

CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

This study has measured Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's commitments to civic education by reference to the public, rhetorical and economic dimensions of republican citizenship. All three of these educators were heirs of a long tradition of civic education. In seeming fidelity to this tradition they exhorted their charges to engage in public service. But their sense of service was not always synonymous with the political activities that are associated with republican citizenship. Porter advocated service, but it was service that was often attuned as much to God as it was to politics. Eliot, too, upheld service but it was a service that could be as easily fulfilled through a professional career as through active political participation. Wilson, more than either Eliot or Porter, maintained allegiance to the vision of education as cultivating men for active participation in politics.

Moreover, if Porter and Eliot's exhortations to service were not always directed toward making men more political, the civic features of their exhortations were also weakened by their sympathy for cloistered activities which lacked the directly public character of republican citizenship.

Their civic commitments were also compromised by the rhetoric they employed and by the type of rhetorical practices they sought to foster in their respective institutions. Theorists like Hannah Arendt and Michael Walzer have suggested that an attachment to civility can threaten civic life. As I noted, Porter and Eliot were especially attached to forms of civility and to forms of discourse that would placate and appease. However, as I also noted, civility's effects on civics are much more protean than my reading of Arendt and Walzer would lead us to suppose. As a result of civility's equivocal effects, Eliot and Porter's commonsense attachment to civility has ambiguous and indefinite civic effects.

But if their civility does not ultimately help in uncovering their civic commitments, other features of their rhetoric do unveil more definitive signs of their civic impact. As a moral philosopher and as a defender of classical education, Porter sought to maintain a place for normative dialogue at Yale. These dialogues, however, were compromised by his attachment to an archaic pedagogy which emphasized recitation and memorization over critical thinking. Eliot's civic commitments, on the other hand, were compromised by his tacit acceptance of patterned isolationism, and by his incautious embrace of inductive languages and a plain style of discourse. Of the three educators, Wilson's rhetorical proclivities were less civically compromising. He did not uphold archaic pedagogical methods as Porter did, he was less prone to use Eliot's plain style, and he was very fond of the combative rhetoric found in forensic debate.

Finally, these educators commitments to civic education were also effected by their attitudes toward commercial activity. Until the dawn of the Progressive era, Eliot and Wilson had been advocates of *laissez faire*. Their faith in an unregulated economic sphere suggests that Eliot and Wilson were not as civic as they could have been since the impetus to keep government out of commerce limits the realm of the political . Had they placed more faith in the power of political activity to direct commercial activity towards salutary ends they would have had a greater incentive to channel students into political careers. The connection between *laissez faire* ideology and weakened commitments to civic education also suggest that as Eliot and Wilson embraced Progressivism they would have developed stronger commitments to civic education. However, when Wilson and Eliot started to embrace the idea of a regulatory state, this shift had only ambiguous effects on their civic commitments. Enlarged state regulatory activity allowed professionals to play a greater advisorial role

in directing state activity but it did not necessarily enlarge the realm of the political or increase a student's incentive to participate in public debates about collective ends. The shift from a laissez faire state to a regulatory state expanded the civil service more than the realm of the political -- or at least that is how Wilson conceived of it. In the "Study of Administration" Wilson justified the call to increase administrative capacities as a way of expanding dialogue over collective means rather than collective ends.

These sentiments strongly suggest that Wilson and Eliot's gradual embrace of the regulatory state had only ambiguous effects on their commitment to republican citizenship. A more definitive avenue for exploring how their attitudes toward commerce influenced their civic commitments has been made, in this study, by examining how Porter, Eliot, and Wilson reacted to the increased demands for specialization imposed by a commercial economy. As we have seen, Porter and Wilson exercised more caution than Eliot in bringing specialization onto their campuses. More so than either Porter or Wilson, Eliot embraced the culture of professionalism and in the process distanced himself from the general learning and the longstanding civic traditions that he had been heir to.

