

Us and Them: The Case for a Muscular Humanism

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

The news comes to us like telegrams of our troubled modernity.

Gunmen burst into a Bahai church in a South African township, line up the few white (Iranian) members of the congregation, and shoot them dead. The Bahai religion holds that all races are one and the Azanian People's Liberation Army, which apparently dispatched the killers, explain that they wanted to send a clear message against the mixing of races. In fact, the Azanian movement has been profoundly shaped by European race thinking, as you might expect of a group that borrows its name from a mythical place of barbarism named in Evelyn Waugh's satiric novel *Black Mischief*. The truth is, their abjuration of "race mixing" has nothing to do with local indigenous traditions and everything to do with the logic of apartheid.

"One million Arabs are not worth a Jewish fingernail," Rabbi Yaacov Perrin says in a eulogy for Dr. Baruch Goldstein before a thousand sympathizers. The turn of phrase reflects a perverse misreading of a passage from Exodus; but this voice is one we have heard before. It is the voice of messianic hatred. We hear it from the Balkans to the Bantustans; we hear it from Hezbollah and from Kach. Closer to home, we hear it in the streets of Bensonhurst, whose rage is now exported to far-flung reaches of the earth.

And, of course, we have heard it from some of those who profess to be addressing the immiseration of black America. "Never will I say I am not an anti-Semite," Khalid Muhammad announced a few weeks ago. "I pray that God will kill my enemy and take him off the face of the planet earth." He is

currently peddling tape records of his speeches under the suggestive title, "No love for the other side."

Last week, the government of Malaysia bans the film "Schindler's List" on the remarkable grounds that it "incites sympathy for one race." One race and, we may presume, the wrong one at that, for the Muslim government also objects to the depiction of Jewish ceremonies in the film. No love for the other side.

And so it goes. That suffering ennobles is a lie; an old lie that has been exposed countless times, yet has proven surprisingly durable. Messianic hatred is scarcely the province of the privileged classes. David Duke draws his support from the least affluent and most anxious of white Southerners. Similarly, if cagey demagogues should find inviting prey in black America, our immediate circumstances make this unsurprising. For in so many ways, black America is a third world country within a first world one. That nearly half of African-American children live in poverty is one scandal; another is simply that this fact has become an acceptable feature of our social landscape, as unremarkable as crabgrass.

Yet if profoundly anti-modern creeds like these continue to grow, perhaps liberalism--by which I mean that political tradition of individual liberty that harkens back at least to the Enlightenment--must itself shoulder some blame. For too long, liberalism has grown accustomed to recusing itself from other people's problems, the tragic conflicts that embroil communities of different faiths. Genital mutilation in Africa? Don't ask us to arbitrate among the mores of another culture. Human rights abuses in China? Are we really in a position to judge? And so it goes. Deference to the autonomy of other beliefs, other values, other cultures has become an easy alibi for moral

isolationism. When we need action, we get handwringing. When we need forthrightness, we get equivocation.

Pace many conservative pundits, I doubt that true relativism has made many inroads among us. What we have instead is a rhetoric of relativism. And what it comes down to is something like: if you want to think that, fine. But let's call such "moral relativism" by its real name: moral indifference.

But there's another way in which liberalism has failed itself. If sometimes it has been too eager for approval, at other times it has posed too stark an either-or between older group loyalties and an allegedly universalist creed that would supplant it. On the world stage, it has veered between the Scylla of excessive complaisance and the Charybdis of alienating and intolerant rigidity. This will not do.

We need a liberalism that has confidence in its own insights, a liberalism possessed of clarity as well as compassion. To those creeds that prate of sacred fingernails, of "no love for the other side," of the sins of mixing ethnic or racial categories, we must juxtapose a muscular humanism. A humanism that is without arrogance, but that is also unafraid to assert itself, its tenets, its hard-won moral knowledge. One that has courage as well as conviction.

There is, of course, something of a paradox here. The greatest evils done by our species have always been committed in the name of future generations, in the name of an awaiting utopia. These are deeds whose heinous nature could not be concealed if they were committed in the name of our own interests in the here and now; but that utopianism wraps in the garb of virtuous "sacrifice." Accordingly, it is its stoutly anti-utopian aspect -- its capacity for self-doubt -- that liberalism has claimed a moral advantage.

But the capacity to entertain uncertainty doesn't direct Hamlet-like paralysis. It directs merely a willingness to revise our beliefs in the light of

experience, to extend respect to those we do not agree with, and to listen to our critics. Is it, after all, unreasonable to be suspicious of Westerners who are exercised over female circumcision but whose eyes glaze over when the same women are merely facing starvation? And yet a self-critical liberalism should also be conscious of its strengths. There are Coca-Cola cans littered over every acre of this planet, so it seems: shall we not seek to achieve something similar on behalf of the language of human rights, a language that has already proven useful for citizens across the globe?

The Azanian, the West Bank fanatic, the Five Percenter march to a single drum. There's been much talk, in recent years, about the politics of identity--a politics that has a collective identity as its core. One is to assert oneself in the political arena *as a* woman, a homosexual, a Jew, a person of color. But while the conversation about it may seem recent, the phenomenon itself is age-old. The politics of identity starts with the assertion of a pre-given identity. It says: this is who we are, make room for us, accommodate our special needs, confer recognition upon what is distinctive about us. It is about the priority of difference, and while it is not, by itself, undesirable, it is--by itself--dangerously inadequate.

By contrast, what I'm calling humanism starts not with the possession of identity, but with the capacity to *identify with*. It asks what we have in common with others, while acknowledging the internal diversity among ourselves. It is about the premise of a shared humanity. In short, the challenge is to move from a politics of identity to a politics of identification.

To be sure, a politics of identification doesn't enjoin us to ignore or devalue our collective identities. For it's only by exploring the multiplicity of human life in culture -- perhaps the grandest and most daunting subject of all -- that we can come to terms with the commonalities that cement *communitas*.

It's only by this route that move a little further to what the African American poet Robert Hayden, himself a member of the Bahai faith, conjured up when he urged us to "*renew the vision of/a human world where godliness/is possible and man/is neither god, nigger, honkey, wop, nor kike/but man/permitted to be man.*"

We may be anti-utopian, but we have dreams, too.

—HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

Democracy and Disagreement

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What Reciprocity Requires

Deliberative reciprocity expresses two related requirements, one primarily moral and the other primarily empirical. When citizens make moral claims in a deliberative democracy, they appeal to reasons or principles that can be shared by fellow citizens who are similarly motivated. The moral reasoning is in this way mutually acceptable. The qualifying phrase, "similarly motivated," indicates that a deliberative perspective does not address people who reject the aim of finding fair terms of social cooperation. It cannot reach those who refuse to press their public claims in terms accessible to their fellow citizens. No moral perspective in politics can reach such people except one that replicates their own comprehensive set of beliefs. Since that perspective would entail rejecting entirely the comprehensive beliefs of their rivals, it would not help reduce let alone resolve moral disagreements.

When citizens deliberate, they seek agreement on substantive moral principles that can be justified on the basis of mutually acceptable reasons. Deliberative arguments for universal health care, for example, would appeal to a mutually recognized principle of basic opportunity for all citizens. Whether there are such principles, and how they should be interpreted, can often be discovered only in the process of deliberation itself. Insofar as moral reasoning in politics succeeds in finding such principles, the conclusions of deliberation become mutually justifiable. Insofar as it fails, reciprocity continues to make demands on citizens. It prescribes accommodation based on mutual respect.

The other requirement of reciprocity refers to the empirical or quasi-empirical claims on which moral reasoning often depends to achieve its practical purposes. When moral

reasoning invokes empirical claims, reciprocity requires that they be consistent with relatively reliable methods of inquiry. Such methods are our best hope for carrying on discussion on mutually acceptable terms. The claims need not be completely verifiable, but they should not conflict with claims that have been confirmed by the most reliable of available methods. Even when moral reasoning does not explicitly rely on empirical evidence, its premises should not be implausible. Plausibility is no doubt partly subjective, but at the extremes at which the requirement comes into play, we can usually find a sufficiently objective test. We can at least distinguish, among beliefs that we regard as false, those that could be true without requiring us to reject reliable methods of inquiry, and those that could be true only if we rejected such methods.

Consider the claim that miscegenation is wrong because God says so in the Bible. We cannot prove or even logically refute the claim that God forbids mixing of the races. But we may ask: If God speaks literally through the Bible, why does so much of the Bible defy a literal reading? Many of its claims are implausible if taken literally not only according to well-established scientific standards but also according to the more general beliefs and practices of those who rely on the authority of the Bible. Virtually all contemporary fundamentalists subject Biblical claims to interpretation, accepting some as literally true and revising the literal meaning of others. To reject moral claims that rely on implausible premises is therefore not to repudiate religion. An appeal to divine authority per se is not what creates the problem for a deliberative perspective. The problem lies in the appeal to *any* authority whose conclusions are impervious, in principle as well as practice, to the standards of logical consistency or reliable methods of inquiry that themselves should be mutually acceptable.

Religious fundamentalists may reply that they accept the requirement of reciprocity because their moral reasons, far from being impervious, are readily accessible to anyone

who is willing to live a spiritual life as they do. All those who live such a life can gain similar access to the moral mandates of divine authority. How, then, can deliberative democrats claim that these religious appeals are any less accessible than any other claims about public policy that draw on the personal experience of some citizens? The answer does not exclude religious appeals per se. Any claim fails to respect reciprocity if it imposes a requirement on other citizens to adopt one's sectarian way of life as a condition of gaining access to the moral understanding that is essential to judging the validity of one's moral claims. This requirement stands in contrast to the many moral claims in public life that can be assessed and accepted by individuals who are conscientiously committed to one of any of a wide range of secular and religious ways of life.

In the face of moral disagreement in politics, the principle of reciprocity tells citizens to appeal to reasons that are recognizably moral in form, and mutually acceptable in content. Prudence questions the need for morality in this sense, while impartiality challenges the need for mutual acceptability. If political reasoning is mutually acceptable, the prudential critic asks, why does it have to be moral in any further sense? The impartialist critic asks the opposite question: if political reasoning is moral, why does it have to be mutually acceptable in any other way?

2. Reciprocity in Practice

The state of Tennessee requires public schools to help students "become good citizens in their school, community, and society."⁹ In Hawkins County in 1983, the Board of Education unanimously adopted a Holt, Rinehart, and Winston basic reading series for the use of all public school students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The aim of the reading curriculum, recommended by the Board's textbook selection committee, was to teach both reading skills and the values of democratic citizenship. When the textbooks were issued, a group of fundamentalist Christian parents asked that their children not be required to use them. The parents said that the content of the books conflicted with their religious convictions. They objected to exposing their children to information about other ways of life unless the information also included a statement that their own way of life is the only true one. The parents also said that their children should not be taught to make critical judgments, to use their imaginations, and to exercise choice "in areas where the Bible provides the answer." Among the specific parts of the curriculum to which the parents objected (and the grounds of their objections) were:

a short story describing a Catholic Indian settlement in New Mexico, on the grounds that it teaches Catholicism:

- a reading exercise picturing a boy making toast while a girl reads to him ("Pat reads to Jim. Jim cooks. The big book helps Jim. Jim has fun."), on the grounds that "it denigrates the differences between the sexes" as affirmed in the Bible;

- an excerpt from Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*, because Anne Frank writes in a letter to a friend that nonorthodox belief in God may be better than no belief at all; and

- a passage describing a central idea of the Renaissance as "a belief in the dignity and worth of human beings," because such a belief is incompatible with true religious faith.

The school board discussed the parents' objections, and acknowledged the sincerity of the parents' religious beliefs. But in the end it rejected their request to exempt their children from reading the textbooks.

Neither prudence nor impartiality offers a satisfactory way of understanding, let alone resolving, this controversy over the curriculum. The bargaining that prudence would recommend suggests two different outcomes, depending on what background conditions are assumed. If we take the existing conditions as the baseline, the parents (who represent a minority in the county) have little bargaining power, and will have to accept whatever the Board decides. Even (as we shall suggest) this turns out to be the correct outcome, it seems an inappropriate basis on which to resolve a dispute about fundamental values. From the parents' point of view, their way of life and their children's spiritual salvation are threatened. Is bargaining on the basis of power the best that democracy has to offer?

If we assume instead that the bargaining takes place under conditions of equality, the outcome is indeterminate. What it would be rational to agree to would depend on the strength or intensity of one's interests, and the likely effects of alternative policies on these interests. Since the parents are in the minority, they might still lose. But they might win, if they could (say) convince the Board that they care so much about this issue that they would continue to agitate for an exemption, making it difficult for the Board and the school administrators to concentrate on other educational matters. What is missing in the calculation of the relative bargaining power of each side is any consideration of the merits of their claims.

A principle of impartiality does consider the merits of the claims, but produces no outcome at all—or more precisely the outcome it produces is the same fundamental moral disagreement that began the controversy. In this case, two comprehensive moral views face each other in a stand-off. On the one side are the parents whose religious beliefs dictate their views about (almost) all aspects of life, including the way their children should be educated. On the other side stand other parents whose moral views may be no less comprehensive. They believe that their own values, including their religious values, are best served by a school system that chooses textbooks on the basis of the judgment of educational experts. Nor is there any morally neutral position in this case. Neither exempting the children from the reading classes nor upholding the School Board's right to require the children to use the textbooks is morally or politically neutral.¹⁰

What does the principle of reciprocity recommend in this case? It does not consider the relative bargaining power or intensity of interests on either side, and it does not seek a completely neutral position. Nor does it demand that the parties actually reach a

consensus. What it requires are reasons that can be justified to all parties who are suitably motivated to find fair terms of social cooperation.

Consider the parents' objections to the curriculum. They imply a willingness to grant an exemption to any children whose parents have similar religious beliefs that are offended by the textbooks. The objections are thus general in form, and in this respect count as a moral claim. But their reasons do not meet the tests of reciprocity. The parents' reasoning appeals to values that can and should be rejected by citizens of a pluralist society committed to protecting the basic liberties and opportunities of all citizens. Keep in mind that the parents are trying to prevent schools from teaching their children to make critical judgments, to use their imaginations, to exercise choice "in areas where the Bible provides the answer," and to consider the merits of the idea that all human beings have a dignity and worth. If the parents were successful, their children (and perhaps others) would fail to receive the education that is necessary for developing their capacities as democratic citizens. The parents would deny the School Board the authority to teach future citizens the skills and knowledge that are necessary for protecting liberties and opportunities of all citizens, including the parents and their children themselves. Among those skills and knowledge is the capacity for critical reasoning—the ability to justify one's own actions, criticize the actions of one's fellow citizens, and to respond to their justifications and criticisms. Since this capacity is a pre-requisite for making reciprocal claims, its denial cannot itself be the basis for such a claim. If accepted, the claim would undermine the opportunity for (at least some citizens) to make reciprocal claims in the future.

The same kind of argument even more clearly defeats the parents' objection to teaching that each human being has dignity and worth. This belief too is necessary for basic liberty and opportunity. Furthermore, it underlies the principle of reciprocity itself. If each

citizen were not regarded as having dignity or worth, then reciprocity would lose much of its moral point. Beings who lack dignity or worth might not be morally obliged to find mutually acceptable terms of social cooperation. At the least, social cooperation among creatures without dignity or worth would be radically different from the kind of interactions among free and equal citizens to which most forms of democracy are committed.

In its civic education, deliberative democracy goes even further than other forms of democracy. It would teach children not only to respect human dignity, but also to appreciate its role in sustaining political cooperation on terms that can be shared by morally-motivated citizens. It would be pedagogically self-defeating if schools were to teach this lesson dogmatically or through indoctrination. But they are not bound to remain neutral on a question that affects the nature of democracy itself. To accept the fundamentalist parents' objection to teaching a commitment to "the dignity and worth of human beings" would therefore undermine a fundamental feature of deliberative democracy—a feature that makes possible the making of reciprocal claims on behalf of any moral or religious view.

The empirical claims that the fundamentalist parents make also fail to meet the test of reciprocity because they cannot be sustained by reliable methods of inquiry. When teachers require children to read stories describing a Catholic Indian settlement in New Mexico, the effect is not to encourage children to believe in Catholicism. There is no reliable evidence that children who are required to read about different religions or different ways of life are likely to convert to those religions or choose those ways of life for themselves. The assumption that this is the effect of education ignores a simple distinction between teaching students about a religion and teaching them to believe in a religion. The parents of course might wish to deny the significance of this distinction:

they might claim that merely teaching about other religions undermines their own religion (by implying that religions are a matter of rational choice or subjective opinion). But the distinction is important not only as matter of logic but also as a basis for a civic education that helps citizens understand the diverse ways of life of their fellow citizens. Without such an understanding citizens cannot sustain an educational policy that respects all religions on terms that all morally-motivated citizens can share.

It might be argued that the exercise that pictures the boy cooking while the girl reads is intended to change attitudes and may very well do so to some modest degree. Here the first reply to the parents would point again to the pre-requisites of citizenship. The exercise is not seeking to "denigrate" differences between the sexes but to eliminate differences in their basic liberties and opportunities. The further reply would have to address the question of who should have the ultimate authority for the education of future citizens. If the fundamentalist parents object to the story because it portrays boys in a role that the Bible would not endorse, then they retain their right as parents to teach their children that boys should not have fun cooking because the Bible says so.

But to go beyond what the parents teach in their home, they would have to claim an unconditional authority over the education of some future citizens, and that claim cannot be the basis for resolving disagreement about educational policy on fair terms of cooperation. In a democratic society, schools share educational authority with parents. As representatives of all citizens, school officials have a legitimate responsibility to teach children "to become good citizens in their school, community, and society." There is a public interest in educating good citizens, and no citizen can fairly claim that what constitutes good citizenship is whatever happens to conform to his or her particular religion.

What if the parents deny the principle of reciprocity itself? They might argue that it is biased against fundamentalism, and in favor of religions that conform to deliberative views of civic education and prevailing modes of empirical inquiry. The parents would be right to claim that the principle is not neutral among religions or ways of life. The case for reciprocity and more generally the deliberative perspective must be defended on substantive moral grounds, and there is no reason to expect that such a defense would have the same implications for all moral positions. But the value of public reason expressed by the deliberative perspective is not just another morality. It is offered as the morally best basis on which citizens who disagree about moralities and religions can act collectively to make educational policy. The principle of reciprocity is not privileged in the sense that it needs no moral defense, but the defense it needs and the objections to which it is vulnerable are different from those of moral and religious claims that do not take into account the problem of moral disagreement in politics. The principle proposes a basis on which those who morally disagree can cooperate, and it can be appropriately criticized only by proposing an alternative basis, not by simply reaffirming the moral or religious claim that constitutes the disagreement. The fundamentalists do not offer an alternative, even though they themselves need the equivalent of a principle of reciprocity even to make their own case. Even the objection that reciprocity is biased must be stated in a form that appeals to some sense of fairness that is assumed to be accepted by other citizens as a basis of social cooperation.

How about the claims of the Board of Education—do they better satisfy the principle of reciprocity? The reasons the Board gave to justify their decision are general in the sense that their policy applies to all parents, whatever their objections to the curriculum may be. No children receive exemptions on religious or moral grounds. In this respect, the Board's arguments, like those of the parents, constitute a moral claim. But the Board's arguments against the fundamentalist parents accept the distinction between teaching a

religion and teaching about a religion, which as we have seen is critical to the reciprocal perspective on educational policy. "While it is true that these textbooks expose the student to varying values and religious backgrounds," the superintendent of schools said, "neither the textbooks nor the teachers teach, indoctrinate, oppose or promote any *particular* value or religion."¹¹ The Board's version of the distinction contrasts *particular* values and *public* values. Schools may not teach particular values such as the doctrines of Catholicism, but they should teach public values, such as human dignity, which are essential to democratic citizenship. Public values of this kind should not be rejected by parents who are motivated to find fair terms of cooperation with their fellow citizens. The curriculum that the Hawkins County Board adopted was one reasonable, even if not the uniquely correct, way for a public system school to teach democratic values.

