Conservative Democracy in the expanded *Politics and Vision*

Joshua I. Miller

**Prologue**

1. During my second year of graduate school a number of Wolin students gathered with our teacher at Helen Pringle’s house for an afternoon party. Somehow I fell into a public debate with “the master” about the relationship of politics and theory. I knew something about politics and was guessing about theory. Even now I can recall my fear during the discussion, but I remember just as clearly Sheldon’s graciousness. He could have wiped me out either with superior reasoning or by invoking citations from his vast knowledge and exposing my ignorance. He could have ridiculed me or gotten angry. Instead, he proceeded gently and respectfully, posing questions and points of view that I might not have considered. For nearly thirty years my discussions with Wolin have been characterized by this tone. My biggest fear is that he will conclude from this essay that the years have not been good to me, theoretically speaking, and that his teaching efforts have gone for naught: I’ve become more like Crito than like Socrates.

   i.

2. In the expanded version of *Politics and Vision*, Sheldon Wolin paints a paradoxical portrait of democracy.¹ In it, he links democracy with conservatism in three ways.² First, he calls for political and cultural transformation while praising resistance to change. He finds in democracy a defense of the normal and ordinary, and connects democracy with modest action. He takes democracy to be a conservative counter-balance to the perpetual innovations initiated by the state, capitalism, technology, and popular culture. He argues that democrats should respect, and protect against elitist upheavals, the roots and rhythms of ordinary people who at their best embrace their own history, customs, and speed rather than buying into those of mainstream culture. On the other hand, he is committed to the radical alteration of existing institutions and consciousness; he would radically disrupt what already exists. Wolin severely criticizes Nietzsche for the latter’s disrespect for the ordinary and normal; however, like Nietzsche, Wolin “attack[s], expose[s], and subvert[s] the establishment’s modes of thought…as well as its forms of social morality and aesthetics” (460).³

3. A second ambiguity appears in Wolin’s conflicting portraits of ordinary people. Sometimes he portrays them as debauched followers of fashion, but at other times they appear as anti-elitist resisters of change. Finally, Wolin perceives local reactionaries as being inadvertent contributors to democracy because they provoke public discussion about significant issues and resist liberal change. Wolin suggests that anti-evolutionists, book-banners, opponents of feminism and a woman’s right to an abortion, and perhaps even the Ku Klux Klan, indirectly contribute to the local, democratic, and resistant traditions he embraces because they fighting constant elitist initiatives and they provoke a dialogue among the citizens about crucial issues. So in three ways Wolin intriguingly combines democracy and conservatism: he simultaneously calls for innovation and preservation; he sees the people as corrupt...
followers of the new and as embodiments of the old; and he sees certain enemies of
democracy as its unwitting allies.

4. I want to examine the nature of the relationship of conservatism and democracy in
Wolin’s great book. Even if one concedes that Wolin desires transformation in order
to attain democracy, and calls for resistance only to anti-democratic change, it still
seems as if he wants goods that are in opposition with each other. Would not a
radical change of the type that he seeks require at least some of the heroic action that
he rejects? Secondly, does reactionary resistance really advance democracy? Does
populist opposition to leftist notions of justice produce a dialogue that can be properly
called democratic? In these dark times for democracy, when war, racism, and
homophobia are in the ascendancy, the intertwining of democracy and conservatism
may lead to the misidentification of democracy’s enemies as its allies, and a sweeping
embrace of tradition may preserve the bad with the good.

ii.

5. If conservatives are “characterized by caution or moderation” in what sense is
Wolin’s democratic theory conservative? He wishes to preserve from assault by
capitalism and technology certain experiences and relationships. For example, he
seeks to maintain the teaching of the liberal arts in colleges and universities, opposing
those who would dismiss them as superfluous antiquities. He would similarly stand
against relentless real estate development and the destruction of old growth forests.
Wolin combines conservatism with democracy, which for Wolin includes the direct
participation of the people in politics, community, and small-scale sites of common
living and political action.4

6. He conceives of democracy as being “fugitive” or episodic” rather than being a fixed
form of government that might have a constitution with prescribed institutions.
Democracy, Wolin claims, takes the form of “standing opposition” (604). Yet,
democracy involves the ordinary rather than the heroic; it seeks to preserve the
normal rather than making great revolutions. The aim of democratic action, as Wolin
sees it, is to gain “some measure of control over the conditions and decisions
intimately affecting the everyday lives of ordinary citizens, to relieve serious and
remediable distress and to extend inclusion…by making access to educational and
cultural experiences and healthy living conditions a normal expectation” (604-5).
While Wolin recognizes the need for democrats to innovate, change mass
consciousness, and reform institutions, he also believes, as I have already shown, that
democracy has a conservative dimension.5 The terms are by no means clearly distinct.

iii.

