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Hope and Democracy

Now that we have a working definition of what hope is, I want to explain why it matters for democracy, before turning to how we might learn how to hope to round out the book. Facing despair and a struggling democracy, many Americans are asking, "How can I hope?" and "What should I hope for?" Focusing on the relationship between hope and democracy, which I articulate in this chapter, offers not only an enriched understanding of *how* we hope together but also particular content of *what* we might hope for within our country. And it offers insight into how democracy and hope are mutually supportive of one another. Given the current struggles faced by our citizens and our democracy, this relationship suggests that valuing and nurturing hope may be one important way to sustain and strengthen our democracy today and, especially, over time and into the future.

Recall that hope functions as a verb—the active process of hoping—but hope also may have particular objects or objectives that serve as ends-in-view. The objects are things (sometimes public things like parks and clean water)[195] we desire and the objectives are events or states of affairs that we want to bring to fruition (such as enjoyable employment that brings financial stability).[196] Those objects and objectives may help us make our way out of indeterminate situations, satisfying our needs or resolving our problems so that we can grow and move forward.[197] While these examples might sound quite large or ambitious, objects and objectives as ends-in-view are often smaller aims that may string together with others across time toward larger outcomes. For example, my husband and I might first reflect on our frustrating experience of detachment from others and consider ways to create opportunities to get to know and interact with families in our community. Then we might gather with a neighbor to discuss our desire to get to know others in our area better and brainstorm potential ways to do so. Next, we might set up a designated play space for children on our street to see if other families are looking for recreation or opportunities for engaging with neighbors, and so on. Each of these smaller ends-in-view occurs long before we might set our sights on building a public park as our larger object of hope.

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Objects and objectives are what we hope for in our lives, our communities, and our democratic nation.

Hoping Together

To delineate how we may hope together, let's begin with five approaches described by philosopher Titus Stahl.[198] First, he presents "distributively shared hope" (1), where each individual in a group hopes for something. Even though they hope for different things, they share the property of hoping. Second, he describes "minimally shared hope" (2), where every person in a group hopes for the same thing, but may not know that the others also hope for that thing or may not approve of them doing so. While these are potential starting points to hoping as I see it, they aren't sustainable because they don't provide a climate that acknowledges and supports hope or a disposition to exert effort in the face of struggle. They can also fall prey to some of the problems of privatized hope that I discussed in chapter 1, preventing the effective identification of social problems and the collective work needed to address them. Focusing on these versions of hope might help individuals personally or for a short while, but they aren't likely to bring about the significant and lasting improvements in our lives or in democracy that hoping together can. These approaches also fail to recognize that working with others on problems that hinder our own personal futures is a way to improve our own prospects as well as those of others. We need forms of hope that better link one's future possibilities to the well-being of the country as a whole.

Third, Stahl describes "cooperatively shared hope" (3), where each member of a group hopes for some thing and is aware of and supportive of the others also hoping for other things. This form of hoping together is the minimum foundation for which I am calling. Here, people are enacting hope and acknowledging the importance of others who are also enacting hope, even if their particular objects or objectives may vary.

Fourth is "fully shared hope" (4), where each member of a group knows about and supports each other in hoping for the same collective outcome. And fifth is "collective hope" (5), where all members of a group jointly hope for the same collective outcome. In this case, "the group acts on joint commitments, but each individual also has derivative commitments from the group that are distinct from their own personal commitments.[199] Both 4 and 5 are more desirable for the overall well-being of democracy because

they entail not just the practice of each individual citizen hoping, but also those citizens hoping separately or together for some outcome that is mutually beneficial. When those outcomes are public goods or conditions that lead to the flourishing of collective life, the shared content and hopers are brought together in a situation that is particularly ripe for reviving democracy. Options 4 and, especially, 5 may also involve creating an imaginative space where members creatively work together toward their collective outcome. Such a space not only can generate new ideas but also can be a sandbox for experiments in shared living, where citizens are mutually recognized and no one feels left behind or slighted. Versions 4 and 5 also differ from privatized hope; they entail us inviting others into our hoping action, potentially revealing the sources of problems, and providing a space for social problem-solving. These options assert the value and importance of shared and collective work. Let's consider how 3, 4, and 5 might play out as hoping together.

When hope is understood as pragmatist habits, with their deep connections to social and political life, hope transitions from the individual to the community. Hoping involves reflection, action, and consequences that concern and impact other people in one's environment. Hoping together is a process that is more than just the sum of each individual's hope; rather, hoping together takes place in a community that shapes the objects and practices of hoping. Hoping together may start with or build off of the particular hopes of individuals, but through dialogue they become collectively held when others also desire them and are willing to work toward them.[200] Each individual may hold the same object of hope, as in minimally shared hope (2), but may be unaware that others are concerned with the same object of hope. Thus, they feel no affiliation to others as a result. Here, we have a mere aggregation, a summing up of each individual's hope, rather than an association of hopers. This gives us only a superficial identity as merely being concerned with the same object and fails to provide the richer social identity needed to bind people together in America through times of struggle. However, when we hold a joint commitment to that object, it binds us with others, and in some cases, we cannot dissolve that commitment without the community's agreement. This sort of hoping together provides a more substantial sense of social unity.

