

## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

From the end of the Civil War until the turn of the century, American higher education experienced a great expansion and metamorphosis. The old-time college, which had been devoted to the inculcation of discipline and piety through perusal and recitation of classic and biblical texts, was overtaken by a growing university which offered a wider array of courses. This new curriculum often fostered more secularized, scientific research and placed increased emphasis on vocational and professional training as a way of more effectively understanding and administering to the growing needs of an industrializing society. In the process of this curricular proliferation, the classical core of the old time college was often displaced.

Educators in this period responded differently to these developments. In this study I look at three educators who were prominent leaders of elite Atlantic seaboard institutions during this revolution in higher education. Where Noah Porter, president of Yale from 1871-1886, stubbornly upheld the virtue of the old classical curriculum, Charles Eliot, president of Harvard from 1869-1909, responded as a modernizer who was constantly hiring new faculty and expanding the curricular options. Coming in the aftermath of the major educational expansions, Wilson, president of Princeton from 1902-1910, was a closing icon in this whirlwind of academic change. Where Porter stalled and Eliot marched forward, Wilson attempted a two-step: he ceded to change while recalling the virtues of waning educational traditions.

As presidents of Harvard, Yale and Princeton, these men were at the head of the most effective educational institutions for channeling men into high public office. These schools also produced a large number of other prominent and influential

educational leaders.<sup>1</sup> As men who were poised to effect the future of higher education in America, Eliot, Porter, and Wilson were therefore unequaled. Moreover, unlike many other significant institutions that led the way in the late nineteenth century-- Johns Hopkins and Cornell, being the most prominent on this list--Yale, Harvard, and Princeton were institutions that had long claimed to be educating students for citizenship. These men had to confront this civic tradition more directly than the pioneers of younger schools because it was part and parcel of their institutional heritage. It is their inordinate influence, along with the way they confronted the tradition of education-for-citizenship and the imperative to modernize which makes these schools such provocative subjects of inquiry for the study of politics.

Describing the civic intents and civic consequences of Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's educational theories constitutes the focus of this study. It examines how dedicated these educators were to turning their schools into civic institutions that would produce citizens. The study gauges how civic these educators were by examining whether they intended to prepare students for active participation in political life and whether these civic intentions were compromised by their other ideological commitments. A few of their institutional reforms are cited to draw attention to concrete instances where their civic commitments may have been thwarted, but on the whole, the study is an ideological one. In other words, the study examines the intents of these educators and the way that these intents cohered with the rest of their pedagogical and political vision. An examination of the concrete civic consequences attached to their intents would demand an extensive investigation into

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<sup>1</sup> Marcia Graham Synott, *The Half-Opened Door, Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900-1970* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979) 3.

the civic activities of graduates who had studied at their schools during their tenure. Such an investigation still remains to be done.

These educators were all committed to using higher education as a way of preparing students for citizenship. But their vision of citizenship differed from each other and varied over time. They were, to different degrees, attracted to the vision of their students eventually becoming active participants in the political process. At the same time however, they expressed varying degrees of sympathy to the ideal of a college cloister where scholars and students would remain relatively insulated from the fray of politics and from the demands of the market. Moreover, while they often sought to express the civic importance of education, at other times they emphasized its professional and vocational value. How these educators weighed these varying commitments and how they sought to integrate them into their attempt to educate students for citizenship unveils a larger vision that delineates past answers to the abiding question of how to construct citizenship and education so as to promote a viable, if not noble, community. As we shall see, all three of these educators had good civic intents but their civic resolve did not always cohere with the rest of their pedagogical and political visions. Their civic intents were either compromised by an excessive sympathy for cloisterization, civically impoverishing forms of rhetoric, by an incautious embrace of specialization, or by their elitism.

Of course, a precise reading of Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's commitment to citizenship can only be articulated by providing a clear and definitive measure of citizenship. Is citizenship realized in those who abide by consensually determined normative values? Are persons displaying citizenship when they are socialized to accept beliefs and values that are commonly thought to maintain an existing social order? Can citizenship be realized in private pursuits? Conversely, if citizenship

depends on public pursuits, do these public pursuits necessarily have to be political?

Putting this last question another way, is citizenship only realized when one participates actively in public discussions that reflect on the end of associations?

There is no consensus on the answer to these questions but for this study a specifically republican notion of citizenship will be used where citizenship depends not only on public service but on participation in political decision-making -- and even more particularly, on decision-making which revolves around choosing collective ends.

A focus on a specifically republican notion of citizenship has suggested certain parameters for study. Republican citizenship is promoted by some forms of pedagogy while discouraged by others. The possibilities for republican citizenship are effected by a myriad of factors, including the extent of social hierarchy, the balance between public and private activity, the quality of civic conversation, the ubiquity of leisure, the form of economic activity, and the relative presence of civic institutions like a free press and a system for promoting literacy.

