

Winter 2018

# Education as an Instrument for Peace and Democracy: Dewey's Perspective on the Rise of Nationalism

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## Recommended Citation

Cohan, Audrey Ed.D and Howlett, Charles F. Ph.D., "Education as an Instrument for Peace and Democracy: Dewey's Perspective on the Rise of Nationalism" (2018). *Faculty Works: Education*. 60.  
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# EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY: DEWEY'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE RISE OF NATIONALISM

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This article examines Dewey's views on the concept of nationalism and how it should be taught in schools. Dewey was the first major American philosopher to address the positive and negative factors associated with the term, which became increasingly used for political purposes during and after World War I. Four basic aspects are addressed in this analysis. First, the authors discuss several fundamental Deweyan propositions tied to peace and citizenship. As Dewey viewed it, education is an extension of democratic ethics and healthy community-building. Second, the authors explore Dewey's goal for achieving world citizenship and lasting peace, which was based upon a social science approach to education. Third, Dewey's 1920's lectures and articles related to world peace contained valuable ideas for future implementation when addressing the mandated regulations public schools are required to discharge with respect to nationalistic allegiance. Lastly, the authors detail how Dewey's publications during this period relied on his instrumentalist technique for separating means and ends with respect to war and peace; he continuously addressed the dichotomy of means between nationalistic politics and power and that of a democratic education. The significance of this article chronicles Dewey's views for educating students to the dangers of overzealous nationalism. This type of nationalism, he cautioned, was an impediment to the development of a peace consciousness, an important by-product of his pragmatic approach to world affairs. Dewey's writings addressed this topic nearly 100 years ago and remain relevant today.



*Volume 2 · Number 3 · Winter 2018 · Pages 143-174*

John Dewey's role during World War I became a defining period in his life; it was at that point he became the nation's proclaimed intellectual spokesperson uniting a romantic national idealism with a realistic progressivism supporting military intervention.<sup>1</sup> Attaching his pragmatism to President Woodrow Wilson's progressive war aims was part of the much larger goal for establishing international democracy. Unfortunately, this pragmatic experiment of using war as the means to achieve the desired ends failed to reach fulfillment. His calculus did not consider completely, despite warnings, how powerful the appeal to nationalism could be when the call to arms was announced. The war's outcome caused him to take a closer look at how schools should teach nationalism in keeping with his view of democracy as a way of life. This paper is an historical synopsis of Dewey's writings and views about the importance of developing social consciousness and social ideals among schoolchildren and how educators might respond today. He was the first major American philosopher to give the concept of nationalism serious attention in terms of its relationship between thought and social context.

Specifically, Dewey sought to distinguish between a political definition of nationalism based on state power and governmental control, which is oftentimes used for narrow and exclusive purposes, and a friendlier, positive type that promotes cultural appreciation and community understanding. Dewey was, of course a democratic patriot. But he was one who sought to distinguish between a coerced patriotic loyalty based upon political mandates and one that was motivated by a deep appreciation for democratic values and moral principles. Furthermore, how Dewey viewed nationalism and patriotism as impediments to world peace in light of World War I will be addressed. The postwar years offered him the opportunity to re-

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<sup>1</sup> Consult the following biographies: Charles F. Howlett and Audrey Cohan, *John Dewey, America's Peace-Minded Educator* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016); Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995); Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Steven Rockefeller, *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

examine the meaning of nationalism in relationship to American democratic values and educational objectives.

### **Pre-War Deweyan Propositions Tied to Peace and Citizenship**

Prior to the war, Dewey insisted upon a benevolent role for education and schools in our society. He believed strongly that the role of the schools—driven by a collective social consciousness—would benefit all society rather than premised on nationalistic righteousness. He was ill prepared for the fact that his belief system did not match what was happening in schools. To that point, his many prewar writings consistently reflected his desire for schools to serve as instruments for community building and means for addressing social ills through pacific means.

For instance, as far back as 1897 in “My Pedagogic Creed,” Dewey argued, “all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race.”<sup>2</sup> This required an ethical foundation as the basis for effective citizenship in a democratic society. He posited this view in “Ethical Principles Underlying Education.” In this lengthy essay, he observed, “Society is a society of individuals and the individual is always a social individual. He lives in, for, and by society, just as society has no existence excepting in and through the individuals who constitute it.”<sup>3</sup> The ethical obligation of education, he added, is “training for citizenship,” which “develops the power of observation, analysis, and inference with respect to what makes up a social situation and the agencies through which it is modified.”<sup>4</sup> In *The School and Society*, moreover, which he wrote at the turn of the century, he pointed out that the school and citizenship education represented the best “means of seeing the progress of the human race.”<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this is one of Dewey’s most enduring concepts

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<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed,” *Dewey on Education: Selections*, ed. by Martin S. Dworkin (New York: Teachers College Press, 1959), 19.

<sup>3</sup> John Dewey, “Ethical Principles Underlying Education,” *Third Yearbook of the National Herbart Society* (Chicago, 1897), 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>5</sup> John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1899),

and one that best connects school and society.

Furthermore, in *Moral Principles in Education* (1909) a book he wrote during the middle of the Progressive era (1900-1920), he flatly stated, "Apart from participating in social life, the school has no moral end nor aim."<sup>6</sup> In *Schools of Tomorrow*, which he co-wrote with his daughter Evelyn, he took special note of the contributions of the Italian educational innovator Maria Montessori, whose own ideas about learning are credited with helping to shape the development of peace education. It was her belief that children unwilling to accept the authoritarian habits of their teachers would be less inclined to obey rulers urging them to go to war. She believed a teacher's pedagogy should free the students' spirits to promote love and understanding and reject blind obedience to authority. According to the Deweys:

Madame Montessori...believes that the technique of living can best be learned by the child through situations that are not typical of social life, but which have been arranged in order to exercise some special sense so as to develop the faculties of discrimination and comparison.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the goal behind an experimental education, which Montessori professed, was to foster the process of "learning with doing" in order to "replace the passive education of imparting the learning of others" as currently taught in the classroom. It was a fundamental theme in *Schools*. It would be this type of learning necessary for promoting "a democratic society where initiative and independence are the rule and where every citizen is supposed to take part in the conduct of affairs of common interest."<sup>8</sup> Clearly, all of Dewey's prewar writings encapsulated his progressive view that schools were the instrument for shaping young minds; that is

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<sup>6</sup> John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), 65.