In hoping together, the community becomes a source for hoping, producing indeterminate situations and shared experiences that trigger inquiry and imagination. And the community becomes a concrete location for

hoping, where the people around us influence our attitudes, emotions, and actions. Sometimes we build solidarity by sharing our similar experiences and reactions. Within the community, we identify shared social problems as well as individual struggles, all the while discussing why they are problems worthy of address. We then craft desired outcomes, keeping in mind what we find to be feasible, all the while maintaining a spirit of possibility. In many cases, we work together through the process of inquiry to imaginatively propose solutions to those problems. We then try out those hypotheses together, seeking to determine whether they have increased our ability to lead flourishing lives so that we can grow as individuals and together. When our hypotheses fail, we must come together to deliberate, to seek out alternative views and ideas from beyond our initial community, and to once again creatively envision new approaches to try. With each reiteration, we shape our new objects and objectives critically, checking to see whether evidence supports them and whether they reflect what we truly want or need.[201]

Hope matters to democracy because shared hoping, and the content of such hope, ties communities together. Hoping with others for the same objects and objectives entails a joint commitment that binds us beyond being a "we" of hopers. It gives our connections substance and direction. Hoping together can help support an individual's persistence in pursuing a goal because it enhances our obligations to others and our reasons to pursue the object or objective. As a result of being connected to other people and to shared ends, this hoping together is more sustainable than individual hope because it entails more resources for problem-solving and persistence.[202] It may also nurture our sense of responsibility to follow through on our commitments to those we hope with. Finally, the experience of solidarity can affirm the worthwhileness of action with others and move us beyond more fleeting individualized hope undertaken without regard for others. While despair often isolates us and cynicism distances us from each other, hope builds solidarity in one's commitment to and interaction with other citizens. Commitment to each other and action on each other's behalf builds the trust and involvement entailed in self-government necessary for democracy to thrive.

The practice of hoping together and determining the content of our significant shared hopes shapes our identity; it becomes who we are and how we see ourselves. And when that identity is geared toward future-driven action and betterment of our collective living, that identity leads us to work together as a public. As a result, hope is not just instrumentally useful because it is aligned with specific outcomes but also is intrinsically valuable in constituting our

identity. In such a community, our habits of hope are nurtured to keep us disposed toward hopeful action even as our ends-in-view vary. This proclivity keeps us adaptive to novel situations and actively seeking new and better ways of living. Our community is also strengthened when its members understand themselves in terms not only of their shared commitments and aims but also as hopers—as the type of people who flexibly adapt to challenging situations and engage in effort to improve them. Such an identity can help to unify citizens from an array of demographic backgrounds, political parties, and experiences. Even if the content of our hopes differs significantly or we believe that others are mistaken about their vision of a better future, perhaps some of our divisions can be at least partially mitigated by recognizing the shared role of hope in our lives and our shared identity as hopers.

William James was clear that pragmatism "does not stand for any special results. It is a method only."[203] As such, the emphasis should remain on the action, methods of inquiry, and proclivities of hoping.[204] Indeed, it is these practices that sustain our commitment and enable us to achieve the content of our hoping, whatever that may be. Shared hoping binds us together and adapts us to our changing environment. Through hoping together, we build our resolve and bolster our courage to improve the world. When we face disappointment, obstacles, and failures, our fellow hopers buoy us.

Inviting others to engage in the imaginative parts of hope may help break down some walls between citizens prevalent in our currently polarized society. Part of our polarization stems from stereotypes of competing political parties, such as assumptions that Republicans are racist or uneducated and Democrats are elitist and out of touch with reality. When we imagine and problem-solve with others across party lines, we have firsthand experiences that may confront those stereotypes with examples of intelligence, care, creativity, resourcefulness, and more. When we do this sort of work together and our focus is on our shared fate in the future, we are pushed to see the humanity and value of those we may disagree with politically. This may enable us to set aside those differences, even if only temporarily or partially, and perhaps put first the strong collective identity of doing common work together.

Working together also helps us build our trust in the intentions and capabilities of our fellow citizens. We may see firsthand that those different from us can exert effort in the world and can have positive impact that benefits themselves and others, including ourselves. Moreover, we may recognize our own limitations in achieving our goals and come to enlist or rely on others

to help us, or we may recognize that a particular problem requires an "all hands on deck" approach. Unlike the self-segregation and echo chambers that many citizens seek today to shore up themselves with only like-minded people, when we hope with others who differ from us, we open ourselves up to them. This may create a space for new relationships and learning across differences. Those relationships may then lead to further identification of shared problems and new endeavors of hope.

Ultimately, the process of hoping with others is important to reviving democracy because it binds us with them, pushes us to take action together to solve our shared problems, and builds an identity based on hopeful effort and commitment to common work. Working across differences can help to combat increasing disengagement and distrust. It can help us confront despair and offer a pathway out of that state, thereby releasing us from paralysis. Such hoping creates and improves some of the conditions needed for democracy to thrive that have struggled most in recent years. As social and political, hoping is a practice immersed in webs of power, where power varies in form, degree, and impact among the people hoping together. And the goals of hope are often shaped by power structures and inequities. Whereas viewing hope as individualist or confined to one's emotions or spiritual beliefs hides power and inequities at play, pragmatist hope enables such power to be better identified, harnessed, and challenged in varying circumstances according to what is needed for citizens to flourish.

