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## ELLA FLAGG YOUNG AND THE GENDER POLITICS OF *DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION*

Though John Dewey had considered education and democracy separately in his early career, he came to understand them as essentially linked concepts during his nearly ten-year collaboration with Ella Flagg Young at the University of Chicago. This intellectually gifted woman, who eventually became superintendent of Chicago's schools, connected education and democracy as well as theory and practice, essentially showing Dewey how democratic schools might work. This article briefly traces Dewey's developing ideas of education and democracy in the context of his relationship with Young.

In July of 1916, Ella Flagg Young published a review of John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*.<sup>1</sup> This woman, hailed around the country as one of the most significant educational leaders of her day, had just stepped down from her superintendency of the Chicago schools, the first woman in the United States to have held such a high position of public service. She also had studied with Dewey, his first doctoral student at the University of Chicago (UC), then became his colleague as she joined the faculty of the Department of Education. She had collaborated with him intensively on many projects including the famed Laboratory School and the landmark *Contributions to Education* volume that they coauthored.<sup>2</sup> Dewey's daughters, who later compiled a brief biography of their father, explained that he considered "Mrs. Young as the wisest person in school matters with whom he has come in contact in any way. . . . Contact with her supplemented Dewey's educational ideas where his own experience was lacking in matters of practical administration, crystallizing his ideas of democracy in the school and, by extension, in life."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, given Young's own rich professional experience in the Chicago schools, she had a great deal to teach Dewey about the need for democratic practices as means of empowering students and teachers alike. This was especially true given that she long had endeavored to humanize the experiences of students even when the prevailing administrative ethos tended toward mechanization; and she had implemented numerous unusual practices through the years to flatten the otherwise increasingly hierarchical and centralized power structures so that teachers could freely create innovative, meaningful curricula in supportive community with one another, with students, and with her. Dewey learned a great deal from Young—and his interest in both democracy and education expanded significantly over the course of their collaboration.

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Young had much to say about Dewey's new book. Essentially, she wholeheartedly embraced his core ideas as well as his careful, measured argumentation. Likely reflecting her own view, she explained, "The reader, fascinated by the ideal and charmed by the style in which that ideal is disclosed, lays this book down enriched by its perusal the particularly gratified that one's own ideal of school and education has at last been adequately portrayed."<sup>4</sup> Then she added, "With his usual insight Professor Dewey will probably say that he was not quite ready to write the book ten years ago."<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, there was still a great deal that Dewey did not comprehend about how schools worked—or could work—when he left Chicago in 1904 to become a philosophy professor at Columbia University. Perhaps he needed not only time to process his ideas, but also some distance from the intensive immediacies of educational politics that he experienced during his Chicago years. Despite having been deeply engaged with Young as well as a host of others who were laboring, agitating, and innovating in and around the Chicago schools, not to mention his own involvement with the Laboratory School (also with Young) and the other institutions he administered at UC, Dewey abruptly diminished his direct contact with educators and schools when he moved to New York.<sup>6</sup> His new appointment in Columbia's philosophy department kept him a safe distance away. In the end, he crafted *Democracy and Education* as a comprehensive, cohesive, and definitive statement on the central role that education—particularly schools—must play in creating a truly democratic society.

Even though Young praised Dewey's book as "a treatment of conditions that leaves nothing untouched," it is nonetheless a work that is largely stripped of important school context, of the grit and grind of students' daily lived experience, and most especially of attention to the essential agents of democracy and education: teachers, most of whom were women and many of whom were actively campaigning for full suffrage so that they might finally exert some democratic power in controlling the institution in which they worked. Young herself had long supported the suffrage movement, both formally and informally. The need for women's suffrage had become more painfully clear to her supporters when she first became superintendent in 1909—and could not have voted for the mayor or any other official who may have had a hand in her selection.<sup>7</sup> Suffragists frequently upheld Young as an example of the public good that women might accomplish if they had the vote. Furthering her own advocacy, Young even introduced a controversial motion at the National Education Association (NEA) convention to hold President Woodrow Wilson responsible for following through on his public and widely touted pledge to "fight" with suffragists, adding language that "this Association hopes to see him fighting," rather than continue his more typical words without deeds.<sup>8</sup> Dewey even tracked Young's superintendency from afar, astutely observing the role of suffrage in women's ability—or inability—to be democratically empowering agents in and for schools.

In *Democracy and Education*, however, Dewey largely steers clear of discussing teachers other than in a very general, even abstract sense; neither does he explicitly address political, structural, and cultural disempowerment teachers faced on account of sex; nor does he sufficiently examine the fundamental challenges that lie ahead in making education a cornerstone of a truly democratic society without fully empowered teachers. However, this more circumscribed view of teachers contrasts sharply with the one he had held a little over a decade earlier—at the height of his collaboration with

Young—when Dewey had argued strenuously in defense of teachers' freedom and empowerment, ideas expressed in his article, "Democracy in Education" [emphasis added].<sup>9</sup> Somehow, though, during the years between this earlier piece and his later, fully developed book, Dewey had deeply subordinated the concept of teachers' essential roles in forging a democratic society. If Young was troubled by this omission, she did not express it in her largely admiring review of her mentor's work.

