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WILLIAM JAMES AND THE ART OF POPULAR STATEMENT

Paul Stob

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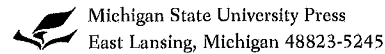
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For Sarah and Elliott

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Acknowledgments

When I was still an undergraduate student, two events foreshadowed the writing of this book. First, I began reading William James's work. For the most part I didn't yet understand James, but his thoughts captivated me nonetheless. Second, I heard the word "rhetorician" for the first time, and, for some strange reason, it sounded like something I wanted to be. *William James and the Art of Popular Statement* is, at least in retrospect, the culmination of these two events.

Of course, in the years between my undergraduate education and the publication of this book, numerous individuals have given me their time, guidance, and criticism (in the best sense of the term). Marty Medhurst is not only an extraordinary editor but a longtime teacher, mentor, and friend. Jim Aune has been a profound influence on my life and career, and I owe him more than he'll ever know. John McDermott was really the first to help me understand William James, and his scholarship and teaching continues to inspire me.

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Introduction

On May 1, 1903, William James sat at his desk catching up on correspondence. One of the letters he wrote that day was to his close friend and philosophical ally Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller. James addressed a number of topics in the letter—a recent essay Schiller had published, page proofs of a book notice James had written, gossip about mutual friends, the chance of James teaching at Oxford, and James's plan to retire from Harvard. He also discussed how intellectually rewarding it had been to deliver the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh. The lectures, which James had completed in the spring of 1902, had led to the publication of one of his masterpieces—*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, a wildly popular book that many deemed an instant classic. Thinking over the success of *Varieties*, James told Schiller something remarkable: "I believe popular statement to be the highest form of art."[1]

This remark, buried in a wide-ranging letter, is more revealing of James's intellectual commitments than scholars have yet recognized. By the spring of 1903, James was one of the most visible and influential

scientists, psychologists, and philosophers in the world. Yet he singled out "popular statement" as his intellectual ideal. Not locked away in his study, not behind a desk in academic seminars, not in the pages of professional journals, but in statements to general audiences was where he saw his calling. When thinking about his career and his plans for the future, James turned to the discursive relationships he had fostered with "popular" audiences. Popular statement—the kind of statement that had made *The Varieties of Religious Experience* a smashing success—was the height of intellectual creativity.

James's commitment to the art of popular statement did not go unnoticed during his lifetime. Few, if any, American scholars received the kind of popular coverage that he did. According to a North Dakota paper in 1887, James produced "unusually readable" essays that stood out prominently in an age of scientific jargon.[2] His thoughts on the human mind, summarized a Texas paper in 1888, were "most eloquent, . . . both beautiful and forcible," and accessible to generally interested readers without specialized training in psychology.[3] In 1891, a New Orleans paper explained that *The Principles of Psychology* was filled with "luminous pages," representative of someone with "the rare power of presenting the most abstract ideas in a vivid pictorial form."[4] James was "brilliant and vigorous," opined a Massachusetts paper in 1898, able to treat complex issues "in a way to interest everybody."[5] With a clear sense of his audience, concluded a California paper in 1899, James wrote "so that even the ordinary reader accompanied him without the least difficulty."[6] In 1907, a New York paper summarized James's career by explaining that his work contained "unusual skill and persuasiveness," which enabled him to attract "considerable attention not alone among philosophers by profession, but also among ordinary folk who do not as a rule meddle with philosophy." According to the paper, James skillfully adapted his discourse "for the man (and woman) of the street," using "the concrete example to bring home the abstract proposition. He does not even occasionally disdain the use of the slang of the day to elucidate the problems of all time."[7]

After James's death in 1910, countless tributes echoed these sentiments. The *Los Angeles Times* deemed his writing style "as clear and as fascinating as that of a brilliant novelist," which enabled him "to reduce technical terms to a common language, intelligible to a child."[8] Among all the "pioneers of a new world of thought," concluded the *Chicago Tribune*, James was the "preeminent" intellectual; he "fascinated, aroused, and dominated us by his thought, his marvelous style, and his personality."[9] "No American thinker," the *New York Times* lamented, "could leave a deeper sense of loss in our intellectual life than William James. He was widely read and his influence was widely felt." His death, the paper predicted, would be "an experience of personal regret to multitudes beyond the range of his acquaintance."[10]

