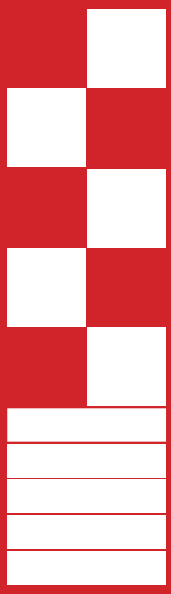
Franklin Ford Collection

edited by
Dominique Trudel &
Juliette De Maeyer



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FRANKLIN FORD COLLECTION

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"He Has Ideas about Everything": An Introduction to the Franklin Ford Collection

DOMINIQUE TRUDEL & JULIETTE DE MAEYER

This collection would not have been possible without the hard work of Amandine Hamon and Simona Feng, to whom we offer our warmest thanks.

doi

On April 13, 1886, a lively debate took place before the members of the Nineteenth Century Club in New York. During a conference discussing the press, one participant asserted the surprising opinion that the newspapers were not as good as those of fifty years before.[1] At the dawn of the Progressive Era, such beliefs were not shared by the majority, and were certainly not common among journalists. For the first time in history, an extensive coverage of fresh international news was possible, thanks to the cables of the Associated Press and the like. Reporting was becoming a self-conscious and esteemed occupation in American cities, and reporters were generally greeted with kudos, as readers enjoyed the exotic adventures of the many star journalists and "girl stunt reporters" of the era.

The surprising comment came from the mouth of Franklin Ford (1849–1918), the editor of the *Bradstreet's Journal of Trade, Finance, and Public Economy*. A seasoned newsman, Ford was then embarking on a long reflection on journalism, media, and communication. Over the next three decades, he gave conferences, published essays, and discussed his ideas with many high-profile correspondents, including Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Columbia University librarian James H. Canfield, and legal scholar Thomas M. Cooley. He also launched (or participated in) many publications and schemes aimed at changing the news, politics, education, finance, and society at large—some of these based on what he called the "movement of intelligence" or the "triangle of intelligence."

[1] "Talking about Newspapers," *Democrat and Chronicle*, April 16, 1886; "The Week in Society," *New York Tribune*, April 18, 1886.

Today Franklin Ford is mostly known for his involvement in the *Thought News* project at the University of Michigan, alongside John Dewey, Robert Ezra Park, George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, and Fred Newton Scott, as well as one of Ford's brothers, Corydon. Between 1888 and 1892, the group planned to launch a revolutionary "philosophical newspaper," called *Thought News—A Journal of Inquiry and a Record of Fact*. According to a circular printed in the *University of Michigan Daily*:

> *Thought News* has but one thing to report and that is a mere announcement—the announcement that the social organism is here. . . . If the social organism is a fact, and not a poetic dream, it must be studied like a steam engine, in its principle and in its practical activity. . . . So the chasm between education and life, between theory and practice, is bridged over once and forever.[2]

[2] "The Thought News," *University of Michigan Daily*, April 8, 1892.

The ambitious project eventually failed, and *Thought News* was never published. In the aftermath, Ford wrote a fifty-eight-page manifesto, *Draft of Action*, in which he outlined the grand plan behind *Thought News*. Ford wrote passionately about "systematic inquiry" (or "full social inquiry") and the nitty-gritty of a national organization that would publish dozens of publications and connect businesses, universities, and public authorities.

The *Thought News* episode attracted the attention of many scholars, who mostly approached the work of Ford in connection with the theorization of media and communication developed within classical American pragmatism and the Chicago School tradition. If this angle turns out to be relevant and legitimate, it still seems insufficient. The events surrounding the failure of *Thought News* and the role played by its participants are not well-known. The handful of primary sources readily available only attest to a very small portion of Ford's evolving ideas and many activities. The focus on the relationship between Ford and Dewey, and on the influence of Ford over Dewey, not only obscures other topics and key actors, but also contributes to an unfairly negative picture of Ford, who was later called a "scoundrel" by Dewey.[3]

[3] Zena Beth McGlashan, "The Professor and the Prophet: John Dewey and Franklin Ford," *Journalism History* 6, no. 4 (1979): 107–23, on 109.

Other contemporaries had a different opinion of Ford's work and personality. In 1896, a Detroit newspaper piece presented Ford as the "conundrum of the day" and draws this mysterious portrait:

> He has ideas about everything, you know—about the bank, the newspaper and the schools. He's a curious fellow, and very interesting. Let me tell you. He has a lot of words that he always uses. Here are some of them: Protection, publicity, unity, verbalism, post office, telephone, newspaper and "into relation." He always wants to bring everything "into relation."[4]

[4] "Who is He?" *Detroit Evening News*, December 24, 1896.

To date, there is no archival collection dedicated to Ford. The exact extent of Ford's work remains unknown, as his papers were destroyed when a fire wrecked his Columbia University office in October 1914.[5] The remaining records are scarce, and scattered across dozens of archival collections, some of them yet to be digitized. In the last couple of years, through interlibrary loans, microfilms, and devoted research assistants and archivists, our collection of documents slowly took shape, and at the time of writing, amounts to fifty-five documents authored by Ford, as well as 111 documents about Ford's endeavors.

[5] "Blaze Ends Fire Peril at Columbia," *New York Tribune*, October 11, 1914.

The *Franklin Ford Collection* offers a curated tour of Ford's writing, and aims at putting them "into relation" for the very first time. The nineteen texts of the collection were selected for many (and sometimes diverging) reasons. While some are typical of Ford, others are uncharacteristic. Some stand out for the density of the theoretical arguments, while others attest to Ford's little-known professional trajectory. Overall, the documents expose the three core themes developed by Ford throughout the years: 1) the specific problems of the press and the many remedies he envisioned; 2) the interconnected flows of money, transportation, and communication central to modern industrial societies; and 3) the political and social theory that lay behind Ford's projects and which became more explicit in his later years.

These documents were carefully transcribed and are mostly presented "as is," in order to allow the expression of Ford's unique style and lexicon. We only corrected obvious spelling errors and harmonized the punctuation (quotation marks, dashes, hyphens, etc.) and the overall presentation (line spacing, numbering, headings, etc.) in order to improve the readability of the documents. We also added dozens of explanatory notes that help to contextualize the content of the documents, identify Ford's sources, and bring things "into relation," in line with Ford's own intellectual habit. As the Portable Document Format (PDF) of all original files are included in this collection, making these minor adjustments seemed the appropriate editorial approach. We encourage readers to examine the PDFs, which present many interesting details, including letterheads, illustrations, and colors that situate them more precisely in their historical moment.

In order to better understand this material, this introductory chapter will first turn to the existing historiography. Who has written about Ford? And to say what? This survey will allow us to put into perspective the various issues raised by (or related to) Ford and his work. We then offer a detailed biographical sketch, with specific attention to Ford's social, intellectual and historical context, and

proceed to give readers an initial overview of the themes they will find in the collection. This introduction concludes with insights that emerged from close reading of our archive and the content of this collection, including Ford's eclectic intellectual lineages and role in linking proto-pragmatism with what has now become the canonical way in which media and communication scholars understand pragmatism and the Chicago School of social thought.

Historiographical Knots

The *Thought News* episode is undoubtedly the gravitational center around which the existing literature on Ford revolves. What could be more understandable, when big parts of what is known about Ford come from Dewey scholars, interested in this peculiar episode in Dewey's youth?

Morton White's *Origin of Dewey's Instrumentalism*, published in 1942, is possibly the first scholarly account of the *Thought News* episode. White writes that a letter in which Dewey describes his encounter with Ford "presages Dewey's break with idealism" and announced an early version of the pragmatist theory of truth. Hence, according to White, "the work of Ford is fascinating not only in its own right but all the more so because of its impact on Dewey."[6]

Willinda Savage, likewise treating *Thought News* as a key moment in Dewey's early intellectual development and interest in communication, describes the controversy caused by the project in great detail. She also reproduced a letter sent to her by Dewey, reflecting back on *Thought News* sixty years later: "No issue was made; it was an overenthusiastic project. . . . [T]he *idea* was advanced for those days, but it was too advanced for the maturity of those who had the idea in mind."[7] In line with White and Savage's argument, Dewey scholars from the 1950s and 1960s commonly consider *Thought News* as a pivotal point in Dewey's philosophical trajectory.[8]

Among these, sociologist Lewis Feuer interestingly emphasizes the political dimension of *Thought News*. He describes the group that coalesced around Dewey as "leftist," and Ford as their "prophet." As a result, Feuer underlines the religious and revolutionary underpinnings of *Thought News*, described as a "socially messianic newspaper" and "an instrument for realizing socialism."[9] Pointing to Ford's dismissal of the ruling class, Feuer's analysis remains unique in the historiography. It has been praised for pointing to a crucial episode in Dewey's trajectory, or dismissed for its "rather simplistic description of Dewey as a 'socialistic mystic.' "[10] Earl James Weaver's 1963 unpublished PhD dissertation offers a detailed analysis of the Ford brothers' intellectual influences, among them Auguste Comte, Henry

[6] Morton G. White, *The Origin of Dewey's Instrumentalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 101–2.

[7] John Dewey's letter quoted in Willinda Savage, "John Dewey and Thought News at the University of Michigan," *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review* 56 (1950): 204–9, on 209.

[8] See John Blewett, "Democracy as Religion: Unity in Human Relations," in *John Dewey: His Thought and Influence Influence*, ed. John Blewett, 33–58 (New York: Fordham University Press, 1960); George Dykhuizen, "John Dewey at the University of Michigan," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23, no. 4 (1962): 513–64; and Neil Coughlan, *Young John Dewey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

[9] Lewis Feuer, "John Dewey and the Back to the People Movement in American Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20, no. 4 (1959): 545–68, on 549–50.

George, and Lester Frank Ward, as well as a cross-reading of the 1890s writings of brothers Corydon and Franklin Ford, John Dewey, and William James. Pointing to a broad range of converging themes and arguments, Weaver argues that "the influence of the Fords on Dewey was evident in almost everything he did or wrote from about 1890 on."[10] That includes Dewey's pedagogical shift, beginning in 1889, from core philosophy courses (on Plato, Hegel, etc.) to courses on methods, ethics, and political philosophy, as well as his final departure from the University of Michigan in 1894, which is said to have partly resulted from the embarrassment and tensions prompted by *Thought News*.

[10] Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 214.

[10] Earl James Weaver, "John Dewey: A Spokesman for Progressive Liberalism" (PhD diss., Brown University, 1963), 66.

Later book-length studies continued to dig deeper into the intellectual history around Dewey.[11] Among these early 1990s works, Steven C. Rockefeller's analysis stands out as one of the most detailed accounts of Dewey's embroilment with Ford's ideas. Rockefeller argues that Dewey was trying to harmonize his philosophic method—then still close to Hegel's idealism—with a scientific approach, and that Ford provided a practical solution. Rockefeller carefully situates most of Dewey's intellectual production of the late 1880s and early 1890s in direct connection with this aim and with the *Thought News* project. Dewey's work on logic, ethics, poetry, and even his classes would bear the imprimatur of Ford's style and ideas, and lead Dewey to write "prophetically in grand historical terms."[12] Then at the apex of his neo-Hegelian period, Dewey argued that the old divisions of science and spiritual values, knowledge and practice, were overcome by history. "The secret of this movement," Dewey wrote, is "a single, comprehensive, and organizing unity."[13] Rockefeller makes a similar argument regarding the work of Fred Newton Scott, as his 1892 lecture on "Christianity and the Newspaper" pleaded for the newspaper reform envisioned by Ford. Scott argued that such a reformed newspaper could be "the voice of the real, the living Christ."[14]

[11] See Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Andrew Feffer, *Chicago Pragmatists and American Progressivism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Steven C. Rockefeller, *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); and Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[12] Rockefeller, *John Dewey*, 177.

[13] John Dewey, quoted in Rockefeller, *John Dewey*, 178.

[14] Fred Newton Scott, quoted in Rockefeller, *John Dewey*, 189.

It is also in Dewey's shadow that Ford entered the field of communication—notably in efforts to refine and sometimes redefine the field's intellectual history and genealogy. Ford's admission into the history of communication research was orchestrated by none other than James W. Carey, in his 1970s attempt to rediscover the "Chicago School" tradition.[15] Carey was then invested in a campaign of disciplinary reformulation, which profoundly shook communication research. Imported by Carey from more prestigious neighboring fields, the Chicago School storyline made its way into disciplinary memory, and so did Chicago-inspired research.[17]

[15] Carey's attempt to revive the Chicago School tradition was part of a larger movement cutting across American social sciences and humanities. Among notable works of the era that contributed to the rediscovery and revival of the Chicago School, see Jean B. Quandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970); Fred H. Matthews, *Quest for an American Sociology: Robert E. Park and the Chicago School* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977); and Winifred Raushenbush, *Robert E. Park: Biography of a Sociologist* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1979).

In 1976, an unpublished paper authored by Carey and his PhD student Norman Sims tracked down the *Thought News* episode and stitched together a biographical profile of Ford based on primary and

secondary sources.[18] This essay is one of the first to cite Ford's *Draft of Action* extensively, alongside some of Ford's other little-known opuscules. It also attributes to Ford some publications under his full Christian name, William F. Ford, which Ford used until the late 1870s.

In Carey and Sims's account, Ford epitomizes a "scientific" approach to journalism that aims to rationalize and centralize fact-gathering at the national level, thanks to the telegraph and telephone. They opposed Ford's view to a literary model, emphasizing "the integrity of feelings, personal observations and opinions, and an essentially local and individualistic organization of society."[19] According to Carey and Sims, Ford exerted a key influence on John Dewey, Robert Ezra Park, and the "Chicago School" in the 1920s and 1930s, to the extent that the Chicago School became a synthesis between the "scientific" and the "literary" views. "Ford's writings introduced a temper of thought that had a vast and direct influence on the only group of American scholars to take the newspaper seriously, the Chicago School of Social Thought."[20] Such direct influence is manifest, Carey and Sims added, in Dewey's *The Public and its Problems* (1927), which "restated Ford's main ideas" with the addition of "a concern for the integrity of communities and neighborhoods that was more characteristic of the literary perspective."[21] Ford's touch is also to be found in Park's classical article "The Natural History of the Newspaper," in which Carey and Sims saw echoes of Ford's earlier reference to the "natural history" of governments, among other things.[22]

This early rendering of Ford and the Chicago School is quite different from Carey's later analysis.[23] In a series of subsequent essays, Carey abandoned his earlier characterization of the Chicago School as a synthesis between a scientific and a literary model, and clearly associated the Chicago School with the literary tradition alone.[24] The scientific approach would then be epitomized by Walter Lippmann, with Dewey and the Chicago School positioned as his rivals.

