

JOHN DEWEY AND ALBERT C. BARNES: A DEEP AND MUTUALLY REWARDING FRIENDSHIP

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Albert C. Barnes and John Dewey were close friends for more than three decades. Each influenced the other: Barnes's educational activities were based to a large extent on Dewey's educational writings, while Dewey's conception of aesthetics was strongly influenced by Barnes. Dewey's *Art as Experience* is not only dedicated to Barnes, but also includes numerous references to Barnes's analysis of paintings. Their voluminous correspondence as well as their published work confirms both the intellectual context of their relationship and the pleasure they derived from each other's company. Yet, most references to this association describe it in negative terms: that Barnes took advantage of Dewey's good will or naïveté, and that the intellectual benefits of the relationship were one sided. A thorough analysis of the written record, especially their extensive correspondence but also their public affirmation of their intellectual debt to each other, demonstrates that this significant friendship contributed mutually to their ideas and provided personal satisfaction for both men.



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Introduction¹

Albert Coombs Barnes, physician, collector, businessman and most important, educator, and John Dewey, philosopher and public intellectual, were intimate friends for over thirty years. They shared ideas, interests and actions, exchanged close to 2,000 letters and travelled together for pleasure and professional activities. The record of their intertwined lives is documented in their correspondence and in their mutual acknowledgements in their respective published works of what they learned from each other. Yet, this rich and mutually rewarding friendship has puzzled almost everyone who has written about it.²

In this essay, I examine their personal relationship, why the two men became such good companions, and what they learned from each other. I do not address the complex question of the origins of Barnes's aesthetic theory. Instead, I intend to illustrate how the educational program Barnes initiated in his Foundation was influenced by Dewey's writing and why Dewey, in turn, admired Barnes's efforts at the Barnes Foundation and was indebted to Barnes for his understanding of visual aesthetics. They found common ground in their motivations and actions, as well as in their developing ideas.

Barnes and Dewey each repeatedly acknowledged their debt to the other. Barnes dedicated his major aesthetic treatise, *The Art in Painting* to Dewey, "Whose conceptions of experience, of method, of education, inspired the work of which this book is a part."³ In return

¹ This article is based on the Second Violette de Mazia lecture sponsored by the Violette de Mazia Foundation at the Barnes Foundation on May 22, 2016. I am especially grateful for the assistance provided by Ross Lance Mitchell, Director of Barnes-de Mazia Education and Outreach Programs at The Barnes Foundation, and Barbara Ann Beaucar, Archivist at the Barnes Foundation, for their invaluable assistance in preparing for the lecture. I also want to thank Mary Maher and Emily Romney for their help in preparing this manuscript.

² For exceptions, see Dennis (1972) and Carrier (2007).

³ Albert C. Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, 1st edition. (Marion, PA: The Barnes Foundation, 1925).

nine years later, Dewey dedicated *Art as Experience* "To Albert C. Barnes in Gratitude."⁴ In addition, in the preface to this famous treatise, Dewey devotes almost half of the text to an extraordinary paean in praise of the educational work of the Barnes Foundation:

My greatest indebtedness is to Dr. A. C. Barnes. The chapters have been gone over one by one with him, and yet what I owe to his comments and suggestions on this account is but a small measure of my debt. I have had the benefit of conversations with him through a period of years, many of which occurred in the presence of the unrivaled collection of pictures he has assembled. The influence of these conversations, together with that of his books, has been a chief factor in shaping my own thinking about the philosophy of esthetics. Whatever is sound in this volume is due more than I can say to the great educational work carried on in the Barnes Foundation. *That work is of a pioneer quality comparable to the best that has been done in any field during the present generation, that of science not excepted.* I should be glad to think of this volume as one phase of the widespread influence the Foundation is exercising.⁵

Considering the advances in physics and biology during Dewey's lifetime which he analyzed in several of his published works, the penultimate sentence is particularly striking. Although Dewey frequently acknowledged his debt to others, there is nothing comparable to this intense and detailed tribute in the introductions, prefaces or dedications in any of the other 36 volumes of Dewey's complete works published by the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University.

Despite this record, philosophers and others who write about Dewey have repeatedly considered this friendship, if they describe it

⁴ John Dewey, *Art as Experience, The Later Works of John Dewey: 1925–1953*, Vol. 10, edited by JoAnn Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 1987). Originally published 1934. Hereafter referred to as LW 10.

⁵ LW 10: 7-8. Emphasis added.

at all, as peculiar or one-sided based on stereotypical characterizations of the two men. Dewey is generally recognized as a kindly, patient, and gentle academic who suffered odd characters and seldom expressed personal criticisms. Barnes, on the other hand, is described as crude, pugnacious, uncompromising, and eventually offending everyone with whom he interacted. Like all stereotypes, these portraits, although reflecting qualities that both men exhibited, obscure the richness and mutually gratifying qualities of their intense and fruitful relationship.

Some writers even resort to presenting a contradictory portrait of Dewey's character in order to denigrate his relationship with Barnes. Most striking in this regard is Sydney Hook's extensive eulogy of Dewey in *Commentary*. Hook notes that:

Few people knew how shrewd a Yankee Dewey was. He knew when he was being buttered up, he knew how self-interest concealed itself behind public interest . . . Nevertheless there was a simplicity and trustfulness about him, almost calculated naivety in his relations with people whose ulterior motives were rather transparent.⁶

Later in the article he describes Dewey's relationship with Barnes in uncompromising negative terms, "Dewey's goodness was so genuine, constant, and sustained, even under provocation, that I sometimes found it somewhat oppressive . . . It was almost with relief that I discovered a serious shortcoming in him. That was his indulgent friendship for Albert C. Barnes."⁷ Others have also attributed Dewey's relationship with Barnes to some kind of weakness. Ryan, in reference to some of Dewey's peculiar relationships, including that with Barnes, writes:

Dewey had a taste for the company of oddballs of all sorts, and the seeming gullibility of which his friends complained

⁶ Sidney Hook, "Some Memories of John Dewey," *Commentary* 14, no 3 (1952): 246-247.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

may have been less a real failure of judgment than a policy of giving possible charlatans the benefit of the doubt.⁸