It was during these critical years between Dewey's collaborations with Young and the publication of *Democracy and Education* that the nearly exclusively female ranks of teachers, particularly those in Chicago and New York City, rallied together in strong associations that sought to win their rights and curb what they regarded as overreach by a primarily male body of superintendents and other education leaders.<sup>10</sup> And many of these same teachers played crucial leadership roles in the larger women's suffrage movement, which was building strength state-by-state as Dewey drafted what would soon become his seminal work. Dewey was quite well aware of these developments as he had worked together with a number of suffragists and other women's activists on various projects through the years. Dewey, nonetheless, chose the safer route in *Democracy and Education*, articulating a gendered male view backgrounding—or rendering invisible—women's roles and authority in educational reform. This legacy persists even into the present.

This article begins by describing Dewey's early, limited scholarly forays into the concepts of education and democracy. It then explores Ella Flagg Young's significant influence on him as he came to understand that she, more than anyone he would ever encounter, understood truly democratic education with its broad theoretical and practical dimensions. Furthermore, it depicts ways that Dewey came to depend on Young working in the background to make his projects succeed even while he proved unequal to the task. Then it details some of the intense and gendered battles that Young fought as Chicago superintendent and suffragist—while Dewey retreated into far less politically fraught academic work. In this way, I argue, Dewey's reputation as a pioneering scholar of education and democracy grew, while he suffered none of the consequences of those women who actively engaged in these political battles, perpetuating a pattern of disempowerment that undercut his own core democratic principles.

#### DEWEY'S EARLY INTEREST IN EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY

Before coming to Chicago, Dewey, still a relatively young scholar, had investigated a broad range of philosophical ideas, publishing his thought on such disparate topics as materialism, psychology, the embodiment of religion, the nature of knowledge—and democracy.<sup>11</sup> He published his first work specifically on democracy in 1888 while on the faculty of the University of Michigan: "The Ethics of Democracy." In this meditation on political philosophy, he questions the notion that citizens are isolated, non-social entities, arguing instead that humans essentially are social beings.<sup>12</sup> Four years later, Dewey wrote another brief piece, "Christianity and Democracy," in which he argues that religious understanding, or revelation, is "in intelligence" in the sense that a human interprets the universe "in terms of his own action at the given time."<sup>13</sup> Though Dewey would later refrain from addressing religious topics extensively, his argument here offers Christian belief as a means for understanding and justifying a central place for

democracy. Beyond these two exploratory works, each of which captures themes that he would amplify in his subsequent work, Dewey did not otherwise focus on democracy again until 1903 when he published “Democracy in Education,” a brief piece that was significantly influenced by Ella Flagg Young.<sup>14</sup>

The second important intellectual strand of Dewey’s work to consider in relation to *Democracy and Education* is education in a general sense—and schools in particular. Once again, Dewey did not publish much work about education in the years before he joined the UC faculty and began his extensive collaborations with Young. No doubt, he had long understood something of the travails of the classroom. After completing his undergraduate studies at the University of Vermont, he began his teaching career. His cousin, a high school principal, offered him his first job. Reportedly, however, his teaching was undistinguished, if not ineffective. When his cousin departed, Dewey’s contract was not renewed. He found another high school teaching position that he kept for a year; but perhaps weary from this work, he subsequently enrolled in graduate school at Johns Hopkins to study philosophy.<sup>15</sup> Then during the early years of Dewey’s academic career at the University of Michigan, he published a few works that concerned education in a tangential manner: “Education and the Health of Women” and “Health and Sex in Higher Education,” both of which addressed the then-hot topic of whether or not higher education harmed the health of young women, and “Psychology in High Schools from the Standpoint of the College” and “Teaching Ethics in the High School,” each of which explored the possibility of high school curriculum in his areas of primary scholarly interest. He became a member of the Michigan School-Masters’ Club during these years, possibly in solidarity with Michigan men who shared his understanding of the challenges of classroom teaching; but despite this connection, Dewey’s published work before moving to Chicago fails to consider schools or education either as a central focus or in a broad sense.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, before Dewey began teaching at the University of Chicago in 1895, he had made some initial, though very limited ventures into understanding democracy. Similarly, his interest in education existed, though not as an area of focus. He had not connected the two concepts in his published work.

#### ELLA FLAGG YOUNG’S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND INTELLECTUAL FORCE

John Dewey and Ella Flagg Young first met in autumn of 1895 when Young enrolled in the first course that he offered at UC.<sup>17</sup> Young, a fifty-year-old assistant superintendent with thirty-three years of experience working in the Chicago schools, took time out of her demanding schedule to pursue a degree at this new institution of higher education. From the start, Young and Dewey reportedly enjoyed vigorous debates with each other in classes, sometimes leaving other students feeling excluded.<sup>18</sup> Young deeply admired Dewey’s broad philosophical and theoretical understandings. And Dewey quickly came to appreciate that few other persons in the city, or perhaps the country, knew as much about schools as Young. Beyond her impressive knowledge, she also was an extraordinarily capable teacher and leader, not to mention administrator. And as he would later express, she possessed a remarkably agile and quick mind, able to see the theoretical and practical implications of a matter simultaneously.<sup>19</sup>

Young's educational experience and understanding had been hard won and was in many ways unlikely. She attended primary school only for a few months before dropping out because of intense boredom. She eventually taught herself to read, quickly becoming a voracious reader. At fifteen, friends talked her into taking the teachers exam with them. She easily passed, but school officials would not allow her to teach because of her prior lack of school attendance. Instead, they offered her the chance to enroll in the new Chicago Normal Program. She accepted the offer and easily mastered her studies. She consistently stood out for her "unschooled," idiosyncratic approaches, such as creating her own mentored practice-teaching experience when the program offered none or devising completely unorthodox and unexpected, yet exceptionally good, interpretations of assignments.<sup>20</sup> When she began teaching, she created innovative methods grounded in her unique interpretations of then cutting-edge pedagogies such as the object-lesson. She chose to teach students that other teachers warned her to avoid, like the reputedly difficult "cowboys," who insisted on their freedoms when they were not working in Chicago's stockyards. She repeatedly proved more than equal to such challenges and rose quickly through the ranks.<sup>21</sup> In only a few years, she became principal of the School of Practice and essentially prepared most of Chicago's new teachers. The superintendent at the time said of her leadership: "The training branch of the Normal department, under the instruction and training of Miss N. Ella Flagg ... has proved a very satisfactory success, and I do not say too much, when I say that this is not excelled by any similar school in our country."<sup>22</sup>

