

The “Lippmann-Dewey Debate” and the Invention of Walter Lippmann as an Anti-Democrat 1986-1996

MICHAEL SCHUDSON

University of California, San Diego

Columbia University

The “Lippmann-Dewey Debate” became widely discussed in the 1980s and 1990s in U.S. media and communication studies, in large part through the influence of James Carey. While Carey’s initial writing on the Lippmann-Dewey exchange was insightful, by 1987, his characterization of the exchange seriously misread Lippmann, and misdirected subsequent discussion. Comparing Carey’s remarks about Lippmann, and similar remarks from other leading scholars influenced by Carey’s reading, with what Lippmann actually said, reveals that Lippmann’s elitism did not make him anti-democratic but, instead, a subtle thinker concerned with how to integrate expertise into a functioning democracy. This article speculates why Carey misinterpreted Lippmann’s work, and concludes with what remains relevant in Carey’s argument.

For the past 20 years, communication studies, sociology, and other social science disciplines, have characterized Walter Lippmann as an arrogant critic who found democracy an inadequate system of government, and proposed to remedy these inadequacies by turning governance over to the experts. Scholars who present Lippmann in this way have read the same texts that I have, but find something different in them than I do. I intend to show that their position is demonstrably wrong. I want to pursue the question of why Lippmann, someone who was firmly committed to representative democracy, has been so consistently misread. What produced the distortions? Why, in academic circles in the past two decades, was it so easy to brand someone with overtones of elitism (and indeed Lippmann fell into this category) as an enemy of democracy?

An interchange between Lippmann and the philosopher, John Dewey, in the 1920s, is central to the critique of Lippmann. In some academic circles, the “Lippmann-Dewey debate” has become canonical. Interestingly, however, it was never, in fact, a debate, and it is not clear that Lippmann ever considered himself to be in dialogue or discussion with Dewey (although Dewey’s *The Public and Its Problems* is plainly in discussion with Lippmann). Media scholar and journalism reformer Jay Rosen refers to the

Michael Schudson: mschudson@ucsd.edu

Date submitted: 2008-06-01

Copyright © 2008 (Michael Schudson). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

interchange as "a spirited exchange on the public and its recurrent difficulties," but there was no "exchange" if that signifies a back-and-forth, some kind of overt conversation. A difference of opinion certainly surfaced. But the "debate," such as it was, consisted of favorable book reviews Dewey wrote in *The New Republic* of Lippmann's *Public Opinion* in 1922 and *The Phantom Public* in 1925, followed by lectures at Kenyon College he delivered in 1926 that were published as *The Public and Its Problems* in 1927. In no subsequent instances does Lippmann respond to Dewey's position, and nowhere, to my knowledge, did any contemporaries interpret Dewey's reviews as a notable confrontation. What turned the Lippmann-Dewey discourse into a "debate" were liberal intellectuals in the 1980s and 1990s, writing at another moment of democratic disillusion as they sought to take stock and seek hope.

Among the scholars misreading Lippmann is the late James Carey, an acclaimed leader among American media and journalism scholars. Carey criticized Lippmann for questioning the competence of the mass public to participate in democracy, and for directing mass communication research towards quantitative, "administrative" studies. I believe Carey's judgment is wrong on both the topics of academic genealogy and the history of political ideas, but it is the second matter that concerns me here. My discussion focuses on Carey because his writings were remarkably eloquent and quotable, and in communication studies he is the single most influential interpreter of the Lippmann-Dewey discussion.

Understandings of democracy and democratic citizenship have been part of the normative background of U.S. communication studies, but often this has been understated while the quest for scientific legitimacy has been full-throated. Democracy is even less obtrusive in sociology, where the normative ideal has been not so much democracy as a vision of community, human solidarity, or social equality. Neither Marx, Weber, nor Durkheim were theorists of democracy. The only canonical sociological thinkers who focus on questions of political democracy are Tocqueville and later Habermas. (And on Tocqueville, sociologists typically ignore Volume I of *Democracy in America*, that discusses political institutions, and turn quickly to Volume II, that analyzes national character and social mores.) Various sociologists, historians, political theorists, and media activists in the 1980s and 1990s determined that the United States was in a dangerous move away from community and toward a narcissistic, individualistic, private, consumer-oriented model of life. Robert Bellah, Christopher Lasch, Robert Putnam, and Michael Sandel, among others, wrote eloquently about the need to restore community and the moral bonds that hold it together. This, and not the operation of representative institutions, was the center of discontent.

