



Good Citizens and Bad History: Today's Political Ideals in Historical Perspective

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Recently I read a long essay on how political authority in Washington has changed in the past half century. What stayed with me was a remark by Senator Moynihan, that when he was a junior aide to New York Governor Averill Harriman in the 1940s, it was a rare and grand event for a governor to go to Washington -- "You'd spend time planning how many shirts to take. Going to Washington was a very big deal."¹ It's the shirts that got to me, that detail, a nugget of trustable truth. It is that kind of nugget that I kept looking for in my historical reading, and I tried to include in The Good Citizen.

I mention this with both pride and apology. I think I have a good eye for nuggets. At the same time, someone who lingers over Moynihan's shirts is probably not cut out to be a theorist. And yet we need a theorist here, especially the one who will dare to incorporate the face of actual political life into a theory of desirable political forms.

A historian told me soon after The Good Citizen was published that reviewers would fail to recognize the achievement of the book's first 300 pages and would take up the final fifteen pages, either to praise or damn the book accordingly. He was generally quite right. Not always, but often, the reviewer's position on the final few pages colored the whole review. The nuggets of the first 300 pages, that seemed to me so revealing and so worthy of contemplation, were left aside as interesting debris, while the concluding tentative effort at theorizing a new concept of citizenship was picked over in detail.

Today I want try to explain why the book's most vital contribution is its first 300 pages and what I take to be the critique there of a serious failure of American historical consciousness. Second, I want to re-argue the last fifteen pages, to offer not a theory of contemporary citizenship but at least a listing of what features of the contemporary scene any understanding of civic participation has to take account of. This requires doing a lot more homework than the communitarians have done, or the William Bennett character-building right or the if-we-could-only-rebuild-the-New-Deal-coalition left. It requires

¹ Quoted in Hugh Heclo, "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment" in Anthony King, ed., The New American Political System (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978) p. 95.

doing more homework than I have done, but I will at least try to lay out what I think the homework assignment should be.

I. The First Three Hundred Pages

Understanding the history of civic engagement in America is not a matter of positing a single standard of good citizenship and then documenting how well or how poorly Americans lived up to it in different eras. As it happens, that was the task I originally set for myself. I wanted to measure how well America lived up to a Habermasian model of a vibrant public sphere in different periods of our history -- as if there is and always has been a single normative standard of democratic public life. This book began as a conversation with Habermas. I thought I was a critic of Habermas, because I did not see the late 18th century as an Eden from which we have since been banished. I rejected Habermas's nostalgic view of European history, yet I labored under the deeper Habermasian illusion of a unitary and unvarying standard by which to measure public life. It took me awhile to discover that the Habermasian view was even in its most historical formulation profoundly ahistorical and entirely insensitive to the ways in which intellectual and moral ideals of public life have themselves shifted over time. Moreover, once I came to see this, it became clear that today's academic and journalistic discourse about citizenship is deeply mired in ruts worn in our thought during the Progressive Era. This blinds us to the virtues of trust-based, party-based, and rights-based models of citizenship in its dogged emphasis on a rationalistic, information-based model.

A. "The Citizen" of the Founding Fathers: Trust-Based Public Life

Imagine yourself a voter in the world of colonial Virginia where George Washington, Patrick Henry, and Thomas Jefferson learned their politics. As a matter of law, you must be a white male owning at least a modest amount of property. Of this group, turnout was 40 to 50 percent in the 1780s. Voting was required by law and there were substantial fines for not voting, but the law was rarely enforced. Your journey to vote may take several hours since there is probably only one polling place in the county. You might spend the night at the county seat – if this was George Washington’s district, there might be supper and a ball at the Washington’s, with spirits flowing freely (during an election in 1758, it is estimated that George provided a quart and a half of liquor per voter). As you approach the courthouse, you see the sheriff, supervising the election, flanked by the candidates for office.

You go up to the sheriff, announce your vote in a loud voice, audible to all those around you, and then you go over the candidate for whom you have voted and shake hands in a ritual of social solidarity.

Your vote has been an act of assent, restating and reaffirming the social hierarchy of a community where no one but a local notable would think of standing for office, where voting is conducted entirely in public view, and where voters are ritually rewarded by the gentlemen they favor.

In such a world, what information did a voter require? Colonial education aimed to instill religious virtue, not to encourage competent citizenship. Schooling and reading were understood to be instruments of inducting citizens more firmly into the established order. When people praised public enlightenment, this is what they usually had in mind.

