, in Cornman's view, explained why a young child "who is a natural tale-bearer, and who scarcely develops friendships to a degree worthy of the name, makes the more willing and efficient officer." What was most unsettling about this was the implication that the civic morality preached in self-governed schools could not be reconciled with the child's inchoate social morality—his or her communal ideals. This, Cornman suggested, was reason enough to be wary about the civic practicum and he pleaded for caution, writing that "these ideals may be poor things but they are their own and the best they have and we should be exceedingly careful how we tamper with them."[27]

Among those who shared Cornman's concern about tampering with the moral development of children was the director of the School of Education at the University of Illinois, William Chandler Bagley, who in a 1914 textbook on classroom management criticized the practical civics regimen for emphasizing the monitorial aspects of government. While he acknowledged the effort to differentiate between the kind of childish tale-bearing "that has been stigmatized for untold generations" and the ostensibly conscientious "testimony" given by citizens and agents of the state, he argued that nevertheless, the attempt to recast the latter as a civic responsibility was fundamentally flawed. Injecting the idea of civic "truth" into school life was artifice, Bagley wrote, "a more or less literal imitation of a cumbrous and far from perfect system which has gradually developed in adult society" and had "not evolved naturally in a juvenile society to meet the needs of that society." In the adult world, this kind of truth-telling was "a virtue because of its social necessity, not a necessity because of its inherent virtue" and it was a mistake to teach it as if it were the latter. Thus, he warned, "until it is demonstrated that

[27] Swift, 174; Cornman, 292.

the school group needs this kind of virtue for its survival, it may be safely concluded that the deeply seated prejudice against tale-bearing and irresponsible espionage has a worth and a meaning that merit respectful consideration and investigation before the prejudice is abandoned."[28]

As Bagley saw it, the mania for school cities—and the concomitant effort to differentiate between tattling and giving testimony, between loyalty to one's fellow citizens and loyalty to the state—raised a question. "Can an effective group responsibility be engendered without an organized system which rests on a system of mutual espionage?" As far as he was concerned, the answer was no, and this had profound ramifications for both school life and the adult civic life that followed. It was true, he wrote, that "the boy who believes that telling on his mates is contemptable may grow up to be an 'undesirable citizen' because of his later unwillingness to report offenses in adult society." However, that did not mean the inverse was any better, for "the boy who is taught that espionage is a virtue (and he will not distinguish very clearly between 'tale-bearing' and 'giving testimony') may also develop into a type of citizen that is to the minds of some equally undesirable—the officious meddler and the inveterate scandalmonger."[29]

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Among the several stories that Swift cited as anecdotal evidence in favor of the civic practicum, was the tale of a twelve-year-old boy whose teachers had declared him to be "a menace to the school and the community because of his total lack of moral sense." Transferred to a civic laboratory, he had been unsure of what to make of a situation where pupils were called citizens and his behavior was frowned upon instead of eliciting giggles from his peers.

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[28] Bagley, William Chandler. *School Discipline* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914), 105-107.
[29] Ibid.

Fortunately, Swift noted, "he was not too old to get a few new ideas and adapt himself to new conditions" and one day, after "learning how the land lay" in his school city he took it upon himself to turn in three truant classmates to the principal. Although clearly a betrayal of conventional child-ethics, this act of minor vigilantism helped him establish his bona fides as a good citizen, for Swift tells us that "later, in recognition of his observation and skill, his schoolmates elected him chief of police" and that while in office "his work with truants . . . made a record with the school."[30]

Like tale-bearing recast as good citizenship, the image of the pupil-constable was a staple in positive depictions of democratized schools. A 1906 article in *The Arena*, for instance, focused on one Manhattan school city police chief, thirteen-year-old Rocco Montemorra, "who goes out into the streets and arrests boys who ought to be in school and are not." A diligent officer according to his principal, Montemorra, even managed to apprehend a chronic truant who had eluded adult attendance officers for months. Aggressive efforts to stamp out truancy were similarly effective in upstate New York, where the *Syracuse Post Standard* reported that "the truant problem has been solved and cases of absence are a rare occurrence" in two schools where civic laboratories had been established, explaining that whenever pupils failed to appear in class the "marshals" of school city police departments visited their homes to verify whether or not their absences were legitimate. Stories like this abounded: a "boy Police Commissioner" declaring a campaign against truants, asking for support from his citizen classmates; a chief and his "detectives" on watch in the halls, ensuring that pupils behaved themselves between periods; the activities of the "vigilance department" in a large Minneapolis school.[31]

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[30] Swift, 47-48.
[31] "Democracy in Education: or The School City in Practical Operation," *The Arena* 35:198 (May 1906), 517; Cronson, Bernard. *Pupil Self-Government: Its Theory and Practice* (New

While adults waxed enthusiastic about the activities of pint-size-police officers—and there was no doubt that such tales made for more exciting endorsements—they were just as impressed with the fact that embedding law-enforcement responsibilities within the fabric of school civic life seemed to discourage misbehavior itself. If the number of citations for talking in corridors or swearing in schoolyards fell over time, or if attendance rose in schools where absenteeism had been high in the past, it was because pupil-citizens were learning to tailor their behavior to an omnipresent school-government. After a visit to a successful Manhattan civic laboratory a reporter noted that "the [school] city's police officers represent real power" and went on to describe at length the activities of a special "truancy squad" that had raised attendance in one class of "incorrigibles" from fifty to one hundred percent in less than a month. "The boys of the neighborhood have learned from the experience of a few that there is no evading the squad," he explained. "To them it seems almost ubiquitous." The implication was clear: it was the representation of power, not dozens of arrests, that made this improvement possible. Like the four chronically truant brothers who mended their ways after a school city police officer cornered the eldest hiding in a local stable, these citizens-in-training were being taught to police themselves lest their government be forced to do so.[32]