There was a utopian yearning in this work that James Carey shared. Carey began writing about John Dewey as early as 1975 (Carey, 1975/1989a, pp. 13-36), but he did not comment on Dewey's interchange with Lippmann until 1982. In his 1982 essay, Carey aims to chart a course for communication studies alternative to the quantitative research that has been dubbed "administrative" rather than "critical" in the distinction Paul Lazarsfeld originated in the 1940s. Carey's sympathies in this essay lie clearly with Dewey, a philosopher who not only can "affirm what is before our eyes" but who can "transcend it by imagining, at the very least, a world more desirable" (Carey, 1982/1989a, p. 88). Carey exposes Lippmann as too compromised by his realism or even, perhaps, by a certain delight in puncturing the balloons of romantic democrats. Carey wants to recapture a utopian aspiration in social thought and sees this an essential for a critical study of communication.

I will return to this first statement of Carey on the Lippmann-Dewey interchange, but for now, I note only that I see nothing wrong with it. It states Lippmann's and Dewey's positions with fairness and insight. It is Carey's later commentaries that diverge from this initial balanced assessment of Lippmann and Dewey. The first of these was prepared as the centerpiece of discussion for a conference at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara in 1986, and published in the Center's magazine in 1987. Carey introduces his complaint that "from the nineteen-twenties forward, the public was conceptually evacuated," that there was a "decline and dismissal of the public sphere" and that intellectual work on the character of the public "disappeared along with the public itself" (Carey, 1987, pp. 5-6). Although he attributes this to developments in political theory and the rise of public opinion polling, among other things, he uses Walter Lippmann as the chief exhibit of what went wrong.

In this article, Carey asserts that Lippmann's *Public Opinion* is "the founding book of modern journalism" (Carey, 1987, p. 6), although with greater reason he had called it in 1982 "the founding book in American media studies" (Carey, 1982/1989, p. 75). He rightly takes its message to be "a dour one," but he makes a mistake in assessing Lippmann's argument to be that voters are "inherently incompetent to direct public affairs" (Carey, 1987, p. 6). I do not think Lippmann used the word "incompetent," and I do not think he would have. Rather, what he insists on in *Public Opinion* is that we must reject a view of democracy that is premised on the "omnicompetence" of citizens. I have not located any place where Lippmann positively asserts that voters are "incompetent." "Incompetent" ordinarily refers to is a characteristic of a person, but Lippmann discusses incompetence as a feature of a position — the position of outsider. A major point of the book is that a capacity for democratic self-government has nothing to do with native gray matter, but with the insufficiencies all of us share, a limited ability to attend to matters beyond our everyday experience. Carey, however, wants to portray Lippmann as an anti-democratic elitist. He interprets Lippmann as believing that American society can escape drift and acquire mastery "only through a class of experts, a new order of samurai, who would mold the public mind and character: men and women dedicated to making democracy work for the masses whether the masses wanted it or not" (Carey, 1987, p. 7).

This interpretation distorts Lippmann's arguments. Lippmann actually proposes ideas that are both more and less "elitist" than what Carey asserts. Lippmann is more elitist, looking at him from Carey's angle of vision, because he not only places considerable faith in experts, but he expects them to advise public officials rather than the masses who have elected them. This places the general public a whole step removed from the everyday practice of democratic decision making. But, in practice, it is the step that representative democracies around the world have taken and managed. For Carey, "Lippmann, in effect, took the public out of politics and politics out of public life" (Carey, 1995, p. 390). Not so. This is what elections do. This is what constitutes representative democracy rather than direct democracy. Lippmann understood that and accepted this reality, while Carey did not.

Bernard Manin has made it clear in his study of 18th century thinking about representation that the practice of electing representatives was regarded at that time as an act appropriate for aristocracies. In the 18th century, it was taken for granted that the franchise would extend only to propertied adult males, and that these men would naturally vote for esteemed leaders in the community, not mavericks, outsiders, or plebeians. Democracy, that is, the participatory model of the ancient Greek city states, did

not mean elections, but rather the selection of leaders by lot (Manin, 1997). No participants of the U.S. Constitutional Convention suggested selecting leaders by lot. Rather, what the founders sought to establish was a republic, not a direct democracy, and what the Federalist Papers justified explicitly (contrary to the claim Carey curiously and inaccurately asserts about them in his 1989 discussion of Progressive Era thinkers) was a representative system, not the "face-to-face public of direct interaction" that Carey joins Dewey in seeking to restore (Carey, 1989b, p. 273).