Even those who want to find redeeming value in their friendship use remarkable language in discussing the two men's relationship. In an article arguing that philosophers could benefit from following Dewey's example of forging strong relationships outside the "parochial exclusivity of academe,"⁹ Granger discusses Dewey's "disreputable alliances (such as that with Barnes)" as one of several relationships that, "made it possible for him continually to renew himself personally as well as professionally." In a doctoral dissertation dedicated to Barnes's aesthetics, Megan Bahr (1998), who spent a year at the Barnes Foundation taking their courses and had access to the foundation archives, states:

From reading most of the secondary literature . . . It is hard to imagine what it was about Albert C. Barnes, M. D., that a prominent intellectual like John Dewey would find to like and admire . . . But these . . . [reports] . . . greatly underestimate the genuine affection and admiration that Dewey clearly felt for his friend . . . The truth is that Dewey in fact spent relatively little of their thirty-four-year friendship in the company of Barnes. And most of his visits with the doctor clustered around specific projects on which the two men collaborated.¹⁰

The last two sentences are rather naïve since even a cursory review of the record documented in their letters generates a list of at least 40

⁸ Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, Co., 1995), 207.

⁹ David Granger, "A 'Scientific Aesthetic Method': John Dewey, Albert Barnes and the Question of Aesthetic Formalism," in, D. C. A. Cunningham, et al., "Dewey, Women, and Weirdoes: or, the Potential Rewards for Scholars Who Dialogue across Difference," *Education and Culture* 23, no 2 (2007): 53.

¹⁰ Megan Bahr, *Transferring Values: Albert C. Barnes, Work and the Work of Art*. Unpublished PhD Diss., University of Texas (1998), vii-viii.

times they met over the course of their friendship despite both men's extensive travel itineraries. Not only did they visit each other frequently in their respective homes, New York City and Merion, Pennsylvania, but documented trips together include a road trip to New England in 1918, two voyages to Europe in 1925 and 1930,¹¹ a journey by train to the west coast in 1930 and another to Black Mountain College in 1936. In addition, Dewey and his wife repeatedly urged Albert and Laura Barnes to join them when they spent two years in China, and Barnes was one of the handful of people present at Dewey's private second marriage at his apartment in New York.¹² Perhaps the most surprising treatment of this relationship and its mutual significance for their work on aesthetics is to ignore it completely, as Abraham Kaplan does in his twenty-six-page introduction to the Center for Dewey Studies edition of *Art as Experience*.¹³

Dewey's Interest in Experience, Education and Action

Dewey's philosophy emphasized the significance of experience. He not only used the term in the title of three major works, including *Art as Experience*, but repeatedly invoked experience as the only basis for all knowledge and understanding of life. He also attributed his own intellectual development to experience, especially experience with other human beings, more than to learning from literature. In his only autobiographical statement he wrote:

Upon the whole, the forces that have influenced me have come from persons and from situations more than from books—not that I have not, I hope, learned a great deal from

¹¹ The literature that discusses their relationship frequently mentions three or more trips but only two, in 1925 and 1930, are documented. Dewey's activities during the various dates suggested for a third trip indicate that he could not possibly have had sufficient free time to include a European journey in those years.

¹² *New York Times*, "Dr. John Dewey, 87, to Wed Widow, 42," (December 11, 1946), p. 64.

¹³ Abraham Kaplan, "Introduction," in LW 10.

philosophical writings, but that what I have learned from them has been technical in comparison with what I have been forced to think upon and about because of some experience in which I have found myself entangled. . . . I like to think, though it may be a defensive reaction, that with all the inconveniences of the road I have been forced to travel, it has the compensatory advantage of not inducing an immunity of thought to experiences—which perhaps, after all, should not be treated even by a philosopher as the germ of a disease to which he needs to develop resistance.¹⁴

Another characteristic of Dewey's philosophy relevant to his relationship with Albert Barnes is his emphasis on the importance of education in society and in his goal to develop a philosophy that would be relevant to a general public. Dewey is widely known both for his writings on education and their influence on the progressive education movement and his effort to put his educational ideas into practice through the laboratory school he founded as chair of the joint departments of psychology, philosophy and pedagogy at the University of Chicago from 1896-1904.¹⁵ In *Democracy and Education*, he states:

If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, towards nature and fellow men, philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education.¹⁶

And he later emphasized the role of education in his philosophy in the autobiographical essay mentioned above:

¹⁴ LW 5:155 ("From Absolutism to Experimentalism").

¹⁵ "There is no major systematic philosopher who has looked so long and carefully at education [as has Dewey]" D. Hawkins, "Teacher of Teachers," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. X, [4] February 29, 1968, pp. 25-29.

¹⁶ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 328. Also found in MW 9:338.

Although a book called *Democracy and Education* was for many years that in which my philosophy, such as it is, was most fully expounded, I do not know that philosophic critics, as distinct from teachers, have ever had recourse to it. I have wondered whether such facts signified that philosophers in general, although they are themselves usually teachers, have not taken education with sufficient seriousness for it to occur to them that any rational person could actually think it possible *that philosophizing should focus about education as the supreme human interest* in which, moreover, other problems, cosmological, moral, logical, come to a head.¹⁷

Commentators on Dewey's philosophy have repeatedly noted that the central tenets of his philosophy were based on doing and reflecting, connecting immediate experiences with past ones and associating them with their possible consequences. Applying thinking to action, recognizing problems and doing something to address them is significant for him. Thus, it is hardly surprising that he was repeatedly drawn to people whose passion was for some kind of educational activity and who, like Dewey, went to great length to support their beliefs through action. Barnes's major activity for the last 30 years of his life was using his constantly growing art collection to establish an educational program.

Dewey is also known for his faith in democracy¹⁸ and his consistent support of political activities that would promote democratic practice. Several of these relationships, such as his friendship with Jane Addams, were with people who devoted their lives to bold action in support of progressive causes. Others include prominent progressive educators.

One noteworthy example of Dewey's attachment to activists is his relationship with and championing of F. M. Alexander, the creator of his eponymous Method. Alexander, like Barnes, was a

¹⁷ LW 5:156 ("From Absolutism to Experimentalism"). Emphasis added.