Although the exact contours of the Chicago School and Ford's role in it took on different guises as Carey told an evolving story, *Thought News* remained a stable cornerstone. Carey considered that *Thought News* was nothing less than the founding event of American communication research:

> American research and scholarship on communication began as a cumulative tradition in the late 1880s when five people came together in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Two were young faculty—John Dewey and George Herbert Mead—and two were students at the time—Robert Park and Charles Cooley. The final element of the pentad was an itinerant American journalist by the name of Franklin Ford, who shared

[17] Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, "The Chicago School of Sociology and Mass Communication Research," in *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies: Media History and the Foundations of Media Studies*, ed. John Nerone, 554–77 (London: Blackwell, 2013); Jefferson Pooley, *James W. Carey and Communication Research: Reputation at the University's Margins* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016).

[18] James W. Carey and Norman Sims, "The Telegraph and the News Report" (paper, Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism, College Park, MD, August 1976). According to their bibliography, Carey and Sims based their analysis on six documents authored by Ford, spanning from 1874 to 1903.

[19] Carey and Sims, "The Telegraph," 4.

[20] Carey and Sims, "The Telegraph," 5.

[21] Carey and Sims, "The Telegraph," 29–30.

[22] Carey and Sims, "The Telegraph," 32.

[23] Pooley, *James W. Carey*.

[24] James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); James W. Carey, "The Chicago School and Mass Communication Research," in *American Communication Research: The Remembered History*, ed. Everette E. Dennis and Ellen Ann Wartella, 21–38 (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996).

> with Dewey—indeed, cultivated in him—the belief that "a proper daily newspaper would be the only possible social science."[25]

In a slightly different narrative, Carey also recast the same characters in a story of the origins of American sociology and modern journalism:

> Systematic American Sociology and modern journalism were, to a certain extent, twin born. When John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, and Robert Park were joined in Ann Arbor in the 1880s by a curious itinerant journalist, Franklin Ford, modern sociology and the desire for a scientific, objective journalism began an implicit and reflexive development.[26]

Following up on Carey and Sims, Zena Beth McGlashan, then a graduate student at the University of Iowa (where Carey was named professor in 1976), contributed two pieces about *Thought News*.[27] Her analysis pointed to the crucial influence of the episode on both John Dewey and Robert Park, as well as to its premonitory dimension, writing that "Ford was anticipating polling service, corporate and governmental information officers, a complex specialized press—all elements which contribute to what is called today 'the communication explosion.' "[28] Published shortly after, Daniel Czitrom's *Media and the American Mind*, which took up key aspects of Carey's narrative,[29] focused on Ford's influence over the Ann Arbor group and offered a detailed overview of Ford's *Draft of Action*. It also emphasized Ford's eccentricity, describing him as a "quixotic man,"[30] in line with prior renderings but departing significantly from Carey and Sims, who soberly described Ford as an "economic journalist."[31]

John Durham Peters also contributed a substantial analysis of the *Thought News* episode, which situated the initiative as an early manifestation of the progressive fascination with expertise.[32] Peters positioned *Thought News* in the intellectual lineage of Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte, though without their elitism, and in parallel with the work of French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, who also imagined a revolutionary newspaper in the early 1890s. In Peters's analysis, the key feature of *Thought News* was to provide society with an accurate image of itself, realizing what Spencer dubbed the "coherent heterogeneity of society" and Comte the "positivist age." Central to the project was "the wish to socialize the means of intellectual production to make each citizen, as it were, social scientists."[33] More recently, Peters described *Thought News* as a "daily updated encyclopedia,"[34] an interesting line of analysis which nevertheless neglects the odd periodicity of the publication, which was to "appear as often as the material at hand warrants" and had been mocked at the time for that reason.[35] Peters underlined Ford's strange personality,

[25] James W. Carey, "Culture, Geography, and Communications: The Work of Harold Innis in an American Context," in *Culture, Communication and Dependency*, ed. William H. Melody, Liora Salter, and Paul Heyer, 73–91 (Norwood: Ablex Publishing, 1981), on 74. The quote was later republished in Carey, "Communication," 110.

[26] James W. Carey, "Review: *The Discovery of Objectivity*," *American Journal of Sociology* 87, no. 5 (1982): 1182–88, on 1182.

[27] Zena Beth McGlashan, "John Dewey and News," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 2, no. 1 (1976): 3–14; McGlashan, "The Professor."

[28] McGlashan, "The Professor," 111.

[29] Jefferson Pooley, "Daniel Czitrom, James W. Carey, and the Chicago School," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, no. 5 (2007): 469–72.

[30] Czitrom, *Media*, 104.

[31] Carey and Sims, "The Telegraph," 5.

[32] John Durham Peters, "Reconstructing Mass Communication Theory" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1986); John Durham Peters, "Satan and Savior: Mass Communication in Progressive Thought," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6, no. 3 (1989): 247–63.

[33] Peters, "Satan," 252.

[34] Kenneth Cmiel and John Durham Peters, *Promiscuous Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 47.

[35] *Detroit Tribune,* April 10, 1892.

describing him as "a sort of crackpot journalist-philosopher," but he also insisted on situating Ford in the intellectual context of the era.[36]

Starting in the mid-1990s, mentions of Ford and *Thought News* became more frequent, as the episode seemed to become part of the field's remembered past. Ford and *Thought News* found their way into widely read books, such as Dan Schiller's *Theorizing Communication* and Wilbur Schramm's posthumously published memoirs.[37] Schiller carefully positions Ford's concept of "intelligence" in the intellectual and political context of the *fin de siècle* era and suggests interesting parallels with Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward,* published in 1888. Schramm describes *Thought News* as a newspaper reporting changes in public opinion that anticipated by thirty years the development of polling and survey research. In Schramm's slightly revised narrative of the history of communication research, Ford strategically plays the role of a "forefather" of the field's "four founding fathers" (Harold Lasswell, Paul Lazarsfeld, Kurt Lewin, and Carl Hovland).

Among notable recent works, Andrej Pinter further develops Peters's 1989 argument regarding the connection with the ideas of Gabriel Tarde, and also emphasizes the parallel with the work of Albert Shäffle.[38] While both favored an organicist theory of society in which the press had to play a regulating role, Tarde would have exerted a direct influence on the project, while the contribution of Schäffle's ideas remained uncertain.[39] Jeremiah Dyehouse, for his part, draws attention to the role played by Fred Newton Scott, a professor of English at the University of Michigan, in the *Thought News* adventure, and insists on the preoccupation with "good writing" (as a contribution to the social organism) that was shared by Scott and Dewey.[40]

Despite the relatively abundant secondary literature, Ford remains paradoxically shrouded in mystery. The dominant focus on the *Thought News* episode and, within it, on the relationship between Ford and Dewey, paints Ford into an uncomfortable corner, playing the role of a secondary character that only mattered through his alleged influence on Dewey. But there is more to Ford than that—which our research and the texts included in this collection aim to show.

In doing so, the collection reaffirms the need for and pertinence of an archival-based approach to the intellectual history of media and communication research.[41] While historical narratives about the history of the field are often motivated by complex disciplinary and epistemological politics, primary sources have the important function to help keep in touch with the *terra firma* of the historical record. If we do not fully share Franklin Ford's somewhat naive conception of "primary facts" and enthusiasm for their centralization, we want to

[36] Peters, "Satan," 253.

[37] Dan Schiller, *Theorizing Communication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Wilbur Schramm, *The Beginnings of Communication Studies in America* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997).

[38] Andrej Pinter, "Thought News a Quest for Democratic Communication Technology," *Javnost—The Public* 10, no. 2 (2003): 93–104.

[39] Considering that Ford and Dewey met in 1888, that Tarde's *Les lois de l'imitation* was only published in 1890 (and translated in English in 1903), and also that both Dewey and Robert Park were later critical of Tarde, Lana Rakow concludes that direct influence of Tarde on the project is unlikely. See Lana F. Rakow, *John Dewey: A Critical Introduction to Media and Communication Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003): 77–78. Ford would later refer to Tarde's work, writing that he was acting "consciously on Tarde's vision." See David H. Burton, *Progressive Masks: Letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., and Franklin Ford* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1982), 45.

[40] Jeremiah Dyehouse, "Theory in the Archives; Fred Newton Scott and John Dewey on Writing the Social Organism," *College English* 76, no. 4 (2004): 248–68.

[41] Jefferson Pooley, "The New History of Mass Communication Research," in *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories*, ed. David Park and Jefferson Pooley, 43–69 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

contribute to the ongoing professionalization and sophistication of the field's historiography by providing easy access to (and a first assessment of) historical documents whose full interpretation remains an open-ended process.

Among the many interesting works about Ford, one stands out and serves as an inspiration for this project. Historian David H. Burton carefully edited and published the correspondence of Franklin Ford and Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.[42] The two regularly exchanged letters from 1907 to 1918, and Ford often discussed his projects and elaborated his theories in letters longer than ten pages, single-spaced. The letters not only highlighted Ford's little-known activities after *Thought News*—pointing to an array of other correspondents, intellectual influences, and unknown publications—but also helped to support the thesis that Ford belonged to the pragmatist constellation, of which Holmes was one the brightest stars.[43]

[42] Burton, *Progressive Masks.* See also David H. Burton, "The Curious Correspondence of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes and Franklin Ford," *The New England Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1980): 196–211.

[43] Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001); Robert Danisch, *Pragmatism, Democracy, and the Necessity of Rhetoric* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

In the balance of this introduction, we first sketch a biographical portrait that steers away from the "scoundrel" or "crackpot journalist-philosopher" portrayals. Our material shows that Ford was undoubtedly an original character, to say the least, but also that he was taken seriously by his contemporaries and that his views were considered and appreciated by many scholars, journalists, politicians, and businessmen. By adding elements to what is already known of Ford's life trajectory, we contextualize his arrival at Ann Arbor in 1888 in the entourage of John Dewey and in light of his social and professional networks and lifelong entanglement with media and communication problems. By situating Ford in his historical, intellectual, social, and political context, we show how the cast of this story is not limited to the Ford–Dewey duet: It is a complex assemblage which many people and ideas forged "into relation." We have tried to give life to this collective portrait, which is inevitably incomplete. We then offer an overview of the material of this collection, and show how the texts authored by Ford that we have included revolve around three interconnected problems: news and journalism, information flows more broadly (including finance and transportation), and political theory. Finally, we further develop insights that emerged from our close reading of the Ford archive, in order to add some nuance to the existing takes on the place of Ford in media and communication scholarship. We specifically seek to assess Ford's place within pragmatism and thereby revisit the *Thought News* episode as an example of pragmatic inquiry.

Franklin Ford "Into Relation": A Biographical Sketch

Franklin Ford was born in 1849 in Dundee, Michigan, to Valorus D. Ford, a millwright and pattern maker, and Eliza Bell, who was born in the north of Ireland. He was the eldest of four children: Franklin, Robert, Sheridan, and Corydon. The four brothers would each have a career in journalism while Corydon—who for a time was closely associated with Franklin's journalistic projects—was also a physician. Corydon later practiced among copper miners in northern Michigan and was deeply involved in Ruskin utopian socialism as the editor of the most prominent Ruskin paper, the *Coming Nation*.[44] Very little is known about Ford's childhood, formal education, or early career. While still in Dundee, he developed a close relationship with his grandfather Bell, a machinist, inventor, and owner of Dundee's water works, and possibly began working for Detroit newspapers as a stringer. He then worked for the *Baltimore Gazette*, the *Philadelphia Record*, and the *New York Sun* before taking up the editorship of *Bradstreet's Journal of Trade, Finance, and Public Economy* in 1880. Ford was thirty-one. His editorship lasted seven years, helped to establish his reputation as a journalist, and undoubtedly marked a turning point in his career.

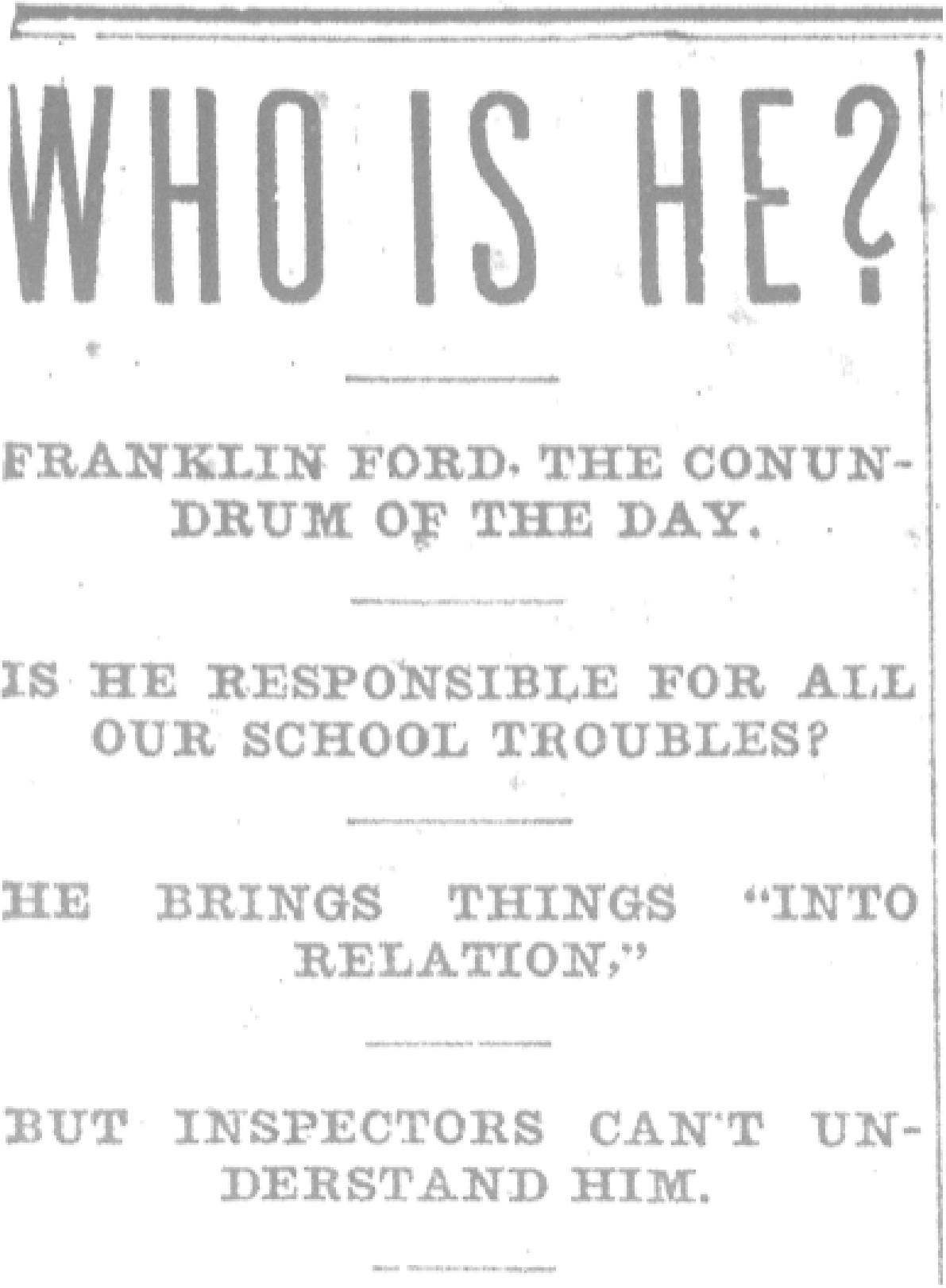
[44] Corydon Ford became the editor of the *Coming Nation* in 1901 and was also associated with *Appeal to Reason*, another prominent socialist paper.