When Young later became principal of a large grammar school, one of the first women in the country to achieve such a position, her school earned the reputation as one of the finest of its kind in the city as teachers, students, and Young worked intensively together in a creative, intellectually charged, and mutually reinforcing environment.<sup>23</sup> John McManis, a former student of both Young and Dewey at UC, later a colleague, and finally her contemporaneous biographer, said:

While others were teaching and preaching "democracy and freedom" with blare and great noise, the Skinner Elementary School in 1885 was carrying on its work with an eye to the independence and cooperation of each individual child and teacher within its walls. Class-work was organized in such a way that each one felt himself a contributor to the whole. In arithmetic, for example, Mrs. Young's method was distinctively democratic. Instead of having "a method" of solving problems, a common practice among principals in teaching this subject, she had as many methods as there were teachers in her school. ... [S]he insisted that each one was to make her own contributions to the life and interests of the school. Visitors remarked that they found as much value in going through the rooms of the school as they could have found had they gone to many schools, because each teacher worked out her subjects in her own way.

In faculty meetings Mrs. Young insisted on discussions giving free play to ideas of each person, and never attempted to dominate the minds and independence of the teachers. She was always exceedingly generous in her appreciation of new ideas and acknowledged her obligations to the teachers who presented them to her and the school. "What new ideas have you today in this work?" was a common question of hers, and the person called upon for such help felt that she was really a part of the creative force of the school.<sup>24</sup>

Young drew national fame when a noted education journalist, acting on a tip, visited the Skinner School during her principalship. He then profiled her in a series of widely

circulated articles and speeches, describing her as the finest teacher he had ever encountered.<sup>25</sup> Right after that, she was promoted to an assistant superintendency, again, one of the first women in the country to hold such a position. By the time Young joined Dewey's class, she also had established herself as an accomplished writer, delivering subsequently published papers in a variety of settings including the esteemed National Educational Association annual meeting, one of few women to have done so.<sup>26</sup> She was, in sum, a gifted teacher, a beloved and highly successful school administrator, an intellectually talented practitioner, and a pioneer in establishing new places for women in schools. Dewey would come to consider her work as an exemplar, maybe even *the* exemplar of how democracy and education might require and reinforce the other.

#### DEWEY LEARNS FROM AND DEPENDS ON YOUNG

Once Young began studying with Dewey, she was quickly pressed to increase her involvement at the University of Chicago. UC President William Rainey Harper, who had led the city's so-called Harper Commission, which among other things had advocated for a doubling of professional teacher training, wanted to boost UC's enrollments by hiring the wildly popular Young to teach. Though Harper repeatedly recommended her and the UC Board of Trustees approved funds to hire her as a lecturer even while she completed her early studies and held her assistant superintendency, she mostly declined these offers, citing her already heavy load.<sup>27</sup> Harper then sought to hire her as a full-time UC faculty member, which she initially refused because she believed that she was unqualified given her lack of a doctoral degree. By 1900, though, she completed and successfully defended her dissertation under Dewey's direction. She then agreed to join the faculty as an associate professor in what was called the "Department of Pedagogy." She immediately expressed her objection to the name, "Pedagogy," requesting instead that the department's name be changed to the more encompassing term, "Education," a request that was granted right away. A year later, she was promoted to professor.<sup>28</sup>

Even before she joined the UC faculty, George Herbert Mead had discussed with Dewey the advisability of hiring Young to become principal of what was initially called the "University Elementary School," suggesting:

The scheme strikes me as most admirable from every standpoint. If Mrs. Y. could take principalship of the school, it seems to me that the selection would be ideal, and it would be difficult to find a woman or man who has the thorough acquaintance with practical pedagogy and the appreciation for ideas and desire to work for reformation in such degree as Mrs. Young. I suppose the strength the appointment would have with the teachers and city is what especially causes Mr. Harper to beam.<sup>29</sup>

The *Chicago Tribune* even reported that Young would work closely with Dewey in running the school.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps because of her notable other responsibilities, though, she declined the principalship of the school. She did, however, become "University Supervisor," and in this role worked behind the scenes to assist her mentor by ensuring that the school ran smoothly, even drafting its curriculum and instituting necessary practices.<sup>31</sup> She even suggested, wisely, that the school's name be changed to the "Laboratory School."<sup>32</sup> Though the school had opened in 1896, well before Young's tenure, it had

been riddled with problems ranging from incoherent and incomplete curricula, dysfunctional faculty relations and coordination, poor parental communication, and noteworthy fluctuations in enrollment, mostly downward. Once on-board, though, Young quickly did much to bring the school to a state of functionality and intellectual integrity, even while her primary responsibilities were elsewhere.

