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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
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A 21st Century Defense of Participatory Democracy

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In Political Science

by

Jason William Vick

Dissertation Committee:
Associate Professor Keith Topper, Chair
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2015

DEDICATION

To

My parents

for their love, support, and example

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
CURRICULUM VITAE	vi
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	ix
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction	1
CHAPTER TWO: Democracy's Contested Meaning: A Brief History	15
CHAPTER THREE: Dead and Buried or Alive and Well? Examples of Participatory Democracy in the 21st Century	60
CHAPTER FOUR: All Power to the Precariat: Can We Have a Democratic Economy in the 21st Century?	99
CHAPTER FIVE: Embracing Commonality without Erasing Difference: Can We Have Democratic Community in the 21st Century?	141
CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion	189
REFERENCES	193

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A Twenty-First Century Defense of Participatory Democracy

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A 21st Century Defense of Participatory Democracy

By

Jason William Vick

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Irvine, 2015

Professor Keith Topper, Chair

This project investigates and answers one of the most important questions of contemporary democratic theory and practice, namely, the question of the place of widespread, active, and direct citizen participation in democratic politics today. Drawing on a wide range of theoretical and empirical resources, this project simultaneously reorients and reinvigorates the participatory ideals that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Challenging those who dismiss these ideals as misconceived, utopian or unrealistic, I demonstrate that when properly revised to account for the major developments of the past half-century, participatory democratic theory offers a compelling normative defense of democracy that is also essential for addressing the most pressing political and economic problems today. In particular, I organize the dissertation around three thematic questions: Are there contemporary examples of participatory democracy? Is the participatory ideal of economic democracy still realizable? Is democratic community possible in the twenty-first century? Each question, which relates to and builds on the previous one, works to critique, update, and rehabilitate participatory democracy so that it can be an empirically-informed, normatively challenging democratic theory well-suited to the demands of contemporary democratic theory and practice.

Chapter One: Introduction

“Any law that the populace has not ratified in person is null; it is not a law at all. The English people believes itself to be free. It is greatly mistaken; it is free only during the election of the members of parliament. Once they are elected, the populace is enslaved; it is nothing.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau

“Democracy is a never-ending process, always to come, and not simply an end-goal or the promise of a perfect democratic society.” Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen

“For a democratic polity to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist, i.e. a society where all political systems have been democratized and socialization through participation can take place in all areas.” Carole Pateman

We are in the streets. A woman with a bullhorn is shouting, “Show me what democracy looks like!” and every time she does so we shout back “This is what democracy looks like!” There are thousands of us. It is September 2007 and we are marching from Lafayette Park to Congress to protest the ongoing war in Iraq. When we arrive at the Congressional building a troop of police in full riot gear marches before us. Protesters hum the melody to the Imperial March from Star Wars in mockery, an attempt to deflate the intimidating display of (potential) state violence. These armed guards are protecting Congress—but from whom? Participants cross the police line and are arrested in an act of (largely symbolic) civil disobedience. We cheer them on and sing “Give Peace a Chance.” The spirit of the sixties is alive and well, galvanized by the actions of the Bush administration. We did not end the war that day but we were both reflecting and contributing to the cultural and political changes that would bring the war to an end over the next few years. We stop by a sandwich shop on the way out, chatting with fellow college students about the possible rebirth of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the future of the anti-war movement. I think back to that morning, riding the metro into the city surrounded by fellow protesters and peace signs. We have encountered

something like community, and something like democracy, on this beautiful Saturday in our nation's capital. It remains the most meaningful political experience of my life.

Fast forward to Fall 2011. I stand with fellow graduate students in sedate Irvine, California, at the site of the Occupy Orange County encampment. People give speeches, put up tents, hold signs, and before long we march through suburban Irvine to cheers, whistles, honks, and occasional berating, "Get a job!" or "Get a life!" With the labor protests in the upper Midwest, the Arab Spring, and Occupy Wall Street, it feels like the world is exploding. We are still sorting through the consequences of this fateful year today (the year of dreaming dangerously, as Žižek called it). These experiences suggest a series of questions, some of the most important ones for democratic citizens to ask: Can these profoundly meaningful democratic experiences, found in protests, civil disobedience, and the smaller acts that constitute a social movement, be institutionalized? Can this vital, participatory energy be injected into the formal institutions of government at the city, state, or federal level? What about in the workplace? Can democracy as active citizen participation ever be more than a fleeting moment? Is it destined to remain fugitive, as Sheldon Wolin has suggested, bursting forth here and there in the face of antidemocratic corporate and state power but incapable of consolidation? Does the ideal of participatory democracy still make sense in the 21st century?

Now is the time to ask these questions. Contrary to much scholarly and popular opinion, the past few decades have produced a rising wave of participation in politics across much of the globe. As citizens in the consolidated liberal democracies, particularly in the United States, become increasingly disillusioned with the formal institutions of

government and economy, they hunger for more meaningful forms of participation.¹

There is an incredible popular energy here and very good comparative scholarship studying it. Political theory, however, has yet to fully acknowledge or investigate this development. The body of literature related to participatory democracy, though containing a few widely read texts, is relatively underdeveloped theoretically.² In particular, there has been little exploration of these ideas by political theorists in recent decades as republican, deliberative, and agonistic theories of democracy have supplanted earlier participatory theories.³ While there have been some notable contributions, to date no attempts have been made to investigate systematically what participatory democracy has to offer and what it means today. This is what I attempt to do.

¹ See the following for current rates of confidence in major American institutions as well as historical trends. Most of the political institutions have experienced long-term declines in confidence. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>. For in depth analysis, see the work of Russell Dalton. For instance, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

² A quick search through JSTOR for the term “participatory democracy” reveals that, while interest in this topic has hardly disappeared, it has received little attention from political theorists in recent years. There is a non-trivial amount of publishing on participatory budgeting and other real world experiments as well as continued empirical survey research that measures the desire for active citizen participation among ordinary citizens. See Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan, Jeffrey A. Karp, “Enraged or Engaged? Preferences for Direct Citizen Participation in Affluent Democracies,” *Political Research Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2007) for an example. Political theory concerned with citizen participation, however, has largely moved into the realm of deliberative democracy, with certain thinkers, such as Archon Fung, continuing to make occasional appeals to the earlier ideal of participatory democracy. For a recent article that explicitly endorses the ideal of participatory democracy, see Harry C. Boyte, “Constructing Politics as Public Work,” *Political Theory* 39, no. 5 (2011) : 630-660.

³ See Jeffrey Hilmer, “The State of Participatory Democratic Theory,” *New Political Science*, 32, no. 1, (2010) : 43-63; Emily Hauptmann, “Can Less Be More? Leftist Deliberative Democrats’ Critique of Participatory Democracy,” *Polity* 33, no. 3 (2001) : 397-421; Carole Pateman, “Participatory Democracy Revisited,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 1 (2012) : 7-19.

Movements such as Occupy Wall Street demonstrate the continuing relevance of the ideas of participatory democracy for both political theory and practice, frequently characterizing their actions and justifying them by appeals to the language and principles of participatory democracy. Occupy Wall Street is in fact symptomatic of our political moment in so far as it did not target a particular policy but rather signified a more general dissatisfaction with the workings of democracy and the economy. The ideals of participatory democracy, I argue, are uniquely suited to challenge and undo the neoliberal policies that have produced in the past few decades growing inequality, disempowerment, and devastation to the democratic public sphere.

It would thus be a mistake to ignore participatory democracy or consign it to a distant past. If we are living, as I argue, in a participatory moment, then there is an urgent need for a participatory democratic theory that is adequate to the moment. The advisory councils and citizen juries advocated by proponents of deliberative democracy are valuable but do not provide adequate avenues for citizen participation. According to the highest standards of democratic participation, they are not good enough.⁴ In the meantime the minimal institutions of representative democracy continue to decline in popularity and legitimacy. This project ties together several threads—participatory democracy is popular “out there” in the real world where there are increasing demands for it. Indeed, many protest movements in North and South America as well as Europe have focused their critiques on the inadequacies of representative democracy, including its failure to provide meaningful and robust opportunities for democratic participation. Given the resurgence of interest in participatory democracy in many parts of the world today, it is

⁴ These criticisms are discussed in more detail in Chapters two and three.

important for political theory to (re)consider some key questions: How has citizenship changed in the fifty years since participatory democracy first gained currency? How have the economic developments of the past half-century impacted it? How and where can we find democratic community today? And why is it important? What can the real-world experiments in participatory democracy teach us?

The overarching purpose of this work is to demonstrate that participatory democracy is a compelling and relevant theory of democracy for the 21st century. In addition, I hope to provide valuable practical suggestions for confronting the most pressing issues facing American democracy today and a firm normative basis. I am focusing on a few questions in particular to show that participatory democracy offers especially compelling answers to them and is a workable but demanding ideal for politics today. Specifically, I will focus on how participatory democracy, as theory and practice, can contribute to political and economic equality, workplace democracy, citizen empowerment, and the defeat of neoliberalism. More than other democratic theories, participatory democracy offers the resources to challenge the weakening of democratic forms of citizenship and community and can contribute to effective, vigorous, legitimate and democratic government, particularly in the city and the workplace. Participatory democracy not only offers desirable answers to problems of American democracy but answers that are often neglected by other normative theories, including deliberative, republican, and agonistic democracy (though I have respect for the values and goals of each).

There are some recent works that do gesture in this direction. Tom Malleson, Gar Alperovitz, and others have examined issues regarding the democratization of the

economy in the 21st century, often drawing on and expanding the ideas of earlier participatory democrats. Some important scholarly work on these topics has been done recently. For example, Benjamin Barber has explored the potential in the city for serious democratic reform as well as municipal coordination on issues of global concern, highlighting valuable cases and success stories. Sociologist Erik Olin Wright has investigated particular “real utopias” where on the ground experiments in democratic participation are taking place. Carole Pateman’s 2011 APSA address, “Participatory Democracy Revisited,” examined fundamental questions of participatory democracy and in doing so stressed how radical and relevant participatory democracy remains today. Other theorists working at a higher level of abstraction, namely Sheldon Wolin, Wendy Brown, and William Connolly, have in recent years considered how neoliberalism and corporate capture of the political sphere has threatened efforts to expand democratic practices, citizenship, and participation. Notwithstanding these and other contributions, theoretical investigations of participatory democracy continue to lag behind the pace of real-world experiments. Consequently, one objective of this dissertation is to help fill this scholarly gap, drawing on empirical research as well as theoretical inquiry. As Sheldon Wolin has remarked, “political theory might be described as the attempt to theorize the political by addressing the concerns of politics rather than of philosophers and using civic rather than professional forms of discourse.”⁵ It is in this spirit that I cast my own work, where the concerns of politics, rather than abstract philosophy, guide my theoretical inquiries.

⁵ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 504.

The works I have mentioned above often oscillate between celebration of promising empirical examples of participatory democracy, on the one hand, and theoretical despair over the prospects for democracy today, on the other hand. In this study I bring together these two perspectives, showing why there are good reasons to be deeply troubled by the current predicament yet also optimistic about the possibilities for democratic reform, and regeneration, particularly given the spread and popularity of participatory democracy in the 21st century. Bridging these two views is one of the contributions to scholarship this dissertation hopes to make. In this work I draw broadly on earlier scholarship in participatory democracy, agonistic democracy, and a range of other democratic theorists, political economists, and comparative and American scholars of politics. As the study unfolds I also develop a number of theoretical criticisms of contemporary scholarship in democratic theory, suggesting that while agonistic theories of democracy in particular are promising and absolutely central to this project, they are also in important respects defective. Thus a second contribution of the project is to construct a dialogue between participatory, agonistic, and deliberative theories of democracy.

Participatory democracy is now often seen, at best, as a decent enough impulse but no longer the proper subject of theorizing. I contend that this is a loss for democratic theory in particular and political theory as a whole. While political theorists have neglected these ideas, experiments in participatory democracy are flourishing around the world, from municipal participatory budgeting (begun in Porto Alegre, Brazil and now expanded to many cities around the world) and Chicago community policing to the burgeoning coop and workplace democracy movement. Theorists neglect these issues at

their own peril. At a time when experiments in direct, local democracy are not only alive and well but rapidly expanding, and discontent and distrust with formal democratic institutions is rising (witness Occupy Wall Street and the recent bus fare protests in Brazil), attention must be directed to these issues for political theorists to adequately conceptualize the meaning of democracy in the 21st century. My project is therefore both an act of reclamation and of reconceptualization, drawing our attention back to the participatory theories of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s and arguing for a reconceptualization of these theories in the light of current developments.

Given the dizzying variety of meanings and definitions attached to the term democracy, it is important to clarify the understanding of democracy that guides this project. Democracy is several things: a form of government (which can apply not only to formal political institutions but also those of the economy, education, the household, etc.), an ethos, and a forever unfulfilled and radical project. As John Dryzek asserts, democracy is never a settled accomplishment. Rather, it is always on the move, always expanding or contracting. I thus view democracy as existing on a continuum, one in which we can always move toward greater democracy or away from it.⁶ Democracy is an unfinished, radical dream, not a conservative accomplishment. The goal is not achieving democracy, once and for all. There is no settled, stable, final state of democracy. The goal is always more democracy, the question is always whether we are moving in the right direction, are we pushing for more democracy or losing what we have?⁷ This depiction of

⁶ See Dryzek's thoughts in *Democracy in Capitalist Times: Ideals, Limits, and Struggles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁷ There are some spheres in which democratization must take more halting or provisional steps. For instance, democratizing the university is a goal of many participatory democrats. What this entails in practice is a difficult question. What role should students

democracy resonates with that provided by many participatory and radical democrats, who often see democracy in insurgent, constantly evolving terms. Democracy is the struggle for more democracy.

In many ways, despite our tendency to see and celebrate progress, we have been moving backwards on key issues of democratic concern in the United States (though on issues of patriarchy we have probably been moving, however slowly, in the right direction) and thus the question is how best to deal with these issues.⁸ Participatory democracy offers a powerful tool for thinking about and addressing democratic shortcomings and declining legitimacy.

As with all participatory democrats, I have an expansive conception of politics. If politics concerns, as David Easton argued, the “authoritative allocation of values,” or as Harold Lasswell has said, who gets what, when, and how, then it applies not just to formal institutions of government but to other major social institutions as well, including those of the economy, education, gender and race relations, and elsewhere.⁹

have in formulating curricula, hiring decisions, budgetary matters, etc? This study focuses less on these questions and more on how to democratize major political and economic institutions and practices.

⁸ Although the dissertation does not focus on the question of race, one can plausibly argue that structural racism has become worse in recent decades, spurred by the War on Drugs and the broader policies of the carceral state. This is of concern for those committed to expanding American democracy. For an influential recent argument, see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010). As for patriarchy, I am not arguing for complacency. Rather, I am raising two cheers for the salutary effect that decades of feminism have had on American democracy.

⁹ David Easton, *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*, second edition. (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1953) and *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965). Harold Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: Meridian books, 1958).

I define participatory democracy as *equal and direct participation in collective self-government*.¹⁰ It is important to remember here that this is an aspiration, never to be entirely fulfilled. It is best thought of as an ideal type, a normative ideal of democracy, one that can usefully regulate thought even if it is never fully instantiated empirically. We can thus say with regard to this definition, the closer the better, but there are no social systems writ large that are participatory democracies. With that said, I do believe that institutions can be more or less democratic, that participatory democracy is capable of taking institutional form (with varying degrees of success), while never being definitively established, settled, or fully achieved. Instead, the question is how much of the ideal is met in a particular institution, or how many institutions embody the ideal in society at large. And as I have stressed above, the question on our minds ought always to be, are we moving closer to, or further from, the ideal?

In the following chapter I provide a brief overview of the history of democracy, its practice and ideas, before turning to four contemporary normative theories of democracy that are particularly influential today. I discuss and offer some critique of republican and deliberative theories of democracy and then give a more detailed discussion of the two theories that are most central to this project, participatory and radical theories of democracy. While I think that these two theories are the most promising (and normatively compelling), I am ultimately committed to a renewed defense of participatory democracy, so that the radical theories come under some

¹⁰ This definition is intended to be similar to previous definitions. See Carole Pateman's definition of full participation in *Participation and Democratic Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970) for comparison. See also Carol Gould, *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

criticism in both this chapter and particularly in later chapters. They are thus integral to the project but also, I argue, not adequate to the task, a task that only participatory democracy can successfully meet.

The third chapter focuses on four different examples of participatory democracy in the 21st century. My goal here is to show current, not historical, cases of participatory democracy in practice, both as a demonstration of the idea's continuing power and resonance with ordinary citizens, as well as a way to gain insight into how it works (or does not work) in the political-economic context of today. Thus, I don't focus on any of the communes, coops, or participatory workplaces that emerged from the 1960s and 1970s. My focus is on four distinct, ongoing examples: participatory budgeting, community policing, deliberative polling, and Occupy Wall Street. Participatory budgeting and community policing are municipal reforms that emerged in the 1990s and have grown in size and legitimacy since. Because there is considerable empirical research on these cases we can learn much about how successful they are, when they work (and don't work), and can draw a series of lessons for participatory democratic theory. Deliberative polling, pioneered by political scientist James Fishkin, is not a municipal reform but rather a political science experiment, testing how deliberation and the quality of information impacts the discussions, preferences, and decisions of democratic citizens. While couched in the language of deliberative democracy, these deliberative polls provide valuable insights into how citizens deliberate, participate, and respond to information when making democratic decisions. They thus have much to teach proponents of greater democratic participation. The final case that I consider is a social movement, Occupy Wall Street. It is important to consider some cases of participatory

democracy that involve formal decision-making power in institutions of democratic governance (such as participatory budgeting and community policing) as well as a case that is set outside of, and in many ways against, the formal political and economic institutions. Indeed, this is a large part of participatory democracy's heritage. One of the key lessons of the 1960s and 1970s was that in a minimalist democracy, the most meaningful democratic experiences may occur outside of the formal arenas of politics. Participatory democracy can be said to embody two impulses: first, a celebration of the meaning and power found in social movements, which are a key site of democratic experience and citizenship, and second, a demand that these rich, participatory experiences be translated into the formal institutions of the political-economic system. Whereas municipal policing and budgeting reforms embody the second desire, the Occupy Wall Street movement represents the first, a citizen protest that both demanded greater democracy and attempted to embody the democratic future it desired via its day-to-day operations.¹¹

Chapter 4 turns more directly to neoliberalism and the political economy of democratization. Here I consider a number of important changes that have characterized the American political economy over the past half-century and the manner in which these changes have impacted prospects for further democratization. I set out a qualitative description of how these economic changes have altered the character of democratic citizenship in the US and its relationship to participatory democracy. I ask whether the participatory goal of democratizing the economy is still realizable today, given developments such as de-unionization, rising inequality, corporate capture of politics, and

¹¹ What David Graeber, as well as many participants in OWS, describe as “prefiguring” the future they want to see.

the general hegemony of neoliberalism. While in part painting a dark picture, this chapter also considers ways in which neoliberalism can be challenged, before turning more directly to arguments for workplace democracy. I endorse many of the conventional arguments in favor of workplace democracy while also adding one of my own, namely that democratic workplaces are a particularly desirable way of producing economic equality because the egalitarian pay scales that democratic workplaces frequently opt for are more likely to be seen as legitimate, as they are the outcome of democratic choice among the employees. Finally, in this chapter I consider some of the national and global steps that need to be taken to ensure a broader economic democracy, including regulations to promote unionization and to encourage nations to actively limit wage inequality.

In Chapter 5 I return to a question of longstanding interest to political theorists, the question of community. Specifically, in this chapter I elucidate a vision of democratic community, explaining why it is valuable for democracy and the manner in which it is being threatened by neoliberalism (as well as other imperatives). Drawing on the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Benjamin Barber, and Charles Taylor, I sketch the most salient features of this vision of democratic community and explain its centrality to the participatory democratic project. A considerable part of the chapter is devoted to questions of plurality and difference. Here I develop a critique of agonistic theories of democracy, focusing on their inability to adequately attend to the importance of community as a key feature of a robust, participatory democratic politics. In particular, I argue that the language and insights of agonistic democracy are less effective in articulating a response to neoliberalism than a revised participatory democracy.

Participatory democracy thus needs to be updated, revised, and even partially reformulated, to address the following: the lessons to be learned from the growth of quality empirical evidence regarding its successes and failures in recent real-world examples; it must be reconstituted as a response to neoliberalism, economic inequality, and corporate power; and recast as a theory for recovering and sustaining empowering forms of democratic community. This is the task of the present study. While the seeds of these ideas were laid long ago by earlier participatory theorists, the challenge today for participatory democrats is to nourish their developments so that the tree continues to grow in the right direction, hopefully blossoming in the democratic springs that await us.

Chapter Two: Democracy's Contested Meaning: A Brief History

Introduction

The English word “democracy” is derived from the Greek word “demokratia,” meaning rule by the people. What exactly does this entail?¹² Does rule by a majority qualify as rule by the people? In contemporary societies like the United States can the people be said to rule in any substantial sense? Sometimes this is modified into the claim that democracy is merely the consent of the people but this is watering down democracy to the point of meaninglessness. If consent is construed passively (and how would we measure *consent*, anyway?), then presumably many historical socio-political arrangements (and many current ones, too) have met this definition, but what do any of them have to do with Athenian democracy? If democracy is self-government, what does this look like institutionally? Or perhaps we should take a more chastened view of democratic possibilities and say with Joseph Schumpeter that the role of the people today is “to produce a government” while would-be leaders wrestle in a “competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”¹³ Might we push instead for a strong vision of democracy that is characterized not by infrequent elections but “ongoing civic participation in agenda-setting, deliberation, legislation, and policy implementation”?¹⁴ Or is democracy perhaps not located in institutional settings but in the ruptures, protests, and revolutions when “those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some

¹² David Held offers a wide-ranging and persuasive discussion of different varieties of democracy in *Models of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006). See also Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), for another discussion of the many manifestations of democracy.

¹³ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 269.

¹⁴ Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*, p. 151.

account”¹⁵ Is democracy fleeting, a fugitive, against which stands the American constitution, not to mention the modern corporation, “designed to strew as many barriers as possible to democratic power”¹⁶

We inhabit an odd historical moment, one in which democracy is widely seen as the only legitimate form of government while there remains considerable contestation over its meaning and substance. Much empirical social science today involves attempts to specify the necessary and sufficient conditions of democracy and democratic institutions. In these contexts democracy is usually characterized as an idealized version of actual democratic practices in Europe and North America, with some mixture of competitive elections and liberal rights at its core. While there is no doubt value in these efforts, they are of limited use for normative political theory. To begin with, as John Dunn and others have noted, modern “democracy” bears almost no resemblance to the original Greek city-states in which it originated. Among the many difficult questions one might ask is the following: Why do we call our political system a “democracy”? Are there alternative visions or practices of democracy that might be explored and developed today? Is liberal, representative democracy the closest approximation to “rule by the people” that is now achievable?

One of the central objectives of the present study is to provide answers to these questions. By looking back at the Athenian democratic experience and then focusing on two contemporary theories of democracy, participatory and radical-agonistic democracy,

¹⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 27.

¹⁶ Sheldon S. Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” In *Democracy and Difference*, edited by Seyla Benhabib, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 41. See also *Democracy Incorporated* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

that draw on its ideal of rule by the *demos*, I hope to reclaim the democratic ideal as a radical (but not utopian) aspiration, rather than a conservative accomplishment. It is important to bear in mind that if the people can be said to rule at all in today's democracies, it is only in the most indirect, attenuated sense. The point, therefore, is to show that the Athenian ideal, of direct self-rule by the people¹⁷, is alive and well today in both political theory and practice, even if it has been largely eclipsed by efforts to reduce democracy to indirect rule via competitive elections. At its best, democracy has served the American experience as a critical ideal, calling forth our best impulses, ideals, music and literature, rather than as a stable, accomplished fact.¹⁸ The democratic theories that occupy this project, both participatory and radical-agonistic, are part of that critical aspiration, calling on America to fulfill its democratic promise rather than contributing to efforts to Americanize foreign governments. I proceed, aware that democracy has become (nearly) universalized just as it has been robbed of much of its substance, while retaining the brilliant power to inspire hopes for collective freedom that only genuine rule by the people can provide. It is the belief that democracy, understood as direct rule by the people, is not only desirable but necessary in our world today that motivates this project.

¹⁷ I should note that I do not endorse the Greek conception of *the people*, which excluded women, slaves, and foreigners. A participatory democratic conception of the people, fitting for the 21st century, must include all resident adults, and this necessitates a struggle to incorporate felons, ex-felons, and undocumented residents into full citizenship.

¹⁸ See Cornel West, *Democracy Matters* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

Organization

What, then, is democracy? Is it any *one* thing? Is it a form of government, a way of being, a view of the world? How has it become so widely viewed as the only legitimate form of government and why is there still so much contestation over its use and meaning?¹⁹ What are the various languages of democracy that have accompanied its many appearances and disappearances, its revolutions and its fugitive triumphs, as well as its many defeats and failures? In this chapter I will examine some of the most prevalent theories of democracy, beginning with an analysis of several historical models before moving to an engagement with four contemporary normative models of democracy: republican, deliberative, participatory, and radical-agonistic. In particular, I will focus on the development of what I see as the two most promising normative theories of democracy, participatory democracy and radical-agonistic democracy. By tracing their development and situating them within a broader context, I will argue that they are uniquely suited to address some of the dilemmas and defects of American democracy today.

I will begin with a brief examination of three historical models: Athenian democracy, Roman republicanism, and the republicanism of the Italian Renaissance. I focus on these historical models in particular because they have such a large influence on contemporary debates in democratic theory, particularly on the theories that guide this study.²⁰ Here I will assess the extent to which the latter two models should properly be

¹⁹ See John Dunn, *Democracy: A History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005).

²⁰ I recognize that there are many other historical cases one could discuss in providing a brief history of democracy. My selective focus is guided by the necessities of a study that engages most directly with participatory democracy, radical democracy, republicanism, and deliberative democracy.

considered part of the democratic tradition at all and the manner in which the Athenian model continues to inspire democratic hopes today. I will then consider important contemporary theories of democracy, beginning with republican theories, which have experienced a renaissance of their own starting with the influential work of Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock in the 1970s and continuing today with the scholarship of figures like Phillip Pettit and John McCormick.²¹ Next I will discuss deliberative democracy, which has risen to a position of predominance in democratic theory since the 1980s and has drawn heavily on scholars such as Jurgen Habermas, James Fishkin, Amy Gutmann, and Dennis Thompson. After discussing some of the limitations of these two theories of democracy, I will turn to participatory democracy, which emerged with SNCC, SDS, and the struggles of the 1960s and is associated with Carole Pateman, Benjamin Barber, and Arnold Kaufman. Finally, I will consider radical-agonistic theories of democracy, which have emerged in the 1980s with the work of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, William Connolly, Iris Marion Young, and others. My purpose here is to provide a history of these two literatures, including some of their remarkable similarities as well as differences, and to explore some of the answers they provide as well as the questions they leave unanswered. In doing so I will provide a brief history of these more radical theories of democracy as well as an indication of where my own contributions to contemporary debates will be made. In addition I should note that I

²¹ For instance, J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Volume One: The Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

will be drawing heavily on the work of Sheldon Wolin, who frequently blurs the already fuzzy lines between participatory and radical-agonistic theories of democracy, and who, in doing so, provides a (daunting) starting point for the path on which I wish to proceed.

The Origins of Democracy and Republicanism

In this context, it makes sense to return to beginnings, for the shadow of Athenian democracy looms large over the history of Western politics and philosophy, especially over the trajectory of participatory and radical-agonistic theories of democracy. The Athenian ideal of direct citizen self-government, of genuine rule by the *demos*, continues, on the one hand, to haunt efforts to reduce democracy to periodic elections and, on the other hand, to inspire efforts to develop more robust democratic institutions and practices. To be blunt, what did Athenian democracy look like? How did it develop? Why did it end?

First, Greek democracy did not emerge overnight and it did not emerge in Athens alone. Out of the slow rise of urban civilization grew a series of Greek coastal cities that came to be dominated by a number of tyrants in the 7th and 6th centuries BC. A period of social struggle ensued, producing a number of reforms in Athens and elsewhere, which, combined with “the formation of a slave economy” allowed for the creation of an “economically and militarily independent citizenry” that possessed the time, energy, resources, and will to participate as democratic citizens. While Chios may have been the first democratic city-state, Athens became the most prominent.²² John Dunn interprets the rise of Athenian democracy in the following manner: “democracy in Athens arose out of

²² David Held, *Models of Democracy*, p. 12.

struggles between wealthier landowners and poorer families” but many of these were not intended, in themselves, to render Athens a democracy. The famous reforms of Solon, and later Kleisthenes, “reorganize[ed] Athenian social geography and institutions to resolve a set of immediate problems;” these reform efforts, aimed at solving problems like debt and unequal land ownership, culminated, perhaps unintentionally, in 507 BC with a polity and way of life that would soon be termed “democracy.”²³ While it is important to recognize the gradual nature of the rise of Athenian democracy, it should be noted that Dunn’s interpretation is not the only one available. Josiah Ober, working in the same time frame, sees the emergence of Athenian democracy as a more abrupt, revolutionary, and self-conscious constitution of rule by the demos.²⁴ It is not necessary for our purposes to settle this debate, just to recognize its existence.

What were some of the key features of this Athenian democracy? First, an understanding of liberty as the opportunity to rule and to be ruled in turn (this is Aristotle’s well-known definition of citizenship), combined with a more personal liberty to do as one wishes. This very public conception of freedom and citizenship unsurprisingly stressed civic virtue, public activity as the source of one’s identity, the subordination of private life to public affairs, and direct participation by an “active, involved citizenry” in the legislative and judicial functions. The *demos* was sovereign,

²³ John Dunn, *Democracy: A History*, pp. 32-33.

²⁴ See Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) and *The Athenian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

and this was illustrated at its most basic in the fact that the *ekklesia*, the assembly of citizens, was the key law-making body.²⁵

For the purposes of this study, it is not necessary to explore in detail the well-rehearsed objections to Athenian democracy, which have left a deep imprint on Western political thought, from Plato through the Federalist to contemporary political theory and political science today.²⁶ A few features of the Athenian model should, however, be noted. The most important of these features involve the exclusionary elements of Athenian democracy. In a city with a full population of several hundred thousand people, no more than a third would have qualified as citizens, and somewhere between 30,000 and 45,000 would have met the requirements for full citizenship. Somewhere around half of the city's residents were slaves.²⁷ Perhaps even more troubling, though less remarked upon, was the fact that every citizen was male and women were heavily confined to the household. The democracy itself was prone to factions and impulsive legislating, given the lack of checks on the power of the temporary majority. And yet, democracy in Athens did not disintegrate due to internal collapse or revolution. Rather, "what ended it was not Athenian political choices (or even their unintended consequences). It was foreign military power: the armies of the kingdom of Macedon."²⁸ The Athenian model,

²⁵ David Held, *Models of Democracy*, pp. 13-27. The particular institutional features of Athenian democracy need not concern us here, though they are a fascinating look into how a deeply democratic polity could be (and indeed was) constructed in the real world.

²⁶ See Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (New York: Verso, 2009), and Sheldon S. Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," and "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy," In *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*, edited by J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach, and Josiah Ober (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). See also, more generally, Dunn, *Democracy: A History*.

²⁷ Dunn, p. 35, and Held, *Models of Democracy*, Chapter 1.

²⁸ Dunn, *Democracy: A History*, p. 34. See Chapter 1 for more general reference.

despite its many shortcomings, continues to serve as a source of inspiration for many contemporary efforts to institutionalize, recover, or reinvent more direct, face-to-face forms of democratic politics, most notably in participatory and radical-agonistic theories of democracy. I turn next to a brief discussion of historical republicanism before moving on to contemporary theories of democracy.²⁹

First, what is the relation between republicanism and democracy? Debates concerning the American founding, and modernity more broadly, tend to focus on the opposition between republicanism and liberalism, and consequently tend to conflate republicanism and democracy, which are often viewed as twin rivals of liberal thought. While Ancient Rome provided a large role for elections and empowered its common citizens through various tribunes, it neither was, nor aspired to be, a democracy. Similarly, as numerous scholars have pointed out, republicans in the Italian Renaissance did not see themselves as democrats; in fact, they tended to have fairly aristocratic attitudes toward class inequality and political participation.³⁰ If Ancient Rome was not a democracy, and Renaissance republicans generally harbored aristocratic, undemocratic attitudes, then what does the history of republicanism have to do with democracy?

Put simply, the republican city-states of Italy, drawing their cue from Rome, contributed to the development of Western notions of self-determination and popular sovereignty. Harking back to republican Rome, Renaissance republicans asserted two

²⁹ For an unconventional account, see Murray Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1987), who sees medieval communal life as an example of democratic self-government.

³⁰ See Held, *Models of Democracy*; John McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Volume One: The Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

key values: “their right to be free from any outside control of their political life---an assertion of their sovereignty,” and “their corresponding right to govern themselves as they thought fit,” which included a republican constitution that would allow for some measure of popular participation.³¹ In summary, “the core of the Renaissance republican case was that the freedom of a political community rested upon its accountability to no authority other than that of the community itself.”³² It is important to recognize that this popular self-determination, while a component of democratic thought, is not reducible to the Athenian democratic concern with a form of self-government in which the distinction between ruling and being ruled was erased. The differences between republicanism and democracy are difficult to parse but are nonetheless essential to an adequate understanding of democratic theory and practice. Let it be noted for now, at the risk of great oversimplification, that whereas Athenian democracy is characterized by rotation of offices by lot and a sovereign assembly open to all citizens as equal legislators, Roman and Italian republicanism is characterized by election to office and a mixture of different decision-making institutions geared towards channeling the interests of each social class.³³

Republicanism

With this admittedly brief historical survey standing as background, the remainder of this chapter will review the development of democratic theory in the 20th century with

³¹ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Volume One*, pp. 6-7.

³² Held, *Models of Democracy*, p. 34.

³³ There is also a fair amount of evidence that historical instances of republicanism have been considerably more oligarchic than democratic Athens, as have been the ideas espoused by proponents of republicanism.

a particular focus on the theories that provide a critical assessment of existing democracies and provide a normative ideal by which to judge them. These bodies of theory are republicanism, deliberative democracy, participatory democracy, and radical-agonistic Democracy. If classical and renaissance republicanism stands for self-determination, mixed government, citizen virtue, and popular participation by all social classes, what do contemporary republican theorists stress? In the following I will focus on the work of Phillip Pettit. It should be noted, however, that there is considerable debate about these matters among contemporary republican thinkers. While representative of key ideas, Pettit does not offer the only republican perspective.³⁴

At its most basic, republican freedom is defined as non-domination, or immunity from arbitrary interference. The problem is not interference *per se*, for this is how liberalism defines freedom, as the absence of interference or restraint.³⁵ Republicanism, rather, focuses on relations of subordination and domination. Within republican thought the relation between master and slave is typically treated as an exemplar of relations of domination. In this relationship the slave, regardless of how frequently or infrequently he is interfered with, is still in a subordinate position where he *could* be arbitrarily interfered with if the master chose to limit the slave's freedom. The master-slave relation is therefore a relation of domination, whether the master is kind and gentle or brutal and interfering. The upshot of this approach, in contrast to liberal freedom, is that "if you are not subject to a *capacity* for arbitrary interference by anyone else, then it follows that the non-interference you enjoy in the actual world, you enjoy with a certain resilience or

³⁴ Quentin Skinner, in addition to his more historical work, has addressed the question of what a theory of republicanism should look like today. See *Liberty Before Liberalism*.