7. Wolin simultaneously portrays democracy as radical and conservative. It is radical in
two somewhat incompatible ways: existing consciousness and institutions would be
transformed, and democracy would constitute a permanent and creative opposition to
mainstream forms of power. If transformation were achieved would democracy
remain oppositional to challenge undemocratic lapses? Wolin proposes the goal of
radical democracy, the achievement of which would require profoundly revising
American political practices, consciousness, ideas, and institutions. Even if democracy is never achieved it would require great change to go in that direction. Wolin calls for more political action, a new public consciousness, and restrictions on the corporations.6 According to Wolin, democracy takes place outside of established political forms. It is not about voting, joining a political party, making a donation, or writing to one’s congressional representative. Democracy is incompatible with both capitalism and the multi-national corporation, so presumably they would need to be controlled or significantly altered in order to be compatible with democracy. Wolin’s view of democracy is highly ambitious, even utopian. Democracy opposes undemocratic power. It certainly does not assume the continued existence in their present forms of capitalism, the liberal state, and mainstream culture.

8. Both the radical and conservative elements of Wolinian democracy are contained in his endorsement of the Civil Rights, anti-war, feminist, and ecology movements (522). He sees in them the rejection of hierarchy and the creation of new political forms. He wants to conserve the gains that these movements made, but he also endorses their profound alterations of political forms and consciousness.7 Genuine democracy, according to Wolin, is unstable, or at least lacking a fixed form.8 It is creative and innovative; it implies improvisation and resistance to centralization.9 The improvisation and tumult sound appealing compared to stagnation and despair, but they do not seem conservative. Does conservatism not imply the preservation of stable institutions, customs, and practices? It is fair to say that capitalism is committed to ceaseless change, and that reactionary administrations are willing to undermine democratic gains and constitutional protections, but, for much different purposes, Wolin also sees the need for political innovation and disruption.

9. Perhaps the radical nature of Wolin’s democratic vision is obvious, and what requires explanation is his conservatism. So, what is conservative in Wolin’s democratic vision? To begin with, democracy is conservative because it opposes capitalism, the state, technology, liberalism, and postmodern culture, all of which are devoted to incessant elitist change (523, 595).

The virtù of [Superpower] lies in its dynamic, its ceaseless reaching out. In its political economy form it is a furious drive for the innovations that promise greater rewards and expanded opportunities for exploitation. That drive is remarkable for its ability to keep extending the limits of the possible: the idea of limits becomes an incitement, new ‘challenges.’ Its state-form, Superpower, incorporates technological innovations and increasing productivity so that it strains at limits as it projects power throughout the world in pursuit of elusive terrorists, new markets, and new sources of energy (595).10

10. Wolin criticizes the dominant American culture for propping up Superpower’s.11 He refers to this anti-democratic culture as “fashionism.”12 In response, Wolin calls for democracy “that nurtures the civic conscience of society” to challenge capitalism.13 Thus, democracy is conservative because it defends the common life, and the good things that already exist, from attack by the dominant culture.
11. Compared to the fantasy of a total revolution, which fantasizes the elimination of the state or the multi-national corporation, there, is something restrained, limited, and cautious in Wolin’s conception of democracy and democratic transformation. For Wolin, democracy is small in scale and takes place at a “multiplicity of modest sites” (603). Wolin recognizes this modest notion of democracy in the left of the nineteen sixties because it recast democracy “in terms of smaller scales and ‘appropriate technologies,’ participatory possibilities rather than leadership…” (524).

12. As much as he calls for new actions and the alteration of political consciousness, Wolin endorses or validates certain existing political experiences and actions. He sees democracy in community organizing, grassroots trade unions, and environmental activism. Democracy attempts to preserve the “political” which stands for “valued commonalities (peace, justice, security, culture, education)…to be shared, promoted, tended, and defended by those who are members…” (425). Wolin sees it as a central task of democracy to conserve “the normal,” which he identifies as “the product of cultivated relationships (e.g., of love, of family, friendship, neighbors, co-workers, citizens, patriotism, etc.). The normal sustains the skilled activities that assure the everyday operation of society” (467). This commitment to preservation is stated most strongly in opposition to Nietzsche who seeks “relentless destruction…emptying the world of established forms of value, religion, morality, politics, and popular culture” (464). Wolin does not want to empty the world of these things, but does seek their profound alteration.