This study touches on many of these factors that effect citizenship. But since this study is particularly concerned with higher education, it has focused on factors that are particularly manifest in and around academia. These include the relative autonomy of the university vis a vis a larger public, the kind of civic conversation which the university promotes, the kind of economic activity which the university supports, and the ways in which the academy is implicated in the creation of social hierarchy. While these are the dominant themes in this study, as a whole the study is driven by two theoretical perspectives that help delineate the parameters of republican citizenship and the type of activities that would tend to threaten it. These are the rhetorical ideals of republican citizenship entertained by political theorists like Hannah Arendt and Michael Walzer, and the economic dimensions of republican citizenship as

they have been delineated by J.G.A. Pocock, Isaac Kramnick, Joyce Appleby, Drew McCoy and other scholars who have sought to describe the economic practices associated with republican and liberal ideology.

These descriptions of republican citizenship will help us to understand Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's relative commitments to civic education.

### *Dimensions of Republican Citizenship*

#### *Rhetorical dimensions*

Republican citizenship is best found in collectivities where people cherish public conversation and take an active interest in articulating collective needs. One of the more prominent theorists to speculate on what would spark this civic interest was Hannah Arendt. In the Human Condition, Arendt argued that interest in political life had been readily sparked by the oratorical culture of the ancient Greek republics and she took these as an inspiring model for encouraging republican citizenship. Arendt described Greek oratorical culture as "agonistic" (after the Greek *agon*). It was a place devoted to "the sharing of words and deeds" where an individual would be impelled to citizenship because he was struck by "the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring up against others". While Arendt became more tempered later on, in the Human Condition citizenship was strongly associated with agonistic politics or a rhetoric that was incendiary, combative, and highly adversarial.

Arendt's attempt to associate republican citizenship with a divisive politics are echoed by Michael Walzer in his essay "Civility and Civic Virtue in Contemporary America." While Walzer does not embrace Arendt's rhetorical extremes, he shares with Arendt a certain suspicion of civility and tempered discourse. Together, they suggest that the inordinate civic value and vitality which civility and tolerance lend to

political discussion is sometimes outweighed by the desiccating effects of civility. Doubting the absolute value of civility, is or course, a position which resists many ingrained notions of good behavior. Instead of stressing the heroic and defiant polemic as an important component of political speech (as Arendt does in The Human Condition) we often celebrate civility and cooperation. Instead of contest, competition, and inflammatory exchange we accent compromise, and if not compromise, at least courtesy. These sympathies hold merit because without a modicum of civility, the political sphere strays ever closer to the exchange of blows - a situation in which the republic rapidly loses its viability. Yet in spite of these caveats one cannot dismiss incivility altogether because it constitutes an important component of republican discourse. We can acknowledge a certain tension between incivility and republican citizenship, but to banish incivility as some might propose is to threaten the factional disputes and passions that have historically comprised the vitality of the republican experience. As Michael Walzer illustrates, a certain balance must be struck between civility and incivility. How we strike this balance helps to identify our relative commitments to republican and liberal ideals:

It is often said that the worst wars are civil wars because they are fought between brethren. One might say something similar about republican politics: because it rests on a shared commitment it is often more bitter and divisive than politics in other regimes. Civility and tolerance serve to reduce the tension, but they do so by undercutting the commitment. They encourage people to view their interests as fragmented, diverse, and private; they make for quiet and passive citizens unwilling to intrude on others or to subject themselves to the discipline of creed or party. I am not going to argue that we need choose in some absolute way one or the other of these forms of political life. What exists today and what will always exist is some balance between them. But the balance has changed over the years: we are, I think, more civil and less civically virtuous than Americans once were. The new balance is a liberal one.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Walzer, "Civility and Civic Virtue in Contemporary America," *What It Means To Be An American* (New York: Marsilio Publishers Corp., 1992) 95-96.

Although Walzer suggests which rhetorical styles accord with what ideology, this study is not primarily interested in gauging whether Porter, Eliot, and Wilson were republican or liberal. Nor, for that matter, does the study categorically accept incivility as the most expeditious avenue for enlarging civic space. Clearly however, the practice of rhetoric has some effect on citizenship. And if the balance between civility and incivility influences civic life, I will also argue that other rhetorical styles have an impact on civic life. While these styles cannot be detailed until chapter four, the important introductory point is that Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's rhetorical proclivities are worth comparing because rhetorical styles can make politics enchanting or repelling. These qualities, in turn, effect a citizenry's commitment to politics.

### *Economic dimensions*

While the study spends some time exploring the rhetorical dimensions of republican citizenship, it also focuses on its economic dimensions. These economic dimensions are best fathomed by understanding some traditional distinctions between republican and liberal ideology and how a republican sense of citizenship often is at odds with the economic practices supported by liberalism.