<sup>7</sup> John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1915), 116.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

preparing future citizens to address societal conflict in nonviolent ways in order to improve the welfare of all.

### **America at War**

Obviously, war and societal conflict were mediums of action Dewey hoped would be eliminated. Yet, World War I diverted his attention away from the function of education as an instrument for progressive reform and peaceful coexistence. Despite his own reasoned appeal in asking educators to follow his lead in support of American military intervention so that international democratic progress could be achieved and Old World autocracy banished, it was nationalism's emotional and irrational sway over the public that his pragmatism failed to control.<sup>9</sup> Nowhere was this more apparent than in the field of education.

Schools, in particular, quickly became "seminaries of patriotism."<sup>10</sup> More than 100,000 school districts became receptive instruments to all ideological forms of nationalistic propaganda. Led by the National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest teacher organization, and the Committee on Patriotism through Education, district after district banned the teaching of German and demanded loyalty oaths of schoolteachers and support personnel. Throughout the country, many teachers were unfairly accused of disloyalty because of their pacifist beliefs or lukewarm enthusiasm for war. They were summarily dismissed, suspended, or transferred to another school. Academic freedom became an afterthought, buried beneath the brick and mortar that had been used to construct the nation's halls of learning.

Nationally, moreover, over 800,000 high schoolteachers and students were introduced to the National Board for Historical Service's war study plan prepared by Samuel B. Harding, a history

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher McKnight Nichols, "Education, Expediency, and Democratic Dilemmas in War Time: Inside the Dewey-Bourne Debate," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* Vol. 16, no.4 (October 2017), 438-55.

<sup>10</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York; Oxford University Press, 1980), 57.

professor at the University of Indiana. Clearly designed for propaganda purposes, Harding's work deftly portrayed the callousness of German soldiers who blindly followed the militaristic wishes of its autocratic leaders while rejecting the Allies sincere desire for peace. Moreover, throughout the nation, elementary schools teachers were instructed to teach the themes of patriotism, heroism, and sacrifice as well as learning about the differences between German autocracy and the American democratic way of life.<sup>11</sup> Sadly, the nation's schools were no longer considered the best instruments for furthering the progress of the human race.

### **Post-War Views on Nationalism and Schooling**

After the war, Dewey was determined to apply his philosophical and educational views to counter World War I's ultra-nationalistic spirit. In keeping with his concept of progressive education, schooling was considered a viable mechanism for challenging entrenched customs and beliefs, which also included how the concept of nationalism was being taught. In a rarely mentioned speech he delivered to Massachusetts schoolteachers in 1922, Dewey proclaimed that the main purpose of "our common school system of education" must be "to prepare the boys and girls and young men and women who come to these schools to be good citizens, in the broadest sense."<sup>12</sup> What he meant is that students must be prepared to be active and concerned members of their schools and communities recognizing the commonalities and responsibilities of being part of a productive community. Outlined in his speech, "Social Purposes of Education," was how the educational system had "allowed our students too largely to go out with not only a paper knowledge, but in too innocent a frame of mind about the power and source of power that has to be applied to work the governmental machinery."<sup>13</sup> While he agreed that

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>12</sup> John Dewey, *John Dewey. The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-1990), MW 15: 158.

<sup>13</sup> MW 15: 160.

teachers and schools do have a responsibility to educate students about the importance of nationalism, it could be better appreciated when connected to the expressed goal of community-building and interpersonal relationships.

### **Transition of Thinking**

How then did Dewey, after the war, select aspects of his already posited educational philosophy, and how did he address the way schools should teach a positive concept of nationalism? Initially, he hinted at it in 1916 with the publication of his magnum opus, *Democracy and Education*. As noted educator Leonard Waks explains, “Nationalism *per se* is barely mentioned in *Democracy and Education*, but when placed within the context of his work during World War One, the book can be fruitfully be read as a program for countering nationalism through education.”<sup>14</sup> What affected Dewey’s view of nationalism was the way in which the government converted public schooling into instruments for patriotic allegiance. Nationalism as a pathway for democratic community building through education, as he envisioned in his book, had been undermined. As Dewey viewed it, education is an extension of democratic ethics. It is the primary instrument for establishing the end: a democratic way of life guided by an ethical foundation, which formulates a code of conduct.

Specifically, to address the problem of war, Dewey believed this could be accomplished through a social science approach to education. Dewey recognized that his views on nationalism raised both ethical challenges and a backlash of indoctrination. To Dewey, history and geography were the essential subjects necessary for alleviating the existing social ills in the world; this was consistent with his earlier writings, which now took on added importance following the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914. Dewey first emphasized in *Democracy and Education* that “the segregation which kills the vitality

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<sup>14</sup> Leonard Waks, “Research Note: John Dewey on Nationalism,” unpublished paper, Temple University, 2017, 1. His work was later published in *Dewey Studies* Vol. 1, no. 2 (Fall 2017), 112-125.



of history and geography is divorced from present modes and concerns of social life.” The teaching of “geography and history for cultivating a socialized intelligence,” according to Dewey, “constitutes its moral significance.”<sup>15</sup> Such “moral significance” was tied directly to the social functions of geography and history. Both subjects were not only critical to developing a national consciousness, which he understood, but also useful instruments for going beyond physical boundaries to learn about other nations’ history and culture.