The empirical assumptions on which the Board relied also satisfy the standards of inquiry that reciprocity sets. Whether students were taught rather than merely taught about any particular religion could be discovered through reliable methods of inquiry if anyone doubted the Board's claim. Those assumptions that do not lend themselves to empirical inquiry were also plausible in a way that could be generally accepted. The assumption that all human beings have a dignity and worth, though not subject to ordinary empirical investigation, is consistent with an extensive set of social practices that are essential to democracy, including rights of religious freedom and other basic liberties and opportunities.

The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals decided in favor of the School Board, finding that "mere exposure" to ideas did not violate free exercise of religion.¹² For broader reasons, the principle of reciprocity leads to the same conclusion. The claim that the parents present is not justifiable to citizens who themselves are motivated to present claims that can be justified to citizens with whom they morally disagree. The claims that the School Board presents come closer to meeting this test. The principle of reciprocity in cases of this kind yields a determinate resolution.

Prologue

From the novel, Dreamer

Charles Johnson

In the Upsouth cities he visited, violence followed him like a biblical curse, but one step ahead of his assassins. Despite his clerical vows, or perhaps because of them ("I have come to send fire on the earth," Luke 12:49), he walked through a world aflame. Chicago in the hundred-degree summer heat of 1966 was the site for the special form of crisis his wing of the Movement produced: families divided, fathers at the throats of their sons, brothers spilling each other's blood. This was the beginning of his northern crusade to undo the work of the Devil. This was the battlefield, a modern plain of Kurukshetra, where in the midst of a shooting war between Richard Daley's police and black snipers on the West Side (two were dead, hundreds were in detention), he composed that electrifying speech, "A Knock at Midnight," read for him by friends at St. Peter's Cathedral seeing how he was stretched so thin, there in Chicago, he couldn't fly as scheduled to Geneva and instead spent three hellish nights rushing from one burning slum to another, pleading until 4AM with both armed camps for peace. It is...midnight in our world, and the darkness is so deep that we can hardly see which way to turn.

He was tired by the time the Movement reached the North. His life had always belonged to others. For ten years he'd been God's athlete, traveling nearly eight million miles (one forth the distance to Mars) back and forth across a country as divided as it had been during the Civil War, giving thousands of speeches in churches where he was celebrated as the heir of Thoreau---or better as the North American mahatma (Great Soul), meeting with presidents and heads of state, performing more eulogies for the Movement's martyrs than he cared to remember, leading his generals in the siege of one southern town after another, flying to Africa, then India, and two years before to Oslo to accept the Nobel Peace Prize with a team of federal agents right on his heels, as they always were, closer even than his own heartbeat, he sometimes felt, though you had to wonder where they were and what the devil they were doing when that Harlem madwoman, Izola Curry, plunged a Japanese letter opener into his chest. Or when his Montgomery home was bombed, nearly killing his young wife and baby Yolanda.

More tired, acclaimed, hated, gaoled, and hunted than any Negro in history, but living this close to death was as inevitable as his being ordained a minister when he was eighteen. No matter how he looked at it, his calling meant that from the moment he donned his robe the laws governing his life were different from the vast majority of men, indeed, it was no longer his life to do with as he pleased. The world owned him long before he could own himself. As it is with candles, so it was with him: the more light he gave, the less there was of him. Moreover, since the first World War the Army had sniffed something dangerous in his family, some blood-gift for subversion

more radical than anything Lenin dreamed up in Moscow; they had watched his father and grandfather closely, and interfered with their lives just as they did his, as devoted to shaming him, discrediting him, and driving him from public life as he was to bringing his ever-expanding congregation a bit closer to the kingdom of God on earth. People always thought he was older than his thirty-seven years. In point of fact, he felt old. Centuries old, and looked over fifty in some photographs: washed by all waters, and sometimes late at night, when he couldn't sleep before yet another early morning flight, and his leather suitcase from Paris lie packed on the table in yet another unfamiliar hotel room, and the memories came washing over him in waves---the poor living like chattel, children dynamited in a church, Watts burning for six days, the death threats spewing through the telephone at his wife---on those nights he wept for the blood spilled by his enemies, for his own life's lost options, for the outrageous fragility of what he hoped to achieve in a world smothering in materialism, in the propaganda of sensation, in scientific marvels unmoored from any sense of morality, and he wondered, there in the darkness before the dawn of what might be his last day of earth, if he'd ever been young at all.

Don't go to Chicago, his closest advisors said. You can't win there. Stay on your own turf.

The enemy was more elusive, said Hosea Williams and the city's famed pastor, Joseph H. Jackson. Not crude country sheriffs like "Bull" Conner who before the world's cameras fell tail-over-tincup into the bully-buffoon role they scripted for him, nor heavy-browed bigots such as George Wallace whose reactions made outstanding copy for the cause. In Chicago, the

villians were faceless institutions: banks, real-estate agents, insurance companies, and landlords hardly better off, in some cases than their ghetto tenants. But this town, he knew, was the Up North equivalent to Birmingham. If they could triumph here, establishing a beach-head for satyagraha (truth force) in a brutal city with a murder rate of slightly more than two people per day, here in balkanized ethnic enclaves that spawned Al Capone and hardened street gangs like the Cobras, the Vice Lords, and the Black Stone Rangers, here in a city where Stokely Carmichael's poorly-timed but inevitable cry for "Black Power" during their Mississippi march to support one of the South's wounded heroes, James Meredith, opened a Pandora's box of rage and rang deeper into black hearts than any appeal for love (he knew betrayal, a stab in the back when he saw it, but told Carmicheal, "I've been used before"), then they could conquer any citadel of inequality in the world.

Yet no one thought he could win.

A decade after his Montgomery victory, and spiraling successes throughout the South, nigh Hegelian in the mysterious way the Movement kept changing as he chased it, and changing him, pushing him higher and higher, beyond anything he'd dreamed possible in college, from local bus boycotts to unqualified calls for integration, and finally to grander dreams of global peace and equality---a decade after his finest triumphs for non-violence the Press, even people who'd joined hands with him, singing, "We shall Overcome," now saw his methods as outmoded, his insistence on loving one's enemies as lunacy, his opposition to Black Power as outright betrayal. Oh, he needed a victory here. The Chicago crusade was costing as much as \$10,000 some

months. In the spirit of Martin Luther two centuries earlier, he taped his demands for the poor on the door of City Hall after marching three miles with five thousand men and women of goodwill from Soldiers Field; but despite money spent and speeches delivered, the mayor's office maneuvered, matching his call for jobs and open housing with promises and claims for progress that his critics dismissed as smoke and mirrors, mere band-aids aimed at making the problem (and him) go away. Never a day passed when he did not read that his stature was diminished, his day of leadership done, and he could not ignore his critics if he was, as he so often claimed, committed to the truth. Twelve times he'd been imprisoned in Alabama and Georgia jails, stabbed once, spat upon, and targeted for death so often times he could say, like the Apostle Paul, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord." Yet for all his sojourning on the Jerico Road, his long journey through the valley of the shadow of death, his deeper, esoteric message about freedom had barely been heard. The gleaming keys he offered to the Kingdom made men and women who accepted his exoteric, surface-skimming political speeches shrink back once they saw the long-sealed door he was asking them to enter; they could not pass through that portal and remain as they were: white and black, male and female, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor--- these were ephemeral garments, he knew, and could no more clear that entrance than a camel through a needle's eye. To gain the dizzying heights of the mountaintop the self's baggage had to be abandoned in the valley. Little wonder, then, that so few grasped the goal he pointed to, or that on the Mississippi march, then in Chicago he was booed, and would have wept over this but instead thought back with thanksgiving (and was not all thought, as

Heideggear pointed out, a form of thanksgiving?) to his professor at Morehouse, Benjamin Mays, who impressed upon him the importance of learning Henley's poem, "Invictus." (It matters not how straight the gate...) After twelve years of sacrifice, the young people in the Mississippi crowd called him a traitor, an Uncle Tom. (how charged with punishment the scroll...) In the cities, they sang, "We shall Over Run." (I am the master of my fate/ I am the captain of my soul.)

But somehow their rejection and resistance to his vision fit well into the way he then understood the world. He was a tightrope walker straddling two worlds. One of matter. One of spirit. Every social evil he could think of, and every "ontological fear," as he was fond of saying lately, arose from that mysterious dichotomy inscribed at the heart of things: self and other, I and Thou, inner and outer, perceiver and perceived. It was a schism that, if not healed, would consume the entire world. Martyrdom held no appeal for him, but for every sorcerer named Jesus there was a Judas; for every bodhissatva called Gandhi, a Poona Brahman named Nathuram Godse. The way to the crown was, now and forever, the cross. And it made no sense to carry the cross unless one was prepared to be crucified.

He sensed how close he was to the end, this Christian boy from Atlanta, this product of three generations of black preachers, this theistic idealist, and sometimes he wished he was two people, or perhaps three. One to co-pastor each Sunday beside his father at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Another to spend more time with his family, especially with his children; catch up on his reading (especially Tillich, Fromm, and Buber, the psychologists who interested him more now than when he was in college); listen

to opera, take his wife dancing, play basketball with SCLC's staff, leave his blue suits in the closet, dress more casually, and perhaps one day pursue a simple, ascetic life similar to that of Thich Nhat Hanh, the poet, Zen master, and chairman of the Vietnamese Peace delegation whom he was currently promoting as a candidate for the Nobel. As he'd told his Montgomery congregation the day he resigned as pastor in 1959, he longed to escape "the strain of being known...I've been faced with the responsibility of trying to do as one man what five or six people ought to be doing...What I have been doing is giving, giving, giving, and not stopping to retreat and meditate like I should---to come back. If the situation is not changed, I will be a physical and emotional wreck. I have to reorganize my personality and reorient my life. I have been too long in the crowd, too long in the forest..."

And a third person to direct the Chicago campaign from the foul-smelling flat the SCLC and CCCO leased at 1550 South Hamlin Street in the heart of "Slumdale." From a security standpoint its location was a nightmare. The neighborhood was notorious for crime. Saturday night shootings and streetwalkers. Establishing a perimeter was impossible. Any rooftop across the street would tempt a rifleman. Noises from downstairs, loud, braying conversations from other apartments, could not be kept out. When a sanitation truck rolled by the floor shuddered and pictures fell off the wall. Even so, he insisted that not a blessed thing in this soulless place be changed. They had come to Chicago to dramatize the fact that for ninety dollars per month slumlords gave poor blacks---who on the average earned \$4,700 yearly---the opportunity to dwell, some families packed ten to a

flat, in wretched dumps of such advanced rot and decay each crumbling unpainted wall, each untiled floor, each broken-down radiator, each crisp roach egg in the cabinets, each dishrag curtain on the windows, and each rusted faucet reinforced the free-floating despair that if you lived here, where every particle of your physical surroundings induced shame and was one step up from trash, was a throwaway, was sub-standard, then the country must regard you as throwaway too.

The hallway leading to his third-floor rooms was blackdark. The stairs trembled under his feet. He couldn't lock the front door so winos were free to piss in the entryway. In other words, the place where he'd brought his family was a urinal. And he, even he, hated the climb up the rickety steps to the top of the stairs. High above his door a single tungsten bulb buzzed in a halo of swirling dust motes the last few seconds before its filament flimmered out. Inside, their four rooms---hollow rinds filled with second-hand furniture---were arranged boxcar style (one for sitting, two for sleeping, and a miserable little kitchen) and were blisteringly hot and claustrophobic in the summer of 1966, even when his wife threw open the windows, for whatever breezes came through the rooms carried as well petroleum fumes and loud conversations and the roar of traffic from the streets below. Was this worth ninety dollars a month? Moreover, was proving his point by living here worth the toll he saw it taking on his family? The drain, the darkening of their spirits. "There's nothing green in sight," Coretta said, and for a moment he'd felt panic, afraid, wondering if his work for his people, which he knew would kill him ("This is what is going to happen to me," he'd told her as

they sat solemnly watching the news of John Kennedy's murder)--- wondering if it would destroy his beautiful wife and four children as well.

In the last forty-eight hours, he'd survived a meeting with Richard Daley from whom he'd won a few precious concessions (sprinklers attached to fire hydrants, swimming pools shipped to the West Side) that might defuse the potential for more rioting, then he gathered with gang members to sway them to the side of non-violence, meetings so torn by conflict and shouting and hatred of the police he had to make himself appear as the person at fault in order to calm the others down. Having come through these crises, and with more to face, the man from whom the world expected everything, who sometimes went for days on four hours of sleep and rested fully only when he checked into a hospital, tried for a moment to nap, to step back from the severe discipline that black manhood called for in the 20th century for just one precious moment in the sweltering heat of his Lawndale flat.

A liberal mistake.

IS EVERYTHING RACE?

By Randall Kennedy

Some liberals appear to have lost the ability to debate public policy without resorting to dubious, formulaic invocations of racial discrimination. The most recent case study in this depressing trend is the debate over the sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine. Under federal law a person caught with five grams of crack cocaine goes to jail for five years, while it takes 500 grams of powder cocaine to get the same sentence. The disparity, in

other words, is 100 to 1. A related disparity is equally striking: nationwide, over 90 percent of those convicted for crack violations are black, while blacks make up only about 30 percent of those convicted for powder violations. These two facts—that crack offenses are the most heavily punished drug crimes and that blacks comprise the overwhelming bulk of crack offenders—have led many liberals to argue that the crack law is racist. Addressing himself to the crack/powder disparity at the Million Man March, Jesse Jackson declared that “[it’s] wrong; it’s immoral; it’s unfair; it’s racist; it’s ungodly.”

I’ll let Reverend Jackson determine its godliness. But the racism charge is wrong. This is not to endorse present crack sentencing laws. To the contrary, they should be modified. But a bad law is not necessarily a racist one. And the difference matters.

The claim that crack sentencing laws are racist rests, in part, upon the assumption that crack is really no different than powder, that, as Democratic Representative John Lewis of Georgia puts it, “cocaine is cocaine.” This is incorrect: crack is generally cheaper, more addictive, more easily distributed, associated with higher levels of violent crime and thus more socially destructive than powder. In *Against Excess, Drug Policy for Results*, Professor Mark A.R. Kleiman observes that, “in 1978, cocaine was something between a curiosity and a menace.... By 1988, cocaine had become the drug problem par excellence, with a retail market nearly equal to those for heroin and marijuana combined.... How did a minor drug [cocaine] become so major, a seemingly benign drug so horrible? In a word, crack happened.” Even the U.S. Sentencing Commission, which generally downplays the differences between crack and powder and recommends eliminating the disparity, admits that “a policymaker could infer that crack cocaine poses greater harms to society than does powder cocaine.”

While many now attack the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which originally set different sentences for crack and powder, saying it was the result of white stereotypes of a black criminal menace, eleven of the then twenty black members of Congress supported it. New York Democrat Charles Rangel, who chaired the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, vocally applauded “crack[ing] down on crack” on the grounds that “crack was the newest and most insidious addition to the drug culture ... cheaper than cocaine and more addictive.” Alton Waldon, another New York Democrat, declared, “I do not think there is any step we can take that is too swift, too timely, too severe in correcting this evil.” Rangel, Waldon and nine other black representatives may have been misguided—but racist?

Still, some contend that, even if the crack law was not racist in its intent, only racism or racial insensitivity can explain Congress’s failure to reform it in the light of its racially disparate consequences. “I have never suggested that the motivation ten years ago ... was a racist motivation,” North Carolina Democrat Mel Watt declares, but “the impact of this law has been very, very, very sub-

stantially racist.” This argument assumes that it burdens the black community to sentence crack dealers to long prison terms. But does it? What about the neighbors—probably also black—of those who violate the crack laws? They may well be *helped* by the long absence of offenders who, but for prison terms, might continue to corrupt their streets and children. Those who portray crack dealers as representatives of the entire black community, a status to which Marion Barry, Mike Tyson and O.J. Simpson were also elevated during their brushes with the law, do law-abiding African Americans a disservice.

Conservatives are *right* when they argue that blacks, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, have more to fear from a lenient or indifferent criminal justice system than from one that punishes offenders too harshly. But things only get worse when black politicians respond with the assertion, “How dare *you* tell me how *my* people feel or what is best for them.” They are not only trying to hijack debate, but engaging in an ultimately counter-productive political strategy.

The fate of the Sentencing Commission’s proposed modification of the crack law is illustrative. The commission concluded that whatever the differences between crack and powder they do not justify the 100 to 1 differential and recommended eliminating the disparity altogether. The recommendation would have gone into effect automatically absent specific disapproval from both houses of Congress. This October, however, Congress rejected the proposal, the first time it has done so in the commission’s eleven-year history.

Several factors influenced Congress’s decision, including the perceived electoral advantage of seeming tough on crime, the ideological fervor of the new Republican congressional majority and sincere anger at the misery created by drug traffickers. But I suspect that these were buttressed by a defensiveness created precisely because opponents of the current sentencing law branded it (and by implication its backers) as racist. Allegations of racism put into question more than a person’s judgment; they put into question a person’s basic moral fitness. Once a dispute becomes framed as a matter of fundamental racial justice, considerations of personal honor and public reputation elevate the stakes and polarize the antagonists. Furthermore, given our current racial climate, once a charge of racism is lodged, it tends to dominate other concerns. Instead of determining on a broad basis the relative merits of a policy, discussion is channeled toward the narrow question of whether or not a given policy is racist. During the congressional debate, for example, the commission’s strong, non-racial reasons for sentencing reform were overlooked. Beneath the loud allegations of racism, the fact was lost that, under current law, low-level crack dealers sometimes receive longer sentences than their high-level, powder-selling suppliers.

Moreover, by imputing evil intent to one’s opponent, the racism charge often shades into a larger, corrupting

paranoia about the white establishment. "Is there a conspiracy," Democratic Representative Bobby Rush asked during the sentencing debate, "to incarcerate as many African American males as possible?" Such sentiment has led black jurors to acquit clearly guilty criminal defendants to avoid sending more black men to jail. You see its consequences in other areas as well. Take the stifling of intelligent debate over decriminalization of drugs. On one side are claims that the war on drugs is genocidal because a disproportionate number of those subject to arrest, prosecution and incarceration are black. On the other are claims that decriminalizing drug use would amount to genocide because blacks would constitute a disproportionate number of those allowed to pursue their drug habits without deterrent intervention. Both of these claims are without basis. Both illustrate conspiratorial, disparity-mindedness run amok. Both are the products of calculated exaggeration. Both are aimed at short-circuiting rather than deepening discussion.

I do not want to leave the impression that there is no race problem within the administration of criminal justice. There are a good many Mark Fuhrmans in the ranks of the police. Scores of prosecutors daily violate their oaths of office when, for racial reasons, they peremptorily strike potential jurors. Courts authorize the police to treat a person's race—typically blackness—as a proxy for an increased likelihood of misconduct. Therefore, if I, a black man, alight from an airplane, I

stand a much greater risk than my white fellow citizen of being stopped and questioned by the Drug Enforcement Administration because courts have permitted it to use blackness as part of its drug courier profile.

Liberals should attack these violations of racial neutrality in the administration of criminal justice and demand that conservatives join with them in doing so. After all, for the past quarter century conservatives have argued that the state should act without regard to race, though they have done so vehemently only in their opposition to affirmative action.

There is, of course, a race problem in the administration of criminal justice—a big one. But that problem resides not in race-neutral legislation such as the crack law, but rather in laws and practices that purposefully treat blacks differently from whites. The crack law, in my view, is overly harsh. Though there should be a difference in punishment between crack and powder because crack is more socially destructive than powder, the current 100 to 1 ratio is too extreme. But by milking overheated and unsupportable racial rhetoric, liberals alienate people whose support they ultimately need to enact sensible reform. Going overboard, making a mistake, even being a damned fool is different from "racism." The difference matters.