In his late twenties and early thirties—even before he started his tenure as editor of *Bradstreet's*—Ford was involved in public speaking and was an active participant in political and intellectual life. In the mid-1870s, Ford was involved in a reformist group, the Workingmen's Industrial Political Association, where he served on the association's "Committee for Political Organization" and presided over meetings of the association at the Masonic Hall.[45]

[45] "The Workingmen's Assembly," *New York Daily Herald*, January 30, 1874; "The Industrial Political Association," *New York Times*, March 1, 1874.

Ford's subsequent interventions in public affairs turned to municipal finance, which became one of his long-lasting topics of interest. In 1879, his work on municipal finance was presented before the Philadelphia Social Science Organization and the New York Municipal Society, as well as at the meetings of the American Social Science Association in Saratoga Springs, New York. The thirty-page paper he read at the New York Municipal Society on April 7, 1879, was deemed interesting enough by the society to be printed and placed in circulation. In 1881, Ford presented a second paper, titled "Some Points in Municipal Finance," at the meeting of the American Social Science Association. A brief report of the meeting published in the *New York Times* opens and leads with Ford's contribution, presenting a detailed summary of his paper—whereas Alexander Graham Bell's address about his work with the deaf only earns a couple of lines in the middle of the article.[46]

[46] "Social Science Themes," *New York Times*, September 10, 1881.



WHO IS HE?

FRANKLIN FORD, THE CONUNDRUM OF THE DAY.

IS HE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL OUR SCHOOL TROUBLES?

HE BRINGS THINGS "INTO RELATION,"

BUT INSPECTORS CAN'T UNDERSTAND HIM.

Excerpt from The Evening News *(Detroit), December 24, 1896*



The Bradstreet's building, in Moses King's Handbook of New York City *(Boston: M. King, 1893), 816.*

From 1880 to 1887, Ford served as the *Bradstreet's* editor. Credit reporting agencies such as Bradstreet were the first large-scale national information service providers in the US.[47] The firm relied on the telegraph and the typewriter—mostly considered a curiosity at the time—to process data through their "system." The Bradstreet agency made pioneering use of media technologies, such as carbon paper, and of advances in the lithographic process. Reporting could be supported by a massive archive, which counted about four million reports by the mid-1880s, all accessible within two minutes.

During Ford's editorship, financial publications were booming and economic journalism was transitioning into a more specialized activity.[48] As a credit agency, Bradstreet had its own model: "Reporting" was mostly conducted through the branches of the agency, which counted about twelve hundred full-time employees and sixty-five thousand collaborators. In this sense, the making of the journal was truly a distributed and collective activity. It was the product of a "system," to use the agency's favorite buzzword. Ford was deeply interested in the new technologies of the era and in their application to journalism. He dubbed *Bradstreet's* his "newspaper laboratory"[49] and sought to experiment with new ideas pointing in the direction of a more systematic and scientific approach. Ford courted several experts and scientists to write for *Bradstreet's*, which was also eager to open its page to statisticians.[50] Contrary to other trade journals of the era, *Bradstreet's* did not publish prices, but aimed to seek "after the influences which make prices—the primary facts existing in relation to trade and finance."[51] Reporting on the crop of corn, cotton, tobacco, and other products was considered crucial since the crop constituted the "primary fact" behind the prices. In the same vein, *Bradstreet's* "legal decision column" aimed to deliver "primary facts," as it provided an overview of recent legal decisions that could affect price-making and businesses.

During his tenure at *Bradstreet's*, Ford's expert opinion was regularly solicited on a variety of topics. In 1882, he testified before a New York State Senate committee on speculation at the New York Produce Exchange. He also was a guest lecturer on municipal affairs at the University of Michigan in 1883. The practical bearing of his study of municipal affairs was, then, to draw a "scientific line between the city and the state."[52] Ford's 1883 leaflet[53] analyzed the question and recommended giving greater executive power to the mayor and power of taxation to the city council. In 1886, he was invited by William Russel Grace, then mayor of New York City, to join a committee slated to present recommendations to the New York State Constitutional Convention to broaden municipal autonomy.

[47] Josh Lauer, *Creditworthy: A History of Consumer Surveillance and Financial Identity in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

[48] Wayne Parsons, *The Power of the Financial Press* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

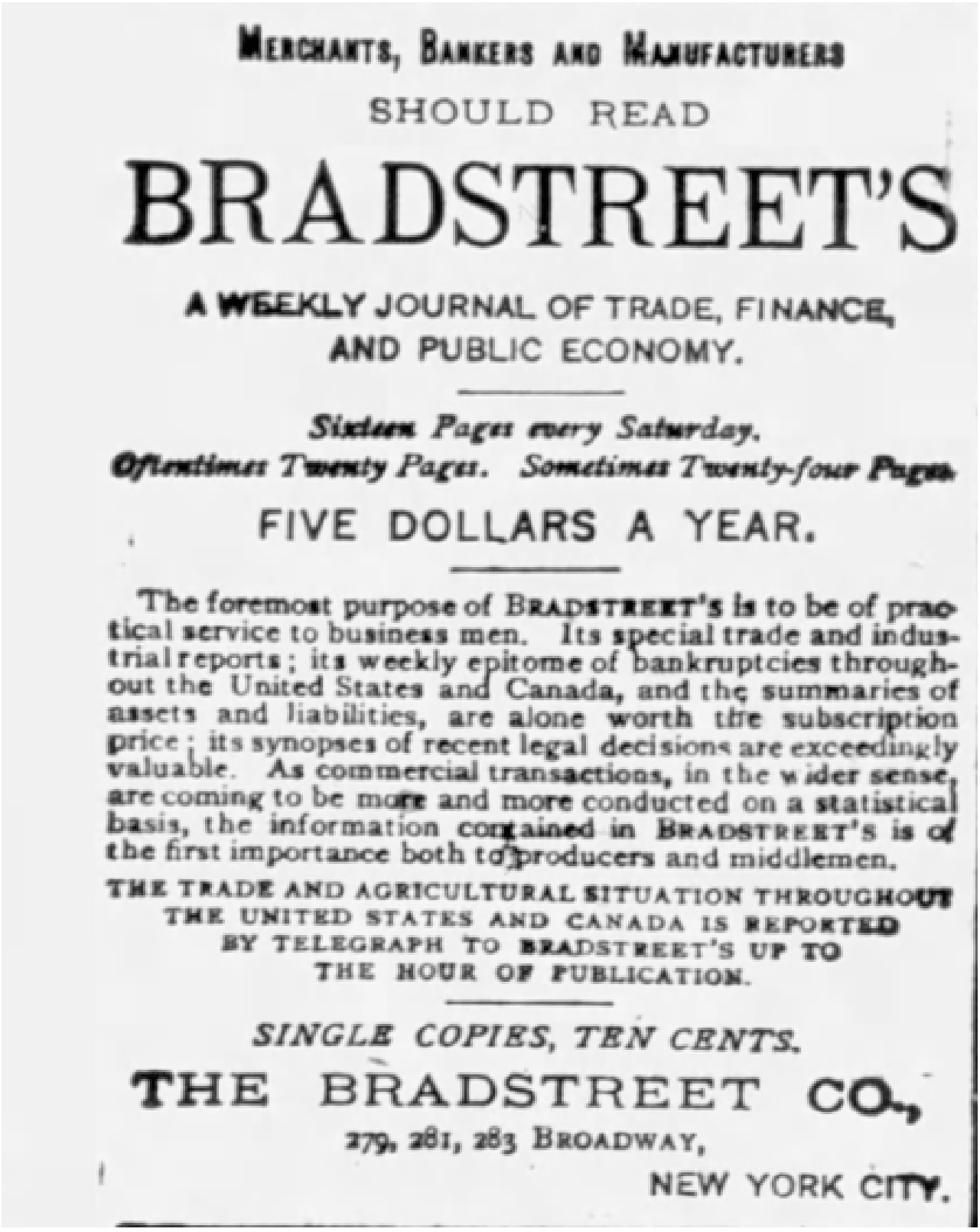
[49] Franklin Ford to James B. Angell, April 13, 1887 ("A Newspaper Laboratory").

[50] Among others, Ford solicited university professors Woodrow Wilson, James Burrill Angell, and Thomas M. Cooley, and economist Edward Atkinson. Ford himself was sometimes presented as a "statistician." See "A High Authority on Wheat," *The Mail* (Stockton, CA), November 20, 1880.

[51] Clark W. Bryan, *Credit: Its Meaning and Moment* (New York: Bradstreet Press, 1883), 24.

[52] Franklin Ford to Thomas McIntyre Cooley, November 26, 1883.

[53] Franklin Ford, *Mayor Edson's Charter and the Democratic Principe* (New York: Bradstreet Press, 1883).



Ad for Bradstreet's Journal*, published in the* Daily Chronicle *(Knoxville, Tennessee), March 5, 1885.*

By the mid-1880s, Ford's focus had turned to matters related to the press and journalism. At the time, he planned to convince the president of Bradstreet, Charles F. Clark, to reorganize its publishing operations according to his views. The scheme included supplying "leading country papers with the city fact" and the launch of three "class" papers: *Food*, *Metal*, and *Textiles*.[54] For unknown reasons, these projects did not materialize at Bradstreet and, by early 1887, Ford was trying to implement a similar scheme on his own, touring the "chief intelligence centres" of the country. In a letter to Herbert Baxter Adams, then professor of history at Johns Hopkins, he shared his plan to visit Montreal, Toronto, Buffalo, Rochester, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, St. Paul, Louisville, Cincinnati, Nashville, Memphis, Galveston, New Orleans, Atlanta, and Richmond.[55] Three months later, writing to Edward Atkinson from New Orleans, Ford recounted his visit to Chicago by way of St. Paul, Omaha, Cheyenne, Denver, Leadville, Kansas City, St. Louis, Memphis, and Nashville, and planned to continue on to Galveston and then New York by way of Birmingham, Atlanta, Savannah, and Charleston.[56] Ford claimed to have succeeded in convincing local newspapers to form a syndicate connected to his office-to-be in New York.

[54] Franklin Ford to Edward Atkinson, October 13, 1886.

[55] Franklin Ford to Herbert Baxter Adams, January 28, 1887.

[56] Franklin Ford to Edward Atkinson, April 13, 1887 ("Banding Together the Leading Newspapers").

A couple of months later, in the spring of 1887, Ford successfully teamed up with three associates to launch Ford's Special News, which aimed at furnishing newspapers with reports on topics "not covered by the ordinary newspaper syndicates."[57] He also planned to create an investigation department to report on corporations—a business "not wholly unlike *Bradstreet's*."[58] The quartet behind Ford's Special News had an impressive background. Lindley Vinton was the heir of a rich Indianapolis family who studied at Amherst College, the University of Berlin, and Columbia Law School. He would later have a successful career as a lawyer in New York. Walter Hines Page was an established journalist, founder of the *State Chronicle* in Raleigh, North Carolina, who had been associated with the *New York World* and *Evening Post*. He would later serve as the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* (1896–1899) and as US ambassador to Britain under Woodrow Wilson. The last member of the group was Frank West Rollins, a graduate from MIT and Harvard Law School who would later be elected governor of New Hampshire. Still, Ford's Special News folded a couple of weeks into its operation, as Ford "suffered a serious mental attack" and accused his partners of stealing his ideas.[59] In a letter, Ford recounted a "fight" that prevented the plan with Page, Rollins, and Vinton from going through.[60]

[57] *Indianapolis Journal*, September 11, 1887.

[58] Franklin Ford to Edward Atkinson, October 11, 1887.

[59] "The Classes," *Amherst Graduates' Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1944): 258.

[60] Franklin Ford to Edward Atkinson, October 11, 1887.

It seems that Ford briefly tried to operate the trust (re-baptized Ford's News) on his own, but he was soon to depart on a second tour

of the "centers"—this time conceived as universities. In the spring of 1888, over four months, Ford visited philosophers and political scientists at Columbia, Harvard, Yale, Johns Hopkins, and finally, the University of Michigan, where the *Thought News* project took shape over the next four years.

Ford claimed to have met Dewey in the spring of 1888, but the details surrounding this first meeting are not known. Dewey resigned from the University of Michigan in the same period (March 1888) to accept a position at the University of Minnesota. He spent most of the 1888–1889 academic year in Minnesota, before returning to Ann Arbor the next spring. Dewey's absence from Ann Arbor in 1888–1889 suggests that Ford had other partners that first year. Since the episode was mostly chronicled through the lens of the Ford–Dewey duet, we want to emphasize the role played by other people and the specific context surrounding the *Thought News* project. The "Ann Arbor group" is much wider than originally described by James Carey, and its porous boundaries cover the connected worlds of the institutional life of the University of Michigan, local journalism and publishing, and the broader Ann Arbor community.