For example, Dewey believed the study of geography must connect to social and political problems. By that, Dewey meant that geography would have to take into consideration the various peoples, their cultures, their habits, their occupations, their art, and their contributions to the development of culture in general. It now entailed that students not be taught simply about rivers, lakes, mountains and other physical features, which had been the common staple for years:

When not treated as a basis for getting at the large world beyond, the study...of geography becomes as deadly as do object lessons which simply summarize the properties of familiar objects....the imagination is not fed, but is held down to recapitulating, cataloguing, and refining what is already known. But when the familiar fences that mark the limits of the village proprietors are signs that introduce an understanding of the boundaries of great nations, even fences are lighted with meaning.<sup>16</sup>

History, as well, would have to divorce itself from its past emphasis on dates, heroes, and battles. Such teaching, as Dewey predicted, fostered a more intolerant and chauvinistic view of nationalism in the minds of impressionable students. A country’s history should not be defined by its success in wars or economic superiority on the global market. More study should be centered upon the social meaning of a country’s history to address its shortcomings and how it can become a better nation. “The true starting point of

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<sup>15</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1916), 213.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

history,” he insisted, “is always some present situation with its problems...[Otherwise], we get only a sugar coating which makes it easier to swallow certain fragments of information.”<sup>17</sup> In a forceful tone, Dewey suggested that

...before starting with history as such it would be a good idea to identify the important problems of present-day society—problems in politics, social problems, economic problems, problems in diplomacy, and others. Then explore each of these problems in its historical setting; try to determine the origin of the problem; examine past efforts to deal with the problem; find out what sort of situation caused it to become a problem.<sup>18</sup>

Many of Dewey’s writings addressed the idea of cause and effect as he sought consistently to draw upon historical events in order to foster global understanding through education. In terms of cause and effect connected to historical events, what he sought to accomplish was emphasizing the negative impact on students’ thinking when teaching about military conflicts such as the American Revolution, Mexican War, and World War I strictly from a nationalistic viewpoint. Students would thus equate America’s greatness to military superiority rather than examining how history has been a powerful motivating force in community building and uniting cultures regardless of creed and ethnic differences. By relying on wars as a major frame of reference socializes students into accepting the dominant political, economic, and social realities. Instead, students should be encouraged to look at past historical events in which the concept of nationalism served to bring people together as one community. Specifically, he looked to the American immigrant experience—“e pluribus Unum”—as the most compelling example of how nationalism can counter notions of exclusivity and intolerance. People from other parts of the world settled in America found ways to cooperate peacefully with one another and continue the democratic

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>18</sup> R.W. Clopton and T-C. Ou, eds. *John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919-1920* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973), 277.

way of life. Why this historical example can't be used in classrooms to promote international understanding was his primary objective.

### **Encouraging Peace Education in School**

In 1923, Dewey called for a school program designed to promote international cooperation through nationalistic principles. Applying the social science approach of Columbia University historian James Harvey Robinson's "New History" to education, as well as carrying over the seeds from an argument he raised in an earlier article entitled "Nationalizing Education," published during World War I, Dewey began to clarify his thinking. To that end, Dewey proposed that the chauvinistic patriotism found in current history textbooks be eliminated. What caused him to argue this point was his own experience during World War I, when the populace failed to heed his advice regarding the "what a real nationalism, a real Americanism, is like."<sup>19</sup>

Dewey further urged educators to cultivate two essential truths within a broader understanding of nationalism: that its composition is both global and racially diverse. Dewey insisted:

No matter how loudly anyone proclaims his Americanism, if he assumes that any one racial strain, any one component culture, no matter how early settled it was in our territory, or how effective it has proved in its own land, is to furnish a pattern to which all other strains and cultures are to conform, he is a traitor to an American nationalism. Our unity...must be... created by drawing out and composing into a harmonious whole the best, the most characteristic which each contributing race and people has to offer.<sup>20</sup>

The key for addressing nationalism is to recognize "that the peculiarity

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<sup>19</sup> John Dewey, "Nationalizing Education," *Education Today by John Dewey*, ed. by Joseph Ratner (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), 114.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-115.

of *our* nationalism is its internationalism” and unless that was acknowledged “we shall breed enmity and division in our frantic efforts to secure unity.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, to nationalize our education and to write history texts in the American democratic spirit demands that it serve as an “instrument in the active suppression of the war spirit and in the positive cultivation of sentiments of respect and friendliness for all men and women wherever they live” and “to make the public school an energetic and willing instrument in developing initiative, courage, power and personal ability in each individual.”<sup>22</sup>

Dewey’s ideas for a peace education program were outlined in a very important article, which appeared in a 1923 issue of the *Journal of Social Forces*. He began this piece by arguing that “The teachers in our schools and the communities behind the schools have a greater responsibility with reference to this international phase of social consciousness and ideals than we have realized. As we need a program and a platform for teaching genuine patriotism and a real sense of the public interests of our own community so clearly we need a program of international friendship, amity and good will.”<sup>23</sup> What he called for in his concluding sentences was a curriculum using the subjects of history and geography for building tolerance, communal respect, and racial understanding traversing fixed boundaries. Genuine patriotism requires a social consciousness that defines the meaning of community as one not restricted by physical terrain or elitist attitudes. In terms of