So this is important to have straight at the outset: a concept of an ‘informed citizen’ was simply not a leading idea for the founders. The whole of the citizens' informational obligation was to recognize virtue well enough to be able to know and defeat its

counterfeit. Citizens were supposed to turn back the ambitious and self-seeking at the polls. But they were not to evaluate public issues themselves. That was what representatives were for.

One example: when George Washington looked at the "Democratic-Republican clubs," political discussion societies that sprang up in 1793 and 1794, he saw a genuine threat to civil order. The clubs were, to him, "self-created societies" that presumed, irresponsibly and dangerously, to make claims upon the government, to offer suggestions to the government about what it should decide -- when they had not been elected by the people nor sat in the chambers of the Congress to hear the viewpoints of all. What de Tocqueville would one day praise, Washington excoriated. He asked, in a letter to a friend, if anything could be

More absurd, more arrogant, or more pernicious to the peace of Society than for self created bodies, forming themselves into permanent Censors, and under the shade of Night in a Conclave resolving that acts of Congress, which have undergone the most deliberate and solemn discussion by the Representatives of the people, chosen for the express purpose and bringing with them from the different parts of the Union the sense of their Constituents, endeavoring as far as the nature of the thing will admit to form that will into laws for the government of the whole; I say, under these circumstances, for a self created permanent body (for no one denies the right of the people to meet occasionally to petition for, or remonstrate against, any Act of the legislature etc.) to declare that this act is unconstitutional and that act is pregnant of mischief, and that all, who vote contrary to their dogmas are actuated by selfish

motives, or under foreign influence; nay, in plain terms are Traitors to their Country, is such a stretch of arrogant presumption to be reconciled with laudable motives: especially when we see the same set of men endeavouring to destroy all confidence in the Administration, by arraigning all its acts, without knowing on what ground or with what information it proceeds and this without regard to decency or truth.

The Founders did not support broad publicity for governmental proceedings, they did not provide for general public education, and they discouraged informal public participation in governmental affairs. They viewed elections as affairs in which local citizens would vote for esteemed leaders of sound character and good family, deferring to a candidate's social pedigree more than siding with his policy preferences. As for the free press, some patriots who were ardent defenders of free speech and press when they were challenging a monarchy felt quite differently when the authority in control was an elected legislature and not a hereditary monarch. Even the likes of Sam Adams were wary of open criticism of government once the new nation was launched. They left us a checkered legacy of practices, however glowing their fondly stated ideals.

Before I move on, I want to pause and ask you again to picture that scene of voting. It is more like an election for chair of a college's Academic Senate than for a representative to Congress. It is based on trust. Issues are not central; they do not normally figure at all. The voters look for someone they know or at least someone within a set or circle they know. There will be no surprises. No one stands for Academic Senate chair who has not already

proved him or herself. Nor does anyone vote who has not already been recognized as a person of responsibility in the community, someone with a stake in the kingdom, to borrow the language of the seventeenth century.

What model of democracy is this? It is not one that today any editorial page anywhere in the country crows about or even notices. But it is the basis for union elections, and alumni association elections, corporate board elections and church elections. To some degree, it is still connected to school board elections, and even to city and county elections. Our political system continues to depend on trust. At a local level, where officials are often likely to see themselves as trustees for right-minded or public-spirited common sense rather than advocates for a political program, the political system operates on little else besides social trust.

B. The Party Era and the Progressive Era "Informed Citizen": Party-Based Public Life and Information-Based Public Life

Picture a second scene of voting in the mid-nineteenth century, as mass political parties cultivate a new democratic order. Now there is much more bustle around the polling place. The area is crowded with clumps of activists from rival parties. On election day, the parties hire tens of thousands of workers to get out the vote and to stand near the polling place to hand out the "tickets" they have printed. The voter approaches the polling place, takes a ticket from one of these "ticket peddlers" he knows to be of his own party and goes up to the voting station and deposits his ticket in the ballot box. He need not look at it. He need not mark it in any way. Clearly, he need not be literate. He may cast his ballot free of charge, but it would not be surprising if he received payment for his effort. In New Jersey, as many as one third of the electorate in the 1880s expected payment for voting on election day, usually in an amount between \$1 and \$3.

What did a vote express? Not a strong conviction that the party offered better public policies; parties tended to be more devoted to distributing offices than to advocating policies. Party was related more to comradeship than to policy, it was more an attachment than a choice, something like a contemporary loyalty to a high school or college and its teams. Voting was not a matter of assent but a statement of affiliation. Drink, dollars, and drama brought people to the polls, and, more than that, social connection, rarely anything more elevated.

