

*American Citizenship:
The Quest for Inclusion*

JUDITH SHKLAR

THE TANNER LECTURES ON HUMAN VALUES

Delivered at
The University of Utah

May 1 and 2, 1989

JUDITH SHKLAR holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University where she is now John Cowles Professor of Government, and where she has taught modern European and American political theory since 1957. She has been Pitt Professor of American History and Institutions at Cambridge, Carlyle Lecturer at Oxford and has given the Storrs Lectures at the Yale Law School. She has also been a MacArthur Fellow, a visiting fellow of All Soul's College in Oxford. She is author of *After Utopia* (1957) ; *Legalism* (1964) ; *Men and Citizens*, about Rousseau (1972) ; *Freedom and Independence*, about Hegel (1979) ; *Ordinary Vices* (1985) ; *Montesquieu* (1987) ; and *The Faces of Injustice* (forthcoming).

VOTING

There is no notion more central in politics than citizenship, and none more variable in history or contested in theory. In America it has in principle always been democratic, but only in principle. From the first and most radical claims for freedom and political equality were played out in counterpoint to chattel slavery, the most extreme form of servitude, the consequences of which still haunt us. The equality of political rights, which is the first mark of American citizenship, was proclaimed in the accepted presence of its absolute denial. Its second mark, the overt rejection of hereditary privileges, was no easier to achieve in practice, and for the same reason. Slavery is an inherited condition.

The dignity of work and of personal achievement, and the contempt for aristocratic idleness, were from colonial times onward at the very heart of American civic self-identification. The opportunity to work and to be paid an earned reward for one's labor was a social right, because it was a primary source of public respect. It was seen as such, however, not only because it was a defiant cultural and moral departure from the corrupt European past, but also because paid labor separated the free man from the slave.

Under these conditions citizenship in America has never been just a matter of agency and empowerment; it has always been a matter of social standing as well. I shun the word *status* because it has acquired a pejorative meaning, so I shall speak of the *standing* of citizens instead. To be sure, *standing* is a vague notion, implying a sense of one's place in a hierarchical society, but most Americans appear to have a clear enough idea of what it means, and their relative social place, defined by income, occupation, and

I would like to thank my colleagues Michael Sandel and Sidney Verba for their help with these lectures.

education, is of some importance to them. They also know that their concern for their social standing is not entirely compatible with their acknowledged democratic creed. Often they tend to resolve the conflict between conduct and ideology by assuring themselves that really there is less exclusiveness and status-consciousness than there used to be in the past.¹ Nevertheless, standing as a place in one of the higher or lower social strata, and the egalitarian demand for “respect,” are not easily reconciled. The claim that citizens of a democracy are entitled to “respect” unless they forfeit it by their own unacceptable actions is not a triviality. On the contrary, it is a deeply cherished belief, and to see just how important it has always been, one has to listen to those Americans who have been deprived of it.

The significance of the two great emblems of public standing, the vote and the opportunity to earn, seems clearest to these excluded men and women. They have regarded voting and earning not as just the ability to promote their interests and to make money. They have seen them as the attributes of an American citizen. And people who are not granted these marks of civic dignity feel dishonored, not just powerless and poor. They are also scorned by their fellow citizens. The struggle for citizenship in America has, therefore, been overwhelmingly a demand for inclusion in the polity, an effort to break down excluding barriers to recognition, rather than an aspiration to civic participation as a deeply involving activity.

In these lectures I shall try to give an account of citizenship as it appeared to disenfranchised and dependent men and women, and by considering their aspirations, I hope to develop a historically more realistic account of American citizenship and its meaning than the idealized versions offered, especially by theorists of participatory democracy. In emphasizing the unique character of American citizenship, I do not, however, intend to stress what is often called “American exceptionalism.” Rather, I mean to reflect

¹ Richard P. Coleman and Lee Rainwater, *Social Standing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), passim.

upon the peculiarity of a democracy that has had to struggle not merely with a distant and inegalitarian European past but also with its own infinitely more despotic institutions and beliefs.