An illustrated article on "The School City and its Work," which appeared in the January 1908 issue of *The Circle* magazine, caught the gist of this lesson in a caption under a photograph of a boy officer making an arrest. "When it comes to playing 'hooky' you can't fool the School City policeman," it reads, "for he's a boy himself and he knows the ropes." Although meant to be

York: The MacMillan Company, 1907), 73; "Discipline Problem Solved by Pupil Self-Government," *Syracuse Post Standard*, May 6, 1911, 17; Stowe, Lyman Beecher. "Self-Government in Greater NY," *The Citizen* 16:2 (October 1913), 29; Legro, Fanny C. Principal Questionnaire, ND, Box 81, Folder 1, NSGC.

[32] "Pupils Govern," *New York Daily Tribune*, May 6, 1906, 4.

humorous—other children in the image, observing the would-be truant in "police" custody, seem to be in sympathy with his predicament—the caption points to what citizens in school cities were learning from experience, that self-government implied government everywhere. Connecticut student Kenneth A Woodford, for instance, although skeptical about classmates making laws was confident that pupils made better agents of law-enforcement, "because a pupil officer sees more." One of his classmates, Karl Maerklein, agreed, suggesting that the presence of pupil police helped to avoid the kind of "mixup" that had been common before the introduction of self-government, commenting that "lots of times the teacher will get the wrong pupil, and not speak to the wright (*sic*) pupil; Where the officers can get the pupil that is doing wrong easier." Others noted how order in their schools had improved because officers were "less conspicuous" than teachers or suggested that officers elected by pupils were better able to enforce standards of behavior because they "know most of the children and they know their actions." In the eyes of youngsters like these, more effective regulation was the best proof that their government was working. As another youngster explained, pupil officers were effective, "because, a teacher cannot be all over at the same time. While the pupils can be in the yards, toilets and all around the buildings where a teacher . . . cannot be."[33]

Some pupils, of course, described ubiquitous class officials as a source of irritation—complaining, for instance, that "the health officer thinks she is the only smarty in the room" or that "most of the officers think there (sic) wise and try to order a child around" or that "people who hold office" bullied citizens who were not their friends. These impressions were

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[33] Stowe, Lyman Beecher, "The School City and Its Work," *The Circle and Success* (January 1908), 15; Woodford, Kenneth A. Pupil Survey Response, March 20, 1912, Box 85, Folder 2: Maercklein, Karl. Pupil Survey, ND, Box 85, Folder 3, NSGC; Hubbard, Bernice. Pupil Survey Response, ND, Box 79, Folder 4, NSGC; Huss, Ida. Pupil Survey Response, ND, Box 77, Folder 1, NSGC; Unsigned Pupil Survey Response, March 20, 1912, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC.

corroborated by teachers who observed that some officers tended to be "over-zealous in their efforts to keep good order" or were "officious" or "in danger of being generally disliked." However, the detached tone of these accounts also suggests that whether they liked it or not, for quite a few children, the exercise in self-rule helped normalize "all over at the same time" regulation.[34] So much so, in fact, that some pupil-citizens advocated for its expansion, pointing out, for instance, that secluded corners of the school such as dressing rooms "where there is a lot of whispering done" needed *more* officers, or arguing that "the monitor's authority should be extended to the classrooms" or suggesting that "a body of officers, or policemen, should be appointed at the beginning of each year, who would spy on the pupils taking their names and year, if the[y] happened to be disorderly." Asked to assess the system of self-government in her school, San Diego student Helen DeVoe wrote, "I think there ought to be one member of every study period appointed as a sort of policeman. No one should know who this person was. If there should be a particular person who created a big disturbance every day, I think there ought to be someone who would report him, for most pupils would not go before the Student Body President and tell on one of their fellow students."[35]

The logic behind her suggestion points to one of the implicit lessons of the civic practicum—that what might otherwise be considered dishonorable behavior (in this case informing on a fellow student) becomes acceptable in a secret policeman, whose behavior is

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[34] Lindblom, Linnea, Pupil Survey Response, March 18, 1912, Box 86, Folder 1, NSGC; Wright, Ransom, Pupil Survey Response, March 26, 1912, Box 86, Folder 1, NSGC; Solomon, Sammy E. Pupil Survey Response, ND, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC; Adams, Margaret J. to Frank Kiernan, January 11, 1913, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC; Davidson, W.E. Principal Questionnaire, December 6, 1912, Box 90, Folder 2, NSGC.
[35] Robbins, Florence. Pupil Survey Response, ND, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC; Heaag, Edwin R. Pupil Survey Response, ND, Box 86, Folder 3, NSGC; Cheatham, Sterling. Pupil Survey Response, March 25, 1912, Box 87, Folder 2, NSGC; DeVoe, Helen. Pupil Survey Response, ND, Box 87, Folder 2, NSGC.