In Ann Arbor, Ford found himself in familiar territory. The University of Michigan is located only twenty-five miles north of his hometown of Dundee. Ford's uncle, Corydon La Ford, was a renowned professor of anatomy at the university, where he taught until his death in 1894. Ford's younger brother, also named Corydon, attended medical school in Ann Arbor and was involved in many campus controversies. After completing his degree in Minnesota, Corydon Ford was soon back at Michigan to help with *Thought News*. Dewey's correspondence during the *Thought News* project often mentions both Ford brothers, and it is obvious that Corydon's radicalism played a part in the project.

Besides his close family, Ford arrived at Michigan with an address book full of friends and acquaintances. Thomas McIntyre Cooley, the long-time dean of the university's law school and father of sociologist Charles Horton Cooley, was an old friend of Ford's. Cooley had previously written legal columns for *Bradstreet's* and had invited Ford, in 1883, to give two lectures at the university. Ford was also acquainted with James Burrill Angell, the university's president and a former journalist, with whom he discussed his project in great detail as early as February 1887, at least one year before he first met Dewey. Ford was also well-connected to local journalists, editors, and public figures. Dewey's correspondence alluded to Ford's prominent Michigan friends, such as Judge Edgar O. Durfee and Colonel William Ludlow.[61] During the *Thought News* years, the group worked hard on making connections with a variety of people. Participants solicited

[61] John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey, June 19, 1891.

by Dewey include journalist and scholar Joseph Villiers Denney, United States Commissioner of Education William Torrey Harris, and Edward C. Hegeler, publisher of *The Monist*.[62] Corydon Ford also invoked discussions with John V. Sheehan, an Ann Arbor publisher and bookseller, and faculty members Alfred Henry Lloyd and Henry Carter Adams.[63]

Among the familiar figures associated with *Thought News*, Charles Horton Cooley's role is the most mysterious. Cooley settled in Ann Arbor in January 1889 and took several classes with Dewey, but soon interrupted his studies to work in Washington. At the time, Cooley, an avid reader of Herbert Spencer, was mainly interested in the railway and its social significance. By 1892, Cooley was back at Ann Arbor as an instructor in political economy. He then offered an answer to Spencer's famous assertion that society has no "sensorium," writing in his journal that he had found the social sensorium in the newspaper.[64] This idea also figured in Ford's 1892 *Draft of Action*, which refers to "Herbert Spencer's hunt for the sensorium." Cooley's 1894 dissertation, "The Theory of Transportation," can be summarized as an attempt "to see transportation and communication as an organic whole."[65] It provided one of the first overarching approaches to communication as the sources of selves and society.[66] The dissertation also attests to the rich intellectual cross-fertilization within the group. How to centralize and organize transportation, how to organize science through communication, and how to better disseminate information in society ("publicity is not attained until facts are not only connected but communicated")[67] are among the many Fordian themes touched by Cooley (or Cooleyan themes also important to Ford).

After studying at the University of Berlin for three years, George Herbert Mead arrived in Ann Arbor in the fall of 1891 as an instructor of philosophy and was soon fully invested in *Thought News*. In February 1892, Mead sent twenty-five copies of a circular presenting *Thought News* to his brother-in-law, journalist Henry Northrup Castle, and urged people to subscribe to the new journal. In typical Fordian fashion, Mead described to Castle the underlying assumptions behind *Thought News*, writing that "the conditions are free enough now so that the organic intelligence of America can express itself articulately as it has already dynamically in the locomotive and the telegraph."[68] Detailing how Ford had "wrestled wholly minded with the fact of organized intelligence—the meaning of Hegel—and the fact has succeeded in registering itself upon him," Mead was glowing about *Thought News*. "The thing," he wrote, "is only the greatest that the world has ever seen. It is the sudden conscious recognition in an

[62] The copy of *Draft of Action* kept at Brown University Library bears the inscription "Presented to WTH [William Torrey Harris] by Prof. John Dewey." See also John Dewey to E. C. Hegeler, November 20, 1890 and January 12, 1891; and John Dewey to J. Villiers Denney, February 8, 1892.

[63] Corydon Ford, *The Child of Democracy* (Ann Arbor: J. V. Sheehan, 1894).

[64] Jean B. Quandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970).

[65] Edward C. Jandy, *Charles Horton Cooley: His Life and His Social Theory* (New York: Dryden Press, 1942), 55.

[66] Peter Simonson, "Varieties of Pragmatism and Communication: Visions and Revisions From Peirce to Peters," in *American Pragmatism and Communication Research*, ed. David K. Perry, 1–26 (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001).

[67] Charles H. Cooley, *The Theory of Transportation* (Baltimore: American Economic Association, 1894), 142.

[68] Gary A. Cook, *George Herbert Mead: The Making of a Social Pragmatist* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 30.

integral unit of society that he and all exist only as the expression of the universal self."[69]

In 1892, on his way to South Dakota, Robert Park stopped in Detroit, where he heard that Dewey was launching a new type of newspaper. He decided to go to Ann Arbor, where Dewey introduced him to Ford. According to Park's biographer, this stopover "changed the course of Park's life."[70] Park was charmed by Ford, who assigned him the responsibility to cover "the relation of art to life" for *Thought News*.[71] Park's letters to his wife-to-be Clara Cahill were very enthusiastic. He supported the project even after it was dropped by Dewey, sending Ford's *Draft of Action* and related articles to his wealthy stepfather, Michigan Supreme Court Judge Edward Cahill. Many of the concepts Park later developed can be understood in Ford's lineage, including his plea for a "natural history" of the newspaper, an approach indebted to Ford's ideas about the natural history of governments.[72]

Among the many people involved in the project whose role remained little-known, the case of Junius E. Beal is among the most interesting. Owner and editor of the *Ann Arbor Courier*, Beal was supposed to print *Thought News* on the *Courier*'s press.[73] In April 1892, when the project was taunted by the local press, the *Courier* republished a long article defending *Thought News* and explaining its aims.[74] Later, Beal's paper published the only piece detailing the reasons for abandoning the publication, stating that *Thought News* "ha[d] evidently perished from inanition" and that "it would have proven a heavy tax on the brains and purses of its backers."[75] Such explanation is consistent with that given later by Park, but differs from Dewey's reminiscence about a project that was "too advanced" for its time.[76] Park also mentioned that a first issue had been prepared but not distributed. "We got out the copy for the first issue of the 'Thought News,' but it was never published. It was set up and then pied. My share in paying for it was $15."[77]

An influential member of the Michigan State Editors Association, Beal was an early advocate of journalism education.[78] He had deep ties with the University of Michigan, where early initiatives in journalism education had taken place.[79] In early 1892, Beal organized the twenty-fourth annual meeting of the association at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Over three days, the connections between journalism and the university were explored at great length, and it seemed clear to all that these were set to further develop. Fred Newton Scott presented a paper on "How to Read a Newspaper," followed by local journalists, who addressed topics such as "What Journalism Offers to the University Graduate" and "The College Bred Newspaper Man." President Angell himself hosted a banquet for the

[69] Coughlan, *Young John Dewey*, 145.

[70] Winifred Raushenbush, *Robert E. Park: Biography of a Sociologist* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979), 18.

[71] Raushenbush, *Robert E. Park*, 21.

[72] Carey and Sims, "The Telegraph."

[73] "Thought News," *Ann Arbor Courier*, April 20, 1892.

[74] For an overview of the controversy and its treatment by the press, see Savage, "John Dewey"; and Westbrook, "John Dewey," 55–57.

[75] "Local Brevities," *Ann Arbor Courier*, May 13, 1892.

[76] John Dewey to Willinda Savage, May 30, 1949.

[77] Raushenbush, *Robert E. Park*, 20.

[78] Junius E. Beal, "College Graduates vs. Practical Printers as Editors," *Proceedings of the Michigan Press Association at the Twenty-First Annual Meeting* (Pontiac: Bill Poster, 1888), 33–36.

[79] In the spring of 1891, Fred Newton Scott began teaching "Rapid Writing," a course that included elements of newswriting, which stands among the myriad of short-lived, experimental journalism courses that emerged in US universities in the 1880s and 1890s.

members of the association. Proclaiming that "the editor is the most vital of men," his address drew from his own experience as editor of the *Providence Gazette*. "If I have had any success in my life," Angell proclaimed, "it is due to my experience while editing, for several years, a daily newspaper. It makes a man a hard worker."[80]

Only a couple of months before the planned *Thought News* launch date, the meeting showed the deep interconnections between the worlds of journalism and the university. Not only was the university poised to train professional journalists, but journalism, in turn, was positioned as a means to prepare for remarkable academic careers. In this respect, *Thought News* does not seem "too advanced," but rather nurtured by a highly favorable institutional and intellectual context—one which should be the object of greater scholarly attention.

Thought News was a thrilling political and intellectual project, one also infused with profound personal ties. Dewey's correspondence alluded to Ford as a close friend: Dewey's account of Ford's grand ideas to his wife, Alice Chipman Dewey, is interspersed with mundane anecdotes of both men taking walks by the river, swimming, or taking care of Dewey's cats.[81] Despite this evident warmth, it seems that the relationship ended rather bitterly.[82]

After the failure of *Thought News*, Ford relocated to Detroit. As he seemed to do in a quasi-compulsive way, he soon opened a new office. Ford's News Office succeeded Ford's Special News and Ford's News, and was advertised in the local press with claims that "under telephonic communication the scientific handling of news becomes possible."[83] He was also linked to a credit agency (The Credit Office) and continued as a public speaker, giving talks with titles such as "The Organization of Journalism" or "The Political Meaning of the Telephone."[84] In 1893, he published a piece titled "The Press of New York—Its Future" (included in this collection), which was simultaneously about the future of the press and the future of New York. Arguing that the telephone marked the culmination of progress initiated by the railroads and the telegraph, Ford envisioned a greater supply of news and a boost in profits for the newspapers. Observing that New York was located at the center of these communication networks, Ford wrote that "New York is the future Rome" of a world that was "Romeless."[85]

While in Detroit, Ford continued to associate with controversial projects. In 1896, he was one of the editors of *The Optimist*, a short-lived monthly publication linked to the Central Labor Union of Detroit, alongside his brother Sheridan, Detroit newspapermen Thad Stevens Varnum and Frank Cobb, and Thomas W. Lacey. "Very neat typographically" and "more a literary gem than a labor organ," *The Optimist* aroused a strong reaction in literary circles.[86] *The Clack* de-

[80] Theo E. Quinby, "Our Last Day in the Athens of Michigan," *Twenty-Fourth Annual Meeting and a Royal Outing in Southern Climes: Michigan State Press Association* (Howard City: B.J. Lowry, 1892), 8.

[81] John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey, June 10–14, 1891.

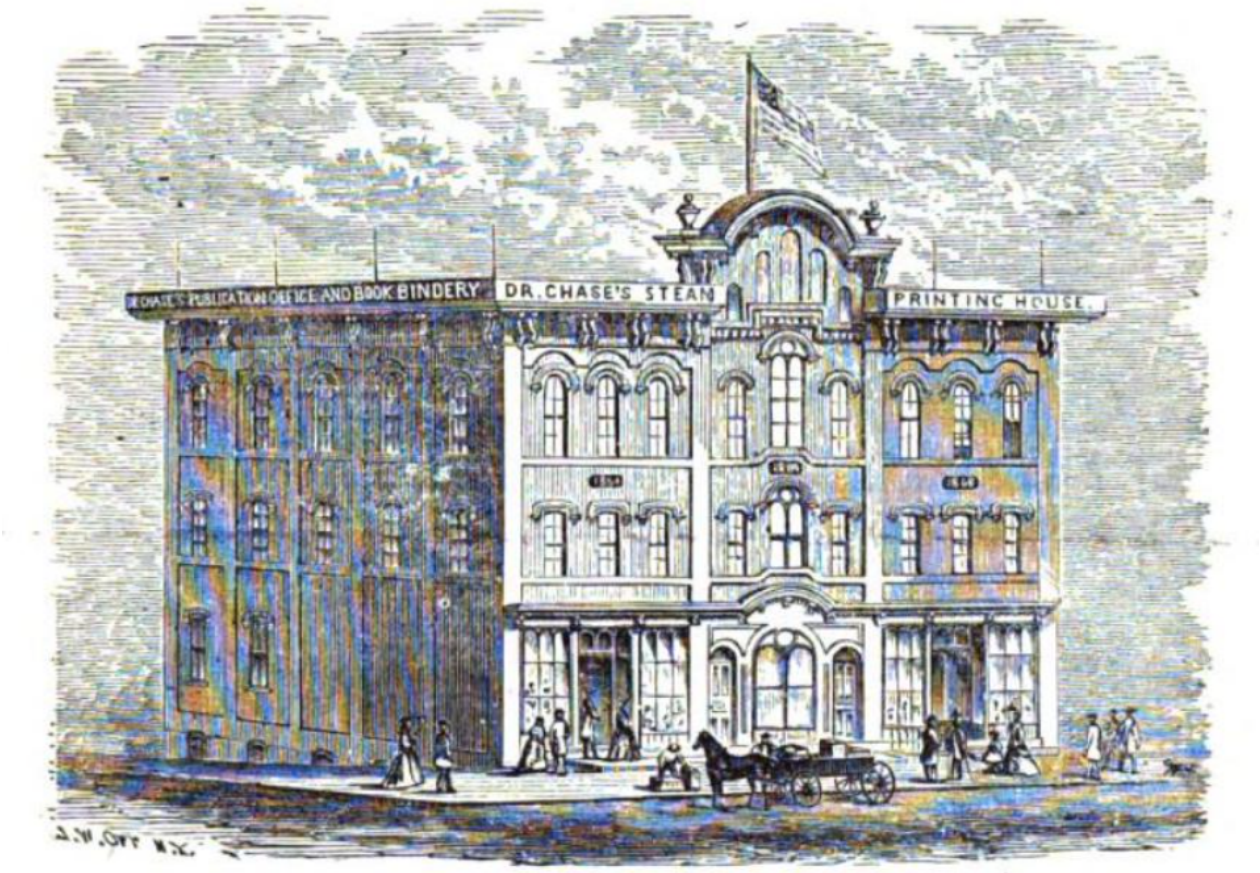
[82] In addition to Dewey's harsh comments mentioned earlier, Corydon Ford portrayed Dewey as an indecisive ally. "Clogged of the dead institution, he could not move; his salary meant that he was to keep quiet as to the overturning concepts." See Ford, *Child of Democracy*, 175.

[83] "Experts Employed," *Detroit Free Press*, December 18, 1896.