In 1901, Dewey made what would prove to be a series of destructive administrative mistakes in running schools at UC, mistakes that ultimately contributed to his departure three years later. First, Dewey bargained with Harper for greater administrative responsibilities in exchange for the higher salary Dewey thought he deserved. Harper relented, giving Dewey a \$7000 annual salary, in line with those of Harper's most expensive and illustrious faculty hires. To uphold his end of the bargain, though, Dewey would need to provide oversight of two secondary schools and another elementary school in addition to the Laboratory School. Many years later, Dewey would tell a writer for the *Atlantic Monthly* that "That demand for more pay did more to make a man of me than any other act of my life!"<sup>33</sup> Before this, Dewey essentially had no administrative experience other than leading his small departments at UC, and he found his duties significantly beyond his administrative capabilities.<sup>34</sup>

His second most notable mistake was hiring his wife, Alice, to serve as principal of the Laboratory School. He did this without first telling Harper, yet another sizable error. Her new salary of \$500 a year and the free tuition that their children then enjoyed meant that the Deweys' economic situation had improved considerably. Critics, however, including Harper, expressed concern about such blatant inside hiring and the conflicts of interest that might occur.<sup>35</sup> Dewey insisted on keeping the arrangement even though Alice Dewey, like John, had taught high school for only a few years. She had no experience teaching primary level children like those in the Laboratory School; neither did she have any administrative experience.<sup>36</sup> With Alice in the principalship, Young then became a codirector of the Laboratory School along with John Dewey, which meant in part that Young would need to work feverishly in the background to keep the school functioning well and without suffering extensively from the many administrative missteps that the Deweys would make.<sup>37</sup> Young's work in this regard was largely invisible. On the other hand, Dewey, who typically kept everyday activities and functions of the school at arm's length while relying heavily on Young, to some degree on Alice Dewey despite her tumultuous relationships with many teachers and parents, and also on the school's women teachers, largely enjoyed growing national attention and acclaim for the Laboratory School. Dewey received credit while the women who made the school work, most especially Young, did so in the shadows.

Despite this unequal partnership, Young and Dewey did collaborate meaningfully on another important project in which Dewey endeavored to draw explicit attention to Young's work. Together they wrote and published the University of Chicago's *Contributions to Education* series, six monographs (1901–02) collected into a single volume with each contributing three monographs. Every one of these monographs reveals something of the influence of the other author.<sup>38</sup>

By far the most significant of Young's works in this volume is her dissertation, *Isolation in the School*, first published as a book in 1900 and then reprinted for the series in 1901. This work offers a critique of the then increasingly widespread administrative practice of centralized, "one-man power" in schools; it also provides a grounded exploration

of how schools can foster freedom and democratic practice among students, teachers, and administrators alike, much as Young had during her principalships and assistant superintendency. Just before writing *Isolation in the School*, she had struggled with the ripple effects of the Harper Commission's *Report* calling for tightly centralized school administrative power as well as increased salaries for male teachers at the expense of those for female teachers.<sup>39</sup> In one widely publicized speech, she also bemoaned what she viewed as a broad shift of teaching from creative, intellectually engaging work into the drudgery of a bored housewife.<sup>40</sup> Most especially, though, Young disliked working with the highly ineffective Superintendent Benjamin Andrews, a close friend and mentor to Harper, who failed to consult meaningfully with Young and the other assistant superintendents, essentially rendering their services irrelevant. As Young's companion, Laura Brayton, would later write, "The time came when the autocratic regime, which reduced assistants to mere machines, and the everlasting playing of politics in the office of the Superintendent of Schools, became unbearable and she [Young] resigned."<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps as a way of working out these tensions, in *Isolation in the School* Young calls for the empowerment of teachers and students alike, which she believes is necessary to eliminate a default tendency toward isolation among the many parts of the educational enterprise. "Isolation" takes on several specific meanings in this work. In one sense, it is a kind of compartmentalization that can exist when an organization splinters into discrete, specialized parts, each of which communicates imperfectly with the others. In another sense, it is the disempowerment that individuals or classes of persons experience when they are discouraged or prevented from exercising free thought and social discourse. Young argues that "it must be predicated that freedom belongs to that form of activity which characterizes the *teacher*. The schools will be purged of the uncultured, nonprogressive element, the fetters that bind the thoughtful and progressive will be stricken off, when the work is based on an intelligent understanding of the truth that freedom is an essential of that form of activity known as the teacher."<sup>42</sup>

In the final part of *Isolation in the School*, Young argues that schools must foster freedom among students, teachers, and administrators alike—all critical to forming a broader American democracy. Schools must help prepare students for living in a democratic society by being thoroughly democratic institutions that sensitize members of the community to their interconnectedness, cultivate an ongoing practice of cooperative decision making, and generally empower all members rather than concentrating authority among a few. "Never has the function of the school in a state been more plainly indicated than is that of the public school in this country evolving a theory and practice of developing self-government for childhood and youth." This means that students must contend with meaningful choices. So too must teachers. As students must have voice in determining their experiences in schools, teachers must as well. "The school cannot take up the question of the development of training for citizenship in a democracy while the teachers are still segregated in two classes, as are the citizens in aristocracy. . . . The teaching corps must be unfettered in its activity in striving to realize those things which will involve themselves in a free play of thought in the individual and the community."<sup>43</sup>

Not content to leave readers only with abstract conclusions, Young describes a means by which this unfettering of teachers may be facilitated: the establishment of councils where teachers have the power to make decisions that affect their experiences in schools. In such councils, she contends, teachers should be able to articulate their



thoughts freely and make decisions cooperatively, deliberatively. “The voice of authority of position not only must not dominate, but must not be heard in, the councils. There should be organized, throughout every system, school councils whose membership in the aggregate should include every teacher and principal ...” She explains in detail how councils could be organized—largely based on the design she had created and implemented a decade earlier as an assistant superintendent working with teachers in her district. Such councils should be representative, facilitate deliberation, and mitigate the structural power differences between teachers and administrators.<sup>44</sup> In short, Young decisively brought education and democracy together, both in concept and practice.