³⁵ Hobbes offers the most famous example of freedom as non-interference: freedom is the "absence of external impediments to motion."

security.”³⁶ Republicanism sees freedom in terms of capacities and relationships, not mere acts. Pettit also contrasts this conception of freedom with what he calls a populist, or democratic, conception of freedom, in which freedom occurs through individual self-mastery or collective self-government. Pettit’s republicanism thus seeks to chart a middle ground between what he sees as the inadequate conception of freedom offered by liberalism (freedom as non-interference) and the overly demanding conception of freedom found in populist democracy (freedom as self-mastery).³⁷

In sum, the major features of contemporary republicanism include the rule of law, a mixed constitution with a separation of powers, civic virtue, and checks on majority rule. Non-domination, embodied in these recognizable institutions, delivers three goods: 1) freedom from the uncertainty of subjection to arbitrary interference, 2) freedom from the necessity of strategizing to avoid the arbitrary interference of the powerful, and 3) freedom from being seen as socially subordinate.³⁸ Pettit, in his substantial body of work, demonstrates how the republican conception of freedom has challenging normative implications for political and material equality, punishment, the selection and monitoring of public officials, public deliberation, and basic constitutional questions. While it is impossible to do full justice to his work here, it is important to raise two concerns.

The first concern is as follows: republicanism, both in its historical instantiations and in the work of its contemporary defenders, is not deeply democratic. As John

³⁶ Phillip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 24, my italics.

³⁷ Some of the historical moments that Pettit calls attention to as inspiration for modern republicanism include Classical Rome, Italian Renaissance city-states, the English Civil War, the Eighteenth Century revolutions, and the work of Harrington, Montesquieu, de Tocqueville, and Rousseau (who, as Pettit notes, is also in many ways a populist democrat).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, chs. 1-4.

McCormick notes, “democrats should worry when philosophers employ the language of republicanism...put bluntly, republicanism has always justified serious constraining or constriction of democracy.”³⁹ Republicanism, in most of its varieties, is pervaded by a deeply liberal fear of majority rule, and in spite of casting aside the liberal conception of freedom as non-interference, still retains an understanding of popular government as something alien. Pettit suggests that the primarily democratic features of republicanism occur when citizens can contest government decisions---“what it requires is that for any way in which public decision-making may offend against someone’s interests or ideas, there are means whereby those interests or ideas can be asserted in response.”⁴⁰ To his credit, Pettit recognizes that such contestatory moments are important sites of democratic politics (as radical-agonistic democrats show) but the underlying assumption is that more enduring forms of popular, democratic self-government are undesirable, if not impossible.⁴¹

The second concern, in some ways a reformulation of the first, is republicanism’s inattentiveness to what Patchen Markell terms “usurpation.” Whereas non-domination is concerned with the “problem of *control*: what matters is that this course of action be responsive to your interests, not determined by another’s whim,” usurpation is concerned with whether you are actually involved in the course of action---“whatever it is that’s happening, and however it’s being controlled, to what extent is it happening *through you*, through your activity?”⁴² In over-attending to the question of domination, i.e. whether I

³⁹ John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, pp. 141-142.

⁴⁰ Pettit, p. 190.

⁴¹ It should be clear, at this point, why democratic thinkers like Sheldon Wolin are so insistent on the distinction between republicanism and democracy.

⁴² Patchen Markell, “The Insufficiency of Non-Domination,” *Political Theory*, p. 12.

am being interfered with arbitrarily, republicanism makes itself vulnerable to objections of paternalism. Put bluntly, the republican has to admit that an able adult who lives with his/her parents and concedes all decision-making to them, is nevertheless not dominated provided the parents don't arbitrarily interfere and make all decisions in accord with the grown child's interests. While this may not be a case of domination, it is also not desirable, precisely because it is a case of perpetual childhood, which republicanism, as formulated by Pettit, cannot guard against. Markell's case of usurpation presses the following question to republicanism: Do we actually get to *do* things ourselves? Politically, do we have something akin to democratic participation? If adulthood is something akin to individual self-government, then democracy, as self-government, can be seen as a form of collective adulthood. Republicanism leaves open the possibility of perpetual childhood as a form of freedom. Only a strong conception of democracy, one that is adequately attentive to self-government and usurpation, can articulate what is so troubling about this case.⁴³

Deliberative Democracy

Over the past twenty to thirty years another body of democratic theory has developed, deliberative democracy, which has exploded to the point of achieving near-hegemonic status among contemporary democratic theorists. Deliberative democracy provides a set of critical tools for assessing the practice of real-world democracy, which, given its current prominence, must be situated in relation to my own project and that of

⁴³ Benjamin Barber offers an interesting discussion of how consumer capitalism infantilizes and thus prevents the development of responsible, adult democratic citizens capable of collective democracy. See *Consumed* (New York: W&W Norton and Company, 2007).

competing normative theories of democracy. There are several different types of deliberative democracy, which share certain common features but also diverge in significant ways, to be detailed below. Given the range and depth of deliberative democratic theory, it is not possible to discuss every one of its many variants in detail. This section will focus on a few key perspectives in contemporary deliberative democratic theory, explaining their shared emphases as well as the manner in which they disagree, and why they are important for democratic theory. The deliberative democratic perspectives that I will focus on are a Habermasian one, rooted in the philosophy of Jurgen Habermas and further developed by Seyla Benhabib; the deliberative theory developed and popularized by Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson; and the deliberative polling model offered by James Fishkin.

Though comprised of several different strands, deliberative democrats share a number of themes in common. To begin with, each shares a preoccupation with the conditions of good deliberation: how should people talk about moral and political issues in public, how can people justify their arguments or decisions with good reasons, how can the public sphere be transformed so that it is more rational and reflective, how might good deliberation produce more thoughtful, informed preferences among the electorate, and so on. The divergence comes about less through profound disagreement than by way of employing different languages and emphases in each theory, although as deliberative democracy has grown over time some important cleavages have emerged.⁴⁴ I will therefore briefly discuss the Habermasian model, the Gutmann-Thompson model, and the

⁴⁴ While I will not focus in detail on this component here, the debate between proponents of impartial deliberation and critics of this perspective is one area of significant disagreement. For a helpful overview, see David Held, *Models of Democracy*, chapter 8.

Fishkin model, before raising some questions regarding the limitations shared by all varieties of deliberative democracy and differentiating it from the participatory and radical-agonistic theories of democracy.

One of the most significant varieties of deliberative democracy has developed out of the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas and has been further developed by a number of scholars, most notably Seyla Benhabib, Simone Chambers, and even in the hard-to-classify democratic theory of Iris Marion Young. Built around Habermas' theory of communicative action, which views communication as inherently oriented toward the goal of reaching understanding, this form of deliberative democracy focuses, on the one hand, on the importance in political deliberation of providing good public reasons in support of one's political claims and proposals and, on the other hand, on the importance of identifying and excluding from public political discourse mechanisms that distort communication, particularly under the imperatives of the market economy and the bureaucratic state.⁴⁵ The goal for Habermasian deliberative democrats is to articulate the standards governing a lively, public political deliberation, thereby producing forms of political deliberation that are vibrant and robust yet free of distortion. This approach draws on the rich, complex body of work of Jurgen Habermas, which, in addition to its historical influences in Kant and the Frankfurt School, blends together philosophy of language, social theory, and German philosophy to develop these ideas.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Habermas' famous work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* traces the rise and decline of the (in principle) open and inclusive bourgeois public sphere.

⁴⁶ In the 1960s and 1970s Habermas was sometimes described as a neo-Marxist, a description that would not accurately characterize the projects he has been developing for the past few decades.

What does this entail as a normative theory of democracy? In a modern, large-scale, complex society, it is not possible, suggests Habermas, for citizens to make all political decisions through the mechanisms of direct democracy. He nonetheless remains committed to the democratic ideal of self-government in some form. Habermas therefore describes the (not fully realized) development of a subjectless, amorphous public sphere of informed opinion formation, which could, through communicative action, generate a communicative power that would in turn pressure governments to follow particular policies and justify their actions to the citizenry. Although this would be a “weak” public, compared to, say, the “strong” public of Athenian citizens, it would retain the ability to participate in “an open and inclusive network of overlapping, subcultural publics having fluid temporal, social, and substantive boundaries.”⁴⁷ For Habermas, “deliberative politics thus lives off the interplay between democratically institutionalized will-formation and informal opinion-formation.”⁴⁸ This “wild” and informal public sphere is where democratic opinions are formed, provided the public sphere can be adequately sheltered from the instrumental demands of money and administrative power (what Habermas terms “system” power). In turn, these opinions from this active, mobilized public sphere can guide formal law making and require elected officials to justify their decisions in the language of the public sphere. In his words, “the public opinion that is worked up via democratic procedures into communicative power cannot “rule” of itself but can only point the use of administrative power in specific

⁴⁷ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998), p. 307.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

directions.”⁴⁹ This abandonment of the ideal of a direct, participatory, face-to-face democracy in deliberative democratic theory is something that will be discussed below in more detail.⁵⁰

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (hereafter referred to as GT) have developed another influential approach to deliberative democracy. Their approach is importantly distinct from the Habermasian perspective in a number of ways. First, GT are concerned with how citizens deliberate about politics and the kinds of reasons they provide one another. Second, GT effectively demonstrate how deliberative theories of democracy are distinct from participatory democracy, elite democracy, and other, particularly aggregative, theories of democracy. They therefore provide clarity regarding the relation of deliberative democracy to many of its competitors. The work of GT also relates to debates among other deliberative theorists such as John Rawls, Joshua Cohen, and Jane Mansbridge, who have all provided arguments for the types of discussion that should be acceptable for public political deliberation.⁵¹

For GT, deliberative democracy is defined by “the need to justify decisions made by citizens and their representatives.”⁵² Its primary characteristic, unsurprisingly, is the need to *give reasons* to one another so as to adequately justify such decisions. GT are

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 300.

⁵⁰ For a critique of Habermas’ deliberative democratic theory as elitist and non-participatory, see Harry C. Boyte, “Constructing Politics as Public Work: Organizing the Literature,” *Political Theory* 39, no. 5 (2011) : 630-660.

⁵¹ See the discussion in the following edited volumes for a primer on these issues: Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1996); James Bohman and William Rehg, *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997); and Stephen Macedo, *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵² Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 3.

motivated more broadly by the attempt to engage with moral disagreement in politics and the need to develop a language whereby citizens can argue and deliberate with one another while retaining an atmosphere of mutual respect. They are thus attentive to the “sources of moral disagreement,” including conflicts of self-interest, scarcity of resources, incompatible values, and incomplete understanding.⁵³

How can politics proceed in the face of (seemingly) unavoidable and profound disagreement? To begin, citizens and representatives must have institutions available for deliberation and mutual reason giving. Thus they argue that, “in the absence of robust deliberation in democracy, citizens cannot even provisionally justify many controversial procedures and constitutional rights to one another.”⁵⁴ Similarly, deliberative democracy seeks agreement “on policies that can be provisionally justified to the citizens who are bound by them.”⁵⁵ This justification must take place through a general principle of reciprocity, where “reasons are recognizably moral in form and mutually acceptable in content.”⁵⁶ On this account, the assertion that marriage is properly defined as a union between a man and a woman because the Bible defines it that way does not qualify as an acceptable reason. Rather, citizens must appeal to reasons that others not only can understand but can also reasonably accept. While theological claims would not be ruled out *per se*, sectarian reasons along the lines of “because my religion says so” would be excluded. Thus we find GT stressing again and again that “the fundamental values of democratic institutions...*must be justified by moral arguments that are at least in*

⁵³ Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 18-26.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-57.

principle acceptable to [all] citizens who are bound by them."⁵⁷ The goal of political deliberation is, when possible, deliberative agreement, and when not possible, as will frequently be the case, a justified, reflective, deliberative disagreement.

One final model to mention is James Fishkin's work on deliberative polling. I include Fishkin's approach to deliberative democracy because he is notably distinct from a number of other deliberative perspectives. Fishkin is less concerned with specifying how people ought to deliberate than he is in discovering what such deliberation might look like in practice. Fishkin therefore conducts a social science experiment, the deliberative opinion poll, to gather evidence of what citizen deliberation might look like in practice. Whereas conventional opinion polling measures a snapshot of unreflective preferences, deliberative polling brings "a representative sample of the population together in one place for a few days in order to deliberate on a pressing matter of public concern," measuring the change in preferences before and after the intensive deliberation.⁵⁸ By drawing on a representative sample of the broader populace, the deliberative poll is designed to indicate what the general electorate would think about a number of issues if they adequately deliberated on them. Without deliberation, politics runs the risk of becoming "nothing more than power without the opportunity to think about how that power ought to be exercised."⁵⁹ In doing so Fishkin has attempted to demonstrate the positive impact that deliberation can have on citizen preferences and subsequent participation, by combining the face-to-face conditions of direct democracy

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

⁵⁸ David Held, *Models of Democracy*, p. 247.

⁵⁹ Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 36.

with the sophisticated deliberation and representation of a representative body.⁶⁰ The significance of the deliberative opinion poll for *participatory* democratic theory and institutions will be further elaborated in the following chapter.

It can be difficult to articulate objections to deliberative democracy. For one, deliberative theories of democracy have valuably proliferated and come to enjoy a prominent place within contemporary political theory. Second, the idea of *deliberation* seems so innocuous, at once demanding of our polity without dipping too far into radicalism or utopian dreaming. Instead, I would like to register a few notes of caution regarding deliberative democracy. In spite of the often-significant disagreements among deliberative theorists, each of the varied deliberative perspectives shares a set of weaknesses that must be addressed.⁶¹ First, as Carole Pateman has noted, the key experiments in deliberative democracy, such as “deliberative polls, deliberative days, citizens’ juries, expanding voter feedback mechanisms and citizen communication,”⁶² have not been institutionalized in a manner that allows for regular citizen participation as a democratic right. Most of these experiments consist of relatively brief engagements in

⁶⁰ For further elaboration of this point, see *Democracy and Deliberation*, ch. 8.

⁶¹ Recent scholarship has helped to clarify this issue (see Carole Pateman, “Participatory Democracy Revisited.” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 1 (2012) : 7-19; and Emily Hauptmann, “Can Less Be More? Leftist Deliberative Democrats’ Critique of Participatory Democracy,” *Polity* 33, no. 3 (2001) : 397-421) but in the 1990s scholars often blurred the boundaries between participatory democracy and deliberative democracy, sometimes treating participatory democracy almost as a less sophisticated version of deliberative democracy. When one considers the theories in detail, however, it becomes clear that the difference in perspective is quite profound. For an example that treats deliberative democracy as the natural outgrowth of the participatory energies of the 1960s while also understating the significance of participatory democratic theory during that time, see the introduction to James Bohman and William Rehg, ed., *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997). The introduction does, however, contain a careful discussion of a range of debates within the realm of deliberative democracy.

⁶² David Held, *Models of Democracy*, p. 246.

which disparate citizens convene to discuss (and perhaps) issue recommendations on major policy issues. However, these forums, even if institutionalized, are not open to citizens as a democratic right. Contrasting deliberative experiments with Participatory Budgeting (PB) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Pateman notes that the municipal budgeting process approximates the ideals of participatory democracy, where citizens have “the right to participate in decision-making about their collective life and to live within the authority structures that make such participation possible.”⁶³ Whereas much of deliberative democracy, in theory and in practice, “leaves intact the conventional institutional structures and political meaning of democracy,” participatory democracy, like the case of PB in Porto Alegre, “becomes a regular part of a vital area of municipal government. Nor is it a supplement to existing democratic institutions. PB changes and democratizes the structure of one part of those institutions.”⁶⁴

Two more general concerns must be noted as well. Deliberative democracy, with its focus on a fairly rigorous mode of citizen deliberation, tends to deemphasize, if not outright ignore, questions of power and inequality, particularly with regard to class, race, and gender. Deliberative democratic theorists carefully specify the manner in which deliberation should be conducted to ensure both proper justification and equality among participants. This focus on formal equality can tend to downplay the significance of the extreme economic inequality that characterizes life in 21st century America. As Lynn Sanders effectively argues, even in situations that have full formal participatory equality,

⁶³ Carole Pateman, “Participatory Democracy Revisited,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 1 (2012), p. 15.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

like a jury, inequalities from outside society frequently exercise a negative influence.⁶⁵ Most social spheres are permeable to the influence of inequalities in education, status, gender, race, and class even in the face of careful rules that formally guard against such inequality. This is not necessarily a definitive objection to deliberative democracy and in recent years deliberative theorists have taken up the question of how to address this concern more directly. It is not clear, however, if the solutions they have proposed, such as allowing narrative, greeting, and story-telling in deliberative settings, are adequate to the enormity of the task posed by unrelenting growth in the disparity of life prospects between the most privileged Americans and the rest of us.⁶⁶

More broadly, deliberative theorists have frequently ignored the rather obvious questions of who is talking to whom and whether the major institutions of economic and political power are going to be challenged or at least reformed as part of deliberative democracy. In societies punctuated by racial, class, and gender inequalities, can people deliberate as the abstract citizens that deliberative democracy envisions them to be? Can a Wall Street CEO and a Wall Street occupier have an exchange of mutually acceptable reasons? Can they respect one another? Should they? The Occupier possesses no power to force the CEO to abide by the outcome of the deliberation, should it occur. As both

⁶⁵ Lynn Sanders, "Against Deliberation." *Political Theory* 25, no. 3 (1997) : 347-376.

⁶⁶For some examples, see Jane Mansbridge with James Bohman, Simone Chambers, David Estlund, Andreas Føllesdal, Archon Fung, Cristina Lafont, Bernard Manin and José Luis Martí, "The Place of Self-Interest and the Role of Power in Deliberative Democracy" *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Volume 18, Number 1, 2010, pp. 64–100; and in particular Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), chapter 2, and "Difference as a Resource for Democratic Communication, from James Bohman and William Rehg, *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, chapter 12, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997).

Michael Walzer and Ian Shapiro have noted, much of politics consists in a struggle over power and resources, with frequently zero-sum results. In such cases, the effort to produce a more egalitarian and democratic polity will come about in part through a struggle over power between those who oppose and those who desire greater democracy--while it will hopefully remain non-violent, rational persuasion will have little to do with the success of the outcome. As radical and participatory democrats like Michael Walzer have argued, "the democratic way to win is to educate, organize, mobilize...more people than the other side has...and while legitimacy is strengthened if good arguments can be made about the substantive issues at stake, the victory is rarely won by making good arguments."⁶⁷

Similarly, can the communicative power generated by deliberative democracy challenge or unseat political and economic elites? It seems safer to say that if there is a ruling class, "popular organizations and mobilizations are the only ways to oppose" it.⁶⁸ On this reading, deliberative democracy neither advocates nor provides the necessary tools for the radical democratization of authority structures envisioned by both

⁶⁷ Michael Walzer, "Deliberation and What Else," In *Deliberative Politics*, edited by Stephen Macedo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 66. See also Ian Shapiro, "Enough of Deliberation," In *Deliberative Politics*, edited by Stephen Macedo, 28-38, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For a more sophisticated discussion of some of the limitations of deliberative democracy, see Lynn Sanders, "Against Deliberation," *Political Theory* 25, no. 3 (1997) : 347-376 and Iris Marion Young, "Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy," *Political Theory* 29, no. 5 (2001) : 670-690. For a further discussion of the relation between deliberative democracy and key power centers in society, see my "Why Talking is Not Enough: A Response to the Deliberative Democrat," unpublished essay.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 67. An elaboration of this point, with key examples drawn from American history, can be found in Marc Stears, *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of a New Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

participatory and radical-agonistic democrats.⁶⁹ As I will argue throughout the dissertation, participatory democracy provides a better set of tools than competing theories for challenging injustices and entrenched political and economic power. Iris Marion Young, whose work carefully weaves together influences and concerns from deliberative, participatory, and radical-agonistic democracy makes this point effectively in a famous essay that dramatizes the limitations of deliberative democratic strategies for challenging the powerful.⁷⁰ Similarly, Marc Stears' recent book, *Demanding Democracy*, documents how effective social movements in American history have challenged economic elites and institutional racism and how non-deliberative, both in tactics and ultimate aspirations, they have been.⁷¹

Participatory Democracy

What is participatory democracy? Is it merely an artifact of the Sixties? If it is dead, or dying, why should we want to resuscitate it? Participatory democracy emerged in the 1960s with the student movements, such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and with the growing concern among some political theorists that democratic theory was no longer focused "on the participation of the ordinary man, or the prime virtue of a democratic political system seen as the development of politically relevant and necessary qualities in

⁶⁹ See Emily Hauptmann's thoughtful article for a discussion of the differences between deliberative and participatory theories of democracy, "Can Less Be More? Leftist Deliberative Democrats' Critique of Participatory Democracy," *Polity* 33, no. 3 (2001) : 397-421.

⁷⁰ Iris Marion Young, "Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy." *Political Theory* 29, no. 5 (2001) : 670-690.

⁷¹ Marc Stears, *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of a New Politics*. John Medearis develops this critique further in *Why Democracy is Oppositional* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).

the ordinary individual.”⁷² A similar concern may have motivated the Port Huron Statement’s expressed desire for a “democracy of individual participation.” Proponents of participatory democracy stressed that only a strongly democratic, participatory society should qualify as a democratic polity, which “requires that the scope of the term ‘political’ is extended to cover spheres outside of national government,” including (but not limited to) the workplace, household, neighborhood, and university.⁷³ For, “as long as rights to self-determination only apply to the sphere of government, democracy will not only be restricted in meaning to the occasional periodic vote...but will also count for little in the determination of the quality of many people’s lives.”⁷⁴

There are a number of conceptions of participatory democracy. For one, its lineage “consists of ideas inspired by republicans such as Rousseau, by anarchists and by what were earlier called ‘libertarian’ and ‘pluralist’ Marxist positions.”⁷⁵ Some participatory democrats have been more concerned with individual development, others preoccupied with collective self-government. As Pateman argues, “Rousseau’s entire political theory hinges on the individual participation of each citizen in political decision making...it also has a psychological effect on the participants,” whereby more effective participation empowers individuals, equipping them with the skills and desire to

⁷² Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, p. 104. For a history of these ideas, see Meta Mendel-Reyes, *Reclaiming Democracy: The Sixties in Politics and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1995); James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995); Tom Hayden, *The Long Sixties: From 1960 to Barack Obama* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009); and Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

⁷³ Ibid., p. 106.

⁷⁴ Held, *Models of Democracy*, p. 212.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 209.

participate further in self-government.⁷⁶ Other participatory theorists, equally influenced by Rousseau, have stressed the collective and the common, the public and the creation of community. For Benjamin Barber, Rousseau's concern with democratic political autonomy is predicated on the citizenry "establishing common meanings and common ends, common agendas and a common language."⁷⁷ These divergent, if not contradictory, self-understandings emanate from the fact that, as David Held rightly observes, participatory democracy is an odd but powerful mixture of Marxism, anarchism, republicanism, Athenian democracy, and a radicalized ideal of liberal democracy. This helps to account for its concern with participatory self-government, economic, racial, and gender equality, and individual development (and rights).⁷⁸

Many participatory theorists have also stressed the centrality of economic democracy to the construction of a more participatory polity. Pateman herself in 1970 focused on the value of workplace democracy through a consideration of the democratic firm in Communist Yugoslavia.⁷⁹ This idea of workplace democracy would retain a central place in participatory democracy for years to come. It is found in Bachrach and Botwinick's thoughtful work in the 1990s and continues today in the empirical work of scholars like Gar Alperovitz and theorists like Tom Malleon.⁸⁰ What all these theorists

⁷⁶ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, p. 22.

⁷⁷ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 13.

⁷⁸ As Pateman insists today, liberalism is a broad enough category that some of its manifestations are compatible with participatory democracy while others are not.

⁷⁹ The idea of worker control of the firm has its roots not only in the guild socialism of thinkers like G.D.H. Cole, whom Pateman focuses on, but also in the radical thought of council communists like Anton Pannekoek and Anarcho-Syndicalists like Rudolf Rocker.

⁸⁰ See Peter Bachrach and Aryeh Botwinick, *Power and Empowerment: A Radical Theory of Participatory Democracy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Gar Alperovitz, *America Beyond Capitalism* (Takoma Park, Maryland: Democracy

share in common is the idea that for democracy to be meaningful it must be expanded to the economic sphere, in particular the workplace, because in a modern capitalist society the workplace is where we spend much of our lives. If this institution, so central to our daily experience and personal identity, is not democratic then how can we claim to be democratic citizens?⁸¹

A separate, but related question, for participatory democrats concerns the economic preconditions for effective democratic participation. How much material equality, if any, is necessary for us to participate as equals?⁸² This question in particular has guided much of Pateman's work. This in part explains her turn to feminism in the 1980s—women, in particular, through a combination of historical and contemporary legal, economic, and discursive inequality and exclusion, often lack the resources to participate on an equal footing with men. Pateman did not reject the participatory ideal but rather supplemented it with the following claim: a polity that did not attend to, and correct, its patriarchal practices could not become an egalitarian participatory democracy.⁸³ More recently Pateman has continued this theme with a focus on the basic income, which would empower all citizens, but in particular under-educated and under-employed women, to be full citizens through the economic security that it could provide.⁸⁴

Collaborative Press, 2011); and Tom Malleon, *After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁸¹ Even Robert Dahl came to espouse a mild version of this position by the 1980s. See *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁸² I take up these questions in more detail in Chapter 4.

⁸³ See *The Disorder of Women* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989) and *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988).

⁸⁴ See "Democratizing Citizenship: Some Advantages of a Basic Income." *Politics and Society* 32, no. 89 (2004) : pp. 89-105.

Other participatory theorists have perhaps been less attentive to the economic preconditions of participatory democracy. Benjamin Barber's attention has largely been directed towards efforts to expand vigorous democratic participation in the formal political sphere, particularly at the city level.⁸⁵ However, even Barber has shown an interest in the interrelation between global capitalism and democracy. In particular, he has targeted his critique at the ways in which consumer capitalism fosters an ethos that is unhealthy for, or even antithetical to, democratic citizenship.⁸⁶ Similarly, while Sheldon Wolin does not attempt to articulate the preconditions for democratic citizenship, his work since the 1980s has been focused on the growth of corporate power and the ways in which private corporate power merges with state power, creating new and undemocratic forms of concentrated power. This, to Wolin, is foreclosing the limited opportunities for democratic citizenship and participation in America today.⁸⁷

Arnold Kaufman, at the University of Michigan, was likely the first academic to speak positively on the topic of participatory democracy, arguing that a more direct, participatory model of democracy would better develop individual faculties.⁸⁸ According to Kaufman, "a democracy of participation may have many beneficial consequences, but its main justifying function is and always has been...the contribution it can make to the

⁸⁵ Both in classics such as *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* and in his recent work *If Mayors Ruled the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁸⁶ See *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995) and *Consumed*.

⁸⁷ See, in particular, *The Presence of the Past* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); "Fugitive Democracy." In *Democracy and Difference*, edited by Seyla Benhabib, 31-45 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and *Democracy Incorporated* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). For a thoughtful cataloguing of the ways in which global capitalism limits democratic possibility, see John Dryzek, *Democracy in Capitalist Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁸⁸ He may in fact have been the one to coin the phrase "participatory democracy."

development of human powers of thought, feeling, and action.”⁸⁹ In this sense participatory democracy offers far more than representative democracy ever could; not protection from tyranny, but political empowerment and intellectual development. For Kaufman, participation consists in both preliminary discussion to formulate priorities and decisions and an equal say in the actual decision process itself. There is no evidence, empirical or philosophical, that “precludes the possibility that participatory democracy may play an important role in enabling a person to develop his constructive and creative powers and achieve greater happiness.”⁹⁰

If neither human nature nor the imperatives of the modern nation-state and the global economy preclude a more participatory democracy, then the task following Kaufman’s work is to sketch out in more detail what exactly the term entails. Intentionally or not, Carole Pateman offered the first, and still definitive, theoretical articulation and defense of participatory democracy. In *Participation and Democratic Theory*, published in 1970, Pateman began her defense of participatory democracy through a discussion and rejection of minimalist (or orthodox) theories of democracy. Joseph Schumpeter's classic statement of minimalist democracy, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, defines democracy as the "free competition among would-be leaders for the vote of the electorate."⁹¹ Although Schumpeter adds several qualifications necessary for this electoral competition to function properly, the essence of democracy is this

⁸⁹ Kaufman, p. 184.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 184. For more on the debates that were taking place at the time, see Duncan and Lukes, “The New Democracy,” *Political Studies*, XI, no. 2 (1963) : 156-177. For Kaufman’s argument that the social-political problems of the 60s merited a radical response, see *The Radical Liberal: New Man in American Politics* (New York: Atherton Press, 1968).

⁹¹ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 285, conditions for democracy 289-296.

minimalist, electoral condition. Citizen participation plays no meaningful role in Schumpeter's theory; in fact this orthodox theory of democracy requires little of citizens beyond voting at regular intervals. The minimalist, or orthodox theory of democracy, is therefore concerned primarily with competition for leadership positions among a minority elite.⁹²

The participatory theory of democracy, emerging out of the popular struggles of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, was defined first and foremost as an alternative to more minimal conceptions of democratic participation. Drawing on Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, and G.D.H. Cole, Pateman develops an alternative, more participatory vision of democracy. To summarize, the participatory theory of democracy argues that national representative institutions are not sufficient to qualify a political system as democratic. For a "democratic polity to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist, i.e. a society where all political systems have been democratized," including but not limited to the economic sphere.⁹³ As I argue in an earlier work, "the primary justification for this theory is a structural-psychological claim, dating back to Rousseau, which states that institutional structures have an impact on individuals (and vice versa), and that increased space for citizen participation will both empower and educate individuals to be effective, democratic citizens. In other words, a participatory society is necessary for an individual to be a thoughtful, public citizen, and not simply a private, self-interested individual."⁹⁴

⁹² Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 5.

⁹³ Ibid., 42-43.

⁹⁴ Jason Vick, "Participatory Versus Radical Democracy in the 21st Century: Carole Pateman, Jacques Rancière, and Sheldon Wolin," *New Political Science*, Vol 37, No. 2, 2015, p. 208.

In the 1980s Benjamin Barber delivered a sophisticated defense of participatory democracy through an extended critique of liberalism and an articulation of a communitarian, local participatory politics. Inspired in part by the direct democracy of Ancient Athens and the commune democracy of the Swiss canton, Barber characterizes his “strong” democracy as a “self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogenous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their civic attitudes and participatory institutions rather than their altruism or their good nature.”⁹⁵ As Barber argues, democratic “politics is devoted to the legitimation of power and influence,” an accomplishment only realized when institutions of “power and influence” are organized along strongly democratic lines.⁹⁶ In this sense, Barber repurposes the fairly homogeneous Swiss democracy of Rousseau for the conditions of the 21st century.⁹⁷

Of special import for this study is the diverse and essential work of Sheldon Wolin, whose influence in political theory extends well beyond the confines of democratic theory, one of many areas where it has deservedly had a considerable impact. In some sense Wolin serves as a nice bridge from participatory to radical-agonistic democracy, for his work often defies the boundaries between the two bodies of thought.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*, p. 117.

⁹⁶ Benjamin Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, p. 107.

⁹⁷ As Barber notes, two major problems that a strong vision of democracy must confront are the problem of scale and the relation between democracy and capitalism, capitalism here referring to both neoliberal efforts at privatization of the public sphere and growing material inequality.

⁹⁸ For a related but much more in-depth discussion of the relation between participatory and radical democracy, see my “Participatory Versus Radical Democracy in the 21st Century: Carole Pateman, Jacques Rancière, and Sheldon Wolin,” *New Political Science* 37, No. 2 (2015) : 204-223. I include an extended discussion of Wolin’s thought in the context of these two theories of democracy.

Wolin is attentive to the changing character of political and economic power in the United States over the past century, arguing that as these forms of power merge and become more totalizing, the participatory democratic project becomes increasingly difficult to realize. In response to these developments, Wolin suggests that democracy be reconceptualized as a "mode of being that is conditioned by bitter experience, doomed to succeed only temporarily," but still everywhere a recurring possibility.⁹⁹ Turing away from the increasingly difficult task of institutionalization, democratic politics must be found in the fleeting, fugitive moments of protest, which become constitutive of the political itself¹⁰⁰. Through his emphasis on democratic moments of upsurge, Wolin comes to sound like contemporary proponents of radical democracy, in particular Jacques Rancière.

Wolin, however, does not completely discard the institutional project of participatory democracy, even as he registers a note of caution regarding its feasibility (and desirability) today. A careful reading of Wolin finds considerable sympathy for participatory democracy even in his most recent (and arguably most pessimistic work), *Democracy Incorporated*. In participatory democracy, "elections would constitute but one element in a process of popular discussion, consultation, and involvement."¹⁰¹ Thus, Wolin praises key moments of reform in 20th century America, from the New Deal to the Great Society, all of which expanded centralized power but with the purpose of expanding the social and participatory elements of American democracy. This tension between participatory and radical democracy makes Wolin a uniquely useful source for

⁹⁹ Sheldon S. Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Sheldon S. Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated*, p. 147.

future research and will be discussed more in chapter five. Wolin's hybrid democratic theory brings together the earlier insights of participatory democracy, with its emphasis on slow, local, institutional politics, with those of radical democracy, wherein expressions of democratic politics are found primarily in moments of protest and have difficulty taking institutional form. As with other radical democrats, Wolin harbors a skepticism of centralized power and the manner in which democratic energies can become ossified when they are institutionalized.¹⁰² The relations between these two bodies of democratic theory will be further explored in the following section.

Radical-Agonistic Democracy

In more recent years a body of democratic theory has developed, influenced by Marxism and participatory democracy but charting a path of its own, which I will call radical-agonistic democracy. The term *radical democracy* originates with the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in the 1980s and has developed into a theory that also includes, with some contestation, Jacques Rancière, Iris Marion Young, Bonnie Honig, Hannah Arendt, William Connolly, and Sheldon Wolin, among others. While heavily influenced by earlier participatory theories of democracy, radical-agonistic democracy adds an attentiveness to questions of plurality, difference, disagreement, and the questions of justice associated with this. In addition, radical-agonistic democrats tend to locate the political in key moments of rupture and protest, characterizing democratic

¹⁰² See in particular "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy," in *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*, edited by J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach, and Josiah Ober (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) for his thoughts on institutionalization and Athenian democracy.

politics as something that is often episodic, ephemeral, and difficult if not impossible to institutionalize in today's world. This diverse range of thinkers has also been more attentive than other theorists to the various forms of exclusion and oppression that plague modern democracies, exploring how people may be excluded from participation by virtue of a lack of free time, adequate resources, social recognition, or public space.