Reformers at the end of the 19th century saw little in the parties to recommend them. The Mugwumps sought to make elections "educational" and the Progressives tried to insulate the independent, rational citizen from the distorting enthusiasms of party. It is to them that we owe the ideal of the informed citizen, not to the founding fathers. In the 1880s, political campaigns began to shift from parades to pamphlets, and so put a premium on literacy. In the 1890s, the Australian ballot swept the nation and so for the first time in American history literacy was required to cast a ballot. Voting changed from a social and public duty to a private right, from a social obligation to party enforceable by social pressure to a civic obligation or abstract loyalty, enforceable only by private conscience. In the early 1900s, non-partisan municipal elections, presidential primaries, and the initiative and referendum imposed more challenging cognitive tasks on prospective voters than ever before. These changes enshrined "the informed citizenry," provided a new mechanism and a new rationale for disenfranchising African-Americans and immigrants, and inaugurated an enduring tradition of hand-wringing over popular political ignorance.

From 1880 to 1910, the most basic understandings of American politics were challenged and reformed. Attacking the emotional enthusiasm of political participation, the corruption in campaign financing and campaign practices, and attacking broadside the parties for usurping the direct connection between citizens and their government, reformers invented the language by which we still measure our politics. These were our premature Habermasians.

In the end, the reformers faced the curse of getting what they wished for -- the elevation of the individual, educated, rational voter as the model citizen. The result was that political participation drastically fell. The large voting public of the late nineteenth century with voter turn-out routinely at 70 percent or more became the vanishing public of the 1920s with turn-out under 50 percent. Even in 1932 -- 1932! -- turnout was the same (53%) as it would be in 1980 and lower than it was in 1992.

Again, I ask you to linger over the actual physical act of voting. I insist on this political anthropology, as it were, because we are normally so blind to it. Habermas was blind to it. Democratic theory is blind to it. But this is where the wheel hits the road. This is where we learn our politics, where political knowledge is in our fingers, not just our heads, like a piece learned on the piano. The civics lessons at school and the newspaper are important, but they are commentaries on our primary experience of participation in government. That primary experience, that primal scene of modern democracy teaches us more than we ever suspected. If I am right in this, the decade of the 1890s was a turning point in which American politics spun itself into a new regime. For the first century of the American nation, the concept of the "informed citizen": was at most a minor theme; from the 1890s on it became a central meaning for citizenship.

C. Rights-Based Public Life

At the polling place, we are still in this third era, but citizenship has changed again, this time, opening a second front of action for the man or woman in the street, who now can and should think of suing, as well as voting, as an avenue of civic engagement.

In 1935 the Court considered questions of civil liberties or civil rights in two of 160 opinions; in 1989 it was sixty-six of 132. The Supreme Court and American constitutionalism in general shifted from an emphasis in the nineteenth century on

"powers," concerned with the relative authority of the state and federal governments, to an emphasis on rights and the obligations of government and law to the claims of individuals.

The lesson here for citizenship is that until the late 1930s at the earliest, the courts as makers of policy were not on the map of citizenship. Now, a new avenue of national citizen power and a new model for political action emerged.

The new model citizenship added the courtroom to the voting booth as a locus of civic participation. Political movements and political organizations that, in the past, had only legislative points of access to political power, now found that the judicial system offered an alternative route to their goals. The lever of change, if you had to single out just one, was the NAACP.

The civil rights movement opened the door to a widening web of both Constitutionally-guaranteed citizen rights and statutory acts based on an expanded understanding of citizens' entitlements, state obligations, and the character of due process. This affected not only the civil and political rights of African-Americans but the rights of women and of the poor and, increasingly, of minority groups of all sorts. This helped stimulate a broad federalization of American politics.

In the course of a decade, 1963-73, the federal government put more regulatory laws on the books than it had in the country's entire prior history. In schools and in universities, in families, in the professions, in private places of employment, in human relations with the environment, and not least of all in political institutions themselves, including the political parties, the rights revolution brought federal power or national norms of equality to bear on local practices. In each of these domains, the outreach of the Constitutional order spread ideals of equality, due process, and rights.

Not only ideals of equality were spreading -- so was the reality. By 1979, the top 5% of the income pyramid held a smaller percentage of total national income than at any point before or since in this century. Also, by that point, the national investment in health for the elderly had risen enormously with the establishment of Medicare in 1965. In 1959, 40

million Americans or 22.4% of the population lived in poverty; in 1970 this was down to 25 million or 12.6%.