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Public Spirit in Political Systems

Jane Mansbridge

Solving Problems through Public Spirit

Public spirit, the political form of altruism, produces effective solutions to the problem of cooperation in collective action dilemmas. In many situations, including the market, each individual acting self-interestedly produces a common good. In certain dilemmas, however, each individual's acting in his or her narrow self-interest makes it impossible to achieve a collective good.³ In these situations one can institute some form of authority to punish defection and reward cooperation, or use other strategies to make cooperation "pay" in narrowly self-interested terms. Love and duty, however, also accomplish the same result. If I make your good my own through empathy (love), I will be less likely to act in ways that hurt you. If I make the collective good my own (love of nation), I will forgo my individual benefit for that good. If I am committed to a principle that for one reason or another prescribes cooperation, I will forgo self-interest for reasons of duty.

Altruistic motivation comes in these two distinguishable forms. One, which I call love, connotes an emotional attachment to another individual or collective through which an actor makes the other's good his or her own. The second, which I call duty, connotes a rational commitment to a principle or set of principles. Several scholars have independently divided altruistic motives into these two forms, each giving the pair a different set of names: affection and principle, sympathy and commitment, love and duty, empathy and morality, we-feeling and conscience, or solidary and purposive motivations.⁴

Solving collective action problems through love and duty rather than through punishment or material reward has certain costs.

Those motivations are less susceptible to compromise and negotiation than the motivation to gain material benefit. However, solutions based on love and duty, that is, altruistic solutions, are also usually cheaper, require less monitoring, and are more adaptable than solutions based solely on material sanctions. When participants in a system develop an emotional attachment or moral commitment to a cooperative goal, they will tend to adopt whatever policies they think will promote that goal, adapting themselves to situational changes rather than requiring a fixed schedule of regulations and sanctions. In the many cases where great adaptability is needed, effective monitoring is not possible, or the cost of effective sanctions is too high, altruistic solutions are the only feasible solutions to collective action problems.

Most existing forms of social organization rely on mixtures of material sanctions and altruistic motivations. The systems that produce the most cooperation often stress altruistic values in conjunction with a backup system of incrementally graded, relatively certain sanctions. Altruistic values produce most of the cooperation, while sanctions keep the purely self-interested from making suckers of the altruists.

Observers can easily underestimate the degree of altruism necessary to make a polity, or any organization, operate effectively. First, we underestimate the incidence of altruism dramatically if we define all behavior as self-interested, using the criterion of revealed preferences: if an action were not in some sense in one's interest, one would not do it. The problem here is that analytic and moral reasoning requires some distinction between self- and other-regarding actions. After defining all motives as self-interested, we then have to distinguish between self-regarding self-interest and other-regarding self-interest. But the seemingly harmless definitional move of calling all behavior self-interested on the grounds that some self-decided to do it often slides into a substantive underestimation of the prevalence of "other-regarding self-interest."

Second, we underestimate the prevalence of altruism if we count as altruistic only behavior that is demonstrably opposed to self-interest. Human beings often spend considerable effort making their duty, love, and self-interest coincide. Altruism thus plays a role—sometimes a major role—in much behavior for which some self-interested explanation could be found. Although social scientists

studying altruism can definitively demonstrate its occurrence only when someone acts in ways that defy any feasible interpretation of self-interest, identifying only such instances as altruistic would mean recognizing only a fraction of the altruism actually operating in social interaction.

Categorizing an act as altruistic or not is not just an academic exercise, but has practical consequences. Social psychologists have observed that, at least in the United States, modeling altruism tends to produce altruism in those who observe the model. Reducing the number of times people see or hear about others acting altruistically should, in the same way, reduce incentives to act altruistically.⁵

Private Spirit Can Lead to Political Breakdown

Not only in emergencies, when some citizens must find it in themselves to give their lives for their country, but also in an infinite number of daily individual choices, successful polities cannot work on the basis of purely private spirit. Although the "American genius for politics" has always been thought to describe designing political institutions that required only self-interested motivation, none of the framers of the Constitution believed that the Republic could survive without a healthy leaven of "virtue" in the characters of its representatives and its citizenry.⁶ Without what the framers called virtue (and I here call public spirit), for example, elections would not be possible, regulatory compliance would dwindle, and Congress would self-destruct.

As B. F. Skinner pointed out, the chance that one man's vote will decide the issue in a national election "is less than the chance he will be killed on his way to the polls."⁷ The odds of making a difference through one's vote are, from a rationally self-interested perspective, not worth any voter's trouble. If every voter acted only on the basis of self-interest, therefore, very few people would vote.⁸

Regulatory strategies based only on self-interest also often destroy what they hope to improve. Systems based on negative sanctions are particularly likely to foster an organized subculture of resistance to regulation. Sanctions can produce a game of "regulatory cat-and-mouse" in which regulated businesses defy the spirit of the law by exploiting loopholes, and the regulators write more spe-

cific rules to cover the loopholes. The result is often an incoherent accretion of rules, a "barren legalism concentrating on specific, simple, visible violations to the neglect of underlying systemic problems" and a system unable to adapt to new technologies and environments.⁹

In the United States Congress, it is in each individual's narrow self-interest to devote most of his or her time to constituency service, personal contact with voters in the constituency, and attracting media attention. If each individual acted this way, however, no one would do sufficient "homework" in any area of specialization to give the members of Congress enough expertise to judge the policy recommendations of their staff, the experts testifying before their committees, and the information that interest groups produce.

Similarly, it is in the interest of each individual member of Congress to blame the country's ills on the venality of Congress in general and the other members of Congress in particular, painting him or herself as the sterling exception. But the more often each member of Congress engages in this behavior, the less often voters will trust Congress as a whole or any member of that institution.

The Role of Public Spirit

Each of these dilemmas has a solution based largely on the cultivation of public spirit.

In large elections in the United States, some voters simply engage in denial, refusing to look at the odds and insisting that their vote has a large chance of being decisive. Others engage in a form of "magical thinking," implicitly assuming that their voting, and voting in a particular way, will lead others to vote, and vote in that way, as well.¹⁰ These voters may believe they are voting for purely self-interested reasons. Yet many citizens who vote do so, at least partly, on the grounds that it is their duty to vote ("Well, it's my duty to vote. [Who is it a duty to?] Myself, my country, my family, my people"). Some act on the larger moral principle that a maxim based on their action could become a universal rule ("If everybody thought the same way, then what's going to happen with the voting? ... you're going to have no vote at all").¹¹ In the aggregate, the decision to vote is correlated with other measures of social altruism,

such as giving blood and being willing to serve on a jury.¹² Were it not for these millions of individual actions based in part on public spirit, the system of popular elections, which serves as the primary legitimating tool of American democracy, would collapse.

In regulatory systems, Ian Ayers and John Braithwaite argue that "the more sanctions can be kept in the background, the more regulation can be transacted through moral suasion, the more effective regulation will be." Their studies of regulatory compliance in the nursing home, pharmaceutical, and mining industries show that in these cases successful regulation requires combining a primary stress on moral suasion with the ability to draw, if necessary, on big sanctions and a graded system of lesser sanctions. The regulatory strategy must be mixed, because the motives of the regulated are mixed. Many corporate actors are both material value maximizers and concerned to do what is right, to be faithful to their identities as law-abiding citizens, and to sustain self-concepts of social responsibility. A strategy based totally on appeals to public spirit will be exploited when actors are motivated solely by self-interest, but a strategy based mostly on punishment will undermine the goodwill of those motivated by public spirit. Ayers and Braithwaite suggest a tit-for-tat regulatory strategy that begins with cooperation, prompting and expecting a cooperative (public-spirited) response, and that punishes a noncooperative response with small sanctions, keeping a set of incrementally bigger sanctions in the wings.¹³

Mixed strategies must emphasize public spirit not only to avoid the counterproductive expenditure of energy on conflicts of will and the subsequent rigidity of regulation, but also in order to avoid the well-documented phenomenon of extrinsic incentives driving out intrinsic ones. In the experiments that reveal this pattern, subjects who were given material rewards for desired behavior came to see that reward as the sole reason for their actions. When the reward was removed, they stopped acting in the desired manner—even though before any material reward was introduced they had acted in the desired way for nonmaterial reasons, including reasons intrinsic to the act itself.¹⁴

Yet strategies that depend primarily on public spirit also require sanctions, allowing the regulators to punish those who cheat in order to keep the public spirited from being "suckered." For example, in efficient systems in which most taxpayers pay their taxes, many

taxpayers comply both because they believe that the collective objective for which they have tacitly agreed to be taxed is achieved (that is, that those who control the revenue from taxes are using it effectively for public-interested ends) and because they believe that others are also complying. Coercion is an essential condition for achieving the second goal, which assures those who contribute that they will not be exploited by the noncontributors.¹⁶ The criminal justice system has a similar structure, in which most compliance derives from moral suasion but is supported by a graded set of sanctions.¹⁸

In the United States Congress, a relatively elaborate set of institutionally public-spirited norms backed by a graded series of formal and informal sanctions has traditionally encouraged members of Congress to, among other things, do their "homework" in their areas of specialization and not overly deprecate Congress as an institution. Since the 1950s, when such norms were first documented,¹⁷ congressional reforms have undermined certain sanctions that helped uphold some of the norms, and political changes outside Congress, such as a weakening of the party structure and a greater emphasis on individual media attention, have undermined other sanctions. At the same time, nonpolitical changes, such as cheaper airfares to one's home state, lower levels of social drinking, and a greater emphasis on private family life, have weakened some of the social ties that created emotional attachments to the institution.¹⁸

Healthy institutions adapt to changes like these by developing functional equivalents of past norms. Although specialists in Congress have documented a decline in certain older norms,¹⁹ no one has investigated the possible evolution of new norms serving similar functions. In light of the more permeable boundaries of today's Senate, one would want to incorporate in the network of applicable incentives, sanctions, and monitoring much that is outside the walls of Congress, taking place in the executive and judicial branches and in the media. Negative campaigning, for example, has undoubtedly contributed to the widespread public perception that "my congressman is good, but Congress itself is bad."²⁰ Yet the incentives for negative campaigning extend far beyond the walls of Congress, as do some of the disincentives. Permeable boundaries make it harder to control a collective action problem.

In a 1986 speech to the Institute for Humane Studies, James Buchanan repudiated analyses of legislatures based on the single motive of self-interest. He argued that both those who imagine a world of benevolent public servants following only the public interest and those who have "modelled politicians and bureaucrats as self-interested maximizers" share a "fatal flaw." Their images are partial, pulling out and accentuating one element in human behavior, while in fact each political actor combines a concern for the general interest, narrow self-interest, and other motivational elements. Buchanan pointed out that "the constraints, rules, and institutions within which persons make choices politically can and do influence the relative importance of the separate motivational elements."²¹

Buchanan concluded, with a sentiment common in American institutional thought, that constitutional design should aim at reducing overall the extent to which institutions must rely on public spirit.²² I disagree. We do not know much yet about the way efficient organizations function, but two facts seem clear. First, public spirit is not simply a fixed and scarce resource that must be hoarded for emergencies and used sparingly. Rather, in some circumstances, the exercise of public spirit creates more public spirit, both in the actors and in those who notice their behavior.²³ Second, context is crucial. We must distinguish between the arenas of national politics in which the political system can afford to look most like a Schumpeterian marketplace, where each individual's acting according to self-interest produces relatively good aggregate results, and, conversely, the arenas in which each individual's acting according to self-interest is most likely to undermine cooperative gains. In the arenas where self-interested action is most likely to undermine the larger system, we should think consciously about which combinations of sanctions and altruistic motivation are most likely to generate cooperation. We must also then think about the structures, experiences, and cognitions most likely to produce and support those combinations of sanctions and altruistic motivation.

Creating Public Spirit in Political Systems

Although some sort of public spirit is at least functionally useful, and perhaps even necessary, in political systems, political scientists

know remarkably little about how to go about creating it. I will argue that a degree of perceived justice, the experience of political participation, and the experience and outcomes of political deliberation help create and maintain that spirit. This list is not intended to be exhaustive. Leadership, particularly of individuals who evoke public spirit rhetorically and model it in their own lives, and the creation or discovery of an outside enemy can galvanize collective energy, turning it to public ends for good or for ill.

Public Spirit in the United States: A Decline?

It is not clear whether United States citizens and their leaders have become more or less public spirited over the past 50, 100, or 200 years. Traits like altruism or public spirit are not unidimensional but vary greatly by context. An individual who is public spirited in one context may be extremely self-seeking in another.⁵¹ If we set out to measure the increases and declines in public spirit (or "community obligation" or "public morality") over time, we would undoubtedly find that on some dimensions public spirit had increased and on others declined.

Yet we do not require evidence of decline to justify concern with public spirit. If my arguments here are correct, improvements in material productivity, both absolute and relative to others, depend at least in part on improvements in increasing certain "efficient" forms of public spirit. As workers in more developed societies move into services, technological improvements in the production of material goods will necessarily play an ever smaller role in economic growth, just as improvements in agriculture eventually did. That means a society's overall economic success will increasingly depend on innovations in institutional design for the delivery of services and on improving the human qualities of the work force, including its capacity for public spirit.

Some indications seem to mark a decline in public spirit in the United States. We know that turnout in elections has declined markedly, as has confidence in most of the professions, confidence in the institutions of government, and feelings of efficacy and trust in government. But there are many possible reasons for these declines. It is not clear that they are caused by a general decline in public spirit. Nor is it clear that we want, for example, a return to the violently partisan conditions that promoted the highest historical electoral turnout in the United States.

Certain structural changes might have produced declines in public spirit; others might have produced increases. Fewer citizens in the United States now come from small towns, and small towns promote a sense of collective responsibility.⁵² Greater demands on government ("overload") may lead more citizens to think the government is not doing its part in the tax bargain and to feel grudging in return.⁵³ The "me-generation" rhetoric of the Reagan years may have undermined civic concern, as may earlier disillusion with the Vietnam War and an uncertainty about values associated with the questioning of authority brought about in part by that war and in part by other rapid social changes, such as the increased availability of safe contraception and the adolescent demographic bulge of the late 1960s. However, the citizenry is becoming more educated, which on the individual level is strongly associated with public-spirited attitudes.⁵⁴ Compared with the 1950s, a higher standard of living and a stronger social safety net should allow individuals the luxury of more other-regarding behavior, although these real improvements since the 1950s might be counteracted by more recent and

therefore psychologically more effective declines since the 1970s. Childrearing has also become more reasoned and less punitive, a characteristic associated at all class levels with higher altruism.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Political systems are forms of "social capital," that is, networks of relations created by past effort that make present effort more productive.⁶⁶ Like many other complex social organizations, political systems usually require for efficient functioning not only good systems of monitoring and sanctioning but also a powerful leaven of the mutual trust generated through love and duty.

Evolutionary biologists posit a race between the demands of individual selection, in which individual altruism is punished (except in the case of various orders of genetic kin) by genetic extinction, and the demands of collective selection, in which individual altruism that benefits the community is rewarded by collective survival and

growth. The cultural arrangements of human beings, including our political arrangements, are our primary mechanisms for promoting collective survival and prosperity in the face of individual incentives for narrow self-interest. Those cultural arrangements depend, as I have tried to show, not only on efficient arrangements for monitoring and sanctioning defection but equally critically on public spirit. We urgently need to understand more than we now do about the institutions, norms, principles, affinities, and sanctions that promote public-spirited behavior in political life, because in many instances that public-spirited behavior is precisely what makes the collective system viable.

Notes

1. Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, 1280b, trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 118–19.

2. Plato, *Republic*, Book I: 338, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 558, citing Thrasymachus in order to demolish this view. See also Plato's *Gorgias* and, more generally, Eric Alfred Havelock, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics* (Yale University Press, 1957).¹

3. In Michael Taylor's more formal definition, "A collective action problem . . . exists where rational individual action by each of the members of some set of actors can lead to an inefficient or Pareto-inferior outcome" (Michael Taylor and Sara Singleton, "The Communal Resource: Transaction Costs and the Solution of Collective Action Problems," in Robert O. Keohane, Michael McGinnis, and Elinor Ostrom, eds., *Proceedings of a Conference on Linking Local and Global Commons Held at Harvard University, April 23–25, 1992* [Harvard University Center for International Affairs, 1993], p. 66). For an analysis of experiments using the prisoners' dilemma and related collective action problems, and of a variety of solutions to these problems using both material sanctions and forms of altruism, see my "On the Relation of Altruism and Self-Interest," in Jane J. Mansbridge, ed., *Beyond Self-Interest* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 133–43. Although I have avoided explicit references to prisoners' dilemmas and related problems in this article, they remain the implicit analytic focus throughout.

4. These labels derive, respectively, from David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, vol. 1, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (Longmans [1741], 1898); Amartya Sen, "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory" [1978], in Mansbridge, *Beyond Self-Interest*, pp. 25–43; Jon Elster, "Selfishness and Altruism," in Mansbridge, *Be-*

THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF CIVIC AMERICA

BY ROBERT D. PUTNAM

For the last year or so, I have been wrestling with a difficult mystery. It is a classic brainteaser, with a *corpus delicti*, a crime scene strewn with clues, and many potential suspects. As in all good detective stories, however, some plausible miscreants turn out to have impeccable alibis, and some important clues hint at portentous developments that occurred before the curtain rose.

The mystery concerns the strange disappearance of social capital and civic engagement in America. By "social capital," I mean features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. (Whether or not their shared goals are praiseworthy is, of course, entirely another matter.) I use the term "civic engagement" to refer to people's connections with the life of their communities, not only with politics.

Although I am not yet sure that I have solved the mystery, I have assembled evidence that clarifies what happened. An important clue, as we shall see, involves differences among generations. Americans who came of age during the Depression and World War II have been far more deeply engaged in the life of their communities than the generations that have followed them. The passing of this "long civic generation" appears to be an important proximate cause of the decline of our civic life. This discovery does not in itself crack the case, but when combined with other data it points strongly to one suspect against whom I shall presently bring an indictment.

Evidence for the decline of social capital and civic engagement comes from a number of independent sources. Surveys of average Americans in 1965, 1975, and 1985, in which they recorded every single activity during a day—so-called "time-budget" stud-

A more extended version of this article, complete with references, appears in the Winter 1995 issue of PS, a publication of the American Political Science Association. This work, originally delivered as the inaugural Ithiel de Sola Pool Lecture, builds on Putnam's earlier articles, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," Journal of Democracy (January 1995) and "The Prosperous Community," TAP (Spring 1993).

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ies—indicate that since 1965 time spent on informal socializing and visiting is down (perhaps by one-quarter) and time devoted to clubs and organizations is down even more sharply (by roughly half). Membership records of such diverse organizations as the PTA, the Elks club, the League of Women Voters, the Red Cross, labor unions, and even bowling leagues show that participation in many conventional voluntary associations has declined by roughly 25 percent to 50 percent over the last two to three decades. Surveys show sharp declines in many measures of collective political participation, including attending a rally or speech (off 36 percent between 1973 and 1993), attending a meeting on town or school affairs (off 39 percent), or working for a political party (off 56 percent).

Some of the most reliable evidence about trends comes from the General Social Survey (GSS), conducted nearly every year for more than two decades. The GSS demonstrates, at all levels of education and among both men and women, a drop of roughly one-quarter in group membership since 1974 and a drop of roughly one-third in social trust since 1972. (Trust in political authorities, indeed in many social institutions, has also declined sharply over the last three decades, but that is conceptually a distinct trend.) Slumping membership has afflicted all sorts of groups, from sports clubs and professional associations to literary discussion groups and labor unions. Only nationality groups, hobby and garden clubs, and the catch-all category of “other” seem to have resisted the ebbing tide. Gallup polls report that church attendance fell by roughly 15 percent during the 1960s and has remained at that lower level ever since, while data from the National Opinion Research Center suggest that the decline continued during the 1970s and 1980s and by now amounts to roughly 30 percent. A more complete audit of American social capital would need to account for apparent countertrends. Some observers believe, for example, that support groups and neighborhood watch groups are proliferating, and few deny that the last several decades have witnessed explosive growth in interest groups represented in Washington. The growth of such “mailing list” organizations as the American Association of Retired People and the Sierra Club, although highly significant in political (and commercial) terms, is not really a counterexample to the supposed decline in social connectedness, however, since these are not really associations in which members meet one another. Their members’ ties are to common symbols and ideologies, but not to each other. Similarly, although most secondary associations are not-for-profit, most prominent nonprofits (from Harvard University to the Ford Foundation to the Metropolitan Opera) are bureaucracies, not secondary associations, so the growth of the “third sector” is not tantamount to a growth in social connectedness. With due regard to various kinds of counterevidence,

Those born between 1910 and 1940 are substantially more engaged in community affairs than people born later.