[84] "Coming Entertainments," *Detroit Free Press*, April 30, 1895.

[85] Franklin Ford, "The Press of New York—Its Future," in *Progress and Prospects of New York, the First City of the World, 1492–1893*, 46–47 (New York: Commercial Travelers Club, 1893), on 46.

[86] "Strike at St. James' Church," *Chicago Chronicle*, June 6, 1896.



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Ad for Junius E. Beal's Printing House in The Commencement Annual of the University of Michigan*, June 30, 1892.*



Ad for Ford's News Office in Detroit Free Press, *December 18, 1896*

scribed the publication as "the most revolting gutter filth under the name of literature. . . . It is not even decent indecency. . . . Here one gets the unadulterated, unperfumed stench of the sewer, without a suggestion of an artist's excuse."[87]

Ford's public life also became entangled with that of Mathilde Coffin, whom he had met in 1892. Born in 1861 and a graduate of Boston University, Coffin had a successful career in the field of education. After serving as principal of schools in Pennsylvania and in Michigan, earning a national reputation for her expertise on educational subjects, she was named assistant superintendent of the Detroit public schools in 1893. Thanks to this position, she was "one of the most highly paid women executives in the country."[88]

In the mid-1890s, Coffin made the front page of the Detroit newspapers. At the time, she was leading a reform movement through the city's school system. In ideas that started to emerge in the mid-1890s and that were to become prominent during the Progressive Era (notably in Dewey's work on education), she argued that schools were disconnected from life. "Let us take a look at the schools," Coffin wrote. "The children are there to connect with life, and yet, how far from real life is much of the work in the schoolroom."[89] She particularly critiqued the "slavish" use of textbooks that presented abstract problems, detached from real-life situations, and she made several attempts to create real-life pedagogical material. Coffin's office collected "teachers' problems," which sprang "directly from the daily

[87] "Clacks," *The Clack*, July 1896, 123.

[88] Wilma W. Henrickson, "Too Bright for the Schools—Assistant Superintendent Mathilde Coffin," *Detroit in Perspective: A Journal of Regional History* 7, no. 2 (1983): 26–41, on 28.

[89] "An Educational Revival in Detroit," *The Intelligence*, November 15, 1896.

newspaper"— they were written by teachers, set in type, printed, and distributed among the schools. Among other reforms, she introduced "special teachers" to teach music, drawing, or physical education, and believing that "the people should get in closer touch with the schools,"[90] organized educational leagues bringing together mothers and teachers.

Coffin's progressive educational ideas raised strong reactions, and she was accused of introducing "fads" into schools, stirring agitation within the school system, exceeding her role as assistant superintendent, and even maneuvering to secure the position of superintendent.[91] The press castigated Coffin for her independence and her initiative (she was "a genius with exalted ideas" whose ability had been "misdirected" in devising "schemes of her own")[92] and, at the same time, accused her of falling under Ford's influence. During the hearing that led to her suspension, Coffin was accused of being "spoiled" by Ford's ideas—which Coffin vehemently denied.[93] The press also reported that Ford was believed to "have a plan to get a monopoly on the school board news."[94]

Ford and Coffin's 1897 marriage in New York was a surprise, as "not even the friends of the couples were let into the secret, and very few even surmised that the strong friendship which existed between them would ripen into love."[95] Their marriage effectively ended the dispute over Coffin's role in the public school administration, as a teacher who married was automatically discharged (even though Coffin persisted and brought the issue to court in 1897). The newlyweds moved to New York, Ford's beloved "new Rome," where Coffin had a long and successful career as an educator, school expert, public speaker, and later in her life, lecturer in psychoanalysis.[96] She was a force to be reckoned with—and more than likely no mere puppet in Ford's grand plan.[97]

After Ford and Mathilde Coffin resettled in New York, in the spring of 1897, Ford took the position of "chief reporter" of *Textile America*, a new trade journal. The venture had a capital investment of $50,000 and an experienced team that included publisher Thomas W. Lacey, who was previously involved in *The Optimist* in Detroit.[98] Ford's exact role in the new publication is unclear, but seems quite important. He had lobbied for such a publication at least since his days at *Bradstreet's*, and later described its functioning in the *Draft of Action*. The new publication was presented in recognizably Fordian prose as the "organ of the textile division of commerce." In addition to topics such as the price of Egyptian cotton and new dying products, Ford revisited familiar arguments about the self-government (or self-regulation) of the railroad industry and the banking sector.[99]

[90] "A Clever Actor!" *Detroit Free Press*, April 10, 1897.

[91] "It's Out," *Detroit Free Press,* December 17, 1896.

[92] "The Relieving of Miss Coffin," *Detroit Free Press*, December 20, 1896.

[93] "Is Suspended," *Evening News* (Detroit), December 20, 1896

[94] "The Conundrum of the Day," *Evening News* (Detroit), December 24, 1896.

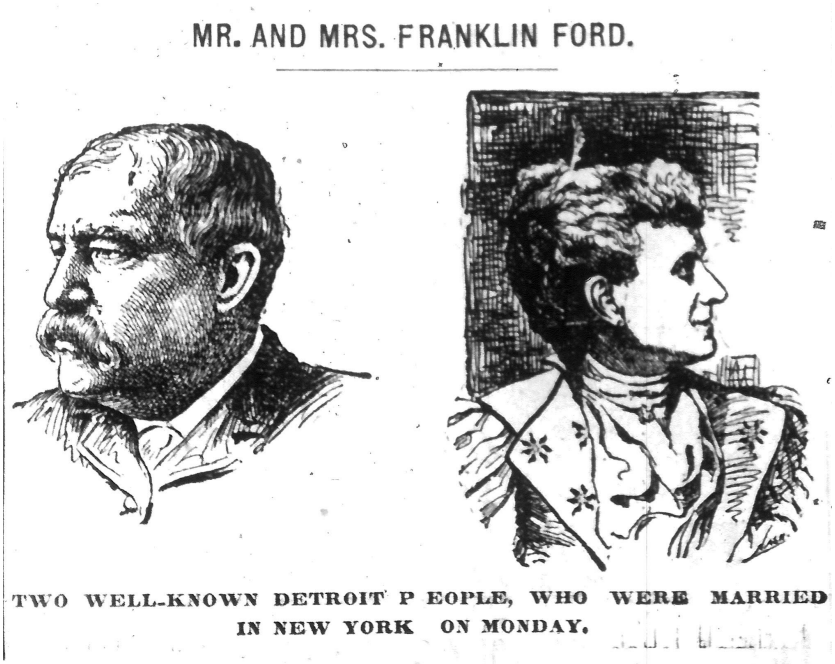
[95] "Miss Coffin Married," *Detroit Free Press*, May 8, 1897.

[96] "Mrs. Ford, Ex-Aide of Estimate Board," *New York Times*, July 4, 1941.

[97] On Mathilde Coffin's career, see also Dominique Trudel and Juliette De Maeyer, "The Many-Sided Franklin Ford and the History of a Post-Discipline," *Communication Theory* 32, no. 4 (2022): 439–49.

[98] Thomas W. Lacey was a close associate of Sheridan Ford, with whom he worked as an organizer in the labor movement.

[99] Franklin Ford, "Traffic Associations," *Wichita Daily Eagle*, May 4, 1917 (reprinted from *Textile America*); "A Unified Banking System," *Textile America*, August 28, 1897.



Wedding announcement in the Detroit Evening News, *May 7, 1897.*

As part of his work for *Textile America*, Ford wrote a five-article series on "better credit reporting," describing how he helped Ryerson Ritchie and Robert J. Lyle to conceive the idea of the Credit Clearing House, which was incorporated in New York in 1896 and soon established in fifteen American cities. Pointing to how the free exchange of information among merchants contributed to establishing credit ratings, Ford theorized a relationship between freedom and communication. "The measure of freedom of action for the action," he wrote, "was of course just in proportion to the degree of communication attained."[100] While Ford's theory remains little-known to this day, it is strikingly similar to Walter Lippmann's famous 1920 claim that "liberty is the name we give to measures by which we protect and increase the veracity of the information upon which we act."[101]

Ford's name disappeared from *Textile America* starting in late 1897. In the following years, he was associated with various credit agencies, including the Credit Clearing House, the Credit Office, and the National Credit Office.[102] It is likely that Ford was making a living from his work in the world of credit, which allowed him to continue other activities in parallel. With the help of Columbia's Head Librarian, James H. Canfield, Ford resumed the organization of the "University Centre" in early 1907, from an office set up for him at Columbia. Inquiring into "the working relation between the news centre and the university,"[103] he also operated numerous news offices under a variety of names, including Fords, Ford's Central News,

[100] Franklin Ford, "Better Credit Reporting: A Revolution in Progress Through the Clearing-House Principle," *Textile America*, August 7, 1897, 34.

[101] Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (Bethlehem: mediastudies.press, 2020), 21.

[102] Franklin Ford to John H. Finley, December 17, 1913.

[103] Franklin Ford to James H. Canfield, December 17, 1904.

The News Office, General News Office, and City News Office. As usual, he spent his time writing letters to newspapers, giving public lectures, and participating in local political life. Ford's work in this last stage of his life synthesized his previous interests: news, finance, transportation, education, science, and politics. It all coalesced in a rather radical political project that Ford summarized in a striking formula: "News is government."

Ford's ideas had some resonance, but never to the full extent of their ambitions. Everyone seemed to only see the relevance of a subset of his project, refracted through their own interests. In 1901, for example, New York City Comptroller Bird S. Coler praised Ford's plan for a municipal news bureau,[104] while *Electrical World and Engineer* applauded Ford's proposed use of telephone networks:

> Here is an ingenious scheme, difficult possibly, but with underlying elements of practicability and value. But what strikes us specially is Mr. Ford's insistence on the point that with the telephone "or instantaneous communication," there should no longer be life for lies or a lingering chance for rumor in regard to any moot point in business, commercial or social life.[105]

[104] "Mr. Coler's Plan to Increase City's Credit," *New York Times*, December 16, 1901.

[105] *Electrical World and Engineer* 38, no. 1 (July 6, 1901): 2.

Others marveled at Ford's sheer charisma and his "innumerable electric phrases," not saying much about his actual ideas. In 1906, a letter of a certain Francis D. Bailey to the *New York Tribune* attributed the phrase "pocket nerve" to Ford, describing him as "that very curious and cyclopean seer" and adding that "doubtless other terms from his mind will pass into circulation, perhaps become fixed in the language without attribution."[106]

Ford's Columbia office was destroyed in a fire on October 10, 1914. His papers, representing the work of twenty years, are believed to have been ruined in the blaze.[107] Ford died in 1918. Obituaries remembered him as "once the editor of *Bradstreet's* and a widely known newspaperman."[108]

[106] "From a Seer's Mind," *New York Tribune*, July 20, 1910.

[107] "Blaze Ends Fire Peril at Columbia."

[108] "Franklin Ford Dead," *New York Times*, July 1, 1918.

A Tour of the Franklin Ford Collection

Now that readers are more accustomed with Ford, we would like to briefly discuss the materials included in the present collection and to point to some new leads they open. The organization of the materials reflects Ford's evolving concerns, from a narrower focus on the problem of news and its reform to the broader question of communication flows (money, information, transportation), and finally, to their political implications. Our overview of these texts is another opportunity to contextualize Ford's ideas and career, as it points to several new details and opens paths of inquiry for future research.



FRANKLIN FORD

FORDS

THE NEWS CLEARING HOUSE

Portrait of Franklin Ford published in Notable New Yorkers of 1896–1899 *(New York: M. King, 1899), 599.*

Reforming the News

Published or written between 1887 and 1907, these six documents attest to Ford's long-standing project to reform the news, at both the theoretical and practical levels. Following his work as *Bradstreet's* editor, Ford considered that "a far-reaching newspaper advance had become possible—this, through perceiving that we now have the resultant of the locomotive and telegraph—the elimination of distance."[109] Under these new conditions, which allow full access to the facts through a technologically organized inquiry, the daily newspaper was first simply considered "a vehicle for selling the results of inquiry."[110]

[109] Ford, "A Newspaper Laboratory."

[110] Ford, "A Newspaper Laboratory."

Alongside Ford's most well-known text, *Draft of Action*, which was deemed "printed, not published," and to be "held in confidence," two letters written on the very same day, April 12, 1887, refer to Ford's post-*Bradstreet's* project to form a news trust (see "A Newspaper Laboratory" and "Banding Together the Leading Newspapers"). As Ford describes in an 1893 essay ("The Press of New York—Its Future") published in a souvenir book of the Commercial Travelers Club of New York City, the aim of this project was the "ultimate associated press."[111] These documents also present Ford's views on the papers of the era and refer to various media tycoons, including James Gordon Bennett (*New York Herald*) and Horace Greeley (*New York Tribune*).

[111] Ford, "The Press of New York—Its Future," 47.

A short memorandum written by John Dewey ("Organization of Intelligence Requires an Organism") describes Ford's ideas about journalism shortly after they first met. Sent to Henry Carter Adams — one of Dewey's colleague and closest friend in Ann Arbor—the two-page piece is an all but overlooked little gem.[112] The expressions that Dewey borrowed from Ford here were intended to clarify Ford's ideas and make them more topical—for example, Dewey wrote that the organization envisioned would be "automatic," a word used sparingly by Ford. This memo anticipated Dewey's later work on communication. Published forty years later, Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems: An Essay into Political Inquiry*, which lamented that the public remains disorganized and suggested that the circulation of facts should be facilitated in order to reorganize a genuinely democratic public, can be traced back to this short memorandum, and the same applies to Dewey's concept of inquiry.

[112] Buried in the papers of Adams at the University of Michigan, most Dewey scholars overlooked the document. The memorandum is mentioned in Brian A. Williams, *Thought and Action: John Dewey at the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor: Bentley Historical Library, 1998), 30; Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 126.