Radical-agonistic democrats are concerned with how to productively engage with difference and skeptical of the drive for consensus. Influenced by the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s, these thinkers have in recent decades wrestled with questions of identity politics, the end of the Cold War, the failures of the 1960s, and the rise of neoliberalism and have often drawn on post-structuralist insights and concepts. Particularly popular in political theory today is the work of Hannah Arendt, who, though it would perhaps be anachronistic to call a radical or agonistic democrat, has some affinities with the ideas developed in this body of theory, specifically with her celebration of the rare moments of public, political action that appear in the chaos of revolutionary upheaval, be it Paris in 1789 or 1968. Another point to note is the post-Marxism present in much radical-agonistic democratic theory. Many of these thinkers draw heavily on the Marxist tradition without embracing anything identifiable as Marxism, *per se*. As the working class has become more fragmented and come to have a variety of (often) competing interests, the Marxist agent of revolutionary transformation, the proletariat, no longer can serve the same function. The task of the left “has ceased to have any *necessary* link with a class,” and must expand to include other social movements if it is to

successfully challenge the current hegemony of neoliberalism. There are no longer, the left can now admit, any “privileged points of rupture.”¹⁰³

The term radical democracy comes to us from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s 1985 classic *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which features the subheading, “Towards a Radical Democratic Politics.” Laclau and Mouffe self-consciously situate their work within the Marxist tradition by characterizing it as a post-Marxist project, one that will use but also go beyond standard Marxist categories in the hope of recovering the “plurality within Marxism.” As one of the first, defining works within the radical-agonistic body of literature, the authors helped to define the key stresses of this theory of democracy, which include the rejection of the search for consensus which had characterized much of participatory democracy, at least in practice. As radical and agonistic democrats with a Marxist background, Laclau and Mouffe wanted to break out of a rigid Marxism in favor of a democratic politics that would contain a pluralistic collection of left-wing democratic movements, with gender, environmental, and racial equality movements standing alongside the traditional class-based ones. Radical democracy, in its initial formulation, thus focused on how the left might achieve a new, successful hegemonic articulation of power relations within current democracies, one that would expand the range of democratic operations and expand economic and social equality. Political movements on the left, then, will not revolve solely around class struggle but will possess a “collective will that is laboriously constructed from a number

¹⁰³ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (New York: Verso, 2001), p. 86. For a similar argument from a very different perspective, see G.A. Cohen, *If You’re An Egalitarian How Come You’re So Rich?* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000).

of dissimilar points.”¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Laclau and Mouffe, as post-Marxists and radical democrats, stress the contingency of political success—the victory of the proletarians is no longer guaranteed by the forces of historical materialism, capitalism will not inevitably produce its communist successor. This recognition of the sheer contingency of political life would permeate all subsequent radical-agonistic democratic theory---as Laclau and Mouffe note, “the political meaning of a local community movement, of an ecological struggle, of a sexual minority movement, is not given from the beginning: it crucially depends upon its hegemonic articulation with other struggles and demands.”¹⁰⁵

Both Laclau and Mouffe have further developed these ideas in more recent work and it will be helpful to spend a moment reviewing Mouffe’s work on agonism and agonistic democracy. More than anyone else, Chantal Mouffe and William Connolly (to be discussed below) have developed the *agonistic* element in radical-agonistic democracy. Mouffe’s democratic theory has focused in particular on the inherently conflictual nature of politics and the presence of both agonism and antagonism within the democratic polity. Mouffe’s project has progressed through a critical engagement with Rawlsian liberalism and Habermasian deliberative democracy, both of which, in their own ways, want to reach a final resolution to political struggle. Radical-agonistic democracy, on the contrary, embraces pluralism not as a fact to be grudgingly tolerated (as some might say Rawls does) but as something that is “constitutive at the conceptual level of the very nature of modern democracy and considered as something that we should celebrate and enhance.”¹⁰⁶ While too complex to be explicated at full length here,

¹⁰⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁶ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000), p. 19.

Mouffe suggests that there are two basic ways in which we can confront pluralism. The first, antagonism, results from the conflict that pluralism produces and involves an us/them relation between enemies who, in Mouffe's words, share no symbolic space. The second, agonism, also involves an us/them relation but one that is now constituted in a productive manner between not enemies but adversaries who share a symbolic space and through this common ground can engage one another on the basis of their disagreements over how to organize society. In sum, "*antagonism* is struggle between enemies, while *agonism* is struggle between adversaries...the aim of democratic politics is to transform *antagonism* into *agonism*," hatred into mutual respect and positive engagement with difference.¹⁰⁷

The work of Jacques Rancière offers a clear case in which we can diagnose the shift from participatory to radical-agonistic democracy. Rancière, like other radical-agonistic democrats, wrestles with the legacy of Marxism and its relation to radical democratic theory and practice. For Rancière, a discussion of politics begins with a reconceptualization of the political.¹⁰⁸ Politics is not a regular activity; rather, it is fleeting and rare, occurring only when a group that has been marginalized or excluded asserts its equality, when "the natural order of domination is interrupted" by those who have no part.¹⁰⁹ Politics, therefore, occurs through the assertion of a wrong, beginning

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 102-103. These themes will also have considerable resonance in the work of William Connolly. See Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, for further elaboration.

¹⁰⁸ As with my discussions of Pateman and Wolin in this chapter, see my "Participatory Versus Radical Democracy in the 21st Century: Carole Pateman, Jacques Rancière, and Sheldon Wolin." *New Political Science* 37, No. 2 (2015) : 204-223, for an elaboration of Rancière's thought and the relation between participatory and radical democracy.

¹⁰⁹ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 11.

when a party that doesn't exist politically identifies the wrong of its exclusion and declares its existence as an equal member of the community.¹¹⁰ Politics is thus distinct from philosophy; it is premised upon disagreement between parties, it occurs through and because of the "rationality of disagreement."

If politics is premised upon the equality of speaking beings, then most of what are commonly termed "political activities" must be conceptualized as something else. Rancière used the term "policing" to signify the institutional and organizational structures that we associate with everyday politics and government. For Rancière the policing practices are defined by the "organization of powers" and the "distribution of places and roles."¹¹¹ They are thus deeply unequal. Whereas policing concerns the distribution of bodies to their proper place, and is thus ongoing and hierarchical, politics occurs when a radical assertion of equality breaks through. Politics can occur only because of the "equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being" and happens when the poor, or those who have no part, assert in commonly understood language that they are equal speaking beings, and thus parties to a community of equals.¹¹² It is only through the equality of all humans as speaking creatures that assertions of politics can break through the ongoing domination that characterizes the unequal institutions of policing.

Another key theorist of radical-agonistic democracy is Iris Marion Young. Drawing upon both participatory democracy and Habermasian deliberative democracy, Young also raises concerns motivated by her engagement with feminist and post-

¹¹⁰ In a similar (though distinct) vein, Ernesto Laclau conceptualizes populist politics as something that emerges out of a chain of particular demands made upon authority figures (or institutions). See Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2007).

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 30.

structuralist theory. She is, then, a hybrid theorist, whose evolving work bridges the lines between these varied (but not necessarily mutually exclusive) democratic theories. Young suggests in her influential work *Justice and the Politics of Difference* that political theory should attend to oppression and domination, as central features of justice, in addition to the standard focus on distribution. Oppression can involve exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and/or violence. Justice, then, concerns more than the distribution of resources; it also involves the need to politically and economically empower the disenfranchised, primarily through further democratization of government and the division of labor.

As with many radical-agonistic democrats, Young locates much of democratic politics today in the insurgent political movements of the left, including the varied women's movements, ecological and environmental movements, LGBT movements, and the ongoing, if at times sputtering, anti-war movements. Similar to Rancière, Young argues that "insurgent movements can best create and nurture autonomous publics in the space of civil society. These movements repoliticize social life, treating many given and unquestioned institutions and practices as alterable, subject to choice. They generate discussions about how those institutions might be best organized and those practices best conducted."¹¹³ Young argues that public discussion need not be unitary, a precondition of public life she associates with Barber and Arendt, but should rather be open, inclusive, and heterogeneous.¹¹⁴ In terms of justice, this also entails the enactment of state policies

¹¹³ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 88.

¹¹⁴ I would argue that this is an unfair reading of Barber. In *Strong Democracy* Barber is keen to distinguish his strong democracy, which recognizes a heterogeneous public, from unitary democracy, which strives to eliminate difference as such. In a similar vein,

that specifically target, for elimination, ongoing inequalities among historically oppressed groups. The universalistic justice associated with Rawls must give way to a more particularistic justice, attentive to the actual manner in which social equality can best be produced through empowering everyone to participate and to realize their capacities. Young's project is permeated by many participatory democratic impulses, blurring the lines between the two bodies of theory that I have (for the moment) neatly separated. This blurring, and the positive resources available through such an act, will be explored more fully in the following chapters.

William Connolly's rich and diverse body of work must be included in any discussion of radical-agonistic democracy due to his extended engagement with agonism and pluralism in the democratic polity. At its most basic, Connolly's project, in particular over the past two decades, focuses on the need for democratic citizens to cultivate deep mutual, agonistic respect for difference, which he terms a "multidimensional thick pluralism." Connolly's agonism, similar though not reducible to Mouffe's, recognizes the ubiquity of faith in public and private life and thus the inherent contingency and (therefore) contestability of all perspectives. In a world of pluralism, no single perspective can persuade all rational citizens or prove its ultimate truth. The radical democrat, the atheist existentialist, and the conservative evangelical Christian all hold worldviews that are respectively built on various foundational values and gut intuitions about how the world works. Every perspective involves an element of faith.

The significance of this for Connolly is the need to cultivate a critical responsiveness to the views and needs of others, built around careful listening and

Barber emphasizes the plurality of the directly democratic Swiss society that he (not uncritically) celebrates in *The Death of Communal Liberty*.

generosity towards those seeking to gain recognition---one might say that he is reminding us of the need to listen to Rancière's dispossessed, the part of no part, when they do speak. It is important to remember as well that political dialogue is more complex and rich than a philosophy seminar, "for thinking and judgment are affected by inspiration, attraction, and example as well as by the logic of argument. Better, the former ingredients mix into the latter recipes."¹¹⁵ Radical-agonistic democracy, for Connolly, entails a deep pluralism constructed through respect for a world peopled with multiple minorities, an appreciation of uncertainty, and recognition of doubt and weakness in one's own worldview. This requires that "you admit that the philosophy you adopt...is profoundly and legitimately contestable to others...when you acknowledge that your philosophical stance is grounded in a complex mixture of contestable faith and porous argument you take a step toward affirmation of political pluralism," regardless of the particular politics and philosophy you embrace.¹¹⁶ While it is impossible to do justice to the work of someone like Connolly in such a short space, this briefly summarizes many of the ideas that have been central to his recent work and shows how they might offer a more nuanced engagement with argument, belief, and plurality than that of the overly rationalistic deliberative democrats.

One can see strong similarities between participatory and radical-agonistic theories of democracy, to the point where one could reasonably argue that radical-agonistic democracy is a more recent strain of participatory democratic theory---a strain

¹¹⁵ William Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 35.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 44. For further elaboration of these ideas, see William Connolly, *Identity/Difference; Why I am Not A Secularist; Neuropolitics; and Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*.

influenced by various strands of continental philosophy¹¹⁷ and the social and political context of the 80s, 90s, and today, including the end of the Cold War and the persistence of social movements around race and gender identity. Similar to participatory democracy, radical-agonistic democrats stress the exclusions characteristic of modern democracies while also engaging with the importance of moments of protest and disruption, recognizing how these moments are often the most meaningful sites of democratic citizen action today. In addition, radical-agonistic democrats are at great pains to contribute to the development of an agonistic ethos, one suited to a diverse, profoundly plural, and equally disenchanted universe that provides neither final answers nor sure foundations for moving forward. In this way radical-agonistic democrats have contributed to the development of democratic ideas that first blossomed with the New Left in the 1960s and continue to be of great relevance today.

There are some limits to this promise, however, and it is at the intersections of participatory and radical-agonistic democracy that this dissertation will make its contribution, fueled by the dialectical interplay between these two bodies of theory. Specifically, I will address two important criticisms of radical-agonistic democracy. First, I will argue that radical-agonistic democrats are not only under-attentive to the imperatives of institutionalization but at times actively hostile to it. Much of the time, this body of theory leans towards a characterization of government as something inherently (and forever) alien and oppressive, a bureaucracy to be fought, via moments of rupture in the streets, but never fundamentally altered. This is not to suggest that these

¹¹⁷ Althusser's French structuralist Marxism, post-structuralism, first and second generation Frankfurt School critical theory, and Derrida's literary deconstruction, to name a few.

theorists, who at times differ substantially from one another, fail to provide *any* resources for engaging with questions of institutional structure but that they tend to fetishize the moment of protest without attending to its impact. Consequently, political theorists are increasingly asking of radical democrats, what happens after the moment of rupture? Some important measure of politics happens in a far more mundane manner and surely this has to be part of the goal of those aspiring for a deeper form of democracy---not just challenging authority structures but democratizing them in a fundamental manner.¹¹⁸ In a related fashion, these theorists tend towards an over-celebration of difference, treating the appearance of difference *as such* as fundamentally good, without distinguishing between positive and negative forms of difference, a concern I will confront directly in chapter 5. The insights of radical-agonistic democracy permeate this work but I also will offer considerable criticism of certain key elements in this body of theory as part of my defense of a revitalized theory of participatory democracy.

Conclusion

What is the uptake from this brief survey of the many contested meanings of democracy? Is the Athenian model of direct, face-to-face democracy, in which the full body of citizens is sovereign, realizable in the 21st century? If not, what exactly stands in the way? This project is dedicated to the idea that a more participatory mode of democratic politics is not only realizable but strongly desirable in the world we inhabit. It is a primary task in the coming chapters to demonstrate that radical visions of

¹¹⁸ To reiterate, this is one of the essential points of participatory democracy in its classic texts. See Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*; and Barber, *Strong Democracy*. It is also the focus of chapter 3.

democracy, both participatory and agonistic, are not only capable of greater realization but are uniquely attuned to the social, economic, and, of course, political problems of the 21st century and thus uniquely effective, and normatively desirable, responses to these very problems. If Hegel and Marx were right that a dialectical tension between opposites can be the motor for a profoundly productive and energetic process of change, then this project will be similarly defined and driven by the productive tension that emerges when these two related bodies of theory, participatory and radical-agonistic democracy, are brought together for extended dialogue. It is their valuable differences and disagreements, not their many commonalities, which lie at the heart of this project. Their *conflicting* impulses and insights, motivated by a similar desire for greater democratic participation and economic equality, will allow us to better navigate the tensions of contemporary democracy, its promise and its failings, its preconditions and its products. By bringing together the most insightful proponents of a deeper democracy over the past half century and mining the messy conversation that ensues, we can get a better sense of where we are, where we want to go, and how to get there.

Chapter Three: Dead and Buried or Alive and Well? Examples of Participatory Democracy in the 21st Century

Is participatory democracy still relevant today? Are there robust examples of participatory democracy in the 21st Century? The ideal of a more direct, participatory, and face-to-face democracy that emerged out of the social movements and intellectual ferment of the 1960s and 1970s has in part given way to new theories of democracy (deliberative, agonistic, and republican, to name a few) that have come to dominate discussions in democratic theory. This chapter thus asks to what extent theories of participatory democracy remain relevant for the 21st century. Given the changes that have taken place in the past half-century with regards to corporate power, economic inequality, information technology, and globalization, it considers whether the participatory ideal is realizable today. Does it still have the power to motivate and mobilize both citizens and scholars?

To answer these questions I consider four distinct examples that illustrate the promise and problems associated with contemporary experiments in participatory self-government: participatory budgeting in Brazil, deliberative opinion polls, community policing in Chicago, and Occupy Wall Street. In this chapter I draw on the participatory ideal articulated by Pateman, Wolin, and Barber to illuminate these contemporary experiments in participatory democracy and argue for its continued relevance to democratic theory. I analyze these examples to see what they can teach political theorists, who have tended to neglect this topic in recent scholarship. I turn, in part, to a consideration of empirical research on participatory democracy to fill in the gap left by political theory over the past twenty years. This chapter thus serves as an act of reclamation and of reconceptualization, drawing our attention back to earlier

participatory theories of democracy and arguing for a reconceptualization of these theories in the light of current experiments, allowing for participatory democracy to be updated and revitalized as a normative theory for the 21st Century. I argue that the ideals of participatory democracy continue to resonate in the real world, inspiring social movements and institutional innovations, and second, that there are at least some successful instances being institutionally realized in the world today.

The chapter is structured around an examination of these four examples of participatory democracy. In the first section I outline the origins and ideals of participatory theories of democracy. In doing so I draw largely on the work of Pateman, Barber, and Wolin. As I will show, these thinkers offer distinct but overlapping visions of participatory democracy. Having explained the origins and basic features of participatory democracy, I will then consider its value in addressing the political problems of the 21st century. I conclude this section with a brief discussion of some of the theories that have supplanted participatory democracy in the past quarter century. The second section moves to a discussion of the most studied and celebrated contemporary example of participatory democracy, namely, municipal participatory budgeting, which originated in several cities in Brazil, most notably Porto Alegre, in the 1980s and 1990s. Using the Brazilian experience as a case study, I aim to derive important lessons about the prospects for participatory democracy today. The third section shifts our attention to a similar experiment, community policing in Chicago. Here too I shall explore what this experiment can teach us about participatory democracy in the present age. In the fourth section I turn to James Fishkin's experiments in deliberative opinion polls, arguing that they offer key lessons and valuable empirical evidence for proponents of participatory

democracy. In the fifth section I examine Occupy Wall Street, exploring the features of this short-lived social movement for insight into the experience of protest and the significance of political-economic inequality in the contemporary world.

Participatory Theories of Democracy

What exactly is participatory democracy? Moreover, why does it continue to resonate with citizens and, to a lesser extent, with scholars half a century after its emergence in the world of politics? What is its enduring appeal? In what ways might it offer more compelling answers to contemporary problems than competing theories of democracy? In this section I will attempt to answer these questions before turning to a consideration of four distinct (and ongoing) examples of participatory democracy.

The basic impulse behind participatory democracy is the idea that ordinary citizens should have the opportunity to participate directly in (at least some of) the key social, political, and economic institutions. This implies in turn that most of our major institutions, from the corporation and the university to city hall and state government, need to be structurally changed so that they allow for more direct and equal forms of democratic participation. The history of participatory democracy is of special interest in the sense that its origins are in a complementary exchange between the social movements of the 1960s and the intellectual currents of the academy, something not found in other theories of democracy. The term itself likely originated jointly out of the activism of Students for a Democratic Society (hereafter SDS), in which *The Port Huron Statement* of 1962 speaks of a “democracy of individual participation,” and in the teaching and scholarship of University of Michigan philosophy professor Arnold Kaufman, who began

to speak of a “participatory democracy” around the same time. Its lineage thus lies in a mixture of leftist social and political activism, concentrated among students, civil rights protesters, and anti-war activists, and sympathetic scholarship, largely among political theorists and philosophers. This section will thus focus on both popular documents and the political theories of Pateman, Barber, and, to a lesser extent, Wolin to ascertain what participatory democracy is and why it remains central to an understanding of politics today.

Participatory democracy did not erupt out of thin air. In addition to the crucial role played by the social movements of the 1950s and 1960s in forming and contextualizing the theory, it relied on earlier experiments as key sources of inspiration, including classical Athenian democracy, the New England town hall, the Soviets of the Russian Revolution, and the political thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In constructing a modern version of participatory democratic theory, Carole Pateman draws on a diverse range of figures, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to John Stuart Mill, to G.D.H. Cole.

In her 2011 Presidential Address to the American Political Science Association, Pateman explores the development of participatory democracy as it has evolved over the past few decades, considering several institutional examples of participatory government. Of particular importance is her suggestion that, while many new institutions claim to embody the principles of participatory democracy, only some of them actually come close to the participatory ideal as it was initially articulated by scholars and activists. Some of these institutional innovations in participatory governance include participatory budgeting (to be discussed below) and citizens’ juries. As Pateman notes, however, “most of the [recent] expansion of participation does not disturb existing institutions” and many

“examples called ‘participatory budgeting’ are merely consultative or provide information.” Thus, while “we are seeing an expansion of participation and an extension of citizenship” we are not yet witnessing “the beginnings of democratization and the creation of a participatory society.”¹¹⁹

This observation raises important questions: Are there any institutions that currently embody the participatory ideal articulated by Pateman? What are the proper standards for assessing whether current institutions embody the participatory ideal? According to Pateman, participatory institutions must possess the following features: “citizens have the right to public provision, the right to participate in decision-making about their collective life and to live within authority structures that make such participation possible.”¹²⁰ In other words, public institutions move us closer to participatory democracy when they are open, as a matter of right, to all citizens in the relevant neighborhood, town, municipality, etc., and when those citizens are institutionally empowered to participate in the formal decision-making process. Participatory budgeting in Brazil, particularly in some of the more successful cases, comes closest to capturing these ideals and thus merits extensive discussion below.

In the 1980s Benjamin Barber delivered a sophisticated defense of participatory democracy through an extended critique of liberalism and a spirited defense of a community-focused, locally based participatory politics.¹²¹ Inspired in part by the direct

¹¹⁹ Carole Pateman, “Participatory Democracy Revisited,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 1 (2012), pp. 14-15.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

¹²¹ There are some important differences in the visions of participatory democracy articulated by Pateman and Barber but for the purposes of this chapter I want to draw from each of their bodies of work without dwelling too much on the tensions and

democracy of Ancient Athens and the commune democracy of the Swiss canton, Barber characterizes his “strong” democracy as a “self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogenous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their civic attitudes and participatory institutions rather than their altruism or their good nature.”¹²² As Barber argues, democratic “politics is devoted to the legitimation of power and influence,” an accomplishment only possible when institutions of “power and influence” are organized along strongly democratic lines.¹²³ In this sense, Barber repurposes the fairly homogeneous Swiss democracy of Rousseau for the conditions of the 21st century.¹²⁴

These aspirations give some indication of what participation can do and why it is so valuable for democracy. Not only does direct citizen participation empower citizens with a sense of efficacy, but local democratic institutions also ideally have an educative effect, serving as “schools of democracy” and teaching citizens practices of effective participation. The best way to teach people how to become democratic citizens is to provide opportunities for them to participate in a more direct and meaningful manner. Pateman and Barber in particular are motivated by a strong concern for the kind of citizens the polity produces, via its institutional structures. For both of them participatory democracy is defended as a solution to this problem. If one is worried that citizens are uneducated or undemocratic, there is a compelling way to address this concern:

dissimilarities. Even today they remain, in many ways, committed to the same participatory ideal(s) that have animated their work from the start.

¹²² Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*, p. 117.

¹²³ Benjamin Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, p. 107.

¹²⁴ As Barber notes, two major problems that a strong vision of democracy must confront are the problem of scale and the relation between democracy and capitalism, capitalism here referring to both neoliberal efforts at privatization of the public sphere and growing material inequality.

democratize the authority structures. By democratizing authority structures one also democratizes the citizens who participate in those authority structures. These measures also have the potential not only to produce more democratic citizens but also more democratic legitimacy for ailing political and economic institutions.

Alongside the focus on the relation between structural change and the individual is a stress on the communal aspect of more direct and participatory forms of democracy. Barber casts participatory democracy as a form of common action in the face of uncertainty, in which talk and participation together build a sense of citizenship and in turn generate a public-oriented “We” type of thinking. Participatory democracy, by creating commonality and (perhaps) revitalizing a local sense of community, offers an answer to the atomizing influence of neoliberalism. “To participate [democratically] *is* to create a community that governs itself...Indeed, from the perspective of strong democracy, *participation* and *community* are aspects of one single mode of social being: citizenship.”¹²⁵ Thus for Barber participatory democracy is in part defined precisely through the creation of community; to be a citizen in a participatory democracy is to be a participant in, and a member of, a community. As Barber remarks, democratic “citizens are neighbors bound together neither by blood nor by contract but by their common concerns and common participation in the search for common solutions to common conflicts.”¹²⁶ Other political theorists, such as Sheldon Wolin, have also articulated a distinctive vision of participatory democracy, appealing to the value of a slow, deliberate, local, and egalitarian form of democratic politics, defined by a concern with acting in common.

¹²⁵ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, p. 135.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

While democratic theory in the 1960s and 1970s was increasingly defined by debates between the advocates of minimalist, elitist theories of democracy, on the one hand, and more participatory theories of democracy, on the other hand, the debate largely lost momentum by the mid-1980s as a new wave of democratic theories emerged. The energy and ideals of participatory democracy were largely splintered and channeled into a number of new theories, in particular deliberative and agonistic theories of democracy. Deliberative democracy has drawn on the participatory dream of a face-to-face, deliberative polity, while abandoning the more radical hopes that characterized early participatory democracy. In contrast, agonistic theories of democracy have channeled the participatory impulse to locate democracy in those moments of protest and rupture, when democracy is in the streets, as the old saying goes. Participatory democracy is now often seen, at best, as a decent enough impulse but no longer the proper subject of theorizing.¹²⁷ In this chapter I argue that the growing indifference to participatory theories of democracy impoverishes democratic theory in particular and political theory as a whole. The remainder of the chapter thus focuses on four distinct, contemporary examples of participatory democracy, demonstrating that the ideals of participatory democracy still resonate in the popular imagination among activists, reformers, policy advocates, and politicians. Two examples in particular exemplify the aspiration that the citizen be given the opportunity to “share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction

¹²⁷ Some democratic theorists have engaged with these new trends while retaining many of the earlier participatory ideals. For instance, Iris Marion Young self-consciously draws on the complementary languages of participatory, deliberative, and agonistic democracy in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Similarly, Sheldon Wolin retains his concern for participatory democracy while exploring more radical-agonistic ideas in work such as *The Presence of the Past* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) and “Fugitive Democracy”.

of his life”—municipal participatory budgeting, a major institutional innovation for democratic decision-making, and Occupy Wall Street, the most prominent social movement on the left to challenge the quality and character of American democracy by holding it to the standards of a more participatory democracy.¹²⁸

Participatory Budgeting in Brazil

Experiments in participatory budgeting at the municipal level constitute the premier site of participatory democracy today.¹²⁹ The most famous and successful case of municipal participatory budgeting, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, has now been institutionalized and operative for over two decades and has enjoyed world-renown since the 1990s as a major policy success. Participatory budgeting has expanded rapidly over the past twenty years, blossoming in many cities across Brazil, Latin America, and now around the world. While there are many possible cases to refer to, this chapter will focus on empirical research in Latin America, particularly the continued success of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre and a number of other Brazilian cities.¹³⁰ As participatory budgeting (hereafter referred to as PB) has become an institutionalized method of decision-making and resource distribution it has spurred a considerable amount of research by social scientists interested in its successes and failures, thus allowing

¹²⁸ Quote from Tom Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005), p. 53.

¹²⁹ Carole Pateman and Benjamin Barber have both identified it as the key institutional embodiment of participatory democracy to emerge over the past two decades.

¹³⁰ More than 250 cities in Brazil have implemented PB since 1990, providing a comparatively lengthy time frame that provides more valuable empirical evidence than that offered by more recent projects.

interested observers to gain some appreciation for the factors that may contribute to these successes and failures.

Participatory budgeting appeared in the 1980s in response to social movements in Brazil that had emerged during the twenty or so years of military dictatorship and was first instituted by the Worker's Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores or PT) in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1988-1989. While it has come to enjoy a certain "good governance" legitimacy, PB was initially conceived as a radical democratic project advanced by the Brazilian left in the wake of military rule. Some of the reasons for the adoption of PB by the Worker's Party included the desire for greater transparency, government accountability, and the creation of institutions that would be resistant to corruption and clientelism. The original intent, according to Brian Wampler, was "the expansion of rights, authority, and democratic practices to ordinary citizens."¹³¹ PB is best described as a "new institutional format in which participatory decision-making processes are grafted onto existing representative democratic institutions," thus modifying the existing representative democracy in potentially radical ways without entirely replacing its key structures.¹³²

One of the most encouraging features of PB in Porto Alegre, Brazil¹³³ is that a majority of participants are low income while approximately half of all participants are women. Participants also tend to be active in other civil society organizations. Thus, PB, like Chicago Community Policing, New England town hall meetings, and other forms of

¹³¹ Brian Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability*. College Station, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007, p. 1.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹³³ A feature largely replicated with Chicago Community Policing.

direct democracy, diverges from the familiar pattern in which higher rates of participation correlate strongly with higher socioeconomic status (SES).¹³⁴ Some of the factors that increase the likelihood that PB will be adopted (and if adopted, successful) in a Brazilian city include a higher standard of living, a substantial number of civil society groups, and a supportive, leftist mayor.¹³⁵ In the most successful case of PB, Porto Alegre, the PB process controls 100% of new capital investment, while in another relative success, the city of Ipatinga, the PB process accounts for 50% of new capital investment.¹³⁶ As of 2004, PB councils in Brazil had allocated more than \$400 million in US dollars to new capital investments.¹³⁷

PB has become a trend among policy analysts and social scientists but how does it stack up to the ideal of participatory democracy articulated in the 1960s and 1970s? As Pateman has recently argued, PB in Porto Alegre is a strong case of participatory democracy because it is open to all city residents as a matter of right and each resident possesses real decision-making power. As she notes, participatory democratic theory is committed to a view of citizenship in which citizens have “the right to participate in decision-making about their collective life and to live within authority structures that make such participation possible.” This demanding standard is met in large part in the

¹³⁴ See Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) for a detailed empirical examination of who participates in American politics and the factors that influence this participation.

¹³⁵ Brian Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability*.

¹³⁶ In some of the less successful cases of PB, the participatory process only accounts for between 1% and 10% of new capital investment, usually due to, among other factors, a mayor and city government unwilling to shift much of its budgeting authority to the participatory budgeting councils.

¹³⁷ Brian Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability*, p. 6.

successful model of PB found in Porto Alegre. However, in many cities in Brazil and elsewhere, practices of participatory budgeting fall far short of it.¹³⁸

What about concerns articulated by radical-agonistic democratic theorists, like Jacques Rancière, who stress the democratic power of moments of rupture and tend to be skeptical of attempts at institutionalization?¹³⁹ As Wampler notes, conceptions of PB have evolved as “it began to be considered a good government program as opposed to an experiment in radical democracy that would reorder the Brazilian state and society.”¹⁴⁰ If PB is now championed by institutions like the World Bank as a ‘good governance’ measure does this mean it has failed to live up to its radical democratic potential? While it would be unwise to venture too strong an answer here, a cautious “no” is the most appropriate response. PB, championed and institutionalized by the leftist Worker’s Party, grew in both the number of participants and the amount of money allocated during the Worker’s Party’s many years of rule.

Perhaps the most notable achievement of PB, particularly in Porto Alegre but also elsewhere, is its success not only in resisting neoliberal governance but also in achieving its original radical democratic goals, i.e. instituting a form of direct and participatory democracy whereby ordinary (especially low income) citizens decide for themselves how to allocate municipal capital investments. In doing so it has also helped to redirect city expenditures to badly needed public works projects in the underserved areas of the city. In addition to its redistributive impact PB has also been a critical locus of participatory

¹³⁸ Carole Pateman, “Participatory Democracy Revisited,” pp.14-15.

¹³⁹ Similar concerns are expressed, in various ways, by Sheldon Wolin, Hannah Arendt, and Bonnie Honig, among others.

¹⁴⁰ Brian Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability* p. 29.

democratic citizenship for the poor and less educated, who participate in PB in higher numbers than might be expected. It thus has the potential to serve as a “citizenship school” for the traditionally disempowered.¹⁴¹ The substantial successes of Porto Alegre and Ipatinga (according to Wampler), and the relative successes of Belo Horizonte and Sao Paulo (according to Avritzer) include increased accountability, mobilization of low-income citizens, and a demonstration of the feasibility of participatory democracy in the 21st century city.¹⁴² Survey evidence also indicates that participants feel empowered by the experience and consequently, when citizen participation is combined with positive tangible outcomes, the result is a virtuous circle of participatory democracy.¹⁴³

What, then, are some of the limitations of PB? In what ways does it fall short of the participatory ideal as articulated by participatory democratic theorists? What can we learn from it? Broadly speaking, PB might be negatively characterized as an extreme version of the slogan “think globally, act locally” in which democratic energies are channeled into micro projects such as improving a park or paving a road and thus diverted from large-scale democratic concerns such as the enhancement of public education, the reduction of economic and social inequality, or the strengthening of the welfare state. Certain problems, particularly those related to economic inequality and

¹⁴¹ See Wampler, pp. 69-73.

¹⁴² See also Jenny Pearce, ed. *Participation and Democracy in the 21st Century City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) for a collection of essays on other recent participatory experiments in Latin American and British cities. Chapter 5 lends some insight into the strengths and weaknesses of President Chavez’s efforts to implement participatory reforms at the national level in Venezuela. For further analysis, see David Smilde and Daniel Hellinger, ed. *Venezuela’s Bolivarian Democracy: Participation, Politics, and Culture under Chavez* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), especially chapter 2.

¹⁴³ Brian Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability*, Ch. 8.

transnational corporate power, are inherently national and even global in scope, and therefore cannot be adequately addressed through small-scale, neighborhood-by-neighborhood actions. The PB process, which involves a substantial element of local, direct involvement might not be easily scaled up to the national or global level with regard to questions of economic democracy, a question I will address in more detail in a following chapter.

What of the PB experience itself? Taken on its own terms, what are some of its limitations? First, as Wampler observes, successful cases of PB in Brazil required, among other things, a supportive city government and mayor that were genuinely willing to cede a substantial amount of budget-making authority to PB. When cities failed to do this, as in Rio Claro, the PB experiment suffered. Even successes like Porto Alegre have seen the PB process suffer when the party most supportive of it, the PT, has been out of power since 2004.¹⁴⁴ In a similar vein, Avritzer considers the role of civil society mobilization, arguing that perfecting the design of the PB institutions was less essential than an active and engaged civil society mobilizing in favor of (and thus contributing to the success of) the process. In cities where civil society actors were relatively weak and the ruling political coalition was divided or unsupportive, as in Salvador, a variety of participatory experiments struggled.¹⁴⁵ National factors were also relevant. As Benjamin Goldfrank argues, more decentralized polities like Brazil and Uruguay were more receptive to local experimentation in (and ultimately greater success with) various participatory reforms

¹⁴⁴ See Sergio Gregorio Baierle, “Porto Alegre: Popular Sovereignty or Dependent Citizens?” in Jenny Pearce, ed. *Participation and Democracy in the 21st Century City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹⁴⁵ Avritzer also considers participatory health councils and city master plans, experiments that are distinct from but also attempt to realize some of the same ideals as PB.

while more centralized systems, like Venezuela in the 1980s and 1990s, struggled to provide opportunities for locales to successfully experiment with forms of participatory democracy.¹⁴⁶

It is also important to mention, if in passing, PB's relation to deliberative democracy. Although the two forms of democracy are not antithetical, and PB may be most effective when it meets some of the criteria articulated by deliberative theorists, it is best characterized as an example of participatory democracy. PB is not primarily about providing a deliberative forum; rather, it is concerned with empowering citizens to directly make budgetary decisions, a form of direct and democratic authority that attempts to satisfy Pateman's definition of full participation: "a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions."¹⁴⁷ The kind of consultative citizen bodies often contemplated by proponents of deliberative democracy do not possess the decision-making authority demanded of Pateman's participatory democracy. By contrast, PB does make a good-faith effort to do so.

