

# The Democratic Spirit

*Kwame Anthony Appiah*

*Abstract: There is a famous paradox about democracy: most forms of participation make no obvious difference to political outcomes and yet people act anyway. I argue that they are more likely to act politically if they have certain attitudes and commitments; and that productive attitudes of the right kind can be sustained by a culture in which two kinds of honor are central. One kind of honor is collective: it is the honor of nations, which is the concern of the patriot. Another is the honor of citizens, who are worthy of respect because they contribute to the practices that serve the republic. I suggest some practices we Americans might want to take up and honor for the sake of our own republic today, drawing attention to two discoveries in social psychology that could be productively brought to bear in our political life: namely, the Ben Franklin effect and the Contact Hypothesis.*

[H]ow much more profitable it is prudently to remove, than to resent, return, and continue inimical proceedings.

–Benjamin Franklin, from his *Autobiography*

America acts. It starts – and ends – wars, accedes to treaties, gives foreign aid, raises taxes, authorizes corporations, creates patents, defines and punishes crimes. It does these things in the name of the American people, and we, the people, by way of elections, choose the legislators and executives who manage the doing of them. But we are supposed to be involved in the processes of government in more ways than simply by voting. All governments are of the people; all usually claim to be for the people. In our democracy, we aim to be a government by the people as well.

In this essay, I attempt to explain the relationship between our individual acts as citizens, on the one hand, and what our country does on the other. I assume that, in some sense, we can act as a people, literal or metaphorical.<sup>1</sup> So I want to develop a picture of the ways in which we individuals participate in those collective acts. Then, with that understanding in place, I will argue that doing this properly

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requires us to develop a certain political psychology: a way of thinking and feeling and acting as citizens. As you will see, it is a political psychology that is by no means standard in our country today; and I conclude by suggesting some practices and institutions that might lead to its becoming more common.

This volume explores how various institutions of our society help sustain democracy. In every domain there is a form of democratic stewardship that contributes to this task. It involves following norms, some of which are specific to institutional roles and particular professions. I focus here on the ways in which citizens contribute *as citizens* to the sustenance of democracy and on how institutions can help in this task.

Aristotle said in his *Politics* that the ideal political community, his city-state, should be small enough that its citizens could “know each other’s personal characters” but big enough to be self-sufficient, and so he recommended that it should have a population “that can well be taken in at one view.”<sup>2</sup> Today, however, self-sufficiency seems inconsistent with knowing each other’s characters. While there are tiny political units, like the New England town, where it is plausible that people really could know one another, and where a meeting of the people really could govern, every American state and city – let alone the United States as a whole – is bound to be a political community of strangers. The challenge of modern politics (a challenge that Aristotle did not contemplate) is for strangers – people who know very little, if anything, about each other – to cooperate in the collective task of running the republic.

Our social psychologies evolved in pre-historic times in the context of a social life with a few score people. Aristotle’s city-state already required interactions

on a larger scale; but the government of a group that size could perhaps be conducted by people meeting face to face, hearing each other’s arguments (at least if you had the voice, as Aristotle puts it, of Stentor, the herald “whose cry,” Homer said, “was as loud as that of fifty men together”<sup>3</sup>). Even with the invention of the microphone, this is evidently inconceivable for the political interactions necessary on our modern scale of millions. How, then, to take the social psychology of a creature evolved for life in minuscule communities and transfer it to the multitudinous life of a modern nation?

Political scientist Benedict Anderson’s well-known account of modern nationalism focuses on a central mechanism by which the nation-state takes hold of the lives of ordinary people around the world: namely, by allowing them to think of themselves as participating, through their shared identities as citizens, in the ongoing *story* of a vast group of strangers.<sup>4</sup> As Ernest Renan, that great French historian and nationalist, put it succinctly well over a century ago: “An heroic past, great men, glory – I mean real glory – this is the social capital on which the national idea is based.”<sup>5</sup> What he had in mind was the fact that stories of this glorious past were part of what linked individuals in national fraternity and sorority: nations are narrative communities.