¹⁸ A major biography of Dewey is aptly titled "John Dewey and American Democracy. See Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U. Press, 1991).

difficult man who ferociously pursued his goal of teaching people the value of mind-body relationships through his method of gentle physical guidance. Dewey was an avid pupil of the Alexander Method and urged his family and close friends (including Barnes) to take lessons with Alexander.¹⁹⁶ Dewey recognized in Alexander a person who worked consistently to realize an educational goal: to help people attain better posture through a technique that required accepting the possibility that mind and body were not isolated, but that the former could influence the latter through specific actions. Not only did Dewey experience the value of Alexander lessons for his own physical wellbeing, but through his studies with Alexander he came to realize that these activities provided empirical evidence challenging the classical separation of “mind” and “body,” one of the major dualisms that Dewey opposed. Dewey wrote introductions to Alexander’s books and met with Alexander at least twice on trips to Europe after Alexander returned to England in 1919.

Jo Ann Boydston, the founding editor of the *Collected Works of John Dewey* and for many years director of the Center for Dewey Studies, makes a case for understanding Dewey’s relationship with Alexander that is similar to my description of his relationship with Barnes. After noting commentators usually describe Dewey’s relationship with Alexander as “some kind of aberration” on Dewey’s side, she writes:

I would like to suggest two possible reasons for this lack of sympathy, understanding, and acceptance by Dewey’s followers. The first is that they have mis-read his personality and the second is that they have mis-read his work.

The mis-reading of Dewey’s personality stems from an image of Dewey that many philosophers use—however unwittingly—to disparage his relationship with Alexander.

¹⁹ Evelyn, the Dewey’s oldest daughter, writing to her parents, reports “Fred [her brother] is even buggier than dad on Alexander.” See “Evelyn Dewey to John & Alice Chipman Dewey” (1918.12.08 (02302)). Barnes tried the Alexander treatments, but was not impressed.

Dewey's softheartedness, his well-known willingness to write forewords, prefaces, introductions, book blurbs, kind reviews, and encouraging words, sometimes led him into a kind of soft-heartedness, making him the victim of flamboyant characters, intellectual conmen, and sycophantic arrivistes. This supposed naïveté of Dewey is a myth. That he was gentle, benevolent, obliging, and encouraging is true, but that he would allow himself to be duped is calumny. To find Dewey naïve, one must overlook the essential core of self-reliance and self-confidence that underlay his assumed manner.²⁰

Evidence that Dewey was insightful about Barnes's character and not easily duped can be found in his correspondence. For example, in the years following the end of the first World War Dewey supported the work of Salmon Levinson, a Chicago lawyer and old friend who was actively promoting the "Outlawry of War Movement."²¹ Dewey thought that Barnes might be persuaded to contribute to this effort and he was well aware that Barnes could support the movement financially. This is what he wrote to Levinson as a method for approaching Barnes:

I wish you would send all of your printed material to A. C. Barnes, 24 North 40 Street, Philadelphia, accompanied with a letter saying that you are sending the literature at my request, and that if he is interested, you would be very glad to receive

²⁰ Jo Ann Boydston, "John Dewey and the Alexander Technique," address at the International Congress of Teachers of the Alexander Technique, August 1986. <http://www.alexandercenter.com/jd/deweyalexanderboydston.html>. Accessed October 19, 2016. Boydston includes Albert Barnes in her list of shady characters she mentions later in her article. The full record of the Dewey-Barnes relationship documented in the archives of the Barnes Foundation was not available to her at the time she gave this lecture.

²¹ Although the effort had support from significant figures, including Senator Borah, and culminated in the Kellogg-Briand pact ratified by 14 countries, it obviously had little impact on the post-war rearmament of most of the countries that signed the pact and certainly didn't delay the next World War.

criticisms and suggestions from him regarding the carrying on of an educational publicity campaign.

I am suggesting the way the letter should be written because he is in a position to be of a great deal of assistance, if he wants to be, but he is somewhat difficult to manage, and would be likely to shy at any suggestion of financial or other personal support, but not at the idea of making some practical suggestions and criticisms. Then, if he got interested, he might volunteer the other kind of aid himself.

Sincerely yours, | John Dewey²²

In Albert Barnes, Dewey found not only a person who was devoting his life to education, explicitly and repeatedly stating that his education activity was based on Dewey's work, but also an individual who was his intellectual equal, a man who had read an enormous amount, could state his opinions clearly and loved to discuss them. Barnes and Dewey also shared a commitment to political and social action in support of progressive causes, including civil rights. Finally, not least in importance, they simply had a good time together; they enjoyed each other's company.

Albert Barnes as Educator

Barnes was proud of his humble origins, his efforts to educate himself and his ability to learn from experience. In a letter he wrote to Alice Dewey, he gave a detailed description of his early years and his interest in education:

. . . In short, I was living by experimenting with what made up human nature. From eleven I've made my own bread and butter and never had to struggle to do it because I simply did—that is really did—what I thought was the fitting thing to

²² "John Dewey to Salmon O. Levinson," 1923.11.28 (02797).

do under the circumstances My principal interest has always been education first for myself, then for the less fortunate around me, then in the education of the public in general From the time I was eleven until now I've been vitally interested in education—particularly that kind of education that looks upon experience as the best teacher. Mr. Dewey has best stated my beliefs in *Democracy and Education*, but neither there or in his other writings does he bring out with enough emphasis the principle that makes the world stationary—almost: I mean the domination of the spirit of imitation on all classes, from the intellectual to the peasant.²³

Years later, he emphasized again how he had learned from experience in an exchange of letters with Dewey concerning the possible contribution to aesthetic theory of German academics who had emigrated to the United States in the 1930's:

Many years ago, when I was painting, I was also playing semi-professional baseball, and two nights each week I was boxing The kind of stuff that Schaefer-Simmern sent you made up the subject matter of what I read and heard talked about [when I was studying in Germany]. It was not of the slightest use to me either for the understanding of painting or knowing how to do it myself. In fact, it jarred the kind of thinking and habits that had become ingrained in me by a preoccupation with science. As I look back, I am absolutely sure that I learned more about painting, music and how to go about doing things in a practical world from my experiences on the baseball field and in the boxing ring I hope that the reduction of your philosophy to such “trifling” affairs as baseball and boxing will not shock you.²⁴

²³ “Albert C. Barnes to Alice Chipman Dewey,” 1920, © Barnes Foundation Archives.