legitimated by the government. Of course, it is likely that nothing came of either DeVoe's secret police idea or the proposition that a special "body of officers" be assigned to "spy" on pupils. However, the sentiment was codified in at least one civic laboratory, when, in 1912, the school republic at the Chemawa Indian School in Oregon passed a bill establishing a Department of Secret Service. The new law, which passed unanimously, gave the President of the republic "power to appoint as many officers of the department as he shall deem necessary" and stipulated that these officers were to report to the President alone, "on matters concerning missing articles, the destruction and defacing of school property and of all other forms of evil which from their nature shall not be made public."[36]

In most schools, of course, policing was not intentionally clandestine; if pupil-constables knew where to look for hooky-playing classmates or were able to pinpoint citizens who violated ordinances against swearing in the schoolyard, it was because they were part of the fabric of the school community. Yet, the normalization of surveillance in civic laboratories—the lesson that regulation was an intrinsic common good—meant that in most self-governed schools, pupils also learned that maintaining standards of good citizenship across the student-body was to some extent a shared responsibility. "In a good school city," Connecticut student Norman Strong explained, the burden of law-enforcement fell to "officers *or* pupils. [Emphasis added.]" Thus, recasting school-life as a civic experience did not merely undercut juvenile notions of loyalty or delegitimize arcane childhood prohibitions against tattling, but it also simulated a public in which these alternate moralities had been stripped of their influence. Indeed, as members of this public, apprentice citizens were part of what Michel Foucault described as "a marvelous machine" for homogenizing power, in which they were expected to take responsibility for their

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[36] Wilson L Gill. *The School Republic in Indian Schools* (Chemawa: Salem Indian Training School, 1912), 28-29.

government while, at the same time, imposing the power of that government upon themselves—a dynamic that was captured in the testimony of Wisconsin eighth grader Maguerita Vandine, who noted how self-rule had brought order to her school. According to Vandine, "Before we adopted Pupil Self-Government, the teachers stood as guards in the halls" and that as a result, children viewed them as nothing more than guards to be evaded. However, she wrote, under the new system, things pupils did all the time before, "they do not do now because their own playmates and themselves act as guards now."[37]

Beyond the "ubiquitous" presence of monitorial agents then—a list that in some schools included not only constables but a plethora of other posts, from health inspectors to fire safety officers to public works inspectors—children learned that upright citizenship meant both participating in the formal processes of government and assuming some personal responsibility for governing one's fellow citizens. Thus, they argued that they were clearly capable of self-government because "[we] know about the children when they are out at recess or in other places around the school building and the teachers are not generally there" or noted that "a pupil can often have more power over his or her friends that the teacher or principal imagines" or claimed that self-government was "an advantage to the pupils in general . . . because if they are citizens and they see disorder anyplace about the school they are bound to report it.[38] What did these sentiments look like in action? The answer can be discerned in a report written by Lyman Beecher Stowe, who, while observing pupil court proceedings at a large self-governed school in

[37] Strong, Norman. Pupil Survey Response, ND, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC; Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 202-203; Vandine, Maguerita. Pupil Survey Response, January 16, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC.
[38] Steele, Richard, Pupil Survey Response, March 20 1912, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC; McCrane, Isabel, Pupil Survey Response, ND, Box 85, Folder 2, NSGC; Hanlon, Walter. Pupil Survey Response, April 27, 1911, Box 87, Folder 5, NSGC; Stowe, Lyman Beecher, "School Republics," *The Outlook* 26 (December 1908), 944, 948.

Brooklyn, noticed that "accusers were as apt to be plain citizens as officers." He attributed this to the fact that "every citizen was supposed to inform himself of the laws of the republic" and that "every citizen pledges himself to report at once to the proper authorities any violation of the law which he sees. And they do this without any thought of thereby violating the boys' well-known code of honor which so violently condemns 'telling on' a comrade." Stowe, of course, was a staunch supporter of pupil self-government and saw nothing wrong with a system in which "every pupil is a citizen, every citizen is either an officer or a potential officer, and every officer is as interested in having things go right as are the teachers." Yet, this was precisely this kind of system that alarmed William Chandler Bagley—a "carefully fostered system of espionage" masquerading as democratic self-rule.

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At the 1904 Chicago Conference on Good City Government—the same gathering where Henry Thurston criticized the civic laboratory approach for its excessive machinery—another member of the panel, University of Chicago Sociology Professor George E. Vincent, wondered if all the talk about autocratic teaching methods and passive citizens was missing the point. "I think on paper the contest between the despotism of the school and the perfect freedom of after life is very striking and vivid," Vincent said, but he pointed out that "as a matter of fact such a contrast does not exist at all in actual life."

> We people who are out in the world are being coerced and bullyragged and moved by suggestion by other people to do all sorts of things which on final analysis we don't want to do but did not notice at the time. In other words, men in society are controlled, not by coercive power from without, but are controlled

by suggestion. We are all controlled by suggestion.