I believe that the weight of available evidence confirms that Americans today are significantly less engaged with their communities than was true a generation ago.

Of course, American civil society is not moribund. Many good people across the land work hard every day to keep their communities vital. Indeed, evidence suggests that America still outranks many other countries in the degree of our community involvement and social trust. But if we examine our lives, not our aspirations, and if we compare ourselves not with other countries but with our parents, the best available evidence suggests that we are less connected with one another.

Reversing this trend depends, at least in part, on understanding the causes of the strange malady afflicting American civic life. This is the mystery I seek to unravel here: Why, beginning in the 1960s and accelerating in the 1970s and 1980s, did the fabric of American community life begin to fray? Why are more Americans bowling alone?

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Many possible answers have been suggested for this puzzle:

- busy-ness and time pressure;
- economic hard times (or, according to alternative theories, material affluence);
- residential mobility;
- suburbanization;
- the movement of women into the paid labor force and the stresses of two-career families;
- disruption of marriage and family ties;
- changes in the structure of the American economy, such as the rise of chain stores, branch firms, and the service sector;
- the sixties (most of which actually happened in the seventies); including
 - Vietnam, Watergate, and disillusion with public life; and
 - the cultural revolt against authority (sex, drugs, and so on);
- growth of the welfare state;
- the civil rights revolution;
- television, the electronic revolution, and other technological changes.

The classic questions posed by a detective are means, motive, and opportunity. A solution, even a

partial one, to our mystery must pass analogous tests.

Is the proposed explanatory factor correlated with trust and civic engagement? If not, that factor probably does not belong in the lineup. For example, if working women turn out to be more engaged in community life than housewives, it would be harder to attribute the downturn in community organizations to the rise of two-career families.

Is the correlation spurious? If parents, for example, were more likely than childless people to be joiners, that might be an important clue. However, if the correlation between parental status and civic engagement turned out to be entirely spurious, due to the effects of (say) age, we would have to remove the declining birth rate from our list of suspects.

Is the proposed explanatory factor changing in the relevant way? Suppose, for instance, that people who often move have shallower community roots. That could be an important part of the answer to our mystery *only if* residential mobility itself had risen during this period.

Is the proposed explanatory factor vulnerable to the claim that it might be the result of civic disengagement, not the cause? For example, even if newspaper readership were closely correlated with civic engagement across individuals and across time, we would need to weigh the degree to which reduced newspaper circulation is the result (not the cause) of disengagement.

Against those benchmarks, let us weigh the evidence. But first we must acknowledge a trend that only complicates our task.

EDUCATION DEEPENS THE MYSTERY

Education is by far the strongest correlate that I have discovered of civic engagement in all its forms, including social trust and membership in many different types of groups. In fact, the effects of education become greater and greater as we move up the educational ladder. The four years of education between 14 and 18 total years have *ten times more impact* on trust and membership than the first four years of formal education. This curvilinear pattern applies to both men and women, and to all races and generations.

Sorting out just why education has such a massive effect on social connectedness would require a book in itself. Education is in part a proxy for social class and economic differences, but when income, social status, and education are used togeth-

er to predict trust and group membership, education continues to be the primary influence. So, well-educated people are much more likely to be joiners and trusters, partly because they are better off economically, but mostly because of the skills, resources, and inclinations that were imparted to them at home and in school.

The expansion of high schools and colleges earlier this century has had an enormous impact on the educational composition of the adult population during just the last two decades. Since 1972 the proportion of adults with fewer than 12 years of education has been cut in half, falling from 40 percent to 18 percent, while the proportion with more than 12 years has nearly doubled, rising from 28 percent to 50 percent, as the generation of Americans educated around the turn of this century (most of whom did not finish high school) died off and were replaced by the baby boomers and their successors (most of whom attended college).

So here we have two facts—education boosts civic engagement sharply, and educational levels have risen massively—that only deepen our central mystery. By itself, the rise in educational levels should have increased social capital during the last 20 years by 15-20 percent, even assuming that the effects of education were merely linear. (Taking account of the curvilinear effect in the figure, “Education and Civic Life,” the rise in trusting and joining should have been even greater, as Americans moved up the accelerating curve.) By contrast, however, the actual GSS figures show a net decline since the early 1970s of roughly the same magnitude (trust by about 20-25 percent, memberships by about 15-20 percent). The relative declines in social capital are similar within each educational category—roughly 25 percent in group memberships and

roughly 30 percent in social trust since the early 1970s, and probably even more since the early 1960s.

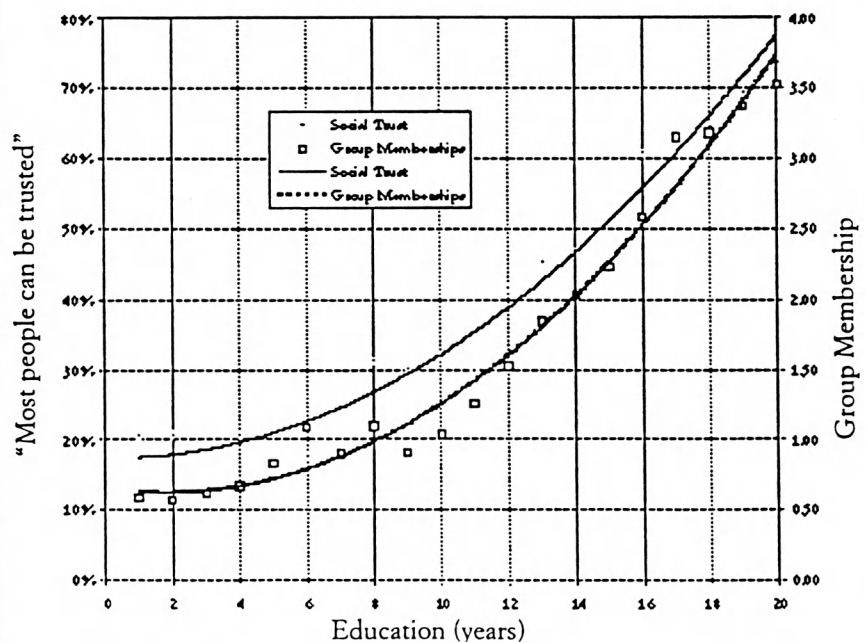
While this first investigative foray leaves us more mystified than before, we may nevertheless draw two useful conclusions. First, we need to take account of educational differences in our exploration of other factors to be sure that we do not confuse their effects with the consequences of education. And, second, the mysterious disengagement of the last quarter century seems to have afflicted all educational strata in our society, whether they have had graduate education or did not finish high school.

MOBILITY AND SUBURBANIZATION

Many studies have found that residential stability and such related phenomena as homeownership are associated with greater civic engagement. At an earlier stage in this investigation I observed that “mobility, like frequent re-potting of plants, tends to disrupt root systems, and it takes time for an uprooted individual to put down new roots.” I must now report, however, that further inquiry

EDUCATION AND CIVIC LIFE

Social trust and group membership by years of education



Source: General Social Survey, 1972-1994

fully exonerates residential mobility from any responsibility for our fading civic engagement.

Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census 1995 (and earlier years) show that rates of residential mobility have been remarkably constant over the last half century. In fact, to the extent that there has been any change at all, both long-distance and short-distance mobility have declined over the last five decades. During the 1950s, 20 percent of Americans changed residence each year and 6.9 percent annually moved across county borders; during the 1990s, the comparable figures are 17 percent and 6.6 percent. Americans, in short, are today slightly more rooted residentially than a generation ago. The verdict on mobility is unequivocal: This theory is simply wrong.

But if moving itself has not eroded our social capital, what about the possibility that we have moved to places, especially suburbs, that are less congenial to social connectedness? In fact, social connectedness does differ by community type, but the differences turn out to be modest and in directions that are inconsistent with the theory.

Controlling for such characteristics as education, age, income, work status, and race, citizens of the nation's 12 largest metropolitan areas (particularly their central cities, but also their suburbs) are roughly 10 percent less trusting and report 10-20 percent fewer group memberships than residents of other cities and towns (and their suburbs). Meanwhile, residents of very small towns and rural areas are (in accord with some hoary stereotypes) slightly more trusting and civically engaged than other Americans. Unsurprisingly, the prominence of different types of groups does vary significantly by location: Major cities have more political and nationality clubs; smaller cities more fraternal, service, hobby, veterans', and church groups; and rural areas more agricultural organizations. But overall rates of associational membership are not very different.

Moreover, this pattern cannot account for our central puzzle. In the first place, there is virtually no correlation between gains in population and losses in social capital, either across states or across localities of different sizes. Even taking into account the educational and social backgrounds of those who have moved there, the suburbs have faintly higher levels of trust and civic engagement than their respective central cities, which should have produced growth, not decay, in social capital over the

last generation. The central point, however, is that the downtrends in trusting and joining are virtually identical everywhere—in cities, big and small, in suburbs, in small towns, and in the countryside.

Of course, Evanston is not Levittown is not Sun City. The evidence available does not allow us to determine whether different types of suburban living have different effects on civic connections and social trust. However, these data do rule out the thesis that suburbanization per se has caused the erosion of America's social capital. Both where we live and how long we've lived there matter for social capital, but neither explains why it is eroding everywhere.

PRESSURES OF TIME AND MONEY

Americans certainly *feel* busier now than a generation ago: The proportion of us who report feeling "always rushed" jumped by half between the mid-1960s and the mid-1990s. Probably the most obvious suspect behind our tendency to drop out of community affairs is pervasive busy-ness. And lurking nearby in the shadows are economic pressures so much discussed nowadays, from job insecurity to declining real wages.

Yet, however culpable busy-ness and economic insecurity may appear at first glance, it is hard to find incriminating evidence. In the first place, time-budget studies do not confirm the thesis that Americans are, on average, working longer than a generation ago. On the contrary, a new study by John Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey of the University of Maryland reports a five hour per week *gain* in free time for the average American between 1965 and 1985, due partly to reduced time spent on housework and partly to earlier retirement. Their claim that Americans have more leisure time now than several decades ago is, to be sure, contested by other observers, notably Juliet Schor, who in her 1991 book *The Overworked American* reports evidence that work hours are lengthening, especially for women.

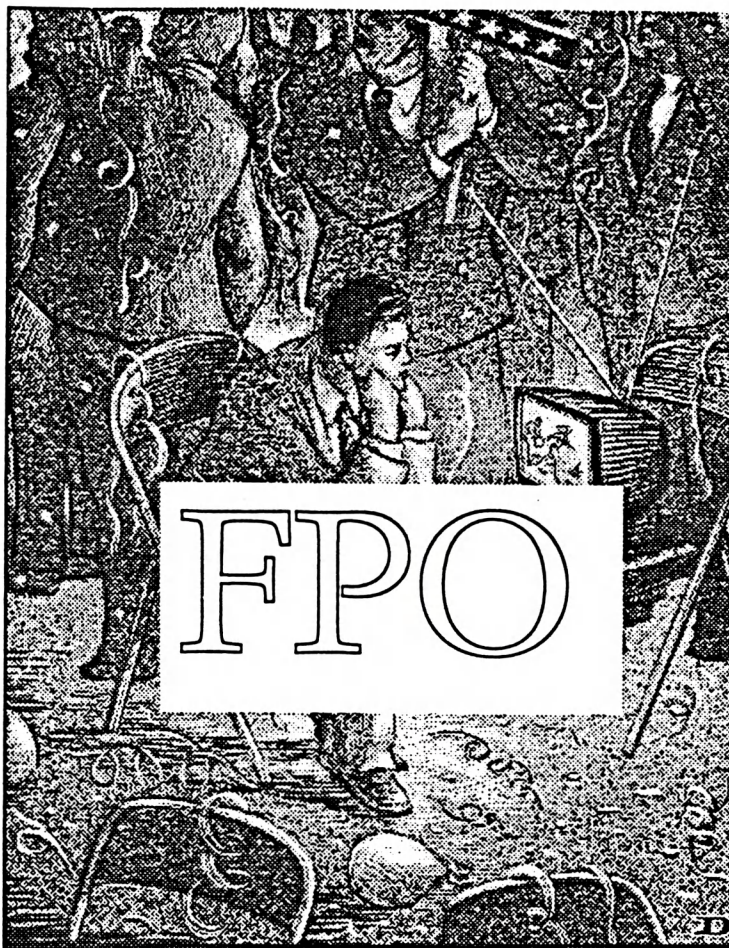
But whatever the resolution of that controversy, other data call into question whether longer hours at work lead to lessened involvement in civic life or reduced social trust. Results from the GSS show that employed people belong to somewhat more groups than those outside the paid labor force. Even more striking is the fact that among workers, longer hours are linked to more civic engagement. The patterns among men and women on this score

are not identical: Women who work part-time appear to be somewhat more civically engaged and socially trusting than either those who work full-time or those who do not work outside the home at all—an intriguing anomaly, though not relevant to our basic puzzle, since female part-time workers constitute a relatively small fraction of the American population, and the fraction is growing, up from about 8 percent to about 10 percent between the early 1970s and early 1990s.

But what do workaholics do less? Robinson reports that, unsurprisingly, people who spend more time at work do feel more rushed, and these harried souls do spend less time eating, sleeping, reading books, engaging in hobbies, and just doing nothing. Compared to the rest of the population, they also spend a lot less time watching television, almost 30 percent less. However, they do not spend less time on organizational activity. In short, those who work longer forego *Nightline*, but not the Kiwanis club; *ER*, but not the Red Cross.

So hard work does not *prevent* civic engagement. Moreover, the nationwide falloff in joining and trusting is perfectly mirrored among full-time workers, among part-time workers, and among those outside the paid labor force. So if people are dropping out of community life, long hours do not seem to be the reason.

If time pressure is not the culprit, how about financial pressures? It is true that people with lower incomes and those who feel financially strapped are somewhat less engaged in community life and somewhat less trusting than those who are better off, even holding education constant. On the other hand, the downtrends in social trust and civic engagement are visible among people of all incomes, with no sign whatever that they are concentrated among those who have borne the brunt of the economic distress of the last two decades. Quite the contrary, the declines in engagement and trust are actually somewhat greater among the more affluent segments of the American public than among the poor and middle-income wage-earners. Moreover, personal financial satisfaction is wholly uncorrelated with civic engagement and



social trust. In short, neither objective nor subjective economic well-being has inoculated Americans against the virus of civic disengagement; if anything, affluence has slightly exacerbated the problem. Poverty and economic inequality are dreadful, growing problems for America, but they are not the villains of *this* piece.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN

Most of our mothers were housewives, and most of them invested heavily in social capital formation—a jargony way of referring to untold unpaid hours in church suppers, PTA meetings, neighborhood coffee klatches, and visits to friends and relatives. The movement of women out of the home and into the paid labor force is probably the most portentous social change of the last half century. However welcome and overdue the feminist revolution may be, it is hard to believe that it has had no impact on social connectedness. Could this be the primary reason for the decline of social capital over the last generation?

Some patterns in the survey evidence seem to support this claim. All things considered, women belong to somewhat fewer voluntary associations than men do. On the other hand, time-budget studies suggest that women spend more time on those groups and more time in informal social connecting than men. Although the absolute declines in joining and trusting are approximately equivalent among men and women, the relative declines are somewhat greater among women. Controlling for education, memberships among men have declined at a rate of about 10-15 percent a decade, compared to about 20-25 percent a decade for women. The time-budget data, too, strongly suggest that the decline in organizational involvement in recent years is concentrated among women. These sorts of facts, coupled with the obvious transformation in the professional role of women over this same period, led me in previous work to suppose that the emergence of two-career families might be the most important single factor in the erosion of social capital.

As we saw earlier, however, work status itself seems to have little net impact on group membership or on trust. Housewives belong to different types of groups than do working women (more PTAs, for example, and fewer professional associations), but in the aggregate working women are actually members of slightly more voluntary associations (though housewives, according to Robinson and Godbey, spend more time on them). Moreover, the overall declines in civic engagement are somewhat greater among housewives than among employed women. Comparison of time-budget data between 1965 and 1985 seems to show that employed women as a group are actually spending more time on organizations than before, while housewives are spending less. This same study suggests that the major decline in informal socializing since 1965 has also been concentrated among housewives. The central fact, of course, is that the overall trends are down for all categories of women (and for men, too, even bachelors), but the figures suggest that women who work full-time actually may have been more resistant to the slump than those who do not.

Thus, although women appear to have borne a disproportionate share of the decline in civic engagement over the last two decades, it is not easy to find any micro-level data that tie that fact directly to their entry into the labor force. Of course,

women who have chosen to enter the workforce doubtless differ in many respects from women who have chosen to stay home. Perhaps one reason that community involvement appears to be rising among working women and declining among housewives is that precisely the sort of women who, in an earlier era, were most involved with their communities have been disproportionately likely to enter the workforce, thus lowering the average level of civic engagement among the remaining homemakers and raising the average among women in the workplace.

No doubt the movement of women into the workplace over the last generation has changed the *types of organizations* to which they belong. Contrary to my own earlier speculations, however, I can find little evidence to support the hypothesis that this movement has played a major role in the net reduction of social connectedness and civic engagement. On the other hand, I have no clear alternative explanation for the fact that the relative declines are greater among women, both those who work outside the home and those who don't, than among men. Since this evidence is at best circumstantial, perhaps the best interim judgment here is the famous Scots verdict: not proven.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Another widely discussed social trend that more or less coincides with the downturn in civic engagement is the breakdown of the traditional family unit—mom, dad, and the kids. Since the family itself is, by some accounts, a key form of social capital, perhaps its eclipse is part of the explanation for the reduction in joining and trusting in the wider community. What does the evidence show?

First of all, evidence of the loosening of family bonds is unequivocal. In addition to the century-long increase in divorce rates (which accelerated from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s and then leveled off), and the more recent increase in single-parent families, the incidence of one-person households has more than doubled since 1950, in part because of the rising number of widows living alone. The net effect of all these changes, as reflected in the General Social Survey, is that the proportion of all American adults currently unmarried climbed from 28 percent in 1974 to 48 percent in 1994.

Second, married men and women do rank somewhat higher on both our measures of social capital.

That is, controlling for education, age, race, and so on, single people—both men and women, divorced, separated, and never married—are significantly less trusting and less engaged civically than married people. (Multivariate analysis hints that one major reason why divorce lowers connectedness is that it lowers family income, which in turn reduces civic engagement.) Roughly speaking, married men and women are about a third more trusting and belong to about 15-25 percent more groups than comparable single men and women. (Widows and widowers are more like married people than single people in this comparison.)

In short, successful marriage, especially if the family includes children, is statistically associated with greater social trust and civic engagement. Thus, some part of the decline in both trust and membership is tied to the decline in marriage. To be sure, the direction of causality behind this correlation may be complicated, since it is conceivable that loners and paranoids are harder to live with. If so, divorce may in some degree be the consequence, not the cause, of lower social capital. Probably the most reasonable summary of these arrays of data, however, is that the decline in successful marriage is a significant, though modest part of the reason for declining trust and lower group membership. On the other hand, changes in family structure cannot be a major part of our story, since the overall declines in joining and trusting are substantial even among the happily married. My own verdict (based in part on additional evidence to be introduced later) is that the disintegration of marriage is probably an accessory to the crime, but not the major villain of the piece.