One of the more prominent authors of late to forward distinctions between republican and liberal ideology is J.G.A Pocock. Pocock conflates the term republicanism with civic humanism and uses the term to denote "a style of thought....in which it is contended that the development of the individual towards self-fulfillment is possible only when the individual acts as a citizen, that is as a conscious

and autonomous participant in an autonomous decision-taking political community.”<sup>3</sup> Using a language that centers around virtue, liberty, and corruption, republicans, in Pocock’s understanding, saw citizenship as participation in a political process that determined the ends of a community. This form of citizenship constituted the highest and most exalted form of virtue, “. . .the highest conceivable form of human life was that of a citizen who. . .ruled and was ruled as one of a community of equal heads making decisions which were binding on all. . . .”<sup>4</sup>

In exalting citizenship or political activity as the highest form of virtue, republican ideology also tended to come into conflict with bourgeois notions of virtue. In contrast to the republican or civic humanist embrace of Aristotle’s basic faith in the virtue of political activity, Pocock believed that liberalism was qualitatively different. For Pocock, “bourgeois ideology” supposed “that market behavior was all that was needed to make a human being a human being...” The contrasting senses of virtue, and what it meant to be a human being, seem to lead to a basic conflict between liberal and republican ideals of citizenship. Where republicans believe that the citizen, as a being contributing to the public good, realized himself through politics, liberals often see the citizen as a being who can contribute to the public good through market activity.

Given these differences in republican and liberal thought it is not surprising to find Pocock affirming that his reading of political history “consistently displays

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<sup>3</sup> J. G. Pocock, A., "Civic Humanism and Its Role in Anglo-American Thought," *Politics, Language, and Time* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) 85.

<sup>4</sup> J.G.A Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment; Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) 68.

republicanism as being at odds with liberalism” and that it would be a “mistake...to suppose that the tension [between virtue and commerce] ever disappeared”<sup>5</sup> In spite of this emphasis on a fundamental dissimilarity between republicanism and liberalism, historians have often noted that the boundaries sometimes seem more amorphous. As historian J.C. Isaac notes, James Harrington, (Pocock’s quintessential seventeenth century anglo-republican) was “definitely suspicious of commerce” but this did not mean he categorically rejected it. According to Isaac, Harrington actually spoke a civic language while at the same time sharing with liberalism “ not only a critique of private domination but a vision of private freedom. ” Moreover, far from rejecting the pursuit of private interest, Harrington lauded the virtue of the autonomous yeoman who was, in Isaac’s view, “a hard working, self-reliant individual, a petty bourgeois if not a capitalist.”<sup>6</sup>

The differences appear even more amorphous when considering American republicans who harbored even stronger attachments to liberal thought. As historian Drew McCoy notes, American republicans were at times prompted to “retreat toward traditional classical modes of expression that voiced serious doubts about the compatibility of commerce and republicanism.” But if American republicans expressed fidelity to ancient antipathies to private property and luxury, they tried to do

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<sup>5</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, "The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth Century Sociology," *Theories of Property: Aristotle to the Present* (Ontario, 1979). Cited in Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Republicanism Vs. Liberalism? A Reconsideration," *History of Political Thought* ix Summer 1988: 352-53.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Republicanism Vs. Liberalism? A Reconsideration," 366.

so without “disregarding the new imperatives of a more modern commercial society.”<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Joyce Appleby refers to Jeffersonian republicans as a species of republican who began to replace the traditional association between nature and fortune with Adam Smith’s more benign metaphor of the invisible hand. As Appleby relates:

Nature it seemed, had resolved the age-old tension between individual self-interest and the welfare of the community, making it possible to believe, as Jefferson did, that ‘the right of the whole can be no more than the sum of the rights of individuals.’ ..... Conservatives acknowledged the growth of self-interested actions, but in an elegiac spirit. Jeffersonian Republicans seized upon the liberating potential in this new conception of human nature and invested self-interest with moral value.”<sup>8</sup>

In associating virtue with private interest and industry, Jeffersonian republicans seem to be voicing sentiments which sound suspiciously similar to liberalism. Jeffersonian republicans continued to be concerned with political corruption and social decay but their political economy did not seem to categorically exclude liberal practices or ideals. Republicans have, at least at certain times, embraced the penumbras of liberalism when they exalt industry, work, and private property as virtues that “tended to make men independent citizens, who actualized their natural political capacity.”<sup>9</sup> And while republicans may have felt uncomfortable with an unmitigated possessive individualism or a rampant, uncontrolled capitalism this discomfort did not necessarily connote a categorical rejection of all commercial

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<sup>7</sup> Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1980) 10, 91.

<sup>8</sup> Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order - the Republican Vision* (New York: New York University Press, 1984) 97.