The section also features a chapter ("In Search of Absolute News, Sensation, and Unity") from Corydon Ford's 1897 book, *The Organic State*, whose authorship is attributed to Franklin Ford. The piece offers a critical analysis of the newspaper's coverage of the 1896 Republican and Democratic conventions and a detailed discussion of

the nature and functions of news. Ford describes his plan in the spirit of G. W. F. Hegel and inspired by the work of the Fish Commissioner (the "Fisheries"), whose reports involved ordinary citizens providing their own facts, like in Ford's News Office.[113]

The section's last document is a 1907 letter ("The News System: A Scientific Basis for Organizing the News") to Clinton W. Sweet, the founder and editor of the *Record and Guide* and the *Architectural Record*. Ford presents his "invention," the "News Centre," in great detail, and urges Sweet to invest his money "before others could hope to occupy the central position in the News System." Proposing to use his own "General News Office" as the basis of the "News System," Ford outlines all the steps he envisioned: convincing investors and subscribers, making connections with universities and with the City of New York, building partnerships with businesses such as the F. W. Dodge Company and the New York Telephone Company, and publishing books and a series of general and trade papers.[114] Overall, the business was "on the lines of the Associated Press," but much more ambitious. While all the news traffic would go through the News Centre, "news" itself seems to be considered on a larger scale. Information about municipal contractors and their day-to-day activities, for instance, is "news," and so is the value of each building in New York City. Such a detailed account of human activities is key to Ford's "organic" conception of news, which aims at the registration and optimal circulation of each and every fact. Ford considered his company a "public institution" and, unlike traditional newspapers, it would not only earn its revenues from sales and advertising, but also from corporations to whom specific sets of facts are useful. According to Ford, "the support of a given class journal must come to be in direct proportion to the place of such firm or corporation in the related industry."[115]

[113] Ford contributed to the work of the Michigan "Fisheries" in 1891 by providing an estimate of Dundee's carp population, which amounted to fifty. See *Tenth Biennial Report of the State Board of Fish Commissioners* (Lansing: Robert Smith, 1893), 210.

[114] Franklin Ford to Clinton W. Sweet, January 30, 1907 ("The News System: A Scientific Basis for Organizing the News").

[115] Franklin Ford to Clinton W. Sweet, January 30, 1907 ("The News System: A Scientific Basis for Organizing the News").

Interconnected Flows: Money, Information, and Transportation

The documents in the second section, published between 1897 and 1902, encapsulate Ford's view that the fields of transportation, credit, banking, and many others are interconnected—all characterized by a need for free-flowing information. It constitutes a good sample of Ford's public-facing work at the turn of the century, and gathers articles published in *Textile America* (and sometimes reprinted elsewhere), circulars issued by "FORDS"—one of Ford's many publishing ventures—and a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*. All these texts share similar themes: Ford criticizes existing mercantile agencies, praises advances in communication technologies as enabling "new conditions" in the circulation of facts, and advocates for

self-regulating information systems organized around what he calls "clearing centers."

Ford builds on his extensive experience at *Bradstreet's* to look at the history and current state of credit reporting, and to outline his vision for improving the industry. In his contributions to *Textile America* and elsewhere, Ford criticizes the model of existing credit rating agencies, including Bradstreet itself (see "Better Credit Reporting" and "The Mercantile Agencies and Credit Reporting"). These agencies, according to Ford, have erected an "unwieldy machine"[116] which artificially hinders the direct interchange of information between merchants. Ford compares the ratings compiled by credit agencies to "gossip about trading concerns," a mere "literary procedure" that distorts the actual experience of merchants and creditors.[117]

In the article from the *Better Credit Reporting* (1897) series that we chose to publish here, Ford outlines the practical ways in which a system built on the principle of the credit clearing house would favor the "direct interchange of experiences."[118] Through a system of daily reports (the article includes a blank "reporting sheet" and explains at length what a typical report looks like) put into circulation by the clearing center, merchants who participate in the "trading circle" could trade their "single experience for the experience of all."[119] We see another affirmation of Ford's conception of truth and facticity, as he professes that the "facts" put in circulation (which are "contained in the merchants' ledgers, being the actual experiences of merchants with credit seekers") will necessarily be true: "Reports so made up are matters of fact; they are true. . . . The reports carry their own guaranty. In each case the merchant is the reporter, and he cannot afford to do otherwise than report truthfully."[120] But not all "facts" are automatically true; some still needed to be checked, an issue that Ford equates to that of the division of labor: Merchants can report their "facts" themselves (obviating the need for professional "credit reporters"), but these facts nevertheless require occasional verification, and that is when the expert accountants or auditors are necessary.[121]

The key to Ford's system is the clearing house, a central entity through which information flows rapidly. This concerns the credit system, but also the banking system (see "The Express Companies and the Banks") and transportation (see "Traffic Association"). Ford establishes a direct link between these new developments in communication infrastructures—what he calls the "new conditions," or the conditions of "full communication."[122] He praises the "completion" of the post office, the advent of express mail and money order companies (such as American Express, founded in 1850), and of course, the telegraph and the telephone. In "Cooperative Credit

[116] Ford, "Better Credit Reporting: A Revolution in Progress Through the Clearing-House Principle," 34.

[117] Ford, "Better Credit Reporting: A Revolution in Progress," 34.

[118] Franklin Ford, "Better Credit Reporting: Practical Operation of the Credit Clearing-House in Detail," *Textile America*, August 21, 1897, 9.

[119] Ford, "Better Credit Reporting: Practical Operation," 10.

[120] Ford, "Better Credit Reporting: Practical Operation," 10.

[121] Franklin Ford, "Better Credit Reporting: The Development of News as a Thing of Trade," *Textile America*, September 18, 1897.

[122] Franklin Ford, *The Country Check* (New York: FORDS, 1899), 18.

Reporting," a letter to the editor published in the *New York Times* in 1902, Ford argues that, with the "talking wire, the plan looks to the universal extension of the clearing house principle." Ford's texts are also concerned with how these new mediums reconfigured time and space. In "The Express Companies and the Banks" (a 1899 circular published by FORDS under the banner of *Bank News Bulletin*), for example, he describes how the "double movement" necessary to convert personal checks into money (the check is first sent to a center, and comes back over the same paths with a bank draft to demand payment) is transformed in a "single movement" by express companies—a disruption notably embodied by Traveler's Cheques, launched by American Express in 1891.

Ford discusses at length the adequacy of this movement to the geography of a vast territory such as that of the United States, in which the circulation (of information, of money) must function between the periphery and the centers, and between the different centers as well. This is what Ford calls the "unity of the banking system," in which "the check is flying everywhere" (see "The Country Check"). But this unity has consequences beyond the exchange of money as, according to Ford, it is also ultimately about information and the ordering of facts: "The discovery that the entire banking connection in America is a single system, compels the adoption of a single language as means to classifying and ordering the facts."[123] The model that he deems fit for credit reporting, for instance, is also to be applied in every sector of life, as credit reporting was just "a phase of social registration."[124] Accordingly, each type of fact would be recorded and put in circulation by the appropriate center: "The facts as to land ownership are registered with the Title Guarantee and Trust Company; births and deaths are registered at the Health Office, marriages at another center, while the bank transactions at ninety-five clearing houses throughout the country are registered each week in New York as the main center in the banking system and are thence distributed to all sub-centers."[125] Newspapers have a role to play, too, in the informational ecosystem, as they were to be the "main centre" for all facts; trade papers, for example, would allow bankers or merchants to "be in constant touch with the outlook in all divisions of commerce."[126]

The texts in this section already allude to the political consequences of this informational system. Under the "new conditions" described by Ford, governments would become unnecessary, as the "the whole system appears as a self-regulating body controlled by its clearing centers."[127] Ford continued to explore these themes in subsequent years. Self-regulation through information systems is the crux of the collection's final section.

[123] Ford, *The Country Check*, 10.

[124] Franklin Ford, "The Mercantile Agencies and Credit Reporting," *Textile America*, June 3, 1899, 6.

[125] Ford, "The Mercantile Agencies," 6.

[126] Ford, "Mercantile Agencies," 7.

[127] Ford, *The Country Check*, 3.

News is Government

This last series of Ford's writings features works revolving around politics and political theory. It articulates complex historical, empirical, and philosophical arguments. Ford had a long-standing interest in politics and reforms. He gravitated around the labor movement for many years and wrote extensively on municipal governance. Late in life, he turned to political theory as a means to articulate what could otherwise be considered separate efforts. Political theory means putting things "into relation."

"News is government" is among the best of Ford's many home-cooked formulas.[128] It refers to the central place of news as a governing force in society, and to the triumph of "facts" and "science" over editorial opinion, which dates back to the days of the penny press.[129] The power of the press, in Ford's view, has nothing to do with political journalism and very little to do with politicians. Instead, it is about substituting the "method of science" and "expert inquiry" in place of the ballot.[130] Ford's argument is anchored in a narrative that distinguishes between successive modes of decision-making, from "the primitive method of fight," to the "majority or count of noses," and finally, to the extension of science brought by an "organized news system."[131]

Such an argument was not wholly original. In the mid-1880s, English newspaper editor William Thomas ("WT") Stead also suggested that journalism was poised to succeed the House of Commons, itself successor to government by kings. The time was considered ripe for "government by journalism."[132] Proposing a similar teleology, Stead shared with Ford a taste for grandiloquent organicist metaphors, writing that "the press is at once the eye and the ear and the tongue of the people. It is the visible speech if not the voice of the democracy."[133]

The parallels between Ford and Stead are many and worth considering. Although there is no evidence of a direct connection between the two, it is clear that Ford was well aware of Stead's ideas and journalistic work. In the 1880s, Stead became a celebrity in America, especially among his fellow journalists.[134] Stead's "new journalism"—an expression also used by Ford in his *Draft of Action*—emphasized the importance of journalistic investigation in the service of social reforms, as well as the use of maps, charts, and diagrams. Stead's 1894 best-selling study of Chicago's underground economy included detailed folding maps locating brothels and saloons, and initiated a broad civic reformist movement in the city.[135] The book echoed Ford's 1874 study of Newark, which also contained charts and a folding map (but focused on more traditional economic sectors).[136]

[128] "News is Government," *Wall Street Journal*, February 7, 1907.

[129] Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 14.

[130] Franklin Ford, "The Public Necessity of Organizing Sovereignty through Credit Authority," *Legal News Bulletin*, April 20, 1910.

[131] Ford, "Public Necessity of Organizing."

[132] William T. Stead, "Government by Journalism," *The Contemporary Review* 49 (May 1886): 653–74.

[133] Stead, "Government," 656.

[134] John Nerone and Kevin Barnhurst, "Stead in America," in *W. T. Stead: Newspaper Revolutionary*, ed. Laurel Brake et al., 98–114. (London: British Library, 2012).

[135] William T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago* (Chicago: Laird & Lee, 1894).

[136] William F. Ford, *The Industrial Interests of Newark, N.J.* (New York: Van Arsdale, 1874).

Another parallel is suggested by Ford's many attempts to operate an information bureau committed to answering special inquiries, which echoed Stead's paranormal communication bureau for private communication with the other world.[137]

Ford's "organization of the State under absolute communication" reads as a radical version of Stead's government by journalism.[138] While Stead insisted on the key role played by journalism in the political game and its capacity to mobilize public opinion, Ford envisioned that journalism would soon succeed existing political institutions. In fact, Ford's approach gives very little place to influential professional journalists like Stead, and to their power over politicians or public opinion. His focus, instead, is on the infrastructures which enable collective inquiry and the circulation of facts. Ford came to insist less on the centralized control of communication infrastructures, a key tenet of the *Thought News* plan, and much more on the role played by citizen-journalists, who were supposed to contribute their own facts from the most marginal points of a networked infrastructure with many different centers. In a letter published in June 1901 by the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* ("City News Office Needed"), Ford describes how every member of the community can contribute to the circulation of information: "In its outworking the reporting system will connect with all sources of expert knowledge, and with every individual in the community as any one may at times possess a fact of value to his neighbor, to his class or to the people as a whole."[139] The new form of government he envisioned was decentralized by design. As Ford rhetorically asked Columbia president Nicholas Murray Butler in a 1909 letter (see "A New and Revolutionary Government"): "Do you not perceive that the Industrial State, long held in a language of metaphor, is at last presenting itself in America on the plane of fact, and that its regulating centres are forming independently of the inherited or Military State?"[140]

Among these many centers that interested Ford, municipal governments were of special interest. Most of Ford's writings in this section of the collection deal with an attempt to reorganize municipal news on scientific principles. Ford's City News Office (yet another office of his) published a whole volume on the question in 1903 ("Municipal Reform: A Scientific Question"). In a 1905 leaflet (see "Government is the Organization of Intelligence or News"), he also describes a "General News Office" (established in 1904) that was to be "the main centre for the local News System."[141] While this office was to collaborate with the existing administrative and political apparatus, Ford argues that, in the long term, such an office and the communication infrastructure that supports it were to replace existing political institutions from the bottom-up—a plea for self-regulation in all as-

[137] Nerone and Barnhurst, "Stead," 108.

[138] Franklin Ford to John F. Dillon, November 4, 1904.

[139] Franklin Ford, "City News Office Needed," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 22, 1901.

[140] Ford, "A New and Revolutionary Government."

[141] Franklin Ford, "Government is the Organization of Intelligence or News System," *General News Office*, 1905.

pects of society (see "The Simple Idea of Government"). Ford was not afraid to apply this framework to controversial events. Following the Ludlow Massacre in April 1914, in which striking Colorado miners were killed by John D. Rockefeller's private security services, Ford wrote:

> The old State-centre or the Military Power, the strong-willed captains of industry, the Creditlord, i.e. the typical banker of the day, are all resisting by every means in their power the full, all-round functioning of the new machinery; they are vainly trying to ward off its social outcome. Why, the coal miners of Pennsylvania or Colorado are able to combine together because they are in communication with each other by electric wire—without communication, no common interest that can hold together. And so, Mr. Rockefeller and his friends are simply fighting the telephone; no wonder they have a hard time of it. The truth is that they are thinking in terms of a past age, i.e. in language that is already lying dead in the public mind.[142]

[142] Franklin Ford to Edgar L. Marston, April 29, 1914.

The collection ends with a 1912 letter to Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. ("News is the Master Element of Social Control"), in which Ford takes stock of his eclectic intellectual influences and offers a synthesis of his political ideas. Far from representing a conclusion to Ford's lifelong vision, this long letter delineates all the work that remains to be done. After admitting that he is only "applying" the work of others and that his associates must be credited for the success of the Credit Office, Ford describes the magnitude of the task at hand in humble terms: "I think it fair to say that I have done as much strictly scientific work in my field as Darwin did in his, but I have to do twice as much."[143]

[143] Franklin Ford to Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., January 19, 1912 ("News is the Master Element of Social Control").

What to Make of Ford?

To conclude this introduction, we would like to offer some parting thoughts. We circle back to the introduction's first paragraphs, and to the ways in which Ford's life and work have found a place in the existing literature, with the aim of adding our own piece to the puzzle.