Participatory budgeting in Brazil offers powerful evidence that more direct and participatory forms of democracy create a measure of political equality even in the face of persistent material inequality. This has theoretical support in the claims of proponents

¹⁴⁶ See Benjamin Goldfrank, *Deepening Local Democracy in Latin America* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Penn State University Press, 2011). Josh Lerner's new book, *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014), explores how municipal participatory budgeting can be enhanced by using insights from game design theory, so that the participatory process is more enticing for citizens. When done well, as in Toronto, Canada and Rosario, Argentina, participants found the outcomes fair and the process itself to be fun.

¹⁴⁷ Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, p. 71.

of participatory democracy but also growing empirical evidence.¹⁴⁸ Thus, whereas electoral and other forms of participation are highly correlated with SES, this is less so with more participatory forms of governance, an encouraging piece of evidence for the argument in favor of participatory democracy. This also suggests that some of the radical democratic concerns regarding the dangers of institutionalization are misplaced. Yes, the process can be coopted or inadequately institutionalized (as Wampler and Goldfrank discuss), but successfully implemented, participatory budgeting has been a very effective mechanism for empowering ordinary people, building community, and developing a more educated and active citizenry.

Community Policing in Chicago

Another innovative reform in participatory government, the Chicago Community Policing system, has occurred closer to home, and thanks to the research of Archon Fung, we have learned much about it. Beginning in 1992-94, the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), frequently referred to as community policing, has provided a neighborhood-by-neighborhood venue for Chicago residents to meet with local police officers and to discuss and coordinate solutions to crime. Although not empowered to allocate resources, Chicago residents are nonetheless able to influence the formulation and implementation of city policing priorities, thus meeting, at least partly, the participatory ideal that citizens should have “substantial and equal” opportunities to

¹⁴⁸ See also Frank Bryan, *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How It Works* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004) for evidence on who participates in the direct democracy of the New England town hall.

participate in decisions affecting them.¹⁴⁹ In addition to providing opportunities for more direct and meaningful participation, participatory reforms such as community policing are designed to make government agencies more responsive and, in the long term, effective in executing their tasks. The goal of such reforms is to increase both democracy and government efficacy.

Chicago community policing did not emerge overnight. Progressive city reforms earlier in the 20th century had built up a centralized and heavily coordinated city government in the realm of both education and policing. Dissatisfaction with the performance and inaccessibility of such centralized institutions led to a decentralization backlash in the 1980s and 1990s. Rather than turn to further marketization and privatization, however, Chicago instituted a series of participatory reforms designed to increase citizen involvement and collaboration in addressing everyday issues such as education reform and neighborhood crime. Fung thus characterizes these reforms as an innovative alternative to the previous options of centralized (and bureaucratic) public management or its equally troublesome opposite, neoliberal privatization. Such participatory reforms constitute at their best a new and powerful alternative to the tired old solutions that have frequently been offered in public debate and policy discussions. Perhaps best characterized as a series of radical reforms, institutional efforts to develop greater participatory democracy at the local (usually municipal) level empower citizens and change the way decisions are made without tearing down the institutions of the state.

Chicago community policing involved two institutional reforms. First, police officers “were assigned to particular beats for sustained periods so [they] could

¹⁴⁹ Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 4.

familiarize themselves with the problems and residents of their beats and residents could get to know them.”¹⁵⁰ Second, monthly meetings were established at the beat level so that police and residents could “jointly identify, strategize, and eventually solve the most urgent problems of crime and disorder in their neighborhoods.” Not only was monthly attendance higher in high crime areas (suggesting that those most affected by criminal activity were the most involved) but meeting attendance was also noticeable for having high rates of poor and minority participation. As with participatory budgeting and New England town hall democracy, direct participation in community policing appears to reverse the trend toward lower levels of participation as one moves down the SES ladder. Chicago community policing provides tangible evidence that direct forms of democracy are both achievable in the 21st century and provide a better setting for the enactment of political equality among citizens.

Community policing, while not perfect, has largely been a successful enterprise. Deliberation in monthly meetings focused mostly on local, concrete, solvable problems and attending to these “urgent and eminently tangible questions set distinctive dynamics in motion...ordinary participation biases were reversed---there were more women than men, and more poor people than wealthy ones.”¹⁵¹ “The subject of deliberation,” Fung concludes, “importantly affects the normative character of its processes and thus its eventual outcomes.”¹⁵² Because community policing deals with the everyday concerns of crime, particularly theft, gang activity, break-ins, and violence, it tends to draw participation from the lower-income residents who are most impacted by these issues.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 232.

Nor should these meetings be judged in a vacuum; they have generally been more open, fair, and participatory than the older patronage-based ways of influencing the police.

Community policing efforts have nevertheless run into some troubles. Most notably, material conditions do matter. As a result, wealthier beats often had more productive meetings and citizen-police collaboration than poorer areas. In addition, wealthy and white residents were often the most articulate and therefore frequently dominated discussions while poor and minority participants sometimes struggled to participate effectively. In spite of these reservations, it is important to note that community policing (as well as related educational reforms) offered the most institutional improvement to the least privileged because participatory reforms “created new opportunities for voice and popular engagement” that far exceeded those available under the old bureaucratic model. Thus, although wealthy neighborhoods continued to outperform poor ones under the new model, community policing improved citizen participation and efficacy relative to the previous system for most neighborhoods, especially the least-advantaged. Somewhere between five and six thousand residents attended community policing meetings each month and about 14% of Chicago residents report that they have attended one beat meeting.¹⁵³

If these numbers seem small, one must remember to compare them to the previous arrangements that they have replaced. On Fung’s analysis, “while these numbers comprise only a modest fraction of the total number of the city’s residents, many more Chicagoans participate in public-governance decisions as a result of these reforms.” Judged by this standard, the community policing reforms must be considered at least a

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 225 for quote and figures.

partial success, if not a resounding one. It is also helpful to note that when full “accountable autonomy” was implemented, which consisted of citizen participation, pragmatic deliberation on concrete issues, and a measure of centralized coordination and accountability, most neighborhoods experienced considerable success, even when operating with limited resources and social capital. Community policing stands as a lesser sibling to participatory budgeting, offering ordinary citizens access not to the sovereign process of legislative decision-making but direct, collaborative input into the execution of city policy (in this case, policing) at a neighborhood-by-neighborhood level. It thus provides another model of how direct democracy can be implemented with limited cost and considerable effect even in cities with millions of residents. Community policing is notable for offering citizens an avenue for participating directly on issues that matter most to them and providing a certain measure of political equality that representative democracy does not seem capable of offering. Community policing plausibly qualifies as an institution of participatory democracy in Pateman’s typology because with it “all citizens have the opportunity *and the right* to participate each year in a major part of city government” and doing so “democratizes the structure of one part of those institutions.”¹⁵⁴ Democratic theorists in America thus drifted away from participatory democracy just as one of the major American cities was beginning an experiment in greater participatory government.

¹⁵⁴ Carole Pateman, “Participatory Democracy Revisited,” p. 11, my italics. See also Archon Fung, “Minipublics: Deliberative Designs and Their Consequences,” in Shawn Rosenberg, *Deliberation, Participation, and Democracy: Can the People Govern?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) for a typology of different forms of citizen participation and deliberation.

Deliberative Opinion Polls

One of the more interesting ideas in the expansive (and still growing) deliberative democracy literature is the deliberative opinion poll, developed by James Fishkin over the past two decades.¹⁵⁵ At its most basic, “a deliberative opinion poll models what a public *would* think, if it had a more adequate chance to think about the questions at issue.”¹⁵⁶ The ideal is to measure not the unreflective preferences of the electorate-at-large but the thoughtful preferences of a small, representative group of citizens before and after they have deliberated on a given issue. This group, if sufficiently representative, would then offer us a glimpse of what the broader public might think after having thoroughly deliberated. Part of the goal here is to bring a measure of face-to-face discussion to modern large-scale democracy while respecting political equality and democratic deliberation. Deliberative polls “embody political equality because everyone has an equal chance of being represented in the national sample of participants” while also ensuring “deliberation because they immerse a selected group of citizens in intensive, face-to-face debate.”¹⁵⁷

Unlike much of the deliberative democracy literature, Fishkin’s focus is less on the necessary features of public deliberation and more on the manner in which such deliberation might be politically implemented. The deliberative opinion poll, were it to be institutionalized in some manner, would reflect the same values embodied in the jury

¹⁵⁵ The deliberative opinion poll is perhaps best seen not as an example of participatory democracy *per se* but rather as an experiment that provides valuable empirical information for proponents of participatory democracy. In this sense it is distinct from the other examples.

¹⁵⁶ James Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

system, where citizens are selected by lot to participate in a form of face-to-face, direct democracy that operates within our broader representative system. Presumably deliberative polls would draw on the same institutional legitimacy that sustains the jury system.

Fishkin, in particular, wants to focus on the Athenian jury system and its similarity to the deliberative poll. These juries were not simply courts in the modern manner of speaking--“they were miniature, statistically representative versions of the entire citizenry who were given wide discretion in making political judgments for the polity.”¹⁵⁸ They were not just a crucial feature of Athenian democracy but, on Fishkin’s reading, an important, deliberative body that reflected on, adjusted, and corrected the decisions of the Athenian assembly. As critics are quick to note, however, such an institution relied for its success on the face-to-face intimacy of the Athenian Assembly and jury system.¹⁵⁹ The challenge, for Fishkin, is to devise a deliberative institution that retains some of these features in the context of the nation-state. The solution is simple enough: participants in deliberative opinion polls are selected at random (by lot) and deliberate in person over a period of several days, thus recreating the face-to-face element correctly deemed necessary for a more direct and participatory democracy. “For while the society served may be large, the face-to-face society in a deliberative opinion poll is itself small.” To quote Fishkin more fully,

The basic point is that deliberative opinion polls offer direct democracy among a group of politically equal participants who, as a statistical microcosm of the society, represent or stand for the deliberations of the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

¹⁵⁹ As for whether Ancient Athens is best regarded as a “face-to-face” society, Josiah Ober helpfully reminds us that it was a city of roughly a quarter million residents of whom between 30,000 and 50,000 were citizens. It was, for its time, a large, wealthy, complex city. Not exactly the material for a little Vermont town meeting.

whole. The institution is, in that sense, a direct face-to-face society for its participants and a representative institution for the nation-state.¹⁶⁰

The deliberative opinion poll has a strong resonance with the slow, democratic localism that characterizes participatory democracy. As Wolin argues, the task of the democratic citizen is to “reclaim public space as a space for deliberation, criticism, and alternatives”¹⁶¹ while Barber notes that in strong forms of democracy “the individual members are transformed, through their participation in common seeing and common work, into citizens.”¹⁶² While not reducible to one another, it is clear that Fishkin’s deliberative polls share the same ideal that motivates proponents of participatory democracy like Wolin and Barber: the ideal of an active, reflective, and engaged citizenry. His findings are thus of particular interest to participatory democratic theorists hoping to bring their theory into the 21st century. In addition, Fishkin’s well-documented and extensive studies offer one of the few attempts by a democratic theorist to test the plausibility of these ideas in an experimental setting. For democratic theorists who are not engaged in hypothesis testing but are instead trying to refine normative theory, Fishkin’s polls provide valuable empirical evidence. Deliberative opinion polls are thus particularly relevant as a social scientific attempt to identify some of the effects of face-to-face discussion of political issues among ordinary citizens.

The careful experiments in deliberative polling conducted by Fishkin over the past two decades offer some heartening evidence for strong democrats of all stripes. To begin with, Fishkin found, first, that citizens are in fact competent at deliberating on complex policy issues when placed in a supportive deliberative environment and, second,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁶¹ Sheldon S. Wolin, *The Presence of the Past*, p. 191.

¹⁶² Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*, p. 232.

that their opinions often change as they become more informed. As Fishkin notes, “the first indicator that something is happening is that opinions change. More than two-thirds of all the attitude items in Deliberative Polls result in statistically significant net change.” The second point to note is that “participants always become significantly more informed.”¹⁶³ Deliberative polling also increases single-peakedness, so that participants have a more consistent understanding of issues thus reducing the chances of what rationalists would term “collectively irrational” outcomes.¹⁶⁴ Not only are participants learning from the experience of face-to-face deliberation but they also take their experience with them. Deliberative polling increases the participant’s sense of internal and external efficacy such that “participants become more confident that they can have an effect and increase their sense that government will be responsive.”¹⁶⁵ In addition, participants tend to have higher “public-spiritedness” and higher rates of participation later, suggesting that institutionalizing greater face-to-face participation in government would have a series of positive effects.

While I have drawn on deliberative opinion polls as a contemporary example with participatory democratic resonances, it is important to bear in mind that deliberative democracy and participatory democracy are not the same. In Fishkin’s typology, elaborated in *When the People Speak*, deliberative democracy emphasizes political equality and deliberation while participatory democracy maximizes political equality and

¹⁶³ James Fishkin, *When the People Speak* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 121.

¹⁶⁴ I do not endorse the rational-irrational terminology employed by rational choice scholars. For some interesting comments on the limits of rational choice approaches, see Ian Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), Ch. 1.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

mass participation. Though they overlap, their concerns split with participatory democrats more concerned with mass, hands-on involvement and deliberative democrats more concerned with reflective deliberation. These are not, however, necessarily antagonistic values. The ideal of people making decisions directly, in a face-to-face and deliberate manner, animates the participatory vision articulated by Pateman, Barber, and Wolin. Similarly, the optimistic belief held by student and other activists in the 1960s and 1970s that ordinary people are competent participants and deliberators is vindicated in Fishkin's deliberative polling research. He provides compelling evidence that ordinary citizens, when provided with more information and a venue for direct discussion and participation (here defined loosely as involvement), will become more informed, often change their opinions, and both enjoy and be empowered by such activity.

Deliberative opinion polls thus provide social scientific evidence that key postulates of participatory democratic theory, namely that citizens enjoy, learn from, and are empowered by face-to-face political deliberation/participation, are not only plausible but largely accurate. Citizens learn, opinions evolve, they participate well (and usually sincerely, though it is arguable that this could change as the stakes are raised), and they enjoy it.¹⁶⁶ They also have a greater sense of efficacy and participate more in the future. The only limitations to expanding such face-to-face involvement so that it achieves the goal of mass participation desired by participatory democrats are practical concerns regarding the large-scale implementation of such proposals. This is where the growing experiments in municipal participatory budgeting and community policing are relevant.

¹⁶⁶ One possible objection to the generalizability of Fishkin's results concerns what would happen if citizens were not just deliberating but making decisions on key policy issues. It is possible, though not necessary, that this would activate conflicting interests in a manner that would undermine sincere deliberation.

These experiments demonstrate how face-to-face deliberation can be institutionalized at the neighborhood and city level.

Occupy Wall Street

The Occupy Wall Street protests that emerged in New York City and spread across the United States over the period of several months in the Fall of 2011 were one of the most fascinating political events in recent memory for anyone interested in or committed to democratic activism. Occupy Wall Street (hereafter OWS) is the only example of, or experiment in, participatory democracy that I consider that is first and foremost a social movement. While participatory budgeting and community policing may have been influenced and even spurred into being by social movements and community activism, OWS itself was a radical social movement that was at its peak for no more than two to three months and has limped along in a more sporadic and dispersed form since then. It is thus somewhat different than the previous examples I have considered but no less crucial for democratic theorists, particularly those with radical and participatory inclinations.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ In a recent retrospective on the 50th anniversary of the Port-Huron statement many of the original participants in the early days of Students for a Democratic Society cited Occupy Wall Street as an encouraging recent manifestation of the ideals of participatory democracy. See Tom Hayden, ed. *Inspiring Participatory Democracy: Student Movements from Port Huron to Today* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2013). Benjamin Barber has also celebrated Occupy Wall Street in recent work. See *If Mayors Ruled the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

To begin with, OWS appealed quite self-consciously to the language of participatory and direct democracy,¹⁶⁸ alluding in many ways to the social movements of the 1960s that inspired the original participatory ideal. The general ideal that animated the organizational structure of OWS was a vision of a democracy as direct, participatory, face-to-face, and deeply consensual. This vision of democratic citizenship entails a willingness to expend considerable time in meetings to address the central disagreements and concerns of participants. This was embodied in the OWS General Assembly, which met for (up to) several hours every evening to discuss issues, debate possible actions, and make key decisions concerning the direction of the movement. Decisions were generally made on the basis of consensus and individual participants were empowered with a full veto if they strongly objected to particular decisions. As one participant insisted, OWS was an attempt to create a space for “democracy—real, direct, and participatory democracy... We all strive to embody the alternative we wish to see in our day-to-day relationships.”¹⁶⁹ With its insistence on an almost Rousseauian model of collective, direct democracy, OWS, particularly its sovereign General Assembly, was “absolutely brilliant, a vivid reminder of a kind of democratic ideal our society seems to have totally abandoned,”¹⁷⁰ but which is not without resonance in the era of minimalist, representative democracy.

¹⁶⁸ A feature that is well documented in written sources on OWS and confirmed by my own (limited) participation in the Southern California incarnation of the Occupy movement.

¹⁶⁹ Taylor, Astra, Gesse, Keith, and editors from n+1, Dissent, Triple Canopy, and The New Inquiry, ed, *Occupy! Scenes from Occupied America* (New York: Verso, 2011), pp. 8-9.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

OWS may stand as a contemporary if short-lived attempt to instantiate the ideal of “pure” or direct democracy. Did it, however, achieve any lasting impact on American politics? What were its goals? Did it achieve, partly or fully, its self-defined goals? Or are these the wrong questions to ask? Are such questions unfair? Do they somehow miss the point of the movement? First, there was the sense of power and joy expressed by many participants. Participating in OWS “is one hell of a great way to stand up. It works. And it brings great joy and a sense of power to those who do it. It’s how the world gets changed these days,” testified an Occupy Oakland activist.¹⁷¹ Such sentiment, if widespread, would be indicative of the ability of movements like OWS to increase the political efficacy and sense of empowerment among ordinary citizens in an age of apathy, disempowerment, and cynicism. Furthermore, a number of Occupy participants testified to the development of community as one of the most positive features of OWS, a community that may be lacking in our ordinary relations in neoliberal capitalism and representative government. Thus could one Occupier explain that a democratic social movement “is about how one changes in the process of participation. People spoke of how this new relationship with their communities changed them, that the idea of “I” changed as it related to “we,” and this “we” changed again in relation to the “I.”¹⁷² Comments like this, and similar findings among participants in participatory budgeting and deliberative polling, testify that the ideal of a community-building strong democracy, articulated by Benjamin Barber (among others), is not only possible but is in fact (at least partially) realizable in 21st century politics. As Barber argues, it is as a democratic “citizen that the individual confronts the Other and adjusts his own life plans to the

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 153.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 10.

dictates of the shared world. *I* am a creature of need and want; *we* are a moral body whose existence depends on the common ordering of individual needs and wants into a single vision of the future in which all can share.”¹⁷³ OWS, for many participants, appeared to offer just such a citizenship.

As for the commonly heard criticism of OWS as an amorphous movement without any concrete demands, we should recognize that this charge is unpersuasive on several counts. The OWS Principles of Solidarity was an early document which detailed some of the commitments and goals of the movement, which included “engaging in direct and transparent participatory democracy,” “empowering one another against all forms of oppression,” and “redefining how labor is valued.”¹⁷⁴ In addition, frequently heard goals included “economic justice” and “direct democracy” not just as features internal to the community of Occupy participants but as radical demands on the broader polity.¹⁷⁵ Demands commonly made by those involved in OWS included reinstatement of Glass-Steagall, more rigorous forms of financial regulation, and greater democratization of the polity. Such goals were demanding, perhaps vague, but hardly non-existent. As defenders of OWS often argued, the movement also helped to set the terms of public debate, shifting the conversation from debt reduction to social justice and redressing economic inequality.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*, pp. 224.

¹⁷⁴ Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street: The Inside Story of an Action that Changed America* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), p. 22.

¹⁷⁵ For more on this, see *Occupy! Scenes from Occupied America*.

¹⁷⁶ Further empirical research remains to be done on this point, though I am skeptical that such zeitgeist moments are easily captured by empirical research, at least of the kind that we are currently capable of producing.

OWS also raises a series of more difficult questions that extend beyond assessments of its successes and failures. What does it mean in the 21st century to adhere to the “principles of direct democracy, consensus-based decision making, inclusiveness, and transparency?”¹⁷⁷ Part of the reluctance of OWS to coalesce around concrete policy demands concerns its nature as a peculiar social movement—unlike the anti-Iraq War protest movement, OWS was not spurred by one particular grievance or disastrous policy but a cumulative series of decisions, events, and economic developments, many not traceable to particular individuals in power. It represented a broader dissatisfaction with the state of democracy and capitalism in the USA today and this is the source of its promise. If our goal is a more direct and participatory democracy, what policies do we demand, as citizens or theorists? As Todd Gitlin asks provocatively in his thoughtful work on OWS, to whom do you speak if you want direct democracy? This in turn raises the broader question of how those on the left who champion a more egalitarian and democratic polity can best pursue this goal.

On Gitlin’s account, OWS (and other movements like it) succeeds through its ability to change popular understandings of what is possible and thereby transform the popular imagination in enduring ways. Thus, the shift in media debate from debt to jobs and inequality may have reflected a broader shift in the public imagination, even as the Occupy encampments were shut down and media coverage declined.¹⁷⁸ This element of

¹⁷⁷ Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ It is perhaps worth noting that as a teaching assistant to an introductory political science course in early 2013, approximately a year after the Occupy movement came to an end, my students regularly translated Marx’s and other author’s concerns with poverty and inequality into the OWS language of the 99% and the 1% without any prompting on the part of the Professor or the teaching assistants. This is just an anecdotal case of what

vision and imagination serves a crucial role as a source of inspiration for future activism and the possibility of more institutionalized success. Occupy encampments “became both communities of self-government and incubators of identity,” “prefiguring the kind of society they want to live in.”¹⁷⁹ This face-to-face community-building, even if it only lasted a few months, offered participants and spectators alike a vision of a more democratic society and the ideals animating it. In this sense it may function like the Paris Commune of 1871 or the Soviets in the early stages of the Russian Revolution, a revolutionary beacon call to those on the democratic left of the polity they are striving for and a testament to its continued resonance in the 21st century.

In many ways, then, OWS harkens back to and even instantiates the 1960s dream of a “democracy of individual participation,”¹⁸⁰ where mobilized citizens in the streets both embody and call for greater direct democracy. It is worth noting as well that OWS participants, while emphasizing deliberation, largely eschewed some of the more recent trends in political and democratic theory, opting instead for the terminology and imagery of participatory democracy. This is especially noteworthy given that many of the participants, particularly in New York, were graduate students familiar with more recent scholarly work in these areas. Furthermore, the ritual of General Assembly debate, with its mic checks, people’s amps, and slow, deliberate pace, evoked the 1960s vision of participatory democracy in which ordinary citizens assembled in-person, possibly for

such a shift in the popular imagination might look like and the enduring impact that living through such events can have, even for those who merely spectated.

¹⁷⁹ Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation* (New York: Itbooks, 2012), quotes from pp. 68, 73, respectively.

¹⁸⁰ Tom Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement: The Visionary Call of the 1960s Revolution* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2005).

several hours, to participate in a consensual process of decision-making.¹⁸¹ Like their ‘60s forebears, OWS participants expressed a generalized dissatisfaction with the state of democracy and capitalism today. On Barber’s interpretation, OWS “announced two truths: that America (like the world) is deeply divided with up to 99 percent of the population dominated economically by one percent that controls a preponderance of wealth, and that as a result democracy is in deep crisis: neither Wall Street nor Washington, D.C. is what democracy looks like.”¹⁸²

What are some of the enduring lessons for democratic theorists to draw from OWS? Citizens camping in public parks and putting the more prosaic details of their lives on hold as they engage in a nationwide social movement is likely not sustainable for more than a few months at a time. How can the lessons of OWS be translated to the more enduring political and economic institutions that were the object of the Occupiers’ critique? It is important to proceed with caution in assessing the impact of OWS. To begin with, social movements often move on time scales of years and decades, rather than weeks and months, and it may be entirely premature (and unfair) to declare the efforts of the Occupiers a failure.¹⁸³ As a number of people have noted, it is possible (though

¹⁸¹ The emphasis on consensual decision-making in OWS is an example of the lasting impact that 1960s experiments in participatory democracy had on the imagination of the Occupiers. Proponents of participatory democracy often disagree about whether consensus is a necessary feature of participatory democracy. For a discussion of some of the pathologies of consensual decision-making, see Jane Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), particularly the chapters on the participatory workplace. See also Not An Alternative, “Counter Power as Common Power,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, No. 9 (2014), for an overstated but at times helpful critique of the OWS emphasis on consensus and horizontalism.

¹⁸² Benjamin Barber, *If Mayors Ruled the World*, p. 314.

¹⁸³ As David Graeber argues, “movements that have successfully aimed for a broad moral transformation of society (from the abolitionists to feminism) have taken much longer to

difficult to verify) that OWS helped to create an atmosphere in which Bill DeBlasio could be elected the next Mayor of New York City in 2013.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, putting income inequality and economic justice back on the national political agenda may stand as a substantial success in its own right, particularly if such discursive pressure contributes to a political atmosphere that culminates in favorable legislation. This discursive impact is difficult to capture but potentially very significant. The judgments offered are thus necessarily limited by their proximity to the initial Occupy events and our assessments may very well evolve in the coming years. This does not mean that we should refrain from assessing the legacy of OWS, just that we should do so from a position of humility with regards to our ability to adequately assess its legacy. I proceed as a sympathetic and engaged critic of OWS.

First, OWS testified to the continued dissatisfaction with minimalist, electoral democracy, a dissatisfaction that tends to connect to feelings of apathy and powerlessness. If anything, distrust in national political and economic institutions has only grown in the past half-century.¹⁸⁵ The hope, then, for a politics that is communal, face-to-face, participatory, and empowering has not gone away and resonates as much

see concrete results. But when they do, those results are deep and abiding.” David Graeber, *The Democracy Project* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2013), p. 149.

¹⁸⁴ One attempt to assess the ongoing impact of OWS a year after its arrival is found in David Plotke, “Occupy Wall Street, Flash Movements, and American Politics,” *Dissent*, August 15, 2012, available at <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/occupy-wall-street-flash-movements-and-american-politics>

¹⁸⁵ Gallup polling data shows that trust in all three branches of government has been declining since the late 1990s and has, for the legislative branch, reached its lowest point in over forty years. See Sean Sullivan, “Americans’ Declining Trust in Government—In One Chart,” *Washington Post*, September 27, 2013, accessed online. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2013/09/27/americans-declining-trust-in-government-in-one-chart/>

I would contend that this declining trust in public institutions has a non-coincidental correlation with the rise of neoliberal ideology and policies.

with citizens of the 21st century as it did with those in the 1960s and 1970s. The most important lesson, however, has to do with the potential for radical reform when social movements like OWS are coupled with sympathetic, progressive governments.

Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil was a product of (at least) two key factors: a mobilized citizenry and community associations demanding a more transparent and empowering process coupled with elected officials at the city level who were interested in implementing these proposals and sincerely responsive to popular demands for a more democratic process. Similarly, if the economic and political reforms envisioned by participatory democrats are to be implemented in the United States or elsewhere, they will require sympathetic officials at the municipal, state, and federal level as well as a sustained, broad-based, and dynamic social movement pressuring them to go further than they would otherwise be inclined to go. “The occupiers believed there was something intrinsically wrong with how democratic nation-states do business in the age of globalization and insisted correctly that this has undermined equality and put democracy at risk.”¹⁸⁶ A sustained movement built around such general beliefs, capable of mobilizing popular pressure and electing reform-minded officials into office, offers the best hope of institutionalizing greater participatory democracy in the United States.

OWS also draws in interesting ways on ideas expressed by recent radical democratic theorists, in particular Jacques Rancière and Sheldon Wolin. Rancière’s suggestion that democratic politics today achieves its most radical and meaningful instantiation in “moments of rupture”, when an excluded group targets illegitimate exclusions and disrupts the ordinary processes of politics, is both vindicated and

¹⁸⁶ Benjamin Barber, *If Mayors Ruled the World*, p. 315.

challenged by the OWS experience. While the experience of OWS (and similarly short-lived radical moments) endures in various ways in the lives of participants and spectators, its impact is also necessarily limited by its inability to transform itself into an organized movement. We might similarly regard OWS as an instance of Wolin's "fugitive democracy" but have to ask of both Rancière and Wolin: What do these fugitive moments accomplish?¹⁸⁷ If the New Deal reforms of the 1930s and the civil rights reforms of the 1960s offer tangible examples of how direct popular pressure operating in tandem with sympathetic government officials can produce positive, lasting legislative and institutional change, OWS stands in some respects as a failed attempt at the same task.¹⁸⁸

There are of course dangers in drawing the parallels too tightly. Have President Obama and recent members of Congress been as willing and able as previous leaders (FDR and his Congress in the 1930s, LBJ and his Congress in the 1960s) to enact radical reform? Are they as susceptible to popular pressure? Do corporate power, neoliberal ideology, an especially right-wing Republican Party, or some combination of these factors, make similar reform efforts much more difficult today? This may very well be the case—in fact, as I have argued elsewhere, Sheldon Wolin in his recent work articulates the manner in which the conditions of democratic possibility have changed (perhaps even disappeared) in recent decades due to the rise of transnational corporate power and the success of neoliberalism.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, for all its promise and potential, OWS seems to leave us with a stinging absence, the absence of tangible reform. The

¹⁸⁷ Sheldon Wolin himself has noted that OWS was a very good example of what fugitive democracy looks like. Personal communication, June 20, 2013.

¹⁸⁸ Donatella della Porta provides a useful review of literature on social movements and their impact on democratization and social justice campaigns. See *Can Democracy Be Saved?* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2013).

¹⁸⁹ A claim that will be elaborated in later chapters.

conditions of democratic possibility may be disappearing before our eyes but the radical democratic model of brief, disruptive protest has not yet proved itself adequate to the challenge nor is it likely to be as successful as the sustained social movements that fueled previous eras of progressive reform.¹⁹⁰ It is to an entirely different case, that of Participatory Budgeting in Brazil, that we must turn for an example of successful institutionalization of participatory democracy. With that said, we should be careful about drawing too stark of an opposition between radical and participatory theories of democracy—popular movements in the streets and efforts at institutional reform are not necessarily at odds with one another. Democratic empowerment can come about both through popular mobilizations and efforts to stabilize those democratic moments in more enduring institutional forms.¹⁹¹

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that participatory democracy is alive and well as a democratic ideal, inspiring social movements and institutional innovations both in the United States and around the world. I have specifically focused on four examples of participatory practice to see what they can teach us about the possibilities and perils of seeking participatory democracy in the 21st century. Through consideration of four recent

¹⁹⁰ This judgment may prove to be premature. For example, Noam Chomsky notes that the New York City Council passed a resolution critical of corporate personhood in the wake of Occupy Wall Street. If pressure for a constitutional amendment effectively repealing the Citizen's United ruling gains steam in the next few years we may well consider OWS as the catalyst which sparked such pressure. For a brief discussion of these issues, and the argument that OWS "simply changed the entire framework of discussion," see Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* (Brooklyn: Zucotti Park Press, 2012).

¹⁹¹ Here we might say that the radical '60s slogan "Question Authority" needs to be supplemented with the reformist slogan "Democratize Authority" to stress the importance of both challenging illegitimate institutional structures and also making them democratic, popular, participatory, and accountable, and thus legitimate.

and distinct experiences---deliberative opinion polls (a social science experiment), Occupy Wall Street (a short-lived social movement), Chicago community policing and Brazilian participatory budgeting (both municipal institutional innovations)---I have shown the manner in which the ideals of participatory democracy still resonate, are realizable, and have the potential to effectively respond to some of the problems created by the rise of neoliberalism over the past few decades.

James Fishkin's deliberative opinion polls offer evidence that ordinary citizens enjoy discussing political issues and are in fact empowered and educated by the experience, a valuable source of empirical support for an idea that goes back to the 1960s, namely that citizens both want to actively participate in their political lives and that they will be positively transformed by doing so. Occupy Wall Street serves as an example of the role that participatory democratic ideals still play in contemporary social movements and the power they have to mobilize and motivate cynical and disempowered citizens. While I have also discussed some of the shortcomings of the Occupy model of social protest, it nevertheless draws on the discourse of participatory democracy to articulate an account of the limitations and injustices of representative democracy as it currently operates in the United States and elsewhere. This discourse, I am suggesting, offers the best hope for undoing the growing political and economic inequality of the past forty years both in terms of conceptualizing the problem and in terms of offering an effective solution.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Here I am disagreeing strongly with theorists such as Žižek or Badiou who are trying to resurrect the term "communism" among the contemporary left. Not only is this term a non-starter in the American context but it also misconceives the nature of the problem. The panacea of total revolutionary transformation offered by these thinkers is not a solution but rather an effort to avoid the question of how to construct a more egalitarian

Finally, the municipal innovations of community policing in Chicago and participatory budgeting across many Brazilian cities demonstrate the practicality of institutionalizing participatory mechanisms of governance at the city level as well as some of the difficulties encountered in doing so over the past twenty years. Participatory institutions at the city level are especially encouraging in so far as they tend to foster participation among those who are least empowered by conventional forms of political participation (voting, contacting representatives...). Both community policing and participatory budgeting, when they have functioned well, have had a disproportionate amount of participation among lower SES demographics. In a similar vein, Frank Bryan's research on the New England town hall has confirmed that town meetings also tend to attract a higher proportion of less educated, less affluent citizens. While much research remains to be done, these examples suggest that more direct and participatory forms of democracy may produce greater political equality than that found in traditional electoral forms of participation, particularly when potential participants have a meaningful stake in the outcome of the participatory process.