<sup>9</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, "Authority and Property: The Question of Liberal Origins," *After the Reformation: Essays in Honor of J.H. Hexter* (Philadelphia, 1980) 347. Cited in Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Republicanism Vs. Liberalism? A Reconsideration," 360.

activities. Republican ideals, became more “elusive” (to use McCoy’s term) when commerce was introduced, but given the exigencies of modernizing economies, republicans did not always feel compelled to reject commercial activities altogether.

In spite of the fact that self-described republicans may have adopted liberal practices it is hard to dismiss the extant tensions between liberalism and republican ideology when we recall the republican faith in citizenship -- as active participation in the articulation of the public good. American republicans might have entertained the virtues of a commercial economy but in doing so they displaced the central republican faith in citizenship or political activity as the best way of ensuring virtue. When republicans recall the civic humanist contention that human potential is only realized through active participation in politics, and that virtue is contingent on political activity, than the compatibility between liberalism and republicanism, and between commerce and republican citizenship becomes much more tenuous.

The tensions seem to subside because both ideologies can use a language of virtue that appeals to a larger public good. But when the term virtue is unpacked, it becomes clear that liberalism and republicanism are attached to notions of citizenship that are fundamentally different. As Isaac Kramnick puts it,

What emerged in the course of the late eighteenth century....was a new notion of virtue, one that dramatically rejected the assumptions of civic humanism. Citizenship and the public quest for the common good were replaced by economic productivity and hard work as the criteria of virtue. It is a mistake, however, to see this change simply as withdrawal from public activity to a private, self-centered realm. The transformation also involved a shift in emphasis on the nature of public behavior. Now the moral and virtuous man was defined not by his civic activity but by his economic activity. One’s duty was still to contribute to the public good, but such contributions could best be made through economic activity, which actually aimed at private gain. Self centered economic productivity, not public citizenship, became the badge of the virtuous man.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 196.

The shift described by Kramnick --from an ideology of civic humanism to neo-liberalism-- helps elucidate the civic humanist concept of citizenship and the ways in which liberalism tends to displace it. Liberals and republicans still associate citizenship with a type of person that contributes to the public good. But the means for making these contributions are different. Whereas republican citizenship demands participation in the public quest for the good life, the liberal professes that it is possible to fulfill the requirements of citizenship and to make public contributions through the pursuit of private profit or through action in the marketplace.

Since this study is concerned with the virtue of republican citizenship (e.g. the form of virtue and citizenship achieved through political activity) and since Porter, Eliot, and Wilson lived in a commercializing society that often celebrated the virtue of a different form of citizenship (e.g. the form of virtue and citizenship achieved through participation in the marketplace) the study is especially careful in identifying whether certain dimensions of Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's economic sentiments were compatible with their varying commitments to republican citizenship.

### *Literature Review*

The rhetorical and economic dimensions of republican citizenship serve as the methodological devices for unpacking the civic orientation of these educators' pedagogical visions. Studies of American civic education have been done before, but none have used the republican constructs outlined above to look specifically at Porter, Eliot, and Wilson. In Educating Republicans, David Robson looks at the American college from the period 1750-1800. While Robson is inattentive to reception theory (that is, how students received and reacted to their education), he claims that college students during this era were being educated for citizenship in a republic. In American

Education: The National Experience 1783-1876, Lawrence Cremin examines the early national period and describes in detail much of what has been used as introductory material in this dissertation; in the common schools of early nineteenth-century America the attention to civic education was well in evidence. As for works more pertinent to the period covered in this study, Louise Stevenson's "Preparing for Public Life: the Collegiate Students at New York University, 1832-1881" describes the shift from educational practices that upheld "republicanism" to those that upheld "liberalism" as they occurred at New York University. In a far more ambitious project entitled The Origins of American Social Science, Dorothy Ross argues that in order to legitimate their activity, the emerging social sciences appealed to a republican rhetoric of decline. America's industrial emergence threatened these scholars' vision of America as an exceptional country that had managed to escape the corrupting effects that time inevitably brought about in the Old World. In order to ensure that America would remain exceptional, social scientists believed that their knowledge could be used to "stay the hand of time," effectively preventing the American republic from succumbing to the decline which attended America's emergence from an ostensibly more pastoral age. If social scientists legitimated their activity by reference to a republican model of decline, Ross claims that they were, in the main, intent on "insur[ing] the realization of a harmonious liberal society." They upheld individualism and sought to ensure that the liberal opportunity which had been guaranteed by virgin land in the west would continue even when the frontier disappeared. These liberal tendencies are confirmed by Thomas Haskell's The Emergence of Professional Social Science. While Haskell only makes passing reference to civic education, his history of the emerging social sciences delineates how the broad civic intent of early social science was narrowed as social scientists shirked "agitation" in favor of

“investigation”. While Ross and Haskell's works certainly address developments in the research university, they place little emphasis on the undergraduate experience.