In the past 20 years, some of the developments of 1960-75 have unraveled, but much less than we usually acknowledge. By 1995, the poverty rate was up to 13.8% (36 million people)² The disparity between rich and poor has grown again, by some measures reaching the level of 1950, although nowhere near the levels of pre-war days.

Progress toward economic equality has ceased, but other changes of the 1960s are not undone and not about to be. The gospel of rights has been carried from one field of human endeavor to another, transporting rights across the cultural border of public and private. Rights for women, gays and lesbians, children, prisoners, the disabled, students and children, employees and others have all been greatly expanded, actively litigated, prominently generating an organizational infrastructure both inside institutions like schools and businesses and outside them in advocacy groups.

There has been what Lawrence Friedman calls a "due process" revolution, one that "has revolutionized the inner life of private institutions as well as public ones."³ In Friedman's view, this elaborates a more general development of this century in which "the basic norms of modern legal culture have been spreading throughout society." Coincident with this, is growing adherence to a world of "plural equality," greater sensitivity to and recognition of the legitimacy of pluralism, difference, and alternative outlooks. Instead of one governing code, there is "a band, a range of codes that more or less coexist."⁴

In 19th century legal culture, "equality did not mean pluralism." Society's leading citizens thought equality meant granting rights to guests who lived in a house they

²Sar Levitan, et. al. Programs in Aid of the Poor (7th edition, 1998) pp. 25, 41. If you look not at poverty levels but at the distribution of wealth across groups, the income distribution grew slowly more equal from 1947 through 1979 -- say, the percentage of income received by the top 5% of families -- but then grew rapidly more unequal, reaching 1947 levels of inequality by 1989 and surpassing those levels significantly by 1996. See Frank Levy, New Dollars and Dreams (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998) p. 199.

³Lawrence Friedman, Total Justice (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) p. 88.

⁴Friedman, p. 119.

themselves owned and occupied. Twentieth-century pluralism now accepts that society is a confederation of groups each with joint tenancy of the common house.⁵

Let me recap where I think I have challenged conventional understandings of American political history:

1. I am developmentalist rather than creationist. So are almost all historians, but scarcely any political theorists. Historians largely agree that individual Constitutional "rights" as a practical experience is a 20th century, not an 18th century, development. But this is not part of our public culture or our journalistic culture or our Fourth of July culture. Popular understanding of our past is creationist -- God, Tom Jefferson, and James Madison brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and equality and we've just been working out the details ever since. Well, this is dangerous nonsense. I don't want to find a children's history textbook, as I did a few days ago in Barnes & Noble, that includes David Koresh in the index but not Fred Korematsu. I think it is wonderful for eighth grade history classes to study the Bill of Rights with care, but that they never mention Footnote Four of *U.S. v. Carolene Products* 1938 is a travesty.⁶ We should honor Jefferson and Madison, to be sure, and I am more in awe of them now, having read them closely, than ever before, but their names need to be paired with names like Thurgood Marshall -- the litigator, not the justice; and Earl Warren, and Martin Luther King. What remains unassimilated into American consciousness is how much the NAACP and Martin Luther King made this land for you and me, even if "you and me" are white and middle class.

2. Second, again a developmentalist point: our popular culture of politics comes more from the Progressives than from the Founders, and it is time to reconsider what the Progressives taught us. Perhaps it will help to remember that the Progressives were

⁵Friedman, p. 120.

⁶Footnote Four says that the Court should look at legislative acts with close scrutiny where (a) they violate an express provision of the Constitution (b) they bear on aspects of the political and electoral process itself or (c) they single out a discrete and insular minority.

frequently racist. And devoted to efficiency. And suspicious of immigrants. And generally nerdy. Why, then, do we continue to accept so many of their views without question? Maybe not everyone does, but certainly journalists and media scholars do, and one strongly suspects that there is something very parochial and self-serving, if unintentionally so, in this.

3. Third, history has not stopped. Change continues. So it is about time that we admit that the "post-war world" is over. It probably ended in 1973. But history goes on. Evaluating continuity and change in the past 54 years is difficult. And so the sour mood of the left must be rejected: it is just not true that whatever good happened in the 1960s was destroyed in the 1980s by Reagan, Burger, Rehnquist, Jerry Falwell, and Phyllis Schlafly. The changes of the 1960s persist.