These examples do more than show the feasibility of participatory democracy in the 21st century, however. They also provide considerable insight into how participatory democracy must be re-conceptualized and updated in light of political and economic developments over the past half-century. While earlier statements of participatory democracy, from *The Port Huron Statement* to Pateman's *Participation and Democratic Theory*, stress the importance of workplace democracy as a key site of participatory

and democratic world out of the one we currently inhabit. The answer that participatory democracy offers is more nuanced---more radical than social democracy but more evolutionary and piecemeal than revolutionary communism.

politics, recent innovations in participatory government have mostly been located in the formal institutions of governance at the city level. This is indicative of the impact that growing material inequality and corporate power have had on efforts to achieve greater democracy in the workplace. As the power of organized labor has declined (and that of management correspondingly grown), employers are increasingly unreceptive to the possibility of any meaningful forms of worker representation or control. While the economy has become increasingly stratified (and defined by precarious, unorganized labor for the majority), the public sphere continues to offer the best prospect of democratic accountability and participation. Neoliberalism, however, poses a danger in both spheres: it has contributed to increasing economic inequality in the private sector and it has also challenged the legitimacy of a democratic, accountable public sphere defined by equal, participatory citizens. This is a challenge that the following chapters tackle in detail.

Chapter Four: All Power to the Precariat: Can We Have a Democratic Economy in the 21st Century?

“We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can’t have both.” Justice Louis Brandeis

"No country not experiencing a revolution or a military defeat with a subsequent occupation has probably ever had as rapid or as widespread an increase in inequality as has occurred in the United States in the past two decades." Lester Thurow

“Career opportunities are the ones that never knock.” The Clash

Dating back to the 1960s and 1970s participatory democrats have championed workplace democracy as a key feature of participatory democracy. Genuine democracy, they argued, requires more than just the democratization of formal political institutions. Other major institutions, most notably the economic ones that occupy so much of our lives, ought to be democratized as well. This chapter assumes rather than challenges these normative arguments. I agree that a society cannot be truly democratic if some of its most important authority structures, such as the modern corporation, are profoundly undemocratic. Rather, my concern is the following: with growing economic inequality, changes in the nature of work and life under global post-industrial capitalism, and transnational corporate power that grows unabated, is the participatory ideal of workplace democracy still realizable today? Does it still have resonance more than half a century after the birth of participatory democracy?

As Carole Pateman argues, the problem of how to establish workplace democracy has only become more difficult in recent years, due to “rapid and thorough economic restructuring and [the fact that] many multinational corporations now outrank medium-sized states in their “GNP.” Temporary and part-time employment is spreading rapidly,

as is “outsourcing.”¹⁹³ With work becoming more temporary and spatially dispersed, and corporate power weakening the ability of states to regulate the behavior and flow of capital, the challenge for participatory democrats is to articulate if and how such an ideal as workplace (and broader economic) democracy is still achievable and what it might look like. To put the point bluntly, as Pateman does, “conditions for democratization and the development of a political conception of democratic rights have been eroded.”¹⁹⁴ As I will argue, meeting this challenge will require a two-pronged strategy: first, efforts to improve democracy in the workplace and, second, national and global efforts to change the relationship between capital and labor. Fortunately, there is a growing body of research in political economy that explores some of these very questions. Concerted efforts to enact more progressive national legislation, global regulation, and local workplace democracy have the potential to create a virtuous democratic circle, in which each decision produces greater material equality, which improves the quality of American democracy, which positively reflects back onto efforts to enact further economic democratization, and so on.

In what follows, I will offer both a theoretical and practical contribution. At the theoretical level, democratic theorists have examined many important issues in recent years, but have not fully attended to questions of corporate power, economic inequality, and their relation to democracy.¹⁹⁵ In this vein, I will not be theorizing macroeconomic issues as a question of distributive justice but rather investigating how economic

¹⁹³ Carole Pateman, “Self-Ownership and Property in the Person: Democratization and a Tale of Two Concepts.” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2002), p. 49.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁹⁵ Some of the noble exceptions that inform this chapter include recent work from Wendy Brown, William Connolly, Carole Pateman, and Sheldon Wolin.

developments impact the prospects for successful political and economic *democracy*.¹⁹⁶ In addition to developing a more theoretical characterization of how recent economic developments have impacted American citizenship and democracy, I will attempt to offer some suggestions for improving the prospects for participatory democracy in the future. One deficiency of recent democratic theory is the lack of concrete proposals for expanding democracy. While theorists of deliberative democracy have developed proposals for things like deliberation days to encourage public deliberation of political issues, they have failed to offer ideas for challenging the stranglehold that corporate power has on our political process.¹⁹⁷ It is here, in participatory democracy's concern for transforming institutional power structures, that a valuable practical contribution can be made.

The chapter will be divided into four sections. In the first section I identify and discuss some of the most significant developments in American political economy over the past fifty years, with a focus on the well-documented increase in income inequality since the 1970s. The second section, drawing on Guy Standing, Sheldon Wolin, and others, aims to characterize in more depth the impact these economic developments have had on the nature of American citizenship through their transformation of work,

¹⁹⁶ Iris Marion Young suggests that justice should be seen to include not just distribution but 1) the structure of decision-making, 2) the division of labor, and 3) production and distribution of cultural imagery. In other words, thinking about justice necessarily includes not just distribution but more obviously participatory questions such as who does what work and who makes the decisions. Young, however, is an exception here, not the norm, and her positive influence will be felt throughout the dissertation.

¹⁹⁷ See, for instance, Ian Shapiro, "Enough of Deliberation," In *Deliberative Politics*, edited by Stephen Macedo, 28-38 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Iris Marion Young, "Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy," *Political Theory* 29, no. 5 (2001) : 670-690, for arguments that deliberative democracy struggles to deal with questions of power.

economic equality, corporate power, and consumerism. Having laid the theoretical groundwork, section three offers proposals for expanding workplace democracy, and a normative defense of workplace democracy as both necessary and desirable today. Section four broadens the scope of this investigation to include a discussion of policy options at the national and global levels. The aim is to chart changes that will control the power of capital and improve the prospects for participatory democracy.

The Rise of Neoliberalism and Other Economic Developments of the Past Half-Century (or, how the American Dream came and went)

What are the major changes in the American economy over the past fifty years? While there are too many to count, this section will focus on five developments that are of particular significance for proponents of participatory democracy. These are growing income inequality, the political mobilization of the corporate class through intensified (and very effective) lobbying efforts, the decline in labor union power, the consolidation of elite influence over the political system, and the emergence of neoliberalism as the hegemonic political-economic ideology of the past few decades. After discussing these developments I turn in the following section to a consideration of their significance for participatory democracy in the 21st century.

In examining changes that define the half-century since the emergence of participatory democracy as a major idea in American politics, perhaps the most notable is the steady increase in income inequality since the 1970s. Whereas the period from the 1930s to the 1970s was marked by both substantial economic growth and a significant

decline in income inequality¹⁹⁸ (a period dubbed *the great compression*), over the past forty years a substantial rise in inequality in the United States and many other advanced economies has occurred (a period called *the great divergence*). Although similar trends are evident in other wealthy countries (for instance, Great Britain) this development is most pronounced in the United States, where levels of absolute inequality and rates of increase in inequality are among the highest of all the OECD countries. By most estimates, the fabled top 1% currently receives close to 25% of the national income, up considerably from its low point of 9% in the 1970s. Moreover, the top 10% now earns roughly half of the nation's income.¹⁹⁹

Particularly striking is the fact that with the massive increase of women in the workforce over the past half-century, many households now have two income earners. However, even dual-income households aren't earning significantly more in real income than single-income households were fifty years before.²⁰⁰ This figure is most effectively captured in a quick glance at median income levels, which have been virtually unchanged

¹⁹⁸ To the point that mainstream economists started to assume that capitalist economies necessarily became more egalitarian as they became more advanced, as Timothy Noah points out in his excellent survey of the political economy literature of the past few decades. See *The Great Divergence* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012).

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. See also Robert Reich for an argument that extreme income inequality slows the economy and even precipitates crises. The top 1% captured upwards of 25% of national income on the eve of the Great Depression and did not see such a large share of national income again until the years right before the Great Recession. From *Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

²⁰⁰ Gar Alperovitz provides the following figures: "The percent of wives working rose from 28.5 percent in 1955 to 42.3 percent in 1973 to 61 percent in 2002." See *America Beyond Capitalism* (Takoma Park, Maryland: Democracy Collaborative Press, 2011). Robert Reich identifies women joining the workforce as a "coping" mechanism for families with stagnant or declining incomes. This coping mechanism, of course, is tapped out once most women have joined the workforce. See *Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future*.

in the United States since the 1970s.²⁰¹ As Paul Krugman notes, “economists are arguing about whether typical Americans have benefited at all” from economic growth over the past few decades.²⁰² In other words, there is no definitive evidence that economic life is improving for the median American and considerable evidence that it is getting worse. There is, however, no debate about whether the richest Americans have seen their incomes and wealth increase. Median income may have stagnated (or even declined) but mean income has increased because real income has increased massively for the top 10% of earners since the 1970s. The reasons for this steady increase in inequality are contested and will be discussed in more detail below but a few points merit a quick mention now. First, the college premium, which estimates how much more lifetime income an American with a college degree will make compared to those without one, has increased. While this might initially seem like a positive development (it pays to go to college—great!) it has actually contributed to inequality because making a living is increasingly unviable without a college degree yet only around 30% of adult Americans have a bachelor’s degree.²⁰³ In other words, the college premium is a payoff for a privileged section of the population, constituting less than one-third of all adults in America. Second, as complex financial activity has grown in scale and become increasingly deregulated we have witnessed a shift in norms such that massive compensation for

²⁰¹ See Paul Krugman, *The Conscience of a Liberal* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007). Krugman, effectively summarizing debates among professional economists, declares, “the point is that the typical American family hasn’t made clear progress in the last thirtysomething years.” *The Conscience of a Liberal*, p. 128.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 126.

²⁰³ See this US census report from February 2012:

<http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/education/cb12-33.html>

CEOs and hedge fund managers has become more widely accepted.²⁰⁴ Taxes have also generally become more regressive in recent decades, contributing to this broader trend.²⁰⁵

If growing income inequality is one of the defining changes in recent decades, a related and equally important one is the widely recognized successful political mobilization of the business world since the 1970s. The rise of the transnational corporation coincided with a growing sense in the corporate class that it was losing key political battles in the 1960s due to a lack of effective lobbying.²⁰⁶ In roughly a decade, the number of firms with registered lobbyists in Washington, DC increased from 175 to around 2,500. In a similar period (the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s) the number of corporate PACS quadrupled.²⁰⁷ These developments in turn have accompanied the rise of

²⁰⁴ Offering a more long-term perspective, Immanuel Wallerstein argues that US hegemony began to end around this time and with it the economy turned to financialization and debt to manage its various difficulties. Perhaps of more interest, Wallerstein notes that the 1960s and 1970s saw a challenge to the predominant centrist ideology, from both the New Left and the rise of the neoliberal right. See Immanuel Wallerstein, Randall Collins, Michael Mann, Georgi Derlugian, and Craig Calhoun. *Does Capitalism Have a Future?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). The volume contains a valuable discussion of structural questions including whether a sustainable, slow-growth (or no-growth) eco-friendly capitalism is possible.

²⁰⁵ David Harvey considers increasing income inequality to be a contradiction of capitalism—as workers have less income, they have less money to spend as consumers, which may actually threaten capital profitability in the long run, a problem recognized by industrialists such as Henry Ford. While Harvey’s insights inform this chapter, I am less concerned with how these developments threaten capitalism than I am with how they threaten citizenship and democracy. See David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁰⁶ I should stress that this subjective sense of being under siege did not necessarily reflect political-economic reality. Domhoff extensively documents corporate political mobilization from the 1940s to the 1960s and shows that the corporate-conservative coalition frequently won political battles during this period, largely defeating the efforts of the liberal-labor alliance. See G. William Domhoff, *The Myth of Liberal Ascendancy: Corporate Dominance from the Great Depression to the Great Recession* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2013).

²⁰⁷ From Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, p. 118. It was around the same time (in 1971) that soon-to be Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell wrote his infamous memorandum to

commercial television in the past fifty years and the expanding role of money in politics, particularly via television advertisements.

Furthermore, these developments have not gone unnoticed by the American public—in a 2011 Gallup poll 62% of Americans said they wanted major corporations to have less influence and 67% said that they were dissatisfied with the size and influence of major corporations.²⁰⁸ Even more striking, polls commonly find around 90% of Americans think that there is too much money in politics.²⁰⁹ Polls consistently show a broader disenchantment with major political and economic institutions in American life. This feeling of disenfranchisement on the part of the American public is increasingly well-supported by mainstream political science literature. In a recent study by Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page, which tested various theories on the distribution of American power, the authors found that individual economic elites and organized business interests affect public policy while ordinary people do not.²¹⁰ It is hard to find results more stark than this. And while this academic corroboration of popular intuitions about elite rule may seem a long-time coming no one has adequately considered its implications for our self-identity as a democracy. If mainstream political scientists, committed to our

the US Chamber of Commerce advocating much more aggressive political lobbying strategies on the part of big business. See *Winner-Take-All-Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

²⁰⁸ Lydia Saad, “In U.S., Majority Still Wants Less Corporate Influence.” *Gallup*, February 1, 2011. Available at <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/145871/majority-wants-less-corporate-influence.aspx>>

²⁰⁹ See figures in John Nichols and Robert McChesney, who estimate that the 2012 US election cost around \$10 billion when national, state, and local costs are included. From *Dollarocracy: How the Money and Media Election Complex is Destroying America* (New York: Nation Books, 2013).

²¹⁰ Martin Gilens, and Benjamin I. Page. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 12, no. 3 (2014) : 564-581.

institutions of government (and economy) nevertheless confirm that the system is thoroughly dominated by elites, then why call ourselves a democracy? What are we, exactly, if the people clearly do not rule? It is these questions that will be considered in more detail in the pages below.

Perhaps not surprisingly the corollary to increasingly consolidated corporate power has been a steady fifty-year decline in the power and size of American labor unions. Labor union membership as a percentage of the total workforce peaked in the early 1950s, with around 35% of the workforce unionized and has been steadily declining since. Union membership peaked in absolute terms in 1979 with 21 million members and has also been declining since.²¹¹ More than anything else, the demise of labor power has meant that ordinary people have been losing their (our) ability to exercise collective power over their working conditions, specifically in terms of hours, wages, benefits, etc. It goes without saying that most individual workers have very limited negotiating power on the job market and the collective power of the ordinary worker has been systematically destroyed over the past fifty years.²¹² What is most notable is that growth in economic inequality has corresponded heavily with this decline in union membership and power, a point developed more extensively in related literature.²¹³

The rise of corporate power coupled with the decline in labor power has resulted in the increasing consolidation of elite influence over economic policy. As Jacob Hacker

²¹¹ See Timothy Noah, *The Great Divergence*.

²¹² For a good discussion of some of the limits on the power of the individual worker to exercise power over their conditions of (and opportunities for) employment, see Tom Malleon, *After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²¹³ See, for instance, Paul Krugman, *The Conscience of a Liberal*; Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All-Politics*; Timothy Noah, *The Great Divergence*; Gar Alperovitz, *America Beyond Capitalism*; and Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work*.

and Paul Pierson argue in *Winner-Take-All-Politics*, the rise in inequality and the growth of corporate power are largely the consequences of domestic policy choices, not inexorable global trends.²¹⁴ In many ways the continued rise in economic inequality is a direct consequence of the stranglehold corporate power has had over the political process for the past forty years.²¹⁵ As Hacker and Pierson detail, the political science literature increasingly confirms the claim that “influence over actual policy outcomes appears to be reserved almost exclusively for those at the top of the income distribution.” The corollary to this is “the apparent weakness of the link between what elected representatives do and the opinion of middle- and working-class Americans.”²¹⁶ As noted above, the recent research from Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page provides additional support for this view. In short, the relative political power and economic condition of the middle and lower classes of American society has declined dramatically over the past few decades. Concurrently, there has been an absolute decline in economic opportunities and living standards for a substantial portion of the citizenry. These developments, however, could

²¹⁴ For more information on the policy and partisan dimensions of inequality, see Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008). Globalization and trade with other countries, like China, may contribute very slightly to stagnant and declining wages in America, especially among low-skill workers. See Noah, *The Great Divergence*. For more on the manner in which economic inequality increasingly permeates all aspects of American life, see Joseph Stiglitz’s excellent *The Price of Inequality* (New York: W&W Norton and Company, 2012).

²¹⁵ Two classic early statements on elite corporate domination of the political process are G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America? Challenges to Corporate and Class Dominance. Sixth Edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010) and C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956). I have not directly relied on these sources because more recent work has effectively taken up the task of diagnosing the influence of elite power today.

²¹⁶ See Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All-Politics*, pp. 110-112, quotes from 112.

not have been effectively consolidated (and accelerated) without a correspondingly powerful ideology to justify and support them.

What is the powerful ideology that I am referring to?²¹⁷ The predominant ideology of *the great divergence* is a set of political and economic ideas and practices commonly referred to as neoliberalism. While it is not possible to summarize briefly the rapidly growing literature on neoliberalism, I will try to synthesize a few of the key theoretical contributions on neoliberalism over the past decade. So what exactly is neoliberalism? Jodi Dean characterizes it as the idea that market exchange should guide all of human life and that markets best maximize human freedom²¹⁸, which is seen in turn as the fundamental human value. Furthermore, neoliberalism includes an emphasis on the uniqueness and importance of the individual and therefore rejects appeals to collectivity, cooperation, and solidarity. In a similar vein, David Harvey stresses how with neoliberalism human well-being is maximized through free markets, free trade, and a government that actively serves these ends, with a particular emphasis on the state's promotion of capital accumulation. Helpful here is Wendy Brown's reminder that neoliberalism is not merely a set of economic ideas; rather, it constitutes a political rationality that produces neoliberal subjects, behaviors, and organizations. Specifically, neoliberalism is about "extending and disseminating market values *to all institutions and*

²¹⁷ I am using the term ideology fairly loosely to refer to a set of ideas, discourses, and practices that are widely used and recognized, indeed very powerfully so in the case of neoliberalism. As William Connolly has argued, one of the reasons movement conservatism has been so successful in promoting neoliberal ideology has been its ability to produce an effective *resonance machine*; developing, promoting, and disseminating neoliberal discourses and practices across American culture and politics. See *Capitalism and Christianity*, *American Style*, and *The Fragility of Things*.

²¹⁸ I should add that the 'freedom' markets maximize is the acquisitive possessive individualism MacPherson spoke of, not the radical democratic freedom the New Left envisions.

social action” and thus “imposes a market rationale” in every part of life to the point where the state becomes “animated by market rationality.”²¹⁹ Neoliberal practices and discourses work to produce individuals who are not citizens so much as they are rationally calculating market actors. As Brown points out, a collection of such individuals would hardly constitute a *public*, in the democratic sense of the term.²²⁰

A key dimension of this extension of market rationality into all spheres of life is the merging of corporate and political power and the transfer of public revenues into private hands. Summarizing these developments, Sheldon Wolin argues, “the crux of these changes is that corporate power and its culture are no longer external forces that occasionally influence policies and legislation.” Instead, we now have “the union of state and corporation in an age of waning democracy and political illiteracy.”²²¹ In similar terms, Harvey emphasizes the neoliberal opposition to democracy and its emphasis on key decisions being made in public-private partnerships where corporate and state power is blurred, and where the demos as an active, empowered citizenry is nowhere to be found. Naomi Klein’s influential work, *The Shock Doctrine*, makes the further claim that such policies are generally unpopular and often require considerable violence and coercion to implement. Corporate and political elites thus seek to find (or create) events that put the domestic population in a state of “collective shock” which allows for radical policies of privatization to be implemented against their will.²²² The consequences of neoliberalism becoming the “most powerful trend” since the 1970s are precisely those

²¹⁹ Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 38-42, my italics.

²²⁰ Ibid., 43.

²²¹ Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated*, p. 131.

²²² See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Picador: New York, 2007).

mentioned above: the upward redistribution of wealth, the growth of speculative financial activity, the increased mobility of capital, the decline of labor unions, and the rise of corporate political power.²²³ Neoliberalism offers a worldview that is both profoundly powerful and shockingly simplistic, dividing the political-economic world into two antagonistic elements: “self-organizing markets with beautiful powers of rational self-adjustment and states as clumsy agents of collective decision...and it treats the state as necessarily clumsy and inept by comparison to a singular, utopian image of markets.”²²⁴

The Evolution of American Democracy in the 21st Century

The question at the heart of this chapter is the following: how have the economic developments described above impacted American democracy and citizenship? In this section I answer this question by arguing that four key components of democracy and citizenship have changed: 1) Work is increasingly precarious, part-time, and decentered, 2) Growing economic inequality increasingly undermines the possibility of political equality, 3) Political and economic power are becoming effectively consolidated into consociated power, 4) And the consumer economy increasingly pressures us to be juvenile, individualist consumers rather than adult citizens.

²²³ William Connolly, whose recent work on neoliberalism offers insights that inform this chapter, characterizes neoliberalism as a “best of all worlds ideology”—it promotes an impersonal market rationality but then obscures how much state activity is needed to sustain it. Nevertheless, neoliberals are different from classic laissez-faire liberals, in that they do recognize a certain amount of state protection is needed to expand the market process. Laissez-faire liberals had a simpler view and wanted to just leave the state out of natural market processes. See William Connolly, *The Fragility of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

²²⁴ William Connolly, *The Fragility of Things*, pp. 31-32.

Although economists have considered the changing nature of work in America, few have considered its impact on the American citizen as a *democratic political actor*. As noted above, work in the US is increasingly part-time, temporary, unreliable, precarious, undercompensated, and decentered. What do I mean by this? First, that an increasing number of Americans lack a secure income and a steady job and thus that the social compact that underwrote much of the 20th century bargain between capital and labor (and implicitly between the citizen and the state) has largely unraveled. The steady, life-long corporate and union jobs available to much of (white) America half a century ago have been evaporating—the amount of temporary work has increased along with an increase in service sector jobs. Collins notes that approximately 75% of all jobs in the US are now in the service sector. This is doubly troublesome. First, these jobs are more precarious, insecure, and less remunerative than jobs in manufacturing and production. Second, they are slowly being eliminated by IT. As Collins reminds us, there is no reason to think that as technology destroys some jobs it necessarily creates others. While previous technological advance eliminated much manual labor but created white-collar employment, there is no guarantee that current advances in technology will create as many (or as good) jobs as it destroys.²²⁵

In addition, work is increasingly decentered. As less and less time is spent in the actual office, the division between workplace and home becomes increasingly blurred.

²²⁵ See Randall Collins' chapter in Immanuel Wallerstein, Randall Collins, Michael Mann, Georgi Derlugian, and Craig Calhoun. *Does Capitalism Have a Future?* There is a steady stream of business writing celebrating the dynamism of the current American economy, including the fact that the lifelong, one-company career is disappearing from American life. There is no evidence, however, that this “dynamism” is materially helpful to the ordinary American and considerable evidence that these trends are wreaking havoc on the quality of American democracy, as well as the prospects of a decent life for the middle and lower classes.

While flexible schedules have their advantages, their disadvantages are often considerable. As Guy Standing argues in his work on the “precariat,” the workplace is now everywhere, time is global and ongoing, and this means that workers have no control over their time—they are, in effect, never “off.” If this is the case, when are we people? When are we democratic citizens? Or are we always and only workers?

Furthermore, is workplace democracy still a viable ideal if the workplace as a center of collective activity is disappearing before our eyes? It is these kinds of questions that have led Standing to argue that we are witnessing the emergence of a new, unstable, dangerous class, which is largely the product of decades of neoliberalism. It is defined by more insecurity, precarious jobs, and “labor flexibilization,” and cannot be understood according to old class labels. In a world with a more fragmented global class structure, this class is the precariat. Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, the precariat have “minimal trust relationships” with capital and the state—they lack secure jobs but just as significantly, they lack a secure social identity.²²⁶

This lack is stunting American democracy in more than one way. Americans more and more stand in need of the steady hours, resources, and time that it takes to be an informed, active citizen. They also have been losing the ability to understand themselves as democratic citizens, that is, as members of a public that is engaged in collective decision-making on issues of political importance. As noted by Wolin, our 21st century world is defined by rapid change. Nothing is stable or secure, be it jobs or identities. Standing characterizes the precariat, which is swallowing up the working and middle classes, as scared, passive, stressed, and defeated, stuck in a life that is unstable, lacks

²²⁶ Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011).

predictability and certainty and is losing its sense of social memory, community, and meaning.²²⁷ Standing discusses psychological evidence that our online, multitasking lifestyles hurt clear long-term thinking and memory. The never fully realized New Left dream of the empowered, public-minded participatory citizen is giving way to the fragmented, disempowered individual, unmoored from community and a sense of belonging to a world that is at least partly under their human control. This individual is a far cry from the adult citizen who can take measured, thoughtful, deliberate account of a situation and act collectively with others.²²⁸ As a preface to the remainder of this section, it might be useful to cite the words of William Connolly on the condition of the “late modern world.” Today, Connolly argues, one feels “the experience of owing one’s life and destiny to world-historical, national, and local-bureaucratic forces” as well as “a decline in the confidence many constituencies have in the probable future to which they find themselves contributing in daily life.”²²⁹ What I am arguing is that this is more than just a subjective feeling on the part of the 21st century American. It is, in fact, a correct diagnosis of a material reality that is becoming harder and harder to remake.

The most blunt and immediately distressing consequence of the growth of poorly compensated, precarious labor and economic inequality is its damaging effect on political equality. As labor unions have declined and income inequality has soared, the material

²²⁷Ibid., pp. 35-40.

²²⁸ As Jacques Rancière notes, democracy as a radical ideal insists on expanding the public sphere of democratic equality to more and more areas of common concern. The neoliberal world we inhabit, of course, is pushing for the exact opposite. See *Hatred of Democracy* (New York: Verso, 2009), pp. 57-58.

²²⁹ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 25-26. Reading Stephen White drew my attention to these helpful passages. See White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chapter 5, specifically pp. 118-119, for a more detailed discussion.

basis for political equality, and hence, democracy, is disappearing before our eyes. This material basis includes things like a steady job, decent pay, medical care, free time, education, and so on. As noted above, mainstream political science increasingly confirms the proposition that economic elites dominate the political system. But to have political equality and functioning democracy, we need to be relatively equal in terms of empowerment (which relates to education, social status, and material wealth). We are, however, becoming increasingly unequal. Carol Gould makes a similar point when she notes that full democratic freedom requires us to have not just an absence of constraint but a series of enabling conditions, social and material, i.e. becoming democratic citizens requires a relatively equal level of empowerment.

To develop this point more fully, let me pose a few questions: what are the material or economic preconditions for democracy? How much economic equality is necessary for robust practices of participatory democracy? How does economic inequality, particularly extreme income inequality like that which currently characterizes the United States, undermine the democratic commitment to political equality and direct, empowered participation? While it would take a separate book²³⁰ to answer adequately these questions, I would like to sketch out a few provisional answers. Extreme economic inequality, at its most basic, effectively destroys political equality and the possibility for democracy.²³¹ A robust, participatory form of democracy, as Rousseau recognized, requires citizens who can neither buy nor be purchased by one another. Thus, it requires far more economic equality than we currently have in the United States. Carol Gould

²³⁰ A book, I might add, that has not yet been fully written, at least to my knowledge.

²³¹ Political equality and democracy are, if not synonymous, intimately related. Not just formal but substantive political equality is a necessary (and perhaps also sufficient, depending on how it is defined) condition for participatory democracy.

helpfully sharpens Rousseau's point by noting two ways in which inequalities of private property undermine democracy. First, those who have less become cynical, apathetic, and disempowered. Second, the exploitation and domination that result from material inequality are antithetical to democracy as such.²³² Much like Pateman, Gould argues that political democracy is undermined by the general lack of democracy in the social and economic spheres.²³³

To explore this point a bit further, we can turn to Michael Walzer's influential work *Spheres of Justice*. As Walzer notes, to have a thriving, egalitarian democracy, the political sphere must be insulated from inequalities produced in the economy.²³⁴ But economic inequality is becoming so extreme that economic elites are able, via corporate mobilization, to effectively control economic policy. Indeed, this seems entirely predictable. Recent Supreme Court decisions only reinforce these trends and corporations are well positioned to influence or even control legislation such that it favors their short-term interests. Massive economic inequality increasingly produces massive political

²³² See Carol Gould, *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society*. Her first point, it should be noted, is well supported by empirical research. See Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), and Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

²³³ Gould, p. 259.

²³⁴ See Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). Walzer's argument has resonances with Habermas' desire to defend the "lifeworld," which includes democratic politics, from the "system" encroachments of bureaucratic administration and market capitalism. What neither Walzer nor Habermas fully attend to is how this insulation of the political sphere from private economic power is supposed to happen, or indeed if it is even possible when concentrations of private economic power become this severe. See Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action and Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998).

inequality. Similarly, private corporate power is regularly converted into public political power. In fact, as Wolin argues, the two are increasingly indistinguishable.²³⁵

In other words, the material preconditions for maintaining and expanding American democracy are rapidly evaporating. We need (rough) material, educational, and social equality to participate as citizens who are more or less equal. If power is concentrated in any of these domains it almost invariably translates into inequalities in political power. Similarly, inequalities in economic opportunity, education, or social status undermine the commonality and shared experiences necessary to participate as equal citizens who can respect and understand one another. As Stephen White says, drawing on Rousseau, “any sense of connectedness people have is impacted by the social-psychological distance between them. Growing economic inequality clearly thins out the commonality of our experience and our sense of connectedness.”²³⁶ This is an insight that can be traced back to Aristotle, who argues that a thriving polity cannot countenance gross class inequality. We simply can’t be equal citizens if all possible bases for equality (and commonality) have been destroyed before we enter the public arena.²³⁷

The best tools to understand the political consequences of these developments have been provided by Sheldon Wolin, who has actively attended to questions of corporate power, democracy, and citizenship since the 1980s. Over the course of the 20th century, in particular over the past half-century, we have witnessed the consolidation of what Wolin calls “consociated power,” referring to the merging of private corporate

²³⁵ See, for instance, the recent New York Times article detailing how many of the early campaign contributions for the 2016 primary campaigns have come from just a few wealthy individuals. Nicholas Confessore, Sarah Cohen, and Karen Yourish, “The Families Funding the 2016 Presidential Election,” *New York Times*, October 10, 2015.

²³⁶ Stephen White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, pp. 40-41.

²³⁷ This point will be explored more fully in the following chapter.

power and public political power. The American political system is largely dominated by (and increasingly resembles²³⁸) major corporations and this has changed the nature of power dramatically in recent decades. This, in turn, has had a catastrophic effect on the quality and prospects for American democracy. As Wolin has argued in recent work, consociated power is turning the American polity into a managed democracy, veering in dangerous and potentially totalitarian directions. The consequences of these developments are still unfolding today, as elections and politics are increasingly managed (guided by elites using corporate management techniques), social programs won through popular struggle are cut, and the forces of the corporate economy discipline and accustom citizens to hierarchy and uncertainty.²³⁹

Consociated power involves not just the destruction of the public sphere and the (attempted) dismantling of the welfare state but some Foucauldian dimensions as well, seen in the rise of technological surveillance in the wake of the War on Terror and the disciplining mechanisms inherent in the growth of the carceral state. In short, Wolin demonstrates how the politicization of corporate power has weakened democracy in America—largely through its production of citizens who are (and feel) powerless, managed, and distrustful of major political and economic institutions. These changes are increasingly open features of American politics, seen in recent Supreme Court decisions (*Citizens United* and *McKutcheon*) removing restrictions on the ability of economic elites

²³⁸ Wolin makes the following provocative claim: The President is akin to the CEO, Congress the Board of Directors, and the people are shareholders, hoping for good results but largely removed from meaningful decision-making. It is worth asking whether Wolin's metaphor works as well during the Obama years as it did under the Bush regime. See *Democracy Incorporated*.

²³⁹ See Jason Vick, "Participatory vs. Radical Democracy in the 21st Century: Carole Pateman, Jacques Rancière, and Sheldon Wolin." *New Political Science*, Vol. 37, Issue 2, 2015.

to influence political outcomes, the brazenly plutocratic tenor of the Republican Party, and the timid, defensive (and largely pro-corporate) Democratic Party. All of which forces us to ask the following questions: Is the ideal of democratic community feasible today? What role does the citizen play in this scheme? To what extent, if at all, is this scheme consistent with the democratic ideal of participation in collective self-government?

One final point to consider is what identities Americans embody when they are not workers. As Benjamin Barber notes, we aren't always precarious workers. We are also consumers. But this just contributes to the general trends we have been identifying above. Consumer capitalism only reinforces the worst dynamics of the past half-century: we are juvenile, fragmented, more concerned with instant consumer gratification and various toys than with democratic politics. This does not support the measured, thoughtful, community-oriented adults we must be if we are to be democratic citizens, capable of deferred satisfaction and a concern for the long-term good of the country. In Barber's words, consumer capitalism "fosters 'me' thinking on the model of the narcissistic child and discourages 'we' thinking of the kind deliberative grown-up citizens recognize as wisdom."²⁴⁰ Even public goods like garbage collecting and policing are increasingly privatized and thus consumed as private goods—"we are encouraged to withdraw from our public selves" and live "behind walled communities in which we deploy private resources to acquire what were once public goods."²⁴¹ Furthermore, sociologists Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss point to the fact that our identification as consumers also has directly negative impacts on our economic interests as well. Due to

²⁴⁰ Benjamin Barber, *Consumed*, p. 129.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

what they call the symbolic elevation of the consumer in America, we are more concerned with buying cheap products as consumers than ensuring that we have good wages and benefits as workers.²⁴² Thus, “American workers are expected to constantly scramble to seek ever cheaper goods (made by ever cheaper labor) in order to compensate for a quarter-century of wage stagnation, thus forcing them to act as *consumers* directly against their own group interests as *workers*.”²⁴³

If these challenges seem daunting, even insurmountable, that is in keeping with the reading I am suggesting. They constitute, I would argue, the great challenge facing American democracy for our time. Either we will meet these challenges or our democracy will be further delegitimized and its alternatives will grow in strength and legitimacy—the Chinese model, right-wing neoliberalism, even populist forms of neo-fascism possibly blending with the first two.²⁴⁴ What all this suggests is that democracy in America is qualitatively different from what it was fifty years ago, and that the prospects for more economic and political democracy are declining in the face of an increasingly consolidated plutocracy. The rest of this chapter looks at some of the ways we might combat or even undo these problems.

²⁴² Young also argues that the welfare state defines citizens as consumers and in doing so depoliticizes them. See *Justice and the Politics of Difference*.

²⁴³ Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), quote from pp. 28-29.

²⁴⁴ Lest it seem a contradiction, Naomi Klein has effectively demonstrated that in the real world there is nothing inherently conflictual between free market neoliberalism and political authoritarianism, indeed Klein thinks they are intimately related.

Keeping it Local: The Continued Value of Workplace Democracy

If participatory democracy offers an answer to the challenges I have posed above, then what exactly does that answer look like? What kind of solutions might a 21st century theory of participatory democracy offer? The first point that must be addressed is the following: is workplace democracy still a feasible and desirable goal for participatory democrats to champion? Does it still possess the promise that it seemed to offer half a century ago? The answer, I will argue, is yes, workplace democracy can offer an effective, democratic antidote to many (but not all) of the dangerous trends noted above. In this section I work through several normative arguments for the value of workplace democracy as well as empirical evidence for its viability in the face of countervailing political-economic trends. The following section addresses the limits of local strategy and turns to questions of national and global scale.