More direct treatments of late nineteenth century education, albeit with less direct emphasis on republicanism, can be found in Laurence Veysey's The Emergence of the American University, and Frederick Rudolph's The American College and University. These overviews are complemented by the following treatments that are more specific in their curricular focus; for instance, Burton Bledstein's The Culture of Professionalism; the Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America, is helpful in understanding how the college became a springboard for the development of careers. Miriam Brody's Gender, Rhetoric and the Rise of Composition, Gerald Graf's Professing Literature and chapters five and six in Kenneth Cmiel's Democratic Eloquence offer informative treatments of the shifting political significance of college rhetoric in the nineteenth century.

While all of these works offer insights into the character of civic education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they do not specifically focus on the issue in the way I do here. There are works singularly devoted to civic education in the colonial and early national period, but my focus on education for republican citizenship in the post-bellum period is covering new ground. My reading of Porter, Eliot, and Wilson is indebted to older scholarship but brings a new, and particularly political, perspective to it. I hope in this manner to add a brick or two to the edifice of scholarship bridging American educational history with American political thought.

***Civic Education, Civic Life, and the Current Crisis of the Humanities.***

While the dissertation is preeminently about Eliot, Porter, and Wilson's ability to uphold civic education, I have tried to ensure that my analysis appeals not only to

educational historians, but to a broader swath of intellectuals who are interested in knowing how past actions in higher education have served to diminish or expand the present possibilities of a public sphere.

It is in reference to this larger context that I ask: were Eliot, Porter and Wilson's attempts to reform the curriculum efforts that contributed to the development of a vital public sphere? Or were they implicated in its decline? I find these questions intimately related to my efforts to assess Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's civic commitments. While the question of Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's effect on the public sphere constitutes the sub-text of my interest in their commitment to civic education, it cannot be answered cogently without first locating their acts within the larger developments of the American public sphere. There are competing theories about the vitality of the public sphere in America. In The Revolt of the Elites, Christopher Lasch detailed how Americans have forgotten how to argue and how they also have lost many of the public spaces that helped to foster public conversation. Kenneth Cmiel's Democratic Eloquence describes a political corollary in his attention to the rise of plain and professional styles of speech which he associates with the impoverishment of public conversation. Thomas Bender attends to the same impoverishment of politics by emerging professionalization in his book Intellect and Public Life: Essays on the Social History of Academic Intellectuals in the United States.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995) see in particular, his chapters on "The Lost Art of Argument" and "Conversation and the Civic Arts"; Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Thomas Bender, *Intellect and Public Life, Essays on the Social History of Academic Intellectuals in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

Despite this literature detailing a decline in certain dimensions of the American public sphere, Michael Schudson (drawing on Michael McGerr's The Decline of Popular Politics) argues that the American public sphere was never very strong to begin with - especially if one looks at the resources which could have energized it like the press, party politics, and education. While Schudson recognizes that more people voted in the nineteenth century, he raises the possibility that political conversation may have been "gossipy, incidental background to sociability rather than its center" and that political opinions may not have been "coherent ideologies" so much as "patchwork sets of beliefs with little connection among the pieces.." <sup>12</sup> Schudson's reasons for suggesting this possibility stem from the limited resources which citizens could make use of in order to think critically about political issues. The partisan press, Schudson claims, only helped people to think in a "simplified light" of dualistic terms. <sup>13</sup> Schudson also thinks that a similar lack of rational-critical thinking was evident in party politics. As he pointed out, "there is more evidence of participation than of

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Schudson, "Was There Ever a Public Sphere? If So, When? Reflections on the American Case," *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press) 146.

<sup>13</sup> In quoting Michael McGerr's *The Decline of Popular Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) Schudson says:

The press encouraged citizens to see politics in partisan terms. While this helped citizens to understand politics, it also helped them to see politics in the most simplified light: "By reducing politics to black-and-white absolutes, the press made partisanship enticing. The committed Republican or Democrat did not need to puzzle over conflicting facts and arguments; in his paper he could find ready-made positions on any candidate and every issue.".....The aggregate of political newspapers, read side by side, might well have approximated some form of rational-critical discourse, or at least the kind of caricatured, zany "Point/Counterpoint" that "Saturday Night Live" used to lampoon. But there is nothing to indicate that papers were read in this way, no more than one would expect the Baptist to peruse the church newsletter of the Presbyterian. Michael Schudson, "Was There Ever a Public Sphere? If So When?" 156.

serious discussion". While there was plenty of "campaign hoopla" and political "pageantry", the idea of "spectacle" tended to compromise the distribution of reliable political information. While the Lincoln and Douglas debates may seem to challenge this notion, Schudson claims that "the people who listened...were not listening to make up their minds. They were there to rally for their candidate, whatever he might say. It was neither a personality contest nor a debate whose winner would be declared by people weighing the best arguments."<sup>14</sup> Finally, the quality of political conversation was also compromised by the amount of literacy and education. Schudson claims that nineteenth century citizens were not very well equipped in this regard - at least when compared with today. Literacy and primary and secondary education were hardly as widely available as they are now.