Young’s *Isolation in the School* inspired important parts of Dewey’s thought in two of his *Contributions to Education* monographs. In “Psychology and Social Practice,” he describes the possible interrelationships between the still-new field of psychology and education. In a footnote, he credits Young, his “friend and colleague,” with influencing his work generally, and his particular understanding of the need for an empowered teaching force, because otherwise teachers would not only lose their capacity for free thought, but would be unable to nurture it effectively in their students.<sup>45</sup> Here, Dewey clearly expresses his emerging understanding of teachers’ central role in linking education and democracy.

In “The Educational Situation,” Dewey describes an overall tendency for schools to be highly differentiated in ways that render them isolated in the senses that Young describes. He cites *Isolation in the School* when he explains: “The unity and wholeness of the child’s development can be realized only in a corresponding unity and continuity of school conditions. Anything that breaks the latter up into fractions, into isolated parts, must have the same influence upon the educative growth of the child.”<sup>46</sup> Then he applies a similar line of reasoning to teachers: “As long as the teacher, who is after all the only real educator in the school system, has no definite and authoritative position in shaping the course of study, [decision-making power] ... is likely to remain an external thing to be externally applied to the child,” effectively disempowering teachers and students alike by removing their capacities for free thought.<sup>47</sup> In both of these monographs, Dewey reflects his growing understanding that not only must students be empowered, but so too must teachers.

In 1903, a year after publication of the *Contributions to Education* series, Dewey offered a more definitive statement on his emerging views of teachers and students in democratically empowered schools when he published “Democracy in Education” [emphasis added], a brief article in the UC journal that Ella Flagg Young edited, *The Elementary School Teacher*.<sup>48</sup> In this work, he unequivocally articulates the view that while “democracy means freeing intelligence for independent effectiveness,” schools are essentially undemocratic institutions, impinging on the intellectual freedoms of teachers and students alike.<sup>49</sup> He explains that teachers generally do not have “the power of initiation and constructive endeavor which is necessary to the fulfilment of the function of teaching,” that if there is a school system anywhere in the country that enables this power, “that fact has escaped my notice.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, he says that “[e]ither we come here upon some fixed and inherent limitation of the democratic principle, or else we find in this fact an obvious discrepancy between the conduct of the school and the conduct of social life—a discrepancy so great as to demand immediate and persistent effort at

reform.”<sup>51</sup> In this compelling and forcefully argued work, Dewey voices strong agreement with Young’s views about the importance of empowering students and teachers alike if schools are to play meaningful roles in cultivating a fully democratic society.

#### DEWEY RELEGATES WOMEN TEACHERS TO THE MARGINS

By 1904, John Dewey had lost patience with what he viewed as Harper’s meddling and political maneuvering, particularly when Harper discontinued Alice Dewey’s principalship of the Laboratory School. The UC Board of Trustees accepted his letter of resignation on May 2.<sup>52</sup> He then began his new position as professor of philosophy at Columbia University, a position with no administrative responsibilities and no direct connection with Columbia’s Teachers College. Ella Flag Young, who undoubtedly had experienced her own frustrations with Harper, submitted her letter of resignation two months later, likely in sympathy with Dewey.<sup>53</sup> Young may also have felt exasperated with some of Dewey’s administrative and practical shortcomings through the years, but if she did, she reined in her expression of it, offering only public praise and admiration for her doctoral mentor and colleague. Notably, though, Young did not join Dewey in New York, but instead departed with her companion, Laura Brayton, for a year of travel abroad.<sup>54</sup>

Dewey and Young exchanged a few letters over the years and even managed to visit a time or two. From a distance, they also followed each other’s careers with intense interest. Dewey was particularly curious about Young’s appointment to the Chicago superintendency in 1909, which instantly catapulted her to national and international fame.<sup>55</sup> Even though some members of the Board of Education had explicitly sought a man for the position, refusing to consider a woman, the increasingly organized and highly successful agitation of the female Chicago Teachers Federation—and suffragists around the city—had severely constrained Edwin Cooley, the previous superintendent. After an extensive nationwide search, Board members could not find a male candidate for the position who enjoyed anywhere nearly the rapport and mutual regard among the city’s teachers as Young. In the end, they offered her the position in part to recognize what they came to understand as her unmatched experience, knowledge, and record of accomplishment in the schools—but also because in this moment, a male superintendent likely would not have sufficiently understood the range and depth of issues important to Chicago’s largely female and increasingly activist teaching force. The women teachers of the city and their allies celebrated this triumphal moment. Young proceeded to experience four relatively smooth years as superintendent in which she, the educators of the Chicago schools, students, and community members would impressively reconstruct the schools as she endeavored to put into practice much of the thought she had developed earlier in her career, then refined and articulated while at UC.