But there is another kind of connection among those who share identities that has been less remarked upon recently. It is implied when Renan talks not just about the past but about “an heroic past,” about “great men, glory.” For what patriotic citizens feel when they hear and tell those stories is *pride*. You can understand how that sentiment works only if you recognize that each of us shares, through our common national identity, in the honor of our nation . . . a privilege that comes with the

burden of sharing in our country's shame as well. To have honor is to be entitled to respect.<sup>6</sup> If you care for your honor, you will want to be entitled to the respect of others. (Shame comes when you lose your right to respect: in caring for gaining and maintaining honor, you are bound to be concerned about losing it.)

The psychology of collective honor can be made to seem very mysterious. How can I gain or lose honor when somebody *else* does something, unless I was somehow responsible for their doing it? America protects vulnerable people in Somalia. I feel pride. But why? I didn't do anything, some other Americans did. America does something dishonorable at Abu Ghraib. I feel shame. I feel it even though I didn't do anything, even though I didn't support it, even though it was something I have always known was wrong. Why?

Questions like these are better not answered in the abstract. In John Coetzee's recent novel, *A Diary of a Bad Year*, the South African protagonist writes in response to the evidence, published in *The New Yorker*, that the U.S. administration sanctions torture and subverts conventions proscribing torture:

If we grant the truth of what the *New Yorker* claims, then the issue for individual Americans becomes a moral one: how, in the face of this shame to which I am subjected, do I behave? How do I save my honor?

Here is a reminder of how national honor works . . . and of why we should be glad that it exists. It can motivate us to see if, together, we can do what is right. The issue of torture is moral, of course; but what engages each patriotic American is not just the morality of torture but also the honor of a country that tortures. And honor, unlike moral responsibility, is something you may need to recover whether or not it was your act (or culpable omission) that led to disaster.

Patriotism is often identified with love of country. That can't be right: many of my friends love Italy, but not being Italian citizens, they can't be Italian patriots. Love is a sentiment you can feel for what is not already yours. But you cannot share in the honor of a country – or of anything else – unless it *is* yours. My family, my church, my town, and my profession: each can bring me honor (and, alas, shame). But *your* family is, from honor's point of view, not my business. Patriotism is better understood as a concern for the honor of your country, your nation. This concern gives you a serious investment in its doings, even when, like most of us, you do not control them. National honor can engage citizens even when they know, as policy expert Anthony Downs has insisted, that they do not individually make the nation do or stop doing *anything*.<sup>7</sup> They can participate emotionally and symbolically with a great mass of others nevertheless, because their patriotism draws them into a shared experience. (The armed services, as the essay in this issue by Andrew A. Hill, Leonard Wong, and Stephen J. Gerras reminds us, are one of the great molders of this spirit.)

But just as I cannot, on my own, affect a political outcome in most cases, so I cannot steer the nation to the path of honor on my own. We have to ask why someone, even someone engaged with the nation's honor, should participate if, in this sense, it makes no difference. Collective honor defines one of the stakes in our common life. We are bound to care about it if we think of ourselves as Americans at all. But how can it move us to action? We can be engaged to participate by our wish to maintain our *individual* honor as citizens: to maintain, that is, a right to the respect of our fellows.

We are governing the republic together. The successful functioning of the republic depends on many citizens playing many roles. Some will serve as soldiers, police

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officers, civil servants, judges, or elected officials, employed to do the work that is required if America is to do anything at all. Others will serve the republic from time to time as unpaid jurors or as election officials. The republic will work as it should only if most of the citizens who do these things think about what they are doing in certain ways.

Public officials must, for one thing, avoid using – or, ideally, even appearing to use – the powers they are granted by their public role to their private advantage. For another, they must obey norms of nondiscrimination. The republic can flourish with less than perfect conformity to such ideals, but certain basic standards – the rules against nepotism and bribe-taking, for example – are rightly enforced by the criminal law; and others – such as persistent or egregious racism or sexism in the exercise of one’s duties – are properly grounds for removal. If we do not demand absolute conformity, we can insist on certain basic standards. And we must, or the republic will not be able to do its job: indeed, it may degenerate into something that is no better for some than tyranny.