What is workplace democracy and why have participatory democrats found it a desirable, even necessary, reform? Carole Pateman, in her classic *Participation and Democratic Theory*, argues that a democratic polity ought to provide its citizens with widespread opportunities for *full participation*, in which political and economic institutions are characterized by “a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions.”²⁴⁵ This is especially important in the workplace because it is the institution in which we will spend most of our lives, and, in the case of large firms, its actions will also have considerable

²⁴⁵ Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, p. 40-44. As Pateman says, “for a democratic polity to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist, i.e. a society where all political systems have been democratized and socialization through participation can take place in all areas.” In other words, participatory democracy demands a society in which Pateman’s *full participation* is available to citizens in every major social-political-economic institution.

public impact. As Richard Wolff argues, “adult citizens in most countries now spend most of their waking lives laboring in and preparing for workplaces. If democracy is a genuine foundational social value, it ought to govern the workplace first and foremost.”²⁴⁶ A democratic society, then, will be one in which all the major institutions are democratized and citizens opportunities for *full participation*. This is especially valuable in the workplace because it “provides an education in the management of collective affairs that it is difficult to parallel elsewhere.”²⁴⁷ Workplace democracy in its strong form means more than just partial (or even full) ownership; it means above all active participation in the democratic process of collective self-government in the workplace. Broadly put, this means that in a fully democratic workplace “the workers collectively determine what the enterprise produces, the appropriate technology, the location of production, and related matters.”²⁴⁸

Carole Pateman provides some of the most powerful arguments in defense of workplace democracy. Her point, simply put, is the following: workplace democracy changes workers from employees of a firm, business, or workplace, to self-governing citizens of a firm, business, or workplace. When there is a market in labor, workers are forced to alienate some of their right to self-government to their employer. That is, as long as one is an employee, one is subordinated to one’s employer. To be an employee, then, is to be something qualitatively different from a democratic citizen. It is to be at the disposal of someone else who is legally and contractually empowered to govern over you, on pain of unemployment. However, in a democratic firm, they are no longer employees

²⁴⁶ Richard Wolff, *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), p. 147.

²⁴⁷ Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, p. 43.

²⁴⁸ Richard Wolff, *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism*, p. 118.

in the traditional sense. Instead, they are transformed into equal members of the firm, something very much like active citizens with democratic rights. In the democratic workplace, workers are transformed into democratic citizens engaging in the act of self-government and are no longer alienating their freedom. In making this argument one does not have to romanticize all forms of labor.²⁴⁹ Custodial work may not be particularly fulfilling but that is not the point—the point is that one ought to have opportunities to be a democratic citizen while doing whatever work one is doing. In so far as democratic firms are still possible, Pateman points out how valuable and transformative they are via their ability to create democratic citizens in the workplace.²⁵⁰

Whereas Carole Pateman focuses on the transformation enacted through becoming a citizen of the workplace, Carol Gould's work offers a systematic account of the reasons why every person ought to be able to participate in the institutions of which they are a member. While there is not space here to fully work through Gould's detailed account, its broad contours can be sketched. One of the basic democratic principles, according to Gould, is the idea that every individual involved in a common activity has an equal right to participate in making the rules and regulations governing that activity.²⁵¹ Common activities, of course, occur not just in the formal political arenas but in the economic and social spheres as well, a point participatory democrats have been making

²⁴⁹ I use the term loosely here and without the Arendtian connotations.

²⁵⁰ In making this normative argument Pateman is not ignoring the difficulties standing in the way of an increase in workplace democracy, a point I will consider in more detail below. See Carole Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person: Democratization and a Tale of Two Concepts." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2002), p. 49. For an elaboration on the "employment contract" see Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988).

²⁵¹ See Carol Gould, *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society*, p. 84. It is hard to see how one can disagree with this claim without openly embracing non-democratic principles.

since the 1960s. A democratic polity is one in which economic and social activity is also defined by shared, democratic decision-making.²⁵² The claim is that wherever feasible, including in economic institutions, participants should make these decisions in a direct and participatory manner. Only under such a scheme is it possible to realize the principle of equal liberty, a principle that, Gould argues, applies to social and economic activities as well as political ones.²⁵³ As Gould says, “equal liberty also requires an equal right to participate in decisions concerning the social and economic activities in which one engages, as much as it requires the equal right to participate in political matters. For such participation is *just as important* a requirement for the expression of one’s free agency and for one’s self-respect as is participation in political decisions.”²⁵⁴

What we have here are two of the main theoretical reasons for embracing workplace democracy. On the one hand, it enacts a transformation in the nature of the workplace relation such that the worker becomes not only an employee but also a democratic citizen who deliberates, formulates priorities, and participates directly in the actual decision-making process. Workplace democracy creates citizens engaging in the act of self-government in an arena that has traditionally been steeped in hierarchy. On the other hand, Gould stresses the principle underlying the demand for workplace democracy, namely that people ought to be able to participate in the decision-making

²⁵² Pateman makes a similar claim in her classic statement of participatory democracy, *Participation and Democratic Theory*.

²⁵³ See Carol Gould, *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society*, in particular pp. 136-137. Robert Dahl makes a similar, though less radical argument, when he suggests that the principles of democratic authority ought to apply to the economy as well, if we take them seriously. See Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

²⁵⁴ Carol Gould, *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society*, pp. 136, my italics.

process in the institutions of which they are members. In other words, they ought everywhere and always to be citizens, at least when engaged in collective projects such as work, education, and politics. Iris Young makes the basic participatory principle very clear: people should be able to participate in institutions that affect them and/or in which they are members. Social justice thus necessitates not just redistribution, as most political philosophy has stressed, but the democratization of all major institutions as well.²⁵⁵

A related argument in defense of workplace democracy focuses on the consequences of workers' self-management. Simply put, democratic workplaces distribute goods and resources more equally than non-democratic workplaces.²⁵⁶ When workers run a firm they almost invariably select egalitarian pay scales, often limiting differences in wages to ratios of no more than 3-1 or 6-1. In addition (and contrary to the predictions of some economists), there is considerable empirical evidence that coops and other democratic workplaces are as successful as conventional, hierarchical businesses when assessed in standard market terms. When it comes to less conventional criteria such

²⁵⁵ See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), especially pp. 91-94 and 187. For a thoughtful elaboration of the participatory ideal, and some of the conceptual difficulties it entails, see Kevin Olson, *Reflexive Democracy: Political Equality and the Welfare State* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006). See also Alan Keenan, *Democracy in Question: Democratic Openness in a Time of Political Closure* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003) for a valuable discussion of some of the paradoxes inherent in deeply democratic forms of politics.

²⁵⁶ While this work focuses on the democratic value of economic equality, there are also numerous philosophical treatises that lay the foundation for an egalitarian normative philosophy. John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* is the most famous but works by G.A. Cohen, John Roemer, and Phillippe Van Parijs offer a normative perspective closer to my own. See G.A. Cohen, *If You're An Egalitarian How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000) and *Why not Socialism?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Phillippe Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All: What (if anything) Can Justify Capitalism?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); John E. Roemer, *A Future for Socialism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

as reinvestment in the community, job security, and fair and equal remuneration, democratic workplaces frequently perform much better than hierarchical firms.²⁵⁷

Even with these positive features, are there dangers that workplace democracy is becoming less realizable in the increasingly financialized and globalized economy? The answer is yes and no. As noted above, work is becoming more spatially dispersed than ever before, and workplace democracy is much more difficult to realize without a physical, shared workplace. Equally troubling but in the opposite direction, large corporations, which may possess the physical spaces necessary for workplace democracy, are so large and hierarchical that effectively democratizing them appears a daunting task. What is there to be encouraged about, then? As Tom Malleson notes in his recent work, most firms are still small and thus offer ideal sites for experimentation in workplace democracy even in the face of these difficulties.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ For starters, see Tom Malleson, *After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century* and Gar Alperovitz, *America Beyond Capitalism*. See also Peter Bachrach and Aryeh Botwinick, *Power and Empowerment: A Radical Theory of Participatory Democracy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) for evidence on how employee-owned factories (which admittedly are not the same as worker-run factories) tend to have higher productivity and more worker satisfaction than conventional firms. See especially pp. 100-105. Bachrach and Botwinick, like other participatory democrats, situate workplace democracy at the center of the theory.

²⁵⁸ Though somewhat dated, Carmen Sirianni provides a thoughtful discussion of the temporal limits that will inevitably be encountered as the demands of democratic participation are expanded to more and more spheres. I am not aware, however, of any evidence that employment in a democratic workplace is sufficiently more time-consuming than in a non-democratic workplace, or that the extension of democratic participation to other spheres would require unreasonable time commitments. Enduring, institutional participatory democracy must inevitably demand less than the consensus model of the Occupy Wall Street General Assembly. See “Production and Power in a Classless Society: A Critical Analysis of the Utopian Dimensions of Marxist Theory,” edited by the Socialist Review Collectives, in *Unfinished Business: Twenty Years of Socialist Review* (New York: Verso, 1991).

Both inside and outside of the United States one can find many examples of thriving democratically-run firms. For instance, following the economic crisis in Argentina at the turn of the century some 200 factories were taken over by workers. These factories have been successfully managed since then, all while engaging in the difficult process of securing legal recognition of their takeover through the courts and the political process.²⁵⁹ In Spain, the famous Mondragon corporation has successfully embodied principles of cooperative worker democracy since the 1950s, though in recent decades it has faced its share of challenges in maintaining its principles and remaining globally competitive.²⁶⁰ These successes, and less famous but equally remarkable ones scattered across the United States, may be less surprising than they initially appear to be. As Peter Bachrach and Aryeh Botwinick suggest, we have good reason to expect worker-run companies to be more cautious, prudent, and long-term in their approach to decision-making. This is because the workers are more directly impacted by the success or failure of their firm and more directly tied to the kinds of re-investment decisions that management traditionally makes. Neoclassical economics aside, participatory democratic claims that ordinary workers possess both the capacity and desire to manage their workplaces appear at least partly vindicated by the empirical evidence. Workplace

²⁵⁹ For an enthusiastic insider perspective on the recovered factories movement in Argentina, see The Lavaca Collective, *Sin Patron: Stories from Argentina's Worker-Run Factories* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007).

²⁶⁰ For an excellent, up-to-date analysis of Mondragon from a participatory democratic perspective, see Tom Malleson's *After Occupy*. For further discussion, see J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (New York: Verso, 2010), and Gar Alperovitz, *America Beyond Capitalism*.

democracy is thus a viable option capable of challenging economic inequality and corporate power while empowering middle and working class Americans.²⁶¹

Workplace democracy also provides an answer to the question of what more participation does. When it comes to democratization of the firm, greater participation, particularly forms that approximate Pateman's concept of *full participation*, can create greater economic equality by equalizing wages within the workplace. This opens the possibility, stressed throughout this work, of creating positive feedback loops in which more democracy leads to a demand for greater democracy in turn. As people experience greater participation, they become more empowered and demand greater venues for future and further participation, which generates greater equality and more substantive democracy, which then informs demands for more reform, and so on.²⁶² Greater participatory democracy is not merely a good in itself for it also produces positive results, including the possibility of contributing to a reduction in economic inequality. Workplace democracy, while perhaps sounding anachronistic, offers some hope in efforts to combat growing inequality, even in the face of dispersed worksites and flexible labor.

Participatory democracy, with its focus on institutional transformation in the structure of

²⁶¹ For further empirical evidence and a thoughtful theoretical consideration of workplace democracy, see Peter Bachrach and Aryeh Botwinick, *Power and Empowerment: A Radical Theory of Participatory Democracy*. Tom Malleon's *After Occupy* also offers a helpful broadening of what economic democracy should look like: it should include not only workplace democracy but also democratization of financing, investment, and wider market relations. Thad Williamson, David Imbroscio, and Gar Alperovitz also develop a series of proposals for how to strengthen economic democracy and community economic stability at the local level. See *Making a Place for Community: Local Democracy in a Global Era* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

²⁶² Not only is this a core hope of proponents of participatory democracy, it is also a claim that is at least partly supported by empirical evidence. As reviewed in the previous chapter, citizens generally enjoy and find empowering opportunities for greater substantive participation.

the workplace, thus provides a better answer for how to tackle growing economic inequality and corporate political power than competing democratic theories.

One aspect of participatory democracy that deserves greater attention is the notion that workplace democracy has the potential to reduce economic inequality, particularly with regard to incomes. The arguments of Pateman and Gould, written decades earlier, attend less to this prosaic idea than is necessary today. Decades of growing income inequality mean that a strategy that can vigorously enhance both democratic citizenship and income equality in one important step must be elaborated and defended. More to the point, the income equality produced through workplace democracy may possess a legitimacy that other strategies of income equalization lack. Relatively equal salaries that are the product of democratic choices are likely to be understood by their recipients as much more legitimate than after-market income redistribution through progressive taxation. This is for the simple reason that in the case of workplace democracy equal incomes have been chosen democratically rather than coercively imposed through the arm of the state. This is not to suggest that conventional income, corporate, and estate taxes collected through government action are illegitimate—indeed, as I argue in the next section, strongly progressive taxation is both legitimate and necessary to a thriving democracy. It is rather recognition of a difficult reality: the market distribution of incomes may be morally arbitrary (that is, it does not reward income on the basis of need or hard work, nor produce justice in its distribution of resources) but it is nevertheless felt to be natural by many. What William Connolly terms the “conservative evangelical resonance machine” amplifies (and in some cases creates) this feeling through the discourses of neoliberalism, neoclassical economics, the Republican party, Fox News,

talk radio, and so on. Workplace democracy, therefore, offers the opportunities for workers to choose democratically their equal incomes rather than having these “forced” on them from an outside source. In so far as we are inclined to feel that an income is “ours” this offers the possibility of contributing to substantial reductions in income inequality without generating the resentment that often accompanies other strategies of equalization.

If one of the major challenges facing American democracy today is to stop and eventually reverse the destructive long-term trends enumerated above, localized forms of participatory democracy, particularly the proliferation of democratic firms, offer one of the best options available. It is in this sense that participatory democracy is better suited to addressing extreme economic inequality than its competitors. Proponents of participatory democracy put economic inequality at the heart of their theory and seek to diagnose the manner in which economic inequality, particularly extreme income inequality, bleeds into and affects political equality.

As I have stressed, workplace democracy provides one of the most effective ways to reduce income inequality. Participatory democracy is thus more concerned with how economic inequality undermines formal political equality than alternatives such as deliberative democracy. This emphasis can be seen in early statements of participatory democracy, such as *The Port Huron Statement*, the work of C.B. MacPherson and Carole Pateman in the 1970s, and in the work of Carol Gould and Sheldon Wolin in the 1980s.²⁶³ This insight, that extreme economic inequality undermines formal political equality,

²⁶³ See, for instance, C.B. MacPherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*; Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*; Carol Gould, *Rethinking Democracy*; and Sheldon Wolin, *The Presence of the Past*.

which in some respects could be traced all the way back to Marx's *On the Jewish Question*, is less appreciated by proponents of deliberative democracy, who tend to focus more on formal political equality. Similarly, participatory democratic theory is built around the desire to construct meaningful spaces and opportunities for democratic participation, particularly in the workplace and in city government. Deliberative democratic theory, however, is directed towards providing deliberative spaces, such as deliberative polls, citizen juries, and deliberation days, none of which necessarily relate to, let alone redress, extreme economic inequality.²⁶⁴

Participatory democracy in the 21st century is in an important sense a response to neoliberalism, promising to challenge the anti-democratic market fetishism predominant in American political discourse and through the reduction in economic inequality that it can provide. Coupled with efforts to rejuvenate and re-legitimize the democratic public sphere, some of which will be discussed in the following section, participatory democracy can be adequately attuned to the most pressing problems of the 21st century and deliver solutions lacking in competing theories of democracy.

Thinking Big: National and Global Steps for Strengthening Participatory

Democracy

I have argued that one of participatory democracy's core goals, workplace democracy, is still realizable in the 21st century, in spite of some of the serious challenges that such efforts will face. But there are limits to local strategies of enhancing democracy.

²⁶⁴ For representative works, see Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement*; James Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation*; David Held, *Models of Democracy*, chapter 8.

Combatting inequality and corporate power will require more than just an increase in workplace democracy. It will need to be supplemented with certain forms of centralized action at the national and global scale, all of which will be less democratic than the more direct and participatory forms of democracy found in the workplace and the town hall.²⁶⁵ What I propose in this section are a series of large-scale steps that should be seen as complementary to more small-scale forms of participatory democracy. While a range of thinkers²⁶⁶ have suggested various large-scale steps to foster greater material and political equality, few have attempted to show how these steps can be combined with local participatory democracy to produce a more democratic and egalitarian political order. The reforms I am proposing are demanding, at times even radical, but also part of a feasible long-term participatory democratic project. Their feasibility lies in the fact that some or all of them could be implemented, if not today, then in the coming decades, which is the proper time horizon when considering such reforms. This section thus concludes with a discussion of the short and medium term achievability of these proposals.

I will therefore offer a number of suggestions at the national and global level that, when combined with more local reforms, like an expansion of workplace democracy (which is still realizable in many workplaces) offer the possibility of a robust participatory democracy capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century head on. In

²⁶⁵ See Jeffrey A. Winters, *Oligarchy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) for an argument that local democratic politics is inadequate to the task of challenging concentrated economic power.

²⁶⁶ From political economists to political philosophers concerned with distributive justice. These thinkers, however, are generally not interested in promoting more participatory forms of local democracy in tandem with their large-scale proposals. Iris Marion Young stands out as a virtuous counter-example but she is the exception that proves the rule.

other words, it will take a series of large-scale reforms to create and support the growth of more participatory practices of democracy, such as decreasing material, particularly income, inequality, which will in turn improve the quality and efficacy of small-scale reforms like workplace democracy and municipal participatory budgeting.²⁶⁷ Small-scale reforms in turn provide citizens with the most direct avenues of democratic participation and generally foster stronger demands for equality and meaningful democracy at the state, national, and global level. Together, this two-pronged approach to radical democratic reform can weaken the power of corporations relative to the democratic public sphere and provide a more effective challenge to neoliberalism than what is being offered by competing democratic theories.

Perhaps the first and most obvious steps are efforts to reverse the recent *Citizens United* and *McKutcheon* Supreme Court decisions, either through a constitutional amendment process or a more progressive majority on the Supreme Court. As unlikely as the first seems, the second option may be even more so.²⁶⁸ Whereas the *Citizens United* decision removed limits on corporate campaign spending, the recent *McKutcheon* decision removed most limits on individual campaign contributions. While undoing these two decisions is easier said than done, it cannot be stressed enough how poisonous they

²⁶⁷ As Gar Alperovitz persuasively argues, many of our enduring social problems can only be tackled if one is willing to challenge concentrations of private wealth. Thus large-scale efforts to redistribute income and other economic resources will be needed in addition to small-scale participatory projects. See Gar Alperovitz, *America Beyond Capitalism*.

²⁶⁸ Although a half century old, Robert Dahl's classic *A Preface to Democratic Theory* still offers a compelling rebuttal to liberal views of the Supreme Court as an ideal deliberative body. In its entire history the Court has rarely, if ever, taken steps that advance the rights of ordinary Americans. The reformist Warren court is an aberration, not likely to be repeated any time soon. Progressives would do well to take note: the Supreme Court is not your friend. See *A Preface to Democratic Theory. Expanded Edition* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2006).

are to the long-term prospects of American democracy. These two decisions consolidate American plutocracy very much in the manner of Sheldon Wolin's dark and prophetic *Democracy Incorporated*. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly difficult to argue persuasively that Americans have even *formal* political equality, when the Supreme Court protects the ability of powerful corporations and wealthy individuals to so directly influence political outcomes.²⁶⁹

In addition, much more progressive taxation on wealthy individuals and large corporations needs to be implemented, perhaps returning to mid-20th century levels of taxation. Such steps, to be effective, would likely need to be implemented, if not globally, at least across the major OECD countries.²⁷⁰ Such steps should be coupled with either a high minimum wage, on the order of at least \$15-20 per hour, or the implementation of a

²⁶⁹ Further steps could be taken to improve representative democracy at the national level. Erik Olin Wright considers some thoughtful ways to provide public financing of elections as well as floating the idea of transforming one of America's bodies of Congress into a "Citizens Assembly" in which legislators are selected by lot. See Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*. John Nichols and Robert McChesney suggest further steps to revitalize American electoral democracy, including an independent electoral commission, a constitutional amendment guaranteeing a right to vote, and public subsidies for the news. See *Dollarocracy: How the Money and Media Election Complex is Destroying America*. Iris Marion Young in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* explores the idea of regional forms of governance to enhance American democracy. While I do not have the space to discuss each of these reforms in depth, they are generally in the same spirit as the ones I provide. They would, alone or together, in whole or in part, constitute valuable reforms.

²⁷⁰ The scholar who has done the most recent work on income inequality and progressive taxation as a solution is Thomas Piketty. See his widely discussed *Capital in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, "Income Inequality in the United States, 1913-1998," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118, no. 1 (2003) : 1-39; as well as Anthony B. Atkinson, Thomas Piketty, and Emmanuel Saez, "Top Incomes in the Long Run of History," *Journal of Economic Literature* 49, no. 1 (2011) : 3-7. For an accessible account of why income taxes on the wealthiest citizens could be raised above 80% with positive economic consequences, see Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Stefanie Stantcheva, "Taxing the 1%: Why the top tax rate could be over 80%," *VoxEu*, available at <http://www.voxeu.org/article/taxing-1-why-top-tax-rate-could-be-over-80>.

basic income.²⁷¹ Just as the social minimum must be dramatically improved to promote participatory democracy, low ceilings on executive compensation should also be enacted. Recent efforts to implement such a ceiling failed in Switzerland and this may be an indication that successfully capping executive pay will require an international agreement among all wealthy countries, ideally to around no more than 10 times that of the average worker. Similarly, state and federal government support for workplace democracy, particularly in the form of start-up capital, would help to foster the future expansion of democratic workplaces. Cumulatively, what such steps would do is to drastically reduce income inequality and thereby scale back the political inequality produced by corporate capture of the state. Not only are these reforms structurally important but they may also have interesting and unpredictable effects at the individual level. As Kurt Vonnegut brilliantly satirizes in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, the ethos of recipients of substantial private wealth is not exactly salutary to egalitarian democracy. Dissipating such wealth may well contribute to the production of better democratic citizens.²⁷²

Fear that these reforms might generate intense capital flight may be overstated as well—Tom Malleeson’s excellent *After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century* offers a number of examples in which capital controls were very effective at the national level in staving off economic disaster. Neoclassical economists may not approve but steps like this may be necessary to protect the viability of the reforms being advocated here. Similarly, many of these steps would be most effectively consolidated if

²⁷¹ For arguments with regard to a basic income, see the following: Carole Pateman, "Democratizing Citizenship: Some Advantages of a Basic Income," *Politics and Society* 32, no. 89 (2004) : pp. 89-105; Phillipe Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All: What (if anything) Can Justify Capitalism?*; and Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*.

²⁷² Kurt Vonnegut, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

they were done across the OECD countries or better yet, the entire globe. Revamped international labor agreements which set minimal labor standards, robust protections for union organizing, and caps on executive compensation would go far towards ensuring that the global race-to-the-bottom does not become a reality.²⁷³ Internationally agreed-upon standards of high corporate taxation would also effectively limit incentives for capital flight. While ambitious, some important steps could be taken within the United States. Undoing the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 and replacing it with a revised Wagner Act for the 21st Century, coupled with effective federal enforcement of existing labor law and innovative organizing on the part of existing unions, could reverse the long-term decline of labor power.

Bringing many of these reforms together would move the United States firmly in the direction of a more democratic, egalitarian economy, the ripple effects of which would be felt in the political sphere at both the federal and the local level. Such economic reforms would look so radically different from the current political economy of the United States that it is hard to know what to even call such a system; since it would still rely on markets, a number of progressive thinkers have termed this vision a form of market socialism. The point is this: the value of these reforms lies in their ability to create greater economic equality (by reversing the multi-decade trend of increasing economic inequality), and to loosen the stranglehold of corporate power and privately wealthy individuals on the political system. Thus, although these are large-scale steps, they,

²⁷³ Guy Standing argues, reasonably, that we need a new international work-rights regime and must revise the old labor style International Labor Organization. This would effect a further move away from the conservative business unionism of the late 20th century labor movement. See Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* and Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement*.

combined with greater local and workplace democracy, form part of a strategy for advancing participatory democracy, in the sense that they enhance its key preconditions—reducing economic inequality and enhancing political equality, and allow for improved participatory democracy at the local level and improved representative democracy at the national level. Indeed, as Thad Williamson, David Imbroscio, and Gar Alperovitz argue, national and international efforts to scale-back the power of capital may directly enhance local democracy by ensuring greater community economic stability and making neighborhoods and cities less subject to the whims of international financial fluctuations, and thus able to more effectively engage in the demanding act of self-government.²⁷⁴

Advocating such dramatic reforms of course invites questions of feasibility. Even if these steps are desirable and feasible (i.e. real humans and real polities could implement and thrive within these arrangements), there remains the problem of how achievable such reforms are in the near term. As Erik Olin Wright discusses in *Envisioning Real Utopias*, viability and achievability are not the same thing. Viability concerns whether radical reforms, if implemented, “would actually generate—in a sustainable, robust manner—the emancipatory consequences that motivated the proposal.”²⁷⁵ Achievability is more specific: could these reforms be implemented in the current historical context? In other words, even if viable, can we actually achieve these goals? These questions, of course, do not have easy answers and we should be thoroughly skeptical of those who claim to resolve them definitively. Whether particular reforms are

²⁷⁴ Thad Williamson, David Imbroscio, and Gar Alperovitz, *Making a Place for Community: Local Democracy in a Global Era* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

²⁷⁵ Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, p. 21.

actually achievable depends on both “consciously pursued strategies” as well as “the trajectory over time of a wide range of social structural conditions that affect the possibilities of success of these strategies.”²⁷⁶ Put differently, the likelihood of achieving the above reforms depends both on the agency of individual and collective actors, whose commitment and energy varies and cannot be predicted in advance, as well as on long-term structural conditions that also evolve in ways that are near impossible to entirely foresee. With this in mind, proposing demanding and radical, but thoroughly viable, reforms is a critical task for the political theorist. As William Connolly argues, overturning capitalism may be too demanding a vision in the near term but envisioning and defending both small and large scale reforms that would, collectively, radically challenge neoliberalism and push towards a more democratic and egalitarian future is a necessity for normative democratic theory. It is in this spirit that I propose these reforms, a nudge towards a future in which they are more achievable than they otherwise would have been.

This also makes clear the unique contribution that participatory democracy can make. If neoliberalism is as serious a problem as I have claimed, then it requires a democratic theory that makes economic power and discourse a central part of its analysis. Furthermore, it also necessitates a vision of institutional reform. The question of economic democracy was and remains at the heart of participatory democratic theory.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 24-25. The proposals I have been offering combine what Wright terms “interstitial” and “symbiotic” strategies of transformation. Interstitial transformation takes place in the interstices where capital and state power are not totalizing—democratizing the workplace, say, or forming consumer cooperatives. Symbiotic strategies involve using the state and cooperating for the purposes of reform; municipal participatory budgeting as well as federal progressive taxation and expansive corporate regulation count as examples here.

Radical and agonistic theories of democracy, as discussed in chapter two, have a more difficult time envisioning such institutional reforms because of their skepticism of institutionalization as such. But it is precisely a participatory theory and practice of democracy that is needed to make the bridge from the radical democratic moments found in experiences such as Occupy Wall Street to the institutionalization of workplace democracy, greater financial regulation, and so forth. In other words, what is needed is not just a theory that critiques present institutions and practices for their lack of democracy (as radical and agonistic democratic theories tend to do) but one that also articulates how present institutions and practices can be *democratized*. This is precisely what participatory democracy does.

In a different vein, participatory democracy also offers a better response to neoliberalism than deliberative democracy. Participatory democracy, as I have articulated it in this chapter, attends not just to formal political equality but also to the manner in which economic inequalities (in income, wealth, power, and access) seep into the political sphere and undermine political equality. Participatory democracy thus attends more effectively than alternatives to the porosity between economy and polity. Once again, the most effective response to this includes a combination of local efforts (workplace democracy) and national and global efforts (regulation, labor law, taxation) none of which have much to do with deliberation.

Participatory democracy can also serve as a powerful supplement to existing representative institutions. On the one hand, it is a radical democratic experiment that seeks to expand direct, powerful mechanisms of citizen participation and decision-making to ordinary citizens. On the other hand, it would not be easy or desirable to

completely supplant representative institutions at the state and federal level. In this sense, participatory democracy can complement and strengthen representative institutions in a manner that minimal theories of democracy cannot account for. Institutions of participatory democracy can change public opinion on a range of issues, particularly by the manner in which they create feelings of community, efficacy, and concern for the common good among participants. In addition, participatory democracy can mobilize and politicize historically disempowered citizens (as seen variously in participatory budgeting, community policing, and New England town halls). Once politicized and empowered, these citizens may participate more regularly and effectively on a range of issues that go beyond local municipal questions. This participatory aspiration is not implausible in light of the available evidence. Participatory democracy can, as Donna Della Porta and others have argued, effectively save representative democracy from its own failings, including declining faith in the legitimacy of its key institutions.²⁷⁷ Only by making their fundamental institutions more participatory can consolidated democracy's see these institutions revitalized. I continue this line of critique in the next chapter by arguing that participatory democracy is uniquely valuable in its ability to create and sustain democratic forms of community via face-to-face participation.

²⁷⁷ See Donatella della Porta, *Can Democracy Be Saved?* For a thoughtful defense of minimal democracy, see Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Limits of Self-Government* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). It is not clear how Przeworski's perspective can account for the failings of minimal democracy, given its hostility to more robust forms of citizen participation. What can an elite democratic theorist tell disillusioned citizens, besides to stop their (unjustified) complaining?

Chapter Five: Embracing Commonality without Erasing Difference: Can We Have Democratic Community in the 21st Century?

“I was eight years old and running with a dime in my hand
Into the bus stop to pick up a paper for my old man
I'd sit on his lap in that big old Buick and steer as we drove through town
He'd tousle my hair and say son take a good look around this is your hometown
This is your hometown.”
-Bruce Springsteen, My Hometown

“Everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned...”
-Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party

“Political theory might be defined in general terms as a tradition of discourse concerned about the present being and well-being of collectivities. It is primarily a civic and secondarily an academic activity. In my understanding this means that political theory is a critical engagement with collective existence and with the political experiences of power to which it gives rise.”
-Sheldon Wolin, The Presence of the Past

Is the ideal of democratic community both viable and desirable in the 21st century? Recent trends in democratic theory, including proponents of deliberative and agonistic democracy, tend to ignore or downplay the value of community and its role in the democratic polity. In this chapter I argue that a revised theory of participatory democracy, with its focus on the democratization of key authority structures, particularly local ones, offers the opportunity to provide some kind of democratic community via sustained forms of face-to-face participation. Through a reading of Rousseau, Barber, Taylor, and Wolin I develop and defend a participatory democratic theory that is more sensitive to democratic community than alternative theories. Indeed, one of the major benefits of expanded democratic participation is its ability to create new and evolving forms of democratic community. In exploring this issue I investigate the role that commonality and difference play in democratic politics, drawing on the above thinkers to develop a vision of a vibrant participatory democratic practice that consists of both

empowering forms of commonality and empowering forms of difference. In doing so I also criticize a variety of forms of commonality and difference that are destructive of democratic aspirations. This chapter thus contributes to ongoing debates regarding democratic participation, plurality and community, and neoliberalism.

The themes addressed in this chapter form an integral part of my answer to the question: what does participation do?²⁷⁸ I argue that democratic participation can offer some buffer against the loss of community without demanding so much that many citizens find it impossible or impractical to participate. Engaging with these theorists of democracy allows us to grapple with the loss of a key good, community, which is not adequately addressed by contemporary democratic theory. In this chapter I also build on arguments from previous chapters concerning the preconditions of effective democratic participation. Not only do citizens need relative material and social equality to participate as equals, they require some form of commonality in order to interact and collaborate effectively as citizens. Participatory democracy can create a virtuous circle by producing (and sustaining) community, and thus making us greater participants in turn.

This chapter continues the critique of neoliberal individualism that I have developed in previous chapters. When I extend my critique here, I should not be construed as arguing that aggregate individual freedom is now greater than it has ever been in America. Such a measurement would be difficult, if not impossible, to

²⁷⁸ In asking these questions, I am drawing on a long tradition of thinkers who have explored the crucial relation between democracy and community. These include, in addition to those just mentioned, Jefferson, Tocqueville, Dewey, Walzer, Sandel, and Putnam. Dewey himself stresses the value of community as a face-to-face type of relation. See Wolin's discussion in *Politics and Vision*.

accomplish satisfactorily.²⁷⁹ Instead, my criticisms focus on the dominant cultural ethos that informs our discussion and practice of politics, work habits, consumption, personal and public values, and so on. Importantly, I shall argue that the exceptionally individualist elements of American culture produce distinct political challenges for the theory and practice of democracy in the US. I therefore am critical of certain democratic theories, particularly agonistic theories of democracy, for their focus on plurality and difference.

The chapter is divided into six parts. In the first I set out a vision of democratic community and explain why it is of central importance for a vibrant and participatory democracy. In the second I draw on the work of Rousseau to provide the groundwork for a participatory democratic theory that attends to community. In the third I shift to the late 20th century, expanding upon Barber's work to demonstrate how a communal participatory politics constitutes a powerful challenge to neoliberal practices and discourses. In the fourth I relate these political arguments to Taylor's discussion of the individual and his claim that individual fulfillment is only possible within the context of meaningful social relations and institutions. In the fifth I expand on these points to argue for a democratic politics that builds empowering forms of commonality, thus enabling

²⁷⁹ In many spheres of American life opportunities for individual self-expression and choice are greater than ever before. By this I mean that there are less and less obstacles impeding our expression of preferences in lifestyle choice: dress, manners, intimate and social relations, consumption habits, cultural engagements, and a wide variety of personal behaviors. But my argument does not hinge on this point. One can alternatively argue that capitalism fosters an individualist ethos while also severely restricting individual behavior in certain key ways. See G.A. Cohen's arguments in *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For instance, he makes the following simple but powerful point: private property means that there are many places I cannot go, on pain of arrest, as well as many resources I cannot have access to, again on pain of arrest.

community, while also allowing space for, and even celebrating, empowering forms of difference and plurality. In the sixth section I engage the agonistic democrats head-on, focusing on the work of Connolly in particular. Here I argue that agonistic democrats have failed to adequately incorporate concerns for community into their democratic theories. These last two sections provide a more extended engagement with theoretical alternatives to my position and explains why they are unsatisfying. This offers me another chance to bolster the overall case for participatory democracy by showing what it can do that no other theory adequately does, attend to community.

What is Community and Why Does it Matter?