Illinois granted women the vote in June of 1913, after long campaigning on the part of highly determined suffragists. Finally, most of the state’s large teaching force could vote on the full range of matters that affected them, especially schools. Young, frequently called on by state and national media, had this to say: “It is the greatest thing Illinois ever has done.”<sup>56</sup> Even the noted and controversial British suffrage leader, Emmeline Pankhurst, proclaimed, “I am convinced that the women of Illinois, among them are

numbered such world-famous women as Jane Addams and Ella Flagg Young, will worthily use their newly won liberty.”<sup>57</sup>

Almost immediately, though, Young quickly found herself on a collision course with several of the mayor’s recent school board appointees. They stripped her of some of her administrative powers. Refusing to be hobbled in carrying out her responsibilities, she resigned only a month after Illinois women had achieved full suffrage.<sup>58</sup> John Dewey wrote his daughter about the matter, explaining that, “Mrs. Young resigned at Chicago because some of the politicians interfered with her. This is where woman’s suffrage in Illinois comes in handy; the women will probably force the mayor and the board to keep her and not meddle anymore.”<sup>59</sup> Dewey was right—to a point. Newly empowered women across the city, a significant number of them teachers, rose up in protest, demanding that the mayor do everything in his power to keep Young, which he did for a time.<sup>60</sup> The mayor understood that these angry women could now vote.

Dewey continued to send his family updates on unfolding events, especially the ways that newly enfranchised women—and a powerful backlash movement directed against them—affected the democratic nature of schools.<sup>61</sup> And Young sometimes wrote Dewey directly to fill him in, such as when she resigned again half a year later when members of the school board reprised their maneuvers from June. She happily reported to him that, “Nothing is more remarkable than the way the women are developing a knowledge of parliamentary procedure and are also ably distinguishing between speeches made for the purpose of delaying action and speeches made for the purpose of securing a careful inquiry into a report.”<sup>62</sup> Beyond this, Jane Addams and a broad coalition of Chicago’s women activists and allied men, especially including teachers, organized a mass meeting that attracted a great deal of national media attention. They also engaged in many other forms of political activism to get the mayor to retain Young again and repair the dysfunction on the board.<sup>63</sup> The mayor complied sufficiently for Young to return to the superintendency one more time. However, the remaining two years of her service were marred by bitter fights on the board with a persistent faction battling against the political gains won by coalitions of newly enfranchised voters. Young stepped down for good in early January of 1916. Shortly afterward, she read Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*, hot off the press, and then published her review.

## CONCLUSIONS

Young remarked in her review that, “[t]he meaning of freedom in school is given in the clearest and most explicit language—it could not be blurred by one who has made freedom of thought a necessity in his classroom.”<sup>64</sup> She had long admired Dewey’s analytical clarity and his unwavering commitment to freedom so fundamental to democracy.

Interestingly, Young described Dewey’s meaning of *freedom* as “treated from a strictly impersonal standpoint.”<sup>65</sup> As a philosophical treatise at the time, an impersonal standpoint would have been valued—and Dewey likely was reassured in reading her assessment. However, there is a great deal that he diminished in this book to achieve that sort of “strictly impersonal standpoint” overall. Most notably, he backgrounded teachers, shedding his intense awareness of their importance that he had expressed earlier in “The Educational Situation” and “Democracy in Education.” Instead, in this book teachers are essentially abstract, almost peripheral figures rather than essential agents. Dewey also

failed to examine the gendered aspects of teachers' predicament. In so doing, he stripped from his work a key reason that so many of the exemplary women educators of his day, especially Ella Flagg Young, labored so vigorously for full suffrage and true democratic practice in and around schools. Dewey effectively imbibed the spirit and energy of the movement, but without attributing its origins or wishing to disclose its messy, political, and very personal (rather than impersonal) nature. With this omission, he may also have missed the vital forces that animated teacher activists to join theory with practice, democracy, and education.

Dewey distanced himself from the realms of women's work in schools as well as from the social, economic, and political issues that had catalyzed a larger movement for education and democracy, which pre-dated his scholarship on the topic. In this way, he preserved—and even enhanced—his scholarly reputation, was broadly credited with pioneering efforts to link education and democracy, and suffered none of the consequences that accrued to those who actively engaged in this difficult work, most especially women. At the same time, through this important omission, Dewey may have fundamentally undercut his essential democratic principles by perpetuating the pattern of disempowering—and disappearing—the people who could make democratic schools possible.

Finally, the remarkable woman who gave suffragists around the country hope for their broadly expanded democratic rights and enlarged sphere of public service suffered unrelenting, personally targeted, and vicious political attacks until she resigned and eventually her contributions were erased from the public mind. In this way, women have been discouraged from high levels of public service into the present.

## NOTES

The author wishes to thank Cristina Groeger for her exceptionally insightful and helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup>Ella Flagg Young, "Democracy and Education," *Journal of Education* 84:1 (July 6, 1916): 5–6.

<sup>2</sup>Joan K. Smith, *Ella Flagg Young: Portrait of a Leader* (Ames: Iowa State University Research Foundation, 1979); John McManis, *Ella Flagg Young and a Half-Century of the Chicago Public Schools* (Chicago: McClurg, 1916); and Jackie M. Blount, *The Life and Thought of Ella Flagg Young* (in progress). For discussion of Young and Dewey's collaboration on the *Contributions to Education Series*, see Jackie M. Blount, "The Mutual Intellectual Relationship of John Dewey and Ella Flagg Young: *Contributions to Education Series, 1901–1902*" in *Philosophy and History of Education: Diverse Perspectives on Their Value and Relationship*, eds. Antoinette Errante, Jackie M. Blount, and Bruce Kimball (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, in press).

<sup>3</sup>Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey" in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1939), 29.

<sup>4</sup>Young, "Democracy and Education," 5.

<sup>5</sup>Young, "Democracy and Education," 5.