13. Avoiding the heroism embedded in Hannah Arendt’s Human Condition, Wolin’s democratic actor does not storm the White House barricades or attempt to shut down Wall Street. Although democracy is a “crystallized response to deeply felt grievances…..[b]eing a citizen involves doing the best one can to take part in common tasks, the deliberations that define them, and the responsibilities that follow. As a way of existence it lives in the ebb-and-flow of everyday activities, responsibilities, and relationships” (604). Wolin claims that “the role of the citizenry was to tend and defend the values and practices of a democratic civic life” (598). When responding to Nietzsche, Wolin’s image of the citizen drifts towards that of being a good family member or a fully engaged participant in a group activity. In this register, Wolin does not emphasize heroism in democratic action; it conserves normal relationships that already occur in society, and thus will not need to be created out of whole cloth. But, as we have seen, in another register he himself seems to call for large and radical transformation of the citizenry and their relationships, along with new kinds of economy, state, politics, and culture.

14. In sum, Wolin paints contradictory portraits of democracy. It conserves what exists against the drive for change initiated by the state, the economy, and popular culture; it requires the alteration of American political culture and consciousness. The people whose consciousness he most seeks to change are average citizens, although occasionally he speaks of those citizens as already being democratic.

15. In his vision of democratic revolution Wolin identifies ordinary people as the agents of change; yet he perceives something democratic already existing in everyday life. “The demos” are “the carriers of everyday cultural traditions...” (605). Wolin
presents ordinary people sympathetically, believing that experience, habit, custom, and tradition—all of which the people embody—must be defended from the onslaught of Superpower. Whereas elites fare better in liberal and postmodern culture, ordinary people are disempowered by the constant imperative for change required by technology and capitalism (605).

The culture produces ‘practical powerlessness’ by erasing or radically reducing the dependence of practice upon time: promoting…obsolescence of painstakingly acquired skills and understandings; or discouraging memory of older ways and experiences by sentimentalizing them….or disrupting the kind of attachments developed over time (family, marriage) by imposing mobility upon the disintegrating fabric of ordinary life—President Clinton advised Americans that each could expect to hold ‘eleven different jobs’ in the course of a lifetime (493-4).

16. Ordinary people, in Wolin’s account, are by nature rooted in local traditions. Whereas older societies offered education to their members through tradition, today people must strive to keep up with technological “advances.” Ordinary people, however, often do not adapt to the new technologies as quickly as companies would like, and they become technological dinosaurs, objects of derision who are nearly unemployable, if, for example, they cannot master new computer programs. When the state promotes a culture that ignores or violates traditions it corrodes democracy, which requires a slower pace to allow people to think.

17. On the other hand, Wolin suggests that ordinary people have fallen into a degraded condition largely as a result of liberal democracy’s popular culture (546-7). Whereas a truly democratic culture would value preservation and memory, popular culture is in league with Superpower to undermine democracy (560). “Popular culture, in its music and fashions, became more international in flavor, more youth-oriented, more welcoming of change, and enthusiastic about the new technologies of communication and expression” (560). The result of exposure to, and immersion in, this popular culture was the creation of “an amorphous, unanchored citizenry that is unable to express its unsurveyed self except fitfully in anxiety, fear, anger, and irritation…” (575). Citizens have been replaced by consumers who have only the illusion of free choice; in reality, they are passive dependents on the government (576). Can this be democracy’s army?

18. Although portraying the people in a degraded condition, Wolin does not imitate elitists who put the blame on the people themselves for creating their condition. As Wolin sees it, people are formed by their political culture; they could become citizens again if democratic political cultures, institutions, and practices were instituted (576). Wolin’s description of the people is not wrong; they do possess resources and strengths; they do often engage in political action; they have been corrupted—but the elements of this portrait do not all fit together. Who knows?: perhaps the inconsistency is in the people.

19. Although he does not endorse their politics, Wolin seems to believe that local reactionaries constitute a segment of society that is less corrupted by fashion or
capitalism. More than most theorists on the left, Wolin discerns a democratic value in groups who oppose civil liberties and rights, gun control, and tolerance. Localism, Wolin asserts,

is typically the site of the ‘anti-modern centrifugals.’ These go uncelebrated in most of the postmodern discourse about difference: the Klan, militiamen and –women, neo-Nazis, Protestant fundamentalists, would-be censors of public libraries, champions of an ‘original Constitution.’ The political value of such champions of the archaic is not as bearers of truth but as provocateurs whose passionate commitments can arouse self-consciousness in the public, stimulating the latter to become aware of what they believe and of the mixed legacies that compose a collective inheritance. The resulting controversies are crucial to the cause of anti-totality and its vitality (604).