What is community? Does it in fact matter? Even if community is valuable, is it specifically valuable for democracy? Does it have anything to do with politics? The Bruce Springsteen song I cited in the epigraph to this chapter begins with a depiction of community. A boy sits on his dad's lap. Grabs a newspaper. They drive through town. Memories of a childhood anchored in neighborhood, place, a sense of shared space, people, practices, habits, events, locations. Family life, tender upbringing. Community. But what does this have to do with politics? This depiction of communal town life is succeeded in the next set of verses by an image of social division. The narrator's childhood is supplanted by the following: "In 65 tension was running high in my high school. There were a lot of fights between the black and white, there was nothing you could do...troubled times had come to my hometown." Suddenly community is political. A history of institutionalized racism lies beneath the surface of much American communal life, now brought to the fore with the civil rights movement. It is important to

note, however, that our narrator, troubled by this racial tension, nevertheless stays. It is his (or her) hometown.

Springsteen traces the American path beautifully from a childhood in the 1950s to an adolescence in the 1960s. The story is not over. In the 1980s the narrator is an adult with a wife and child of his (or her) own. Look at his hometown now: “Main Street’s whitewashed windows and vacant stores...seems like there ain’t nobody wants to come down here no more. They’re closing down the textile mill across the railroad tracks. Foreman says these jobs are going boys and they ain’t coming back to your hometown.” The song concludes with the narrator and spouse contemplating moving “down south” to where jobs are available. An idyllic²⁸⁰ community, a tension-beset community, a decaying post-industrial town that is hardly a community any longer. The arc of community in post-war America. These developments are not the result of forces of nature. They are the product of a series of political and economic decisions, some taken with knowledge of their consequences, others not. The point, subtly articulated in this song, is that community is political. Institutional racism, social tension, inequality, unemployment, the decline of manufacturing; every one of these conditions is interwoven with local, national, and global political and economic developments, and every one of them has had a significant impact on local community life. The neighborhoods that comprise the hometown of Springsteen’s narrator reflect these broader developments. The character of community is shaped by politics and politics is shaped by the character of community. In this section I present an image of democratic community, explain why it is essential for democratic politics, and describe how it is in the midst of a long-term

²⁸⁰ And a somewhat idealized one.

decline. In doing so I aim to show what is at stake, what is being lost, and why it must be preserved.²⁸¹

Community is several things. It is a set of relationships and it is also a space. It involves the ties, places, practices, discourses, and human connections that give meaning, purpose, and a sense of place. Community allows us to be rooted in ties that are empowering (and perhaps also binding) in so far as we share these ties and meanings with others. Community is what allows us to have a common life with other people, what allows us to live in a way that is not transient, purposeless, and aimless. Community fights off the threat that we live a life without duration and destined to end in oblivion. Community, at its best, means knowing and caring about others in an enduring, empowering manner. As G.A. Cohen argues, community is where and how we care about one another and have shared experiences with our fellow family, friends, neighbors, and citizens. It is a space where we nurture non-market relations, relations that are not instrumental and that have the possibility of enduring.²⁸²

Community, in its democratic form, is also a precondition for effective citizenship. We build and create things in common, we participate and deliberate together

²⁸¹ I want to be clear that by invoking “community” I am not necessarily committing myself to the web of positions that emerged in the 1980s and which are sometimes referred to as “communitarian.” There are overlaps and resonances but also significant distinctions, to be developed below.

²⁸² I am suggesting that community fends off the threat of an isolated individual existence. There has, however, been a tendency in much continental philosophy, both its earlier existential variants and more recent post-structuralist varieties, to characterize the human condition in just such desolate, isolated terms. There is a danger that such language casts us as adrift, alone, without meaning, friendship, or community, and thus helps to make it so. We must be careful to not let the neoliberals win the game before it starts, by happily affirming how adrift, isolated, and different we all are, as some political theory is inclined to do. We need to be buoyed instead by what Sheldon Wolin calls the “ever present possibility” of democracy. For Cohen’s thoughts on community, see *Why not Socialism?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

as equals, and this is the arena of shared experiences, language, ideas, culture, and mutual respect that enables us to become participating and roughly equal citizens. As Barber notes, democratic citizens are something like neighbors; they speak and act together without being identical or submerged into a homogenous mass. Community, as noted above, involves non-verbal bonds as well. Democratic community involves the shared connections that enable us to empathize with, listen to, respect, and care for others, as well as to act in a concerted and collective manner on issues of mutual concern. Interest-talk, while not banned from democratic forms of community, can be destructive of community ties. The self-interested citizens that much of liberal individualism takes us to be are not conducive to building shared democratic experiences.²⁸³ Just as the previous chapter argued that rough economic equality is a precondition for effective democratic citizenship, so this chapter argues that meaningful community is a precondition for effective democratic citizenship.

In *Politics and Vision* Wolin offers an image of shared activity in a democracy, the kind of activity democratic community is made of. “Democracy is about the public life of citizens, about ordinary human beings venturing “out” to take part in deliberations over shared concerns, to contest exclusions from the material and ideal advantages of a free society, and to invent new forms and practices.”²⁸⁴ In Wolin’s view democracy necessarily involves a commitment to “public life”: citizenship, appearance, collective deliberation and action on shared concerns, contesting injustice, creation, and how collaborative and communal, face-to-face and personal, mundane but also inventive it is.

²⁸³ See Benjamin Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, p. 129.

²⁸⁴ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, p. 520.

Democracy is rooted in ordinary life. Precisely because of this rootedness our local communal lives are central to its vitality and substance.

These local communal roots and ties have been declining for some time. The dislocation of industrial and post-industrial capitalism means that many people have their lives uprooted, and must find new jobs, neighborhoods, friends, and community on a regular basis. In the US, for an assortment of reasons, it is primarily in our work that we tend to feel empowered and rooted. We find considerable meaning and citizenship primarily through our work. Indeed, as Wolin notes, in our economically dominated polity, to be a citizen means primarily to be employed. But we can of course lose this at any point, particularly in the era of precarity and flexibilization.²⁸⁵ Many figures in 20th century literature grapple with these exact points--much of Kurt Vonnegut's work explores how and where people can find meaning, purpose, respect, and usefulness when (due to automation or outsourcing) they begin to lose the occupations that were the last remaining place they found these things.²⁸⁶

In this discussion it is important to stress that I am not arguing for a return to some idealized past. Although I sympathize in many ways with Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, I ultimately share the same concerns that Barber raises in *The Conquest of Politics*. It is not possible to solve the problems of modernity by returning to a pre-modern world—it is fundamentally irretrievable. Furthermore, we wouldn't really want

²⁸⁵ See the previous chapter and Wolin, *The Presence of the Past* Press, pp.40-50. See also Chapter 1 of Standing's *The Precariat* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011) for thoughts on how precarious labor destroys community and one's sense of identity, shared purpose, and professional ethos.

²⁸⁶ See, for instance, *Player's Piano*; *The Sirens of Titan*; and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*.

to.²⁸⁷ Replacing the problems of modernity with those of feudal Europe or classical Greece is neither a viable nor desirable option. The question, instead, is how to preserve currently existing (but perhaps disappearing) forms of community and how to create new forms for the 21st century. This is difficult because, as Wolin recognizes, our advanced societies are defined by constant change; it is a feature of the postmodern capitalist condition but is contrary to the slow, deliberate pace needed for democratic politics.²⁸⁸ In a culture and economy defined by and deeply celebratory of constant change, Wolin asks whether “a more critical attitude toward change is not necessary if democracy is to be preserved.”²⁸⁹

We should note as well that local community politics can possess both good and bad elements—it can be democratic, egalitarian, and participatory, but also parochial, close-minded, and anti-intellectual. The question is how to nurture the positive elements while weakening the negative ones.²⁹⁰ What we are in danger of losing, then, is not some archaic value. It is our ability to be citizens, to share and have and do and be and participate in common, together, to be *political beings*, to be *participants* in a *democracy*. To be political means precisely being able to do things in common, to attend to the general and common interest, and democracy is arguably its highest form.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, p. 191. Barber also expands on this idea in *A Place for US* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998) when he notes that going back to the ideal past is not possible without also reverting to other much less savory forms of the past as well.

²⁸⁸ See *The Presence of the Past*, particularly pp. 77-78.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 81, and Barber’s thoughtful *The Death of Communal Liberty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), which takes up these questions in the context of Swiss canton democracy.

²⁹¹ See Wolin, *The Presence of the Past*, pp. 139-140.

A loss of community then ultimately means a loss of democracy, of citizenship, of togetherness. If we don't have the common, if we don't have some form of community, we can't be citizens and we can't even be public beings. A sense of shared space, of commonality, is thus necessary for politics (a claim I will develop further in this chapter). Wolin argues that our collective identity has increasingly moved away from being political, from concern with the collective and the public, and towards purely economic concerns and identities. As I will explain later in my discussion of Charles Taylor, individuality requires community. As Bellah et al. claim in their study of late 20th century community ties in America, "the individual self finds its fulfillment in relations with others in a society organized through public dialogue."²⁹² On this view democracy is embodied in relations of community with neighbors and citizens. The question of democratic community is urgent because as Barber recognizes, if we don't fulfill these needs with *democratic* forms of community, there is a real danger that they will be filled by non-democratic forms of community.²⁹³ Participatory democracy offers the best way of nurturing forms of democratic community today. Democratic forms of community are not given, rather they must be constructed. Constructed by participating together as citizens, through things like municipal participatory budgeting, community policing, jury duty, workplace democracy, protests, and public work.

²⁹² Bellah, Robert N., et al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 218.

²⁹³ Barber, *A Place for Us*, p. 22.

Rousseau: Laying the Groundwork for a Communal Participatory democracy

Jean-Jacques Rousseau holds a contested place in political theory. To some he is a civic republican or an early proto-democrat, to others a cautionary tale about the dangers of non-liberal political philosophies. In this section I draw on his work to set the stage for a vision of a participatory democracy that is grounded in robust forms of democratic community. Rousseau offers a welcome antidote to much recent democratic theory, particularly post-structuralist inspired theories of agonistic democracy. While these theories have made valuable contributions to democratic thought, they are also one-sided in their depiction of democratic action.²⁹⁴ Politics is not just about conflict and difference. It also involves the shared, the general, the public good, and what is relevant for all, as I have argued above. Indeed each of the thinkers discussed in this chapter point towards ways of conceiving the political in a Rousseauian vein without sacrificing difference and plurality or destroying the individual. I offer a reading of Rousseau as a central precursor to modern participatory democracy, or as a proto-participatory democrat, which is in keeping with readings offered by Pateman, Barber, Walzer, Miller, and Cohen, and I will build on this shared understanding of his work.²⁹⁵

In particular I want to argue that Rousseau's idea of the general will is an embodiment of community-oriented democratic political thinking. Drawing on Wolin's distinction between politics and the political, I show that Rousseau's general will, in

²⁹⁴ For an excellent discussion of the theoretical and practical limits of post-structuralist democratic theory, see Joseph M. Schwartz, *The Future of Democratic Equality: Rebuilding Social Solidarity in a Fragmented America* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

²⁹⁵ See, for instance, Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*; Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*; Miller, *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1984); Cohen, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Barber, "How Swiss is Rousseau?" *Political Theory* 12, no. 5 (1985) : 475-495.

which we approach democracy through a consideration of what is in the general interest, is exactly how we ought to think as democratic political actors. As I will elaborate below, I am not interested in Rousseau's idea of willing and hope to avoid that can of worms. Rather, my focus is on the *general* part of the general will, and how this form of thinking relates to, indeed even embodies, democratic political action.

This idea requires both specification and emphasis. We are perhaps too aware of the criticisms of Rousseau (they are widely known and largely underwhelming, unless one is a radical liberal individualist) and we also in our agonistic moment see democracy primarily as conflict, protest, difference, and heterogeneity. But it is much more. In fact the general will is in many ways the prototypical way to think politically as a democratic actor. Wolin defines politics as "the legitimized and public contestation, primarily by organized and unequal social powers, over access to the resources available to the public authorities of the collectivity. Politics is continuous, ceaseless, and endless."²⁹⁶ Wolin's definition of politics coincides with what we tend to think of as the everyday activities of interest groups, lobbying organizations, and politicians. In contrast to politics, Wolin claims, "the political is episodic, rare."²⁹⁷ On one reading Wolin's view is quite similar to those of agonistic democrats like Rancière, who draws a similar contrast between what he calls policing (the everyday, hierarchical arrangements of power) and politics (the authentic democratic moment of protest, which bubbles forth here and there). On this reading Rancière's policing is analogous to Wolin's politics and Rancière's politics is analogous to Wolin's conception of the political. I want to suggest, however, that this

²⁹⁶ Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," In *Democracy and Difference*, edited by Seyla Benhabib, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 31.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

way of reading Wolin is misleading. Indeed, I maintain that Wolin's famous essay, "Fugitive Democracy", is much less agonistic than commentators often assume and in fact contains a powerful Rousseauian impulse.

For Wolin, the political refers to "the idea that a free society composed of diversities can nonetheless enjoy moments of commonality when, through public deliberations, collective power is used to promote or protect the well-being of the collectivity."²⁹⁸ Democracy is a particular form of the political, concerned with "the political potentialities of ordinary citizens, that is, with their capacity for becoming political beings through the self-discovery of common concerns and modes of action for addressing them."²⁹⁹ It should be apparent that the political, particularly in its democratic form, is tightly connected to what is common and shared among the citizenry. Democracy appears when citizens identify common concerns and act upon them. To trace the line back to Rousseau, in the democratic experience of the political, the general will is exactly how we should think.

What is the relationship between the general will, on the one hand, and democratic thought, on the other? This is a difficult question to address in part because Rousseau does not offer one rigorous definition of the general will that is then used to structure all future discussion. Rather, he speaks of it in a fragmentary form, offering glimpses here and there through a description of different aspects of the general will. To begin with, Rousseau notes that a general will exists only by virtue of what "different interests have in common." Thus, among the different interests that various groups and individuals may have, there must be at least something in common which "forms the

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

social bond, and, were there no point of agreement among all these interests, no society could exist.” It is out of this shared common interest that the general will is drawn.

According to Rousseau, the general will “tends toward equality” and “considers only the general interest.” Thus, although the people can be wrong in their decisions or opinions, the general will, which is the common good, can never be wrong, by definition. But the people may fail to accurately discern it. The point here is that the general will, more or less, refers to the common or public good, what is of shared and general concern for everyone.³⁰⁰

So what does this have to do with democracy? In the democratic experience of the political, the general will provides a model of how we should think. There is, however, one critical defect in this model: while Rousseau suggests that the general will is discerned through a process of reflection in isolation from others, in a sort of publicly-minded thought experiment, I, like some other scholars, would argue that the general will should be conceived inter-subjectively, that is, as a result of a process of collective deliberation. We should not think of the general will as pre-given or objectively existing outside the thought and deliberation of citizens. In so far as Rousseau suggests as much, he errs. Instead, the general will should be understood as something that is akin to a jury deliberating over a verdict. Just as a jury must weigh the evidence and discuss it collectively before deciding the outcome, so democratic citizens should view the tasks of deliberation and action as tasks aimed at identifying and acting on the general interest. In matters of democracy, therefore, public discussion of political issues should be oriented toward the general, or public interest, of everyone (or as Rousseau might say, what is the

³⁰⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), Book II, Chapters 1-3.

general good). Importantly, this doesn't mean citizens should ignore particularity or try to erase it. Rather, they ought to approach politics as public, democratic citizens, concerned with the shared, general, public good, rather than trying to maximize their own private goods or interests. It is in this respect that the general will offers an image of how we should think, debate, and act as democratic political actors. I thus want to use Rousseau's general will without the baggage—it offers democratic resources without the need to invoke a will.

As Joshua Cohen puts it, for Rousseau the well-constituted state is one where citizens focus more on the public good than their private goods. The general will is the anchor of a democratic polity, which would be “a *free* community of equals because the members, assumed to endorse the common good as the basis for legitimate law, have their own will as a rule.”³⁰¹ While it may seem that such formulations of the general will strip Rousseau's remarks down to the level of mundane insight, its radicalism in an age of neoliberal hegemony should not be understated. To assert that democracy ought to be oriented around the publicly-minded, participatory citizen is precisely to state how undemocratic neoliberalism is. Either democracy is the end-goal and markets are, at best, a mere means to democratic ends, or, as much of the political and economic elite would have it, the reverse is true. As with Cohen's reading, I am not overly concerned with willing, and how collectivities will. I am concerned primarily with affirming the following: The general will is how we should think, deliberate, and act as democratic political actors, and one can say this without relying too heavily on the concept of a *will*. Rousseau is thus best read as a proto-participatory democrat, one who offers key

³⁰¹ Joshua Cohen, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 59, original italics.

resources for thinking about participation, community, representation, and class relations in the democratic polity (we can affirm this and also recognize that he is a paradoxical thinker who offers many different and sometimes contradictory ideas).³⁰² In an era of neoliberalism, Rousseau offers an essential starting point for constructing an egalitarian, community-oriented participatory democracy.

Barber: Participatory democracy as an Antidote to Neoliberalism

Benjamin Barber's work, particularly *Strong Democracy* and *The Conquest of Politics*, offers a Rousseauian vision of democracy that is updated for the late 20th and early 21st century. In this section I examine his diagnosis of modernity and his vision of a strong, participatory democracy as an antidote to neoliberalism. Barber provides important tools for constructing a participatory democratic theory that is attentive to the possibilities for community not in some distant past but in the present world we inhabit. He is thus a useful successor to Rousseau. He also makes a persuasive case that a community-oriented participatory democracy is the most viable alternative to neoliberalism. So what does Barber say?

A commitment to community as a democratic value, Barber argues, implies that citizens come together to establish common meanings and common agendas; it is almost synonymous with democratic politics. He depicts politics as a "collaborative activity"

³⁰² An entirely separate paper could be written on Rousseau's discussion of class relations and their impact on democratic citizenship. Rousseau's works demonstrate a keen understanding of the manner in which material and social inequality undermines the ability of citizens to come together as political equals. See, in particular, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Translated by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992) and *Discourse on Political Economy*.

that aims to attain the public good.³⁰³ As democratic citizens we define ourselves in relation to our community and experience liberty as citizens in our communities.³⁰⁴ This is one of the central values of participatory democracy: it creates community, fosters democratic citizenship, and pushes back against neoliberal alienation. The problem of modernity, which is accentuated today, is that the bonds “holding together free communities are growing slack.”³⁰⁵ We face ever-increasing obstacles³⁰⁶ to the kind of community-based democratic citizenship that Barber envisions. It is therefore necessary to be able to carve out a small public space for democratic politics to flourish so as to push back against the neoliberal market takeover of everything. Participation and community reinforce one another and are capable of creating the kind of virtuous democratic circle emphasized in previous chapters.³⁰⁷

An important aspect of Barber’s discussion of democratic community consists of an extended critique of liberalism, particularly in its most individualist forms. He begins with a depiction of modernity, both its gains and potential losses: “the liberation the race has sought from traditional societies weighed down with the gravity of custom, hierarchy, and bondage to nature and to natural purpose turns out, when won, to entail homelessness, arbitrariness, and the impossibility of creating a meaningful life in the absence of natural purpose.”³⁰⁸ Modernity, particularly the individualist liberalism it produced, leaves us asocial, in a state of “anomie”, alienated from our fellow citizens and

³⁰³ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, p. 21.

³⁰⁴ Barber, *Strong Democracy*.

³⁰⁵ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, p. 19.

³⁰⁶ The economic obstacles to citizenship are discussed in the previous chapter.

³⁰⁷ Barber stresses this point in *Strong Democracy*, p. 155.

³⁰⁸ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, p. 179. See also *The Death of Communal Liberty* for a practical illustration of what this looks like.

our own identity as public, democratic citizens.³⁰⁹ This is what we are losing, according to Barber. Democratic political community, on the other hand, provides a more compelling expression of our “self-realization.” We are deeply interdependent creatures, and democratic politics is much more capable than alternatives of recognizing this and constructing legitimate forms of public power to deal with it. Drawing on Rousseau, Barber argues, “political community may express human self-realization in ways more satisfying to our disposition toward freedom than can libertarian solitude.”³¹⁰ The crux of democratic politics is that it involves finding a common purpose and creates commonality. In other words, commonality is not pre-given, a substance we possess as innate traits or imposed through the machinery of totalitarian systems of government. Rather, it is the product of democratic practice, which is collaborative and thus constructive of common meaning and purpose.³¹¹

Barber also modernizes Rousseau and corrects some of the defects of his thought. Barber’s strong democracy is pluralistic, defined by pragmatism. It works through and embraces conflict and disagreement without fetishizing them, emphasizing a citizenry created and sustained through common action, rather than blood or nationality. Discussing the sorts of connections that democratic participation can create, Barber notes that “this sort of bonding, which emphasizes common procedures, common work, and a shared sense of what a community needs to succeed rather than monolithic purposes and

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 105.

³¹¹ See *Strong Democracy*, p. 131.

ends, serves strong democracy most successfully.”³¹² Our commonality is produced through common talk and activity; it is part of the democratic process, not external to it.

Barber thus anticipates some of the concerns of agonistic democrats, which I will discuss shortly. It is important to note now that his subtle democratic theory, community-oriented but not unitary, is often taken as an example of an overly unifying vision of democratic politics.³¹³ Readers of Barber will find no such ideas in his actual texts. His democratic vision is not totalizing. It is instead open, reflexive, and dynamic. It grants considerable space to conflict, difference, and plurality.³¹⁴ The difference between Barber and later agonistic democrats, which will be explored further in the following sections, is that he is also deeply attuned to the value of community and what its loss entails for democratic prospects. Barber throughout his work clearly distinguishes his community-focused, participatory democracy from a totalizing monolithic ideal, which he terms “unitary democracy.” About this he is unambiguous. Unitary forms of direct democracy are impractical and undesirable. Only a communal, participatory democracy is suitable to

³¹² Ibid., p. 244.

³¹³ Iris Marion Young explicitly takes Barber to be advocating a unitary public sphere in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. In a distinct but related vein, Seyla Benhabib claims that Barber’s participatory perspective cannot protect individual rights in the manner that deliberative theories can. See “Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy,” in *Democracy and Difference*, edited by Seyla Benhabib, 67-94 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Both charge Barber, in various ways, with advocating a participatory democratic vision that cannot create public forms of democratic community without sacrificing plurality and respect for difference. Barber’s perspective is subtle enough, however, to accommodate values of community and plurality.

³¹⁴ It is also important to ask the following questions: Should all difference be embraced, respected, or tolerated? Should we tolerate racist speech? Sexism? Other forms of difference destructive of democratic commonality? In an era that celebrates every form of tolerance we should ask whether every ethos, every creed, every practice and organization deserves such generosity, particularly if it undermines the democratic values to which we are committed. Wendy Brown’s engaging book *Regulating Aversion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) explores some of the limits of tolerance in the 21st century.

the challenges that we face. At this point we can assess Barber's contribution to the project I am advocating. He is a radical democrat in the following sense: he supports a strong, voluntarist vision of democracy in which citizens deliberate and act collectively in the face of uncertainty. Where science and philosophy cannot provide certain answers to pressing questions of public concern, the institutions and procedures of participatory democracy constitute the most legitimate and effective mechanisms for reaching decisions. Indeed, Barber's ideal is a world that is *radically* democratic, in the sense that democratic practices and ideas should be much more widespread than they are today and also in the sense that this produces radical change in how we think, act, and envision ourselves, as individuals and as a "we." His faith is buttressed by the belief (which I share) that active, concrete political experience is the most important source of sound, prudent political judgment.

Going back to Jefferson, we can say, as Barber does, that the solution to the problems of democracy is more democracy. Specifically, the solution to the problem of individualism, drift, anomie, meaninglessness, a lack of roots, and the loss of community is to expand democratic practice. Democracy, particularly the local, participatory, and collaborative kind, offers the best hope for revising and recreating forms of community suitable to democracy in the 21st century.³¹⁵

³¹⁵ In an essay written in the 1990s Jane Mansbridge bluntly claims, "Participation does make better citizens. I believe it, but I can't prove it. And neither can anyone else," from "Does Participation Make Better Citizens?" *CPN: Civic Renewal Movement. Online@UW: Electronic Publishing Group*. I don't think this characterization is correct in 2015. As discussed in chapter 3, the practice of participatory budgeting, both in Brazil and in many other locations, provides some evidence that participatory democracy can meet the aspirations of its proponents, both in terms of improving citizenship and in developing democratic forms of community. See Brian Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability*, and Leonardo

In the title to this section I suggested that Barber's participatory democracy is an "antidote" to neoliberalism. Let us now examine this claim. A critique of neoliberalism can be made from a number of perspectives. Barber's critique works as a useful complement to the criticism of neoliberalism offered by analytic philosophers like G.A. Cohen. This is not to understate the importance of contributions such as Cohen's. His body of work offers a wide-ranging critique of capitalism. Using the tools of analytic philosophy, Cohen has compellingly argued that major philosophical defenses of right-wing libertarian individualism, as in the work of Robert Nozick, are much less successful than they claim to be. Indeed, as Cohen demonstrates, the arguments offered on behalf of libertarianism frequently fail on their own terms. Such work is essential to challenging neoliberalism by meeting its proponents directly.³¹⁶ There are also limitations on what this internal critique can accomplish and it is here that Barber and others serve as a nice complement.

Note first how Barber's response to neoliberalism is to construct a different language or discourse (as Wittgenstein would say, to play a different language game). Barber speaks the participatory democratic language of citizenship, public, participation, democracy, the common good, community, collective action, common agendas, collaborative activity, and meaning. This is a different world than the one neoliberalism constructs and one far more suited to democratic politics. This is how we should talk as democratic citizens. The language and imagery of the market, if it must be used at all,

Avritzer, *Participatory Institutions in Democratic Brazil* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). See also the study on the impacts of jury duty, John Gastil, E. Pierre Deess, Philip J. Weiser, Cindy Simmons, *The Jury and Democracy: How Jury Deliberation Promotes Civic Engagement and Political Participation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³¹⁶ See in particular the essays found in *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*.

should be confined to the most limited market transactions. Listen to Barber describe market activity: “Markets advance individualistic, not social, goals and they encourage us to speak the language of ‘I want,’ not the language of ‘we need.’ Markets preclude ‘we’ thinking and ‘we’ action of any kind at all, trusting in the power of aggregated individual choices (the ‘invisible hand’) somehow to secure the common good... Consumers speak the divisive rhetoric of ‘me.’ Citizens invent the common language of ‘we.’”³¹⁷

Every thinker I draw from in this chapter, particularly Rousseau, Barber, Taylor, and Wolin, refuses to be drawn into the market discourse of neoliberalism, constructing instead their own languages of democratic practice and citizenship.³¹⁸ This gives them the tools to challenge neoliberal perspectives and arguments in a manner that is distinct from that offered by analytic philosophy. Whereas G.A. Cohen carefully breaks down the libertarian individualist arguments of Robert Nozick, Barber constructs an entirely different theoretical edifice and shows how much more plausible and appealing it is than that offered by Nozick. Rather than demonstrate how a specific step in an argument has gone awry (which is a valuable task in its own right), Barber is able to show how the entire foundation of Nozick’s philosophy, including its implicit assumptions, is wildly implausible. His work thus serves as a valuable complement to predominant approaches in analytic philosophy. It can be hoped that these multiple avenues of critique challenge the many dimensions of neoliberalism more effectively than one line of criticism can.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Barber, *A Place for Us*, pp. 72-73.

³¹⁸ Rousseau of course is writing before the advent of neoliberalism but he is a strong critic of the rationalist enlightenment individualism predominant in his day, what we now think of as classic liberalism.

³¹⁹ See, for comparison, Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, and G.A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*.

Charles Taylor: The Communally Embedded Democratic Citizen

Charles Taylor shows in compelling detail how the best features of modernity, including some version of democracy and a socially-minded version of the modern individual, are historical achievements, not universal features of human life. Moreover, he demonstrates that they are also embedded in a variety of social and cultural institutions which sustain and support them. Thus, contrary to liberal individualist philosophers, who would envision the human individual as a fully developed, largely autonomous and pre-social creature, hampered by the necessary evil of limited government, Taylor stresses the social construction and history of the modern individual. More important for our purposes, Taylor affirms what he calls the “social idea of man”, which dates back to Aristotle and stresses that we don’t develop our full human capacities unless we are situated in a society.³²⁰ This idea has been variously referred to as the embedded, situated, embodied, or rooted self. Bellah et al repeat this: the individual can only be affirmed in relation to society and within a context of social support.³²¹ We are deeply interdependent creatures, our ability to be fulfilled individuals requires sustaining social structures.³²² Also, our ability to engage in collective self-government is a crucial expression of our freedom. It is being challenged, perhaps even lost, as I have argued above.

³²⁰ Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 191. The classic statement of the autonomous individual is found in John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980) and Robert Nozick’s *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) is a definitive modern restatement.

³²¹ Robert N. Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, p. 144.

³²² Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, pp. 205-207.

According to Taylor, “we are threatened with a kind of anomie, in which we cease to believe in the norms governing our social life, but have no alternative but to live by them nonetheless. There is a crisis of allegiance to our society.”³²³ Modern social problems have placed demands on the state that have led to the growth of large bureaucracies and a corresponding loss of faith in government institutions. In addition, most work is experienced as stultifying and oppressive.³²⁴ Increasingly we experience our world as individuals separated from the major institutions within which we are embedded. We don’t trust or believe in the large bureaucracies (both government and corporate) that govern so much of our lives. As a range of thinkers have noted, we are isolated individuals who are nevertheless situated within large, often totalizing institutions.³²⁵ In our atomistic world, we become more mobile, less attached, and judge all social relations according to their contribution to personal fulfillment. That is, we do not see our social commitments as goods in themselves. Lacking strong norms of solidarity, our communities fragment. The last remaining community, Taylor argues, is the nuclear family. However, even it is strained and beginning to unravel (as evidenced in high divorce rates, among other things). The problem, suggested by Taylor but not fully explored, is that if everyone prioritizes the pursuit of personal fulfillment and judges all other goods instrumentally by this standard, the resulting behavior undermines both personal and collective fulfillment. As Taylor says in a slightly different vein, individualistic capitalism tends to supplant the bases of its own legitimacy.³²⁶ Similarly,

³²³ Ibid., p. 282.

³²⁴ Ibid., pp. 278-279.

³²⁵ In addition to Taylor, one finds this idea, in various ways, in the work of Foucault, Connolly, Wolin, and William Corlett.

³²⁶ Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 288.

Bellah et al note in *Habits of the Heart* the “tendency of individualism to destroy its own conditions.”³²⁷

What are the political implications of these remarks? The ideology of radical individualism characteristic of neoliberalism undermines public and collective institutions, practices, and identities. These are the very things that empower politically, that enable citizens to engage in common action as democratic actors. Democratic citizens need supportive family and friend structures, meaningful neighborhoods and local communities, some form of roots and ties, as well as vibrant and legitimate public institutions whereby they can be a democratic *we*, a *demos*, rather than market actors. The strong forms of individualism fostered by neoliberalism (and connected to modernity much more broadly, as Taylor shows) create fragmentation, anomie, and tear away long-standing roots. These ties that bind are also the ties that empower. Put differently, neoliberalism tears at the institutions underpinning the modern individual and the *demos*. Strong forms of individualistic capitalism are self-defeating. Not only do they undermine the material bases of political equality, they undermine the very possibility of a cohesive and functioning social order. A society in which the majority of citizens are chasing after an ever decreasing number of upper-middle class jobs while a tiny fraction of the population lives in isolated enclaves, able to purchase not only luxury but private security (think gated communities) and desired political outcomes (think *Citizens United* and *McKutcheon*) is not a democracy.

More specifically, neoliberal individualism undermines the ability of the individual to develop as a participatory, educated citizen. Pateman and Kaufman stress

³²⁷ Robert N. Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, p. 150.

that this is one of the main benefits of participatory democracy, that it produces such empowered citizens. But they can't really exist, and certainly can't be sustained, if their supporting institutions are decaying. In a perceptive study of old ethnic neighborhoods in St. Paul, Minnesota, Harry Boyte notes that relative economic equality was a critical factor in the development of these communities.³²⁸ Neighborhood residents were not wealthy by any stretch of the imagination but what they shared was a common economic situation. While this still exists in many neighborhoods, it is less and less true of the United States as a whole. Gilded Age income inequality not only undermines political equality, it shreds the shared experience that makes community possible.

Community in the 21st Century: Empowering through Commonality, Empowering through Difference

The need for both community and plurality is a constitutive tension for democratic theory and practice, and it suggests a number of interrelated questions: How do we balance the democratic need for rough material and social equality with the (valuable) fact of plurality in today's world? How can we develop and sustain shared values, projects, language, time, and space, (what we might collectively refer to as "community") without undermining the space for individual expression? Can we have rooted practices and habits that empower without closing off the possibility of evolution and change? Community-oriented democratic thinkers, and I include here Rousseau, Barber, Taylor, Wolin, and Walzer, correctly stress the preconditions for direct participation in an egalitarian, democratic politics, which include a substantial degree of

³²⁸ Harry C. Boyte, *Community is Possible* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984).

equality (educational and material) and cultural-linguistic commonality. It goes without saying that these preconditions remain in many respects unsatisfied in the United States and other democracies today. Alternately, agonistic democratic thinkers, such as Young, Connolly, Honig, Mouffe, and Rancière, call our attention to the dangers of eliminating difference and the undemocratic potentialities inherent in the drive for greater unity and homogeneity.

What is needed, stresses Wolin, is a collective identity that can “give generous expression to differences” and “assume a significant fund of shared symbols and representations.”³²⁹ This is a delicate tension, which has no final resolution and remains an ongoing, precarious balancing act between what are often competing values. This tension also appears in competing conceptions of participatory democracy, most notably in conceptions that emphasize individual self-development,³³⁰ on the one hand, and those that prioritize collective self-government,³³¹ on the other. These are not contradictory, however, and participatory democracy of course concerns both, as individual-citizen development is co-constitutive with a public community of citizenry.

I will provide an analysis that demonstrates how the drive for community and the celebration of plurality can be disempowering, and thus undemocratic, in their own ways. A polity with too much difference and plurality is isolating and productive of an atomistic individualism, which undermines the possibility of engaging in collective action. Current liberal democracies allow considerable scope for self-expression and cultural plurality without producing any corresponding sense of political or economic empowerment.

³²⁹ Wolin, *The Presence of Past*, p. 16.

³³⁰ As seen, via Carole Pateman, in John Stuart Mill, as well as Students for a Democratic Society and the stress on what was called a “democracy of individual participation.”

³³¹ i.e. Rousseau and Barber.