In another sense, however, Lippmann is less elitist than Carey implies. In the chapter in *Public Opinion* called "Intelligence Work," Lippmann writes approvingly of how the Census Bureau, the Geological Survey, the Department of Agriculture, and other government bureaus help democracy work by providing accurate representations of the parts of the world they are delegated to comprehend, and by providing them to the elected or appointed officials who have charged them with their research. In this model, Lippmann's model, the experts do not rule. Their job is not to serve special interests, as Carey seems to believe, but to make it possible for elected decision makers to act in response to the facts of the world that would be invisible if political parties and interest groups alone were empowered to represent the state of the world (Lippmann, 1922, p. 381). In Lippmann's view, the experts are not involved in making policy. Lippmann writes in reference to the British Foreign Office, "It is no accident that the best diplomatic service in the world is the one in which the divorce between the assembling of knowledge and the control of policy is most perfect" (Lippmann, 1922, pp. 381-382). Lippmann believes that what the power of the expert should be "depends upon separating himself from those who make the decisions, upon not caring, in his expert self, what decision is made" (Lippmann 1922, p. 382). The expert "is there to represent the unseen. He represents people who are not voters, functions of voters that are not evident, events that are out of sight, mute people, unborn people, relations between things and people. He has a constituency of intangibles" (Lippmann, 1922, p. 382). If Lippmann's vision were realized, experts would represent the public better than voters.

I suspect that no one else has ever written words more laudatory of the role of experts in a democracy. In this regard, Lippmann is as starry-eyed about sophisticated experts as John Dewey would be about small-town democrats. But Lippmann's praise of experts is specific and precise, whereas Carey's critique is rhetorical and blurred. Lippmann praises a class of experts who offer assessments of the world to elected decision makers; Carey condemns a class of experts who offer policy prescriptions (something Lippmann specifically disparaged) to a general public through the press (something Lippmann endorsed early on in *Liberty and the News* but did not emphasize in *Public Opinion* or *The Phantom Public* – by the time of these books Lippmann had lost much of his faith not in representative democracy but in journalism as its agency.) Therefore on two key points, the character of the advice experts give, and the audience to which experts deliver their advice, Carey misinterprets Lippmann.

More accurate readings of Lippmann were available to Carey. He could have turned to the leading biography of Lippmann, Ronald Steel's *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (1980). In fact he makes a reference to it in his 1987 essay, but only to show that Lippmann "spent his life as consort of the powerful and advisor to heads of state" (Carey, 1987, p. 7). Among other things, Steel makes it clear that Lippmann admired H.G. Wells, and by inference included Wells' vision of a "new order of samurai," intellectual samurai, to direct government (Steel, 1980, p. 215). I have yet to locate a passage where

Lippmann uses the "samurai" phrase himself, although Carey writes twice in "The Press and the Public Discourse" as if it were Lippmann's (Carey, 1987, p. 7). Further to the point is Robert Westbrook's 1991 intellectual biography, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, of course unavailable to Carey in 1987. However, if Carey had consulted this text before repeating key passages of the 1987 essay in his 1996 paper on the Chicago School of Sociology (Carey, 1996/1997, p. 23), he might have profited from Westbrook's half dozen pages on Lippmann's *Public Opinion* and Dewey's views of it. This includes Westbrook's own summary of Lippmann's position, "Expert opinion was not to be directed to the ordinary citizen but to governing elites. The purpose of the organization of intelligence was 'not to burden every citizen with expert opinion on all questions, but to push that burden away from him towards the responsible administrator'" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 299). This is correct, and illustrates the feature of Lippmann's thought that is more sharply elitist than Carey supposes. In summary, experts are not supposed to be mentoring the public, but only tutoring the insiders, the politicians and appointed officials, their tutoring consisting of accurate depictions of the world and not advice on what decisions to make. The public's role, as Lippmann makes even more clear in *The Phantom Public*, is occasional and gross, that is, it arises particularly at election times when citizens make largely one decision, to keep the bums in or to throw them out or, in Lippmann's terms, to say yes or no.