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>23</sup> John Dewey, “The Schools as a Means of Developing a Social Consciousness and Social Ideals in Children,” *Journal of Social Forces* Vol. 1 (September 1923), 514. Dewey continued to promote education as an antidote to militaristic nationalism throughout the 1920s. In a revealing letter to the president of Michigan State Normal College, Charles McKenny, Dewey noted: “In the present state of the world, with the evident proof that war is the greatest of tragedies from which humanity suffers, the necessity for employing all educational forces to create mutual understanding and sympathy is obvious....In the past, teaching especially in history, has been of a character which indirectly at least created an attitude of indifference, if not hostility, to other nations, and thus fostered a spirit favorable to war when an international dispute arose.” John Dewey to Charles McKenny, November 14, 1927, *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, Vol. II, no. 21555, Electronic edition (Charlotte, VA.: Intellex, 1996).

ideals it implies the concept of what it means to be human. History is capable of teaching students how human beings lived in the past and how they adapted to change devoid of violence whereas geography has the potential to educate children about other cultures and their contributions to human development. Dewey's understanding of how to teach history and geography was to instruct students that a proper understanding of nationalism and patriotism should be premised on the belief that no particular group or identity deserved a privileged status. Thus, Dewey hoped that the school would be the primary means for developing social consciousness and social ideals in children.

### **Nationalism's Pitfalls: The Turkish Example**

Reinforcing his philosophy further was his two-month trip to Turkey in 1924. The breakup of the old Ottoman Empire led to the regime of a modernist, Kemal Ataturk, in 1920. Ataturk and his government invited Dewey to visit Turkey and examine the school system to make recommendations for its modernization and improvement. Apart from modernizing Turkey, Ataturk was determined to nationalize the state at all costs. Dewey looked upon this visit as an extension of his interest in international affairs and furthering education as an agent of democracy.

While in Turkey, however, Dewey was troubled by the friction among its disparate population, which existed between the Turks, the Armenians, and the Greeks, each seeking to further its own ethnic and religious beliefs. In a *New Republic* article, he wrote upon his return to the United States, "The Turkish Tragedy," he pointed out that the situation in Turkey is a sad reminder that "the fate of the Greeks and Armenians, the tools of nationalistic and imperialistic ambitions of foreign powers, makes one realize how accursed has been the minority population that had the protection of a Christian foreign power." "[T]he end is not yet," Dewey added, "even with the completed exchange of populations [Greeks and Armenians being deported in exchange for Turks in Greece], and the accompanying misery of peoples at least temporarily homeless, often unacquainted

with the language of their home-kin, with thousands of orphans and beggared refugees, as numerous among the Turks as among the Armenians and Greeks, even if our Christian benevolence, still under the influence of foreign political propaganda, does not hear so much about or experience the same solicitude for Turkish woes.”<sup>24</sup>

With respect to the Armenians, moreover, how is it that even now “the Greeks are requesting that this group, already deported once, be removed from Greek soil” while the power brokers at Geneva are calling for “the creation of the Armenian ‘home’ in Caucasian Turkey—a home that would require protection by some foreign power and be the prelude to new armed conflicts and ultimate atrocities.”<sup>25</sup> This situation, alone, was enough to remind all that securing peace between nations and among peoples was a long way off:

Nothing but evil to all parties has come in the past or will come in the future from the attempts of foreign nations to utilize the national aspirations of minority populations in order to advance their own political interests...If a fiftieth of the energy, money and planning that had been given to searching out terms upon which the populations could live peaceably together with the disruption of Turkey, the situation today would be enormously better than it is.<sup>26</sup>

The tragedy in Turkey was illustrative of how political leaders chose to further their nationalistic ambitions for purposes of exclusivity, superiority, and prejudice rather than peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. “The Turks...have been converted to nationalism,” Dewey opined. But “the disease exists in a virulent form at just this moment.”<sup>27</sup> Modernizing the Turkish educational system as part of its new national identity required that its teachers be trained to embrace all elements within the population as “an indispensable

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<sup>24</sup> MW 15: 141.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

condition of peace, mutual understanding and harmony.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, his experiences in Turkey influenced his thinking about how to achieve world peace with a more intentional curriculum for educators to adopt.

### **Cautionary Tale Regarding German Nationalism**

Rather interestingly, Dewey’s reason for believing that education might be the means for transcending nationalistic boundaries was also found in the important and positive role it had played in the consolidation and unification of the German-speaking peoples during the nineteenth century. What most interested Dewey was how German leaders had used education to nationalize their citizens. Although in Germany, national interests captured education for narrow and exclusive purposes mainly for the perpetuation of the political state, Dewey, nevertheless, saw a beneficial side to this experience in terms of unifying people as a community. He drew upon this observation when discussing his plans for the modernization of the Turkish educational system. However, what he found most wanting in the German example was, that

The state furnished not only the instrumentalities of public education but also its goal.... Since... national sovereignty required subordination of individuals to the superior interests of the state both in military defense and in struggles for international supremacy in commerce, social efficiency was understood to imply like subordination. The educational process was taken to be one of disciplinary training rather than of personal development.<sup>29</sup>

Dewey’s accurate analysis of Germany’s national interests (based on an idealistic and unquestioned devotion to the state) did, unfortunately, eventually lead to its expansive militaristic aggression and the late war.

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<sup>28</sup> MW 15: 148.

<sup>29</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 94.

Thus the message he had for Turkish leaders: use nationalism to modernize and unify all groups but make it an educational instrument for democratic cooperation rather than forcing communities around as part of a will to power.

In light of what happened in Germany and what was taking place in Turkey, Dewey also faced an essential question impacting his thoughts on the relationship between education and nationalism. Is it therefore not possible to initiate a new school program whereby education would enable all peoples to live harmoniously within their own state and then transcend that feeling beyond their own national boundaries? Already, Dewey pointed out, science, art, and commerce were compelling factors making it possible for peoples living in different countries to cooperate with each other, thus making the world more interdependent.