But there is a further task that has to be performed if the republic is to work. Some of us must vote. One of the major reasons why democracies are better places to live than tyrannies is because we change our rulers from time to time. That disciplines those who are, for the time being, exercising authority. An effective lifetime guarantee for incumbents – able, once they arrive, to steer the state’s resources to those who will continue to vote for them in return – exposes them to temptations that are hard to resist.

As Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann point out in their essay for this issue, other conditions must be met if there is to be a reasonable sense of accountability. Voting districts need to be designed so that there is a reasonable chance of

incumbents being removed if enough voters are dissatisfied, for example. And replacing them has to have a prospect of leading to a change in actual policies. Our current system, with its partisan districting and divided government operating with parliamentary-style parties, often does not meet these two conditions.

Even if they were met, however, the discipline of the threat of removal works only if voters’ choices are responsive to what elected officials actually do for the republic. And that requires both:

- 1) that there be reliable sources of information about their activities; and
- 2) that enough of the voters pay attention to the information.

The first of these conditions means that someone has to be engaged in investigating and reporting on public affairs, paying attention to what is happening, deciding what is important, and making it known. So we need the free press that the First Amendment promises us, and we need it to take its function seriously. But the second condition requires that some citizens aim to vote in ways that are guided by that information.

We can survive if some journalists don’t care about the truth or are toadies to those currently in office. (We know we can because we have.) We can survive if some voters don’t bother to vote or vote without knowing what the governors are doing. (This we know, too, for the same reason.) But without a lively world of journalism governed by respect for the truth, the electorate cannot do its job; and even with it, only an electorate that takes notice of that journalism will be able to act together to discipline those who rule.

There are, thus, many different ways in which citizens can participate in the activity of the republic, and if enough of us do

it well enough we will gain the advantages of democratic elections. This kind of participation by ordinary citizens is what makes it true that the people govern. The workings of the republic are, in complex ways, the outcome of all these citizen acts. But that means that those who do not participate in any of these ways are free riders on the contributions of those who do. They gain the advantages of a shared practice without contributing to the burdens, like a rider on a public bus who has not paid his fare. Free riding of this sort is, generally speaking, wrong. And it wrongs particularly those who *are* contributing their fair share. Acts of this kind tear at the delicate fabric of the political bond, which is, as I have already remarked, a bond between strangers. When members of a community fail to contribute in this way they lose the right to the respect of their fellows. And since, as I have said, honor is basically a system of rights to respect and shame is the loss of such a right, it is shameful.

We can demand morally that citizens who have the capacity participate in certain ways; and in requiring jury participation or enrollment in selective service on pain of penalty, we do. These legal demands are different in important ways from many others. The demands of the criminal law or the laws of torts and contracts are not demands made on us as citizens, they apply to all within our jurisdiction; obeying the law is not part of the business of self-government in the way that helping to make the law, through politics, or administer it, as jurors, or defend it, as police officers or soldiers, is.

The question, what forms of participation in the life of the people can we demand, is harder than the question, why can we ask individuals to obey just laws. And so it is a delicate issue whether a law-abiding citizen who is not participating in the life of the republic in some particu-

lar way is doing something that is morally wrong; it is, therefore, a delicate issue to identify which forms of participation, such as jury service, we have the right to demand, on pain of penalty.

But honor comes to our rescue here. For citizen honor is not something we owe to all. What we owe morally to all people is the respect due to their humanity, their human dignity. But how we honor each other *as citizens* is, in good measure, up to us. The rewards of honor can be reserved for those who do more than what is morally required; and we are free, looking at it the other way round, to impose the penalties of dishonor on those who have not done anything morally wrong, provided they have fallen below the standard we have set for good citizenship. We may not have the moral right to punish bad citizenship with the coercive power of the state; but honor has its own logic, and we can shame those whose lapses are not moral but civic.<sup>8</sup>

In order to decide what kinds of behavior fall below the level that entitles you to citizen honor – the political respect of your fellow citizens – we need some ideas about which of the many things a person can do as a citizen are required to earn citizens their due respect. What is the fair share of the burdens of maintaining democracy that each of us owes for this purpose? Once we decided this, we could cry shame against those who were not doing at least their fair share. We should also cry shame against those who do participate, but do so in ways that are inconsistent with the norms that govern our shared life: impartiality for public officials, truthfulness for those in the media, and so on. Honor can operate in the life of citizens not only through their concern for the national honor, but also through their concern for their own individual honor as citizens.