As these accounts attest, James operated with a high level of visibility—among scholars and among members of the larger community. His books and essays were read by scientists and philosophers as well as by those who did not typically read scientific or philosophical treatises. His greatest works—*The Principles of Psychology*, *The Will to Believe*, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, *Pragmatism*, and *A Pluralistic Universe*—were among the most-read scholarly publications at the turn of the twentieth century. At a time when many thinkers seemed to turn away from public culture, James wrote in a way that transcended the intellectual divisions of his generation.[11] With "linguistic simplicity and clearness," remarked the *Springfield Daily Republican*, James had done "more to popularize philosophy than any other writer of this generation. It is a delight for the person unfamiliar with philosophic jargon to read him."[12]

It was not by chance that James attracted so many readers. He worked tirelessly to craft texts that would advance modern thought and prove compelling to general audiences. But the art of popular statement was not only integral to James's books and essays; it was also integral to the lectures he delivered across the country year after year. At the lectern, few scholars could match his passion, wit, and eloquence, and even fewer could attract the crowds that he did. James routinely spoke in packed auditoriums. On several occasions, organizers had to move his lectures at the last minute to larger venues to accommodate throngs of attendees. As one onlooker described the typical scene, "breathlessly listening crowds" greeted James "as the messenger of some new gospel." And he did not disappoint, communicating effectively with everyone from "business men" to "matrons and maids" and "merchants and publishers and newspaper men and men in more humble walks of life."[13]

Yet it would be a mistake to make a sharp distinction between James's writings and lectures, for the vast majority of his publications began on the lecture circuit. The chapters that made up *The Will to Believe*, *Talks to Teachers*, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, *Pragmatism*, and *A Pluralistic Universe*, among others, originated on the public platform. More

striking still, James typically did not undertake major revisions when turning his lectures into manuscripts for publication. What he said at the lectern was, by and large, what the American people read when they devoured his texts. He thus enabled readers to perceive, even to feel themselves a part of, the lecture occasion from which a given text emerged. James's oral prose style gave readers the impression that he was in the act of thinking and that they were participants in the unfolding of insight.[14]

When we think of James nowadays, it is easy to overlook the amount of time he spent on the lecture circuit speaking to the American people and crafting accessible texts. We think of him primarily as a scientist, psychologist, and philosopher. And, of course, he was these things. But he was someone who pursued science, psychology, and philosophy in conjunction with those for whom modern thought was often alien and unappealing. This is not to say that we lack a substantial picture of James's life and work. His ongoing influence has led to stacks of scholarship on his biography,[15] his publications,[16] his upbringing,[17] his scholarly development,[18] his role in shaping American philosophy,[19] his involvement in academic debates,[20] even his fascination with the paranormal.[21] Nor is this to say that we have overlooked the fact that James addressed popular audiences. Scholars have long known that he spoke to ordinary Americans and that his way with words was a prominent part of his appeal. Ross Posnock, for example, has noted that "James articulated his social thought in a rhetoric of incomparable moral eloquence and passion, becoming a beloved cultural hero by the last decade of his life and remaining one in our own time."[22] George Cotkin has explained that James "regularly addressed" popular audiences on "issues of the cultural and philosophical moment."[23] Frederick J. Ruf has explored James's work for its stylistic appeal, showing how James's artful prose contributed to the character of his thought.[24] And Gay Wilson Allen, one of James's many biographers, has written that James routinely "impressed others as a man alive to his fingertips—or better, to the roots of his nimble brain and his witty tongue. His charming presence, his informal, conversational lectures, and his clear, vigorous writings on psychology and philosophy were unfailingly stimulating to all who saw or heard or read him. And the aim of all his professional lecturing and writing was to promote more abundant health and pleasurable activity in his audience."[25]

These characterizations, though apt, only begin to elucidate the role that popular statement played in James's overall intellectual endeavor.

Despite the mountain of scholarship on his life and work, we have little understanding of why so many people traveled to lecture halls to hear him speak, why they made his books national and international best-sellers, and why they subscribed to his view of pressing problems of the day. Even Cotkin's admirable treatment of James as a "public philosopher," which is the most complete account yet of James's efforts to link philosophy with American public culture, does not explore the popular relationships he cultivated, the strategies he used to build these relationships, and the reasons his work demanded attention from academics and nonacademics alike.[26] The art of popular statement was far more than an aside in James's career. It was integral to the way he carried himself, to his interactions with colleagues, to his choice of venues for speaking and publishing, to the discursive style he adopted, to the conversations he influenced, and to the intellectual bonds he fostered with his fellow citizens.