### **Support for a Peace University**

These recent developments in science and technology led Dewey to call for “a new movement in education to preserve what was socially most useful in the national heritage and to meet the issues of the emerging international society.”<sup>30</sup> The identification of patriotism with “national interests,” which inevitably leads to exclusiveness, suspicion, jealousy, and hatred of other nations, Dewey argued, would now have to be abandoned as well as subordinated to the broader conceptions of human welfare. Therefore, in teaching history and geography as part of the social sciences it was Dewey’s primary goal to emphasize what he proclaimed previously, namely, that

...whatever binds people together in cooperative human pursuits and results, apart from geographical limitations. The secondary and provisional character of national sovereignty in respect to the fuller, freer, and more fruitful association and intercourse of all human beings with one another must be instilled as a working disposition of mind.... This conclusion

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<sup>30</sup> Merle Curti, “John Dewey and Nationalism,” *Orbis* Vol. 10 (Winter 1967), 1109.



is bound up with the very idea of education as freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims.<sup>31</sup>

“A new movement in education” to bind “people together in cooperative human pursuits” led him to endorse the concept of a peace university in 1930. The proposed concept was to construct this university, named after President Abraham Lincoln, because of his moral leadership during the American Civil War. The peace university would consist of a six-year course, admitting 200 students each successive year until reaching a total enrollment of 1,200. Apart from American students being admitted, the plan also called for accepting 120 students from other parts of the globe. The curriculum’s specific goal was to foster international understanding and to address the problem of how nationalism had been taught worldwide by various governments seeking to advance their own special interests. It was a proposal Dewey happily supported. Unfortunately, apart from the initial proposal, it never came to fruition. The onset of the Great Depression diverted the necessary funding to make it a reality.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, the idea for a peace university was in response to the developing postwar meaning of nationalism as a new type of secular religion, that the historian Merle Curti pointed out when describing Dewey’s understanding of the term. What Dewey had hoped to accomplish through enrolling students from other parts of the world was to emphasize the importance of the term “nationality,” which had no political standing. The concept of a “Nation by which millions swear and for which they demand the sacrifice of all other loyalties,” Dewey argued, “is a myth; it has no being outside of emotion and fantasy.”<sup>33</sup> It is a man-made political creation, or in other words, a “fictitious” character. It detracts from the human element of language, cultural traditions, and ethnic background as a pathway for international understanding. Teaching about nationalism should be understood in terms of protecting “citizens against pestilence and

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<sup>31</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 99.

<sup>32</sup> “Lincoln University Selects Trustees,” *New York Times*, February 13, 1930, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Curti, “John Dewey and Nationalism,” 1105.

unnecessary infection, to assure them a reasonable degree of economic comfort and independence” and not used as a political instrument for military measures.<sup>34</sup>

### **Fundamental Principles**

The attempt to establish a peace university illustrated Dewey's postwar views about nationalism and world peace. They were based upon five fundamental principles, which remain applicable today: (1) building a democratic community; (2) teaching cooperation; (3) creating an environment based upon moral sensitivity; (4) promoting critical thinking; and (5) empowering self-esteem to challenge established modes of national behavior. These principles were the basis for establishing a trusting environment, one which Dewey advocated would enable schoolchildren to not fear changing their minds when constantly exposed to the nationalistic and patriotic interpretations contained in social studies and history textbooks.

All of Dewey's arguments for world peace were based upon building the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for democratic citizenship. Dewey sought to make clear the distinction between what he labeled “loyal” versus “critical” patriotism. Loyal patriotism, he insisted, is a coerced brand of attachment to one's homeland; it is not freely given and tends to create an unhealthy attitude of superiority relative to other cultures and polities. Instead, he insisted that a healthy understanding of patriotism in a democratic society is one, which furthers the civic purposes of education that the war failed to achieve—a critical appreciation for democratic values and moral principles. Dewey's concept of democracy as a process of collaborative social and political decision-making through inclusive dialogue, public reasoning, and careful and sustained deliberation remains the basic key to unlocking the door when defining the true meaning of democratic nationalism.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1106.

<sup>35</sup> Consult the following works by Sarah Stitzlein: *Teaching for Dissent: Citizenship, Education and Political Action* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012) and *American*

Dewey's underlying motivation was to call attention to the importance of education as an extension of moral democracy. Moral democracy, to him, meant that students should become responsible citizens willing to question the status quo and usher in necessary reforms for the betterment of all society. Training docile and obedient students willing to bend to the dictates of the state will in no way further democratic change. "From the standpoint of...education, a large portion of current material of instruction," Dewey wrote in 1922,

is simply aside from the mark. The specialist in any one of the traditional lines is as likely to fall for social bunk even in its extreme forms of economic and nationalistic propaganda as the unschooled person; in fact his credulity is the more dangerous because he is so much more vociferous in its proclamation and so much more dogmatic in its assertion.<sup>36</sup>

No wonder, he continued, "Our schools send out men meeting the exigencies of contemporary life clothed in the chain-armor of antiquity, and priding themselves on the awkwardness of their movements as evidences of deep-wrought, time-tested convictions."<sup>37</sup> In other words, since the United States helped win the war, it was now America's responsibility to tear away the clothing of "chain-armor antiquity" and proudly don the robes of lasting world peace.<sup>38</sup>

### **Instrumentalism for Peace**

Dewey's publications during this period on the matter of nationalism also took into account his instrumentalist technique for separating

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*Public Education and the Responsibility of Its Citizens: Supporting Democracy in the Age of Accountability* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> John Dewey, "Education as Politics," *Characters and Events: Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. by Joseph Ratner, Vol. II (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1929), 779.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 780.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 779-80.