Objects and Objectives of Hoping Together

For Dewey, the overarching goal of hoping is a democratic society that supports the growth of individuals and flourishing life for all. He does not describe individual citizens as pursuing this goal explicitly or directly in particular ways, but rather as a spirit that guides our action and reflection so that we are alert to opportunities where we can improve democratic living.[205] It focuses our activities by employing our intelligence to clarify and direct our desires and using our imagination to help us construct means to pursue them.[206] Shade describes this process well:

> Committing to a hope indicates our willingness to promote actively, in whatever way we can, realization of its end. Because it is not within our reach, some degree of patience is needed. But in hoping, patience is coupled

> with an active orientation toward the end, an orientation which includes acting *as if*—testing our beliefs about the end and its means—to see what we can contribute to its determination.[207]

Here he brings together the act of hoping via habits and inquiry with the content of such hoping.

Our shared conditions, including the current problems faced in America that I've noted throughout this book, can give rise to shared objects and objectives of hoping. Those shared ends may be for the things and practices of democracy, whether those be formal principles such as justice and equality, things such as public libraries and schools, or ways of life that support and engage democratic living, such as cooperation and deliberation. They may also be values, like respect for persons, and practices, such as listening. They may also be small and specific outcomes a community needs to satisfy some need or solve a problem. Citizens work together to determine that those objects and objectives are realizable and desirable (in that they fulfill present needs but also do not block other, perhaps larger, aims).[208] When the shared hopes arise from people, publics form where people work together to solve social problems and achieve common goals. The content of such hoping comes to compose a vision of our shared life together within American democracy, one that springs from the people and is enacted by them, and one that is, importantly, revisable.

While obvious to many, it needs to be said that not all publics can fairly pursue or achieve their objects of desire due to power imbalances, white supremacy, and more. Some communities have more resources and more cultural and political capital to bring their objects of hope into fruition. A country that substantially celebrates the role of hope would recognize the need to level the playing field so that all publics can more fairly pursue their desired aims. That is not to say it would guarantee their desired outcomes. But at the very least, elected officials could use the sway of their offices to seek out, listen to, and support the efforts and aims of minority, underprivileged, or marginalized groups. In this way, they could affirm, when appropriate, the legitimacy of the problems identified by those groups and bring additional resources, attention, and people power to bear on them, thereby supporting hoping and objects of hope.

A pragmatist is always leery of narrowly defining the shared content of hoping in advance, for it would not arise out of real conditions, inquiry, and the changing needs of citizens. And objects and objectives that do arise

should always be held tentatively, open to criticism and revision as needs and environments change. Those objects and objectives should be assessed to make sure that they "work for us" and help our lives flourish without harming others and, ideally, bring benefits to others. Even democratic principles should not be held as unchanging dogma, but rather can only be reasonable and responsible when subject to revision.[209] With that in mind, I will only briefly note here some of the shared content of hoping that might arise in light of our current struggles. These include: a healthy economy, gainful employment, healing of political divisiveness, trustworthy media, and consistent demonstration that each individual has equal value in our society.

While objects and objectives of hopes must be fluid, resulting from deliberations together and inquiry into our environment, there are some elements of democratic life that have stood the tests of ongoing experimentation and remained significant to ensuring the flourishing of American people and may be worthy to continue. These include: liberty, justice, opportunity, tolerance of an array of lifestyles that do not harm others, reduction of suffering, a system of checks and balances that prevents abuses of power, and citizens viewing each other as political equals entitled to the same civil participation, rights, and responsibilities. Often those ends are best achieved or sustained through democratic means: inclusion, participation, compassion, deliberation, and access to citizenship education that prepares one to be an active and effective citizen.

Some of these democratic ideals have long been wrapped up with practices of white supremacy that have denied those ideals to many Americans of color. Moreover, many of those democratic ideals were crafted and determined by only a sliver of the population, namely propertied white men, and therefore not only lack the voice and input of others but also fail to encapsulate the experiences of those for whom the founding ideals have rarely been achievable or equitably provided. Those objects of hope, then, have been shaped by agendas of power that must be acknowledged, analyzed, called out, and challenged when needed. I am not suggesting that we just need to work harder at providing or ensuring those long-standing objects and objectives of democracy, but rather that we need to recognize their connections to injustice and rework them in broader and more inclusive practices as part of our hoping. But I'm also urging citizens to consider how some of these ideals have sometimes served us well in the past and how they can be revised and improved to continue to serve us well now and in the future. Note that some of these are enshrined in the Constitution and yet the Constitution has flexibility so that

we can continue to revise how democratic principles and practices look as our environment changes.