This book is an exploration of the role of popular statement in James's life and work. By using the lecture circuit, popular periodicals, and his numerous best sellers to address "the people," James was able to distinguish himself from his colleagues and to assume a place of prominence unequalled by other American thinkers of the day. I use the words "the people" advisedly, fully aware that the label points more to a constitutive fiction than to any actual group.[27] Nevertheless, even if "the people" is a rather generic term, even if there is no unified, overarching public sphere wherein citizens congregate as equals, appeals to "the people" can still be effective in bringing individuals together.[28] Addressing "ordinary Americans" or "the masses" is not a matter of reflecting a reality but of calling people forward and constituting publics around particular ideas and perspectives. For James, addressing "the people" about affairs of the mind was a matter of adopting a discursive posture and drawing upon symbols that would allow different audiences—usually nonacademic audiences—to enter his texts. Orienting his thought toward "ordinary Americans" helped those who thought of themselves as ordinary Americans identify with his intellectual project.

Yet as we shall see, the significance of James's work was not simply that he addressed "the people"; after all, many intellectuals spoke *to* general audiences. The central argument of this book is that James's commitment to popular statement ultimately led him to a different kind of thought, a different epistemology, a view of science, religion, and philosophy that revolved around ordinary people and their experiences and

perceptions. James built an understanding of the world around those he addressed, giving them a distinct role in the pursuit of knowledge and, in fact, fostering a new intellectual culture with them. In that regard James did more than speak popularly; he spoke as an intellectual populist. On the lecture circuit and in publications oriented toward general audiences, he confronted aristocrats of the mind—those who had accumulated power through various systems of academic and professional authority—and he argued that intellectual power should be returned to the people. In an age when knowledge was supposedly in the hands of experts, vouchsafed by academically certified specialists, James brought ordinary Americans into the marketplace of ideas. Because of their position outside the strictures of professional inquiry, they were often in the best position to answer life's big questions—questions about God, religion, science, ethics, the nature of the world, the nature of human beings, and the good life.

To be clear, the argument of this book is limited to discursive interactions between James and popular audiences. That is to say, tracing his art of popular statement and the emergence of his intellectual populism is a way of tracing a prominent mode of engagement in his career, but it is not a way of characterizing everything he said and did. The art of popular statement does not provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and analyzing all of James's massive corpus. It does, however, help us see how James committed himself to engaging intellectually disaffected publics, and it helps us understand why these publics responded enthusiastically to his message. The art he developed over the years was an art of attitudes, postures, appeals, and strategies for connecting with individuals who, he believed, deserved to be addressed. James was concerned, from early in his career, with the direction in which the world of thought was moving. In response, he offered popular statement as a kind of corrective, as a way of reconfiguring inquiry so that it better served "the people"—however amorphous and inexact that concept was.

Because the art of popular statement helped James create an alternative to the dominant patterns of thought at the time, this book is also about the transforming world of knowledge at the turn of the twentieth century. James became prominent and influential in part because he often opposed the dramatic fragmentation that defined intellectual culture at the time.[29] Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, knowledge became increasingly associated with professional

training, narrow academic disciplines, and specialized vocabularies that were more or less inaccessible to outsiders. What counted as knowledge, what was necessary to produce knowledge, who could create knowledge, who could express knowledge, and who could use knowledge—these and similar questions were answered much differently early in the nineteenth century than at the end of it. James proved exceedingly conscious of the "culture of professionalism,"[30] and he often tried to combat what he saw as the insidious tendencies of academic specialization—despite the fact that he was one of the most prominent psychologists and philosophers in America. Thus the story of James's art of popular statement is also a story of competing systems of knowledge, which carried (and still carry) very different consequences for intellectual accessibility, participation, power relationships, and discourse.

If we are fully to understand James's place in intellectual culture at the turn of the twentieth century, it is also necessary to understand the social position he occupied. He was more than a scientist, psychologist, and philosopher. He was, to put it succinctly, a public intellectual. As a public intellectual, he helped define the tradition of "scientists, academics in the humanities and the social and political sciences, writers, artists and journalists who articulate issues of importance in their societies to the general public."[31] For James, working as a public intellectual meant spending significant time on the lecture circuit and publishing in popular venues; it meant crafting discourses that drew the American people into intellectual conversations; and it meant speaking a language that distinguished him from his colleagues.