20. In his earlier book, The Presence of the Past, Wolin also found a democratic contribution in reactionaries. There he defended from the charge of “majority tyranny” “so-called populist invasions of freedom, such as mandating prayers in public schools, censorship of public libraries and of the books read by students in school, antibusing legislation, and the campaign to replace evolutionist theory with ‘creationism.’ Although there are many ways of interpreting these phenomena, they do seem to have in common a protest against change. As such they raise the question of whether a more critical attitude toward change is not necessary if democracy is to be preserved…”(79). I must ask: if reactionary groups protest change, why should democrats join them by adopting a more critical attitude towards it?

21. Wolin goes on in this passage to see a democratic contribution both by some reactionaries and other local activists:

Religious fundamentalism, ‘moralism,’ and racial, religious, and ethnic prejudices belong to the same historical culture as traditions of local self-government, decentralized politics, participatory democracy, and sentiments of egalitarianism….Surprisingly, despite the attenuation of democracy at the level of national politics, there still exists a highly flourishing archaic political culture that is democratic, participatory, localist, and, overall, more egalitarian than elitist in ideology….Sometimes it involves the founding of new political associations (e.g., to protest actions of public utilities or rates commissions); other times it means politicizing certain services that were traditionally set aside as the preserves of experts (medical clinics, schools, waste disposal, nuclear energy). Like Tocqueville’s aristocracy, they do not always appear in an attractive light. They can be bigoted, provincial, myopic, and anti-intellectual. Yet their archaism represents the main, perhaps the only, democratic counterthrust to statism (79, 81).

22. This excerpt shows that Wolin is discussing both progressive and reactionary localists. Putting together the arguments of Politics and Vision with those of Presence of the Past it can be deduced that Wolin attributes two democratic functions to local reactionaries: provoking discussion, in the tradition of Socrates or John Stuart Mill; and resisting change from above.
23. Wolin embraces only local activists rather than national reactionary groups, however his argument might be vulnerable to the criticism that national reactionary groups also oppose change and stimulate conversation. Should they also be credited for their educational function? In addition, many local reactionaries are not truly members of grassroots movements; they are encouraged, organized, and funded by national organizations, and those national organizations to a significant degree have been embraced by the George W. Bush administration as they were by the Reagan administration. Thus, the lines among local, national, and establishment reactionaries cannot be clearly drawn. This renders problematic, I would think, the portrait of local reactionaries as constituting a force that resists Superpower.

24. Wolin has tied democracy and conservatism in several inter-related ways: although democracy partly involves transformation and innovation, it also seeks to conserve the past and protect the present from intrusions by the dominant culture, economy, technology, and politics. The power of ordinary people comes from being conservative. At their best, they are rooted in experience and tradition; unfortunately, many citizens today have been corrupted by the dominant culture and have lost their moorings. Some people who have retained their moorings are unattractive reactionaries—part of the Bush base—who oppose stem-cell research, evolution, abortion, “indecency” on television and radio, civil rights, and gay marriage. Whatever their intentions, Wolin believes, when one takes the long view, their contribution to democracy is real. Perhaps Wolin’s attitude towards local activists of the right and left can be fairly characterized as “respect for ordinary people and populists,” especially when they resist elitist change.

iv.

25. I have suggested that Wolin’s theory of democracy contains several seeming incompatibilities. He paints democracy as both radically innovative and protective of existing social forms. The movements that Wolin endorses, civil rights, feminism, and ecology, all altered the status quo. Wolin himself calls for the transformation of institutions and civic consciousness. Such a program is not obviously conservative. In a second paradox, Wolin portrays ordinary people as being conservative and democratic by nature. Yet in reality, according to Wolin, most people have been corrupted by the larger culture. They are consumed by their private lives and give insufficient attention to public affairs; they tend to be preoccupied by fads and fashion. In Wolin’s account the people are simultaneously healthy and unhealthy, conservative and progressive. In a final ambiguity, Wolin identifies as contributors to democracy some of the very people who explicitly reject much of what he believes in, e.g., freedom of speech, gun control, and civil rights for people of color, and gays and lesbians. How can the enemies of civil rights, civil liberties, and equality be democracy’s friends?