Some defections from our citizen obligations are dishonorable because they are morally wrong, of course. They are wrong

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because they involve a failure to contribute our fair share to the common good. So those who are sufficiently motivated by the thought that these defections are wrong will not need the apparatus of honor to keep them doing what they should. Some defections are not morally wrong but are undesirable nevertheless, because without certain contributions, the good that democracy brings will be hard to achieve.<sup>9</sup> What a culture of citizen honor allows us to do is to shape both the behavior of those who are motivated solely by morality and the behavior of those who are motivated not even by that, using what political theorists Geoffrey Brennan and Philip Pettit have dubbed the “intangible hand” of social esteem and contempt.<sup>10</sup>

There are places – Australia, famously – where voting is a legal duty. For nearly seventy years, Australia has achieved a voter turnout rate over 95 percent by imposing a small fine for failure to show up at the polls. (This is not so much mandatory voting as mandatory appearance at the voting booth; you can simply record your presence by voting for “none of the above.”) The penalty is so small – \$20 (AUD) if you cannot provide a reasonable excuse for failing to vote – that we might in fact see this as a case where the law’s function is largely to express disapproval of, rather than punish, those who do not vote. And so the society has effectively inculcated a sense that voting is a civic duty.<sup>11</sup>

This practice is thoroughly alien to our American traditions. The response to the moderate mandates of President Obama’s health care reform bill, for instance, suggests that there continues to be a deep resistance here to individual mandates aimed at public goods. But in many states, jury service, that other great form of citizen participation in government, is enforced by penalties about as mild and almost as effective as the Australian requirement that citizens vote. So there must be other rea-

sons why the Australian plan is a non-starter here: one is that politicians will probably agree only on reforms that do not disadvantage them, and they have reasons both *qua* partisans and *qua* incumbents to fear that such a reform might make an undesirable difference (to their minds, at least) in the outcomes. Another is that those Americans who do vote think of it not just as a duty but also as a privilege: one that you earn by choosing to exercise it. They would likely feel that voting alongside people who were there merely because they had to be diminished the meaning of participation.

Indeed, from a legal point of view, the vote is a privilege in our society: it is a right you are granted, one you are permitted to exercise if you choose. Since we should participate as citizens for non-instrumental reasons, adding instrumental reasons – the avoidance of punishment or a monetary reward – may stop us recognizing the non-instrumental reasons it would be better for us to act on. Better, perhaps, to avoid imposing legal penalties for not voting, because there are reasons to think that people will take these duties more seriously if they are a matter of honor, rather than things they must do to avoid punishment (or, for that matter, to gain an economic reward).

So there are norms of three kinds governing our life as citizens. First, there are moral norms requiring participation, where non-participation is free-riding. Second, there are norms governing how we participate (if we do), which we can call *norms of participation*: they rule out corruption in public officials, inattention in jurors, ignorance in voters, and the like. Third, there are norms of citizen honor, which assign rights to respect to citizens who do more than is morally required in the life of the republic.

It is easier to give examples of citizens who fail to live up to the norms of partic-

ipation than to say in general what degree of participation is required. This is in part because there are so many different ways of participating in the life of the republic as citizens. On the one hand, it is obvious that many in our news media today are shamefully uninterested in the truth; but on the other hand, those editors and journalists who are doing their work conscientiously might reasonably say that they will not vote. We know that we tend to become “invested” in people we vote for, thus making it harder to see their faults. Maybe, then, an editor of a website that covers politics might refuse to vote as an act of citizenship, in order to protect his or her mental independence. In this case, a citizen deserves to be honored for refraining from voting. Thoughtful abstention can be one honorable way of participating in the life of the republic.