The label "public intellectual" is not without its problems, however. Over the last twenty years, the idea of the public intellectual has led to particularly active scholarly debates. Since publication of Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals* in 1987, writers in a variety of disciplines have analyzed the meaning, value, and prevalence of public intellectuals, but they have come to little consensus. For Jacoby, the term captures the spirit of thinkers and writers "who address a general and educated audience" instead of communicating within the borders of specialized academic enclaves.[32] Unfortunately, Jacoby continues, the twentieth century witnessed a precipitous decline in publicly oriented thinkers and writers. Echoing Jacoby's lament, Richard Posner has concluded that "Public-intellectual work is becoming less distinctive, less interesting, and less important."[33] For Jacoby and Posner, the heyday of public intellectualism—the day of William James, W. E. B. DuBois,

John Dewey, Sidney Hook, Reinhold Niebuhr, Hannah Arendt, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others—is but a fleeting memory.

In response to this narrative of decline, a number of scholars have questioned whether there ever was a heyday of public intellectualism. The story, they say, is much more complex than that described by Jacoby and Posner.[34] Other scholars have redirected the debate to an international domain, exploring what seems to be more robust public-intellectual activity in Europe.[35] Still others focus on public intellectuals as oppositional agents—thinkers and writers who challenge power structures and work to abolish the status quo.[36] In addition, there has been extensive work on the role of minority public intellectuals, particularly African Americans, in shaping the social, cultural, and political landscape.[37] The result of these many studies has been a seemingly endless number of opinions on who public intellectuals are, what they do, and why they might be important.

Though scholars seem unable to agree on the current state of public intellectuals—whether they are in decline, abundant, oppositional, or more prevalent internationally—most recognize that debates about intellectual duty vis-à-vis the larger community are nothing new. In fact, one of the reasons it is fitting to treat James as a public intellectual is because he was a central figure in some of the first American discussions of the relationship between intellectual practice and public culture. James struggled with many of the issues that still animate scholarly debates: What is the relationship among experts, specialists, academics, and intellectuals? What responsibilities do these figures have insofar as public knowledge is concerned? What role should specialized languages play in intellectual culture? What is the place of experts in public debates? What can nonacademics contribute to the advancement of thought? These and similar questions presented James with a host of issues he had to work through in his pursuit of popular statement, and they are questions that remain at the forefront of current conversations.[38]

We should also recognize that James was one of the first Americans to use the term "intellectual" as a noun to describe a particular person.[39] While other American thinkers used *intellectual* in its noun form before him—the most notable being Robert Ingersoll[40]—James gave the term cachet, helping to popularize it in the midst of the Dreyfus Affair of the late 1890s and early 1900s.[41] When the French writer Èmile Zola used his literary fame to speak out in national newspapers against the treatment of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French artillery officer and Jew wrongly convicted of treason for selling military secrets to the Germans, the word "intellectual" began to assume its modern connotations in France. Zola and the other "Dreyfusards," as they were called, believed it their duty to engage the controversy and to shed light on the injustice of the situation. In America, James followed the affair closely, paying particular attention to how Dreyfus's friends and colleagues discussed the duty of thinkers and writers to speak out on this political problem. The more James reflected on the situation, the more he embraced the French intellectual impulse. In 1899, he wrote to his friend William Mackintire Salter that "we 'intellectuals' in America must all work to keep our precious birthright of individualism, and freedom from these institutions."[42] In 1900, he repeated the sentiment to William Dean Howells, writing: "I think that '*les intellectuals*' of every country ought to bond themselves together into a league for the purpose of fighting the curse of savagery that is pouring over the world."[43] Then, in 1907, he used "intellectual" in a public lecture to define a "class-consciousness" that ought to stand against political corruption. The lecture was subsequently published in *McClure's Magazine* under the title "The Social Value of the College-Bred."[44] The intellectual, James believed, was one who relied upon his or her learned reputation to clarify the meanings and implications of common problems. Though he never put the word "public" in front of "intellectual," he recognized that public commitments were inseparable from significant ideas.

Studying James's art of popular statement will in no way settle questions about public intellectualism writ large, about the function of intellectual discourse in public culture, or about the value of public intellectuals in different time periods. There is no need to position James as the quintessential public intellectual, nor is there a need to extrapolate from his life and work any general theory of the nature, duty, and significance of public intellectuals. The details of the problems with which he grappled were particular to his time, so it is almost impossible to offer normative suggestions based on his life for what public intellectuals should and should not do.