Likewise, the right's claim that the Great Society was a failure and the cultural left of the 1960s a disaster from which we are only now recovering must be rejected. Any view of the present that does not affirm the obvious fact that blacks and women have a voice they did not have in 1965, or that girls have a future they did not have in 1965, or that gays and lesbians can speak their names in public, or that patriarchal cultural authority whether that of the father in the home or the doctor in the hospital or the teacher in the classroom is rightly more circumscribed than it was in 1965 is just not a serious view.

Communitarian views, then, must also be renounced for contributing to a mood that American public culture has been in free-fall since the 1960s. We took so many pot shots at liberalism over the past thirty years that we convinced ourselves it was dead, or deserved to be. But most of us are, like most of American culture, more liberal than we knew. We object to the marketplace idolatry of consumer choice but we fight for a woman's right to choose -- that's a liberal ideal; we worry that our society's litigiousness tears at the social fabric, but we cherish the legal victories and the legal threats that brought us civil rights, Title IX, "one person, one vote" and the Americans With Disabilities Act. We support public schools but all the way up to Chelsea Clinton we exercise our option to choose

private schools when the public schools stink and we have the money to place our kids elsewhere. That's liberalism, too, the kind that we may exercise with guilt, but we exercise, and may even, despite ourselves, value.

II. The Last Fifteen Pages

I've been trying to learn something about local politics recently. Trying to sort out the city, the county, Community Development Corporations, the Coastal Commission. It will be useful to me personally if and when something called State Highway 56 is completed. The city council approved it about a year ago, I read in the newspaper. I was interested enough to read down to the end of the story to learn that six other governmental bodies still had to approve it before any pavement could be laid. If you look at the hearings over the proposed route, and the testimony collected for the environmental impact report, you'll find materials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency, the California Fish and Game Agency, the California Department of Transportation, the Governor's Office of Planning, San Diego County, the City of Del Mar, the School District of Del Mar, and the San Diego Association of Governments. To be well informed on a single local issue like this one would require months of study.

It is hard for a professor to say this, just as it would be hard for a journalist to agree to it, but the link between information and democracy is not as tight as we have made it out to be. It is important but it is not all-important. To acknowledge this is not to give up on democracy, but to take the first step on the road to a better democracy. It is to point out the limits of one model of democracy and to urge making room for the others.

The model to which we have collectively given the least thought is the rights-conscious model. There is now a large literature devoted to showing what is wrong with rights. It is a varied literature, from both left and right. It is in places an eloquent literature. But I think

on the whole it is a nostalgic literature, even a reactionary literature, it is a kind of Federalist literature. Think about what the old-line Federalists said to one another in 1800 or 1810 -- at the very moment that there was a new burst of freedom, they mourned the loss of civility and deference. We should be very, very careful of donning the mourning cloaks of our Federalist forbears.

Before we jump in to condemn what's wrong with rights, we should think hard about what's right with rights. It is simply a mistake to regard rights as opposed to community, furthering a rampant individualism that threatens the fabric of social relationship and the affectional ties that bind us to one another. Rights are, as Stephen Holmes and Cass Sunstein define them, "powers granted by the political community." They are functions of the state. They cost state dollars. The average jury trial costs \$13,000, the National Labor Relations Board costs \$170 million a year, police protection and correctional facilities cost \$73 billion, and federal disaster relief to protect property rights costs \$12 billion annually. The community makes determined investments in rights.⁷

Moreover, rights articulate a sense of social justice. As Hannah Pitkin has said, there is a world of difference between "I want" and "I am entitled to." The first is egocentric, the second is decidedly a voice of justice. It insists necessarily on public standards for negotiating claims and forces us in the process of claims-making to think about the standards and our stake in them, the character of our community and even our opponents within it. We have 35 years of taking rights seriously, at most. We haven't figured it out very well. But we should not back away from the best shot we've ever had at making this political system work for everyone. The job should be to enunciate some principles and practices about how to make a rights-conscious citizenship effective.

There are some obvious policy implications here. Should people be free to sue their HMOs? A no-brainer. You bet they should. If you set up a medical system with little

⁷Stephen Holmes and Cass Sunstein, The Cost of Rights (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999) pp. 17, 234-36).

legislative or executive control, then individuals are left to control it themselves and the litigative route is one of the few available to them.