means and ends with respect to war and peace. He continuously addressed the dichotomy of means between nationalistic politics and power as force and that of democratic cooperation for peaceful coexistence as the end. Most of his arguments were based upon building the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for democratic citizenship. His scientific model of thinking or inquiry, posited in his 1933 revised work, *How We Think*, became an important aspect of his teaching when addressing this dichotomy. In terms of developing information-processing and thinking skills, Dewey offered the following four steps: (1) define the problem; (2) suggest alternative solutions or make hypotheses; (3) gather data for supporting or negating these hypotheses; and (4) select or reject hypotheses.<sup>39</sup> Historian Merle Curti relied on this study for interpreting Dewey's approach to nationalism as, "his repudiation of general definitions as means for understanding concrete issues....Since for Dewey [social] problems could be solved only in concrete, not in general terms, only by testing hypotheses, not by general definitions and categories, rules of thumb or citation of precedents the matter of defining nationalism, national honor, national interest in concrete terms was crucial."<sup>40</sup>

Problems such as war, militarism and disarmament, patriotic conformity at all costs, viewing nationalism in a superior way to other societies, and social injustice were just some of the problems Dewey encouraged educators to address in their classrooms. Although no easy solution to solving the problem of war was at hand, Dewey called for a process of inquiry as a learning tool. He encouraged teachers to address the problem of nationalism and its association with appeals to war in terms of its destructive experience, which should not be divorced from values clarification.

Thus, his classroom method of inquiry was designed to connect value analysis with problem solving. Critical thinking in education, he argued, must undertake an analysis of problems impacting social development; it involves testing values and applying them to real world situations. Teaching students not to fall prey to sweeping generalizations through the practice of inquiry, gathering

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<sup>39</sup> John Dewey, *How We Think* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., reprint 1971), 9-16.

<sup>40</sup> Curti, "John Dewey and Nationalism," 1106-1107.

facts, and clarifying values should ultimately result in developing better moral judgments. Students need to think about how the idea of peace, for instance, is a more positive hypothetical development when analyzing society's most pressing problem (war) plaguing civilization.

Dewey's progressive education theories further highlighted the disparity between war and peace. He challenged critics who questioned his efforts as to the importance of educating publics on the possibility for lasting peace as nothing more than a utopian fantasy. In terms of war, education teaches people to accept selfish behavior, promote authoritarian methods of rule, ignore moralistic reasons for good behavior, encourage coercion in the name of patriotic conformity and nationalistic allegiance, and comply with patterns of structural violence. In contrast, education for peace fosters responsibility, openness, innovation, self-motivation, cooperative behavior, and barrier-free opportunities to pursue individual interests for the common good.<sup>41</sup> In the long run, which one is a more realistic option for civilization's well-being? Let the method of inquiry begin!

Dewey's intent was not to intellectualize the subject. Establishing a peaceful world order would never be accomplished by simply providing information and developing intellectual virtues; it required a rigorous process of inquiry to solve it and offer appropriate solutions. What he suggested is that one of the most important responsibilities for schools is to concentrate on self-discipline and a humanistic way of life. The lesson he, himself, learned from the war was how effective schools were in promoting a singular patriotism. The final grade, however, was a failure. Teachers did not communicate to their students that the ultimate goal was not the rightness of America's involvement in the war but the establishment of a global community rejecting the resort to armed conflict.<sup>42</sup> They

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<sup>41</sup> Howlett & Cohan, *John Dewey, America's Peace-Minded Educator*, 111.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 111. This was certainly the message he conveyed in a 1930 article, "The Duties and Responsibilities of The Teaching Profession," which appeared in the journal, *School and Society*. In this article he called for teachers to assume greater autonomy and educate their students about the pressing social and political problems of the day. He raised a number of questions teachers should address in relation to democratic social cooperation, including "war and peace." In terms of international relations he asked: "Does the teaching of patriotism tend toward

sacrificed the principles of self-discipline and humanism by failing to encourage their students to think for themselves and to question how their leaders glorified American nationalism to achieve military ends.

When thinking about how to establish peace, Dewey still needed to reconcile his ideas about instrumentalism after World War I. During this conflict he supported the use of military force as the means to establish international order—the end—only to witness how easily his own philosophical argument was captured by an overzealous patriotism—one defined by intolerance and unquestioned loyalty. In the years after the war, however, he was able to reconcile this argument by applying it as a means for achieving social reform and domestic justice in order to advance democratic understanding. This is an important aspect many Dewey scholars may have not paid attention to and was the basis for the book, *John Dewey, America's Peace-Minded Educator*.<sup>43</sup> Antiwar activists applied Dewey's pragmatism as an instrument for change by insisting that peace required social reform as well as social order. In line with Dewey's progressivist thinking, they often argued that in order for the United States to take a leading role in the crusade for world peace the nation's institutions and understanding of nationalism would have to change fundamentally. Critically, relying on Dewey's philosophy of instrumentalism, these peace reformers not only added a moral dimension to their methods but also "a theory of conflict and a dialectic of action in a struggle [crusade against war] that became an 'experiment with truth': testing ideas through political dialogue, exemplary conduct, and communication during conflict, rather than through political violence."<sup>44</sup> Their theory upheld Dewey's belief that antagonistic actions were necessary for establishing an appreciation of truth and the consciousness of growth—a critical step toward

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antagonism toward other peoples?...Should definite questions of international relations, such as our relation to the Caribbean region, the use of force in intervention in financial and economic questions, our relation to the World Court, etc., be introduced?" Consult, Joseph Ratner, ed., *Education Today by John Dewey* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), 224-29.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-75.

<sup>44</sup> Nigel Young, "Concepts of Peace from 1913 to the Present," *Ethics and International Affairs* Vol. 27, no. 2 (2013), 160.

reconciling opposite tendencies.