A fellow conference-goer, Vincent remarked, had claimed that although he had seen his fair share of policemen during his stay in Chicago, he did not need policemen to ensure that he followed the law because he was, in effect, self-regulating. There was, Vincent suggested, a slight fallacy in this perception, for "he has been under the control of a social system that has been embedded in him for a number of years." [39]

Vincent's comment elicited laughter from the audience but his observation, that "in the school the skillful teacher controls by suggestion" was true of civic laboratories as well. Self-government advocates, of course, spoke about instilling a democratic, militant mind-set in future citizens by dismantling classroom monarchies. Yet, the civic laboratories they established, where children passed laws against such things as gum-chewing, whispering in line, or running in corridors, are evidence of how the "embedded" cues that guaranteed self-regulation were redefined—cloaked in a new language of public responsibility, rather than relocated into active, vigilant citizens. Indeed, children described their newfound capacity for self-government in terms that emphasized identification with a collective. Minnesota eighth grader Mabel Larsen, for instance, described the "wonderful" advantages of self-rule, explaining how she had, "learned that boys and girls really can take care of themselves without the teachers standing over them like policemen." She and her classmates could now take care of themselves, she declared, noting that considering her experience, "I could not go to a school that has not self-government because I would feel that someone was watching me which would be unbearable." Connecticut seventh grader Evelyn Tucker expressed a similar sentiment, writing that, "I have learned to take a great

[39] *Proceedings of the Chicago Conference for Good City Government,* 66.

interest in the school government, and have learned how to control myself from any mischief. I can be trusted anywhere, either going or coming from school, without anyone watching me."[40]

As far as both girls were concerned, surveillance was the purview of authority; thus, for both, "watching" had become less intrusive—more "bearable" in Larsen's words—once it had become a public responsibility. Indeed, the notion that participation made surveillance and regulation more palatable than it had been under a teacher's authority led children to "notice that every-one (sic) is doing what they are told" or "do what is right without thinking." According to Wisconsin schoolboy Barney Karon, a person would know "how to govern himself when he goes out into the world, and in time government systems will not be so much necessary because each person will be a governor for himself." The upshot was that children learned to incorporate notions such as "the public good" or "the people" into their understanding of what constituted right behavior and good citizenship—evinced by Norman Strong's perception that since the advent of self-government in his school, "pupils have more respect for their own way of thinking."[41]

In recasting school management as self-rule civic education crusaders sought to transform cooperation through government as a citizen's "own way of thinking" and contribute to the realization of a unified democratic public. Observing children going about their affairs, managing their own governments in schools and throwing themselves into civic life, one could see the process of transforming the public good into a shared way of thinking. As Vincent noted, "every one of these governments in being carried on now by the suggestion of the teacher" but without the friction that ordinarily came with the teacher-pupil relationship; instead, "the

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[40] Larsen, Mabel, Pupil Survey Response, December 6, 1912, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Tucker, Evelyn, Pupil Survey Response, December 17, 1912, Box 81, Folder 3, NSGC.
[41] Karon, Barney, Pupil Survey Response, January 16, 1913, Box 83, Folder 1, NSGC; Strong, Pupil Survey Response.

children are going on in the same way as most of us who are controlled by the political organizations of our party, but who are at the same time deceived into believing that we are representing a spontaneous uprising of the people."[42]

[42] *Proceedings of the Chicago Conference for Good City Government,* 67.

Conclusion

The Decline of Self-Rule and the Triumph of the Useful Citizen

John A. Whalen, a member of the New York City Board of Education had heard enough. It was a Monday afternoon in October 1917, and he had been listening for two hours to a delegation of boys and girls representing over ten thousand high school students who sought to challenge a board decision lengthening their school day. Many of these students were employed in the afternoons and evenings, the delegates explained, and the new policy changing dismissal time from 3:30 to 5:30 posed a hardship because it made it impossible for them to keep these jobs—jobs that for some were a source of support for their families. It was a delicate matter, for the added time was meant to be devoted to military drill and eyebrows on the board had already been raised by reports of socialist agitation and anti-war sentiment among some students. Indeed, rejecting the suggestion that students were unpatriotic or simply looking to avoid their academic responsibilities, one of the representatives insisted that most of his classmates would be perfectly willing to come to school earlier, in order to free up time to work later in the day. Put it all in writing, Whalen told them, promising that his committee would deliberate on the matter before giving them an answer. As they left, he suggested that they make themselves useful by selling Liberty Bonds.[1]

According to observers, the young emissaries had behaved as mature and conscientious citizens ought—advising their restive classmates to try negotiation before taking to the streets with their grievances, and then shouldering the burden of presenting the case, a few days earlier to the Board of Aldermen and now to Whalen and his committee. There was no doubt that they

[1] "Won't Let Pupils Dominate Schools," *The New York Times*, October 23, 1917, 13; Edward C. Delaney, "Outside Employment Among Pupils," *The New York Times*, October 21, 1917, 43.

represented “the cooler heads among the students” *The New York Times* opined, pointing out that they stated their grievances “clearly and concisely, in language that for preciseness and fluency equaled that of their teachers.” Whalen, it appears, had been less impressed, his line of questioning somewhat confrontational. How many of those present supported the walkouts, he wanted to know. Did they “repudiate” disobedience? And what about their appearance at City Hall? Had they received permission from the principals of their respective schools before approaching the Board of Aldermen? They had not, one of them explained, going on to justify this apparent act of insubordination on the grounds that their earlier protests had been ignored by school authorities. Another one of the delegates, Anna Lederer of Wadleigh High School, explained that approaching their elected representatives directly had seemed to be the only course of action available to them that might avert a strike. Whalen was unmoved. In a statement given to reporters after the meeting, he struck an antagonistic tone, saying that “the high school boys of this city are not going to run the schools.” He intimated that while they were not actively striking or speaking out against the school board, the ease with which they questioned competent authority suggested a willingness to do so, and he declared that he would sooner shut down the schools completely than give young people the opportunity to make “seditious speeches” and “declarations against the war.”[2]

Whalen’s reaction was not unlike responses from many of the authorities who confronted strikes—the school administrators, principals, and teachers who were both dismissive and belligerent when young people claimed a right to petition or protest or otherwise stand up for what they viewed as their rights. What was new, however, was the tone of the dismissal, one that

