

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

John Dewey Lives!

And not everyone is happy.

Senator Ben Sasse—an Ivy League History PhD who gained notoriety as the most powerful Republican to doggedly oppose Donald Trump during the 2016 primary campaign—believes that Dewey has been the supreme corrupter of our country. In his 2017 book on what's wrong with America, *The Vanishing American Adult*, Sasse charges this evil “aggressive atheist” with using the new mass public school system to break down families, communities, and other “mediating institutions” in order to glorify the controlling, secularizing state. John Dewey, according to the Nebraska senator, “really is a villain.” (The use of the present tense seems quite intentional.)<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps it is not surprising that conservatives despise the uber-Progressive Dewey so much that there seems to be a department in *National Review* devoted to regularly taking potshots at him.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, those on the left—although not uncritical—tend to embrace Dewey as a hero who indeed speaks powerfully to the current ills of America. The leftward perspective views Dewey as a brilliant diagnostician of our ills: for example, “John Dewey Was Right: American Politics is Merely the Shadow Cast by Big Business.” Activists also see him as providing—especially through his focus on democratic schooling—not merely a set of ideas, but a *method* for re-creating an engaged citizenry and public sphere. As Harry Boyte recently noted in giving the annual Dewey lecture at the John Dewey Society, Dewey (using the model of Jane Addams and Hull-House) called for the robust mobilization of citizens to fight for the best public schools as a route toward fighting for their neighborhoods, cities, and nation.<sup>3</sup>

If only because of his present-day, and polarizing, influence, John Dewey deserves careful reconsideration from historians. The platform that *JGAPE* has taken to newly and freshly explore Dewey is the centennial of arguably his most important book, *Democracy and Education* (1916). Cristina Groeger, this issue's guest editor, has assembled a broad range of scholars to explore the influence of Dewey both in his own time, as a quintessential progressive reformer, and in ours, as his legacy continues to inspire both mainstream and alternative education throughout the world.

Groeger's own introduction to this special issue speaks to the specific contributions of various scholars. We commend her work—primarily completed as a graduate student—as a significant contribution as *JGAPE* continues, for just a few more years, to commemorate and explore the centenaries of important events and individuals in the Progressive Era. Stay tuned for future episodes: World War I, the Red Scare, the Mexican Revolution, and the 19th Amendment.

Robert D. Johnston and Benjamin H. Johnson

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Duane Patterson, "Senator Ben Sasse on the Vanishing American Adult and the Comey Memo," May 17, 2017, <http://www.hughhewitt.com/senator-ben-sasse-vanishing-american-adult-comey-memo/>; Ben Sasse, *The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming-of-Age Crisis—and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup>For example, Kevin D. Williamson, "The Inquisitor's Heirs," *National Review*, May 6, 2017, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/447385/science-identify-politics-conflict-inside-progressive-left>.

<sup>3</sup>Jake Johnson, "John Dewey Was Right: American Politics is Merely the Shadow Cast by Big Business," *CommonDreams*, July 21, 2016, <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/07/21/john-dewey-was-right-american-politics-merely-shadow-cast-big-business>; Harry C. Boyte, "Schools and the Democratic Renaissance," *Huffington Post*, Apr. 30, 2017, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/59068cf1e4b084f59b49fa73>.