Throughout history, the American ideal premised on principles of equality, rights, and opportunities has guided and reunited America through troubling times, such as Abraham Lincoln's invocation of it during the Gettysburg Address. Indeed, following the war, some of our citizens and leaders recognized the need to revise the Constitution to further ensure those principles through new amendments aimed to provide equality to former slaves. And today, frustrated citizens who feel that they are denied equality (because of racism and a host of other things) or opportunity (due to lack of upward economic mobility) should come forward to reassert their importance. They can show the ways those ideals have been distorted by racism and other forms of injustice. For example, concerns with equality for many people of color have been less about receiving resources from the state and more about how racism has systematically led others not to recognize them as persons worthy of equal respect, yet many whites struggle to see this, sometimes choosing to focus on supposedly unjust distributions of welfare, affirmative action, and other state programs that aim to distribute goods rather than acknowledge practices of moral disregard between citizens. Citizens might then expose when those ideals have been contradicted by competing actions, and work toward their improvement, rather than become complacent or throw in the towel on the American experiment out of a sense of disillusionment with its ideals.[210] Such expectations should not fall only on citizens of color and others who are struggling, but also those who are well served currently. Through inclusive listening and inquiry, they should also identify and act on those problems and shortcomings of our ideals.

The importance of America's guiding principles was recently reasserted in the final letter written by Senator John McCain to America. In the midst of an environment where many Americans have bred hatred by reducing patriotism to exclusive acts of culture, he reminded his peers that those principles can bring sustainable happiness and argued that we should turn to them now. In his final lines, he entreated, "Do not despair of our present difficulties. We believe always in the promise and greatness of America because nothing is inevitable here."[211] While pessimism may make bad outcomes seem inevitable, McCain asserted the power of our effort and our employment of the guiding principles that have been central to the promise of our country and its ability to be refashioned.

Shared objects and objectives of hope may help us build a new conception of America that we can rally around—a sense of who we are and what we stand for that we can take pride in, defend, and advance. This may be hard to imagine within such a politically divisive society, but surely there is content to our hopes and our shared fate that we can identify or create together. And some of that content may already be well established within our history, principles, laws, and cultural practices, even if it has become more hidden or has not been fairly distributed in past and recent times. Some of the primary values held by members of certain political parties or civil groups may conflict with the shared hopes of the larger citizenry. Indeed, we can celebrate such conflicts as part of living in a democracy that enables a diversity of views and the freedom to pursue them. But our task is figuring out how to enable all citizens to balance those conflicts while still pursuing their own version of the good life and shared well-being. In part, that requires focusing on the overarching needs and unity of our country as we determine and pursue our objects and objectives of hope.

And, while the continual creation of shared hopes via flexible habits suggests the need for adaptability in one's political views, I recognize that some citizens hold strong views and their ideologies fixedly. While that approach may not be as conducive to a flourishing democracy that is responding to changing needs and environments, I recognize that our democracy has a long history of valuing tolerance, including tolerance of those whose views are fixed.[212] Again, we must work together to figure out how to balance those fixed minority views within a wider society that is flexible, all the while demonstrating the benefits of adaptability and the unifying practice of discussion and engagement with each other. Perhaps we might harness strong views to push and challenge our more flexible ones in productive ways, as we stop to try to listen to and understand the beliefs that some citizens adhere to so tightly. Through such listening and adaptability, we might also model ways that our staunch peers may come to question or change their views in time.

Considering how shared content relates to hoping is worthwhile and may indicate things, values, and ways of living that educators and institutions might specifically nurture in citizens. That shared content may then guide us in our future choices and actions so that we continue to enable individuals and groups to actualize their hopes down the road.[213] And shared content may mutually reinforce the solidarity of hoping together I described earlier. Philosopher Adam Kadlac explains,

> solidarity seems to require a measure of specificity in the goal being pursued, since genuine solidarity is more than a vague togetherness. It is most clearly present when we face challenges together with others as we work toward something we all care about: winning the game; defeating the enemy; fighting poverty, oppression, and disease. As a result, the content of our hope matters and we are able to develop greater solidarity with those who want the same future as we do and who are motivated to work toward bringing that future about.[214]

I'm also reminded of Bill Clinton's claim that "priorities without a clear plan of action are just empty words."[215] The content of our hopes, then, may be goals, values, and ways of life, but they cannot be separated from our actions to realize and sustain them. Those actions play out as the effort, imagination, inquiry, and experimentation that is hoping. How we hope and what we hope go hand-in-hand, and both matter to democracy.