Nevertheless, we can find in James's work important evidence that current conceptions of public intellectualism fall short of capturing his mode of operation in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. For example, Jacoby's definition of the public intellectual—not to mention many subsequent definitions—discusses the public intellectual as someone who

speaks to general audiences.[45] Under this conception, the public intellectual shares knowledge with the masses, offering it to them in a public forum. But if being a public intellectual is nothing more than addressing general audiences and sharing ideas, we could identify most academics as public intellectuals, for countless professors deliver public presentations at some point in their careers. Speaking to or writing for general audiences is nothing unique—in James's day or in our day. Even Charles Sanders Peirce, who never came close to uttering a popular statement, delivered public lectures in Cambridge and elsewhere.[46] But Peirce's thought never connected with the American people, it never led to a shared understanding with general audiences, so it would be strange to call him a public intellectual.

To think of James as someone who simply shared ideas with general audiences fails to capture the appeal, nuance, and power of his thought. As we shall see, he went beyond speaking *to* general audiences by working *with* them on the issues they faced. His work was a matter of collaboration, as he entered into relationships with listeners and readers across the country to confront common problems. James dedicated himself to the art of popular statement specifically because it allowed him to create an intellectual arena that he could occupy with the American people writ large. Public-intellectual practice was a matter of mutually affective relationships—of James and his audiences crafting a shared vision.

Another way of putting it is to say that James's art of popular statement and his public-intellectual persona hinged upon the "micro-situations," to use Randall Collins's term, that constituted his career.[47] In particular lectures and reader interactions, James encountered different kinds of people facing different kinds of problems—and he did his best to confront those problems with them. Over time, these encounters formed a complex chain of associations that connected James to an array of publics and helped move his thought through various networks of individuals.[48] Indeed, one might even argue that the prominence and influence of his ideas emerged directly from his frequent encounters with new and different audiences. The popularly oriented micro-situations of his career fostered countless contexts of reception that made his ideas meaningful for particular people dealing with their own issues.[49]

But how exactly did James's ideas become meaningful in these encounters? After all, simply interacting with popular audiences does not guarantee success; certainly it does not necessarily result in the kind of visibility James achieved. So how was he able to make his statements

popular, effective, and influential? His method for doing so, and the primary reason he succeeded as a public intellectual, was his command of the art of rhetoric. Attuned to the power of language, he knew how to turn a phrase to make an idea memorable. He knew how to adapt his lectures for listeners across the country—be they in New England, further down the Eastern Seaboard, in the Midwest, or on the distant West Coast—thereby giving his audiences the sense that his work was significant for their situation. He knew how to help his listeners and readers reach conclusions about pressing problems facing the nation. He knew how to make nonacademics feel intellectually productive. In short, he understood how language could bridge the gaps between individuals in a society. In James's career, language was "a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols."[50] Speaking to packed auditoriums across the country and publishing some of the best-selling intellectual works of the time, he lived by the fine art of "adjusting ideas to people and of people to ideas."[51]

Unfortunately, the term "rhetoric" can be as problematic as the term "public intellectual," yet both are crucial for understanding James's art of popular statement. For millennia, philosophers, politicians, orators, and others have debated what rhetoric means, and each generation—indeed, each thinker—seems to have defined the term anew. From Aristotle's oft-cited definition of rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion"[52] to more modern conceptions of rhetoric as "the study of misunderstanding and its remedies,"[53] the term can be perplexing and elusive. In popular discourse, many writers exacerbate the problem by contrasting "rhetoric" with "reality," as though the former is completely disconnected from, and insignificant when compared to, the latter. Others talk about "mere rhetoric," thereby belittling the art in light of what they see as true insight. Still others dismiss rhetoric as a matter of style alone, as though thought and language, form and content, style and substance are easily separable.

Despite the seemingly endless number of ways to define rhetoric, those who study it can generally agree that it involves the way symbols shape perceptions, foster personal and collective judgments, and lead to action.[54] At the very least, rhetoric is a tool for inducing change in the world and for altering our relationships with one another. It is a productive art, assisting with deliberation at a time when no clear answers are in sight. A central component of democratic society, rhetoric "can offer counsel, define problems, suggest solutions, provide meaning when all

appears confused and uncertain, or persuade an audience to believe or to act in a fitting and timely manner."[55]