Here we are, amidst the birth of a rights-conscious freedom, mourning the lost civic engagement of the 1950s. Here we are in an age of inclusion, of pluralism, of minorities and women electable and elected to office, and we mourn the world structured by segregation, by sexism. Have we lost something? The Federalists were right, back in 1810, that a world administered through the trusting relationships of a group of landed families who knew one another bred some genuine virtues. It could not survive democracy, but yes, something was lost. The men's clubs and women's clubs and PTAs of the 1950s could not survive cultural pluralism or women in the workplace, and certainly some virtues have been lost there, too.

Change happens. But any way you count it, Americans are more involved in associations today than at any point between 1900 and 1945 -- that is what Robert Putnam's data indicate. And Americans are more involved in associational life than Europeans, more involved in political campaigning, more likely to contribute money to political candidates, more likely to contact government officials, and more active in their local communities.⁸ If, as the best evidence tends to indicate, there has been a fall-off in civic participation between 1950 and the 1980s, this is well worth pondering, but the question must be what the context for this departure is and what the constellation of civic and private life looks like that produced it.

Now, one might ask a different question, of course. One might ask why there was such an astonishing rise in civic participation between 1945 and 1960. Robert Putnam has the beginning of an answer. He refers to the generation that fought World War II as "the Long Civic Generation," more participatory in civic life by the measures of group membership or voter turnout than either the generation before them or the generation after. Putnam is not

⁸Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, "Civic Participation and the Equality Problem" in Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, Civic Engagement in American Democracy (Washington and New York: Brookings Institution Press and Russell Sage Foundation, 1999) p.

otherwise curious about this group or whether they, rather than their successors, might be the outlier, but clearly, four years of mobilization for war, followed by prosperity and among other things by 1955 the highest level of union membership in American history, all of this surely strengthened this long civic generation. Perhaps it takes a four year involvement in a world war, not to mention the several years beyond that brought hundreds of thousands of American soldiers to Germany, Japan, and other garrisons of post-war reconstruction.

This was of primary importance, I think, in shaping the 1950s, but it was not the only thing. Today people worry about declining "comity" in Congress and the state legislatures; and, indeed, the growing coolness of relations among members across the parties has spawned what appear to be unusually harsh language and rude manners. Some of the reasons for this have to do with trends in the broader culture, but some have to do with very simple matters -- as Alan Ehrenhalt has observed, one factor is that there is just not as much alcohol consumed in the state capitals as there used to be. Moreover, as the work of government has grown and legislative sessions have grown much longer, "more members bring their families to the capital, so there is not the feeling of bachelors on holiday that used to surround pretty much any legislature."⁹

If it required war, alcohol, and a misogynistic band of brothers to make civic life work so beautifully and social capital to grow so mightily in the 1950s, it's time to invent a new mode of accumulating social capital and redefining citizenship.

I exaggerate for rhetorical effect, but the 1950s were not a safe place to be old or sick or poor or different. No, if we are to find a model of citizenship for our own day, we must make it, not borrow it from the fifties, and we must make it for the world we live in, not some other place. Any idea of contemporary citizenship must provide a central place for:

⁹Alan Ehrenhalt, "Mayor Daley and Modern Democracy: What We Should Have Learned From Chicago in the 1950s" in Byron E. Shafer, ed. (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1997).

1. What Lawrence Friedman calls "plural equality," the growing acceptance of non-invidious social differences and distinctions, as between blacks and whites, Jews, Catholics, and Protestants, men and women, and to some degree the able and those with disabilities, the old and the young, the straight and the gay.

2. The decline of religious authority, the growing recognition even inside theological orthodoxies that modern religion must reckon with and accommodate doubt, skepticism, and science. Robert Bellah has probably analyzed this best in holding that modern religious symbol systems differ from all past systems because they co-exist with "a deepening analysis of the very nature of symbolization itself." This operates not only at the highest intellectual levels but popularly, too, because, again quoting Bellah, "the symbolization of man's relation to the ultimate conditions of his existence, is no longer the monopoly of any groups explicitly labeled religious." Bellah wrote that "every fixed position has become open to question in the process of making sense out of man and his situation," and lest one immediately tag this with the label "post-modern," it is of course quintessentially modern; I borrow it from a paper published in 1970 based in ideas Bellah began to work out in the 1950s.¹⁰

3. The revolution in due process and the spread of legal norms. The vast expansion of the political field and the great progress in human liberty and equality that the rights revolution has sponsored in little more than three decades, accompanied by a politicization of the home in terms of self-consciousness about sexism and the politicization of the workplace in terms of regulations about fair employment practices, sexual harassment, equal employment opportunity, and due process.