As we have highlighted above, Ford's incorporation in media and communication scholarship is often associated with the narrative around pragmatism and the "Chicago School" initiated by James Carey and others working in his wake. These lineages raise many interesting questions. Should "pragmatism" and the "Chicago School" be conflated, an implication of Carey's approach? Are they "projective devices," allowing anyone to imagine their own private version of the Chicago School?[144] Are they even part of the field (or "discipline," to add a question within a question), since their methodolog-

[144] Lyn H. Lofland, "Understanding Urban Life: The Chicago Legacy," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 11, no. 4 (1983): 491–511.

ical approaches and central concerns often seem distant from what counts as media and communication research?[145]

Chris Russill argues that the "problem" of pragmatism is twofold. First, communication scholars largely failed to understand pragmatism as an intellectual tradition.[146] While many exceptions are to be found, communication scholars often seem "caught" by Carey's plot. They begin with Dewey (or Cooley, or Park) and unravel from this origin point. Consequently, what is upstream—that is, the intellectual traditions which lead to Dewey (or Cooley, or Park)—remains little explored, as is the broader intellectual context which nurtured pragmatism. The second problem, which is a direct implication of the difficulty to understand pragmatism historically, relates more specifically to the concept of inquiry. While Dewey wrote incessantly about inquiry, communication researchers often fail to engage with this notion, preferring to ignore Dewey's admiration for scientific method and emphasize instead his critique of objectivism and his enthusiasm for "conversation."[147]

The case of Franklin Ford seems the ideal locus to explore these two problems. We turn first to the question of classical pragmatism's intellectual roots, by exploring the connections between Ford and the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Lester Frank Ward. We then propose to revisit the *Thought News* episode as a form of pragmatic inquiry.

[145] This question has been explored in Wahl-Jorgensen, "The Chicago School of Sociology and Mass Communication Research."

[146] Chris Russill, "Dewey-Lippmann Redux," *Empedocles: European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication* 7, no. 2 (2016): 129–42. Although Russill is mostly right, notable attempts at reconstructing the pragmatist tradition include works by John Durham Peters, Peter Simonson, Lana Rakow, and others. One of the most important efforts made by communication scholars to approach pragmatism historically is David K. Perry, *American Pragmatism and Communication Research* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001).

[147] Chris Russill, "Through a Public Darkly: Reconstructing Pragmatist Perspectives in Communication Theory," *Communication Theory* 18, no. 4 (2008): 478–504.

A Piece in the Pragmatist Family Tree

Ford's grand plan to launch a new "movement of intelligence" has a rich—and somewhat messy—intellectual lineage. In his correspondence and many of his other writings, Ford explicitly mentioned the many ideas and authors that he found inspiring. The *Franklin Ford Collection* includes, notably, an unpublished 1912 letter sent to Oliver Wendell Holmes, in which Ford offers a long synthesis of his ideas and intellectual influences as he reflected on the work that "forced [him] to the library of Columbia University," which comprised "both the introduction of a new science and its execution in the marketplace." The new "universal governing organs" he discovered—the "news system" and "banking system"—are put into relation with Ford's vast intellectual pantheon. He invoked the enduring influence of French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and British legal historian F. W. Maitland, and at least a dozen names as diverse as Ernest Renan, Condorcet, Voltaire, Edward A. Ross, and Thorstein Veblen. Ford's professed admiration for Proudhon—when his youthful radicalism had long since passed—raises many questions and speaks to a strong and unresolved political tension that cut across

his different projects. On the one hand, Ford had remained close to the world of finance and banking. Constantly favoring monopolies, Ford's work often hinged on central figures of classical liberalism. (In addition to Condorcet, he cites Montesquieu, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill.) On the other hand, his reformist agenda was irrigated by a wide array of radical anarcho-socialist ideas and thinkers. His project to democratize universities, for example, seems resonant with the *universités populaires* established by Jean Jaurès, even as his early involvement with the Workingmen's Industrial Political Association and in avant-garde publications such as *The Optimist* seems at odds with the mainstream liberal doxa.

With no (or very little) formal education and with the habit of putting things "into relation," Ford may have been able to make creative and unexpected syntheses. Emerson's radical individualism and Ward's Comtian collectivism, discussed below, are not easy to fit together. But Ford saw himself as a "practical" man rather than as an intellectual, and despite his long theoretical digressions, he claimed that he was merely "applying" ideas in their practical bearings. Without trying to resolve all the tensions within Ford's work, a closer look at some of its intellectual underpinnings seems a necessary complement to existing work.

While Emerson cast a long shadow over American pragmatism, his writings are not often discussed by communication scholars. Among the notable exceptions are John Durham Peters's *Speaking into the Air* and Peter Simonson's subtle analysis of "overlooked forms of mass communication" in the lineage of Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, Kenneth Burke, James W. Carey, Cornel West, and John Durham Peters, and his detailed portrayal of Charles Horton Cooley as "the last of the nineteenth-century Emersonians."[148] This epithet may very well apply to Franklin Ford too, who explicitly claimed the Emersonian lineage in his early work.[149] As Ford put it, "the movement begins where Carlyle and Emerson left off."[150] Our archival material shows some connection between Emerson's views on knowledge, technologies, and communication, and those of Ford. Most important to pragmatism is Emerson's refusal of foundational knowledge in favor of an open-ended quest for experimental relations with nature. Considered one through the other, their works gave a prominent place to media and communication in pragmatist inquiry and reveal an often-neglected point of contact between pragmatism, media, and communication.

Ford's writings refer to Emerson's correspondence with Thomas Carlyle, which mainly concerns Emerson's role as Carlyle's literary agent for America.[151] Central to their exchanges is a complaint about what Carlyle called the "anomaly of a disorganic literary class, the

[148] Peter Simonson, *Refiguring Mass Communication: A History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 93.

[149] See Ford's 1892 *Draft of Action*, which refers to the "Economics of Emerson" and the "Psychology of Emerson," as well as to "Pathos of Faith without Sight in Thomas Carlyle."

[150] Ford, *Draft of Action*, 28.

[151] Ford, "A Newspaper Laboratory"; Ford, *Draft of Action*.

heart of all other anomalies."[152] Such claim refers to the anarchic mid-nineteen century context of generalized piracy and non-existent international copyright agreements. Without addressing these specific concerns, Ford's plan for a publishing monopoly and for "organized intelligence" is primarily a grand scheme aimed at transforming the publishing business in accordance with core organic principles. Like Emerson and Carlyle, he considered such an operation to be the primary step towards a "movement" that would affect society as a whole. Emerson had a concept for that: the "oversoul," "a grand unifier of society which pulsed into all men like a circulating blood."[153] Among the many implications of the oversoul, immortality comes first. Ford, like Emerson, believed in the immortality of his soul, as he revealed to Dewey.[154]

Ford shared with Emerson, too, a distrust of inherited knowledge and exaggerated deference to the past. Writing half a century after Emerson, Ford could have made his own the first paragraphs of *Nature* in which Emerson complained that "[o]ur age is retrospective, it builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism," and asked, "Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?"[155] Ford's praise for the locomotive, telegraph, and telephone were an invitation to develop such an original relation to the universe, through the specific media technologies of the time.

In a letter sent to James Burrill Angell in 1887, Ford described a first model for organizing intelligence, describing a complex set of circles, "semicircles," and multiple "concentric rings." The model included most of the elements that were later transmuted into Ford's "triangle of intelligence," which he explained in great detail in *Draft of Action*. This mention of circles in the context of a discussion on Emerson directly evokes Emerson's well-known essay *Circles* (1841). Seeing circles everywhere, Emerson touched on a number of themes in the essay, including the problem of knowledge and its relation to technologies, which can be understood retroactively in a Fordian and proto-pragmatist fashion:

> There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe seen by god is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the facts and holds it fluid.... New arts destroy the old. See the investment of capital in aqueducts made useless by hydraulics; fortifications, by gunpowder; roads and canals, by railways; sails, by steam; steam by electricity.[156]

John Durham Peters argues that, for Emerson, "communication never involves contact with another," and that "the impossibility of dialogue gives us reasons to celebrate the universe as a constant transmission to those who have ears to hear."[157] In other words, communication is not related to face-to-face encounters and dialogue, but to

[152] Quoted by Ford in a letter to James Burrill Angell, April 13, 1887.

[153] Quoted in John Durham Peters, "Reconstructing Mass Communication Theory" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1986), 43.

[154] "Ford believes in personal immortality. He says he thinks consciousness must persist—it is so damned persistent." John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey, June 6, 1891.

[155] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston: James Monroe, 1836), 1.

[156] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1883), 302.

[157] Peters, *Speaking*, 155.

forms of mediated encounters with nature, given one has the right "ears." For Emerson, the right ears were akin to the new media of his times, such as photography and phonography, as well as the daguerreotype portraits that fascinated him. He praised the daguerreotype for providing a model for his own writing, as he "seeks to find modes of writing that reproduce, for the reader, the immediacy of America's eventful present, *in writing*."[158]

Ford was animated by similar concerns, and his work provided a provisional answer to this line of inquiry. When he wrote that "the social fact is the sensational thing,"[159] he meant precisely that there is an intimate connection between a more abstract depiction of nature, at the level of the social fact, and its lived experience, at the sensory level. For him, the "right ears" were the newspapers and the advances brought by the telegraph and the locomotive, which changed news gathering and dissemination. For both men, the registration and organization of intelligence through appropriate media technologies were the primary operations of communication, defined as an epistemological problem and as a form of inquiry. But while Emerson focused on communication at the level of the individual, Ford was concerned with collective knowledge and forms of action.

Peters's reference to the Emersonian "impossible dialogue" and escape route into the half-solipsism of personal relation to nature suggests, in parallel, a tragic dimension of Ford's story. There is an enormous gap between Ford's plan for interconnection and his own social situation, between his grand plan as seen in the performative space of his letterheads—which attest to the existence of many "offices"—and the reality. While numerous accounts testify to his social eccentricity, his long letters sent to many important people (often ten or more single-spaced pages) seem to have generated very little dialogue. Most of his collective projects ended quickly or bitterly, only to make way for a slightly different iteration of his solitary meditations. Ford exemplifies what Emerson famously called "the condition of infinite remoteness" and embodied the Emersonian "prescription for courageous self-reliance by means of non-conformity and inconsistency,"[160] at least in the eyes of some of his contemporaries.

Another important source of Ford's ideas is the work of American sociologist Lester Frank Ward (1841–1913), who is only mentioned in passing in existing works about Ford.[161] A paleontologist-turned-sociologist, Ward is a somewhat forgotten figure. His 1883 book *Dynamic Sociology* is nevertheless one of the early classics of American sociology. A response to Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics,* the book clashed with the fatalism of Spencer and his most outspoken American disciple, Yale professor William Graham Sumner. In place of the Spencerian *laissez-faire*, Ward considered that sociology should aim

[158] Tobias Weber, "On the Verge of Today: Emerson and the Emergence of the American Age" (PhD diss., University of Zurich, 2011), 30.

[159] Ford, *Draft of Action*, 9.

[160] Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 10.

[161] Carey and Sims, "The Telegraph"; Weaver, "John Dewey."

to transform society, and argued that applied knowledge was key to social progress. Ward's concept of "telesis" emphasized the possibility of planned progress against Spencer's conservative sociology. Ward's critique of Spencerian social Darwinism was central to the early days of American pragmatism and was discussed during a famous meeting of the Metaphysical Club in 1884.[162] The critique had a profound influence on Dewey (who attended the 1884 meeting) and on the Chicago School of sociology.[163]

Both Ward and Ford displayed a profound enthusiasm for the dissemination of knowledge and for planned social reform. If Ford constantly used Spencerian organic metaphors, and even pushed them to new summits, it is because he thought that society *was* an organism in a greater sense. It had a "sensorium," a unity of consciousness, a "center" from which the work of its organs could be coordinated. Echoing Dewey's argument that "society was an organism in a deeper sense than Spencer had perceived,"[164] Ford proposed to pursue "Herbert Spencer's Hunt for the Sensorium."[165] Ward, for his part, had previously run backward from the organicist metaphor, arguing that living organisms were nothing more than parts united by "communication": "All parts of the organism are *integrated* by means of channels or tracks of protoplasm in the form of nerves, along with constant communication."[166] In doing so, Ward provided scientific and biological grounding for Ford's hunt for the sensorium.

One of Ford's most important concepts, "intelligence," is nowadays mostly associated with Dewey's philosophy. It is also a key concept of Ward's sociology, which casts intelligence as a compound of "intellect" and "knowledge." As knowledge is "registered experience," it is by no means individual, but profoundly social. In other words, at least half of intelligence is external to the human mind and thereby "social." Ford used the concept in a similar fashion. Writing about the "movement of intelligence," with the aim to organize "intelligence centers" and "intelligence trusts," Ford's project echoed Ward's sociology and his understanding of intelligence as a collective endeavor.

Another obvious conceptual convergence is found in Ward's political philosophy. He envisioned a new form of government called "sociocracy." Expanding on Auguste Comte's conception of sociocracy as government by sociologists, Ward favored a greater role for science in the government of society. Standing between individualist democracy and socialism, sociocracy would involve scientific, social, and economic planning in the general interest. He illustrated sociocracy with the "postal telegraph question," arguing that a price of ten cents (instead of twenty-five cents) would satisfy everyone except stockholders, and that a fair price (that is, a price to maintain and de-

[162] Menand, *Metaphysical Club*, 152.

[163] Daniel Tanner, "From Lester Frank Ward to John Dewey: The Three Universal Curriculums," *The Educational Forum* 83, no. 2 (2019): 124–39.

[164] Peters, "Reconstructing," 74. Dewey's comment was made during a lecture heard by Charles Horton Cooley, who also criticized Spencer.

[165] Ford, *Draft of Action*, 39.