THE RISE OF THE WELFARE STATE

Circumstantial evidence, particularly the timing of the downturn in social connectedness, has suggested to some observers that an important cause—perhaps even *the* cause—is big government and the growth of the welfare state. By “crowding out” private initiative, it is argued, state intervention has subverted civil society.

Some government policies have almost certainly had the effect of destroying social capital. For example, the so-called “slum clearance” policies of the

1950s and 1960s replaced physical capital, but destroyed social capital, by disrupting existing community ties. It is also conceivable that certain social expenditures and tax policies may have created disincentives for civic-minded philanthropy.

On the other hand, it is much harder to see which government policies might be responsible for the decline in bowling leagues and literary clubs. Some community institutions sponsored, organized, or subsidized by government, such as National Service, agricultural extension programs, and Head Start, may enhance trust and social capital. Which effect prevails needs to be resolved with evidence, not ideology.

One empirical approach to this issue is to examine differences in civic engagement and public policy across different political jurisdictions to see whether

enlarged government leads to shriveled social capital. Among the U.S. states, however, differences in social capital appear essentially uncorrelated with various measures of welfare spending or government size. Citizens in free-spending states are no less trusting or engaged than citizens in frugal ones.

Cross-national comparison can also shed light on this question. Among nineteen member countries of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for which data on social trust and group membership are available from the 1990-1991 World Values Survey, these indicators of social capital are, if anything, positively correlated with the size of the state. This simple bivariate analysis, of course, cannot tell us whether social connectedness encourages welfare spending, whether the welfare state fosters civic engagement, or whether both are the result of some other unmeasured factor(s). Even this simple finding, however, is not easily reconciled with the notion that big government undermines social capital.

RACE AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS REVOLUTION

Some observers have noted that the decline in social connectedness began just after the successes of the civil rights revolution of the 1960s. That coincidence has suggested the possibility of a kind of sociological “white flight,” as legal desegregation of civic life led whites to withdraw from community associations.

The decline of marriage is probably an accessory to the crime, not the main villain.

The erosion of social capital, however, has affected all races. In fact, during the 1980s the downturns in both joining and trusting were even greater among African Americans (and other racial minorities) than among the white majority. This fact is inconsistent with the thesis that "white flight" is a significant cause of civic disengagement, since black Americans have been dropping out of religious and civic organizations at least as rapidly as white Americans. Even more important, the pace of disengagement among whites has been uncorrelated with racial intolerance or support for segregation. Avowedly racist or segregationist whites have been no quicker to drop out of community organizations during this period than more tolerant whites.

This evidence is far from conclusive, of course, but it does shift the burden of proof onto those who believe that racism is a primary explanation for growing civic disengagement over the last quarter century. This evidence also suggests that reversing the civil rights gains of the last thirty years would do nothing to reverse the social capital losses.

GENERATIONAL EFFECTS

Our efforts thus far to identify the major sources of civic disengagement have been singularly unfruitful. In all our statistical analyses, however, one factor, second only to education, stands out as a predictor of all forms of civic engagement and trust. That factor is age. Older people belong to more organizations than young people, and they are less misanthropic. Older Americans also vote more often and read newspapers more frequently, two other forms of civic engagement closely correlated with joining and trusting.

"Civic Engagement by Age" shows the basic pattern. Civic involvement appears to rise more or less steadily from early adulthood toward a plateau in middle age, from which it declines only late in life. This humpback pattern seems naturally to represent the arc of life's engagements. That, at least, was how I first interpreted the data. But that would be a fundamental misreading of the most important clue in our whole whodunit.

Evidence from the General Social Survey enables us to follow individual cohorts as they age. If the rising lines in the figure indeed represent deepening civic engagement with age, we should be able to track this same deepening engagement as we follow, for example, the first of the baby

boomers, born in 1947, as they aged from 25 in 1972 (the first year of the GSS) to 47 in 1994 (the latest year available). Startlingly, however, such an analysis, repeated for successive birth cohorts, produces virtually no evidence of such life cycle changes in civic engagement. In fact, as various generations moved through the period between 1972 and 1994, their levels of trust and membership more often fell than rose, reflecting a more or less simultaneous decline in civic engagement among young and old alike, particularly during the second half of the 1980s. But that downtrend obviously cannot explain why, throughout the period, older Americans were always more trusting and engaged. In fact, the only reliable life cycle effect visible in these data is a withdrawal from civic engagement very late in life, as we move through our eighties.

The central paradox posed by these patterns is this: Older people are consistently more engaged and trusting than younger people, yet we do not become more engaged and trusting as we age. What's going on here?

Time and age are notoriously ambiguous in their effects on social behavior. Social scientists have learned to distinguish three contrasting phenomena:

Life cycle effects represent differences attributable to stage of life. In this case individuals change as they age, but since the effects of aging are, in the aggregate, neatly balanced by the "demographic metabolism" of births and deaths, life cycle effects produce no aggregate change. Everyone's close-focus eyesight worsens as we age, but the aggregate demand for reading glasses changes little.

Period effects affect all people who live through a given era, regardless of their age. Period effects can produce both individual and aggregate change, often quickly and enduringly, without any age-related differences. The sharp drop in trust in government between 1965 and 1975, for example, was almost entirely this sort of period effect, as Americans of all ages changed their minds about their leaders' trustworthiness. Similarly, as just noted, a modest portion of the decline in social capital during the 1980s appears to be a period effect.

Generational effects affect all people born at the same time. Like life cycle effects (and unlike typical period effects), generational effects show up as disparities among age groups at a single point in time, but like period effects (and unlike life cycle

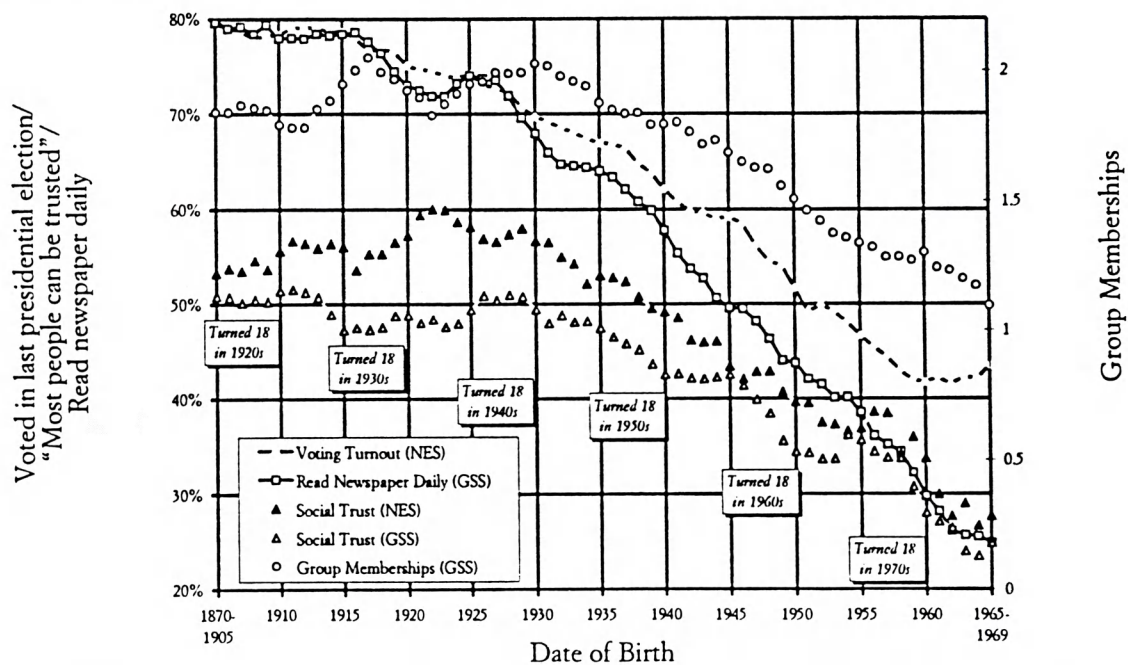
TWO INTERPRETATIONS OF THE CIVIC GENERATION GAP

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BY AGE (EDUCATION CONTROLLED)



Source: General Social Survey, 1972-1994. Respondents aged 21-89. Three-year moving averages. Equal weighting of three educational categories.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BY GENERATION (EDUCATION CONTROLLED)



Source: General Social Survey, 1972-1994, and National Election Studies, 1952-1992. Respondents aged 25-80. Five-year moving averages. Equal weighting of three educational categories.

effects) generational effects produce real social change, as successive generations, enduringly "imprinted" with divergent outlooks, enter and leave the population. In pure generational effects, no individual ever changes, but society does.

Returning to our conundrum, how could older people today be more engaged and trusting, if they did not become more engaged and trusting as they aged? The key to this paradox, as David Butler and Donald Stokes observed in another context, is to ask, not *how old people are*, but *when they were young*. The figure on page 43, "Social Capital and Civic Engagement by Generation," addresses this reformulated question, displaying various measures of civic engagement according to the respondents' year of birth.

THE LONG CIVIC GENERATION

In effect, the figure on page 42 lines up Americans from left to right according to their date of birth, beginning with those born in the last third of the nineteenth century and continuing across to the generation of their great-grandchildren, born in the last third of the twentieth century. As we begin moving along this queue from left to right—from those raised around the turn of the century to those raised during the Roaring Twenties, and so on—we find relatively high and unevenly rising levels of civic engagement and social trust. Then rather abruptly, however, we encounter signs of reduced community involvement, starting with men and women born in the early 1930s. Remarkably, this downward trend in joining, trusting, voting, and newspaper reading continues almost uninterruptedly for nearly 40 years. The trajectories for the various different indicators of civic engagement are strikingly parallel: Each shows a high, sometimes rising plateau for people born and raised during the first third of the century; each shows a turning point in the cohorts around 1930; and each then shows a more or less constant decline down to the cohorts born during the 1960s.

By any standard, these intergenerational differences are extraordinary. Compare, for example, the generation born in the early 1920s with the generation of their grandchildren born in the late 1960s. Controlling for educational disparities, members of the generation born in the 1920s belong to almost twice as many civic associations as those born in the late 1960s (roughly 1.9 memberships per capi-

ta, compared to roughly 1.1 memberships per capita). The grandparents are more than twice as likely to trust other people (50-60 percent compared with 25 percent for the grandchildren). They vote at nearly double the rate of the most recent cohorts (roughly 75 percent compared with 40-45 percent), and they read newspapers almost three times as often (70-80 percent read a paper daily compared with 25-30 percent). And bear in mind that we have found no evidence that the youngest generation will come to match their grandparents' higher levels of civic engagement as they grow older.

Thus, read not as life cycle effects, but rather as generational effects, the age-related patterns in our data suggest a radically different interpretation of our basic puzzle. Deciphered with this key, the figure on page 43 depicts a long "civic" generation, born roughly between 1910 and 1940, a broad group of people substantially more engaged in community affairs and substantially more trusting than those younger than they. (Members of the 1910-1940 generation also seem more civic than their elders, at least to judge by the outlooks of relatively few men and women born in the late nineteenth century who appeared in our samples.) The culminating point of this civic generation is the cohort born in 1925-1930, who attended grade school during the Great Depression, spent World War II in high school (or on the battlefield), first voted in 1948 or 1952, set up housekeeping in the 1950s, and watched their first television when they were in their late twenties. Since national surveying began, this cohort has been exceptionally civic: voting more, joining more, reading newspapers more, trusting more. As the distinguished sociologist Charles Tilly (born in 1928) said in commenting on an early version of this essay, "We are the last suckers."

To help in interpreting the historical contexts within which these successive generations of Americans matured, the figure also indicates the decade within which each cohort came of age. Thus, we can see that each generation that reached adulthood since the 1940s has been less engaged in community affairs than its immediate predecessor.

Further confirmation of this generational interpretation comes from a comparison of the two parallel lines that chart responses to an identical question about social trust, posed first in the National Election Studies (mainly between 1964 and 1976) and then in the General Social Survey

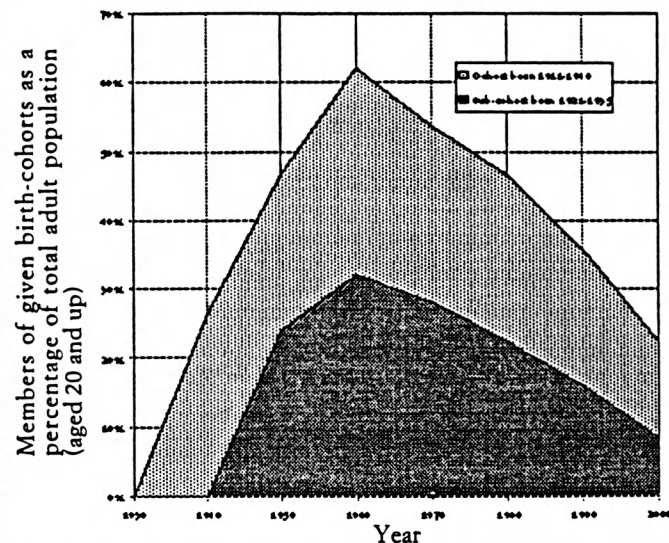
between 1972 and 1994. If the greater trust expressed by Americans born earlier in the century represented a life cycle effect, then the graph from the GSS surveys (conducted when these cohorts were, on average, 10 years older) should have been some distance above the NES line. In fact, the GSS line lies about 5-10 percent below the NES line. That downward shift almost surely represents a period effect that depressed social trust among all cohorts during the 1980s. That downward period effect, however, is substantially more modest than the large generational differences already noted.

In short, the most parsimonious interpretation of the age-related differences in civic engagement is that they represent a powerful reduction in civic engagement among Americans who came of age in the decades after World War II, as well as some modest additional disengagement that affected all cohorts during the 1980s. These patterns hint that being raised after World War II was a quite different experience from being raised before that watershed. It is as though the postwar generations were exposed to some mysterious X-ray that permanently and increasingly rendered them less likely to connect with the community. Whatever that force might have been, it—rather than anything that happened during the 1970s and 1980s—accounts for most of the civic disengagement that lies at the core of our mystery.

But if this reinterpretation of our puzzle is correct, why did it take so long for the effects of that mysterious X-ray to become manifest? If the underlying causes of civic disengagement can be traced to the 1940s and 1950s, why did the effects become conspicuous in PTA meetings and Masonic lodges, in the volunteer lists of the Red Cross and the Boy Scouts, and in polling stations and church pews and bowling alleys across the land only during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s?

The visible effects of this generational disengagement were delayed by two important factors. First, the postwar boom in college enrollments raised levels of civic engagement, offsetting the generational trends. As Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks observe in their as yet unpublished book, *The American Voter Reconsidered*, the postwar expansion of educational opportunities “fore-

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF A CIVIC GENERATION



Source: Calculated from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports.

stalled a cataclysmic drop” in voting turnout, and it had a similar delaying effect on civic disengagement more generally.

Second, the full effects of generational developments generally appear several decades after their onset, because it takes that long for a given generation to become numerically dominant in the adult population. Only after the mid-1960s did significant numbers of the “post-civic generation” reach adulthood, supplanting older, more civic cohorts. The figure above (“The Rise and Decline of a Civic Generation”) illustrates this generational accounting. The long civic generation born between 1910 and 1940 reached its zenith in 1960, when it comprised 62 percent of those who chose between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon. By the time that Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992, that cohort’s share in the electorate had been cut precisely in half. Conversely, over the last two decades (from 1974 to 1994) boomers and X-ers (that is, Americans born after 1946) have grown as a fraction of the adult population from 24 percent to 60 percent.

In short, the very decades that have seen a national deterioration in social capital are the same decades during which the numerical dominance of a trusting and civic generation has been replaced by the dominion of “post-civic” cohorts. Moreover, although the long civic generation has enjoyed unprecedented life expectancy, allowing its mem-

bers to contribute more than their share to American social capital in recent decades, they are now passing from the scene. Even the youngest members of that generation will reach retirement age within the next few years. Thus, a generational analysis leads almost inevitably to the conclusion that the national slump in trust and engagement is likely to continue, regardless of whether the more modest "period effect" depression of the 1980s continues.

OUR PRIME SUSPECT

To say that civic disengagement in contemporary America is in large measure generational merely reformulates our central puzzle. We now know that much of the cause of our lonely bowling probably dates to the 1940s and 1950s, rather than to the 1960s and 1970s. What could have been the mysterious anticivic "X-ray" that affected Americans who came of age after World War II and whose effects progressively deepened at least into the 1970s?

Our new formulation of the puzzle opens the possibility that the zeitgeist of national unity, patriotism, and shared sacrifice that culminated in 1945 might have reinforced civic-mindedness. On the other hand, it is hard to assign any consistent role to the Cold War and the Bomb, since the anticivic trend appears to have deepened steadily from the 1940s to the 1970s, in no obvious harmony with the rhythms of world affairs. Nor is it easy to construct an interpretation of the data on generational differences in which the cultural vicissitudes of the sixties could play a significant role. Neither can economic adversity or affluence easily be tied to the generational decline in civic engagement, since the slump seems to have affected in equal measure those who came of age in the placid fifties, the booming sixties, and the busted seventies.

I have discovered only one prominent suspect against whom circumstantial evidence can be mounted, and in this case, it turns out, some directly incriminating evidence has also turned up. This is not the occasion to lay out the full case for the prosecution, nor to review rebuttal evidence for the defense, but I want to present evidence that justifies indictment.

The culprit is television.

First, the timing fits. The long civic generation was the last cohort of Americans to grow up without television, for television flashed into American society like lightning in the 1950s. In 1950 barely

10 percent of American homes had television sets, but by 1959, 90 percent did, probably the fastest diffusion of a major technological innovation ever recorded. The reverberations from this lightning bolt continued for decades, as viewing hours grew by 17-20 percent during the 1960s and by an additional 7-8 percent during the 1970s. In the early years, TV watching was concentrated among the less educated sectors of the population, but during the 1970s the viewing time of the more educated sectors of the population began to converge upward. Television viewing increases with age, particularly upon retirement, but each generation since the introduction of television has begun its life cycle at a higher starting point. By 1995 viewing per TV household was more than 50 percent higher than it had been in the 1950s.

Most studies estimate that the average American now watches roughly four hours per day (excluding periods in which television is merely playing in the background). Even a more conservative estimate of three hours means that television absorbs 40 percent of the average American's free time, an increase of about one-third since 1965. Moreover, multiple sets have proliferated: By the late 1980s three-quarters of all U.S. homes had more than one set, and these numbers too are rising steadily, allowing ever more private viewing. Robinson and Godbey are surely right to conclude that "television is the 800-pound gorilla of leisure time." This massive change in the way Americans spend their days and nights occurred precisely during the years of generational civic disengagement.

Evidence of a link between the arrival of television and the erosion of social connections is, however, not merely circumstantial. The links between civic engagement and television viewing can be instructively compared with the links between civic engagement and newspaper reading. The basic contrast is straightforward: Newspaper reading is associated with high social capital, TV viewing with low social capital.

Controlling for education, income, age, race, place of residence, work status, and gender, TV viewing is strongly and negatively related to social trust and group membership, whereas the same correlations with newspaper reading are positive. Within every educational category, heavy readers are avid joiners, whereas heavy viewers are more likely to be loners. In fact, more detailed analysis suggests that heavy TV watching is one important

reason *why* less educated people are less engaged in the life of their communities. Controlling for differential TV exposure significantly reduces the correlation between education and engagement.

Viewing and reading are themselves uncorrelated—some people do lots of both, some do little of either—but “pure readers” (that is, people who watch less TV than average and read more newspapers than average) belong to 76 percent more civic organizations than “pure viewers” (controlling for education, as always). Precisely the same pattern applies to other indicators of civic engagement, including social trust and voting turnout. “Pure readers,” for example, are 55 percent more trusting than “pure viewers.”