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[2] “Teachers Now Join Long Day Protest,” *The New York Times*, October 12,1917, 6; “High School Strike Halts for Parley,” The New York Times, October 18, 1917, 14; “High Schools Face a Strike of 10,000,” *The New York Times*, October 22, 1917, 7.

echoed a pervasive nationwide demonization of those who questioned authority. This tone rose in part out of the atmosphere of nationalism that had infused practically every facet of American life when the United States entered the European war. As the impulse to equate conformism with loyal, patriotic sentiment took hold in communities of all sizes and institutions of all kinds—from schools to churches to businesses—collective coercion rather than democratic deliberation increasingly became the order of the day. Indeed, Whalen's use of terms suggesting "sedition" and "disloyalty" was profoundly menacing in a nation where quasi-official vigilante groups such as the American Protective League monitored the activities of citizens and scrutinized neighbors for signs of disloyalty.[3] When a teacher at one of the restive high schools suggested that "the spirit of the Clinton students is very free and in the direction of open-minded liberalism," the editorial page of *The New York Times* suggested that the school was a "nursery of anti-patriotism" and remarked caustically, "we know what freedom and open-minded liberalism, what 'democracy' and 'radicalism' is meant." A correspondent for the *Educational Review* took much the same position, equating open-mindedness and willingness to criticize the government with dangerous anti-American notions. Noting that schools in California suffered from a similar affliction, he suggested that "we would better reduce that system to the simplest conditions, maintained in a spirit of loyalty, than permit it to be maintained as a means of watering down patriotic sentiment and of stifling the instinctive reverence of our youth for our national ideals and standards."[4]

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[3] For more on how war facilitated the cooption of the public's power to coerce to state ends, see, Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); William H. Thomas, Jr., *Unsafe for Democracy: World War I and the U.S. Justice Department's Covert Campaign to Suppress Dissent*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).
[4] "Loyalty in Education," *Educational Review* 55:2 (February 1918), 165; "Teachers Who Are Not Loyal," *The New York Times*, November 18, 1917, 33.

For the most part, critics like these were more concerned about the prospect of teachers transmitting subversive lessons to impressionable students than they were about young people thumbing their noses at authority. As a result, the vitriol stirred up during the commotion over extended classes was largely directed at adults—the English teacher who called for "an attitude of strict neutrality" during discussions in his classroom, for example, or another instructor, who took it "not to be his duty to develop in students . . . instinctive respect for the authorities of the state." The willingness to cite "free speech" as justification for not stamping out political heresy in their schools was evidence, the *Educational Review* claimed, that "many of the teachers are radically anti-American in their sympathies." The question wasn't whether to blame the students who "rebelled, struck, paraded, committed acts of violence" in pursuit of a shorter school day, *The New York Times* said, but rather, "what name is severe enough for their misleaders?" Yet, assertive youngsters were not entirely immune to censure either. When a teacher had his students write letters to President Wilson giving their views on the war, and word leaked out that one 14-year-old boy did not support the president's decision, adults described him as "seditious" while another student, who suggested during a class discussion that Americans had less political democracy than they thought, was told by a teacher to "go back to Germany" if he felt that way. Similar aspersions were leveled at the young people who protested the lengthening of the school day—the "young Leninites" who "had their little hour of Bolshevism." Regardless of how they might manifest themselves, instances like these, of young people questioning their government and its policies—and indeed, brazenly asserting that they had a right to do so—were evidence of "sappy minds with ideas destructive of the American State."[5]

[5] "Loyalty in Education," 162-163; "Teachers Who Are Not Loyal," 33; "Denies Boy's Attack was Read in Class," *The New York Times*, November 19, 1917, 18.

The suggestion, that the right to challenge authority or the right to exercise free speech were fundamental threats to the well-being of the state and should be inadmissible as far as schooling was concerned, was a far cry from the kind of active, militant citizenship that reformers like Richard Welling and Wilson Gill had hoped to see emerge from civic laboratories decades earlier. Although neither man appears to have offered an opinion on the discord in New York City high schools it is clear, that as far as the crisis went, they were firmly behind the national war effort—while remaining committed to advancing the democratic principles that they had been praising for so long. Welling, took a commission in the Naval Reserve and was put in charge of a supply base in Brooklyn, where he raised eyebrows by instituting a management model that incorporated some of the same self-government elements that he had been campaigning for in schools. Having witnessed another officer reprimand a subordinate for creative thinking, he insisted that encouraging independence and a willingness to contribute to the collective good was as important in the service as it was in a democratic public. Indeed, during the years between the World Wars he would embark on a campaign against militarism in schools, insisting that the kind of "orders is orders" lessons inherent in military training was the antithesis of effective citizenship training and it "must not be allowed to hinder the democratic ideal for the public school." Gill too, continued to push against "flag waving" and for instruction in what he described as substantive, thinking patriotism. Writing in 1918 he argued that the kind of responsible citizenship encouraged in civic laboratories was a bulwark against war. Indeed, he suggested that the autocratic schooling "in Germany for a hundred years made it possible for the Hohenzollerens to precipitate and prosecute the present war." Continuing well into the 1920s to write and lobby for the incorporation of his ideas into all American public schools, he insisted

that hands-on civic training was the solution not only to corruption in government at home, but to conflict and militarism worldwide.[6]