Democracy Supports Hope/Hope Supports Democracy

Democracy and hope have a reciprocal relationship where each supports the other. Democracy in our republic is aligned with the spirit of change that enables hope for new and different things and ways of life. Our democracy enables peaceful and frequent transitions of power, which not only help to prevent violent revolutions but also provide formal conditions for change. The ability to run for elected office allows one to take a guiding role in shaping government, society, and daily life. With each election cycle, there is the opportunity for new leadership and new ideas to come into power and, at minimum, for current leadership to be reassessed and alternative ideas to be discussed during the campaign season. Those conversations open the sort of space where the inquiry, imagination, and experimentation of hope are fostered at both local and national levels. For example, during the 2016 presidential election, Bernie Sanders introduced some rather radical new ideas regarding free college tuition and universal healthcare in America. While ambitious and difficult to achieve, these ideas generated discussions among citizens. Supporters greeted the proposals with a spirit of possibility and began to imagine how those ideas might look as actual policies, while others criticized their desirability and exposed constraints on their feasibility. Both

were important to the process of hoping together.[216] One woman who was inspired by his platform, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez joined Sanders's staff. Then fueled by passion for Medicare for all, she developed and expanded her own platform, which attracted considerable support. She went on to a surprising upset over a longtime congressman in New York in 2018, exhibiting how hoping and objects of hope can continue and expand well beyond one presidential candidate or election.[217]

Democracy is designed to prevent ideas and ways of life from being crystalized as dogma; rather, they are always open for discussion and challenge, at the very least, during elections.[218] Unlike other some other forms of government, our frequent elections allow us opportunities to reevaluate our priorities and our leadership as our needs and desires change from one election season to the next. Citizens who increasingly champion authoritarian or military rule today may feel currently aligned with the aims and approaches of such rule, but perhaps have lost sight of how our democracy's frequent elections offer opportunities for reassessment and realignment when such leadership no longer reflects the will or needs of the people. In other words, while authoritarian leadership may suit them well now, those citizens are overlooking the benefits of changing leaders offered within a representative democracy. Moreover, those alternative leadership styles squelch spaces for expressing dissatisfaction and imagining improved approaches, thereby inhibiting hope. Given that military rule is supported more by citizens with less education, it may be important for schools and communities to more strongly affirm these benefits of democracy, including through the use of historical examples that demonstrate the benefits of democracy for ordinary Americans.[219] Military and authoritarian leadership arrangements may seem appealing when hope is low or when one is seeking security and order, but they limit the ability to enact hope and restrict peaceful ways of proposing changes in the future, which may actually breed resentment and disorder in response.

Some long-standing democratic conditions and principles bolster hope because they enable the creative pursuit of one's desired life through providing the freedom and power needed to pursue that life without the hindrance of dictators or unwarranted constraints on liberty. The laws and institutions of the state (including schools) can help protect and ensure those conditions of liberty, equality, and justice that are conducive to hope. But it can be hard to have faith in the principles and institutions of democracy when they have failed in the past, when participating in them has been

out of reach, or when they appear increasingly controlled by political and economic elites. As a result, it is worthwhile to turn our attention to hoping together and to build resolve by studying the stories of successful efforts of social movements and organizations.

Civil society provides what Peter Berger calls "the plausibility structure" for hope.[220] Civil society, with its clubs and groups, is composed of people who can identify shared problems and exert collective effort to alleviate them. It provides tools, including networks of people, histories of past success of "average Joes," and more, that motivate and make it feasible for individuals and groups to pursue hoping and to fulfill the content of their hopes. In the midst of the increasing privatization of hope, civil society offers a space where citizens can try out hoping together and experience how shared hoping can foster one's habits of hope and the flourishing of the group.[221]

Finally, within accounts of democracy, we often find beliefs that bolster our practice of hoping, such as the belief that the system can ensure the freedom of individuals, provide political equality, and offer opportunities for meaningful participation.[222] In other words, democracy promises desirable outcomes that may motivate us to work toward them and, when achieved, those outcomes are often, in turn, supportive of hopeful endeavors. Democracy is appealing because it aims to treat each person as equal to every other, despite their many differences. That political equality provides a more level playing field for pursuing our hopes, even if our personal hopes may be hindered by other factors such as poverty. When that equality is not achieved, habits of hope kick in to help us identify and speak out against practices that inhibit it and to envision better ways of achieving it. When that equality is achieved, we have greater justification for continuing to enact our habits of hope because we believe there is a fair opportunity for us to pursue our desires. As more Americans increasingly support autocratic and military rule, it is worthwhile to showcase the benefits of democracy here. It enables the conditions for a freer and imaginative space of shared hoping, which can pull us out of despair and improve our lives.

At the same time, hope also supports democracy. Both the practice of hoping, which unites citizens in public work, and the content of hoping, which sometimes is aligned with democratic aims or public goods, engage and enhance democracy. Sometimes hoping brings together diverse groups of citizens, requiring deliberation that breaks down boundaries and builds a sense of *e pluribus unum*. Citizens inquire and experiment together, leading to the discovery of new, more efficient, and more effective ways of

living together in our growing country. Because democracy often provides conditions for hope, enacting hope can affirm our commitment to and appreciation of democracy. Pursuing our hopes can also lead to adapting the practices and principles of democracy to meet new situations and needs, demonstrating the flexibility and usefulness of this governmental structure and way of life. Hope also gives citizens democratic resolve, and persistence to withstand the many types of struggles that democracy faces without foregoing the formal or cultural components of democracy.