In other words, each hour spent viewing television is associated with less social trust and less group membership, while each hour reading a newspaper is associated with more. An increase in television viewing of the magnitude that the U.S. has experienced in the last four decades might directly account for as much as one-quarter to one-half of the total drop in social capital, even without taking into account, for example, the indirect effects of television viewing on newspaper reader-

ship or the cumulative effects of lifetime viewing hours. Newspaper circulation (per household) has dropped by more than half since its peak in 1947. To be sure, it is not clear which way the tie between newspaper reading and civic involvement works, since disengagement might itself dampen one's interest in community news. But the two trends are clearly linked.

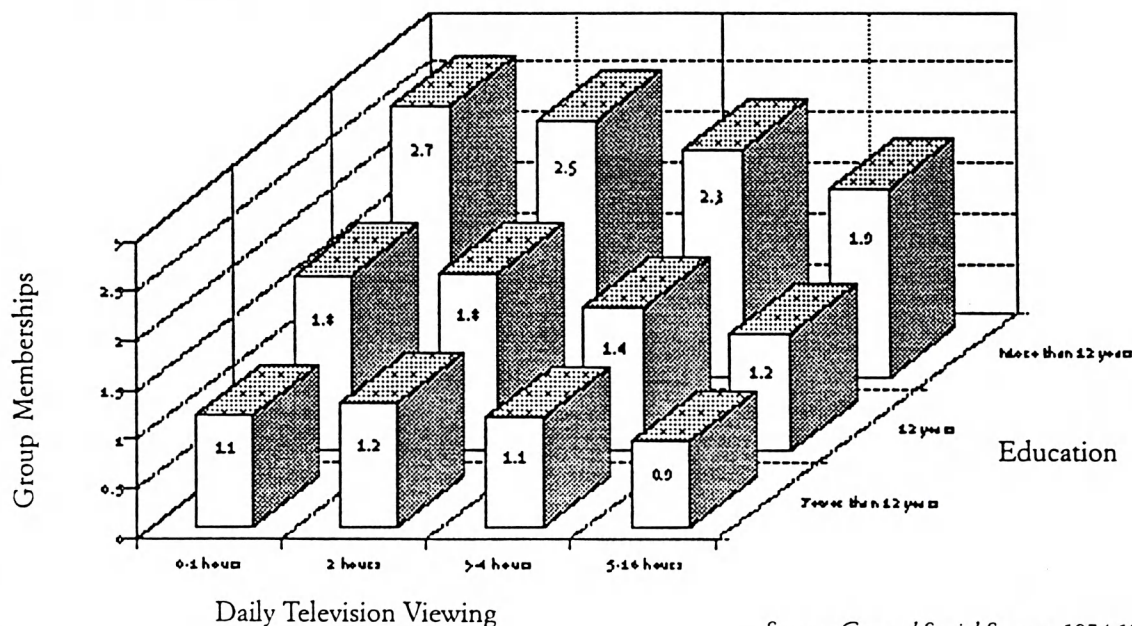
HOW MIGHT TV DESTROY SOCIAL CAPITAL?

Time displacement. Even though there are only 24 hours in everyone's day, most forms of social and media participation are positively correlated. People who listen to lots of classical music are more likely, not less likely, than others to attend Cubs games. Television is the principal exception to this generalization—the only leisure activity that seems to inhibit participation outside the home. TV watching comes at the expense of nearly every social activity outside the home, especially social gatherings and informal conversations. TV viewers are homebodies.

Most studies that report a negative correlation between television watching and community

THE TV CONNECTION

Group membership by television viewing and education



Source: General Social Survey, 1974-1994

involvement (see "The TV Connection"), previous page) are ambiguous with respect to causality, because they merely compare different individuals at a single time. However, one important quasi-experimental study of the introduction of television in three Canadian towns found the same pattern at the aggregate level across time. A major effect of television's arrival was the reduction in participation in social, recreational, and community activities among people of all ages. In short, television privatizes our leisure time.

Effects on the outlooks of viewers. An impressive body of literature suggests that heavy watchers of TV are unusually skeptical about the benevolence of other people—overestimating crime rates, for example. This body of literature has generated much debate about the underlying causal patterns, with skeptics suggesting that misanthropy may foster couch-potato behavior rather than the reverse. While awaiting better experimental evidence, however, a reasonable interim judgment is that heavy television watching may well increase pessimism about human nature. Perhaps too, as social critics have long argued, both the medium and the message have more basic effects on our ways of interacting with the world and with one another. Television may induce passivity, as Neil Postman has claimed.

Effects on children. TV consumes an extraordinary part of children's lives, about 40 hours per week on average. Viewing is especially high among pre-adolescents, but it remains high among younger adolescents: Time-budget studies suggest that among youngsters aged 9 to 14 television consumes as much time as all other discretionary activities combined, including playing, hobbies, clubs, outdoor activities, informal visiting, and just hanging out. The effects of television on childhood socialization have, of course, been hotly debated for more than three decades. The most reasonable conclusion from a welter of sometimes conflicting results appears to be that heavy television watching probably increases aggressiveness (although perhaps not actual violence), that it probably reduces school achievement, and that it is statistically associated with "psychosocial malfunctioning," although how much of this effect is self-selection and how much causal remains much debated. The evidence is, as I have said, not yet enough to convict, but the defense has a lot of explaining to do.

More than two decades ago, just as the first signs of disengagement were beginning to appear in American politics, the political scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool observed that the central issue would be—it was then too soon to judge, as he rightly noted—whether the development represented a temporary change in the weather or a more enduring change in the climate. It now appears that much of the change whose initial signs he spotted did in fact reflect a climatic shift.

Moreover, just as the erosion of the ozone layer was detected only many years after the proliferation of the chlorofluorocarbons that caused it, so too the erosion of America's social capital became visible only several decades after the underlying process had begun. Like Minerva's owl that flies at dusk, we come to appreciate how important the long civic generation has been to American community life just as its members are retiring. Unless America experiences a dramatic upward boost in civic engagement (a favorable "period effect") in the next few years, Americans in 2010 will join, trust, and vote even less than we do today.

In an astonishingly prescient book, *Technologies without Borders*, published in 1991 after his death, Pool concluded that the electronic revolution in communications technology was the first major technological advance in centuries that would have a profoundly decentralizing and fragmenting effect on society and culture. He hoped that the result might be "community without contiguity." As a classic liberal, he welcomed the benefits of technological change for individual freedom, and in part, I share that enthusiasm. Those of us who bemoan the decline of community in contemporary America need to be sensitive to the liberating gains achieved during the same decades. We need to avoid an uncritical nostalgia for the fifties. On the other hand, some of the same freedom-friendly technologies whose rise Pool predicted may indeed be undermining our connections with one another and with our communities. Pool defended what he called "soft technological determinism" because he recognized that social values can condition the effects of technology. This perspective invites us not merely to consider how technology is privatizing our lives—if, as it seems to me, it is—but to ask whether we like the result, and if not, what we might do about it. Those are questions we should, of course, be asking together, not alone. □

Note: Professor Jean Bethke Elshtain (Divinity School, The University of Chicago) was unable to accept our invitation for January 7 because of a long-scheduled commitment to participate in a conference in South Africa.

Jean Bethke Elshtain,

a political philosopher whose task has been to show the connections between our political and our ethical convictions, is the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at The University of Chicago.

Professor Elshtain was born in the irrigated farm country of northern Colorado and grew up in the small village of Timnath, Colorado (population 185). She attended public schools in Timnath, Colorado, and the Cache la Poudre Consolidated High School. A graduate of Colorado State University (A.B., 1963), Professor Elshtain went on to earn a Master's degree in history as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow before turning to the study of politics. She received her Ph.D. from Brandeis University in Politics in 1973 and immediately joined the faculty of the University of Massachusetts/Amherst. She served as an assistant professor from 1973 to 1976 when she was promoted to an associate professorship. She became a full professor in 1981. She joined the faculty of Vanderbilt University in 1988 and was appointed to her current position at the University of Chicago in 1995. As well, she has done guest stints as a visiting professor at Oberlin College, Yale University, and Harvard University.

Her books include

- *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 1981; second edition, 1992)
 - *The Family in Political Thought*, editor (University of Massachusetts Press, 1982)
 - *Meditations on Modern Political Thought* (Praeger, 1986; reissued by Penn State Press, 1992)
 - *Women and War* (Basic Books, 1987; Italian translation published by Il Mulino, Bologna, 1991; Japanese translation published by Hosei University Press, 1994; second paperback edition with new Epilogue, University of Chicago Press, 1995)
 - *Women, Militarism, and War*, co-editor (Roman and Allenheld, 1990)
 - *Rebuilding the Nest. A New Commitment to the American Family*, co-editor (Family Services Publication, Milwaukee, 1990)
 - *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1990)
 - *Just War Theory*, editor (Basil Blackwell, 1990)
 - *But Was It Just. Reflections on the Morality of the Persian Gulf War*, co-author, with Michael Walzer, George Weigel, Stanley Hauerwas, and Sari Nusseibeh (Doubleday, 1992)
 - *Democracy on Trial*, her 1993 Massey Lectures for the Canadian Broadcasting corporation (Basic Books, 1995)
 - *Politics and the Human Body*, co-editor (Vanderbilt University Press, 1995)
- forthcoming is *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1996)

Works in progress include

- *Jane Addams and America*, an intellectual biography of Jane Addams

and

- *The King is Dead. Sovereignty at Century's End*

Page Two of Two from Jean Bethke Elshtain (office fax 312 702-6048)

Jean Bethke Elshtain is the author of well over one hundred essays in scholarly journals, over one hundred essays in journals of civic opinion, and some one hundred-fifteen book reviews. She has delivered many guest lectureships. Of special note are:

The Annual Tom Seely Lecture on Law and the Free Society, University of Texas, Austin, Law School
 The Annual Peace Lecture, University of Groningen, Holland
 The Sproul Lectures, McGill University
 The Distinguished Humanities Lectures, University of Georgia
 The Lynd and Harry Bradley Lecturer, Kenyon College
 The Bertha May Belle Andrews Memorial Lecture, Bates College
 Plenary Speaker, International Conference on Christianity and Democracy, Emory University
 The Edward Douglass White Lecture, Louisiana State University
 The Charles Phelps Taft Lecture, University of Cincinnati
 The Massey Lectures, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
 The Ryan Lecture, Georgetown University Law Center
 The Andrew Cecil Lecture on Citizenship in a Free Society, Univ. Texas/Dallas
 The Donald R. Brown Memorial Lecture, University of Vermont
 The Joy Gilbert Jameson Lecture, The University of the Redlands
 The Bernard J. Flanagan Lecture on Religion and Public Affairs, Holy Cross College
 The Covey Lectures, Loyola University of Chicago
 The Willard O. Eddy Lecture, Colorado State University
 The Lois Miller Memorial Lecture, St. Norbert's College
 The Gordon Sandison Lecture, Western Washington University
 The James A. Gray Lectures, The Divinity School, Duke University
 The McMartin Lecture, The University of Ottawa

Professor Elshtain has been a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. She currently serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of Members of the Institute for Advanced Study. She has been a Scholar in Residence, Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Conference and Study Center, Como, Italy, a Guggenheim Fellow (1991-92) working on an intellectual biography of Jane Addams, and a Writer in Residence, MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire. She is the recipient of the Ellen Gregg Ingalls Award for excellence in classroom teaching--the highest award for undergraduate teaching at Vanderbilt University.

Jean Bethke Elshtain is married and the mother of four children -- Sheri, Heidi, Jenny, and Eric; and the grandmother of JoAnn Paulette Welch.

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The Politics of Difference

THE question of unity and diversity has been posed from the beginning of political thought in the West. The American Founders were well aware of the vexations attendant upon the creation of a new political body. They worked with, and against, metaphors that had once served as the symbolic vehicles of political incorporation. As men of the Enlightenment, they rejected images of the body politic that had dominated medieval and early-modern political thinking. For Jefferson, Madison, and others, political theories of "the King's two bodies"—John of Salisbury's twelfth-century vision in *Politicraticus* of a body politic with the prince as the head and animating force—were too strongly corporatist, predemocratic, and explicitly Christian to serve the *novus ordo seclorum*.¹ But they were haunted nonetheless by Hebrew and Christian metaphors of a covenanted polity: The body is one but has many members.

Indeed, one might argue that it is only incorporation within a single body that makes meaningful diversity possible.

Our differences must be recognized if they are to exist substantively. As political philosopher Charles Taylor noted, "my discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. . . . My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others."² In other words, we cannot be different all by ourselves. The great challenge for the Founders was to form a political body that brought people together and created a "we," but also enabled people to remain separate and to recognize and respect one another's differences. Modern democrats face the same challenge.

I indicated in chapter 2 that one version of our current discontents—the politics of displacement—tries to solve this problem by smashing it to bits. Rather than negotiating the complexity of public and private identities, those who adopt this view disdain and displace any distinction between the citizen and whatever else a person may be—male or female, heterosexual or homosexual, black or white. One seeks full public recognition as a person with a handicap or a particular sexual orientation, or membership in an ethnic or racial group, and that exhausts one's public concerns. Marks of difference, once they gain public recognition in this form, translate all too easily into group triumphalism as the story grows that the public world is a world of many I's who form a we only with others exactly like themselves. No recognition of commonality is forthcoming. We are stuck in what the philosopher calls a world of "incommensurability," a world in which we literally cannot understand one another.

Democrats historically would have found this notion

peculiar at best, anathema at worst. Democrats today are troubled by such developments. We recognize in the rush for recognition of difference a powerful, and legitimate, modern concern. Some forms of equal recognition surely not only are possible in a democracy but form its very lifeblood. The question is, What sort of recognition? Recognition of what? For what? To claim "I am different, you must recognize me and honor my difference" tells me nothing that is civically interesting. Should I honor or recognize someone simply because she is female or proclaims a particular version of her sexual identity? This would make little sense. I may disagree profoundly with her about everything I find important—from what American policy ought to be in the war in the Balkans, to what needs to be done to stem the tide of deterioration and despair in America's inner cities, to whether violence on television is a serious concern or just an easy target for riled and worried parents and educators.

My recognition of her difference, by which I mean my preparedness to engage her as an interlocutor *given* our differences on the things that count politically—including equality, justice, freedom, fairness, authority, and power—turns on the fact that I share something with her: She is in the world with me; she, too, is a citizen. We both, it is hoped, operate from a stance of goodwill and an acceptance of the backdrop of democratic constitutional guarantees, as well as democratic habits and dispositions. We are both committed to rough-and-ready parity, an energetic desire to forge at least provisional agreements on highly controversial issues or to remain committed to the centrality of dialogue and debate to our shared way of life if we cannot resolve our differences. If I am her

enemy because I am white or heterosexual or a mother or an academic, or she is mine because she is none of these things, our only option is to "go to war"—to silence, reproach, even wipe out each other. One makes war with enemies; one does politics—democratic politics—with opponents.

DIFFERENCE AND INEQUALITY

I will turn later to how we come to know something "in common," to accept that we share a heritage, although we share it imperfectly and unevenly. But, first, let me say a bit more about the current politics of difference. At one point not so long ago, it was the liberal position that an emphasis on the ways people differed sanctioned inequality and that our "sameness" alone secured an egalitarian, democratic regime: If you prick me, do I not bleed? After all, was it not hierarchical, inegalitarian, conservative thinkers who insisted that natural differences must translate into social and political inequalities? American society is, perhaps, unique among nations in that, from the first, equality ("all men are created equal") has been one of the touchstones of its national identity and political culture. Need I acknowledge that slaves and women were omitted from the formal definition and struggled mightily for inclusion? But the general principle named both a partial and imperfect reality and a continuing aspiration.

For many conservatives, an extension of equality beyond legal recognition—and even that might be going too far—was balderdash because it was obvious to them that people were

different from one another, indeed, unequal by nature. Such persons equated equality with sameness and inequality with difference. Because it is clear that human beings differ, they insisted, society must reflect those differences. Furthermore, they contended, we will invariably wind up with widespread social inequality because people are not the same; inequality is lodged in nature. It follows that attempts to alter institutions to eliminate or reduce inequality will require nasty social surgery, because we must then eliminate human differences themselves. It seems best, according to this conservative argument, to allow natural differences—seen as inequalities—to work themselves out, even if the result is a stratified, inegalitarian society in the social and economic sense even as we remain equal only before the law.

Those who opposed this view, usually persons from the political Left or centrist liberals, insisted that it strained credulity to believe that all those who were well placed had fully earned it and that their power and privilege simply flowed from their being different—unequal—from the rest of us. Alas, the radical egalitarian response often got as tendentious as that of its ideological opposite. Rather than challenge the equation of equality with sameness, many critics implicitly embraced the idea: The more we were the same, the better. So they extolled a fuzzy or utopian notion of a world in which people were as indistinguishable from one another as happy peas in the egalitarian pod. Arguments defending the necessity to assess the disparate value or merit of diverse human capacities, abilities, and achievements vanished like the early morning dew in the sunlight's steady glare. I clearly remember the heated denunciations of "elitism" from my college compatriots

The conspiracy of kindness became a conspiracy of uncaring. Cruelly, callously, admissions committees agreed to overlook serious academic deficiency. I knew students in college then barely able to read, students unable to grasp the function of a sentence. I knew non-white graduate students who were bewildered by the requirement to compose a term paper and who each day were humiliated when they couldn't compete with other students in seminars. . . . Not surprisingly, among those students with very poor academic preparation, few completed their courses of study. Many dropped out, blaming themselves for their failure. One fall, six nonwhite students I knew suffered severe mental collapse. None of the professors who had welcomed them to graduate school were around when it came time to take them to the infirmary or the airport. And the university officials who so diligently took note of those students in their self-serving totals of entering minority students finally took no note of them when they left.⁴

Unsurprisingly, at the time his book was published, in the early 1980s, there were concerted attempts to discredit Rodriguez as a stalking-horse for right-wing reaction; in this way, his arguments could be ignored, and the general inability of the Left to tolerate diversity in the ranks of minority groups—presumably they should all think alike and have identical needs that can be ministered to—was made evident. This situation has grown even more pronounced since then.

Remember, these assumptions were made with a grim determination to promote sameness in the name of educational and civic equality. Consider how quickly things have changed or, more to the point, how quickly the rhetoric of difference has supplanted the rhetoric of equality—perhaps the

better to promote homogenizing ends. I recall my perplexity at a conference on women and feminism in the late 1980s, when I listened to two and a half days of assaults on the very idea of equality. Equality meant "the same." Equality was the mark of masculinism. Equality was the stigma of heterosexism. Equality was pretty much every nasty thing you could come up with and name. Somehow even the Nazis got to be perverse egalitarians in their rush to exterminate the different.

Equality, I learned, meant "homologization with the male subject." As that was news to me, I decided I needed to ponder this matter further. The rush to eliminate equality from our political idiom and our political aspiration struck me as daft. Recognizing that democracy without equality is an impossible proposition, I got the uneasy feeling—one that remains with me and has only been strengthened by recent celebrations of difference as a uniform and fixed group identity—that perhaps many of those who are immersed in what they call the "discourse of difference" are not so keen on constitutional democracy itself. One participant in the conference was candid about this point. Women, she claimed, should be celebrating their "will-to-power." Democratic equality was both "puny and phony." She evidently neither knew nor cared about the ways that slogan had been disastrously deployed in the not-too-distant past. I refer, of course, to the perverse use of this idea by mid-century haters of democracy, especially in fascist rhetoric and theory. We are not so far removed from these events that we can be blithe about deploying certain slogans uncritically. Perhaps one should not be too concerned, however. Perhaps this is primarily an academic exercise, radical playacting by a few indi-

viduals who would be appalled to see the implication of their own ideas fully worked out.