Primarily, when addressing the issue of nationalism, postwar peace activists applied Dewey's method of inquiry to revise an understanding of nationalism. Relying on Dewey's naturalistic, inquiry-based approach over an epistemological, knowledge-based approach, they called for a critical understanding of nationalism. Cognizant that they could not solve all the political and social problems of the day, they still persisted in their belief that nationalism should not be accepted passively as applied to the principle of "American First." Rather, it should correspond to inquiry as part of a rigorous process, which examines the meaning through hypothesis testing as the basis for further human action. In this context, the most appropriate test requires tying the concepts of nationality and sovereignty (free will) to nationalism as an instrument for democratic cooperation to dissociate it from power politics. Like Dewey, they challenged the public to examine the environmental impact on nationalism's meaning not as accepted knowledge but as an instrumental idea for continuous social reform.

### Lessons for Today

Tellingly, Dewey took great pains to analyze the meaning behind nationalism in a 1927 article he contributed to the pacifist journal, *World Tomorrow*. The term, he insisted, is a double-edged sword. "Nationalism is a tangled mixture of good and bad," he commented. "It is not possible to diagnose its undesirable results, much less consider ways of counteracting them," he added, "unless the desirable traits are fully acknowledged. For they furnish the ammunition and the armor, which are utilized as means of offense and defense by sinister interests to make Nationalism a power for evil."<sup>45</sup> More to the point, Dewey insisted,

[T]he doctrine of national sovereignty is simply the denial on the part of a political state of either legal or moral

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<sup>45</sup> John Dewey, "Nationalism and Its Fruits," *Characters and Events* Vol. II, 798.

responsibility. It is a direct proclamation of the unlimited and unquestionable right of a political state to do what it wants to do in respect to other nations and to do it as and when it pleases. It is a doctrine of international anarchy . . . . Internationalism is a word to which they accused significance, an idea to which by all the great means at their disposal they attach a sinister and baleful significance, ignoring the fact that it but portends that subjection of relations between nations to responsible law which is taken for granted in relations between citizens . . . . [T]he glorification of War through identification with patriotism is proof that irresponsible sovereignty is still the basic notion.<sup>46</sup>

Of course, in the modern world, nationalism has become the philosophy of the state and a unified nation represents the “highest value in civilization.”<sup>47</sup> American nationalism, like almost all nationalisms, Curti observes, “has expressed a faith in the superiority of a particular landscape, a special complex of traditions and institutions, a special mission.”<sup>48</sup> In a dialectical sense, a pluralistic internationalism may very well infer a superiority of a particular landscape. Yet what has presented most problems when teaching about nationalism is that it has lost its association with the root values of Americanism: namely, individualism, nonconformity, and humanitarianism. While many might argue that one of the root values of Americanism is its exceptionalism, Dewey remained steadfast in his belief that such a supposition engenders an attitude of superiority and condescension—an attitude that ignores the fundamental principles of the democratic way of life. Loyalties to past American traditions, ones which were not based upon a sense of exceptionalism and took into account the public will, have been supplanted by an almost unyielding faith in the need for national security as encouraged by the established order. Thus, the American distinction between loyalty to the government and its elected officials and loyalty to the general good

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 802-803.

<sup>47</sup> Merle Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), xiv.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.



needs to be rekindled in the minds of students when asked what nationalism means to them. To promote a healthy definition of American nationalism as an instrument for achieving better relations at home and abroad requires an “individualistic type of loyalty, based on recognition of the services of the nation to the needs of individuals, and on belief in the right of all individuals in the nation to those services.”<sup>49</sup> It should not mean that individuals must surrender their values to the dictates of the state—a bitter pill Dewey had to swallow given the failings of his pragmatism during World War I. The scope of the war, led Dewey to return over and over to the question of nationalism and how it should be defined.

Perhaps, one of Dewey’s most significant criticisms of nationalism was its penchant for developing racial prejudice towards foreigners. He addressed this in a 1922 article, “Racial Prejudice and Friction.” How peoples from other countries were perceived had been shaped by political factors, which became the basis for racial animosity and vice versa: “I think we may safely conclude that the political factor is the one chiefly responsible for converting antipathy to the foreign into definite racial friction. The matter is complicated by the fact that nationalism has spread until now antagonism is reciprocal.”<sup>50</sup> There was absolutely no question that the political mechanisms attached to nationalism and used to promote support for the war ultimately brought responses of fear and suspicion towards foreigners.<sup>51</sup> Thus, it becomes easier to wage a war tied to national loyalty when racial prejudice is associated with the enemy.

What is most important when discussing the concept of nationalism is that Dewey never abandoned his hope that “...all education which develops power to share effectively in social life is moral” and the duty and obligation of all educators is “to provide alternatives to the status quo in personal and social relations, in the conduct of economic and political affairs, and in the nature of

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>50</sup> MW 15:249. It should be noted that many scholars have accused Dewey of this very same view when it came to his own scathing indictment of German nationalism during the war. Consult, Howlett and Cohan, *John Dewey*, 37-40.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-50.

international affairs.”<sup>52</sup> Dewey’s fear was associating nationalism with state worship as an absolute. The way to encourage a healthier understanding regarding the positive aspects of nationalism would be, as Dewey observed nearly one hundred years earlier, to develop a citizen-minded consciousness transcending entrenched political habits, which protect the status quo. This would involve teaching nationalism as an evolving and ever-changing concept not defined by geographical boundaries and political state systems. It would have to take into account an experimentally, psychologically, and sociologically educated approach to ethics and politics—one that respects all races and creeds as neighbors in a world community. Devotion would be to the nation as a cultural community within a global setting while the daily operations within each country would be left to elected officials. In this view, national security would not rest upon the shoulders of military might since there would be no need for it.