Such faith in the concept of practical civics education would prove utopian rather than practical. More and more, principals and teachers who implemented democratic activities into their schools—who attempted to create a "public" within the school— reported shifting their emphasis away from stimulating habits of self-rule toward encouraging active cooperation. As a New Jersey principal explained it, an ideal aim was to facilitate "the cooperative sharing of responsibility for a good efficient school" as exemplified in a "student council representing the student body and active in the social and institutional life of the school, its assemblies, special events, care of buildings, grounds, school spirit, flag, paper, school bank, athletics, elections, etc, etc." Even ardent supporters of the civic practicum began to agree, embracing this attenuated notion of engaged citizenship. Responding to a Sacramento educator's request for guidance, Frank Kiernan of the National Self-Government Committee wrote in 1912 that "the most successful form of student government in the high schools I am familiar with is a student council which acts in an advisory capacity to the faculty and which has general jurisdiction over the athletics, social and civic phases of the high school life." Kiernan's energetic colleague in the self-government movement, Lyman Beecher Stowe, concurred. "Pupil Self-Government is unfortunately a misnomer," he told student teachers at New York's Adelphi College. "But it has

[6] Richard Welling, *How the Twig is Bent*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), 164-176; Wilson L. Gill, "Lay Deep the Foundations of Democracy," *National Magazine* 47:3 (February 1918), 130; Wilson L. Gill, *The Third Act of the American Revolution*, (New York: Constitutional League of America, 1922).

been used so long that it has become a trade-mark. We probably could not change it now if we wanted to. It is not Self-Government but Pupil Cooperation."[7]

Developing a cooperative mind-set had been an essential aim of hands-on civics education enthusiasts from the start. However, while die-hard self-government supporters like Gill and Welling talked about training future citizens to come together as a democratic public—people, that is, who would take an interest in civic affairs generally and hold their governments accountable to the public good—what the movement ultimately produced was a rehearsal for fractals of democratic engagement. The activities that "most nearly give the students some training for citizenship," explained Olivia Pound of the Lincoln High School in Lincoln, Nebraska, "are *those that allow for some degree of participation* in school government" [emphasis added]. In a 1918 article on social programs, she noted, "these organizations should not be confused with the more or less unsuccessful attempts at self-government that have been made from time to time in various schools." These activities might be as "unambitious" as a student council, serving as "little more than an advisory body which meets with the principal or with members of the faculty to discuss problems of the student body." Such activities, she suggested, were helpful because they provided faculty some insight into pupil opinions while connecting pupils to the broader workings of the school. On the other end of the spectrum, were mechanisms designed to give students an opportunity to direct spirit activities, such as "school parties, money-raising projects, school debates, athletics, assembly programs, student finances,

[7] H.W. Dutch to School Citizen's Committee, April 26, 1912, Box 2, Folder 9, National Self-Government Committee Records, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library (Hereafter, NSGC); Frank Kiernan to E.R. Simmermacher, March 12, 1912, Box 3, Folder 2, NSCG; Lyman Beecher Stowe Speech to Adelphi College Typescript, October 5, 1912, Box 98, Folder 2, NSCG.

student clubs, lyceum courses, care of school trophies, etc."[8] What Pound suggested then, was that limited engagement in approved social activities was sufficient for practical citizenship instruction.

Writing a year later, Seattle Principal Worth McClure posited civics instruction in similar terms. Most of his schools, he noted, had largely scrubbed the patently governing aspects from student government, opting instead to employ "one or more types of pupil cooperation or participation in the management of the school." Citing organizations such as boys' and girls' clubs or pupil advisory committees, McClure explained that "these devices, have been found to afford excellent opportunity for the exercise of real self-control, while they were less cumbersome than the school republic or school city, were therefore less susceptible of abuse, and consequently were more efficient in training for *good* citizenship. What McClure and Pound described then were programs that redefined civic engagement as a form of "pitching in" and which recast hands-on civics education as involvement with what Pound called "student cooperative organizations."[9]

While educators eschewed the civic theatre and bureaucratic role-play that was characteristic of earlier experiments in pupil government, quite a few found it useful to retain their police elements. In some schools, Pound noted, "advisory" student councils were also empowered to handle "all cases of tardiness, discipline in the halls, lunch-rooms, and on the school grounds." The organization at the Sacramento High School, for instance, was typical of student governments (both then and now) in that it helped manage entertainment and athletic events and oversaw the publication of the school newspaper and yearbook. However, in addition

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[8] Olivia Pound, "The Need of a Constructive Social Program for the High School," *The School Review* 24:3 (March 1918), 163-164.
[9] Worth McClure, "Morals by Rote," *The School Review* 27:6 (June 1919), 463.

to these prosaic responsibilities, it also assisted with maintaining order in the corridors and included a student-staffed "police court" to adjudicate infractions of school rules. Similarly, "the student executive board" at a Minneapolis school was in charge of maintaining order throughout the school building as well as surveillance of the student body to "eliminate petty thieving and minimize cribbing and cheating." At the De Witt Clinton High School in New York, students staffed a "traffic squad, a study-hall squad, and a hall squad" charged with maintaining order in practically every corner of the building.[10]