Did Lippmann express too much faith in experts? Yes, of course. However, as I have argued elsewhere, the larger problem of experts in a democracy is that they refrain from speaking their minds to the elected officials or power brokers who consult them, not that they bully the politicians into doing their bidding. Carey, like so many others, also misapprehended David Halberstam in the same direction that he misread Lippmann. The experts turn out to be, Carey wrote, not the "new order of samurai" but instead "what David Halberstam acidly described as 'the best and the brightest'" (Carey, 1987, p. 7). In fact, the title of Halberstam's famous book on the making of American policy in the Vietnam war refers not to the experts on Vietnam, notably the old hands at the State Department, but to the cocky aristocrats in the Kennedy administration who ignored them, for example, Averill Harriman and McGeorge Bundy, the people who claimed authority not on the basis of mastering a body of knowledge, but on the basis of their circulation among and command over other powerful men (Schudson, 2006).

For Lippmann, however, the realistic alternative for politicians listening to experts was not their listening to a vibrant public conversation orchestrated through the newspaper, as Carey would have it; it was listening to the loud, carping, self-interested voices of party spokesmen and interest group lobbyists. Carey holds aspirations for journalism that are hopeful to the point of being quixotic. Lippmann, of course, did not, and neither did John Dewey after his fling in the 1890s with *Thought News*. Dewey indeed admired Lippmann's work in this domain. Not only did he find much to praise in *Public Opinion* (in his review in *The New Republic*), but he again praised Lippmann in reviewing *The Phantom Public* three years later, a book that is even more despairing about democracy and even more critical of democratic theory than the earlier volume. In 1925, Dewey judges *The Phantom Public* to be "a statement of faith in a pruned and temperate democratic theory." Dewey understood that Lippmann never abandoned democracy, only utopian aspirations for the role of the public as a participant in democratic decision making on a daily basis. Dewey recognizes that Lippmann sees a very limited role in governance for the general public,

Executive action is not for the public. The intrinsic merits of a question are not for it. The intellectual anticipation of a problem, its analysis and solution, are not for the public. The specific technical, intricate criteria required in the handling of a question are not for the public."

Where Lippmann finds a "positive function" for the public is "to intervene occasionally upon the work of the insiders." (Dewey, 1925, pp. 52-53)

Dewey, is not uncritical. In particular, he suggests with some justice, that Lippmann may be attacking a straw man, a version of democratic theory that places more faith in the activity of the common citizen than any democratic practitioners really believed in or advocated.

Public Opinion is not all stark realism. It is idealistic in its own fashion. If only, Lippmann says, we can find a way to "overcome the central difficulty of self-government, the difficulty of dealing with an unseen reality," (Lippmann, 1922, p. 396) we will have a truly radical reform, one that has found "a way of overcoming the subjectivism of human opinion based on the limitation of individual experience" (Lippmann, 1922, p. 397). But this never fully takes place, and it seems uncharacteristically naïve of Lippmann to have imagined it could. Moreover, the assumption that the world will be well if it did occur, presumes that separate interests are reconcilable, that a harmony of interests is a realistic outcome. Nothing historically assures us that this is the case.

By the time Carey returned to these themes in 1995 and 1996, he had a lot of company. In his important study, *New York Intellect* (1987), historian Thomas Bender argues that Lippmann "defended the intelligentsia, the expert, the insider, against the claims of a democratic public" (Bender, 1987, p. 245). This characterization is not entirely wrong, but it is misleading. The average reader can presume that since intellectual and experts are normally thought of as having a certain education, social standing, and occupational location, "insiders" are also elites. Yet Lippmann insists that "every one of us is an outsider to all but a few aspects of modern life," and therefore in these realms "has neither time, nor attention, nor interest, nor the equipment for specific judgment" (Lippmann, 1922, p. 400). For Lippmann, "insiders" and "outsiders" are not social types, but social locations. Bender goes on to inaccurately cite Lippmann as claiming that outsiders are "necessarily ignorant, usually irrelevant, and often meddling." The quotation come from Lippmann's *The Phantom Public*, yet the words do not characterize Lippmann's position, but rather the position that Lippmann attributes to "critics . . . who pointed out what a hash democracy was making of its pretensions to government." Lippmann's observation is that "these critics" have found that "public opinion was uninformed, irrelevant and meddling. They have usually concluded that there was a congenital difference between the masterful few and the ignorant many." Lippmann rejects this "superficial analysis" (Lippmann, 1925, p. 149). Bender, seeking to criticize Lippmann, is criticizing those Lippmann himself attacks.