In articulating Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's civic commitments by reference to the public, rhetorical and economic dimensions of republican citizenship, it should now be evident that their dedication to republican civic education varied greatly. Porter's civic commitments were compromised by his attachment to an orthodox pedagogy and by his sympathies with cloistered scholarship. Eliot's dedication to citizenship were threatened by an ideal of public service that was not distinctly political, by his adoption of a plain style of speaking that had a tendency to submerge civic contention, by patterned isolationism and by his incautious embrace of

specialization. Of the three, Wilson, so far, exhibits the strongest civic commitments. He envisioned Princeton as a college that was emphatically and almost singly devoted to channeling men into politics, he promoted political debate on campus, and he was very wary of the manner in which specialization and professionalization threatened civic spirit.

But while these educators displayed different attachments to civic education, none of them was particularly warm to the idea that this training should be extended to everyone in equal degree. The position which each of these educators took with respect to civic education was integrated within a larger political outlook that was replete with elite sympathies. While some of these men may have been faithful to the traditional practices and external appearances of civic education, it is less evident whether they were capable of maintaining a profounder civic commitment to a vitalized public space - at least if this vitality is defined by the ideal of broad and inclusive public conversation. While these educators (Wilson especially) sometimes displayed greater fidelity to civic education than their peers, their civic visions were all compromised by the elite and exclusive features of Yale, Harvard, and Princeton. Even when they upheld the three standards of citizenship discussed in chapters three, four, and five, their civics were compromised because they were not inclusive enough. A vitalized civic space and a genuinely civic education is *vital* only when it is populated by beings who can communicate with one another *and* when it manages to be an inclusive institution that enables and encourages everyone to participate in political conversation. In what follows I explore to what extent these educators were capable of developing this more inclusive form of civic education.

Commitments to Hierarchy

The curricular concerns of these educators seem at first gloss, to have been merely about pedagogy or about how and what to teach, but they were, on second glance, deeply implicated in the quality of civic and class arrangements in America. In what follows I will first articulate the hierarchical implications inherent in their educational philosophies. Secondly, I will discuss how these elite sympathies effected their ability to uphold civic education.

Porter

A hint of Porter's elite predilections are revealed in his support for the Whig party. By using a positive state, and an educated leadership, Porter and the rest of his New Haven colleagues hoped to develop the moral character of the nation. To a large extent this desire to lead by way of moral example was carried over into his Yale presidency. As he professed during his inaugural speech,

The higher education in mastering the past and sympathizing with the present, will wisely forecast and direct the future. The men whom it trains are men of the future, and to a large extent have the future of the country in their hands. Hence the relations of this education to the future take up into themselves and control its relations to the present and the past.¹

Yale men, Porter thought, would be alert to the past in a way that would enable them to direct the nation's future. Porter saw Yale as an anvil for fashioning leaders. His vision is further substantiated by his vociferous support for discipline and hard work in college.

While many Yale students treated college as a reprieve from the working world, Porter tried to counteract this by orienting students to a more industrious ideal. This ideal was embodied in his affection for the "patience" and "toil" of German

¹ Noah, Porter, "Inaugural Address at Yale College," 40.

scholarship. Porter's affection for work helped, in one way, to reduce the distance between the college and the work force. If the college student could gain a more industrious repute, then the image of the college as a haven for aristocratic leisure could drop away, dissolving one of the differences which existed between the college and the surrounding world.

Porter's attempt to make higher education more laborious cuts both ways, however, for while it helped in developing affinities between the work of the student and the work of the day laborer, it also had less democratic tendencies. The increased work which Porter meant to confer on true scholarship meant that the ideal would be attainable by only the most ambitious. In paying so much homage to the toil and discipline of scholarship, Porter was trying, whether wittingly or unwittingly, to turn Yale into an experience that would only be within the reach of the most studious and regimented characters. In working so hard for ends that were only indirectly remunerative, Porter's ideal of undergraduate and graduate scholarship bespoke, if nothing else, of an amount of moral ambition that was the province of the few. The time and effort upon which this education depended were generally not an option which the majority of men might elect.² In forwarding a regimen that only appealed to the few and in conceiving of these few as the future moral leaders, Porter envisioned higher education as an elite institution -- an institution, as it were, which acted as a crucible for forming democracy's moral elite. .