The quality of the press, of party politics, and of education lead Schudson to claim that the resources that were available for deliberative political conversation were rather scarce in the nineteenth century. Interestingly, Schudson's work stands somewhat in contrast to Lasch, Cmiel and Haskell who have worried, along with more well known thinkers like Hannah Arendt and Jurgen Habermas, that the vitality of civic conversation has declined in the twentieth century.

While I am inclined to take Schudson to heart in his attempt to dispel "retrospective wishful thinking" or the idea that we have somehow "fallen" I nonetheless agree with Lasch that there are dimensions of nineteenth century political experience that are worth recovering. This project of recovery may define the prescriptive dimension of my study of Porter, Wilson and Eliot, however the more central descriptive question is how these educators helped to develop or compromise the resources that Americans could use in developing vitalized political discussions

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Schudson, "Was There Ever a Public Sphere? If So When?" 158.

that were substantive and critical. Put another way, how did their educational reform, serve to augment or diminish the size of the public sphere?

The history of how American higher education has contributed to the public sphere is by many accounts a whiggish history. The curriculum has expanded, enrollments have increased, and the general rigor and vitality of collegiate and university education have been elevated. In so far as more people have access to higher education and in so far as this education has increased the literacy of its graduates, the resources that they can avail themselves of in the practice of public conversation have swelled. But just because the institution of higher education has functioned more ably than others in bolstering whatever public sphere we have left, does not mean that the development of higher education could not have proceeded along a better path. This dissertation, in part, teases out these setbacks and articulates those instances where the historical relationship between the college and the public sphere was not as definitively whiggish as one might wish it to be.

In attempting to describe these setbacks, I hope to cast new light on contemporary debates over the future of the humanities in the university. This study's relevance to the humanities is particularly significant because the humanities are the most direct heirs of civic education in the university. Some scholars dismiss the idea that the university is in a state of crisis or that the history of higher education is anything but a whiggish one. To characterize the current state of the university as a crisis may be a little hyperbolic but it does not serve our interests as humanists to ignore the fact that the humanities are besieged by a shortage of funds, by a downsizing trend unequalled in recent history, and by a continued decline in enrollments in the humanities. These troubling developments might be attributed to a new era of fiscal and economic austerity that will pass when we find new resources to

finance the heavy cost of education in the humanities. But this still begs the question of why it is considered costly and why its cost does not currently seem to be a high priority for social or personal investment.<sup>15</sup>

At least part of the reason why we are increasingly reluctant to foster the humanities is that they continue to suffer disrepute. In recent years men like Russell Jacoby, Christopher Lasch, and Richard Rorty have accused the humanities (or a part thereof) of harboring insular and self-reflexive conversations which bear little on problems outside the ivory tower.<sup>16</sup> Others, exemplified most recently by Allan Sokol's mockery of Social Text, have sought to portray the humanities or a part of them, as an endeavor that lacks intellectual accountability or scholastic rigor - a conversation if you will, populated by blowhards whose texts obfuscate rather than illuminate the world around us.

Burdened by this ignominy, it is no wonder that students have turned away from the humanities and sought knowledge that at least offers the promise of

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<sup>15</sup> This point is driven home by University of Chicago president Hugo Sonnenschein. In the following remark, Sonnenschein speaks about the cost of education at University of Chicago. While the remarks apply to all the disciplines, they are particularly applicable to the humanities, given University of Chicago's strength in these fields: "One way of putting the cost of a college education into perspective....is to look at the price of a mid-sized Ford. In 1960, that Ford cost about \$2,500. The price of a mid-sized Ford today is about \$25,000. Full tuition, room and board at Chicago....was about \$2,500 in 1960, and it also about \$25,000 today. Yet no one talks about the rate of increase in the price of autos!" "A Conversation with Hugo Sonnenschein." *The University of Chicago Magazine* 87 (April 1995): 34.

<sup>16</sup> Russell Jacoby, *Dogmatic Wisdom: How the Culture Wars Divert Education and Distract America* (New York: Doubleday, 1994); Christopher Lasch, "Academic Pseudo-Radicalism," *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995) 176-93; Richard Rorty, "What's Wrong with 'Rights'," *Harpers Magazine* (1996): 15-18.

pecuniary gain. As these sentiments gain currency, the civic heritage of the humanities, and its close association with a longstanding tradition of civic education, becomes muted. Instead of helping to expand the public sphere and to vitalize political conversation, the humanities are seen as self serving disciplines whose activities do not register very high on the scale of social value.