There are other cases. I think, for example, we should respect citizens who fail to vote because they genuinely cannot see, after looking into the matter, which candidate (or, in a referendum, which position) is right. More generally, because there are so many forms of citizen participation and because citizens differ in what they have to contribute, there is a great variety of ways of contributing responsibly, as a citizen, to government by the people.

Even if you are well informed about what the government is doing, you will not vote as a good citizen unless you use that information responsibly. And the same ideals of equality and mutual respect that govern the behavior of citizen-officials ought to play a role there, too. The republic is supposed to be a pact for the common good. When I vote, I am not supposed to be looking only after my own interest. In the economy, it is possible that a hidden hand produces the best results if we each aim only for our own interests (under the legally enforceable constraint that we must

avoid force, fraud, monopoly, and so on). There is simply no reason, though, to think that that is so in the political realm. Members of racial and religious majorities will often be able to combine to allocate public goods in biased ways. It will be in their individual self-interest to do so. But in our system of government we are committed, through the Bill of Rights and the Civil War amendments, to the federal government’s not doing that. This means that the courts are empowered to reject legislation that is biased in these ways. But it also means that citizens committed to these values will not vote for officials who want to pass such legislation or execute it. We ought to be protected from religious or racial discrimination not just by the courts but also by each other.

Citizens ought to vote for people and policies they believe to be just. There is nothing wrong in considering your own interest, where justice permits it. But because there is no hidden hand argument for politics as there may be for the economy, a society of people who vote only their own interest will be extremely lucky if it flourishes. Morality requires that you act in ways that contribute your fair share to the functioning of the republic. We decide “fair share” by asking whether, if everyone did only what you are doing, the republic would work. If not, you are not doing your fair share.

But how should citizen voters conduct themselves when they are not voting, when they undertake those acts that prepare them to vote and that contribute to the social and cultural conditions that allow our democracy to work well? That, at least, is the behavior we should honor; we can only *require* the behavior that we need of everyone if the system is to work at all.

What is needed will depend on the nature of the republic and its situation. Our republic, for example, is religiously, ethni-

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cally, and politically diverse.<sup>12</sup> One psychological resource amid a diversity of political views is to remind yourself of an important truth: it is just possible that sometimes the other person is right. Intellectual humility – what philosophers call *fallibilism* – is grounded in the fact that it is unlikely that God (or the Universe) showed a special preference for me and mine in portioning out the capacity to make sense of the world.<sup>13</sup> Time and again, people are utterly confident that they have the right view. In retrospect, we often see that they were wrong. There is no reason to think that we will prove infallible when our grandchildren look back at us.<sup>14</sup>

Not only is it hard to make sense of the world in general, we are likely to have especial difficulty in comprehending the world of politics in particular, where good policy depends on a multitude of facts, many of them hard to discern, and on values that are hard to weigh against each other. In these circumstances, it seems only wise to listen carefully to the views of other citizens who disagree with us. If we do so, we may learn of our own errors, just as they could share in our insights if they listened to us.

Fallibilism has its enemies. Robert Frost once said that a liberal is “someone who can’t take his own side in a quarrel.”<sup>15</sup> This is the critique of someone worried about too great a willingness to hear the other side. But it is a mistake to think that you cannot have the intellectual humility that fallibilism teaches, with its willingness to entertain the possibility that you are wrong, and still proceed seriously with the commitments that survive the test of argument. To recognize that I *might* be wrong is not to declare that I *am*.

In any case, there are reasons for listening carefully to the views of our fellow citizens that go beyond the fact that we are likely to learn from them. One is that

our shared participation in the life of the republic will go better if we treat each other with respect. (Morality commends treating each other with respect, too. But I want to draw attention to a *civic* argument for respectful conversation.) An uncivil atmosphere makes deliberation, compromise, and the development of consensus – all of which are necessary in a diverse polity – extremely hard.

A second reason for civil discourse is that in politics, what is best depends on what people happen to want; the bond for the football stadium is good only in a world where enough people in my city care about football. The best way to learn that is to hear what they have to say. People may not know what they really want, and they may have reason to mislead us about what they want. But hearing them say what they want and why is the beginning of understanding their desires.