Being hopeful, though, doesn't necessarily mean being happy with all aspects of our democracy or having a rosy demeanor overall. One can still hope, even when deeply frustrated by the way things are. Perhaps counterintuitively, "Hope often creates discontent, inasmuch as a person's hopes for the future may make them very dissatisfied with things as they are presently."[223] Envisioning possibility can lead us to helpfully critique current constraints on those possibilities. In Dewey's words, "a sense of possibilities that are unrealized and that might be realized are, when they are put in contrast with actual conditions, the most penetrating 'criticism' of the latter that can be made. It is by a sense of possibilities opening before us that we become aware of constrictions that hem us in and of burdens that oppress."[224] That discontent can be used proactively as democratic dissent, which can lead to improvement in the formal structures and culture of democracy. In dissenting, one expresses dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, helps others to see the problem, and then puts forward solutions for discussion and testing. This discontent becomes an important part of cultural criticism, critique, and inquiry geared toward improving social living.

Unlike cynicism, which fails to suggest solutions for the source of frustration, hope-based dissent mobilizes action and engages democracy to imagine and work toward a better future with knowledge of the past and previous fulfilled visions. In similar spirit, philosopher Michael Walzer adds, "[Criticism] is founded in hope; it cannot be carried on without some sense of historical possibility."[225] It is sometimes those who are most frustrated with the world as it is that, through their scathing depictions of that world, provoke hoping in themselves and others that ignites alternatives. As they do, some of the most effective dissenters recount stories of previous dissent that has led to positive change, thereby bolstering hope and suggesting possibility for our actions now.

Importantly, hoping can occasionally resist elements of change and reassert past ways of life that are being left behind back into the vision of the

future. Often, however, dissent is important to a healthy democracy because it generates conversation about the typical ways of doing things and provokes change when those standard ways are no longer effective or when they cause harm to some group.[226] Dissent works against stagnation by bringing forward new ideas and more perspectives on an issue. Our democracy requires the consent of the governed. In order for the laws and practices of a democracy to be upheld, they must be found legitimate by the citizens so that those citizens can consent to them. Through dissent, we expose laws and practices to be illegitimate, out of line with the needs of our society, unjust, or otherwise unacceptable. It then propels us into better ways of living by suggesting alternatives to replace the problematic laws and practices.

One recent example of this sort of dissent is the #MeToo movement, which began by women sharing traumatic stories of suffering caused by sexual harassment and assault, including some stories of being in despair as a result.[227] While crafting a vision of equality and safety for all people, especially in the workplace, #MeToo raised awareness of the pervasiveness of the problem, and encouraged people to share and discuss their related experiences. Consequently, both structural and cultural changes have taken place. New bills to ensure protection and due process have been passed in states and workplaces, new worksite trainings have been instituted about sexual harassment, and the larger population has a new understanding of the pervasiveness of sexual assault and inequity. Even in schools, approximately 14% of surveyed teachers reported changes to their professional development, curriculum, and classroom discussions in response to #MeToo.[228] Many Americans have joined in the hope for making our streets and workplaces safer and more just for all, an aim aligned with equality and opportunity in our society.[229] Most recently, the movement has shifted toward providing resources for survivors and focusing on stories of how people have coped with trauma and moved forward.[230]

Many citizens in America are deeply troubled by aspects of their lives and our society, especially by economic struggles and feelings of being cheated or left behind by others.[231] Despair sometimes manifests as wallowing in those troubles, driven deeper down by experiencing them as overwhelming and perhaps unalterable. The only possible solution may seem to be turning those problems over to messianic leaders or strongman rulers who claim to have simple solutions. But a messianic leader carries the weight of others' expectations of being saved and a strongman leader focuses on what he is going to do for us, rather than drawing attention to what we might do for ourselves

and others. Because of this, such a leader may build individualized hope that we may benefit from his action, but does not build our resolve to participate with others in making life better. And sometimes, a strongman campaigns on the impression that he will fulfill everything desired by others, but once in power, actually focuses on his own narrow agenda. Turning to an authoritarian strongman may be something we resort to when we don't feel personally effective in achieving the world we want; yet, it's another way that we resign our agency and turn over our power to someone else. Instead, dissent is a way to take the struggles and frustrations of our citizens seriously and to give citizens agency in addressing them. Dissent enables those struggling citizens to name problems, call for collective work, and engage in action, rather than resigning to the negativity and paralysis of despair. Hope can spark dissent, which in turn, can lead to inquiry and experimentation that fulfills the objects of hope so that people can flourish once again. This suggests that we should seek leaders who are open and receptive to citizen dissent, not those who squelch it or shy away from it. Those are leaders who invite their critics to the table, try hard to understand their alternative views, and act on them when found worthy.