² Interestingly, many colleges became even more exclusive as the century progressed. As Leslie points out, Princeton, Franklin and Marshall, Bucknell and Swathmore may have become less denominationally exclusive, but this was replaced with a homogenous set of upper-middle-class students whose shared character was money. W. Bruce Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars: College and Community in the "Age of the University," 1865-1917* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

Eliot

If Porter harbored a vision of an elite formed through hard work and toil, Eliot endorsed a similar vision in his promotion of a meritocratic elite that would reveal itself through work. In his inauguration speech, Eliot moved to define Harvard as an institution where "the poorest and the richest students" would be "equally welcome . . . provided that with their poverty or wealth they bring capacity, ambition, and purity." But in making this gesture toward "capacity" or natural talent, Eliot was not willing to turn Harvard into an institution that completely abandoned a more ascriptive aristocratic ideal. For Eliot, Harvard was a place that worked on "selected material - selected by the force of their own capacities, or selected by the vigor and attainments of their parents."³ Harvard would revere the merit of talent while at the same time upholding the legitimacy of inherited wealth.⁴

Eliot continued to defend extant inequalities of wealth and talent throughout his time in office by exhorting people to recognize "the endless diversity of function, capacity and achievement" as well as the "inequality of condition . . . [that is] a necessary result of freedom."⁵ Instead of using higher education as a way of mitigating

³ Charles Eliot, "The Aims of the Higher Education," Address in Chicago, 1891, *Educational Reform; Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Company, 1898) 244.

⁴ Charles Eliot, "Equality in a Republic," Originally published in the "Cambridge Magazine," 1896, *American Contributions to Civilization and Other Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1897) 166.

⁵ Charles Eliot, "The Function of Education in Democratic Society," Address to the Brooklyn Institute on October 2, 1897, *Educational Reform; Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Company, 1898) 415-16.

these disparities, Eliot looked to Harvard and other colleges and universities as a way of developing the gifts of those who were innately talented and of those who had been able to enhance what they had been born with through the help of "refined homes" and "good breeding". If primary and secondary school were to be open to everyone, higher education would be open only to a few. As Eliot put it, in 1888, "the elementary education for all, the higher for all the naturally selected . . ."⁶

In this mix of the rich and talented, specialization figured prominently as Eliot proclaimed in his inaugural, "there is an aristocracy to which the sons of Harvard have belonged, and, let us hope, will ever aspire to belong - the aristocracy which . . . carries off the honors and prizes of the learned professions, and bears itself with distinction in all fields of intellectual labor . . ."⁷ For the Jacksonians, and even for the some Boston Brahmins of early and mid nineteenth century America, talent and wealth could materialize even in the absence of specialization. But as the prophet of an emerging professionalism, Eliot would have been the first to say that an elite was most happily fashioned when it did so through a profession or career.

Eliot's ideas seemed more democratic than Porter's but they were really elitism under a new guise. Whereas the tradition of higher education had reinforced class divisions by selectively conferring the status markers of eloquence and erudition, Eliot overturned this by trying to redefine the status markers that constituted a gentleman. The new status marker, based on a "mastery of some small portion of the human

⁶ Charles Eliot, "The Working of the American Democracy," Harvard Phi Beta Kappa Address, 1888, *American Contributions to Civilization and Other Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1897) 96.

⁷ Charles Eliot, "Inaugural Address as President of Harvard College, October 19, 1869 ." 21-22.

store," certainly helped to redefine the criteria by which to distinguish class, but it did not in any essential way serve to get rid of social stratification.

The opportunity to achieve social distinction might have been opened up to a wider array of people when hard work and talent started to compete against wealth and lineage in determining who would be privy to advanced education. But if Eliot was more meritocratic in his promotion of an education devoted to creating experts, the education was still essentially hierarchical in its results. Greater mobility and greater circulation of elites may have resulted from Eliot's tenure at Harvard, but these qualities did not necessarily lead to substantive equality in civil society. Put another way, Eliot's Harvard may have been increasingly seen by an emerging middle class as an institution that would ensure a fairer means for competing in the race of life. But if Eliot was promoting the ideal of equal opportunity in so far as he was admitting more students on the basis of talent, he certainly did not intend to use Harvard as a way of promoting equality of outcomes. Since Eliot was not an ardent egalitarian, it is hardly surprising that he did not trouble to think about how stratification might negatively effect the civic foundations of democracy. Eliot lauded the culture of professionalism and the value of civic responsibility. But it was a casual juxtaposition that in the end did not bother examine how the stratifying effects of the culture of professionalism might compromise widespread civic action.⁸