But there is room for worry. As the political theorist George Kateb noted: "To want to believe that there is either a fixed majority interest or a homogeneous group identity is not compatible with the premises of rights-based individualism."⁵ Although I prefer to speak of democratic "individuality," rather than "individualism," Kateb's point is well taken. To the extent that citizens begin to retribalize into ethnic or other "fixed-identity" groups, democracy falters. Any possibility for human dialogue, for democratic communication and commonality, vanishes as so much froth on the polluted sea of phony equality. Difference becomes more and more exclusivist. If you are black and I am white, by definition I do not and cannot, in principle, "get it." There is no way that we can negotiate the space between our given differences. We are just stuck with them, stuck in what political thinkers used to call "ascriptive characteristics"—things we cannot change about ourselves. Mired in the cement of our own identities, we need never deal with one another. Not really. One of us will win and one of us will lose the cultural war or the political struggle. That's what it's all about: power of the most reductive, impositional sort.

The political theorist Sheldon Wolin fears that the most important democratic category, the citizen, will dissolve in the acids of this new ideology of difference, an ideology that despairs of, or huffily rejects, equality. In this respect, Wolin defines equality as "some broad measure of similarity if only to support a notion of membership that entails equality of rights, responsibilities, and treatment."⁶ Repudiating the "sameness" of equality for its homogenizing urge, ideologues of difference

embrace their own version of sameness—an exclusionist sameness along lines of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual preference. There is no apparent end to this process, as identities get shaved off into more and more minute slivers, for example, lesbian women of color; "Act-Up" militants who favor outing; white, heterosexual men who were abused by their fathers—the possibilities are endless. Ironically, according to Wolin, it has traditionally been the "nondemocratic rulers, the men who justify their rule by appealing to differences—heredity, divinity, merit, knowledge—who reduce populations to a common condition."⁷ We now impose a common condition on ourselves in the name of diversity.

If one sees in democratic principles, including the insistence that we are obliged to reach out to one another rather than to entrench in our isolated groups, only a cover for hidden privileges, one stalls out as a citizen. This leads to a terrible impasse, Wolin concludes, one to which "the politics of difference and the ideology of multiculturalism have contributed by rendering suspect the language and possibilities of collectivity, common action, and shared purposes."⁸ Yet, those who push such politics must, in practice, appeal to "some culture of commonality" in launching their demands that their differences be respected and their grievances responded to. There is, in fact, a way it can be done that recognizes both the "difference" and the commonality of an aggrieved group.

Let us consider the discourse on equality and difference as it pertains to persons with developmental disabilities. I can track four stages in the story of equality and difference as it pertains to people with such disabilities. First, the "retarded" are construed as being outside the world of equality, having

been identified by others as persons who lack the qualities necessary to play a part in the world of equality and inequality, the world of juridical and civic relations, the world of public freedom. Their difference disqualifies them by definition. Some, of course, even put such persons outside the boundaries of humanity—recall that the mentally handicapped and disabled were the first targets of Nazi extermination policies. In the second stage, the retarded, still called and thought of as such, are drawn within the circle of concern by those who do have a civic identity and are part of the world of democratic equality. The disabled become the recipients of concern; their welfare must be seen to. But they are not yet participants in the drama of democratic equality themselves. In a third phase, the retarded, in and through their "normal" representatives, make claims upon the "equal," arguing that they, too, have the qualifications to be part of the discourse. They, too, can vote and hold jobs—or the vast majority can. They, too, can love and be loved. So, over time, they are incorporated on the presumption that they are not so "different" as was once assumed.

Finally, the developmentally different find their own voice, however halting, and insist that their difference does not sever them from equality.

In vital ways, persons with disabilities are more like than unlike those without disabilities. But because of the ways they are unlike the majority, they must struggle to make the case for equality with respect for difference. They seek recognition. Language shifts: We are not "retards," they implore us; we are your fellow citizens with disabilities. Equality, or entering the discourse of equality, does not and need not have to do with homogeneity. Instead, equality remains a powerful term of

political discourse and an instrument for social change and justice, one of the strongest weapons the relatively powerless have at their disposal to make their case and define their aims before their fellow citizens.

But if you have consigned equality to the discursive trash heap as so much phony-baloney, as we used to say as children, and scream at me that you will have none of it; if, instead, you insist that what politics must consist of is my acknowledging and recognizing your differences but not being allowed to engage you about these differences directly because we have nothing to say to each other, then I can only respond that you are not thinking and acting like a democratic citizen. You are thinking and acting like a royal pain in the neck, and the sooner I can get you out of my sight and mind, I will—not because I am racist or sexist or any of the other handy labels we toss around all too easily these days, but because I am weary of being accused of bad faith no matter what I do, or say, or refrain from doing or saying.

MULTICULTURALISM AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

How did we get into this mess? There are many reasons, including the unraveling of democratic civil society I discussed in chapter 1. Here I want to focus on another dimension of the trials of contemporary democracy: education. American public education is in big trouble and has been since at least the 1970s. Defenders of public schools are on the defensive. Most

often they portray themselves as embattled champions of democracy against repressive right-wingers, evangelical hot-heads, and irrational and unenlightened parents. Now, there are no doubt repressive types and hotheads and overwrought parents engaged in skirmishes with educational institutions, from preschools to universities. But critics do not neatly fit this demeaning and misleading picture.

Bear in mind that it was taken for granted from the start of the American democratic experiment that the survival of the republic for any length of time would depend heavily on the cultivation of civic sentiments among the young. The optimistic hope was that a national character could be formed by the careful molding of each generation's children. This hope had a long and noble lineage. In his great funeral oration, Pericles marked the difference between the Spartan system, which subjected young boys to harsh and laborious training replete with grim martial restrictions, and the open Athenian system of generosity and leniency. Like the Spartans, the Athenians were brave in battle; unlike the Spartans, they promoted goodwill, what we today might call "well-roundedness." (I discuss Pericles' funeral oration in more detail in chapter 4.)

The American Founders debated education, rejecting explicitly a classic civic republican education modeled on the Spartan example because it demanded and likely yielded homogeneity and sameness. In *Federalist Number 10*, Publius advanced a commitment to civility, one that implies acceptance of difference as well as political equality. The "spirit of the people," informed by religious principles and a belief in nature and nature's laws, required no prefixed and dogmatic creed. This epistemological version of difference involved the

awareness of different opinions: We do not all think alike. In contrast, the claims to difference of many contemporary multiculturalists are couched in ontological terms: This is what we *are*. According to this vision of exclusive groups, there is such a thing as "thinking black" or "thinking white"; you can't help it, if you are one or the other. To the extent that public schools put themselves at the service of this latter version of multiculturalism, they disastrously abandon the turf they were deeded, the space within which they were enjoined to help create a commitment to a rough-and-ready social egalitarianism, coupled with an equally strong commitment to civility.

But how can imposed uniformity—whether of sameness or of difference—prepare citizens of a democracy to exercise civic and social responsibilities? This is a worry that many now have about the educational wars being waged in America over so-called multicultural curricula that are designed explicitly to entrench differences. The new multiculturalism promotes, as I noted earlier, incommensurability: If I am white and you are black, we cannot, in principle, speak to or understand each other. You just don't and won't "get it." As a form of ideological teaching, multicultural absolutism isolates us in our own skins and equates culture with racial or ethnic identity. Some critics have described this as a process of "resegregation" and wonder how long it will take to move from separate approaches for black children in the name of Afro-centricity, for example, to a quest for separate schools. One of the glories of American public education has been its mingling of class, gender, ethnicity, and race. That was part of the democratic ethos. In *Days of Obligation*, Richard Rodriguez noted:

American educators have lost the confidence of their public institution. . . . There are influential educators today, and I have met them, who believe that the purpose of American education is to instill in children a pride in their ancestral pasts. Such a curtailing of education seems to me condescending; seems to me the worst sort of missionary spirit. Did anyone attempt to protect the white middle-class student of yore from the ironies of history? Thomas Jefferson—that great democrat—was also a slaveowner. Need we protect black students from complexity? Thomas Jefferson, that slaveowner, was also a democrat. American history has become a pageant of exemplary slaves and black educators. Gay studies, women's studies, ethnic studies—the new curriculum ensures that education will be flattering. But I submit that America is not a tale for sentimentalists.⁹

If we are flattered and cajoled into thinking ours is a story of purity because it is one of victimization, we become sentimentalists. As Rodriguez went on to insist, newcomers to this country need to know about seventeenth-century Puritans and about cowboys and Indians; these are constitutive dramas of American society. Teaching exotic, mythic, and "foreign" pasts does not prepare one for a culture that is both "in common" and forever changing. If I can indulge in yet another reminder, democracy is not simply a set of procedures or a constitution, but an ethos, a spirit, a way of responding, and a way of conducting oneself. Not being simple, democracy does not afford us a straightforward answer to the question of what education is, and for, democracy might be. If, for example, we move too quickly to the notion of relevance—teach them something practical, so they can

get jobs when they leave school—we may stress watery adaptation above authentic excellence. If we concentrate exclusively on the few, assuming that the many are less vital in the overall scheme of things, the democratic culture necessary to sustain constitutional democracy over the long haul will either wither on the vine or not bear fruit in the first place. If we say that education must be for the many, and we believe the many are not up to much, we abandon excellence for the lowest common denominator: There goes Jefferson's aristocracy of virtue and talent!

A delicate line separates the overpoliticization of education from the awareness that education is never outside a world of which politics—how human beings govern and order a way of life in common—is a necessary feature. Education is always cast as the means whereby some, or all, citizens of a particular society get their bearings and learn to live with and among one another. Education always reflects a society's views of what is excellent, worthy, and necessary. These reflections are not cast in cement like so many foundation stones; rather, they are refracted and reshaped over time as definitions, meanings, and purposes change through democratic contestation. In this sense education is political, but being political is different from being directly and blatantly politicized—being made to serve interests and ends imposed by militant groups, whether in the name of heightened racial awareness, true biblical morality, androgyny, therapeutic self-esteem, or all the other sorts of enthusiasms in which we are currently awash.

Consider the following examples. A class takes up the Declaration of Independence, with its grand pronouncement

that "all men are created equal." But when the Declaration of Independence was written, women (and many men) were disenfranchised, and slaves were not counted as full persons. How could this be, the students wonder? What meaning of equality did the Founders embrace? Were any of them uneasy about it? How did they square this shared meaning with what we perceive to be manifest inequalities? What was debated, and what was not? What political and moral exigencies of that historic moment compelled what sorts of compromises? Might things have gone differently? This classroom is an instance of reflective political education in and for a particular democracy—the American version—and its perennial dilemma of the one and the many.

But let me put forth a second and a third example, exaggerated in order to mark the differences between these latter two instances and my first example as clearly as I can. In a second classroom, the teacher declares that the Founders were correct in every respect. To be sure, slavery was an unfortunate blemish, but it was corrected. As a democratic educator at the end of the twentieth century, she must reaffirm her students' devotion to the Founders and the Republic. After all, did they not distill the essence of the wisdom of the ages, good for all times and all places, in their handiwork? They were statesmen, above the fray, not politicians. Here, uncritical adulation triumphs.

The hagiographer's mirror image is offered by my third teacher, who declares that nothing good ever came from the hand of that abstract, all-purpose villain, the "dead, white European male." The words and deeds of such men, including the Founders, were nefarious. Nothing but racists and patri-

archalists, those blatant oppressors hid behind fine-sounding words. All they created is tainted and hypocritical. All is foreclosed. All, presumably, has been exposed. Debate ends or is discouraged. To express a different point of view is to betray a false consciousness, venality, or white, patriarchal privilege. Demonology triumphs.

These two examples of teacherly malfeasance I take to be instances of unreflective, dogmatic politicization. Each evades the dilemmas of democratic equality rather than offering us points of critical reflection on that dilemma. This sort of education fails in its particular and important task of preparing us for a world of ambiguity and variety. It equips us only for resentment or malicious naïveté. Let me be clear: I am not indicting education on any level as the sole author of our growing balkanization. But I am suggesting that the schools, whose mission once was to instill some measure of commonality across differences, now suffer under the claim that that effort itself is but another name for "normalization" and cultural imperialism. All those dedicated teachers in all those public schools—the vast majority of them women—who work long hours for low pay and see their work as a vocation, relegated by some contemporary radicals, including militant multiculturalists, to the status of agents of domination, sometimes witting, sometimes not.

There are two off-kilter positions, then. In one, the mesmerized worshiper of authority, who will brook no criticism of the Founders, denies herself the critical freedom that is hers as an educator and that should be imparted to her students. In the other, the agitated negator of all that has gone before preaches freedom from the dismal and spurious past

and what she sees as an all-pervasive and menacing tradition that she would cast off, and she insists that her students see it that way, too. But a genuine education in and for democracy would bring matters to the surface; would help us engage in a debate with interlocutors long dead or protagonists who never lived, save on the page; and, through that engagement, would elaborate alternative conceptions through which to apprehend our world and the way that world represents itself.

"Perhaps," wrote the political philosopher Michael Oakeshott,

we may think of the components of culture as voices, each the expression of a distinct condition and understanding of the world and a distinct idiom of human self-understanding, and of the culture itself as these voices joined, as such voices could only be joined, in a conversation—an endless unrehearsed intellectual adventure in which, in imagination, we enter into a variety of modes of understanding the world and ourselves and are not disconcerted by the differences or dismayed by the inconclusiveness of it all.¹⁰

This openness to diverse voices helps to keep alive both our distinctiveness and the possibility of commonalities.

I think of my own education, and my democratic dreams, as they were nurtured in the rural Colorado village in which I grew up. The Timnath Public School, District Number 62, incorporated Grades 1 through 12 in a single building. I remember that we memorized the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address. When my classmates and I were in Grades 7 and 8, in a single classroom under the firm if

somewhat eccentric tutelage of Miss McCarthy, the recitation of the Gettysburg Address was quite an event. We would line up in a single row around the classroom. On Miss McCarthy's signal, we would begin to hum the stirring song of the American Civil War, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," as Miss McCarthy recited the Gettysburg Address with flourish and fervor. She had a way of trailing off each sentence in a trembly, melodramatic whisper that sometimes left us hummers in stitches. But I never forgot the Gettysburg Address and its promise of democratic equality.

My democratic dream was nurtured by a presumption that none of us is stuck inside our own skins; our identities and our ideas are not reducible to our membership in a race, an ethnic group, or a sex. I remember my father telling me that the "Mexican kids" were sometimes smart and nice and sometimes not, just like other kids. (Mexican was the term of respect in that time and place.) I had learned long before Martin Luther King, Jr., made it the central theme of his great "I Have a Dream" speech that I was to judge others not by the color of their skins but by the content of their character and the quality of their deeds. It would never have occurred to me that I should think girlishly or that my friend Raymond Barros was required to think "with his blood."

Our text for the high school English class in that isolated little place was called *Adventures in Reading*. I still have my copy—I bought it from the school because I loved so many of the stories and poems in it. The table of contents list "Good Stories Old and New," with such bracing subsections as "Winning Against the Odds," "Meeting the Unusual," and "Facing Problems." We read "Lyrics from Many Lands" and "American

Songs and Sketches." I looked at this text recently as I thought about democracy and education. By no means was it dominated by a single point of view, that of the dread dead white European male. We read Mary O'Hara, Dorothy Canfield, Margaret Weymouth Jackson, Elsie Singmaster, Selma Lagerlöf, Rosemary Vincent Benét, Kathryn Forbes, Sarojini Naidu, Willa Cather, and Emily Dickinson, among others. We read the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the black reformer Booker T. Washington. We read Leo Tolstoy and Pedro de Alarcón. We read translations of Native American warrior songs.

Now this reading was not done under the specific rubric of multiculturalism. It was undertaken on the assumption that life is diverse, filled with many wonders. Through *Adventures in Reading*, we could make the lives and thoughts of others our own in some way. In my imaginings and yearnings, I did not feel constrained because some of the writers I admired most were men. I later chafed against the constraints I encountered outside my imagination, of course, but education is about opening the world up, not imprisoning us in terms of race, gender, or ethnicity. I was taught, as the preface to the textbook said, that: "Reading is your passport to adventure in faraway places. In books the world lies before you, its paths radiating from great cities to distant lands, to scenes forever new, forever changing. . . . Reading knows no barrier, neither time nor space nor bounds of prejudice—it admits us all to the community of human experience." Clearly, I was a lucky child, a lucky *democratic* child, for I learned that, in Oakeshott's words, "Learning is not merely acquiring information . . . , nor is it merely 'improving one's mind'; it is learning to recognize

some specific invitations to encounter particular adventures in human self-understanding."¹¹

This work of self-understanding cannot be the exclusive purview of the family or of some overweening state or bureaucracy that is pushing either homogeneity or multiculturalism. It is primarily a task of civil society, of which schools are a part. Of course, education in and for a democratic culture is a porous affair, open to the wide world outside the door and beyond the playground. But that does not mean it must become the plaything of purveyors of passing political or pedagogical enthusiasms. The danger in continuing down our present path is that our understanding of education itself is increasingly imperiled because we have done too little to protect education, and the children being educated, from heavy-handed intrusion by those who would have both education and children serve this political master or that ideological purpose, whether in the name of change or in defense of some status quo. Thus, we increasingly give over to education all sorts of tasks it is ill equipped to handle. At the same time, we seem intent on stripping education of what it ought to be about: an invitation to "particular adventures in human self-understanding."

A democratic drama is the playing out of the story of self-limiting freedom. The danger in any ideological definition of education is that it undermines this essential dimension, in much the way Pericles argued that Sparta undermined authentic, self-chosen civic bravery by mandating harsh and severe sacrifice. Because democracy requires freedom as responsibility, any definition or system that sanctions the evasion of responsibility, as I sink my identity totally into that of a group and its "groupthink," imperils democracy. Education is atom-

ized; civic identity is splintered. Whether in the name of change or to forestall change, an ideological system of education is the worst way for human beings to try to order and to ensure their collective democratic affairs. For once a world of personal responsibility with its characteristic virtues and marks of decency (honor, friendship, fidelity, and fairness) is ruptured or emptied, what rushes in to take its place is politics as a "technology of power," in Václav Havel's words. Responsibility, according to Havel—and he is as surefooted a guide as any currently available—flows from the aims of life "in its essence," these aims being plurality and independent self-constitution, as opposed to the conformity, uniformity, and stultifying dogmas of left- and right-wing ideologues who abandon reality and assault life with their rigid, abstract chimeras.

A fusion of freedom and responsibility yields a distinct but definite political conclusion: Democracy is the political form that permits and requires human freedom, not as an act of self-overcoming or pure reason, but in service to others in one's time and place. Democrats are so concerned with the education of children because, through education, children can get acquainted with the world in a way that will help them assume responsibility. To live "within the truth," as Havel called it, is to give voice to a self and a citizen who has embraced responsibility for the here and now: "That means that responsibility is ours, that we must accept it and grasp it here, now, in this place where the Lord has set us down, and that we cannot lie our way out of it by moving somewhere else, whether it be to an Indian ashram or to a parallel *polks*."¹²

Havel believes we are all living in the midst of a general crisis of human consciousness, which manifests itself in the

spheres of human freedom, responsibility, and identity. Accepting the risks of free action—an affirmation that education in and for democracy makes possible but does not guarantee—marks one as a person and forms the basis of one's identity. Any mode of thought or program of education that reduces human responsibility narrows the horizon of human possibility. To assume full responsibility is not to lapse into dour moralism or to universalize a giddy and boundless compassion; rather, it is to take up the specific, concrete burdens of one's culture. Recently, for example, Havel denounced the troubles faced by Eastern Europe's Gypsy population as an example of the search in a post-Communist world, for "pseudo-certainties," identity politics being one of the most readily available and virulent forms of such certainty. Assaults against Gypsies, for not being one of "us," offer "a litmus test not of democracy but of civil society. The two are certainly two sides of the same coin. . . . [W]e have created all the basic institutions of democracy—political parties, a parliament, elections. Now much more effort should be focused on building a civil society, to promote a climate that would encourage people to act as citizens in the best sense of the word. . . ."¹³ Public education that undermines the possibility of, and responsibility for, this form of citizenship is an exercise in speciousness.