If Lippmann is an elitist, even his elitism is misinterpreted. Lippmann writes that all of us are outsiders, most of the time, and on most issues. This is not the elitism that Bender implies. Later, Bender writes about how Dewey responded to Lippmann's democratic pessimism in *The Public and Its Problems*. Here Dewey finds a place for intellectuals in a democracy, but "he denied them the authority to prescribe

solutions" (Bender, 1987, p. 313). This implies, in context, that Lippmann encouraged intellectuals to prescribe solutions, but this is what he explicitly disavowed.

Christopher Lasch, writing in 1990 on "The Lost Art of Argument" in *Gannett Center Journal* (reprinted in 1995 in his book, *The Revolt of the Elites*), is another critic of Lippmann. Like Carey (and favorably citing Carey's work on Lippmann and Dewey), he judges American political debate to have been in decline from the turn of the century when journalism was "becoming more 'responsible,' more professional, more conscious of its civic obligations" (Lasch, 1995, p. 163). Lasch finds especially congenial in Carey, and quotes him accordingly, the view that the press should not see its role as "informing the public," but as "carrying on the conversation of our culture" (Lasch, 1995, p. 172). The press abandoned its old function of helping citizens "to follow an argument, grasp the point of view of another, expand the boundaries of understanding, debate the alternative purposes that might be pursued" (Lasch, 1995, p. 173). Lasch accepts Carey's fantasy of what the 19th century partisan press was like, seeing it as brilliantly argumentative rather than, as it seems to me, histrionic, cheerleading, one-sided, rationalizing, ridiculing, and disparaging, rather than arguing against the opposition. In order to ignore the reality of the 19th century press, Lasch also ignores the reality of the Lincoln-Douglas debates that he upholds as "the oral tradition at its best" (Lasch, 1995, p. 164). The debates may have been that, but consequently that shows the weaknesses of the oral tradition. It is worth noting that debates like these were the exception, not the rule, in 19th century political campaigns. Additionally, the debates were not a platform for attendees to think through issues or decide whom to vote for because no one who attended them was eligible to vote for either candidate. At the time, Lincoln and Douglas were running for the U.S. Senate, and the Senate was until early in the 20th century elected by the members of state legislatures. Lasch tells us that the candidates offered a "painstaking analysis of complex issues." However, even this is incorrect, the debates offered a painstaking analysis of a *single* issue. Every one of the nine debates was devoted exclusively to the question of the extension of slavery into the territories. Nor were their words spoken unmindful of print, as each of the candidates prepared their words, and improved upon them with the editors of their own party's papers prior to printing. These nuances, however, were of no concern to Lasch in 1990 because his real subject was not the quality of 19th century political discourse, but the absence of quality in U.S. political discourse in the Reagan-Bush years.

James Fallows also misreads Lippmann in his 1996 book, *Breaking the News*. Aligned with Dewey, he describes Lippmann as someone who wanted to turn over both government and journalism to experts: "The only hope for effective modern government lay in cultivating a group of well-trained experts, who would manage the country's journalism and its governmental affairs. The newspapers and magazines produced by these experts would lay out conclusions for the public to follow, but no one should expect the public to play more than a passive, spectator's role" (Fallows, 1996, p. 236). What's wrong with this interpretation should by now be obvious. First, Lippmann never urged that we should have experts "manage the country's . . . governmental affairs." Experts were to provide decision makers, namely office holding politicians and the managers they appointed, policy relevant, but policy dispassionate portraits of the world. Second, nowhere did Lippmann urge that "experts" run the news media and "lay out conclusions for the public to follow." He did urge that journalists be better educated, but he never expected that journalism could realistically provide policy guidance for the citizenry. In Lippmann's scheme is the role of the public passive and spectatorial? Yes and no. The public's role in Lippmann's work

can be described as highly significant, but very occasional, interventions rather than constant involvement as passive spectators.