⁸ For a broader critique of the culture of professionalism and its effects on American Democracy, see Christopher Lasch's *The Revolt of the Elite*. Lasch criticizes the professional class for promoting "careers open to talents" as the ostensible anchor of democracy. In his view, the emphasis on "careerism tends to undermine democracy by divorcing knowledge from practical experience, devaluing the kind of knowledge that is gained from experience, and generating social conditions in which ordinary people are not expected to know anything at all. The reign of specialized expertise...is the antithesis of democracy as it was understood by those who saw this country as the 'last best hope of earth.'" Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of*

Wilson

Wilson's elite predilections are best revealed by reference to his two tiered vision of education. This vision enabled him to find a place for expertise in spite of his aforementioned vociferous aversion to technically focused training, as well as his distaste for professional, fact oriented non-literary history. Having written the "Study of Administration" in 1887 while a professor at Bryn Mawr, Wilson had been known for his advocacy of a "technically schooled civil service". In promoting "thoroughly trained officials" one might anticipate that Wilson, as college president, would have been a strong proponent of specialization and focused technocratic training at Princeton, since he seemed to be lamenting the lack of these specialties in the nation at large.⁹ But Wilson did not uphold this vision as strongly in his portrait of what Princeton should be. In keeping with his predecessor, James McCosh, and in contrast to Charles Eliot, Wilson wanted Princeton students to retain a grasp on the "whole" even as they became increasingly distracted by the specialized focus of professional education. As president of Princeton, Wilson did not follow the path outlined in his 1887 piece because he had a more elite vision of what Princeton was supposed to be. Despite his advocacy of administrative expertise, Wilson was not about to embrace it without ensuring that it would be tempered by minds that had also been educated more generally. As he wrote in 1893,

The separation of general and special training is an acute symptom of the disease of specialization by which we are now so sorely afflicted. Our

the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995) 79.

⁹ Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration."; Woodrow Wilson, "Democracy and Efficiency," *College and State; Educational Literary and Political Papers (1875-1913)*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1925) 401.

professional men are lamed and hampered by that partial knowledge which is the most dangerous form of ignorance. I would no more employ a physician unacquainted with the general field of science than I would employ an oculist who was ignorant of the general field of medicine. Knowledge is trustworthy only when it is balanced and complete. This is the reason why the whole of the question we are now considering is a university question. Knowledge must be kept together; our professional schools must be university schools. Our faculties must make knowledge whole. The liberal education that our professional men get must not only be antecedent to their technical training; it must also be concurrent with it.¹⁰

Wilson never specifically said whether this meant that administrative experts should have a broader knowledge, or that their actions should be controlled by an elite who did. But Wilson certainly did not conceive of Princeton as an institution that would educate all echelons of an administrative bureaucracy. He was quite willing to recognize that not every specialist could be privileged enough to cultivate the broader perspectives that a Princeton education would inculcate. In the most definitive sense, Wilson did not conceive of a Princeton education and the widely-rooted knowledge which it was supposed to instill as an education that would be open to everyone:

No man who knows the world has ever supposed that a day would come when every young man would seek a college training. The college is not for the majority who carry forward the common labour of the world, nor even for those who work at the skilled handicrafts which multiply the conveniences and the luxuries of the complex modern life.¹¹

College was not an institution designed for the majority, rather, it was an institution designed for "the minority who plan, conceive, who superintend, who mediate between group and group." It was a place reserved for men who did not have

¹⁰ Woodrow Wilson, "Should an Antecedent Liberal Education Be Required of Students in Law, Medicine, and Theology?" Address delivered at the International Congress of Education, Chicago, July 26, 1893, *College and State; Educational Literary and Political Papers (1875-1913)*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1925) 112-17.

¹¹ Woodrow Wilson, "Princeton for the Nation's Service," 448-49.

to worry too much about money and who could nod their heads blithely when Wilson announced: "We must deal in college with the spirits of men, not with their fortunes."¹² The point of a Princeton education was not merely to develop mens capacities by which they might join a profession and become "breadwinner[s]", it was also to foster "citizens" who could "advance the race and help all men to a better life."