The need for respect suggests a habit of mind in which we assume the best of one another – not, as is so common today, the worst. Someone believes that the state should continue to recognize heterosexual marriages but not same-sex ones. I think this is a mistake. How should I respond? It is, of course, possible that this individual is motivated by simple bigotry. But it is also possible that he has reasons and that if I attend to these reasons, I will change my mind or may be able to respond to the arguments in ways that will change his mind. None of that can happen if each of us starts with the assumption that the other is bigoted, or evil, or foolish.

This discussion must involve more than rigorous argumentation, the assembling of evidence and the gathering of reasons. It requires take as well as give. My mother taught me this when I was young. “Your grandfather,” she said, “thought that if he made a convincing argument, the other party would come round to his view. But what usually happened was they just won-



dered what had hit them.” People care to be heard as well as lectured to. And they care about the attitude with which we address and listen to them as well as about what we say. It is an old discovery in politics that people who have been heard – those who have been given voice – will accept outcomes that they do not prefer.<sup>16</sup> That the granting of voice shows respect is one reason. But so is the fact that seeing your opponents as reasonable, even if mistaken, human beings makes it easier to accept (what you think of as) their errors.

Political scientist Diana Mutz has reviewed a great deal of evidence showing that “exposure to oppositional viewpoints”

increases awareness of the rationale for oppositional views, enriches awareness of one’s own rationales for positions, and enhances individuals’ tolerance; those with more positive views toward conflict – a sense that disagreement is an important and acceptable part of democratic dialogue – learn even more.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, as she also argues, people who regularly discuss politics with those they disagree with tend to be less inclined to participate in political life. In order to avoid discourtesy to those we disagree with, we tend to withdraw from political engagement. It looks as though preparing yourself for responsible political participation will make any kind of participation less likely.

When we notice problems of political psychology such as these, we can respond in two ways. First, we can try to imagine institutions that reshape our responses; second, we may use the very facts about ourselves that we have learned to try to motivate ourselves. I commend the second strategy to each of my readers. Remember that as you enrich your understanding of others you may be tempted to withdraw from participation. Resist. But I want to

end by considering some of the possible institutional responses.

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Benjamin Franklin, in his *Autobiography*, tells the story of how he gained the favor of “a gentleman of fortune and education,” not by paying him “any servile respect,” but by asking him a small favor. He ends with a maxim: “He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another, than he whom you yourself have obliged.”<sup>18</sup> (More than a century earlier, the French writer Rochefoucauld, in his *Maxims*, notes a sort of negative corollary of this: “We may forgive those who bore us,” he said, “we cannot forgive those whom we bore.”<sup>19</sup>) These thoughts reflect the fact that what we feel about people depends on how we behave toward them, just as often as the other way round.<sup>20</sup> Social practices that encourage fellow-feeling begin by treating others well.

Another piece of social psychological wisdom reflects a connected point. The Contact Hypothesis, proposed by Gordon Allport in the 1950s, tells us under what conditions contact between members of two groups will create positive or negative attitudes. Allport offered a long list of factors that could make a difference, but one general conclusion was that regular contact in collaborative activities, on terms of rough equality, tended to make for better attitudes. This is surely one of the mechanisms that have produced a new generation of young people in our country who do not share the older prejudices against lesbian and gay people. They have grown up sharing their world with openly gay people. It is the reason why white politicians otherwise as different as Bill Bradley and Jack Kemp, who engaged in professional sports when they were young, are active advocates of racial justice. Their collaboration with their black teammates on terms of rough equality shaped their attitudes when young.<sup>21</sup>

The Ben Franklin effect and the Contact Hypothesis suggest ways of interacting with fellow citizens of diverse identities – including the political identities of conservative, liberal, moderate, independent, Democrat, Republican – that are very different from those that actually obtain in many places in our country today. If we are to have the positive attitudes toward our fellow citizens that are necessary to make our institutions work best, we need to work and play together across the boundaries of our identities. A rich associational life in our communities, binding us together across political identities, is something that we know is a powerful civic resource.<sup>22</sup> The soccer league, the choral society, and the drama club turn out to be worth participating in for reasons beyond their intrinsic satisfactions.