<sup>6</sup>Ellen Condliffe Lageman describes how Dewey's interest in the immediacies of schools as well as in teachers declined when he went to Columbia. "Experimenting with Education: John Dewey and Ella Flagg Young at the University of Chicago," *American Journal of Education* 104 (May 1996): 171–85.

<sup>7</sup>In 1891, Illinois granted women school suffrage, the right to vote on education-related matters. See Sandra D. Harmon, "Altgeld the Suffragist," *Chicago History* (Summer 1987): 19–20. However, in Chicago, school board members were chosen by the mayor—and women could not vote on this matter.

<sup>8</sup>Anonymous, "Heckling the President," *The Suffragist* 5:81 (1917): 8; and "N.E.A. Rejects Mrs. E. F. Young's Suffrage Issue," *Chicago Tribune*, July 14, 1917, 4.

<sup>9</sup>John Dewey, "Democracy in Education," *The Elementary School Teacher* 4:4 (Dec. 1903): 193–204.

<sup>10</sup>Kate Rousmaniere, *City Teachers: Teaching and School Reform in Historical Perspective* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997); Kate Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005); *Grace Strachan, Equal Pay for Equal Work* (New York:

B. F. Buck & Co., 1910); and Jackie M. Blount, *Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency, 1873–1995* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup>For example, see *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882–1898, Vols. 1–4*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969–1971).

<sup>12</sup>John Dewey [1888], “The Ethics of Democracy” in *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882–1898, Vol. 1*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 227–49, quoted from 237.

<sup>13</sup>John Dewey [1893], “Christianity and Democracy” in *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882–1898, Vol. 4*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), 7.

<sup>14</sup>Dewey, “Democracy in Education.”

<sup>15</sup>Blount, “The Mutual Intellectual Relationship.” Also see Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 46–50; Max Eastman, “John Dewey,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 168 (Dec. 1941): 672–73; Michael Knoll, “John Dewey as Administrator: The Inglorious End of the Laboratory School in Chicago,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (Aug. 2014): 4–5, doi:10.1080/00220272.2014.936045; and Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1911), 8, for a discussion of his school teaching, then 13–15 for his intended studies at Johns Hopkins.

<sup>16</sup>John Dewey [1885], “Education and the Health of Women” in *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882–1898, Vol. 1*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 64–68; John Dewey [1886], “Health and Sex in Higher Education” in *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882–1898, Vol. 1*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 69–80; John Dewey, [1886], “Psychology in High-Schools from the Standpoint of the College” in *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882–1898, Vol. 1*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 81–89; and John Dewey [1893], “Teaching Ethics in the High School” in *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882–1898, Vol. 4*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), 54–61.

<sup>17</sup>He had accepted a faculty appointment in 1894, but due to prior travel commitments, did not begin to teach until the autumn term of 1895. For Young’s coursework, see Rosemary Donatelli, “The Contributions of Ella Flagg Young to the Educational Enterprise” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1971, 137–38).

<sup>18</sup>McManis, *Ella Flagg Young*, 102–3.

<sup>19</sup>McManis, *Ella Flagg Young*, 119–22.

<sup>20</sup>Smith, *Ella Flagg Young*; and McManis, *Ella Flagg Young*. As an example of her idiosyncratic style, see “Chicago Notes,” *The Intelligence* (Oct. 1, 1891): 235.

<sup>21</sup>McManis, *Ella Flagg Young*, 35–37.

<sup>22</sup>*Twelfth Annual Report of the Board of Education, 1866* (Chicago: Rounds & James, 1866), 76–78.

<sup>23</sup>Laura Brayton, “Young, Ella Flagg,” *Biographical Cyclopaedia of U.S. Women, Vol. 2* (New York: Halvord Publishing Co., 1925), 3–4; and McManis, *Ella Flagg Young*, 59–62.

<sup>24</sup>McManis, *Ella Flagg Young*, 61–62.

<sup>25</sup>For example, see this retrospective story about Winship’s first encounter with Young: A. E. Winship, “Mrs. Ella Flagg Young,” *Journal of Education* (Aug. 31, 1905): 250–51.

<sup>26</sup>See Ella Flagg Young, “How to Teach Parents to Discriminate between Good and Bad Teaching,” *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the National Educational Association, 1887* (Salem, MA: NES, 1888): 245–49.

<sup>27</sup>University of Chicago, Board of Trustees, Minutes, May 10, July 12, and Sept. 13, 1898, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>28</sup>Robert L. McCaul, “Dewey’s Chicago,” *The School Review* 67:2 (Summer 1959): 261–62; Jane M. Dewey, ed., “Biography of John Dewey” in ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, *The Philosophy of John Dewey* (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1939), 29; and letter from Ella Flagg Young to William Rainey Harper, Oct. 28, 1898, University of Chicago, University Archives, Presidents Papers, 1889–1925, Box 54, Folder 25. See also letter from John Dewey to William Rainey Harper, Dec. 21, 1899, Presidents Papers, 1889–1925, Box 30, Folder 24; and University of Chicago, Board of Trustees, Minutes for Mar. 20, 1900, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. For a discussion of Young’s request to change the name of the department, see McManis, *Ella Flagg Young*, 116.

<sup>29</sup>Letter from George Herbert Mead to John and Alice Chipman Dewey, accessed at the Center for Dewey Studies, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, John Dewey Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, June 23, 1899.

<sup>30</sup>“Mrs. Young will Teach,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1899, 8.

<sup>31</sup>For an extensive analysis of Young’s work at UC, with Dewey, and with the Laboratory School, see Smith, *Ella Flagg Young*, 60–100. Also see Knoll, “John Dewey as Administrator,” 10–11.