Practicing dissent and forming publics around problems can lead to building social movements. Whereas many citizens feel unheard by current leaders, or cynical about their ability to influence public life, social movements can showcase citizens' voices and attract the attention of leaders. Being a part of such a movement can reaffirm the power and impact of citizens in democracy (even those who may lack money or connections), especially when that movement is able to demonstrate impact. They can also show participants the power of engaging in imaginative problem-solving and experimentation together.[232]

When citizens engage in such hope and experience meaningful improvement as a result of their effort, their agency grows, they recognize their own political power, and they experience increased confidence that may lead them to ongoing effort. In other words, habits of hope provide us the support structure and intelligent direction that enable us to become agents capable of changing ourselves and our world. Political agency—one's ability to participate in and impact democratic life—not only is important to the functioning of democracy but also is a useful way to counter current complacency, apathy, and cynicism. Many citizens today don't feel that they can participate in or have an impact on political life. But the experience of hoping with others and achieving the objects and objectives of hope can showcase the agency

citizens do have and nurture it. Or, in the words of Shade, "the very activity of hoping both requires and enables us to transcend antecedent limitations of agency."[233] Experiencing such transcendence can be an eye-opening moment for citizens, helping them to see themselves, their abilities, and their impact in new ways. It can also shift the characteristics they desire and expectations they hold for political leaders, as they become supporters of and coproducers of hope, rather than proponents of a mere "campaign-style" hope.

The agency of individuals is bound up with that of others, as hope often pushes us into trusting in others, and because one's agency can be enhanced and magnified by others. When individuals are encouraged to connect to the work of others, movements and political force can result. On the other end, we know, via the efficacy principle, that individuals will become demoralized if their efforts consistently don't make a difference. The collective nature of hoping, which engages us in structures of support and civil affiliation, can help to stave off such demoralization and buoy us as we continue to try. Hoping improves democratic living because it cultivates an awareness of mutual dependence and builds desirable attitudes, like trust, toward others. These outcomes are significant for the health of democracy even if the goals of our hope are not achieved.

Another way in which hope supports democracy is through the building of culture and identity. Culture, including democratic culture, is often thought of as in the past—memorialized in traditions and statues. But culture is also about the future for which we hope and the shared identity that results from being a part of that vision and its formation. One of the primary ways that we convey our vision of the future, and thereby build democratic culture and identity, is through storytelling. Stories give us accounts of how problems can be solved and how life can be better. Stories can provide evidence that shows people that when democracy is thriving, each citizen has greater likelihood of achieving equality, liberty, and opportunity, which can then help them achieve their own desired possibilities. Stories can also depict the value of the objects and objectives of hope.

Sometimes we create fictional stories about a future we envision and sometimes we retell true stories of the past. Stories of the past can help us to identify social problems, see how people came together around them, how objectives of hope were crafted, and how they were achieved. For example, stories of African American families during the Reconstruction Era exhibit the significant efforts put forward to achieve quality education as a pathway to greater opportunity on the heels of slavery. For a long time, the stories

of many of those involved were unknown by people outside of those communities and yet their narrative of hard work and gradual success sustained ongoing efforts within the community and extended beyond it through trickle-down impact on civil rights initiatives in the mid-twentieth century.[234] Similarly, stories of women's suffrage activism highlighted injustice and shared work toward providing American ideals of opportunity and political equality. These examples showcase the powerful impact of individuals and groups, some of whom lived rather ordinary lives, thereby suggesting, through their telling, that other citizens may see their own potential in a new light today.[235]

As I said earlier, Walt Whitman declared that democracy is "a great word whose history remains unwritten."[236] Part of hoping is writing a new history and future together. That future must reasonably account for past injustices (such as structural inequality, racism, and sexism), attend to current struggles, and make feasible predictions, but, to some extent, it can also transcend and transform them via the alternatives it proposes. The future we construct must remain fluid and revisable. Even as such, a "hope narrative" can sustain and unite us.[237] That narrative may depict shared objects and objectives of hope, perhaps helping us to rally around them, justifying their role in improving our lives, and building our collective resolve to pursue them.

PlaceBase Productions is one interesting example of storytelling. On the heels of the 2016 election, the organization recognized the rifts between rural and urban people, the negative image of rural people, and struggles within rural communities that were significant but often overlooked. PlaceBase Productions reached out to rural communities, inviting residents to tell their stories so that they could share their problems, connect to others, develop pride in their communities, and put forward a vision of a better life together. In some cases, these stories demonstrate moving from despair to hope. Through interviews and story circles, those individual stories are heard and gathered. Eventually they are coalesced into a narrative that is performed as a play within the community, thereby serving as fodder for continued dialogue and action.[238]

Notably, politicians often evoke stories of the America they envision. But unless those stories arise from the expressed visions of citizens themselves or motivate citizens to action as a result, such stories fall short and are not capable of sustaining citizens through difficult times. Stories build on personal and shared imagination to give us illustrations of possibility. But storytelling is not just about telling (this is especially true when it comes to politicians),

rather it is also about listening to the needs and experiences of others so that we can reshape and improve our vision for the future in light of their insight. Too often politicians and citizens filter what we hear through our own assumptions or confirm what is heard to fit talking points, thereby failing to truly hear the stories being told.

Although it did not address past injustice, and while it takes a different format than many stories, one example of such a narrative was the 1994 Contract with America. In response to polling data and surveys about the frustrations of the American people, Republican leaders crafted this document to outline the values and vision to which they were committed, as well as an action plan of legislation aimed at fulfilling those goals. It was intended to unify voters around an increasingly widespread conservative spirit and give details about what that spirit might specifically entail and produce. It was widely publicized and many Americans considered it a narrative shaping the country, the laws, and the leadership they sought. It became a rallying point for creating a new culture that preserved elements of the past within its vision for the future, and it called for leaders and citizens to get involved in that future. It shaped their voting and their actions.