4. The expectation of social security: the growing calculability of risks and the rising popular expectation that social risk will be minimized or insured against by positive, and usually governmental, action.

¹⁰Robert N. Bellah, "Religious Evolution" in Robert N. Bellah, Beyond Belief (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) pp. 40, 42.

5. The reshuffling of intimacy: weakened norms in support of marriage, strengthened norms in support of parent-child bonds, and changing capacity of people to maintain kinship and friendship ties over time and space. There are the symptomatic popularization of genealogical searches, college reunions, family reunions and even businesses and handbooks that cater to them, professional conventions, commercial tours and Elderhostels, all rooted in a fundamental civility and social connectedness.

6. The proliferation of non-party political agencies: interest groups and especially public interest organizations, law firms, and lobbies from the 1970s on, not to mention a proliferation of social movements that spin off from one another like television sitcoms.

7. The shift in Washington politics away from a system of subgovernments that still worked on old-boy trust as late as the 1970s where a small circle of insiders operated pretty much on their own around many issues -- for instance, social security or the Army Corps of Engineers or the traffic safety establishment, each of whom did their work with little controversy and essentially no public scrutiny. But social security, the environment, and traffic safety all became politicized, like so many other domains, and the quiet decorum of subgovernmental Washington was forever shattered.¹¹ What Hugh Hecllo calls "issue networks," much more porous, accessible, and shifting, has replaced the old system. This is also related to a more enterprising, confident, and aggressive national news media.

8. Growth in elite-challenging political action. There has been a notable increase in industrial nations in the past 30 years, including the United States, in regime-challenging popular political activity. Political scientist Ronald Inglehart's conclusion, based on cross-national surveys, is categorical: elite-challenging political action has been growing throughout advanced industrial societies. People are more likely than they were a generation ago to sign petitions, join boycotts, join issue-oriented groups. "Citizens have become increasingly critical of politicians and political parties and more willing to use

¹¹Hugh Hecllo, "Issue Networks," p. 105.

noninstitutional forms of political action to pursue their goals.....we are witnessing a long-term trend that is weakening the authority of established institutions."¹²

These developments are not all to the good. You'd have to be half-dead not to worry about so many simultaneous threats to established cultural authority. It is widely agreed that "The Simpsons" is one of the best things on TV. It is also among the worst, and is especially troubling because it is so popular and so potent. I watch it through the eyes of my children. In some ways, it is just Ozzie and Harriet, of course, and my kids can see the parallels between Homer and me. But it also trades on what Stephen Elkin, in a different context, has called our "unearned knowingness."¹³ Young children, at least mine, today, know a lot in this unearned way. My children are ready to ridicule institutions and individuals long before they've had an opportunity to admire them. "Simpsons" knocks pretense off its pedestal; fine, but my children are much more familiar with iconoclasm than they are with icons, they know more about satire than they do about what kind of honor or achievement led someone or something to be in a position to be satirized in the first place. There has been cultural irreverence before -- MAD magazine, for instance, in the 1950s in its mass marketed form, or Lenny Bruce or Mort Sahl in a more esoteric version. But today, irreverence is not a rebellious choice but a cultural baseline. It is more current than it is undercurrent, and the consequences are untold.

What I am arguing is not that these social changes are necessarily good, though I believe they are on balance good, but that they are. Seeking a model of civic participation or civic consciousness or public discourse that would deny them is a non-starter.

¹²Ronald Inglehart, "Postmaterialist Values and the Erosion of Institutional Authority" pp. 217-236 in Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Philip D. Zelikow, and David C. King, eds., Why People Don't Trust Government (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) p. 220.

¹³Stephen Elkin, "Citizen Competence and the Design of Democratic Institutions," in Stephen L. Elkin and Karol Edward Soltan, eds. Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999) p.394.

Into this picture, the idea of the monitorial citizen I offered in The Good Citizen is a very modest suggestion more than the culmination of my analysis. My claim has to be read correctly: I do not recommend the model of the monitorial citizen as THE appropriate model for our time. I propose it as a modification of the information-based model and I believe it must and should co-exist with models of citizen engagement based on trust, party, and rights. So it should not be read to be more than I intended.