²⁴ “Albert C. Barnes to John Dewey,” 10.28.1946, © Barnes Foundation Archives. Henry Schaefer-Simmern (1896-1978) was a German art educator who emigrated

Born to a poor Irish Protestant family in Philadelphia, Barnes graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1892 at age 20 with a medical degree and then, as he did not have the financial means to set himself up in an independent medical practice, spent several years searching for a profession. He traveled to Germany to study at Heidelberg and Berlin,²⁵ where he attended lectures (including some in philosophy while working in odd jobs to support himself. During these years he also learned German. (Later he also acquired French). He came back to the United States and secured a position with the Mulford pharmaceutical company and persuaded them to hire a German pharmaceutical chemist Herman Hille.²⁶ The two men worked for the company during the day and in their own laboratory at night, where in 1902 they developed a silver protein based antiseptic and registered its name, Argyrol.

This was a period when silver based antiseptics were being brought to the market with some frequency to address the relatively new medical acceptance of germ theory. It was known that various metals, such as silver and mercury in solutions or suspensions destroyed bacteria, now recognized as the causal agents of many diseases. To preserve the actual formulation from potential competitors, Barnes never patented his product, but fiercely defended his trademark throughout the years of producing and selling Argyrol. He subjected Argyrol to clinical trials in hospitals in New York, Philadelphia, London and Berlin (not a requirement for

to the United States in 1936. He met and corresponded with Dewey, who wrote a foreword to Schaefer-Simmern's *The Unfolding of Artistic Activity* (1948). Dewey was impressed by Schaefer-Simmern's recognition that perception was a complex activity and his experimental work in which he asked non-artists to draw. Dewey believed that Schaefer-Simmern had "completely broken away" from his German background: see for example "John Dewey to Arthur F. Bentley," 1946.09.16 (15609).

²⁵ In a letter to Alice Dewey he claims he earned enough money for this trip by spending a year gambling, "I was a bookmaker on the race tracks at Washington and Saratoga and played baccarat, poker and faro every night." See "Albert C. Barnes to Alice Chipman Dewey," 1920, © Barnes Foundation Archives.

²⁶ See J.W. Alexander, "History of medical uses of silver," *Surgical infections*, 10 (2009): 289-292.

bringing a new medicine to market at that time)²⁷ and sent announcements of the laudatory statements from these trials along with Argyrol samples to physicians. Its relative mildness compared to more corrosive silver nitrate as well as his shrewd marketing strategies resulted in Argyrol becoming spectacularly successful, and Barnes became a rich man in a few short years.

His work force was always small, probably no more than 20 employees at one time. Early Barnes showed remarkable concern for his workers and developed enlightened concepts concerning management of an industrial workforce. He employed “Negro” workers (to use the common term of this period) at a time when men of color seldom got such work; instituted an 8-hour work day before this was common, and introduced some profit sharing with his employees. He was particularly troubled by the fact that his factory workers appeared to lead undisciplined lives, often missing work because they had been arrested for various minor offences or simply did not show up. He was not satisfied with this situation, so he determined to improve their lives as well as develop a more efficient and stable work force through an educational program. Beginning in the early years of the business, probably around 1908, the company provided two hours of reading and discussion of social issues most days of the week for all the workers.²⁸ Barnes himself was a voracious reader and he supplied a range of books on psychology, philosophy, social commentary and later, aesthetics for his educational efforts with his workers. He also established a lending library for the employees.²⁹

²⁷ The FDA’s modern regulatory functions began with the passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drugs Act that prohibited interstate commerce in adulterated and misbranded food and drugs.

²⁸ It is not clear from the available records whether these early educational efforts occurred every work day or only several times a week.

²⁹ A hint at the breadth of this library comes from a letter Barnes wrote to Dewey, when Alice Dewey was ill and on a rest cure. Barnes sent her a selection of books that he thought might interest her and asked that they be returned because he had borrowed them from his lending library for his workers. The package included *Samuel Pepys; Diary*, edited by Richard Le Gallienne, *The Heart of a Woman*, by Georgia Douglas Johnson, *The Triumph of the Egg*, by Sherwood Anderson, *Notebook of Anton Chekov*, *Xingu*, by Edith Wharton, *The Cook’s Wedding* by

Unfortunately, he only described these early efforts in detail much later; there is little documentary evidence for the early years of his educational efforts. As he began seriously to assemble his art collection,³⁰ he included aesthetics as part of the educational program and even hung some of his paintings in the factory. When Barnes chartered his foundation in 1922 he created a more formal educational program in aesthetics, based on his collection, but he always considered it an outgrowth of the original educational activities he had begun decades earlier.

Whenever called upon to state his profession, Barnes opted for “educator.” Both his Légion d’Honneur membership document (1922) and his passport (1937) identify him as “educator.”³¹ His systematic educational efforts for others began early in his career as a business man developing pharmaceutical products, even before he focused entirely on the idea of educating through a program in aesthetics with his collection serving as the curriculum.

The Origin and Growth of the Barnes-Dewey Friendship

Barnes was intensely interested in philosophy and psychology,³² and in 1916 hired a young philosophy instructor, Laurence Buermeyer, as a “secretary”; that is, as a person to guide his reading of philosophy. Noting Barnes’s interest in Dewey’s work, Buermeyer suggested that Barnes might enjoy auditing one of Dewey’s classes at Columbia. This was not unusual for outsiders at that time. Barnes had been particularly impressed by *Democracy and Education* shortly after it was

Chekhov, *Stray Bird* by Tagore, *Memoirs of my Dead Life* by [George] Moore, and *The Love Nest* by Ring Lardner. “Albert C. Barnes to John Dewey,” © Barnes Foundation Archives, 1926.

³⁰ In 1912, Barnes commissioned his friend from high school, the painter William Glackens, to go to Paris with a credit of \$20,000 and purchase contemporary paintings for him. The results of this trip originated the collection now assembled at the Barnes Foundation.

³¹ My thanks to Barbara Beaucar, Archivist at the Barnes Foundation, for sharing copies of these documents with me.