The Lippmann-Dewey interchange is also addressed in E. J. Dionne, *They Only Look Dead* (1996) in his chapter on the press. Dionne himself seems sympathetic to Lasch's call for a public culture of argument, and so is implicitly favoring Dewey over Lippmann; but in terms of explicit statement, he remains noncommittal. In any event, he does not take up the question of whether experts should or do govern, but only whether the news media do or should function to promote democratic debate. He clearly believes that the media should perform this function, and that they "need to help Americans recover what Christopher Lasch called 'the lost art of argument.'" There is that talismanic word taken up again, "art," rather than science. Again, aligning himself with Lasch, Dionne maintains, ". . . nurturing the educational spirit that ought to lie at the heart of democracy is surely a central task of journalism in a free society. Journalism ought to be where facts, convictions and arguments meet" (Dionne, 1996, p. 258). He cites Carey as well, referencing the same line that Lasch quoted when Carey writes, "The press, by seeing its role as that of informing the public, abandons its role as an agency for carrying on the conversation of our culture" (Dionne, 1996, p. 259).

In "The Press, Public Opinion, and Public Discourse," (1995) Carey writes with almost painful longing for the recovery of a public life that has been lost. In full Christopher Laschian elegiac spirit, perhaps influenced directly by Lasch's essay, he repeats words from his own 1987 essay and seeks to reassure readers, in an anxious effort, that he is not imagining that an ideal public life can be historically located in some prior era. After all, he asserts, "Public life refers to an illusion of the possible rather than to something with a given anterior existence" (p. 373). (It does? Why?) Placing public life in the past, then, is "merely to situate it in a context where it can be thought, rather than in a landscape where it was real" (p. 374). I do not know what this means or if it means anything. Carey says, "A sense of conceptual loss . . . will pervade this chapter," he continues, and "a loss of . . . a rich, shared public culture" (p. 374). Well, was there a rich, shared public culture or is this essay only an effort to outline a context in which such a culture might have been thought? At any rate, "today our only shared culture is a commercial one, a substitute for a political culture" (p. 374). This oversimplification is not worthy of Carey, but there it is. Of course, American culture is more than its commercial elements: Our language, our kinship system, our socially democratic, informal manners, our independent and privatistic streak, our strongly religious objections to commerce, our tendency to light out for the territories when things get tough, and one should probably add our persistent tendency to criticize commercialism, all construct American culture.

In this essay, Carey again criticizes Lippmann. According to Carey, Lippmann held that the public could not be effectively informed, and so could not master events. Carey reads Lippmann as claiming that "the only hope lay in taking the weight off the public shoulders, recognizing that the average citizen had neither the capacity nor the interest and competence to direct society. Mastery would come only through a class of experts — a new order of "samurai" — who would mold the public mind and character: men and women dedicated to making democracy work for the masses, whether the masses wanted it or not" (p. 390). The samurai metaphor resurfaces as a strangely bellicose metaphor for the self denying, bespectacled economists, and other social scientists that Lippmann hoped might offer elected decision makers a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the world.

Carey's particular concern is not only that Lippmann "took the public out of politics and politics out of public life, depoliticizing the public sphere" (p. 390), but that this left no honest place for journalism. For Carey, newspapers early on had been part of a public conversation, reproducing voices speaking in public (sermons, lectures, legislative debates) to be discussed collectively by white men over their ale in the pub. Indeed, "the public is a group of strangers that gathers to discuss the news" (p. 381) and "the public . . . was a society of conversationalists or disputants, depending upon printing for the dissemination of their ideas" (p. 381). Journalism "reflected speech, and was largely made up of speech" (p. 380), Carey asserts, but in fact, the newspapers of colonial and early national days were primarily made up of advertisements written for the sole purpose of appearing in a newspaper, and reprinted reports from London newspapers of European affairs, neither of these genres originating in speech. Local news barely existed, and local political news appeared even less. (See, for instance, Clark and Wetherell's close, quantitative study of Ben Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*.) Carey's notion of the old-time public life had little correspondence to the reality. It serves him rhetorically as a contrast to the present when "journalists merely translate the arcane language of experts into a publicly accessible language for the masses. They transmit the judgments of experts, and therefore ratify decisions arrived at by that class, not by the public or public representatives" (p. 390).