In the face of these developments, Noah Porter, Charles Eliot and Woodrow Wilson have something to speak to us about. As we attempt to fashion a place for the humanities in the 21st century, it does well to recall that Porter, Eliot, and Wilson (in their varied fashion) were attempting to do the same for the 20th century. More importantly, their reflections demonstrate that, at one time anyway, higher education, and the humanities in particular, were conceived as practices which were critically related to the stability of self-government and the quality of civic life.

Their reflections may not help us to arrive at more expeditious answers to our own unresolved questions, but they can serve to illuminate these questions more fully. Since this dissertation is not a genealogy, their reflections cannot be presented as the seeds from which our own predicaments about education have necessarily arisen. Nonetheless, this study will reveal that many of the tensions that we grapple with today were extant and anticipated in the works of Porter, Eliot, and Wilson. As we try to configure a mutually beneficial relationship between our ideals of self government and our ideals of education it is well to remind ourselves that the crisis of legitimacy experienced by the humanities did not appear ex-nihilo. By looking at our educational predecessors we may well discover a means for bolstering and informing our own attempts to reconfer civic value on the humanities.

### *Chapter Outline*

The distinctions between liberal and republican ideology outlined above suggest that a thorough cataloguing of Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's liberal and republican ideas might be an expeditious way to gauge their civic commitments. However one needs to be careful in this regard because a zealous attempt to catalogue their republican and liberal sympathies prevents one from articulating how they would have described their own political positions. Moreover, while republican and liberal ideologies are often antagonistic, they are not categorically so, and often incorporate common features. The intersection and historical hybridization of these ideologies means that a simple attempt to categorize these educators as either liberal or republican is bound to fail. More importantly, the commonalities between republican and liberalism mean that Porter, Eliot, and Wilson might possibly maintain a commitment to republican citizenship while upholding many tenets of liberal ideology.

The dissertation circumvents this problem by strictly focusing on Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's commitment to republican citizenship rather than attempting to engage in more comprehensive descriptions of their liberal or republican bent. When I do unveil their liberal and republican biases I try to detail how these features compromise or reinforce their ability to uphold republican citizenship.

I begin the task of articulating their commitments to civic education in chapter two where I provide the civic and educational traditions that Porter, Eliot, and Wilson were heirs to. These educators' vision of education and citizenship did not appear ex-nihilo. Rather, their vision arose out of a longstanding western tradition of civic education. This education often conjoined Christian virtues with the virtues of citizenship. Chapter two reviews this civic tradition, describes how Porter, Eliot, and

Wilson were heirs to it, and how their own varying commitments to Christianity served to make them sympathetic to civic education.

Chapter three details their commitment to civic education by reviewing the countless exhortations to public service that these men made. The chapter begins by delineating the larger moral and religious vision that impelled these men to value public service. It then delineates exactly what type of public Porter, Eliot, and Wilson were speaking of when they exhorted students to public service and finally, it examines occasions when they seemed sympathetic to cloistered visions of academe that dampened their public spiritedness.

As we shall see, these educators were master spokesmen for citizenship in so far as citizenship is exalted through exhortations to service, duty, patriotism and leadership. These ideals were part and parcel of their religious and educational heritage. As Christians, Porter, Eliot, and Wilson demonstrated an abiding tendency to conjoin the virtue of citizenship and service to one's community with the virtues of Christian piety. Moreover, as offspring and heirs of some of America's oldest educational institutions they also retained a basic faith in a tradition that had endorsed education as a critical foundation for virtuous association. As conservators of this tradition they believed that education could, and should, be used to develop virtuous people or citizens who could make valuable contributions to the larger public good.

But while Porter, Eliot, and Wilson were by disposition sympathetic to public service, they also recognized the value of more cloistered activities. And while they all valued public life, they were less uniform in describing where this public life might be found. In describing their different understandings of the public and by citing their countervailing tendency to laud cloistered and isolated lives, the chapter offers a preliminary description of their dedication to civic education.

The relative public-mindedness of these men is one standard by which to gauge their civic commitments. In chapter four I complement this by exploring their style of communication. More particularly, the chapter examines Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's rhetorical proclivities and their possible effects in encouraging students to citizenship. While strength of citizenship ultimately depends on the ubiquity of public conversations about collective ends, the impetus to engage in this conversation cannot be effectively guaranteed if the communicative practices that attend it are repugnant, or excessively frightening. Perhaps even more importantly, to actually encourage a discussion over collective ends it is prudent to ensure that the conversation is dramatic or interesting enough to compel people to participate.

In chapter four I also examine Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's commitment to normative inquiry, to forms of university bureaucracy that would serve to foster discussion about ends, and to forms of discourse that would ensure the vital political discussions upon which citizenship is predicated. In this chapter I entertain the possibility that ornate and inflammatory discourses are more likely to ignite civic discussions and to expand civic space than language that shirk these in favor of conciliatory gestures or polite talk that impede direct speech or hard and forceful words.