During Wilson's administration the Princeton admission department began to take talent more into consideration when it had previously looked mostly at status and wealth.¹³ Nonetheless, Wilson's Princeton was still an unreservedly elite institution devoted to the production of leaders who could apply their rarified generalist knowledge to the political problems of the day. If Wilson lauded the merits of wide ranging general studies, it was predicated on an aristocratic vision of who the university was meant to serve directly. Wilson's Princeton education was not an education for everybody and was to be denied to the majority of the American electorate who were condemned instead to the status of "mechanics of the mind . . . or . . . of the hand" privy only to the "technical knowledge and a technical skill."¹⁴ Specialists and experts would be lackeys; not policy makers themselves but instead subject to the dictates of the demos as articulated and molded by a group of more broadly educated Princeton elite.

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As we have seen, Eliot, Porter, and Wilson's opinions on higher education were inextricably bound up with their elite sympathies. Given the fact that only a very small

¹² Woodrow Wilson, "Princeton for the Nation's Service," 448-49.

¹³ Laurence Veysey, "The Academic Mind of Woodrow Wilson," 631.

¹⁴ Laurence Veysey, "The Academic Mind of Woodrow Wilson," 631.

percentage of the population attended college in their day, it is not surprising that they spoke of the college as an exclusive institution. But if they felt impelled to fashion their ideals with some attention to existing circumstances, it still bears noting that they were not terribly inclined to turn their institutions into models that might shadow the publicly endowed and more accessible state institutions that were emerging in the West and at land grant institutions.

While these educators certainly spoke of their institutions as schools that would benefit democracy by elevating the tenor of public discussion, the commitment of these men to a vitalized public discussion is made tenuous by the fact that they continued to use the college as a tool for furthering social stratification. Unlike public high schools and less selective state universities, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale enrolled students on the basis of wealth and talent. While the increased emphasis on talent may have opened these institutions to a wider array of social classes, and may have promoted the ideal of "careers open to talents," these developments did not necessarily serve democracy and the vitalized civic conversation upon which it depends. Even if in varying degrees these men succeeded in creating new leaders who could inject more deliberative oratory into the political arena, this could not help to elevate the tenor of public debate or public participation in the manner that a more broadly oriented and less elite system of higher education might have done.

In summary, these educators were in varying degrees capable of attending to the threats which cloisterization, neutral and dispassionate rhetoric, and specialization imposed on civic education. But if they sometimes managed to avoid or mitigate these threats their dedication to civic education was consistently compromised by their attachment to elite forms of education. These educators forwarded compromised versions of civic education and they were compromised in part because their schools

were of a distinctly select character. These presidents may have been interested in making their graduates into better governors who would be more capable of ruling others but their civic education was not meant to forward self-government --at least if republican government is consonant with broad and active civic participation. Yale, Harvard and Princeton graduates were seen by their respective presidents as *leaders* first and foremost. As leaders they would grasp the reins of power, but not as citizens among equals or as men who would unhesitatingly agree to share these reins with the less educated.

Administering during the nascence of the American university, these men had more opportunities to decide the fate of civic education than anyone. In the face of these opportunities Porter, Eliot, and Wilson advertised their civic intents by praising a civically oriented academe. To the ultimate disadvantage of civic life, their intentions were compromised by their attraction to the cloister, their pretense to discursive neutrality, and by their attraction to specialized economic practices that narrow the bounds of political conversation.

Some of the seeds of America's present civic disaffections were written in this period. But if our own civic misfortunes can be traced in part to Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's failures, their story of thwarted civic aims can still be put to beneficent effect. By understanding how their intents were compromised we can make more informed decisions about our own educational future, and perhaps thereby avoid the civically compromising features inherent in their pedagogical visions.

Although the connections are muted, higher education has a long running civic heritage. The humanities, in particular, are the most direct heirs to this civic tradition in their continued attention to normative and political questions. As late twentieth century higher education continues to downsize, and as the humanities verge on

suffering public ignominy, Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's story of thwarted civic aims can help us find a way through the present impasse. By avoiding their failures, the disciplines that forward civic education can be made better. This might not only ease the crisis of academe but improve the vitality of citizenship and the prospects of self-government.