Of course, in the eyes of other observers, De Witt Clinton was also a hot-bed of student agitation—that "nursery of anti-patriotism" according to *The New York Times*, where young people were taught to question authority. And when Chairman Whalen stalled on reviewing the petition regarding the lengthened school day, over five hundred students from Clinton decided to make good on their threats to strike. In what quickly devolved into a melee, truant officers (along with a contingent of fifty policemen) were able to disburse the crowd, which reassembled a few blocks away to march back to the school building. At this point, however, another one of the school's cooperative organizations—a quasi-governmental police unit which styled itself as the "Dotey Disciplinary Squad" made up of athletes and some of the rougher members of the student body—charged into the crowd of protesters and using "the latest 'flying wedge tactics' separated the mob into smaller units that were easily disbursed."[11]

The readiness with which this contingent of enforcers turned on their classmates, points to a profound shift in youthful attitudes toward power relationships that had occurred since restive "young Washingtons" had banded together to bar out their schoolmasters. Less than a

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[10] Pound, 165.
[11] "Swift Punishment Ends School Strike," *The New York Times*, October 26, 1917,

century earlier, children who now and then mounted little rebellions in their schoolhouses understood this kind of disobedience to be a good thing—a demonstration that, as future citizens, they might be mindful of legitimate authority without being cowed by it. This same attitude of collective, independent empowerment also characterized later classroom insurrections, when youngsters began to describe their protests as strikes rather than battles. In both cases, young people chose their organic communities—that is, communities comprised of their peers—over the collective identities that authority had prescribed for them. Indeed, this explains why some adults attached so much importance to childhood loyalties and schoolyard ethics and expressed concern about what it might mean to devalue them in the name of good citizenship.

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For a short period of time during the First World War the distinction between vigilantism and active citizenship, between voluntarism and coercion blurred—creating conditions which historian Christopher Capozzola argues altered the meaning of citizenship in the United States for good. "At the factory and at school," he writes, "in churches and in dance halls, on the streets and on the telephone, ordinary Americans were watched and governed by their fellow citizens." Viewed against this backdrop of socially policed conformism, an organized band of students breaking up a protest by classmates is, perhaps, not out of the ordinary.[12] Like adults who joined the American Protective League or took it upon themselves to round up draft dodging "slackers" or expose "un-American" activities, young people in the war frenzied United States—some much younger than the teens who routed protesters at De Witt Clinton High School—were enthusiastic members of groups with names like The Boy Spies of America and the Anti-Yellow Dog League, whose ostensible mission was to expose disloyal persons living next door. In

[12] Capozzola, 143.

Capozzola's telling, the metamorphosis of active citizenship—from an expression of civic voluntarism into a shared set of obligations to the state—was catalyzed in this atmosphere of over-wrought nationalism.

Yet, unlike these organizations the Dotey Disciplinary Squad was in 1917 already a fixture in school life at De Witt Clinton. The group itself was the brainchild of Latin teacher Aaron I. Dotey, who seven years earlier had enlisted the help of a select band of boys for keeping track of tardy students. Dotey's intention was to form a semi-official police force to supervise and report on the comings and goings of all students in the building. Over time, the band grew into a kind of schoolhouse Pinkerton Detective Agency, gathering "intelligence" on troublemakers, helping to break up student gambling activity, and planning sting operations to catch thieves in the school building, all while helping to maintain order among their fellow students. In fact, in a 1924 critique of education in America, Upton Sinclair singled out Dotey for condemnation, calling him the "Chief Spy" of the school and describing the unsavory part he played in pushing for the dismissal of colleagues who he deemed un-patriotic, using his squad to gather evidence to support his accusations. Although from an administrative perspective, the squad operated outside the bounds of a sanctioned pupil-government it mirrored the quasi-official status of citizen-vigilance groups. Moreover, its extra-governmental nature notwithstanding, it was no different that the "official" police forces that had figured prominently in civic laboratories, where children had learned about their obligations to the government—*their* government—that manifested the public will. Indeed, while war might have accelerated movement toward a new, cooperative model of citizenship, the foundations had already been laid

in school “cities” and “states,” where the notion of civic virtue was redefined as a commitment to collective consciousness.[13]

Advocates for practical civics education insisted that developing this kind of collective consciousness in the schoolhouse was tantamount to building the sinews of an adult democratic public. Providing children with the opportunity to exercise their civic autonomy—albeit under the watchful eyes of teachers—was essential, the thinking went, to developing the habit of thoughtful participation in the political process. As we have seen, the upshot of this well-meaning effort was to create an environment in which neophyte citizens were expected to embrace the notion of the sacrosanct public interest. However, the notion that conscientious citizens might have differing ideas about what this interest was left unaddressed, reduced, in the civic calculus of the democratized classroom to public opinion—a vague concept that for most pupils was the equivalent of “school spirit” or loyalty to the school, ideas that (theoretically, at least) everyone could agree on. The implicit message was that both in the school and the adult world all responsible members of the body politic worked together toward the same ends, and that civic participation was above all a means for individuals to endorse the prevailing sentiment. This left little room for dissent—the product of the kind of resolute civic skepticism that self-government advocates claimed was the aim of practical citizenship education.