³² He claimed that his business acumen was derived from applying William James’s psychology to his sales strategy.

published in 1916, so he signed up to attend Dewey's bi-weekly graduate seminar "*The Moral, Political and Logical Writings of John Stuart Mill* Alternate Tu., 4:10-6" in the fall semester 1917.³³ He was an enthusiastic participant and after only one session wrote about the seminar to his friend, Judge Robert von Moschzisker:

If you would like to see Dewey in action, go with me to Columbia University . . . The subject is John Stuart Mill, but that is only a point of departure . . . The seminar consists of ten men who sit around a big table with Dewey at the head . . . Since the death of William James, Dewey has been the unquestioned head of American philosophic thought . . . I feel sure that you would enjoy it and that you would get some practical benefit.³⁴

Before the semester was over, Barnes invited Dewey and his wife to visit him overnight and view his collection. John and Alice went to Marion near the end of the semester and Dewey clearly enjoyed the weekend. He wrote a thank you note with a typical Dewey approach to evaluating an experience:

I want to thank you for the extraordinary experience which you gave me. I have been conscious of living in a medium of color ever since Friday--almost swimming in it. I can but feel that it is a mark of the quality of your paintings that there has been no nervous exasperation or fatigue accompanying this sensation.³⁵

Barnes also attended the spring semester 1918 seminar, again coming to New York every second Tuesday by train for a late

³³ Catalogue, 1917-18, Columbia University, p. 11.

³⁴ "Albert C. Barnes to Judge Robert von Moschzisker," Oct. 13, 1917 ©Barnes Foundation Archives.

³⁵ John Dewey to Albert Barnes, 1918.01.22 (03762).

afternoon class on ethics.³⁶ At times, he also combined these trips with additional ways to meet with Dewey:

Dear Mr. Dewey:

You told me that the next seminar would be on Tuesday, February 12th, which is a holiday. If there is no session on that day, I shall be obliged if you will send me word so that I may be spared the trip to New York. But if we have the session, and you are free from noon until four o'clock, it would be a good opportunity to pay the proposed visit to the studios of Glackens and Prendergast.

If you will meet me down-stairs at the Brevort (5th Ave. corner 8th Street) at 12.30, we can have a little lunch, and then go across the square to the studios.³⁷

The summer of 1918, provided additional opportunities for Barnes and Dewey to cement their budding friendship. As it became clear that the war in Europe was reaching its final stage and the United States and its allies were beginning to plan a post-War realignment of power in Europe, they decided to engage in a sociological field study. The Polish community in Philadelphia was lobbying for the return of the Polish monarchy to power in their homeland after the war. Barnes and Dewey determined to find out why this community was so conservative (unlike their Polish-American counterparts in Detroit and Chicago). Barnes provided the funds to rent a house near the Polish section and Dewey provided graduate students to do the research. Dewey wasn't in Philadelphia until late in the summer and Barnes, who would occasionally drop in on the students, didn't think they worked hard enough.

³⁶ Almost every reference to Barnes's attendance at the seminars assumes that they were a weekly event. Some report fanciful stories that Barnes regularly fell asleep (because the seminar met right after lunch, which it did not), and/or that he was driven to New York weekly by his chauffeur, with scant evidence to support them.

³⁷ "Albert Barnes to John Dewey," 1918.02.04 (03765). The elegant Brevort hotel and Parisian café was patronized by New York notables. The academic calendar at Columbia University for 1917-18 lists February 22 as a holiday, but not February 12.

But, perhaps the most significant outcome of the study for the two men's relationship is that in August they took a road trip to Manchester, Massachusetts, to report their findings to Edward M. "Colonel" House, President Wilson's influential advisor. Barnes picked up Dewey in New York in his elegant Packard two-seater roadster on his way from Merion and they drove to Worcester, stayed there overnight and went on to the Boston North Shore the next day. After a brief meeting with House, Dewey went on to visit his son and daughter-in-law (and a new grandchild) at the home of his daughter-in-law's parents in Concord, Massachusetts. Dewey's letter to his wife gives a feel for the joy of the trip, as well as the outcome of the study:

Mr. Barnes is going to meet me with his roadster and take me to Manchester, Mass, where I am going to try to see Col House. . . Mr. Barnes was going to New Eng somewhere, some lake to go fishing with Mr Glackens, and I am glad to have the ride, as I can stand a little change and fresh air. This will give me a chance to see the Baby, for which thank heaven. . . It is just what was fairly obvious from the start, the alliance between the parish priests, the politicians, and other influences which keep the Poles ignorant and away from things in order to control them.³⁸

In the fall of 1918, Dewey and his wife spent the semester in Berkeley, California where he lectured at the University of California. In February 1919, they sailed to Japan and after three months, during which Dewey gave a series of public lectures,³⁹ they sailed to China where they lived for more than two years. During the years in East Asia, Barnes and Dewey kept up a vigorous correspondence. Barnes reported on events in the U. S., sent books to Dewey and told him about his own activities.⁴⁰ Although unable

³⁸ "John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey," 1918.08.03 (02185).

³⁹ Published as *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 1920.

⁴⁰ Barnes also supported their journey in other ways. When John and Alice Dewey were leaving for the trip Barnes lent them \$500 because they worried that they

to meet during this time, they continued to strengthen their relationship. The end of the War allowed Barnes to return to Europe regularly and, given the relative value of dollars to any European currency, to buy paintings aggressively.

During this period, Barnes was developing his plans for creating an educational foundation. Early in the process, he urged Dewey to develop a course on aesthetics, using Barnes's collection to back it up:

I have a suggestion in your academic line which I believe is practical and much needed: . . . You hold a seminar at Columbia on life itself and its aesthetic phases. All the material you need is in *Democracy & Education*, Santayana's *Reason in Art*; it would[include] William James, McDougall, *Creative Intelligence* . . . we'll have some Renoirs here to show the meaning—real meaning, not bunk—of the terms, drawing, color, values, etc. . . . I would be glad to cooperate each week in getting the plan in practical shape. Don't say it won't work—I know it will, I've tried it for years with people who never went to any college but a work-shop. Of course I eschewed [technical] terms and I was handicapped by the absence of what you could put into it.⁴¹

Dewey took several months to answer, either because the letter was delayed or because he needed to think about this offer, but he declined:

I was interested in your suggestion about a seminar in esthetics. But I can't rise to my part in it. I have always

might not have sufficient cash to last them. Evelyn, who took care of finances back in the United States, returned the money to Barnes shortly after they arrived in China. "I told Evelyn to send you back the five hundred you were kind enough to let me have. We have been very well taken care of, both in Japan and China, and didn't need the funds as it turned out, but the accommodation on your part was just the same." Found in "John Dewey to Albert C. Barnes," 1919.9.15 (04103).