Sadly, however, educators continue to encounter what some practitioners refer to as a “selective tradition,” in which mandated state curriculums place pressure on teachers as to what must be taught in the classroom. In many cases, the curriculum is meant to continue the status quo—support the dominant political establishment—while giving the illusion of creating change. For example, the subject of history, one Dewey singled out in his time, remains constricted by institutional mechanisms so that it continues to be taught to maintain the status quo and socialize students into compliance regarding the dominant economic, political, and social realities currently in place. This is the exact opposite of what Dewey wanted in the aftermath of World War I. Indeed, as one observer argues, “State curriculum guides, standardized tests, and corporate textbooks not only regulate what is and is not taught, but also the perspective from which history is taught, the pace of instruction, instructional methods, and ultimately, determine what counts as historical knowledge.”<sup>53</sup> Sadly,

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<sup>52</sup> Curti, “John Dewey and Nationalism,” 1109.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher R. Leahey, *Whitewashing War: Historical Myth, Corporate Textbooks, and Possibilities for Democratic Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010), 12-13.

the nationalistic influence found in textbooks and curricular materials continues: “Lost from textbook narratives and curricular objectives are the demands that war makes on our democratic institutions, its costs in both blood and treasure, and the myriad stories of Americans who struggled to limit war through nonviolent alternatives.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, those who sought to prevent or limit war by nonviolence are just as nationalistic or patriotic in their own right as those who carried arms in combat. So, how do we define the true meaning of nationalism within a democratic construct?

Certainly, Dewey always insisted that the mission of schools is to enable students to examine key social problems. He argued that classes be structured in a problem-solving way, one not driven by a teacher-centered pedagogy as the source of all truth. It was an important element in his pedagogical beliefs:

The teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child but is there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences.<sup>55</sup>

During World War I teachers were instructed to indoctrinate students about the virtue of patriotism and were considered agents of change for immigrants. Consequently, they were not provided the opportunity to discover for themselves their own understanding of nationalism.

The fact that this nation was created through the migration of peoples from other parts of the world was even more reason to appreciate his view, stated earlier, “that the peculiarity of *our* nationalism is its internationalism.” Certainly, one can argue that this view remains one particularism among others in a dialectic of particularisms, which has done little to resolve the problem of war and international distrust. Yet from a philosophical position, Dewey was laying the educational groundwork for a more positive understanding of nationalism, one rooted in communal cooperation, not

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> John Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed,” 24.

institutionalized political standards. Removing the theoretical obstacles to a full appreciation for the concept of nationalism as a borderless bridge, required people to look beyond their own established political system; it called for a revision of their long-established thinking processes. His philosophy was directed at using experience, not acquired knowledge, to appreciate the distinctiveness of American nationalism as part of a much larger process.

Of course, in keeping with Dewey's philosophy, he set out to raise larger questions in order to work through the problem. Each particular problem, like nationalism, was accompanied by another set of problems. He did not offer ironclad solutions but rather a process of inquiry designed to create awareness to the issue. Simply put, it was not a matter of providing a solution to the problem of nationalism, but of offering a method for removing those theoretical obstacles to addressing it. In this context, Dewey insisted in his time, that people may very well have been able to consider its true meaning to be a "unifier" for all peoples, regardless of custom, creed, or nationality. If such had been the case, it would have reinforced Dewey's definition of American nationalism as part of the democratic way. The pathway for teaching nationalism, in Dewey's time as well as ours, is through an appreciation for democracy as a way of life:

Intolerance, abuse, calling of names because of differences of opinion about religion or politics or business, as well as because of differences of race, color, wealth or degree of culture are treason to the democratic way of life. For everything which bars freedom and fullness of communication sets up barriers that divide human beings into sets and cliques, into antagonistic sects and factions, and thereby undermines the democratic way of life. ...These things destroy the essential condition of the democratic way of living even more effectually than open coercion [fed by philistine nationalism] which...is effective only when it succeeds in breeding hate, suspicion, intolerance in the minds of individual human beings.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> LW 14: 227-28.

Given that the twentieth century proved to be the most deadly in terms of death and destruction humankind has witnessed, it remains critical that educators and schools examine how a philistine adoration for nationalism—as contained in school curriculums—actually prevents students from understanding their environment. Educators need to examine mandated state curriculums and school programs, which promote the virtues of nationalism based on economic and military success, and see how they may foster entrenched habits and customs for fear of disrupting the status quo. It is a top-down, authoritarian approach to education, which discourages critical thinking and questioning—the very antithesis of Dewey’s progressive education views. Dewey and his co-author James Hayden Tufts said it best in their 1932 revised edition of *Ethics*: “Those who are devoted to peace must recognize the scope of the issue and be willing to bear the cost, largely moral and intangible, of sacrificing their nationalistic sentiments to broader conceptions of human welfare. The criterion of the greater good of all must be extended beyond the nation...”<sup>57</sup>

A capacity for reflective thinking about what nationalism can achieve and what it can do in terms of building a more equitable social order—one “extended beyond the nation”—is far more beneficial than obedience to political authority marked by institutionalized injustices and fixed by the status quo. The nationalistic fervor of World War 1 contradicted Dewey’s cosmopolitan sensibilities; it violated his “principles of social growth—namely, an ability to accommodate a wider and wider membership and a wider and wider range of interactions among them.”<sup>58</sup> It was employed as an instrument to accept the legitimacy of war while undercutting those virtues calling for good behavior and moral cooperation. Thus, “Is it possible,” Dewey asked in *Democracy and Education*, “for an educational system to be conducted by a national state and yet the full social ends of the

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<sup>57</sup> John Dewey and James H. Tufts, *Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt & Co. rev. ed., 1932), 414.

<sup>58</sup> Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 192-93.

educative process not be restricted, constrained, and corrupted?”<sup>59</sup> Are we capable of reconciling national loyalty or patriotism with a “superior devotion to the things which unite men in common ends, irrespective of national political boundaries?”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 113.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

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