We need to recognize the merits of developing these attitudes and taking part in these activities. But how can we reinforce our commitment to them and teach them to the young? I suggest we heed Franklin's great insight: we should treat each other better so we can feel better about one another. We should begin by developing a civil public culture in which we address both those we agree with and those we disagree with in a more courteous way. *Civis*, in Latin, means citizen: civility is the demeanor citizens owe one another. We should not only engage in the exercise of trying to make the best sense of the opinions of our opponents, we should actually spend time with people of different political identities, doing nonpolitical things and taking advantage of the truth of the Contact Hypothesis. We have spent a half-century learning to escape from the bigotries of race, gender, religion, and nationality; political bigotry – irrational hatred or contempt for those on other parts of the political map from ourselves – is no more creditable or help-

ful than bigotry of other kinds. As Franklin says in the passage that provides my epigraph, “[H]ow much more profitable it is prudently to remove, than to resent, return, and continue inimical proceedings.”

If this is the political temperament that will make the republic work, we need to encourage it through a culture of citizen honor that displays its esteem for productive participation. We can begin by thanking our fellow citizens who do these things. We can hope for media that provide a forum for civil deliberation, respectful of the truth. And we can raise our children, in schools both public and private as well as at home, to understand the value of civic engagement and to undertake it in the right spirit. This is more than a matter of what we say to them in class or around the dinner table. It is a matter of what we get them to do. The habit of respectful attention to others can be taught through exercises (like high school debate) in which students are required to mount defenses of positions they do not share; to give an account of arguments made by others; and to imagine the world from points of view other than their own. As Andy Stern shows in his essay in this volume, unions can be another site of such civic education. Religious institutions, too – church, meetinghouse, mosque, synagogue, and temple – can also practice and endorse the democratic spirit.

To engage with one another as fellow citizens we also need a shared knowledge of the institutions of the republic and their history, as well as an ability to understand discussions of the economy. And since the conduct of foreign policy requires judgments about the whole world, it seems reasonable to ask those who participate in political deliberation to have a basic familiarity with global history and geography, too.<sup>23</sup> This knowledge will come only from a proper education in history and civics; but the habits of mind that I

have sketched are exactly those that are taught through education in the humanities and the social sciences. Interpreting texts, analyzing arguments, engaging imaginatively with fictional worlds and with other places and times, and reflecting together on our moral responsibilities: these are the methods of anthropology, history, literature, and philosophy. And though we should learn these things in school, and deepen our understanding of them if we go to college, both the knowledge and the habits of mind can be reinforced through the media and in our practices of public deliberation.

The proliferation of Web-based media that gather the like-minded into circles of mutual admiration is an obstacle to developing the habits of thought that I have in mind. But it also provides opportunities. While it is often painful to listen in on the conversations in these online enclaves – even when they purport to represent the part of the political spectrum where you yourself think you lie – they do offer us a chance to learn how the world looks from elsewhere. Understanding even those who will not engage with us is part of the challenge of managing the republic together. A commitment to spend some of the time we devote to thinking about politics in the

virtual, if not the actual, company of fellow citizens we disagree with is part of the equipment of a modern citizen.

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One of the great benefits of a stable political system is that citizens do not have to spend all their time worrying about politics.<sup>24</sup> A free society leaves you time for private pursuits. These ideals of participation and engagement may seem to ignore that important point. But most Americans spend some time everyday watching television or reading blogs; most have discussions sometimes, at work or recreation, about political life. Many of us are already committed to these minimal forms of participation. I have only been commending ways of improving that participation. And all our citizens should be given a high school education that offers them the knowledge and helps develop the temperament I have described.