[166] Lester Frank Ward, *Dynamic Sociology* (Boston: D. Appleton, 1883), 371.

velop the infrastructure, to provide a decent return on investment, to promote the use of the greatest number, etc.) should be set only after disinterested investigation.[167] Ford's very similar views and political theory should be considered in the lineage of Ward's (and Comte's) sociocracy. Proclaiming that "science, exact inquiry, is the source of government," Ford gave the example of the milk trade.[168] In place of a regulating agency performing inspections, Ford argued that the "identity of interest between producers, distributors, and consumers" should be identified, and that, as a consequence, the industry should govern itself.[169]

As it is often the case with Ford, archival evidence is a bit scarce. Ward's papers contain two letters from Ford, who straightforwardly explained that he was acquainted with Ward's work.[170] Ford enclosed a leaflet from the General News Office, "Government is the Organization of Intelligence or News"—included in this collection—and boasted that "it represents twenty years of continuous work. In order to write it I was compelled to change the inherited point of view in social observation, which was fully as difficult as for Copernicus and his followers to change the viewpoint in observing the solar system." Ford and Ward would later meet at the fourth annual meeting of the American Sociological Society, held at Columbia in 1909, when Ward presented a paper on "Sociology and the State." A year later, Ford sent excerpts of his work to Ward and proposed to visit Providence so the two could converse.[171] Although we found no further documentary traces of this meeting, it may have happened.

[167] Lester Frank Ward, *The Psychic Factors of Civilization* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1893), 326.

[168] Franklin Ford, *The Simple Idea of Government* (New York: The News Office, 1910).

[169] Ford, *The Simple Idea of Government*.

[170] Franklin Ford to Lester Frank Ward, December 29, 1904.

[171] Franklin Ford to Lester Frank Ward, February 2, 1911.

Thought News *as Pragmatic Inquiry*

The question of Ford's place in the pragmatist family tree could (and should) be approached from other perspectives and is yet to be resolved. Surprisingly, Ford's lengthy correspondence with Holmes has not yet been considered from this angle. Another path not taken is the Jamesian lead. Although James's work is not frequently mentioned by Ford, Earl James Weaver suggests interesting parallels between James's *Psychology* (1890) and the writings of Corydon and Franklin Ford.[172] Dewey's account of the emergence of his own stream of pragmatism, which does not mention Ford, nevertheless situates its birth in Ann Arbor, between 1891 and 1893—the peak of his friendship with Ford.[173] In order to recast Ford's role in the early days of pragmatism, we now offer a few notes on the notion of inquiry in Ford's work, by specifically revisiting the *Thought News* episode. It is also a way of circling back to the beginning and offering our own reading of this foundational story.

[172] "James's most important book, *Psychology*, published in 1890, hints of a functionalism, an instrumentalism, which is not unlike that contained in the writings of the Ford brothers. His picture of a moving, open, changing world, his emphasis on the concrete and the singular as opposed to the abstract and the general, his presentation of mind as activity, of an idea as an experimental instrument, coincided neatly in tone and in detail with Ford's outlook." Weaver, *John Dewey*, 76.

In 1889, Dewey wrote to his friend Henry Carter Adams, professor of political economy at Michigan, that Ford's idea was not simply to tell the truth, but "to find out what truth is; the inquiry business in a systematic, centralized fashion."[173] Inquiry is arguably Dewey's most important and complex notion. It is the epistemological cornerstone of his own stream of pragmatism, with numerous implications for the philosopher's views on communication, including his thesis on the "public" and its role in democracies. As such, it is somehow difficult to pin down. In fact, scholars still debate Dewey's conception of inquiry.[174] Dewey wrote enthusiastically about "the highest and most difficult kind of inquiry" that "must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it."[175] Such inquiry is, by nature, collective, as it both presupposes and articulates a community. It aims at transforming life by putting into relation discrete elements in order to "convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole."[176] It coalesces practice and theory through experimentation; it looks for modest moments of truth while being wary of claims to foundational knowledge.

Communication scholars often tend to rely on Carey's rather simplified definition of inquiry as "conversation and discussion but a more systematic version of it."[177] Chris Russill's work aptly points to other key dimensions of pragmatic inquiry. First, there's its interest in science as a model for inquiry. While pragmatism is often cast as a critique of "scientism" and "positivism" by communication scholars, Russill points to the deforming mediation of Carey and Richard Rorty, who "stripped pragmatism of its interest in science as an exemplar of inquiry."[178] Second, inquiry is a form of action (or response) to a problem as a problem (or as Russill puts it, "a type of action that responds to a problem *as* problematic.")[179] Relating to problems as problems is the first difficulty. It suggests to refrain from immediate response in order to grasp the complexity of situations that are usually experienced as distant. These must be apprehended from a variety of standpoints in order to be experienced as problems, and in light of different possible solutions. As Russill explained, "this requires not only facts but ideas or hypotheses for expanding beyond the habitual and expected reactions we might offer. We should learn to be affected by events as problems, formulated so as to make possible a range of solutions."[180]

Deweyan inquiry does not exist beyond its own logic. It is a means to experience a problem *as* a problem—that is, to cope with the complex problem of knowledge in modern industrial societies. According to Dewey, one of the main features of this problem is that "the paths of communication between common sense and science are as yet largely one-way lanes. Science takes its departure from common

[173] Writing to William James in March 1903, Dewey explained that "we have all been at work at it for about twelve years. Lloyd and Mead were both at it in Ann Arbor ten years ago." Quoted in Dykhuizen, "John Dewey," 536.

[173] John Dewey to Henry Carter Adams, April 4, 1889.

[174] Russill, "Through a Public Darkly."

[175] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1927), 194.

[176] John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), 105.

[177] Carey, *Communication*, 82.

[178] Chris Russill, "Dewey/Lippmann Redux," *Empedocles: European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication* 7, no. 2 (2016): 129–42, on 130.

[179] Russill, "Through a Public Darkly," 485.

[180] Russill, "Through a Public Darkly," 495.

sense, but the return road into common sense is devious and blocked by existing social conditions."[181]

The *Thought News* project fits such a conception of pragmatic inquiry at several levels. While the many advertisements for *Thought News* emphasized the theory-to-practice perspective, the full title of the journal, *Thought News: A Journal of Inquiry and a Record of Fact*, refers both to inquiry and to the dual need for facts ("news") and ideas or hypotheses ("thought"). *Thought News* can thus be read as an early embodiment (or at least a specific model) of inquiry, and the *Draft of Action*'s plea for "full social inquiry"—that is, inquiry that connects specific concerns to "the whole"—can be read as anticipating Dewey's later writings on inquiry. "Inquiry" appears on thirty-eight pages of Ford's fifty-eight-page document and is one of its pivotal notions. Scholars sometimes understand Dewey's concept of inquiry as "problem-solving activities,"[182] with his "unified theory of inquiry" aimed at offering "a single way of thinking about how we resolve problematic situations in science, ethics, politics, and law."[183] In Ford's version, we could say that the emphasis is on problem-solving *infrastructures*. Ford's plan is to design an information system through which the specific concerns of individuals, "classes" (in the sense of specific economic sectors), and "the whole" would be tied, on different scales, and construed as problems having possible solutions. To use Dewey's vocabulary, it is a "machinery of communication"[184] recording facts, putting them in relation, and turning them into "problems." Ford writes that facts must be "interpreted and delivered in their application to life."[185]

Science was central to such inquiry, which was defined by Ford as "a union of science and literature."[186] This project remained partly modeled on *Bradstreet's* scientific reporting, which featured plenty of quantitative data, graphs, and expert opinions. Although Carey's first take on *Thought News* rightfully approached the episode (and "the Chicago School" as a whole) through the lens of this tension between science and literature, his later work clearly adopted the Rortyan perspective criticized by Russill.[187]

The collective dimension of the project also speaks to the notion of inquiry, one that is never a purely individual endeavor. Advertisements for *Thought News* specifically appealed to isolated researchers in search of a community.[188] Ford's *Draft of Action* also makes clear that fact-gathering was to involve everyone. Ordinary citizens were all to be crop reporters—"the citizen king is the crop reporter,"[189] as Ford wrote in one of his typical formulas—collaborating to define common problems that do not first appear as such. The communal dimension of the project is also obvious in the loose group of people behind *Thought News*, as well as in its ambition to connect journalists

[181] Dewey, *Logic*, 77.

[182] Russill, "Dewey/Lippmann Redux," 134.

[183] Cheryl Misak, *The American Pragmatists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 145.

[184] See Lana Rakow, *John Dewey: A Critical Introduction to Media and Communication Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2019).

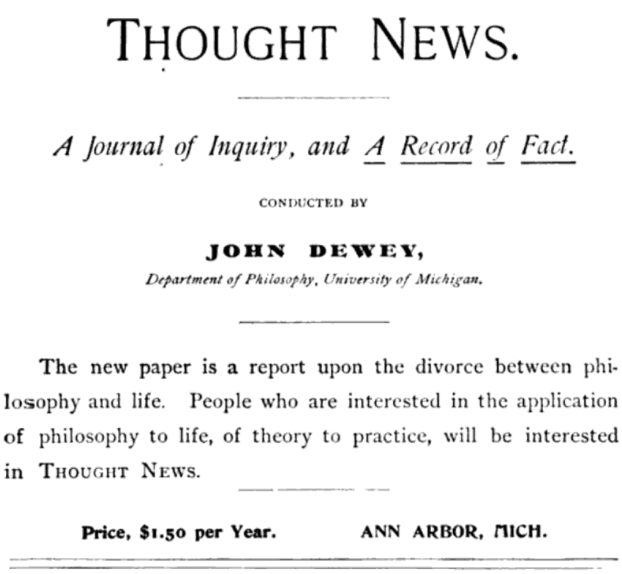
[185] Ford, *Draft of Action*, 42.

[186] Ford, *Draft of Action*, 29.

[187] On this shift in Carey's characterization of *Thought News* and the crucial influence of Rorty, see Pooley, *James W. Carey*.

[188] Published in the *Inlander* of April 1892, an ad for *Thought News* reads, "If you are studying by yourself, If you are interested in the application of ideas to life, If you are interested in the application of theory to practice, You will be interested in Thought News." Quoted in Savage, "John Dewey," 206.

[189] Ford, *Draft of Action*, 12.



THOUGHT NEWS.

A Journal of Inquiry, and A Record of Fact.

CONDUCTED BY

JOHN DEWEY,

Department of Philosophy, University of Michigan.

The new paper is a report upon the divorce between philosophy and life. People who are interested in the application of philosophy to life, of theory to practice, will be interested in THOUGHT NEWS.

Price, $1.50 per Year. **ANN ARBOR, MICH.**

Ad for Thought News *published in* Philosophical Review*, May 1892.*

and scholars, the university and society.[190] The *Thought News* episode is also a telling tale of the enduring and inescapable tension between inquiry as the experience of problems as problems, and the typically more direct emotional response to problems. The line between public problems and private matters is not easy (if not impossible) to draw. Dewey's letters evoked a very deep relation with Ford, oscillating between abstract considerations about *Thought News* and the delicate question of personal relations and commitments. In this sense, the *Thought News* episode illustrates the pragmatic limit to pragmatist inquiry. At least, this is one conclusion that can be drawn from this story *as a failed experiment*.

A different perspective is to consider the idea that *Thought News* did not end in 1892. Ford obviously continued several of its lines of inquiry throughout his life, and so did the other participants of the group. While archival evidence is scarce, many contextual elements suggest that some personal connections survived the episode. Like Ford, Robert Park settled in Detroit in 1892, where he worked as a reporter for the *Detroit Tribune*, alongside close associates of Ford such as Thad Varnum. In early 1893, Park was consulting with Dewey and George Herbert Mead about the foundation of a University Club in Detroit.[191] Echoing the goals of *Thought News*, the organization was "to bring people who are outside of the University in closer connection with it and through them bring the University in closer connection with life."[192] While Park acknowledged on several occasions

[190] See Trudel and De Maeyer, "The Many-Sided Franklin Ford."

[191] Matthews, *Quest for an American Sociology*, 29.

[192] Matthews, *Quest for an American Sociology*, 29.

the enduring influence of Ford's ideas on his work, their personal connections may very well have continued.[193] In 1897, Ford was associated with Delos F. Wilcox, who took classes with Dewey in Ann Arbor in the early 1890s and shared with Ford a profound interest in municipal government. Wilcox, to whom Ford lent manuscripts, referred mysteriously to the "joint work of yourself, Corydon L. Ford, Prof. John Dewey and Mr. Thomas Lacey" as "a more important body of philosophical writings than has yet been published in America."[194] That Ford and Dewey never crossed paths at Columbia University during the twelve years they both had an office on campus also seems unlikely.[195]

It is now time to let readers dive into the texts of the Ford collection. This introduction is far from having exhausted all the avenues opened by the strange character that is Franklin Ford. We have tried to make the story of his life as collective as possible, but some of Ford's acolytes deserve further inquiry, including his wife Mathilde Coffin, who survived Ford by twenty-three years,[196] and his brothers Sheridan and Corydon, who both had tumultuous lives and careers. We have also tried to describe Ford's intellectual pantheon, which would benefit from further exploration.

Perceptive readers will also have noticed that many of Ford's themes anticipate contemporary issues: the fascination with "new" technologies, the intertwining of the informational and financial worlds, the workings of media ecosystems and their eminently political character—to name just a few. We have tried to steer clear of turning Ford into a visionary or a prophet. This does not mean that there is nothing to say about Ford's relevance for today: We have explored these avenues elsewhere[197] and hope that future works will continue to offer a stimulating back and forth between the turn of the last century and contemporary concerns.

Finally, even though we believe that the present collection offers a coherent deep dive into Ford's writings, we also contend that it is incomplete: Some documents of the Ford archive could not be included nor discussed here, and we also know, given the prolific nature of Ford's output, that other writings have yet to be found and added to the collection. The inquiry into Franklin Ford's life and work waits to be put into many more relations.

[193] Ford mysteriously evoked "one of my fellow students who is in Chicago" (who is possibly Park) in a letter to Holmes (Burton, *Progressive Masks*, 114). On Ford's enduring influence on Park, who discussed Ford's work in his classes as late as 1921, see Rolf Lindner, *The Reportage of Urban Culture: Robert Park and the Chicago School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 34.

[194] Delos F. Wilcox to Franklin Ford, December 5, 1897.

[195] Dewey came to Columbia in 1905 and stayed until his retirement in 1930, and Ford had an office set up for him at the library from 1907 until his death in 1918.

[196] "Mrs. Ford, Ex-aide of Estimate Board," *New York Times*, July 4, 1941.

[197] Our work includes a methodological experiment that turned Ford into a series of "bots" on social media. See @FranklinFordBot (website), last updated January 30, 2020, www.franklinford.org. See also: Trudel and De Maeyer, "The Many-Sided Franklin Ford"; Juliette De Maeyer and Dominique Trudel, "@franklinfordbot: Remediating Franklin Ford," *Digital Journalism* 6, no. 9 (2018): 1270–87.