⁴¹ Albert C. Barnes to John Dewey, August 20, 1919 © Barnes Foundation Archives.

eschewed esthetics, just why I don't know, but I think it is because I wanted to reserve one region from a somewhat devastating analysis, one part of experience where I didn't think more than I did anything else . . . I feel about [esthetics] precisely as the average intelligent man feels about all philosophical discussion.⁴²

But after Dewey and his wife returned from this long stay abroad and the two men resumed their visits and continued their correspondence, discussions about aesthetics appear in their letters. Referring to a sentence in *Human Nature and Conduct*⁴³ Barnes writes:

Dear Mr. Dewey: Page 22—"Desire for flowers comes after actual enjoyment of flowers"--this, I'm afraid, is not all wool. Substitute any other object—automobile, fine clothes, pictures, etc.,--and you have the same rose under another name. My experience--here, in this shop, with normally well-endowed, well-meaning people, shows that the underlying guiding principle is our old friend imitation. They desire because others have them and the prerequisite pleasure is, most often, non-existent.⁴⁴

Dewey's response begins a theme that he repeats for the next ten years: acknowledging the relevance of Barnes' criticism, but urging Barnes himself to publish his ideas:

Dear Barnes, The formal or legal reply to your point is that the man in question doesn't really desire flowers, he desires to be like others . . . But I'm not fool enough to think this answers your real point. I haven't answered it anywhere in the book. Its not my gift, or it is my limitation that I cant

⁴² "John Dewey to Albert. C. Barnes," 1920.01.15 (04091).

⁴³ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1922).

⁴⁴ "Albert C. Barnes to John Dewey" 1922.03.03 (04131).

really do it . . . But why the devil don't you do it? Why should the responsibility fall on me especially?⁴⁵

Not long afterwards, Barnes did write his own treatise on aesthetics, *The Art in Painting*, first published by the Barnes Foundation, early in January, 1925. The book came out just two months before the opening ceremonies for the Foundation in March 1925 and was its first major publication. The next year Harcourt Brace took over publication followed by second (1928) and third (1937) editions. The book presents Barnes's formal theory of aesthetics, focusing on "plastic form," the manner in which a painter uses color, line, space and light as a means to create a work of art. Although seldom discussed today, the book was well received, gained important reviews and sold well for years.⁴⁶ A review by Leo Stein, although generally positive, was a great disappointment to Barnes because Stein criticized him for using aesthetics in the service of pedagogy, "The chief defect of his work is a consequence of his [active interest] in education."⁴⁷ Barnes responded angrily, since this was an attack on the core of his career as an educator.⁴⁸ Their friendship took years to recover after this affront.

Barnes and Dewey continued their joint activities in the late 1920's, a period during which Barnes attempted unsuccessfully to influence art education in the Philadelphia schools and aesthetics education at the University of Pennsylvania, and other universities across the country. Dewey frequently attempted to moderate some of Barnes's angry exchanges with school administrators and university personnel when they wouldn't do exactly what Barnes had proposed.

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⁴⁵ "John Dewey to Albert C. Barnes," 1922.03.05 (04132).

⁴⁶ A Harcourt Brace editor estimated the book had sold 14,000 copies by 1952. See *William Schack Papers, 1891-1963*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, [Reel 2917], Donald Brace to William Schack, May 13, 1952.

⁴⁷ Leo Stein, "The Art in Painting," *New Republic* 45[574] (December 2, 1925): 56-57.

⁴⁸ See George E. Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice: John Dewey and Democracy* (Walnut Creek, CA: West Coast Press, 2012), 144-146.

Early in January 1930, Dewey was invited to give the first William James lectures at Harvard University in the spring semester 1931, honoring the late philosopher/psychologist, with no limitation on the subject. Contrary to the views he had expressed a decade earlier, Dewey decided to talk about aesthetics and within a few weeks of accepting the invitation he sent the titles of most of the ten proposed lectures in a letter to Sidney Hook.⁴⁹ At the same time, he was making plans for a trip to Los Angeles in response to an invitation to present an address at the dedication ceremonies for the new UCLA campus on March 30, 1930.⁵⁰ He invited Barnes to join him on that trip and they departed on March 22. On the return trip they stopped for a few days of sightseeing in Santa Fe, Mesa Verde, and Taos, New Mexico, where Barnes bought Santo paintings, jewelry and pottery. It's hard to imagine that they didn't discuss aesthetics on these long train journeys.

In the summer of 1930, Dewey spent his vacation time reading aesthetics literature. In September, he writes to Barnes:

I think I've analyzed Ducasse's theoretical premises. In one sense it wasn't worth the trouble; in another, it has by contrast helped clear up my mind on some points. His account is mostly based on taking words one by one, & then hitching them together--Prall--the Calif. man has a genuine feeling & his book is of an entirely different class. I've read Parker for the first time--he strikes me as the victim of a theory who now wishes to communicate the disease to others.⁵¹

During that fall, he makes numerous trips to Merion to discuss the lectures with Barnes and he decides once again to accompany Barnes on a trip to Europe to look at pictures and also visit his daughter Lucy who is living in Vienna with her Austrian husband. Barnes's

⁴⁹ "John Dewey to Sidney Hook," 1930.03.10 (05729).

⁵⁰ "Philosophy and Education," in LW 5:289-298.

⁵¹ "John Dewey to Albert C. Barnes," 1930.09.19 (04267).

constant theme is that Dewey needs to experience pictures rather than only read about visual aesthetics:

Your "I got a real release and can start much freer from technical philosophy than I could before having the talks with you" is my text for this sermon. Too much philosophy and too little natural reaction to experience, and a too limited experience, is exactly what is the matter with aesthetics from Aristotle to Santayana to Parker to Ducasse. You can cure all that and do an incalculable service to education in art if you will maintain that release and get your own experience as a live animal.