26. What accounts for these paradoxes in Wolin’s conception of democracy? They must be there for a reason. Is Wolin so devoted to both democracy and to conservatism that he will not forsake one for the other, even when they are incompatible? Or are they genuinely connected in a way that I, at least in this paper, do not fully appreciate? One possible approach to theoretical contradictions is the balanced and
respective one taken by Hanna Pitkin who, in lecture, could say something like, “We know that Sheldon Wolin is a rigorous political theorist so if there is a contradiction in his theory it is not the result of sloppy thinking or neglecting to read over what he had written. What could it mean, then, when he calls democracy radical at some points in his book and conservative at others?”

27. One explanation is that democracy, Wolin’s fundamental value, has conservative and radical elements, and that Wolin supports each of those elements only to the extent that they promote democracy. The liberal state and the dominant political culture are committed to incessant change and to fixed political forms, both of which disempower ordinary people. In economics and technology, the regime seeks perpetual change. In the political realm, when the government violates the Constitution it encroaches on existing guarantees of individual rights and remaining pockets of popular power. As Wolin himself states, the Federalists became conservative when they created judicial review and established a cumbersome amendment process that made innovation difficult. Also, they made structural changes of a democratic sort nearly impossible by creating checks and balances, separation of powers, and an enormous nation. So the national government, in its institutional design at least, is not only radical, innovative, and committed to forgetfulness, but also preserves the elitist and undemocratic status quo.

28. I concede to Wolin that resistance to the state can take the form of both preservation and innovation, although I am less sure that all resistance to change is democratic. Resistance to real estate development is democratic because it is in the public interest, but resistance to egalitarian movements is undemocratic even if that resistance comes from the grassroots. Those who seek to stamp out indecency on television, “dirty books” in the public library, positive portrayals of gays and lesbians in textbooks and children’s cartoons may provoke conversation, but this is hardly democratic resistance. Such resistance restricts creativity, the right to read what one chooses, and robs some citizens of dignity. In short, some of the resisters to the state and the dominant culture are undemocratic, and some of these reactionaries remind us that popular action is not the only thing of value or the only standard for judging politics.

29. Wolin posits an opposition between the rhythms and capacities of ordinary people and those of technology, government, and popular culture, but perhaps he underestimated the capacities of ordinary people to adapt to change. Lack of tradition may be aesthetically displeasing, but it may not render people powerless (even if it does make them shallow). Many workers and poor people have mastered the new technologies, when they have access to them. If the question is not that of technological competence, in what way is the pace of change beyond the capacities of ordinary people?

30. Wolin attributes two conflicting identities to the people: when they are healthy, they conserve good traditions and take innovative action to resist the state. At their worst, the people are corrupted by capitalism and fashion. Generally, in Wolin’s account, the populace lacks democratic civic consciousness. Perhaps Wolin should argue that preserving the past would be good for ordinary people rather than asserting that they already embrace it.
31. Wolin admires local reactionaries because they promote dissonance. As mainstream culture smugly accepts lewdness on television, gay marriage, abortion on demand, evolution, and racial tolerance, reactionaries resist the mainstream and stir up a cultural conversation. Calling the culture wars a conversation may be optimistic. Having one’s assumptions challenged does not necessarily produce greater reflection or openness—and maybe it should not. What good conversation or compromise exists on gay marriage, the right to an abortion, or racial diversity? It is certainly frustrating to share a country with homophobes, racists, anti-Semites, and nationalists who are so convinced of American righteousness that they are willing to impose it on other countries in the name of democracy. And the really terrible thing is that the reactionaries appear to constitute the majority and they vote.

32. Wolin implies that the preservation of tradition is generally democratic, but this is not true: anti-democratic traditions need to be disrupted. Democratic citizens should forsake and oppose racist, sexist, homophobic, wasteful, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and hierarchical traditions. The Confederate flag is a tradition that stands for other awful traditions. Let it go, even if we remember that traditions often have value.