One final thought: these remarks about the practices and attitudes that I believe offer hope for our lives as a people managing a democratic republic together are offered in the modest, fallibilist spirit that I have urged on all of us. In our shared life as a political people, our citizen conversation is ongoing. No one has the last word.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For an interesting exploration of these issues, see Christian List and Philip Pettit, *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design, and Status of Corporate Agents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- <sup>2</sup> “The activities of the state are those of the rulers and those of the persons ruled, and the work of a ruler is to direct the administration and to judge law-suits; but in order to decide questions of justice and in order to distribute the offices according to merit it is necessary for the citizens to know each other’s personal characters, since where this does not happen to be the case the business of electing officials and trying law-suits is bound to go badly; haphazard decision is unjust in both matters, and this must obviously prevail in an excessively numerous community.... It is clear therefore that the best limiting principle for a state is the largest expansion of the population, with a view to self-sufficiency that can well be taken in at one view”; Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 7, chap. 4, trans. Harris Rackham; available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0058%3Abook=7%3Asection=1326b>.

- 3 Homer, *The Iliad*, Book V, trans. Samuel Butler; available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/iliad.5.v.html>.
- 4 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 2006).
- 5 Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?: Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1882), 26.
- 6 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).
- 7 Thus "Downs's Paradox": even if you have taken the time to decide which candidate or party will better serve the public interest, because voting takes time and effort, a person concerned to act to maximize the expected value of what she does has no reason to do it. See Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).
- 8 See Appiah, *The Honor Code*, chap. 5.
- 9 You could say that the fair share of non-contributors is nothing when things are going well. What is needed is enough participation and no more. If that is right, then there is nothing wrong with jumping the subway turnstile. But it is not obvious that our democracy is working as well as it could if more people participated in the right ways. So even if you are tempted by this thought, you ought to want people to be doing more than they are.
- 10 Geoffrey Brennan and Philip Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem: An Essay on Civil and Political Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 11 I'm grateful to Norm Ornstein for helping me frame this point. The Australian Electoral Commission website states: "What happens if I do not vote? Initially the Australian Electoral Commission will write to all apparent non-voters requesting that they either provide a reason for their failure to vote or pay a \$20 penalty. If, within 21 days, the apparent non-voter fails to reply, cannot provide a valid and sufficient reason or declines to pay the penalty, then prosecution proceedings may be instigated. If the matter is dealt with in court and the person is found guilty, he or she may be fined up to \$50 plus court costs"; [http://www.aec.gov.au/faqs/voting\\_australia.htm#not-vote](http://www.aec.gov.au/faqs/voting_australia.htm#not-vote).
- 12 It is, I think, less diverse in these ways than we sometimes imagine: there is more agreement in the background than we notice when we focus on our disagreements. But it is diverse nevertheless. See my discussion of this issue in Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Multiculturalist Misunderstanding," *The New York Review of Books*, October 9, 1997, 30–36.
- 13 Many Americans have a thought like this in those moments when others ask God to bless America: they recall that God is the God of the universe and is unlikely to care more for us than for everyone else. So blessing America cannot mean denying blessings to others.
- 14 Kwame Anthony Appiah, "What will future generations condemn us for?" *The Washington Post*, September 26, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/24/AR2010092404113.html>.
- 15 Quoted in Harvey Shapiro, "Story of the Poem," *The New York Times Magazine*, January 15, 1961. Frost continued: "and I am not like that."
- 16 Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).
- 17 Diana C. Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus Participatory Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). This summary is from Jan E. Leighley, "Review of *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus Participatory Democracy* by Diana C. Mutz," *Political Psychology* 28 (4) (August 2007): 499–500.
- 18 Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Bantam, 1982), 125. As a result, this phenomenon is known to social psychologists as the Ben Franklin effect.

- <sup>19</sup> “Nous pardonnons souvent à ceux qui ennuient ; mais nous ne pouvons pardonner à ceux que nous ennuyons” ; François duc de La Rochefoucauld, *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales*, Maxime 304 (Kindle edition). Kwame  
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- <sup>20</sup> This is a prediction of cognitive dissonance theory, as first proposed in 1956 in Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World* (London : Pinter & Martin, 2008).
- <sup>21</sup> Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice : 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York : Basic Books, 1979), 261 et seq.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1994).
- <sup>23</sup> This essay is about democracy in America. In *Cosmopolitanism : Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York : W.W. Norton, 2006), I defend the view that we can be good citizens both of our country and of our world – in other words, cosmopolitan patriots.
- <sup>24</sup> If you grew up, as I did, with a father who was imprisoned for his political beliefs, you cannot help but be conscious of this fact.