But you'll have to stay alive from October 25th to December 1st. I can feed you stuff so fast in the Louvre and in the galleries at Vienna and Berlin that you ought to pant like a greyhound after a race when you get on the boat at Bremen.⁵²

Dewey acknowledges Barnes's assistance in developing his lectures. In a letter from aboard the ocean liner, he writes to Corrine Frost, a frequent correspondent, "I shall be in Paris tomorrow; Mr & Mrs Barnes--of the Barnes Foundation--the finest collection of pictures in the US--came over with me. He is helping me with my Harvard lectures."⁵³ Barnes continued to provide advice to Dewey and send him material to use in the lectures. Even after Dewey had begun residence in Cambridge in the spring of 1931, Barnes sent additional material. Dewey wrote in response, "Dear Al, Thanks for your helpful contributions. I made two lectures of the material on Form--rhythm and balance . . . I keep your book at my side and make frequent use of it."⁵⁴ Barnes even came to Cambridge to visit while Dewey was giving the lectures over several months. David Riesman, whose father had been a classmate of Barnes in Central High School

⁵² "Albert C. Barnes to John Dewey," 1930.10.16 (04298).

⁵³ "John Dewey to Corrine Chisholm Frost" 1930.10.29 (09280).

⁵⁴ "John Dewey to Albert C. Barnes," 1931.03.09 (04292).

in Philadelphia and was a longtime family friend, was an undergraduate at Harvard that year. He recollected that visit some years later:

My parents were close friends . . . of the late Dr. Albert C. Barnes who came to see me when I was a senior in Harvard College and wanted me to spend the next year travelling around Europe buying paintings with him . . . I remember one day he came and yanked me out of bed and said, 'Let's go see Jack.' 'Jack' was, of course, John Dewey. He took me over to John Dewey who was lecturing at Harvard and slapped him on the back with a whack that I thought would send him across the room.⁵⁵

It took Dewey an unusually long time to convert the William James lectures into a publishable manuscript. Barnes wrote repeatedly and urged him to complete the book. The correspondence illustrated in the exchange below reflects both their growing intimacy as they tease each other while continuing their discussion about aesthetics:

Dear Jack,

Your pleasant letter was like a springtime breeze laden with the perfume of flowers. It was so nice that I shall refrain from reminding you that you are an utterly shameless person in having not yet put your Harvard lectures in shape for the printer . . . I am sending you herewith what was to be the first chapter in the book on Renoir . . . It occurred to me that that chapter might be useful in that part of your Harvard lectures which deals with plastic art; if it is, you are at liberty to use it.⁵⁶

Dear Al,

⁵⁵ David Riesman. In Robert B. Williams, *John Dewey: Recollections*, (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), 132.

⁵⁶ "Albert C. Barnes to John Dewey," 1932.11.16 (04339).

Your letter of sweetness & light came last week just as I was leaving . . . I loved your piece on vision & form—You ought to publish it, then I could borrow instead of stealing. Your statement about traditions & their relation to the vision of the artist & of ourselves is the best you've ever made—"Hell, its perfect."⁵⁷

In her analysis of Dewey's relationship with F. M. Alexander, Boydston points out that not only have critics mis-read Dewey's personality, they have also mis-read his work in not recognizing the evolving influence of Alexander's ideas on some of Dewey's most important works, especially *Experience and Nature*. To substantiate the latter claim, she refers readers to "the outstanding scholarly study by Eric McCormack" which traces the development of that influence. Unfortunately, no such careful analysis of Barnes's influence on Dewey's visual aesthetics has as yet appeared. But even a superficial comparison of some passages in Barnes's *The Art in Painting* with similar sections of *Art as Experience* suggests how much Dewey relied on Barnes for his understanding of visual art. Dennis,⁵⁸ who argued that Dewey has no personal emotional feeling for visual art, illustrated some of these in his essay that appeared over 40 years ago. As Carrier⁵⁹ points out, it is sometimes difficult to decide from a selected passage whether it comes from Dewey or from Barnes. A comparison of Dewey's short references to particular painters in *Art as Experience* reveals that in almost every instance, he echoes the analysis that Barnes provided in *The Art in Painting*.

For example, Barnes criticized Botticelli for his "overreliance" on line at the expense of other components of plastic form, "[Botticelli's] line builds a series of arabesques of much charm . . . but that is pure decoration because it . . . stands out in isolation instead of being merged with the other plastic elements;" while Dewey writes,

⁵⁷ "John Dewey to Albert C. Barnes," 1932.11.23 (04305).

⁵⁸ L.J. Dennis, "Dewey's Debt to Albert Coombs Barnes," *Educational Theory*, 22 (1972): 331-332.

⁵⁹ D. Carrier, *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2007).

“[In] Botticelli, the charm of arabesques and line . . . may easily seduce a spectator . . . [and] will then result in an overestimation of Botticelli in comparison with other painters.” Of Chardin, Barnes writes, “each unit strikes the eye with a sense of the rightness as to its . . . contribution to the form as a whole;” while Dewey echoes, “Chardin renders volume and spatial positions in ways that caress the eye.” Barnes believed that some artists emphasized religious sentiments to the aesthetic detriment of their compositions and criticizes Murillo (among others) for this tendency asserting, “Difficulty is often encountered in appraising justly a painter who habitually accentuates human values, religious, sentimental, dramatic in terms not purely plastic. Raphael sins grievously in this respect as do Fra Angelico . . . Murillo . . . Turner;” while Dewey states, “The sentimental religiosity of Murillo’s paintings affords a good example of what happens when a painter of undoubted talent subordinates his artistic sense to associated ‘meanings’ that are artistically irrelevant.”

Significance

A more accurate characterization of the rich, intense intellectual and personal friendship between John Dewey and Albert Barnes is worth documenting for its own sake. To develop an understanding of Dewey’s philosophy it is particularly important to consider personal as well as professional associations, since he emphasized the significance of experience as an essential component of ideas. Dewey frequently referred to his own experiences in response to an activity with an intellectual component, as illustrated in the note he wrote to Barnes after Dewey’s first visit to Barnes’s gallery, quoted earlier in this paper.