Enlisting the cooperation of men and women who identify as autonomous—people who James Block calls “agency citizens” in a liberal society—in a collective civic project that imposes parameters on agency had always been an essential challenge of American education. In the eyes of civic reformers like Gill and Welling, recasting children as authentic civic agents in

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[13] Alfred Grunberg, “Saves Thoughtless Youngsters from Disgrace,” *American Magazine* 84:4 (October 1917), 53-54. Upton Sinclair, *The Goslings: A Study of the American Schools*, (Pasadena: Upton Sinclair, 1924), 77-78.

schools was a practical way of ensuring that these children would view themselves as agents in adulthood. Unlike their elders, who deferred to the mandates of demagogues and corrupt urban bosses, young people who had been given the opportunity to govern themselves once would be loath to let others take over for them when they matured. Or so the reasoning went. Together with the drive to raise militant citizens, however, came the expectation that civic militance was legitimate only insofar as it reflected the public interest, a concept which, because it *was* vaguely defined, was subject to manipulation—in schools, of course, by teachers and principals, and later, in adult life, by public opinion and consequently, by those who would shape public opinion. Ultimately then, the self-government movement introduced into civic training what one historian has described as the moral paradox of Progressive education—that "weakening the authority of adults and giving new legitimacy to peer influence . . . [it] . . . left students vulnerable to the tyranny of both the immediate group and the present moment."[14] Aiming to save future citizens from the predations of special interests, the self-government helped open the door for collective coercion in the name of the public.

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In 1944 prolific teacher-turned-author Harry C. McKown published a handbook for educators—one of dozens he would pen, on a variety of topics pertinent to school-life—with guidance on establishing and managing student councils. Noting that over the previous two or three decades the idea of young people taking a part in managing the affairs of their schools had ceased to be novel, McKown suggested that in fact, such activities had come to constitute a bulwark against forces that sought to undermine democratic institutions. Of course, at the height

[14] Bernard Edward McClellan, *Moral Education in America: Schools and the Shaping of Character from Colonial Times to the Present*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 60.

of the Second World War his readers needed no reminder that the threat was substantial from without; however, he warned, while "armies and navies can crush external foes . . . they cannot vanquish internal enemies. These must be conquered by education."[15]

There was an air of familiarity in McKown's treatment of the topic, as if it went without saying that the up-to-date educator would embrace some form of student government in his or her school. And yet, if semi-autonomous civic life in the schoolhouse was no longer the novelty it had once been, much remained the same. For one thing, like their early twentieth century counterparts, the substance of these activities varied widely, running the gamut "all the way from hypocritical window dressing to plans in which the students assume real and vital responsibilities." Even more important, the internal threats McKown cited as justification for these exercises were strikingly similar to the ones that concerned self-government reformers like Gill and Welling a generation earlier—things such as "fear, doubt, prejudice, smugness, cynicism, indifference to personal social responsibility, lack of civic consciousness, and a childish faith in human 'saviors.'" More than forty-five years had passed since Gill first posited democratized schools as the solution to civic apathy and folly, yet the principled, confident, open-minded, engaged citizenry he claimed to seek remained elusive. What had changed, however, was the belief that any pretext to *self-government* was necessary. Instead of vigilance and tenacity, teachers were expected to emphasize a willingness to make useful contributions to the collective good as a supreme civic virtue. Indeed, referring to the term self-government McKown wrote that there had been since 1915 a steady retreat from the use of "this inaccurate

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[15] Harry C. McKown, *The Student Council*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1944), vii-viii.

and somewhat odious expression toward the simpler and more practical 'participation in school control' idea."[16]

The casual dismissal of self-government as an "odious" term in the context of civics instruction is indicative of how far the thinking on citizenship instruction had drifted. As we have seen, the Progressive political socialization project was often flawed in practice; attempts to implement a hands-on civics program varied according to the philosophies of the teachers involved and how much juvenile democracy they could tolerate on a day-to-day basis. However, the best of them did begin with the assumption that citizens-in-training should be groomed for substantive engagement in the civic life. In a political system where the people have power, governments are only as good as the people require them to be; this the transcendent lesson of the civic practicum—the lesson that the self-government movement sought to impart. What McKown described, on the other hand, was no longer intended to habituate young people to the idea that as citizens they held real influence and responsibility; although he described it as an opportunity to practice civics "in a setting that resembles that of ultimate citizenship" it was not the vital practice that inspired youngsters to view themselves as more responsible or less prone to corruption than their elders; rather, it was political instruction recalibrated to suggest that active citizenship boiled down to expressing one's opinions.[17]

Ironically, recounting the precursors of modern student involvement, McKown singled Welling out for especial praise, writing that, "American education, especially that part concerned with the development of its major objective, good citizenship, owes much to the enthusiastic, tireless, and patient efforts of this eighty-six-year-old master teacher." Yet, perhaps nothing

[16] Ibid, vii, 22.
[17] Ibid, vii.

captures the attenuation of the ideal more than the fact that McKown chose to dedicate his handbook to the elderly reformer—identifying him not as the founder of the National Self-Government Committee, or as a man who argued that self-government for schoolchildren was the key to creating an atmosphere in which governments would be held accountable to citizens, but as someone who encouraged future citizens merely to take part in the democratic process. Thus, the inscription, which reads, "To Richard Welling: The Grand Old Man of the Participation Movement," suggests how, in the final analysis, the history of the Progressive political socialization project is the story of lost opportunities—the abandonment of an idea, that the foundations of a democratic public might be built in schools.[18]

[18] Ibid, v.

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Circle and Success
The Commons
Educational Review
The Educational Weekly
The Intelligence
The International Socialist Review
Journal of Education
Kindergarten Magazine
Marsh's Magazine
Northwest Journal of Education

National Magazine
Normal Instructor
Oregon Teacher's Monthly
The Outlook
Pennsylvania School Journal
Popular Educator
Primary Education
Public Opinion
Review of Reviews
The Saturday Evening Post
The School Journal
The School Review
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Social Service
The Southern Educational Journal
The Survey

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