Nor should it be read as less than I proposed. I have been accused of offering a California, "laid-back" model of what civic participation should be. This is not so. In some ways, monitorial citizenship is more demanding than informed citizenship, because it implies that one's peripheral vision should always have a political or civic dimension. But it does not imply that citizens should know all the issues all of the time. It implies that they should be informed enough and alert enough to identify danger to their personal good and danger to the public good. When such danger appears on the horizon, they should have the resources -- in trusted relationships, in political parties and elected officials, in relationships to interest groups and other trustees of their concerns, in knowledge of and access to the courts as well as the electoral system, and in relevant information sources to jump into the political fray and make a lot of noise.¹⁴

Where do the media fit with all of this? The press is not the focal point of civic life. It never was. It is a tool of civic life. It is a necessary tool. The media's main task is critique, monitoring, a watchdog over authority. Public journalism does not replace this at all. I do not think it claims to. Public journalism simply asks of journalism what every institution and every profession should be asking of itself: has our commitment to the limited values and norms of our profession or our organization obscured the larger purposes to which we

¹⁴You can say all this more curtly than I have. You can say, with Mark Warren, that people don't really want democratic participation most of the time. Most of the time, people prefer trust to voice. Usually we are happy to trust airline controllers, food inspectors and the judicial system -- only when things go wrong do we suddenly think we might want to participate. "So the lure of democratic participation operates at the margins. This is because the scarcity of time, attentiveness, and knowledge relative to the countless decisions affecting our life leaves most decisions to domains of trust, which must be the rule rather than the exception for any individual in advanced industrial societies." Mark E. Warren, "Deliberative Democracy and Authority," American Political Science Review 90 (March, 1996) p. 49.

are dedicated? The public journalism movement raises that question more eloquently and effectively for journalism than anything or anyone else since the Vietnam war.

The critique of The Good Citizen I find most troubling is the view that in criticizing nostalgia for the past I have come dangerously close to a nostalgia for the present. The book has seemed to some readers too morally comfortable.

I understand this objection but I do not think it is apt. I do not think that the end of prompting moral discomfort and social change justifies mythologizing the past. Challenging faulty preconceptions, even if they are the preconceptions of your friends or yourself, is important, and then trying to articulate a position that does not accept greed or laziness or complacency but seeks beachheads for a better life and a more humane society. From the standpoint of journalism, I think that means incorporating some of the ideas of public journalism. From the standpoint of academic work, I think it means taking on the horrendously difficult tasks of trying to model honest dialogue in our classrooms and colloquia, and plain speaking in our writing, and learning, really learning, that our professional commitments disable as much as they enable. I think I grow less morally comfortable every day, the more I see how deeply I have allowed myself to be cut off from the world beyond the university's doors. But that does not mean that I should lie about the past.

We need some new language. We also need some new practices, but I believe half of our problem is in coming to recognize and name the practices that have grown up around us.¹⁵ "Our task," Michael Ignatieff wrote in 1984, "is to find a language for our need for belonging which is not just a way of expressing nostalgia, fear and estrangement from

¹⁵Just to name one: the boundary between the state and civil society barely exists beyond our theorizing about it. What is a political party, part of the state or part of civil society? It spans the boundary, as a voluntary association that takes on responsibility for constituting a ruling majority in the legislatures. What do we have when the states dispense public funds for health, say, largely through contracts with private organizations? What do we have when local government approves a new housing development so long as the developer pays for the building and maintenance of public highways or public parks? A lot of this is new, of course, but it is not entirely new. What did we have in the 1920s and 1930s when the Rosenwald Fund and southern black businessmen built and turned over to the southern states 5,000 schools?

modernity. Our political images of civic belonging remain haunted by the classical polis, by Athens, Rome and Florence. Is there a language of belonging adequate to Los Angeles?" That is a very serious question. Ignatieff's own answer is yes, that Los Angeles is no less a place for belonging than was Manchester or New York or Paris in the 19th century, very strange and forbidding places at the time, places that became the sites for remarkable civic invention, from street lighting to public parks and museums to the apartment house. We need, Ignatieff concluded, justice. We need liberty "and we need as much solidarity as can be reconciled with justice and liberty." I think he has his priorities right -- liberty and justice for all, that comes first, and then solidarities built around them. But we also need, he says finally, "language adequate to the times we live in. We need to see how we live now and we can only see with words and images which leave us no escape into nostalgia for some other time and place."¹⁶

That is a better reply to my critics than I have been able to craft myself. It is a call for a new civic imagination, one informed but not imprisoned by the past, and one that does not fear losing the morally comfortable role of chide and scold by occasionally praising what has been achieved in our lifetimes, and trying to make the best of it.

¹⁶Michael Ignatieff, The Needs of Strangers (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984) 139-141 .