I have not found studies of sources cited in U.S. news media that claim experts get a great deal of attention in news, compared with elected and appointed political officers who dominate most news coverage. Carey's description is not of present journalistic reality, but is a fanciful account of what journalism would look like if journalists were putting into practice Lippmann's model (as Carey wrongly interprets it) of how to solve the problem of democracy. The only redeeming feature of Lippmann's view, but not redeeming enough for Carey, is that journalists maintain the democratic value of publicity. "News kept the experts honest; it kept them from confusing the public interest with the private interest by exposing them to the bright light of publicity. Lippmann had more faith in publicity than in the news or an informed public" (p. 391). Therefore, Lippmann endorsed an independent journalism, the kind dominant today, that "legitimized a democratic politics of publicity and experts," but "also confirmed the psychological incompetence of people to participate in it" (p. 391).

It is unclear why Carey between 1982 and 1987 moved from favoring Dewey over Lippmann in their civil disagreement, to condemning Lippmann as an anti-democratic elitist who urged that experts run the government. Those years spanned the time from early in the Reagan administration, when perhaps the political turn to the right could have been judged a temporary aberration, to the second Reagan term when it was apparent that the country was on a decidedly conservative course. I suspect that for Carey and Lasch and others, a Reagan-dominated America was incomprehensible and the loss of a sense of the public that they mourned was in some measure an effort to make sense of a federal government run by people who claimed to want to remove the government from people's lives.

At the same time, a new mood, around journalism and to some extent among journalists, was emerging. The early 1990s were the pinnacle of the public journalism movement, a rather remarkable development, and one in which Carey's retrieval of the Lippmann-Dewey "debate" inspired not only academics involved in the movement, like Jay Rosen, but journalists who stuck out their necks on behalf

of the movement, like the late Cole Campbell (Rosen, 1999, pp. 38-40). Carey's portrait of the errors of Lippmann proved congenial to public journalism even if remote from Walter Lippmann.

What is worth saving in Carey's commentary on Lippmann and Dewey, if anything? I see two points, both of them ventured in his 1982 essay. First, I think he is correct that Lippmann, by rooting *Public Opinion* in social psychology, offers a depoliticized view of the mass media. He pays relatively little attention to ways that the state and the market distort the production of news, shifting his attention to the ways that reporters' own limited education and hopes and fears make reporting vulnerable to what outsiders thrust in their faces.

Second, Carey is also correct that Lippmann's metaphor for knowledge is a visual one, seeing, while Dewey's metaphor is not the eye but the ear. He quotes Dewey, "Vision is a spectator, hearing is a participator," and Carey follows Dewey in placing emphasis on conversation as the ideal form of human communication, and the true foundation for democratic society. This raises provocatively the question of what follows from choosing a visual over an aural metaphor, or vice versa. It raises also the possibility of alternative metaphors and their implications. What if we think of democracy not so much as sensed, but as a phenomenon that is embodied and enacted? What happens if democracy is not watching or conversing but, as was frequently the case in America's 19th century, marching, parading, jostling, wrestling, eating, drinking, fraternizing? The world we have lost was not the conversational one that Carey depicted, but a performative one, participatory, yes, but not dedicated to a concept of the conversational public he endorses. It was dedicated to the triumph of party, and if the clash of parties forms a public, it is not because anyone was specifically trying to make that happen. They were trying to win elections.

What is almost erased from historical memory is why Lippmann and others were so drawn to the topic of expertise. Their vision was not one of expert judgment, as superior to the personal experience of ordinary citizens, but of disinterested and expert judgment as superior to decisions that would be made by malleable citizens prey to the propaganda of urban bosses and machines and their business partners. The historian of the Brookings Institution, Donald Critchlow, argues that the Brookings's founders in the 1920s saw themselves "standing above partisan politics, by operating outside the political arena, yet formulating and passing judgment on public issues," taking the staff at Brookings to be "a professional elite, the guardians of the Republic" (Critchlow, 1985, p. 9). These reformers, like many others of the era, including many social scientists, "were convinced that the nation was threatened by a dangerous mass electorate, consistently manipulated by machine politicians who sowed unscrupulous and flagrant disregard for any notion of public morality" (Critchlow, 1985, p. 17). The debate of the 1990s thus picks up on the elitism of thinkers like Lippmann. However, what it misses almost entirely is that these thinkers were generally convinced that the public did not act collectively except as it was represented and organized by political parties that were fundamentally self-serving rather than publicly minded. Experts were not to replace the public (that had never, in fact, acted as an independent agent in political life), but rather experts were to provide an alternative source of knowledge and policy to the parties and pressure groups. The reformers, Critchlow avers, wanted to "restore political order and representative government to American society" (Critchlow, 1985, p. 17).