Furthermore, without some forms of commonality (similarities in education, social status, and cultural understanding), citizens will not see themselves as empowered members of a shared democratic polity. If people are too different, if they do not have some things in common, they cannot come together and participate effectively as equal citizens. Our postmodern moment tends to indiscriminately embrace difference and plurality, but certain forms of difference are disempowering. Most obviously, differences in education, wealth, and social status are differentially empowering in ways antithetical to democratic citizenship. In the words of Joseph Schwartz, “difference is not empowering if affluent suburbanites feel no common bonds with residents of the inner city, with the immigrants who care for their children, or with deindustrialized workers experiencing economic and social dislocation.”³³² It is not clear, on the face of it, that polities should celebrate difference *as such*. We don't want to reify difference. At the same time, there are clear ways in which homogeneity can be disempowering or oppressive. The desire for homogeneity is anti-democratic in the sense that it produces types of conformism that destroy the thoughtful, reflective, and engaged habits of mind that ground robust conceptions of democratic citizenship. In efforts to correct this first problem (too much difference), one often finds a tendency to suppress difference and seek certainty in sameness. This hope for community, moreover, can take on oppressive forms, of which the fascist drive for a unified national identity built on blood is the most horrific, but not sole, instance. The desire for unity also neglects the problems of political and social inequality that result from racial, gender, class, educational, and status inequalities. There is a very obvious, if perhaps overstated, danger that Rousseauian conceptions of

³³² Joseph Schwartz, *The Future of Democratic Equality: Rebuilding Social Solidarity in a Fragmented America*, p. 185.

the general will may enforce a false homogeneity. If there is a single, preconstituted general will, why even have participation? Once we have a general will, who needs politics?

What a participatory politics demands is empowering forms of both community and plurality. First, it requires what I call *empowering commonality*, whereby democratic polities attempt to create political equality, in terms of a shared set of common characteristics, such as similar education, wealth, and social status, and thus equal political efficacy/comfort in participation. These are democratically constructive forms of commonality. They are distinct from what might be called unity; whereas unity seeks to absorb or destroy difference, commonality can coexist with some difference, creating the conditions for equal political participation without eliminating particularity or imposing uniformity.³³³ Thus, they are empowering commonalities. As Pateman notes, “once industry is recognized as a political system in its own right then it is clear that a substantive measure of economic equality is necessary.”³³⁴ In other words, political equality presupposes not only a substantial amount of material equality but a broader shared set of commonalities. They are both conditions that foster participatory democratic practice but also likely outcomes of such a practice and thus have the potential to develop positive feedback loops. This idea has many proponents, from Jefferson, who stressed the educational virtues of direct citizen participation (local institutions as “laboratories of democracy”), to Tocqueville, who notes that democracy involves a certain leveling and sameness of social condition, in terms of dress, behavior,

³³³ We might suggest that commonality is a modern, democratic value, while unity is a traditional value whose only modern instantiation is found in fascism.

³³⁴ I.e. material equality is a precondition of equal participation. See Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, p. 107.

talk, and values. Rather than being a hindrance to democracy, this condition of social equality contributes to its effective enactment. This kind of commonality allows us to come together, participate, and understand one another. Participatory democracy both presupposes and also helps to produce empowering commonality. If people are not empowered to be equal citizens, they can't have democratic citizenship, and thus can't achieve democracy. Participatory democracy's value is that it stresses the importance of developing democratic practices and institutions that will help to create a substantial degree of empowering commonality while providing the materials for a reflexive development of further political equality.

Difference is also valuable in its own right. A democratic polity requires empowering forms of plurality, what I call *empowering difference*, whereby individuals and groups can debate, argue, dissent, and express difference, the uncommon, and the unexpected. How can we have art, culture, vibrancy, or social life, without these forms of expression and difference? How can we, more fundamentally, speak of politics, without difference and disagreement? The community-oriented participatory democratic visions sketched above all draw on (and produce) commonality for democratic sustenance while also leaving space for, and even encouraging, many forms of difference and plurality. Coming at this question from the opposite side, an agonistic post-structuralist such as Ernesto Laclau can recognize that a society only based on "pluralism and differentiality" would "lack any kind of common symbolic framework, and would not, actually, be a society at all."³³⁵ But the difference between my position and the view

³³⁵ Ernesto Laclau, "The Future of Radical Democracy," in *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack*, edited by Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen (New York: Manchester University Press, 2005).

of an agonistic democrat like Laclau is more than just a matter of emphasis. As noted earlier, American citizens are losing their ability to share things, to be public, to have things in common, and to participate in politics as citizens concerned with the public good. Similarly, agonistic democrats see normalization everywhere but it is not clear that this is so.³³⁶ Or, differently, neoliberal normalization produces subjects who are docile, scared, passive, atomistic, precarious, and isolated, but also capable of, even obsessed with expressing and affirming their difference and individuality. So, stressing difference and plurality is perfectly compatible with neoliberal normalization, indeed the past quarter-century of advertising suggests that corporate America contributes to the production of subjects capable of identifying as unique, independent individuals.³³⁷ Corporate advertisers were perhaps the first to recognize the potency of the 1960s imagery of individual freedom. As Wolin recognizes, “the fashion and advertising industries discovered that opposition could be appropriated, then marketed as a provocative “attitude,” and converted into profitability.”³³⁸ Whereas such attitudes were rebellious, even revolutionary, challenges to 1950s conformism, they are now a celebrated element of neoliberal capitalism.

To take one particularly iconic corporate example, consider the recent television advertisements for the Apple iPad Air 2. These advertisements are a compelling example to consider because they demonstrate what normalization looks like in the neoliberal era,

³³⁶ See, for instance, some of the arguments on normalization in William Connolly’s *Politics and Ambiguity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

³³⁷ This is not meant as a direct critique of Foucault, who is an influence on most agonistic democrats. Rather, it is to suggest that neoliberal normalization forces individualism upon us. It celebrates difference. Democratic theories that center on plurality and a critique of Marx may not be well-suited to challenging political and economic inequality in the 21st century.

³³⁸ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, p. 523.

when individuals are told they must be different, distinct, individual, innovative, and evolving, rather than to avoid these things. Instead of being pressured to conform, neoliberal normalization pressures people to be adaptive, innovative, self-responsible individuals. In this minute long television advertisement one sees the perfect embodiment of the individualist, tech-savvy ethos of the millennial generation. To the driving, up-tempo rhythm of The Orwells “Who Needs You,” the advertisement depicts men and women in their 20s and 30s engaging in an assortment of activities, some collaborative, others not, all involving the iPad. Two things stand out: first, the commercial presents an image of constant change, innovation, and ingenuity, as it flashes not one but many images across the screen³³⁹ and, second, it repeatedly pauses to focus in on the faces of the various actors and actresses, who are making eye-contact with the camera and affirming their individual identity. In addition, The Orwells’ song itself verbally expresses this ethos. The anti-authoritarian imagery of the song, with lines such as “You better burn that flag/ ‘Cause it ain’t against the law” and “You better help the children/ Let ‘em have some fun,” combined with its anti-militarism, “You better join the army/ I said, “No thank you, dear old Uncle Sam”” seems to express a progressive message that in many ways harkens back to the 1960s. The problem, and the striking irony, is that the anti-authoritarian ethos of the 1960s has been repurposed for the sake of neoliberal capitalism. Apple brilliantly presents itself as individualist, anti-authoritarian, and affirming of creativity and 21st century ingenuity. And to many of its American consumers, and its relatively few highly paid Silicon Valley employees, it may indeed

³³⁹ Contrast this with some car commercials, which focus on one image of mountainous driving to stress a rugged, rural individualism that appeals to an older generation of Americans.

embody those values. But of course Apple is not an outsider, a rebel, or a corporate incarnation of Martin Luther King. It is an enormous for-profit corporation, relying on a massive industrial army of exploited factory workers in East Asia to produce and distribute its products for the purpose of making a profit and pleasing the board of directors that represents its shareholders. The image of rebellion is a consumerist illusion. It is a guise made to sell products, to market an appealing lifestyle to young middle and upper class Americans. The point is not that agonistic democrats are uncritical supporters of corporate capitalism—of course they are not. The point, rather, is that agonistic democrats fail to see the overlap between their depiction of democratic politics and the behavior of the neoliberal subject. “Individuality, innovation, rebellion, difference.” Is this an Apple ad or a passage from Derrida?³⁴⁰

Contrary to these images of perpetual change, participatory democracy is in some important sense conservative, as Wolin and Barber realize. “Substantive democracy—equalizing, participatory, communalizing—is antithetical to everything that a high-reward, meritocratic society stands for.”³⁴¹ Its aim is to slow things down, to push back against the relentless drive of global capitalism to accelerate, undo, revise, redo, and rip apart.³⁴² Back in 1848 Marx and Engels characterized the imperatives of global

³⁴⁰ Sheldon Wolin, in a provocative essay, notes, “conservatives and postmodernists alike are antistatist, except that conservatives know what some postmodernists have forgotten, that multiple centers mean multiple masters.” See “Political Theory: From Vocation to Invocation,” In *Vocations of Political Theory*, edited by Jason A. Frank and John Tambornino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 15.

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 20.

³⁴² Steven Bilakovics characterizes Wolin as developing two visions of democracy, one archaic, the other fugitive and radical. The slow, local, deliberate, face-to-face, communal, participatory, and institutional features of Wolin’s “archaic democracy” are exactly what I am drawing on in this chapter. I differ from Bilakovics, however, in my reading of these two impulses in Wolin. Whereas Bilakovics sees them as posing two

capitalism as follows: “Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions...the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.”³⁴³

The totalizing power of capital threatens democracy. Wolin puts the point succinctly: “The crux of the problem is that high-technology, globalized capitalism is radically incongruent with democracy.”³⁴⁴ This is why, as I argue in this chapter, participatory democracy requires community. Building commonality, and thus democratic community, is a challenge to neoliberal capitalism. It has to deliver meaningful forms of shared experience to produce community that in turn can empower us to further act together by building on our commonality. This is not an appeal to some pre-given or essentialist identity, be it tribal, national, religious, or ethnic. It is rather a created community, constructed through participatory democratic practices that build on and create forms of commonality. Because democratic community does not require unity, it presumes and allows the space for difference to exist within it. Indeed, it celebrates some forms of difference without fetishizing difference as such. Though it is almost sacrilegious to say, a participatory democratic ethos identifies more with the thoughtful Athenian citizen-juror, weighing the case for and against Socrates, than with Socrates himself, alone and proud before people whom he may or may not consider as peers.

extremes, equally unrealizable in the world today, I see two ideal types that capture important features of radical and participatory democratic politics. See *Democracy Without Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

³⁴³ *The Marx and Engels Reader*, p. 476.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

To state things less provocatively, the central task is to develop ways of building commonality without destroying (or being resentful towards) difference. William Connolly, whose work I engage in the next section, offers a powerful example of how to be respectful towards difference. But it is unnecessary to be so reluctant to talk about commonality, citizenship, and the public good. Again, to ignore these topics or subject them to relentless critique is basically to do neoliberalism's job for it. Barber asks, "Is a civic space imaginable that is neither radically individualistic nor suffocatingly communitarian?"³⁴⁵ I have answered in the affirmative, setting out a vision of a participatory democracy that draws on (and produces) commonality for its democratic sustenance while also leaving space for, and even encouraging, many forms of difference and plurality. As Wolin notes, "democracy is first and foremost about equality: equality of power and equality of *sharing* in the benefits and values made possible by *social cooperation*." The democratic experience of the political requires at once "preserving commonality while legitimating and reconciling differences."³⁴⁶ Community and plurality allow space for the expression of commonality and difference in the context of a shared democratic polity. Barber suggests, "rather than denying difference, democratic commonality acknowledges and incorporates it."³⁴⁷ Thus, while these values are in tension, they are not mutually exclusive. They constitute instead a productive, dialectical tension. This tension, I have argued, needs to be balanced rather than resolved.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Barber, *A Place for Us*, p. 48.

³⁴⁶ Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated*, p. 61, my italics.

³⁴⁷ Barber, *A Place for Us*, p. 117.

³⁴⁸ In bringing together participatory democratic theory and radical-agonistic democratic theory, I am drawing on the at times irresolvable tension between the former's emphasis on institutionalization and commonality and the latter's emphasis on rupture and difference. In doing so, I am claiming that this tension can be useful for political theory.

Democracy requires both agreement and disagreement, conformity and dissent, consensus and dissensus.

Is Community Talk troubling? Responding to the Concerns of the Agonistic Democrats

I have chosen the above thinkers, rather than some more fashionable ones, because they grapple directly with issues of community, the public good, and the common. At the same time, they are skeptical of many branches of liberalism, even its post-structuralist variants. So what alternatives are there? What kind of criticisms might my perspective run up against? What have other theorists said with regards to my favored interlocutors? Many deliberative democrats are too caught up in analytic philosophy's obsession with reason-giving and abstract rationality; "expounding on how democratic deliberation might emulate a graduate philosophy seminar" rather than attending to real world problems.³⁴⁹ For instance, we might ask of them whether bad reason-giving, while important, is really our most pressing concern.³⁵⁰ In a world of structural racism, poverty, massive material and political inequality, corporate capture of politics, and mass

Examples of other works that rely on tensions as a central concept include Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); J. Peter Euben, *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Daniel Brunstetter, *Tensions of Modernity: Las Casas and His Legacy in the French Enlightenment* (New York: Routledge, 2012). A Derridean perspective may be skeptical of my use of terms such as commonality/difference but I remain unconvinced by the alternatives. Whether we think of these concepts as binary or as existing on a continuum they remain unamenable to any final resolution and thus have to be balanced in *tension* with one another.

³⁴⁹ Quote from Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Preface to the Expanded Edition, pp. XIX-XX.

³⁵⁰ I am aware of the irony of making this point during Presidential campaign season, when lack of evidence or carefully constructed argument is especially on display among aspiring candidates.

incarceration, should the absence of reasons and justification command our attention?³⁵¹

It would take an entire book, however, to adequately tease out the overlap, shared concerns, and significant differences between the many varieties of deliberative democracy and my participatory democracy, so I will (in a move perhaps unsatisfying to some) bracket these questions and move on to what I see as the more pressing challenge.³⁵² It comes from agonistic democracy, including some of the thinkers who I have drawn upon most heavily in previous chapters.

Agonistic democracy, unlike deliberative democracy, traces its routes to traditions in continental philosophy, particularly structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Deleuze. Agonistic democrats have engaged in a project of challenging appeals to collective identity as inherently exclusionary; indeed, they have become so scared of “we” talk that they can't properly attend to community, the public, and collective identity. In so far as they combat these things they tread dangerously close to siding with neoliberalism and against progressive, egalitarian democracy. (I am agreeing with Jodi Dean here).³⁵³ However, they have been deservedly influential in

³⁵¹ Marc Stears' *Demanding Democracy* offers an excellent discussion of the manner in which social movements have had to rely not just on deliberative reason-giving but on boycotts, protests, symbolic action, electoral and legislative campaigns, brilliant rhetoric, and civil disobedience to achieve substantive democratic reforms. In addition, as Stears argues, these were not temporary tactics to construct a deliberative future. They were essential to the long-term strategy and collective identity of the participants.

³⁵² For a very thoughtful discussion of the relations and substantial disagreements between participatory and deliberative democracy, see Emily Hauptmann, “Can Less Be More? Leftist Deliberative Democrats’ Critique of Participatory democracy,” *Polity* 33, no. 3 (2001) : 397-421.

³⁵³ Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). Dean chides the post 1960s Left for its retreat from the state, its celebration of powerlessness, and its inability to engage in effective collective action. She thus criticizes much post-structuralist political theory for its focus on challenging and deconstructing collective identities.

democratic theory, and their influence is felt throughout this project. This section thus focuses on them and engages in an act of respectful, agonistic pushback. William Connolly formulates the most coherent challenge, in my view, though Chantal Mouffe and Iris Marion Young have made important contributions as well.

William Connolly specifically engages many of these concerns in his exceptional *Identity/Difference*. First, he recognizes that there are “enabling commonalities” that empower us, that we need a “politics of the common good” and “a common language, institutional setting, set of traditions” and “political forum” for politics. I agree very much. He then goes on to suggest that these forms of commonality always contain “subjugations and cruelties.”³⁵⁴ In other words, all claims of community and commonality require critical scrutiny. We must always be open to critique and reworking so as to expose, contest, and remove those cruelties and injustices that may be a significant part of our current common identity. Again, I agree very much. For example, in so far as those who identify as/are identified as transgendered are excluded from current conceptions of American collective identity, we must work to remake our sense of ourselves so that it includes all such persons. This point is both elementary and extremely important.

The point where Connolly and I disagree is that, unlike him, I think the democratic community-oriented perspective I endorse is up to his challenge. Although he is a respectful interlocutor with Taylor and Wolin, Connolly is hesitant to fully embrace the community-focused aspects of their thought because of his concern for the exclusions and cruelties inherent in all forms of collective identity. I suggest the following response:

³⁵⁴ Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, pp. 93-94.

Taylor, Barber, and Wolin all offer a vision, on the one hand, of a strongly democratic, communal political experience, and, on the other hand, provide the intellectually necessary resources to engage in collective revision, self-critique, and reform. Their theories allow room for precisely what Connolly recognizes needs to happen. The open, reflective, democratic politics they champion does not envision a closed, static, and uncritical community. Rather, it is one that involves empowering forms of commonality and shared language and meaning, as well as common projects, while also allowing via the participatory democratic process the culture and openness to reflection that can provide the needed reforms. In other words, participatory democracy is not a finished project but one that is capable of, and requires, space for continual revision and reform. What I am suggesting here may also have some similarities with the reflective patriotism one finds in Cornel West or Richard Rorty, in which democratic citizens strive to achieve their country's best impulses, as exemplified in its art, ideals, and political practices. American democracy as radical aspiration, an unfulfilled promise, rather than a conservative, complacent achievement.³⁵⁵

Some of Connolly's other, related criticisms are less generous. At times he conflates any desire with community for a desire to have total harmony, an impulse to impose an oppressive homogeneity onto a world of people not predisposed to be harmonious. Connolly characterizes Taylor's view of democratic politics in the following terms: politics is "a gathering together of disparate forces into a shared purpose realized in common, deflating the corollary idea of politics as a perpetual contestation that prevents injuries and injustices within them from becoming too naturalized, rationalized,

³⁵⁵ See Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in 20th century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) and Cornel West *Democracy Matters*.

or grounded in a higher direction of being.”³⁵⁶ Community, of course, need not have such an anti-pluralist tinge. It is not at all clear why people gathering together in common *necessarily* damages or deflates pluralistic contestation. Public, *democratic* experiences of community, as described in the works of Barber, Taylor, or Wolin, do no such thing. Each thinker crafts a democratic vision that carefully and intentionally leaves room for diversity, plurality, and critique. Indeed, they embrace such values as necessary to a community-oriented democracy. Moreover, the institutional practices of participatory democracy offer the best options for contesting settled achievements and identities. Family, after all, involves community, but it is not always harmonious. In *A Place for Us* Barber offers an extensive criticism of strong forms of communitarianism that are based on collective tribal, ethnic, nationalist, or religious identities, which too often are totalizing, undemocratic, and thus, dangerous. Passages like these, and a careful reading of each of these thinkers, indicates that they are not the communitarian parodies that critics sometimes make them out to be.³⁵⁷

Wolin explicitly addresses the value of difference as it is embodied in varying forms of local democratic politics: “Difference rejects the notion of a single narrative history and a unifying single purpose...difference is not about a unified collective self but about the biography of a place in which different beings are trying to live together.”³⁵⁸ Notice the language of togetherness is embraced but unitary visions of politics are

³⁵⁶ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, p. 93.

³⁵⁷ See *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong*, Chapter One, particularly pp. 28-29. See also the essays in Charles Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism* (McGill-Queen’s University Press: Buffalo, 1993), in particular chapter 8, for a discussion of how to balance competing demands of commonality and plurality.

³⁵⁸ Wolin, *The Presence of the Past*, p. 93.

rejected. Much of *The Presence of the Past* is devoted to elaborating this idea, in particular his critique of the unitary, centralizing, rationalist, administrative drive embodied in *The Federalist Papers* and US Constitution.³⁵⁹ Similarly, in *Strong Democracy* Barber is very careful to distinguish his vision from a unitary, non-pluralist democratic politics, as noted above. Proponents of participatory democracy should be skeptical of efforts to eradicate difference, as Connolly is. He has put forth a heroic effort to do so. But participatory democratic theorists must also resist the impulse, found at times in Connolly, to conflate democratic forms of community with undemocratic and repressive forms of community. Connolly is at his best when summarizing the elements of “social commonality” and collective identity, engaging their value for democracy, while also keeping us alert for efforts to abolish difference.³⁶⁰ In so far as Connolly does this he has more in common with the thinkers I am drawing on here than perhaps he admits. In so far as he turns away from this thoughtful balancing act, it is an unhelpful theoretical turn.

My criticism of Connolly comes down to the following claim: Connolly defends a democratic politics that allows space for community while also protecting plurality and carving out space for continued renegotiation of who “we” as a community are. But instead of recognizing that participatory democracy accomplishes this, Connolly eschews the language of participatory democracy and chastises other theorists for their invocations of community. As he claims when discussing Taylor, Connolly insist that “the ideal of community itself presses its adherents to treat harmonious membership and consensus not as contestable ends to be interrogated by the most creative means at their disposal, but as

³⁵⁹ See in particular Chapter 7.

³⁶⁰ Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, p. 199.

vehicles of elevation drawing the community closer to the harmony of being.”³⁶¹ As I have demonstrated, however, the invocations of community found in Barber, Taylor, Wolin, and a sympathetic reading of Rousseau, do not press their adherents to seek an unthinking harmony.

This is perhaps an odd criticism in the following sense. Connolly, as an agonistic democrat, articulates a democratic perspective that resonates very much with the one I am defending. Yet at the same time, he suggests, and at times bluntly states, that invocations of community outside of the context of agonistic democracy are particularly dangerous or troubling. But there is no necessary reason for this to be true. Participatory democracy offers a related but distinct vision of democratic politics that is just as attuned to the important but difficult balance between democratic community and democratic plurality. Participatory democracy, also, I have argued, provides greater insight into the nature and value of democratic community than alternative theories while also providing concrete, institutional proposals for how to produce such forms of face-to-face community.³⁶² It is thus exemplary in its ability to theorize community.

Political theories that have drawn directly on post-structuralist thought, such as agonistic democracy, have helped to accomplish two important tasks. First, dating back to Foucault, and continuing through seminal works such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, these thinkers worked to discredit essentialist and deterministic Marxist ideas that were millenarian, dogmatic, and saw class as the

³⁶¹ Ibid., p. 90. It is clear that Connolly’s criticism is meant to challenge more than just Charles Taylor. In that section, although he focuses on Taylor, Connolly has in mind more broadly what he variously calls “civil liberalism,” “communitarianism,” and “civic republicanism.”

³⁶² Specific examples will be discussed later in this chapter.

only source of social and political struggle. In addition, such Marxisms were heavily implicated in the real-world practice of socialism as seen in the USSR and China. They needed to go. Second, these broad post-structuralist efforts contributed to progressive successes for the LGBT movement in the 1990s and 2000s. Celebrated works such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* challenged conventional gender and sexual orientation categories and exposed the forms of power involved in the imposition of dominant sexual identities. They deserve recognition for contributing to the growing equality of Americans who don't fit into easy heterosexual categories. I am willing to give two cheers for the role that post-structuralist thought has played in democratic theory (and political theory more broadly). But they have failed massively on a third, crucial element of democratic practice.

To expand upon the critique developed above, agonistic theories of democracy (which are most directly connected to post-structuralism) have failed to offer an effective language to challenge neoliberalism, hyper individualism, and the resurgence of robber-baron capitalism and inequality. Recognition and difference, plurality and disagreement, are not effective tools for pushing back against neoliberalism. As Joseph Schwartz stresses, you can't playfully act your way out of being structurally poor. Those who are not empowered via education, wealth, and social status may refuse to play the part of the exploited, low-wage, service sector worker. But they do so on pain of extreme poverty, homelessness, and even death.³⁶³ Instead, what is needed, and what I believe a communally oriented participatory democracy can provide, is a turn back to economic

³⁶³ Schwartz's book provides an extended, original discussion of the attention that democratic theorists should pay to issues of economic inequality and the failings of much of democratic theory to do so. I am very sympathetic to his assessment. See *The Future of Democratic Equality*.

issues, institutions, and redistribution.³⁶⁴ This can, and must, be done without losing sight of the continued role that structural patriarchy and structural racism play in American political, economic, and social institutions, and the deeply complex ways in which these three elements of injustice are interrelated. We need, however, the kind of theoretical and practical tools that a language of community, participation, empowerment, equality, and exploitation can provide. What is glaring in much political theory of the past three decades is the avoidance of the ongoing economic catastrophe facing middle and lower-class Americans.³⁶⁵ As discussed in the last chapter, material equality is deeply imbricated with political equality and the practice of meaningful democracy. Declining time and resources on the part of the average American means declining empowerment

³⁶⁴ See the debate between Nancy Fraser and a number of critics in *Adding Insult to Injury: Nancy Fraser Debates Her Critics*, edited by Kevin Olson (New York: Verso, 2008) for a discussion of how the Left should calibrate its focus on insult (concerns of identity and recognition) with injury (concerns for economic domination and exploitation). Walter D. Mignolo's *The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006) overstates the problem but does press the Left on the following point: without attending to class, we run the risk of becoming advocates for a plutocracy that is race and gender blind. Neoliberalism can, theoretically, accept gender and racial equality. What it cannot abide is an expansion of the democratic public sphere and the corresponding decline of market power and inequality.

³⁶⁵ I am not claiming that the quality of scholarship during this period was necessarily low. William Corlett's *Community Without Unity: A Politics of Derridean Extravagance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989) brings post-structuralist perspectives to bear on questions of community and national identity in an insightful and original way. But Corlett's book, and books like it, leave me unsatisfied. I am sympathetic to his suggestion that we should bring a sense of play and the extravagant into our political activity. His vision of a community of mutual gift-giving, however, strikes me as too reminiscent of what is now being called the "sharing economy." This is not a triumph or something to be celebrated—it is a defensive action that ordinary citizens are taking to make ends meet as conventional production and consumption patterns fail more and more Americans. Many of Corlett's suggestions focus more on personal behavior and what sounds too much like charity work. These things may be nice but they are wholly inadequate to the task of reforming our political and economic institutions.

and a decreasing ability to be a participatory democratic citizen. Participatory democracy, going back to the 1960s, is best suited for addressing this.

What is to be done?

Community can seem like an anachronistic value, if indeed it is a value at all. Even if one grants that the kind of democratic community I have sketched above would be salutary for strengthening democracy, this does not mean that it is realizable today. Many of the trends discussed in the previous chapter would seem to make robust forms of democratic community difficult, if not impossible, to realize in the 21st century. I therefore close this chapter with some basic suggestions for how to produce and sustain democratic community that is suited for the world we now inhabit. These suggestions all have one thing in common and it is an insight that goes back to Thomas Jefferson and Alexis de Tocqueville. That is, they all call for an expansion of opportunities for meaningful democratic participation.

First, enhance community by increasing municipal democracy. Certain forms of municipal democracy, in particular participatory budgeting, have been quite successful in generating active citizen participation with substantively desirable results. These active, but not overly demanding, venues for citizen participation all offer the opportunity for citizens to develop sustained forms of democratic community as they come together to participate as (roughly) equal democratic citizens. And of course, as discussed in chapter three, these are opportunities for citizen participation that provide citizens with formal decision-making power. These are not advisory and consultative boards and councils.

They are, rather, opportunities for institutionally empowered citizens to formulate and vote on key budgetary priorities.

Second, expand jury duty. Trial by jury is in many ways the most enduring form of direct democracy in the United States, where citizens selected by lot are empowered to provide verdicts in both civil and criminal cases. For all its flaws, trial by jury is both valuable on democratic principle and appears to actually produce positive, enduring democratic effects.³⁶⁶

Third, expand community policing. Community policing, as discussed in chapter three, accomplishes multiple things. It allows citizens to work together as democratic actors, telling the police what their neighborhood priorities should be, empowering citizens and providing opportunities for participatory democratic community. It also breaks down the divide between the government and the citizens by allowing for citizen participation in a particularly sensitive area of governance. This is particularly promising as a way of reworking the currently toxic relations between police and minorities in many American towns and cities, where a history and present of structural racism leads to violence against minorities, delegitimizes government institutions, and divides white and black citizens.

Each of these suggestions involve face-to-face forms of democratic participation in which ordinary citizens are formally empowered to make decisions, be it deciding a budget, rendering a verdict, or formulating policing priorities. Each is feasible and does not demand too much from an already overburdened populace, a point developed more

³⁶⁶ See Albert W. Dzur, *Punishment, Participatory democracy, and the Jury* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) and John Gastil, E. Pierre Deess, Philip J. Weiser, Cindy Simmons, *The Jury and Democracy: How Jury Deliberation Promotes Civic Engagement and Political Participation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

fully in chapter three. And each asks, or in the case of jury duty, demands, that people come together as citizens and put the rest of their lives on hold, at least for a little while. Indeed, the experience of jury duty is remarkable in this way, in that it is the one last space in which democracy is sheltered from market activity, and takes precedence over all private concerns. In a certain sense this is a very old insight—commentators on democracy have been exclaiming the value of local forms of democratic participation for the past few centuries. But in another sense it is a new, or at least urgent, insight for today. Combatting the power of the market, and producing at least some spaces for democratic participation and community, requires precisely the creation and expansion of venues where these things can happen. More democracy is, more than ever, the answer to the most pressing problems facing America. Participatory democracy, I have argued, is the democratic theory (and practice) most suited to facing these problems.

In anticipation of one obvious objection, the following point should be made. Neoliberalism as I have described it also involves national and global challenges that cannot be met by local forms of participatory democracy. In chapter four I discussed some of the large-scale efforts that would be needed to challenge neoliberalism and corporate power. In addition, cooperative efforts between city governments can provide effective answers to large-scale problems while also drawing on the resources of local, participatory democratic politics. This is the argument Barber makes in his most recent work, which discusses innovative city-level reforms as well as global opportunities for city governments to collaborate on issues of mutual concern. But without the more distant tax and regulatory powers of national governments, neoliberalism will remain unvanquished. To reiterate the argument of chapter four, the expansion of participatory

democracy would have many salutary effects but its impact is also necessarily limited by its localism. Large-scale problems will also require large-scale, globally cooperative solutions. In the conclusion I continue this thought with suggestions for where radical and participatory theories of democracy can go in the future.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Citizen participation is one of the central themes of democracy. Indeed, I have argued that widespread and relatively equal citizen participation is perhaps the defining feature of democracy. This issue is all the more pressing in the face of the declining legitimacy of many consolidated democratic institutions coupled with the global popularity of participatory ideas. Now is a fruitful time to expand and reformulate earlier ideas of participatory democracy for the 21st century. This dissertation contributes to an important and growing literature on this topic. In particular, I have expanded on three points that are vitally important for participatory democracy to grapple with today. First, what empirical research on contemporary participatory experiments can teach democratic theory. Second, the relation between equality and democracy and the necessity of constituting participatory democracy as a challenge to corporate power, inequality, and neoliberalism. Third, the connection between community and democracy and the manner in which participatory democracy allows for the creation and sustenance of democratic forms of community via face-to-face participation. I have also engaged, in various ways, with other theories of democracy, specifically deliberative, agonistic, and republican theories. While I have offered some criticism of each, agonistic theories of democracy have come in for the most criticism, precisely because they are closest of these three to the project I am engaged in. I have drawn heavily on agonistic thinkers such as William Connolly while also suggesting that agonistic theories of democracy are flawed in important respects and thus not an adequate substitute, let alone replacement, for participatory democracy.

One of the many tasks for ushering participatory democracy into the 21st century is to bring it into conversation with recent competing democratic theories. I have taken a step down this path but much remains to be done. It is crucial that those committed to participatory democracy demonstrate its ability to grapple with the key democratic struggles of our time as well as, if not better than, competing theories. We must in particular work to banish the misguided notion that participatory democracy is outdated or incapable of wrestling with the major political problems and theoretical developments of the past half-century. Recent works such as Carole Pateman's "Participatory Democracy Revisited" and Tom Malleon's *After Occupy* mark important steps in this direction; this project is, I hope, another step forward.

Where do defenders of participatory democracy go from here? This chapter closes with a few suggestions for future work in democratic theory, particularly with regard to participatory and agonistic democracy. Democratic theorists must continue to develop an analysis and critique of neoliberalism from a radically democratic perspective—Wendy Brown's new book as well as William Connolly's (which I mention in chapter 4) point in promising directions.³⁶⁷ As more empirical work and reflections on OWS trickle in, this provides us with more tools to assess this iconic but short-lived social movement and new directions for its energies. In particular, as some of the popular energy and activism from OWS has been channeled into new areas, such as climate change activism and prison reform, what can these disparate movements achieve as part of the ongoing democratic

³⁶⁷ See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015) and William Connolly, *The Fragility of Things*. Brown's thoughtful book dovetails with many of my own concerns but was released too late in the writing process for me to adequately engage with it here.

struggle in the USA?³⁶⁸ What can they say about participatory democratic ideas and energies in the 21st century? Recent works like John Medearis' *Why Democracy is Oppositional* also show how one might productively engage with participatory, agonistic, and other democratic theories in a way that doesn't capitulate to either elite or deliberative theories of democracy.³⁶⁹ Much remains to be done here, including an expansion of my bridging of agonistic and participatory democracy, as well as the critique of agonistic democracy from a participatory perspective that I offer, especially in chapter 5.

These are, of course, not the only concerns facing committed democrats today. The massive and increasingly consolidated carceral state that has developed over the past few decades stands as a dark, authoritarian stain on the American democratic project, one in need of vigorous challenge. This is a task to which democratic theorists, in addition to other scholars, activists, and politicians, can and must contribute. Similarly, structural racism and enduring forms of patriarchy remain of central concern for those committed to the expansion of meaningful democracy. And yet my project has focused the democratic lens above all on economic inequality and questions of class. Why is this? Certainly not because of a vulgar Marxist belief that economic conditions determine everything else. Mine is a more contingent focus. Because in what Thomas Piketty suggests may be the most unequal society in human history (in terms of income distribution), economic

³⁶⁸ See Michael A. Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers: The Making of the 99 Percent Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) for an assessment of what the "99 percent movement" has been doing since the physical occupations of Occupy Wall Street were evicted in late 2011. See also Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation*, for a broad assessment of Occupy Wall Street.

³⁶⁹ See John Medearis, *Why Democracy is Oppositional*.

inequality increasingly pervades all social and political relations.³⁷⁰ Citizens locked up because they can't pay minor tickets, corporations and wealthy individuals providing unlimited campaign contributions, state prisons as warehouses for the poor and uneducated, public policy that primarily reflects the preferences of the wealthiest, a college premium that benefits no more than a third of Americans, and an economy offering more and more precarious service sector jobs—these are the features of a society in which who we are and what we do is heavily influenced by the economic resources to which we have access. The American democratic experience is not one experience but a series of experiences, gradations of citizenship and employment. If democracy is to remain committed to political equality, it cannot accept these distinctions. Democracy in the 21st century will be found in, and enhanced by, the struggle against economic, racial, and gender inequalities. It is in these struggles that we can discover, as well as demand more, meaningful experiences of participatory democracy.

³⁷⁰ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* and Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*.

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