Because rhetoric is an art of building symbolic relationships, because it offers speakers and writers the chance to bridge (or to widen) perceived divisions within or among groups, it is an inexorable part of public-intellectual practice. Indeed, a keen understanding of the constitutive power of language is necessary for those who hope to create "enduring works that broadly influence cultural habits and institutional practices during their lifetimes."[56] Moreover, the rhetorical connections an intellectual makes with different publics greatly influence the way that intellectual is perceived by those publics. That is to say, language use is central to the creation and maintenance of a public intellectual's reputation. As Steven Mailloux explains, "Public intellectuals not only rhetorically engage audiences beyond the academy but are recognized as doing so by both academics and nonacademics."[57] In order to bring together texts, audiences, and ideas in specific situations, in order to create recognition and identification across intellectual divisions, public intellectuals depend upon the art of rhetoric.[58] It is the art of rhetoric that structures the micro-situations of a public intellectual's career.

Scholars have long recognized that James, one of America's greatest public intellectuals, was engaged in a rhetorical project, or at least that his thought was helpful for those thinking about rhetoric. Early in the twentieth century, writers of public-speaking textbooks turned to James's work in psychology, particularly his discussion of attention, to help describe the process by which speakers engage the complex mental makeup of audiences.[59] In the middle of the century, however, scholars of rhetoric seemed to move on from James, leaving his work unexamined and unacknowledged. Across the disciplinary landscape, in fact, not just in the field of rhetorical studies, James's thought fell out of fashion.[60] Eventually, a wave of interest in the relationship between rhetoric and pragmatism brought renewed attention to the classical pragmatists, including James.[61] Steven Mailloux, for one, puts James and other pragmatists in conversation with the sophistic tradition of ancient Greece to create a "rhetorical hermeneutics" that draws upon the antifoundationalism of American pragmatism to analyze historical acts of interpretation. The goal for Mailloux is to use "rhetoric to practice theory by doing history."[62] Focusing more on the sociocultural milieus in which pragmatism was born, Robert Danisch uses James's work, along with the work of John Dewey, Jane Adams, Oliver Wendell

Holmes Jr., and Alain Locke, to show how "a belief in uncertainty, epistemological anthropocentrism, pluralism, community, and the need for practical arts are the grounds for a philosophy that indicates rhetoric's central place in human affairs."[63] James is particularly important in this regard because "the intellectual commitments of James's pragmatism share an orientation to the world with classical rhetoric and open the possibility for a new American rhetoric."[64]

Yet for all the accounts of James's link to the art of rhetoric, we lack a complete picture of James as a rhetorician—that is, as someone practicing the art of rhetoric. Danisch has even argued that "James does not appear to have reflected self-consciously on his own rhetorical practices, and for that reason he was not a rhetorician."[65] James's commitment to the art of popular statement tells quite another story, however. Not only did he reflect upon his rhetorical practices but he engaged specific audiences in specific situations and relied upon specific strategies to influence the character of American discourse. Thus far, the closest we have to an account of James as a rhetorician is Frederick Antczak's *Thought and Character*, which includes a chapter on James's efforts to bring together philosophy and public culture. As Antczak describes, James ranged widely from "calculated formality to offhand folksiness," crafting a "rhetoric of democratic education" that linked philosophy with the American experience. "James's tactical genius," Antczak insists, "consisted in recognizing and addressing the paradoxical task of expounding the conflict in philosophy powerfully enough to convey its significance without making it sound intellectually inaccessible."[66] Antczak's characterization is correct, but it is also brief, glossing over questions of how James crafted his work in particular moments for particular audiences relative to particular ends. Without getting into the micro-situations of James's career, we lack a complete picture of his rhetorical artistry and work as a public intellectual.

Because this book is concerned with James's art of popular statement, it focuses primarily on his rhetorical practices relative to popular audiences. This is not to say that one could not focus on James's rhetoric relative to other kinds of audiences or in other situations. It is simply to say that an art of popular statement required the creation of a rhetorical style capable of animating individuals who stood outside the professional cultures of which James was a part. On the public stage and in the pages of books and essays, James faced many of the same challenges that rhetors throughout history have faced. He had to get listeners and

readers interested in problems and ideas—no matter how distant the problems and ideas may have seemed at first glance. He had to ensure that they could follow the progression of his thought. He had to speak a language they could understand, appreciate, and share. He had to bring abstract concepts before their eyes, helping them see what was immaterial. And he had to inspire in them a sense of purpose and agency, or at least the sense that their time with him had been worthwhile. These and similar rhetorical issues stood between James and an effective art of popular statement. But as we shall see, he responded in a way that made him one of America's greatest public intellectuals.