<sup>32</sup>Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, *The Dewey School: The Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, 1896–1903* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1936), 7.

<sup>33</sup>Knoll, “John Dewey as Administrator,” citing Eastman, “John Dewey,” 679.

<sup>34</sup>Knoll, “John Dewey as Administrator,” citing Eastman, “John Dewey,” 679.

<sup>35</sup>Letter from John Dewey to William Rainey Harper, July 22, 1901, University of Chicago, Presidents’ Papers, 1889–1925, Box 30, Folder 24; letter from William Rainey Harper to John Dewey, Aug. 2, 1901, University of Chicago, Presidents’ Papers, 1889–1925, Box 30, Folder 24; Smith, *Ella Flagg Young*, 84–85; Robert McCaul, “Dewey, Harper, and the University of Chicago: July, 1894–Mar., 1902” in *John Dewey: Master Educator*, eds. William W. Brickman and Stanley Lehrer (New York: Atherton Press, 1966), 46; and Knoll, “John Dewey as Administrator,” 21.

<sup>36</sup>Sam Stack, “Alice Chipman Dewey (1858–1927): Still a Mystery?” *Journal of Philosophy and History of Education* 59 (2009): 28–37, esp. 28–29.

<sup>37</sup>Knoll describes the codirector arrangement in “John Dewey as Administrator,” 21.

<sup>38</sup>Blount, “The Mutual Intellectual Relationship.”

<sup>39</sup>For a summary, see “The Educational Commission and Its Report,” *Chicago Teacher and School Board Journal* 1:1 (Jan. 1899): 22. One provision of the report stipulated that more men should be recruited by paying them higher salaries than for women. Another stated “that a larger proportion of the teachers be men; and that all proper means be employed to attract men to these positions.” Finally, the commission recommended that married women teachers no longer be hired. Article 4, Section 9 and Article 6, Section 4, “Recommendations of the Educational Commission of the City of Chicago,” *The Chicago Teacher and School Board Journal* 1:2 (Feb. 1899): 63–64.

<sup>40</sup>Ella Flagg Young, “The Educational Outlook,” *The Intelligence* (June 1, 1899): 411–12.

<sup>41</sup>Brayton, “Young, Ella Flagg,” 5. Also see the front-page story, “Ella F. Young Resigns,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 4, 1899. Also note that Laura Brayton and Ella Flagg Young were “companions” from the mid-1880s until Young’s death in 1918. This is the word they and their friends used to describe their relationship. For example, see “Ella Flagg Young Dies in Service of Her Country,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 11:4 (Jan. 1919): 654–56.

<sup>42</sup>Ella Flagg Young, *Isolation in the School, Contributions to Education, Number 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1901), 22.

<sup>43</sup>Young, *Isolation in the School*, 54–55.

<sup>44</sup>Young, *Isolation in the School*, 55–56.

<sup>45</sup>John Dewey, “Psychology and Social Practice,” *Contributions to Education, Number 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1901), 12.

<sup>46</sup>Dewey, “The Educational Situation,” 25–26 and n. 1.

<sup>47</sup>Dewey, “The Educational Situation,” 30–31 and n. 1.

<sup>48</sup>Dewey, “Democracy in Education,” 193–204.

<sup>49</sup>Dewey, “Democracy in Education,” 193.

<sup>50</sup>Dewey, “Democracy in Education,” 194–95.

<sup>51</sup>Dewey, “Democracy in Education,” 195.

<sup>52</sup>University of Chicago, Board of Trustees, Minutes, *University Archives, Volume 4, 1902–1904*, May 2, 1904, Special Meeting, 449, 453.

<sup>53</sup>University of Chicago, Board of Trustees, Minutes, *University Archives, Volume 5, 1904–1907*, July 19, 1904, Board Meeting, 86. Also see Smith, *Ella Flagg Young*, 97.

<sup>54</sup>Smith, *Ella Flagg Young*, 99–100; and Blount, *The Life and Thought of Ella Flagg Young*.

<sup>55</sup>“Supt. Ella Young is Now Her Title,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 31, 1909, 3; and “A Woman Head of Schools,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1909, 1.

<sup>56</sup>“Women Rejoice over the Result,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 12, 1913, 2.

<sup>57</sup>“Mrs. Pankhurst to American Sisters,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 11, 1913, 1.

<sup>58</sup>“Mrs. Young Quits; Some to Demand She Be Retained,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1913, 1.

<sup>59</sup>Letter from John Dewey to Evelyn Dewey, Aug. 4, 1913, Center for John Dewey Studies, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, John Dewey Papers, Box 5, Folder 2.

<sup>60</sup>“Mrs. Young Quits; Women to Demand she Be Retained,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1913, 1; and “Backed by Board, Mrs. Young Stays as School Chief,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 31, 1913, 1.

<sup>61</sup>Letter from John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey and Family, Dec. 17, 1913, Center for John Dewey Studies, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, John Dewey Papers, Box 5, Folder 2.

<sup>62</sup>Letter from Ella Flagg Young to John Dewey, Feb. 18, 1914, Center for Dewey Studies, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, John Dewey Papers, Box 5, Folder 4.

<sup>63</sup>“Women Arrange Big Massmeeting,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 12, 1913, 2; “Chicago Roused over Mrs. Young,” *New York Times*, Dec. 12, 1913, 11; and “Stand by Mrs. Young,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 12, 1913, 3.

<sup>64</sup>Young, “Democracy and Education,” 5.

<sup>65</sup>Young, “Democracy and Education,” 5.