The rediscovery or the invention of the Lippmann-Dewey debate in the years 1986-1996 was part of an effort to locate a history for an American critical tradition. In a historical context, Marxism died in

1991, and it was, at best, on life support for several years before then as Eastern Europe came out from under the Soviet spell and sphere. In the absence of a believable Marxism, the vocabulary of the Frankfurt school, already sounding archaic, began to appear an increasingly poor fit with the American scene of ethnic, racial, and gender identity politics. Meanwhile, some thinkers, Carey among them, comfortable in American thought, convinced that there was a native intellectual tradition worth every bit as much, and more than the latest European imports, rejected the "sludge" of postmodernism, as Carey called it (1989b, p. 281) and sought to reclaim an intellectual heritage appropriate to the study of media in a democracy.

This is where Dewey came in and why Carey brought Dewey into the communication studies canon. But there is a fetishism of ideas in this part of Carey's work that inhibits critical thought. On the side of the angels, Carey and others adore the terms "the public," "conversation," "argument," "art," and "loss." On the side of the devil, they find "elites," "experts," and "science." In 2008, when the Bush administration has rhetorically placed faith above science, and will above intelligence, the virtues of information, science, and expertise look more precious than they did in 1990 or 1995, and more deserving of a sympathetic hearing. The intellectual challenge is not to invent a democracy without experts, but to seek a way to harness experts to a legitimately democratic function. In fact, that is exactly what Walter Lippmann intended.

References

- Bender, T. (1987). *New York Intellect*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Carey, J. W. (1975/1989a). "A Cultural Approach to Communication" in Carey, *Communication as Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989) 13-36. (Originally published in *Communication*, vol. 2 no. 2, 1975).
- Carey, J. W. (1987). "The Press and the Public Discourse," *The Center Magazine* 20 (March/April) 6-15.
- Carey, J. W. (1982/1989a). "Reconceiving 'Mass' and 'Media'" in Carey, *Communication as Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman 1989) 69-88. (Originally published as "Mass Media: The Critical View" in *Communications Yearbook V* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982).
- Carey, J. W. (1989b). "Communications and the Progressives," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 6, 264-282.
- Carey, J. W. (1995). "The Press, Public Opinion, and Public Discourse" in Theodore L. Glasser and Charles T. Salmon, eds., *Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent* (New York: Guilford Press), 373-402.
- Carey, J. W. (1994). "Communication and Economics" in Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren, eds., *James Carey: A Critical Reader* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 60-75. (Originally published 1994.)

- Clark, C., & Wetherell, C. (1989). "The Measure of Maturity: The Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1765" *William and Mary Quarterly* 46, 279-303.
- Critchlow, D. T. (1985). *The Brookings Institution, 1916-1952*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1922). "Public Opinion," *The New Republic* 30 (May 3) 286-288.
- Dewey, J. (1925). "Practical Democracy," *The New Republic* 45 (Dec. 2), 52-54.
- Dewey, J. (1927). *The Public and Its Problems*. New York: Holt.
- Dionne, E. J. (1996). *They Only Look Dead*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Fallows, J. (1996). *Breaking the News*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Lasch, C. (1995). *The Revolt of the Elites*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public Opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Lippmann, W. (1925). *The Phantom Public*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Manin, B. (1987). *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).
- Munson, E. S., & Warren, C. A. (Eds.). (1997). *James Carey: A Critical Reader*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).
- Rosen, J. (1999). "The Action of the Idea: Public Journalism in Built Form" in Theodore L. Glasser, ed., *The Idea of Public Journalism*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Schudson, M. (2006). "The Trouble With Experts – And Why Democracies Need Them," *Theory and Society* 35, 491-506.
- Steel, R. (1980). *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*.
- Westbrook, R. (1991). *John Dewey and American Democracy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.