Given the scope of James's writing and the sheer volume of his corpus, it would be well-nigh impossible to cover every time he engaged popular audiences. Consequently, I focus on those instances that functioned as turning points in his development and in his relationship with intellectual culture. I pay particular attention, though not exclusive attention, to James's work on the lecture circuit because it was there that he connected most effectively with specific audiences and crafted the oral style that permeated his publications. Approaching James from this perspective will allow us to see the arc of his popular endeavor, including the practices and strategies that led to his prominence. The visibility and influence he achieved was the result of a long process of negotiation and experimentation. Understanding this process will produce a clearer view of how his thought shaped and was shaped by his place in public culture.

Those familiar with James's work will notice significant absences from what follows, and two of these absences deserve special mention. First, I do not investigate James's civic orations and publications, including his work in opposition to American imperialism. Cotkin, among others, has already treated James's anti-imperialism at length,[67] and approaching the subject with an eye toward the art of popular statement would add little to our overall understanding of what James undertook. Moreover, the art of popular statement was about developing relationships, and few Americans knew James as an anti-imperialist, at least when compared to the other roles he played. In the eyes of the nation and world, he was primarily a scientist, psychologist, philosopher, psychical researcher, and communicator; anti-imperialist was a minuscule part of his reputation.

Second, I do not analyze the "Will to Believe" controversy. While the controversy no doubt attracted significant attention, and while it would certainly be possible to place an analysis of the text in the overall development of James's art, the fact was that James accomplished more by delivering *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In the scheme of James's career, *Varieties* was more important and influential than *The Will to Believe*. The overall picture this book tries to paint is of James's constantly evolving pursuit of popular statement, and while other texts and case studies could be included, what follows is enough to reveal the contours and substance of his eloquent vision.

Chapter 1 explores the shifting intellectual terrain that propelled James's career and set the stage for his turn to popular statement. James grew up in the presence of some of the most influential thinkers of the first half of the nineteenth century, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry James Sr., who modeled for him a system of knowledge based on eloquence, popular lecturing, and wide-ranging intellectual vision. The "culture of eloquence" in which Emerson and Henry Sr. thrived was a culture in which advanced degrees were not essential, insight was defined by rhetorical prowess, and big ideas were supposed to edify and entertain communities. But around the time James went to college, eloquence was giving way to expertise, technical vocabularies, and exclusive enclaves of inquiry. At Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School, James entered a "culture of professionalism" that was closely linked to the problems and prospects of modern science. He also encountered figures who demonstrated different means of negotiating the demands of science: Benjamin Peirce, Asa Gray, Jeffries Wyman, Louis Agassiz, and Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. As we shall see, the shift from eloquence to professionalism created a productive tension that animated James's popular efforts. In the process of confronting and working through the challenges of modern thought, he tried to keep alive the spirit of inquiry that had defined his youth.

Chapter 2 investigates James's early efforts to address the intersection of professional inquiry and public culture. As a young scholar his intellectual output consisted primarily of anonymous book reviews in popular periodicals such as the *North American Review*, the *Nation*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. Thus far, scholars have glossed over these reviews, setting them aside as largely insignificant when compared to his later work. But I treat the early reviews as sites of intellectual invention that allowed James to develop many of the ideas, arguments, and strategies of his subsequent work—such as his 1878 lectures at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and the Lowell Institute in Boston. In what became

the most significant lectures of his young career, James drew upon the arguments developed in his book reviews to foster a shared perspective with popular audiences on the significance of modern science.

Chapter 3 continues to explore how James worked with specific communities on issues they faced. In particular, I turn to the most-delivered lecture series of James's career—"Talks to Teachers on Psychology," which he presented almost a dozen times during the 1890s. Speaking to primary and secondary schoolteachers on the relationship between psychology and pedagogy, James did not simply share psychological insights with his audiences. Rather, he worked with them on bettering themselves, their professional predicament, and their place in democratic society. "Talks to Teachers" was, I argue, a collaboration between James and the nation's teachers more than it was a set of scientific musings on pedagogy. By the time James finished delivering the lectures at the end of the 1890s, he fully understood how popular interactions could produce useful knowledge.