The possibility that incivility is associated with rich civic life is inspired by the rhetorical sympathies of Arendt, outlined earlier in this introduction. For a while, Arendt thought that this citizenship could be guaranteed by imbuing politics with a sense of drama and glory. In these so called "agonal" moments, Arendt seemed to be endorsing polemic and adversarial rhetoric over a political discussion characterized by cooperation or persuasion. In later writings however, she tempered her politics by emphasizing the value of persuasion, compromise, and consensus. The question is,

which one is more conducive to citizenship? Contest and highly charged argument would seem to encourage people to pay attention to issues that they might otherwise ignore. On the other hand, if speech becomes too defiant or too polemical, citizens might abstain from argument for fear of getting hurt. The equivocal tendencies inherent in rhetorical or political styles complicate the task of assessing which styles promote citizenship and which one's do not. While a verdict is difficult to render because of these complications, I argue, with certain qualifications, that Eliot's style was more civically compromising either Porter or Wilson's. Where Wilson used ornate language and engaged in agonistic debate, and where Porter never hesitated to address hermeneutic questions or questions of normative concern, Eliot was attracted to scientific and inductive languages that sometimes impeded political activism. These languages led to a more cloistered professional ethic that shirked public advocacy in favor of technical and objective expertise.

In chapter five I attempt to trace the educators' civic commitment through their differing reactions to the emerging culture of professionalism. Essentially, chapter five asks whether Eliot, Porter and Wilson's varying commitment to specialization effected their ability to uphold an education devoted to civic life. In the chapter I show how Eliot exercised much less caution with respect to specialization than either Porter or Wilson. This lack of caution compromised his civic commitments for a variety of reasons, not least being that specialized research was the precursor of value-free social science. This chapter is very much influenced by traditional republican antipathies to commercial activity and more particularly, to the specialization which commercial activity usually breeds. The chapter attempts to gauge Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's commitments to citizenship by examining how well

they were able to integrate their commitments to citizenship with the increasing demands for specialization imposed by a commercializing society.

Briefly, Porter tried to keep Yale from becoming too submerged in the exigencies of the market. If students were meant to stand somewhat above the fray of politics, they were also supposed to do so with respect to commerce. Similarly Wilson spoke fondly of the college as a cloister that would shelter students from an outside world in which commercial activity was pervasive. Over the course of his academic career, Wilson became increasingly troubled by a student body who attended more to the virtues of remunerative gain than to the virtues of service and citizenship. Eliot, in contrast, has been described as a president who catered to the pecuniary, industrial and technological demands of Boston's elite business class. While he made gestures to the virtues of citizenship, these gestures were tempered by his allegiance with a class of people whose interests were increasingly tied to commercial activity.<sup>17</sup> For the most part Porter, Eliot, and Wilson did not bother to explain how their ideological stands toward commerce might effect their commitment to citizenship. But if they do not do this themselves, chapter five examines part of the relationship between their attitudes to commerce and their attitudes to citizenship by examining how well their pronouncements on specialization jibe with their commitment to citizenship.

Of course, specialization is not particular to market society (it has been endorsed as a feature of communitarian associations since at least the fourth century B.C., when Plato wrote The Republic). But in late nineteenth century America, specialization, as a contested social development, arose in association with an

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<sup>17</sup> Ronald Story, *The Forging of an Aristocracy; Harvard and the Boston Upper Class, 1800-1870* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1980).

accelerating commercial economy. A discussion of specialization gives insight into how Porter, Eliot, and Wilson sought to educate men for citizenship in a commercial economy. While the connection was indirect, increased commercial pressure to specialize forced these educators to reconsider the traditions of general learning that had permeated education in the old-time college. These traditions had hallowed the ideal of general learning as the foundation of citizenship. But Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's reconsiderations of the way in which education might serve the specialized needs of an increasingly commercialized society were destined to threaten these traditional notions of how citizenship could be taught. How they resolved the competing commitments of citizenship on the one hand, and specialization on the other, remain the province of chapter five.

Having described Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's civic proclivities in chapters two through five, in the concluding chapter (chapter six), I review these in the light of their elite sympathies. If some of these educators harbored affections for civic education, I remind the reader that their gestures to civic education were cast in elite terms that make them difficult to incorporate into a theory of civic education devoted to truly democratic ends. I discuss Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's democratic limitations and the anti-participatory tendencies inherent in their own varied commitments to civic education. These educators' civic intents were endangered by their attachments to hierarchy, rhetoric, or professionalization. But if these dangers may have compromised their own civic intents, their struggles can nevertheless illuminate our late twentieth-century attempts to vest the academy with compelling civic value.