This is tough stuff. But, then, democracy is for the stout of heart who know there are things worth fighting for in a world of paradox, ambiguity, and irony. This democratic way—moderation with courage, open to compromise from a basis of principle—is the rare but occasionally attainable fruit of the democratic imagination and the democratic citizen in action. Democracy is on trial in our time, beleaguered by foes

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and bedeviled by friends. But there have always been skeptics. Democracy was both tried and condemned by a number of my distinguished forebears in the world of Western political philosophy. Perhaps it is worth making a brief detour into democracy's contentious past in order to take the most accurate measure we can of the current prospects for democracy.

Note:

This is a draft of my contribution to a larger group effort to rethink the governing philosophy of American democracy in response to the great transformations--economic, social, and political--now underway here and around the world. The threshold idea is that our situation at the end of the 20th century bears a remarkable resemblance to the circumstances facing the Progressive movement in the late 19th century.

Bill Galston

Toward a New Democracy: Introduction

It is often said that the core of America is an idea, that we are (as Abraham Lincoln put it) a nation dedicated to a proposition. And this is true. But the idea is dynamic, not static; not dry and abstract, but suffused with a sense of possibility and hope. The American idea is a **promise** extended to all who enter the community, and it is a **dream** cherished by generations of Americans.

The promise of American life--the American Dream--has shaped our history. It is the promise of equal opportunity for all, unfettered by the status of one's ancestors or the limits of one's current condition; of material and social progress from generation to generation; of equal rights for all to protect against concentrations of power and secure a zone of individual liberty; of a free society in which we may form all manner voluntary associations to pursue shared interests and express core values; of democratic self-government at every level of our public lives; and of a civic unity that both embraces and transcends our differences.

The American Dream is not a condition to be described, but an ideal to be realized. Each generation of Americans has been called upon to work toward its fulfillment. And many have been challenged to chart dramatically new paths.

Some generations have encountered, and surmounted, a single focal crisis. For the founders, it was the challenge of forging a unified constitutional republic. For the Civil War generation, it was the "house divided against itself" by the curse of slavery; six decades ago, it was a Great Depression that threatened not only our economy, but democratic institutions here and around the world.

Other generations have confronted, not a single focal crisis, but rather profound challenges along many fronts. Consider the situation at the end of the 19th century: a great economic transformation from agriculture to the new industrial order; a pervasive sense of social disorder--family breakdown, crime, and immorality--as our population moved from rural small towns to rapidly expanding urban centers; cultural challenges posed by unsettled issues of race and unprecedented waves of immigration more ethnically and religiously diverse than ever before; a crisis of governance in which our public institutions were seen as ineffective, corrupt, and exclusionary; and a fundamental debate on many fronts about America's role in the world--the conditions of global economic engagement, the strategies of military defense, the terms on which we would undertake responsibilities beyond our borders.

In response to these challenges, a group of innovative thinkers developed a set of bold ideas for renewing the promise of American life--ideas that provided the basis for what we now know as the Progressive movement. These ideas included:

- o a stronger national government to cope with economic and social consequences of industrialization;

- o social legislation and regulation to deal with problems of urbanization;
- o a reformed system of public education capable of transforming immigrants into citizens;
- o political reform that expanded suffrage and deployed institutions of direct democracy against state legislatures and local governments dominated by special interests and corruption.

The Progressive movement was not a party, but rather a powerful new vision that influenced both parties as well as citizens and leaders who sought to act outside established party structures. While it scored important early successes (both Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson implemented portions of the Progressive agenda), the movement's key contribution was longterm: it created the intellectual and policy predicate for the New Deal and for the rise of a strong centralized government using the tools of legislation, regulation, bureaucracy, and executive leadership to address our national problems. It is no exaggeration to say that the ideas launched by the Progressives shaped our politics for most of the past century.

Today's circumstances are different from those that sparked the progressive movement. Still, the scope of the problems our country confronts at the end of the 20th century bears a remarkable resemblance to those our predecessors faced at the end of the 19th.

- o As the industrial economy yields to the new information age, and as the self-contained national market gives way to global competition, many Americans are experiencing stagnant or declining wages, increased job insecurity, and heightened anxiety about their children's future.

- o Family breakdown, violent crime, and the fraying of neighborhood and community ties have led to a widespread sense of a society coming apart at the seams.

- o High rates of immigration and new forms of ethnic, racial, and religious group self-assertion have weakened confidence in a common civic culture, of a shared sense of what it means to be an American.

- o Our governmental institutions are excessively influenced by special interest groups and concentrations of wealth and power, and they are responsive to a shallow, media-driven, polarized sound-bite politics at the expense of the considered commonsense judgments of average citizens.

- o The collapse of international communism and the replacement of East/West conflict with ethnic and economic rivalries has given rise to confusion about our role in the world and about the strategies for reconciling our global hopes with the means we are willing to devote to their pursuit.

But while our challenges bear a remarkable resemblance to those of a century ago, today most Americans no longer believe that the solution is to be found in a larger, stronger central government. And they are right. In the 20th century, the expansion of central government power--through legislation, regulation, and bureaucracy--dealt effectively with the challenges of growth, security, and social

unity in the industrial age. But today, this course--still supported by traditional liberals--serves more to defend the past than to build the future.

By contrast, many conservatives argue that the overgrown federal government is the source of our problems and that dismantling the government in favor of the free market will solve them. If only our national life were so simple! The market is the best means ever devised for creating wealth. But the invisible hand does not create equal opportunity, or defend equal rights, or renew our civic culture.

At the threshold of the 21st century, the challenge of this generation is to chart a new course to the American Dream

--a course equally removed from the big government structures of the old liberalism and the no-government dogmas of the new conservatives;

--a course that builds on the strengths of the market, that reinvents public institutions to serve public purposes, that brings more effective self-government closer to the people, that helps us rebuild community and a shared civic culture.

We call this course the New Democracy. It rests on three straightforward but powerful ideas.

First: despite all their historic accomplishments, the economics, society, and politics of the Industrial Age are now in irreversible decline. To pretend otherwise is to succumb to nostalgia. For late 20th century progressives, there is no alternative: we must reconstruct our agenda in response to the imperatives of the rising Information Age.

Second: we must retrieve, and renew for our time, the most enduring social ideal of our history, articulated in different ways by Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, by Populists and Progressives alike: the ideal of a nation in which there is equal opportunity for all and special privileges for none.

Third: to realize the ideal of equal opportunity, we must conduct both our politics and our social life on the basis of a moral principle--mutual responsibility. The practical meaning of that principle is clear: We cannot receive benefits unless we give something back to our community and our country. We cannot enjoy our individual rights without doing our fair share to maintain the overall system of rights. And we cannot rightly exempt ourselves from obligations that bind our fellow citizens.

Like the Progressives a century ago, we offer a new politics based on ideas in place of an old politics beholden to interests. Like the Progressives, we hope that the ideas we propose can transform American politics, not just one party; can build new common ground, not new partisan divisions. And like the Progressives, we believe that the New Democracy is the work--not of a day or a year--but of generations to come. Still, we must do what we can. And the time to begin is now.

The Three Cornerstones of the New Democracy

Our country rests on one simple idea: the people have the right, and the ability, to govern themselves. But transforming that idea into reality is anything but simple. Policies and institutions that promote self-government in one era may impede it in the next. Democracy cannot be carved in stone, and the task of self-government is never done. That is why the Declaration of Independence tells us that in addition to the unalienable rights of individuals, there is a collective right of the people, acting as a whole, to alter their institutions to better serve their purposes.

Our current institutions and policies have served us well through the Industrial Age, and through the long struggle against fascism and communism. But today we face new challenges, and we must change to meet them. These challenges have disrupted the old order, and they have brought insecurity and anxiety to millions of average families. But they also offer unprecedented opportunity.

We believe that our nation stands at the threshold of a new era: of growth and prosperity in which all can share; of revitalized free associations among our citizens; of more effective self-government, not just **for** the people but **by** the people, closer to them and more responsive to their concerns.

We call this era the New Democracy. It is possible, but not inevitable. It will come to pass, but only if we have the clarity to envision it and the strength to build it.

To make the New Democracy a reality, we must change how we act. But before we can do that, we must change how we think--about the way prosperity and security are produced in the economy, about the way opportunity can be enhanced through progressive self-government, and about the way we must deal with one another as fellow citizens throughout our society.

The New Economy

A century ago, Americans faced a great transformation of their economy, from agriculture and individual artisanship to giant industrial corporations. Appealing to the tradition of Jefferson and Jackson, some Americans sought to resist this shift as incompatible with equal opportunity and democratic self-government. Others argued that the transition was inevitable. Our nation's intellectual challenge was to decouple enduring Jeffersonian and Jacksonian values from their dying socioeconomic base; our practical task was to craft new policies to strengthen these values within the context of the emerging industrial order. This was the historic mission of the Progressive movement.

The Progressives' program rested on a comprehensive analysis of the new

economy. They understood that this shift in the basis of national wealth was creating profound changes in our society as well. Larger units of organization; concentration and centralization of power; more hierarchy and bureaucracy; increased routinization and anonymity in human relations; rapid urbanization--all these changes and more were inevitable consequences of industrialization. And they would require, in turn, new understandings of worker organization, of labor/management relations, and of the role of government. Fundamental issues of individual economic security, public health and safety, and the of public power to safeguard democracy against the dangers of economic concentration and inequality had to be rethought.

It took generations to complete this rethinking and to create a new public order consistent with the industrial economy--through the efforts of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and decades of national administrations of both parties from the 1940s through the 1970s. And today, once again, we must think and act anew. For the economic transformation now underway is every bit as momentous as the industrialization of a century ago, and its social and political consequences will be equally profound.

A decade ago, politicians and pundits could still puzzle over basic trends. Now, the dimensions of the new economy are increasingly clear. **Knowledge** is the core of the new wealth of nations. The pace of technological innovation is accelerating, and product cycles are shrinking. The information revolution is transforming the design and production of both goods and services. Global economic competition is diminishing the power of national economic policies and is producing an inexorable logic of productivity improvements in every sector. The largely unregulated flow of global capital is creating new opportunities (as well as instabilities) in parts of the world previously shut out of the international economy and is contributing to new pressures on established industrial powers.

Today, as was the case a century ago, the new technology of mass production is linked to new organizational forms. Then it was large, multilayered, hierarchical, bureaucratized units structured along military lines. Today, new information technologies are reversing these trends. In the economy, corporate workforces are shrinking, organization hierarchies are flattening, top-down bureaucratic management of information is yielding to the power of personal computers, and hierarchical authority is giving way to more consensual forms of leadership.

While many corporations have responded effectively to the challenges of the new economy, the prospects for workers and their families have dimmed. Productivity and profits are up, but wages and incomes for many workers are stagnating. Health and pension benefits are being cut back, and a seemingly endless cycle of "downsizing" is shattering expectations of job security. By many measures, inequality is on the rise as the educated professionals who can function most effectively in the new knowledge economy pull away from the rest of society.

These problems are serious, but not unprecedented. A century ago, the new corporate/industrial order produced increased inequality of wealth and magnified insecurity as the economy endured spasms of boom and bust. It took two generations of public policy experimentation to reverse trends toward inequality and create new sources of security for working families. Today, in the new economy, our challenges are much the same. But our responses must be radically different.

While economic agents have adjusted imperfectly to the new forces of information, technology, and global competition, our political system has remained mired in the past. Reform efforts to increase government efficiency by shriking bureaucracy have met with entrenched resistance, exacerbating the loss of public confidence and sparking demands for the wholesale elimination of public agencies and functions. While modern information technology can help decentralize political as well as economic power, these new possibilities for self-government have yet to be translated into practice.

While the policy debate remains clouded, the basic point is clear: The new economy is here to stay, and it is changing the terms on which we must act. We need new policies--for our economic, social and political life--based on hope rather than nostalgia, and realism rather than wishful thinking. There is simply no substitute for bold approaches that acknowledge the irreversible reality and power of the new economy.

Equal Opportunity for All, Special Privileges for None

As we respond to our rapidly changing economy, we must hold fast to our enduring values. One in particular stands out as central to our vision of a good society. It is a principle that has animated generations of American leaders and has attracted tens of million of immigrants to our shores. It is, simply, the promise of equal opportunity for all and special privileges for none. It is the ideal of a society in which individuals earn their rewards through their own talents and effort within a system of fair and open rules.

In one sense, of course, the United States has always been a society without special privilege. The Revolutionary War uprooted our homegrown aristocracy, and the Constitution forever prohibits the granting of titles of nobility. And because we had no aristocracy, we were spared the class warfare that divided European societies for generations.

Still, our history has been marked by waves of struggle against special privilege. Consider the right to vote. It was at first the preserve of relatively well-to-do white males. Over time, states eliminated property qualifications. A wave of social activism at the beginning of this century led to women's suffrage. A hard-fought constitutional amendment eliminated the poll tax. A new wave of

social activism finally redeemed the promise of the post-Civil War amendments and effectively ensured the right of African-Americans to participate in the electoral process. Another constitutional amendment erased the unfairness of requiring young Americans to fight and die for their country while preventing them from participating in the elections that shape foreign policy decisions. And today, conflict continues over the enforcement of "motor voter" legislation that lowers subtle but very real barriers to voting participation by lower-income Americans.

Similar stories could be told about the long fight, not yet concluded, against economic and social privilege. Discrimination, for example, is a moral insult. But it is also an injury--the assertion of unearned and unjustified privilege by some at the expense of others. It violates the most basic terms of the covenant that unites us. And that is why we must fight discrimination until it is only a fading memory.

Our federal budget legislates special privileges, in the form of selective benefits handed out to favored groups on the basis of raw political power rather than achievement or contribution to the common good. These privileges do more than allocate benefits to the undeserving; they divert resources from better uses and deprive others of a fair chance to succeed on their merits. A budget that better reflects our nation's values would do a better job of promoting the national interest. That is why we need to attack fiscal privilege in the national government--and at every level of the federal system.

At various points in our national history, we have persuaded ourselves that the elimination of formal, legal privileges--for example, officially sanctioned aristocracies and racial subordination backed by law--would suffice to create an equal opportunity society. But experience has taught us that merely negative steps, though vitally necessary, are not sufficient. There is no invisible hand that creates equal opportunity; it is a conscious social achievement that requires affirmative acts.

Today, we must return to first principles and ask ourselves what we must do--together--to realize the ideal of an equal opportunity society. For example: What effective steps can we take to strengthen families, assure quality education for all, create bridges for young people to the world of work, and give all workers tools to retrain to meet the challenges of a constantly changing economy?

As we answer these and many other questions, we must keep in mind the first cornerstone of the New Democracy: the irreversible economic shift that is changing our world--and with it, the requirements of equal opportunity. For example: in today's economy, more and more, computer literacy is a key to employment and advancement. For opportunity to be truly equal, all our young people must have the opportunity to acquire this literacy during the course of their elementary and secondary education.

Equal opportunity means a fair chance for every individual to succeed based on talent and effort. It is a double-edged sword. On the one side, it requires the removal of discriminatory barriers and the provision of meaningful arenas for self-development and self-improvement. But on the other, it is not a guarantee of success, and it is not a formula for top-down distribution of social goods. The promise of America is the promise of equal opportunity, not equal results. As we move toward equal opportunity, therefore, we must dismantle the structures that in the past have used mandated outcomes to compensate for disparities in opportunity.

What We Get, What We Give Back: The Ethic of Mutual Responsibility

The third cornerstone of the New Democracy is a principle that should pervade our social bonds as well as our public policies. It goes by many names, but the core idea is simple: As a moral matter, we cannot rightly benefit from any association to which we are not prepared to contribute our fair share or fulfill the duties of our role. And as a practical matter, no association in which this maxim is regularly disregarded is likely to work very well. This is the commonsense meaning of what is sometimes called the "ethic of mutual responsibility."

This ethic is distinguished from three competing principles. First, it does not call for an extreme of altruism--of uncompensated giving to others--but rather for a reasonable balance between what we give and what we get.

Second, the ethic of mutual responsibility rejects libertarianism--the idea that we have no obligations other than the ones we choose. Because we are social beings, because we become human only through our development in society, we live in a dense network of interdependence that we are not free to deny or reject.

And third, the ethic of mutual responsibility is at odds with the philosophy of entitlement--the belief that we can make demands on others, or on the community, without reciprocating. The reason is simple: Just about everything of value, whether material resources or social capital, is produced and sustained through human action, usually in cooperation with others. To demand something of value without contributing anything in return is to assert as a matter of right that others should work for me without compensation. That is wrong as a matter of morality. And in a free society, contributors will soon respond to free riders by withdrawing their support from common enterprises.

Mutual responsibility rests on a foundation of personal responsibility. We are not helpless victims of external forces. We are capable of understanding what is required of us, and of acting on that understanding. That is the faith of a free society, and of democracy itself.

We are born with the capacity for personal responsibility. But as every parent knows, we are not born responsible. The capacity must be developed over

an extended period, starting with the family. While our society must hold all normal adults responsible for their acts, we must recognize the existence of unequal opportunities for developing responsibility. And we must work to ensure, so far as possible, that every child has an adequate chance to do so.

As adults, personal responsibility begins at home. We have an obligation to take care of ourselves and our families--and to avoid unnecessary dependence on others. Regardless of economic or social status, we have an obligation to obey the law--and to convey to our children the importance of law-abidingness.

Mutual responsibility means doing our part to sustain the institutions from which we benefit. For example: because we value the equal protection of the law, we have a responsibility to serve on juries when asked--not to evade jury duty based on weak claims of personal inconvenience.

The norm of mutual responsibility should guide public policy as well as personal conduct. Whenever possible, policies should be structured so that citizens who contribute to the community are rewarded, and those who benefit from the community give something back.

Policies conceived in this spirit of reciprocity are far more likely to work and to enjoy sustained public support. For example, the GI Bill was one of the most effective measures in our history because it expressed the nation's gratitude for our veterans' extraordinary service. And John F. Kennedy's Peace Corps was electrifying because it challenged the most fortunate Americans to give something back through service to their country.

If we take mutual responsibility seriously, we must eliminate public programs that confer one-way benefits on selected individuals or groups. We must reform programs where benefits exceed contributions over time. And we must acknowledge that responsibility links to us future generations as well as to one another. We have received a legacy from our parents and grandparents that we can never repay. But acting as stewards of this inheritance, we can pass it on--intact and enhanced--to our children and grandchildren. That is why practical policy issues such as fiscal discipline and environmental protection also present profound moral challenges to our capacity for responsibility.

Governance in the New Democracy

Taken together, the three cornerstones of the New Democracy--economic transformation, opportunity without privilege, mutual responsibility--define a vision of revitalized enduring values in a context of rapid social change. And they point toward a new conception of self-government.

Recall the basics:

o Changing structures of production and information are breaking down bureaucratic organizations, bringing new decision-making power to frontline workers, entrepreneurs, and individual citizens.

o Implementing the principle of opportunity means dismantling centralized mechanisms that exist only to distribute and defend privilege.

o Taking mutual responsibility seriously means reforming programs and institutions that confer one-way benefits and turn citizens into beneficiaries.

All this means a return to democratic self-government based on confidence in the capacity of average citizens, once furnished with information, to choose responsibly for themselves. In many cases, government, so understood, will yield ground to markets and voluntary associations. When government is still needed, there should be a presumption in favor of decisions made close to the people and implemented in a manner that respects their liberty and common sense.

This does not mean that the federal government is somehow the enemy of the New Democracy. Yes, the philosophy of entitlement is incompatible with the New Democracy. But so is the philosophy of abandonment. What we need instead is government guided by the imperative of empowerment, government that fortifies the self-directing powers of ordinary citizens.

For by itself, the invisible hand will not enable all Americans to participate in the new economy. The commitment to equal opportunity requires affirmative steps taken by the entire nation. The scope of our responsibilities to one another crosses state and local boundaries. We need not always act together as a national community. But even today, national action as circumstances require can still help realize the promise of American life.