33. In conclusion, Sheldon Wolin has long joined democracy and conservatism as core values in his political theory. He sees a certain type of conservatism—respect for the past and certain traditions, the capacities of ordinary people, and resistance to change initiated from the top down—at the heart of democracy. In the expanded Politics and Vision, the conservative dimension of democracy is most pronounced when he criticizes Nietzsche; its radical dimension is clearest in the wonderful final chapter on fugitive democracy. Without attempting to deny the links between democracy and conservatism, I have tried to suggest that they may not easily fit together. Many traditions are undemocratic; achieving democracy would require lots of upheaval. Even the fugitive democracy Wolin endorses is disruptive. It is democratic to respect the capacities of ordinary people, although when they embrace the new and fashionable that may not indicate they are corrupt. Finally, Wolin wants democrats to accept as allies certain reactionaries because they, like the left, oppose the state and the hegemonic culture. While one should be respectful even of one’s political opponents, I don’t see them as friends, assuming that we are talking about the same people. On the other hand, Sheldon Wolin is my friend, and when we disagree he is usually right.

Joshua Miller teaches political theory as a Professor of Government and Law at Lafayette College in Easton, PA. His books include The Rise and Fall of Democracy in Early America and Democratic Temperament: the Legacy of William James. His essays on politics and fashion have appeared in Polity and Fashion Theory. His current research concerns the intersection of protest, fashion, and race. His email address is millerj@lafayette.edu.

NOTES

Miller, Joshua I. “Conservative Democracy in the expanded Politics and Vision”
Theory and Event, Volume 10, Issue 1, 2007


3 “A democratic theory of justice would have to formulate a democratized political economy that could serve as an alternative to the corporate political economy and be committed to radical alteration of institutions, particularly economic institutions traditionally endorsed by liberals” (527).

4 Wolin’s notion of community can be seen in his expression “good-faith political conception of shared fate or cooperative action…” [463].

5 Wolin describes a challenge to liberalism with which he clearly identifies: “modern forms of power were attacked for their destruction of human and natural habitats, their sacrifice of traditional and working-class neighborhoods to economic development, the depletion of natural resources at a furious pace, and the pollution of land, air, and water with industrial waste and military trash” (523). Wolin also criticizes capitalism for “manufacturing a media culture that promotes mass fantasies at odds with the civic culture required by democracy” (527).

6 “It is difficult to fathom how the regulatory state could significantly improve the lot of the disadvantaged without infringing upon the liberty of those who control the means of employment, determine the extent of health care, and resist environmental safeguards” (533).

7 Wolin explains that the alternative politics of the sixties emphasized “democratic participation, public protests and demonstrations, and non-violent resistance. And not fully appreciated at the time, they enlarged the traditional meaning of the political to incorporate ecology….Perhaps the lasting contributions of the sixties were the revival of political consciousness and the development of an environmental consciousness” (523).

8 Wolin labels democracy “ephemeral, protean, amorphous, and fugitive. When democracy is settled into a stable form, such as prescribed by a written constitution, it is also settled down and rendered predictable” (602).

9 “Democracy is about the public life of citizens, about ordinary human beings venturing ‘out’ to take part in deliberations over shared concerns, to contest exclusions from the material and ideal advantages of a free society, and to invent new forms and practices….Notably, its politics was generated outside of, and often in opposition to, established political institutions (political parties, legislatures) and conventional norms. It was, in large measure, a politics of improvisation, of bricolage” (520, 522).

10 This is reminiscent of Marx’s formulation in The Communist Manifesto (Frederick Bender, ed. NY: W.W. Norton, 1988): “Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was…the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient
and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air….” (58).

“A third element [in the post 9/11 ‘new world’] was the emergence of a culture supportive of Superpower. Popular culture, in its music and fashions, became more international in flavor, more youth-oriented, more welcoming of change, and enthusiastic about the new technologies of communication and expression” (560).

“In the economy-dominated polities of our day perpetual demobilization takes the form not of rigid uniformity or crude fascism, but fashionism, conformity to incessant, inescapable change: in technologies, marketable skills, processes of production, and organizational structures and strategies. Instead of simple mobilization there is continuous mobility” (580).

Wolin clearly identifies with movements of the 1960s in which “[d]emocracy was being recast in terms of smaller scales and ‘appropriate technologies,’ participatory possibilities rather than leadership, and rejection of what was perceived as a militaristic and imperialistic state” (524). “Ongoing [democratic] opposition is dictated by the inherently anti-democratic structure and norms characteristic of the dominant institutions of so-called advanced societies, the contemporary corporation and the Superpower state” (604). Democracy is “discordant because, in being rooted in the ordinary, it affirms the value of limits” (606).

Critical totalitarianism, developed by Nietzsche, belittles ordinary relationships for the easy demands they make (467).

Dewey, one of the heroes in the expanded Politics and Vision, democratized the idea of experience “in the sense of being the ordinary stuff of life and accessible to all…” (506).