Chapter 4 explores what was the most controversial aspect of James's career—his work as a psychical researcher. Many scholars treat his dedication to psychical research as a curiosity, simply an extension of his quirky personality and open-mindedness. To the contrary, I present psychical research as a turning point in James's development as a public intellectual. Having dedicated himself to the study of ghosts, mediums, spirit communication, haunted houses, telepathy, automatic writing, and other paranormal phenomena, James encountered significant opposition from academics who saw psychical research as an unfortunate remnant of the premodern era. In response to professional criticism, James took to the popular press and to the public platform to defend himself, his fellow psychical researchers, and the very idea of investigating the paranormal. In 1890 and 1892 articles in *Scribner's* and *Forum*, in an 1896 presidential address before the Society for Psychical Research, and in his 1896 Lowell lectures on "Exceptional Mental States," James did his best to frame psychical research as an important part of modern science and as a way for scientists to help ordinary Americans make sense of their experiences. I argue that James's efforts to defend psychical research resulted in a popular-professional divide that shaped the remainder of his career. In fact, defending psychical research cleared the way for James to develop a populist epistemology.

Chapter 5 explores how James developed this populist epistemology in the context of a specific rhetorical situation. The first American invited to deliver the prestigious Gifford lectures on natural theology, James worked tirelessly to craft his masterpiece, "The Varieties of Religious Experience," which was later published, and widely read, under the same name. Treating "Varieties" as a carefully constructed public performance, I argue that James presented his listeners (and subsequent readers) with a vision of intellectual culture in which the experiences and perceptions of "the people" formed the basis of knowledge. In a complete reconfiguration of the culture of professionalism, which viewed knowledge as extending from the work of specially trained experts, James affirmed everyday experience as the beginning of insight. With "Varieties," then, his work as a public intellectual became mature, for he not only displayed his dedication to addressing ordinary people but also built his thought around them, their beliefs, their feelings, and their perceptions.

Chapter 6 extends the intellectual populism of chapter 5 by turning to what is generally considered James's most important contribution to modern philosophy: pragmatism. As we shall see, pragmatism not only emerged on the lecture circuit but also advanced James's effort to restructure intellectual culture around the primacy of "the people." Best articulated in his 1906 and 1907 lectures at the Lowell Institute and Columbia University, pragmatism was an attempt to overthrow the philosophical aristocracy of the modern era and to call forth a public of lay philosophers who could set the pursuit of knowledge back on track. Although *Pragmatism*, the book that resulted from the lectures, would earn James a number of professional enemies, it would also become one of the most popular philosophical works in American history. Readers hailed it as a new philosophical creed, an American gospel, perfectly attuned to everyday experience at the dawn of the twentieth century.

In the end, exploring James's commitment to the art of popular statement and his corresponding development as a public intellectual will position his work in a new light. As we will see, James tried to carry on an oratorical culture that had defined the life of the mind during the first half of the nineteenth century. What he said was novel for its time, but what he did was familiar and comforting to those who yearned for the intellectual practices of old. We will also see how many reactions to James's work, including popular praise and professional scorn, stemmed from his efforts to engage, edify, and empower ordinary Americans. The art of popular statement was a threat to specialization, expertise, and the in-group languages of academic inquiry. It was, at the same time, a

way of creating a vibrant public sphere by inviting people to participate in civil society.

Exploring the art of popular statement will also provide a striking counterpoint to one of the most prominent and long-standing criticisms of James's life and work. Since his death, and even before, scholars have criticized James for being a rugged individualist, even an elitist, who was blind to the social problems of his time.[68] A number of scholars have already answered this criticism,[69] but James's art represents yet another reply. As he toured the country speaking to the American people, as he took their intellectual predicaments seriously and worked with them on common problems, he not only demonstrated his concern for social affairs but also constructed a new community. Far from being an individualist in the negative sense of the term, James embarked on a decades-long project of bringing people together in an alternative intellectual culture.

By 1910, the year of James's death, no other American scholar could match his visibility and influence. None could rival his standing as an intellectual champion of the people. His efforts to speak a popular language, to challenge professional authority, and to reimagine the pursuit of knowledge endeared him to millions. By making the art of popular statement his intellectual ideal during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, he found a way to speak to the ages.

Abbreviations

Corr.	*The Correspondence of William James*, 12 vols. Edited by Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992–2004.
ECR	*Essays, Comments, and Reviews* (*The Works of William James*). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.
EP	*Essays in Psychology* (*The Works of William James*). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
EPR	*Essays in Psychical Research* (*The Works of William James*). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
ERE	*Essays in Radical Empiricism* (*The Works of William James*). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.
ERM	*Essays in Religion and Morality* (*The Works of William James*). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.