Hope also supports democracy by developing our identity. From a pragmatist perspective, our identities are based in our habits, including our habits of hope. A pragmatist understanding of hope urges us to see hope as not merely instrumental toward achieving something else, but rather constitutive of our own identities. Our identities influence how we interpret our past and our future.[239] Enacting habits of hope may then impact how we understand ourselves, how we interpret our part in democracy, and how we act on both. They are "conducive to an increased self-understanding [because] we structure our hopes by reflecting on what it is that we truly want and what is attainable in our lives."[240] Cheshire Calhoun further explains, "Hopers, by contrast, do not treat their hopefully imagined future as merely a strategically rational hypothesis that it might periodically be useful to adopt for planning purposes. Hopers inhabit their hoped for future. Imaginative projection of themselves into the hoped for future is constitutive of the way they pursue their ends."[241] When we form a vision for the future, we come to engage in behaviors aligned with that future, thereby shaping ourselves.

Hope, then, isn't delayed or just perpetually held off toward the future, but rather is of value in the moment. This pragmatist view of hope composes us now, rather than just moving us toward something else. And, over time, our identity—who we are and how we see ourselves—can become that of a hoper,

one who engages habits of hope. Such a person is well aligned with the spirit of action and adaptability at the heart of American democracy. Growing and asserting such an identity, as an important part of what it means to be an American, may offer sustainable and flexible support for our struggling country.

Finally, an identity grounded in hope may lead to a more flourishing democracy, in part because of its role in publics. These are at the heart of a vibrant democracy and are in contrast to the "complacent class." Whereas we tend to think of democracies as being composed of a single collection of citizens we call "the public," publics are plural and active subsets of people who rally together around some shared problem or interest. They tend to form when people are united through some similar experience and have a need for their shared elements to be addressed. Dewey explains, "The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for."[242] These publics openly discuss their shared consequences, often by forming organizations or movements, and by seeking a breadth of perspectives on the issue at hand. There, they name their struggles and chart paths to improvement, sometimes through developing shared content for their hopes. These activities build a sense of belonging and mutual concern that counters the individualism, self-interested behavior, and distancing of cynicism we frequently see today.

It is possible for those publics to develop provincial identities around particular aspects of their local experiences or desires. Or, publics may uphold objects or objectives of hope that conflict with one another. Sometimes those identities or aims clash with our national identity as Americans or with other publics across the country. For example, a growing group of libertarians has formed in New Hampshire, calling themselves "Free Staters." They are seeking to maximize individual liberty and reduce government oversight, laws, and intervention. Their vision of expanded freedom shapes the content of their hopes and the political community they are crafting together. Yet, just to their south, a sizable portion of Massachusetts residents celebrate the role of government oversight and protection in enabling equality, which led them to be the first state to legalize gay marriage in a move to secure equality of state-sanctioned marriage for all residents. These citizens rally around the notion of equality that often competes with liberty in a democracy, where pursuing one's personal freedom may infringe on the rights of others. In such cases of localized conflict, we must try to achieve a justified balance between our provincial affiliations and our larger national setting. Sometimes that

means finding points of common ground, perhaps in this case, the freedom to love whomever one chooses. Sometimes that requires turning to the history of compromise and enduring principles within our democracy to model a path forward. Sometimes that entails creating a new story that enables those local groups to coexist peacefully under an overarching American identity that tolerates many different ways of pursuing the good life.

Strengthening democracy by supporting and enhancing scattered and fledgling publics requires deep and ongoing collaboration and communication that works to determine, solve, and implement solutions to problems. To meet their needs, they envision alternative futures and construct public goods, including public things, rather than mere material goods for personal consumption. Such is the work of habits of hope. Hope, then, is much more than a mere feeling or a political slogan. It's relationship with and impact on democracy is significant. Hope matters to democracy. Insofar as habits of hope can be cultivated and nurtured formally through schools and informally within families and civil organizations, they offer a pathway out of current problems that is sustainable and itself deeply hopeful.

Reasons to Hope

In light of the many social and economic problems that are causing widespread cynicism and despair, one may be led to ask, "Are there reasons to hope?" Sometimes this question is posed because people are looking for reasons to take action and some assurance that their action would be productive.[243] This chapter answers affirmatively by drawing attention to the citizens themselves as hopers. When the pragmatist worldview of meliorism shapes our orientation to the world and our actions within it, we can engage in hoping with others in ways that increase our agency, achieve our objects and objectives of hope, and improve our democracy. *We* are the reason to hope. This is specially the case when our identity is based in hope, as philosophers Claudia Blöser and Titus Stahl explain: "When hopeful activities and attitudes form an essential part of a person's identity, that person has reason to engage in such activities."[244] We have the ability to create and engage hope through our habits. And, as I will explain in the final two chapters, those habits can be taught and learned. We don't have to develop hope on our own and we don't have to go about enacting hope without support. We can nurture the hope of children in schools and develop a larger culture that aids the hope of adults.