A full elucidation of the consequences of their deep friendship also requires a thorough analysis of the manner in which they influenced each other and how the two friends’ aesthetic theories evolved through their interactions. Such an analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, but a few scholars are beginning to recognize how their development of aesthetic theories were shaped

by both their personal friendship and their evolving conceptions of pragmatic aesthetics.⁶⁰

Acknowledging the influence Albert Barnes's educational program had on Dewey also suggests a possible answer to a question that has puzzled some distinguished scholars: why there is so little discussion of education in *Art as Experience*. This issue was first raised by Herbert Read in his classic *Education Through Art* (1956). He remarked in a footnote:

I regard it as one of the curiosities of philosophy that when John Dewey, late in life, came to the subject of aesthetics . . . he nowhere in the course of an imposing treatise, established a connection between aesthetics and education.⁶¹

Philip Jackson (1998), "share[s] Sir Herbert's puzzlement" and suggests not only that Dewey:

may have chosen not to discuss the educational implications of his theory of arts chiefly because he had not yet thought them through to his own satisfaction.

In addition, Jackson surmises:

⁶⁰ In a paper delivered at the New England Pragmatist Forum David Granger (2015) discusses the aesthetic formalism of John Dewey and Albert Barnes and analyzes the similarity and differences of their views. A recent doctoral dissertation by Alexander Robins (2015), aims to demonstrate the development of the aesthetic theory of the Barnes program as the result of the interaction of Dewey with the group of teachers at the Barnes Foundation that included, (in addition to Barnes) Thomas Munro, Laurence Buermeier and Mary Mullen. Robins also suggests, with little evidence, that Dewey played an active role in developing the specific pedagogy of the Barnes Foundation curriculum. Dewey considered his title as Director of Education as honorary; he never taught any classes at the Foundation. See also chapter 6, "Education through Art and Democracy: Dewey's Art Education Project at the Barnes Foundation" in Masamichi Ueno, *Democratic Education and the Public Sphere: Towards John Dewey's theory of aesthetic experience* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁶¹ Herbert Read, *Education Through Art*, Third (Revised) Edition (New York: Random House, 1956), 245.

To embark on such a project at his stage of life and without a school of his own . . . was more than he was willing or able to do . . . He thus left that task for others to accomplish.⁶²

A simpler explanation is possible. *Art and Experience*, published three years after his lectures and after considerable discussion of its content with Barnes and others who were engaged in a major aesthetics educational effort reads like a finished project, similar to many of Dewey's other major works. Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s the Barnes Foundation had a thriving multi-year educational program with classes attracting up to 100 students at a time, coupled with ongoing efforts to expand the program to a number of universities. Dewey specifically mentions the educational work of the Barnes Foundation as a prime example of the kind of art education he has in mind.

I also find it hard to believe that Dewey didn't have the energy to put his ideas into practice. Although *Art as Experience* came out late in his life (he was 71 when he gave the Harvard lectures on which it was based), he took on major intellectual and physical efforts in later years, including at age 78 chairing The American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky (known colloquially as "The Dewey Commission") that involved a strenuous trip to Mexico and supervising the writing of a 600-page report of the commission's findings. A possible solution to this conundrum is that Dewey felt no need to test his ideas of aesthetic education since he had a model available to him: the Barnes Foundation with its successful, rational method of aesthetic education.

Conclusion

Dewey never wavered in his view that Barnes, using his art collection as the curriculum for the progressive education program at

⁶² Philip Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), xii-xiii.

his foundation, was doing outstanding educational work. Dewey believed that Barnes had demonstrated a way in which aesthetic education could enrich students' lives and strengthened their ability to engage with the world in a positive manner needed to support a democratic society. I am frequently impressed to meet alumni of the Barnes Foundation educational programs who inform me that the training they received there "changed their lives" or "made them see the world differently."⁶³ Dewey never changed his opinion of the significance of the educational work at the Barnes Foundation. In his Foreword to *The Art of Renoir*, Dewey gives a brief summary of his understanding of the educational program at the Barnes Foundation based on "observation and interpretation of what is observed." He concludes:

Since my educational ideas have been criticized for undue emphasis upon intelligence and the use of the method of thinking that has its best exemplification in science, I take profound, if somewhat melancholic, ironic, satisfaction in the fact that the most thoroughgoing embodiment of what I have tried to say about education is, as far as I am aware, found in an educational institution that is concerned with art. . . . It is a reward, as well as an honor, to be associated with an educational institution that is engaged in vital education.⁶⁴

And Dewey accepted Barnes's character and even teased him about it. As Dewey was about to send Barnes a final manuscript of *Art as Experience*, he wrote to Barnes and informed him that the dedication would read:

Dear Al,

⁶³ Unfortunately, although this unique educational program based on Barnes's ideas has been in continuous activity for more than 100 years, no research to support this anecdotal evidence has been attempted.

⁶⁴ John Dewey, foreword to *The Art of Renoir*, by A. C. Barnes and V. De Mazia (New York: Minton, Balch & Co, 1935) x.

Having been appointed, if I read the correspondence aright, an umpire, I hereby decree and determine, subject to confirmation by the proper authorities, that the proper reading of the dedication is:

To
 Albert C. Barnes
 A genius and in
 affection also
 who often makes himself
 God damned uncomfortable
 by the way in which he
 Expresses and suppresses it.
 It is nice that Henry Hart wants to dedicate his book to you-
 he has got the start on me in time of publication but not in
 idea.

Affectionately | Jack⁶⁵

Barnes remained his gruff, mocking self throughout their friendship. Dewey's second marriage in 1946, shortly after the end of the Second World War was a quiet event in his apartment with probably less than 20 people in attendance, including Albert Barnes. But the press was represented and New York Times (1946) reporters wanted a statement from Barnes. The article announcing the marriage noted Dr. Barnes's presence and reported:

Dr. Albert Barnes of Haverford, PA, art connoisseur and head of the Barnes Foundation, a friend of Dr. Dewey, greeted newspaper men with the remark: "What is this, the Nuremberg trial? Where's Drew Middleton and Quentin Reynolds?"⁶⁶

⁶⁵ "John Dewey to Albert C. Barnes," 1933.11.18 (04324).

⁶⁶ *New York Times* "Dr. John Dewey, 87, to Wed Widow, 42," December 11, 1946, p. 64.

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