Modern democratic citizenship was itself, as I shall presently show, a new departure in political thinking, but political equality so intimately entwined with slavery has been doubly complicated. Nor has this combination, perhaps, been fully acknowledged or known. To be sure the most famous of all accounts of citizenship, Aristotle's, was developed for a slave society, but it was hardly democratic in character or intent. After dismissing mere birth and residence as inadequate, he defined citizenship as ruling and being ruled. Only very few citizens can be said to be fit for such activities, or for the perfect education that is the true end of politics. This is a highly exclusive definition, for ideally only men who have the material means and personal breeding for leisure can achieve such citizenship. Women and slaves exist exclusively to serve them domestically. Moreover, as most forms of work are defiling, no one who labors can be fit for freedom. Only the free and wellborn can be genuine citizens, even if all the rest are not actually enslaved.

This is citizenship for members of a master class who feel a real affinity for one another, and who can spend their time together discussing the great matters of policy, especially war, peace, and alliances, as well as domestic expenditures for these and other great public enterprises. Aristotelian citizenship is a mixture of character building and public activity among well-bred gentlemen with plenty of free time.² It is an ideal that has enchanted the admirers of Athens through the ages, not least those Americans who propose direct participatory democracy to us, forgetting just how exclusive educative citizenship on the Aristotelian model has to be, with its premium on cohesion among the fully active citizen.³ Much as it has excited the intellectual imagination, the

² Aristotle, *Politics*, bks. 1 and 7.

³ Most notably Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

Aristotelian citizen as ruler has not really had much bearing on Americans, since even its slaveowners professed far more individualistic and egalitarian values.

The enduring appeal of the Aristotelian vision of participatory democracy is in its account of the practice of citizenship and the importance of political activity in the daily lives of the citizens. It is not claimed that the distribution of citizenship was democratic, since the vast majority of persons so governed were excluded from all public activity or enslaved, but that the privileged enjoyed a perfect form of democratic activity. Disenfranchised Americans have not demanded this sort of citizenship. They have asked for something quite different, that citizenship be equally distributed, so that their standing might also be recognized and their interests be defended and promoted. The call for a participatory democracy may, therefore, be far from democratic, since it does not correspond to the aspirations of most Americans now and has never done so in the past.

Quite different and far more significant for America is the citizen-as-soldier. Machiavelli has been rightly recognized as the most perfect modern defender of this ideal. His ideal citizen is a model of patriotic virtue, possessed of all the military qualities of readiness to fight and to sacrifice his personal interests for the sake of the military glory of his native land. Avarice and those gentler character traits, derided as peculiarly feminine, are excoriated as corrupt, precisely because they interfere with the true vocation of the citizen, military readiness and devotion to glory. To that end there must be good laws as well as good arms, and the virtuous citizens can be expected to support both, unlike the privileged classes, who tend naturally to self-oriented corruption.⁴

In every war young Americans came to harbor some of these sentiments and asked whether men good enough to serve their country in war were not also fit to be full citizens. Indeed, were

⁴ See especially Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

they not better able to perform the duties of citizenship than those who had not displayed comparable military valor? To many Americans the virtuous soldier was the man most fit to be a citizen of a genuinely republican order. This, however, was not a universally shared notion of civic virtue, and indeed, many Americans have always rejected the assumption that citizens had to prove their virtue in order to vote. Rights do not depend on it.

Nothing could be more remote from these essentially active forms of citizenship than the citizen as a loyal subject. Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes were not just apologists for monarchical absolutism but designers of a political order that was meant to fulfill the most immediate needs of ordinary people: minimal security against conquest, civil war, anarchy, and private violence. The subject renounces all pretensions to legislative authority and in return receives security and even prosperity. According to Hobbes this state of affairs was contractually established by rational men. And it must be what people always want above all else, and can achieve if they understand the causes and consequences of lawlessness. Absolute monarchs are no threat to them, even a Nero destroyed only the courtiers around him. Sovereignty is a matter of making and enforcing the laws, and citizenship is at its height when subjects understand why they should obey, and do so invariably, unless their lives are threatened, at which point they cease to be subjects. Until that extreme moment subject-citizens are in one respect alike and equal, all are subjects to a sovereign.⁵

Consent need not play a significant part in the exercise of sovereignty. In Bodin's most conventional view, being a subject is natural and it can be very inclusive. It comes to the sons of the natives born in a given state and it can be acquired by "naturalization," and imitation of nature, presumably, in which consent replaces the accident of birth. Bodin's citizen is "a free subject holding of the sovereign of another man." Citizenship is, however,

⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, ed. Sterling P. Lamprecht (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), pp. 86, 114–15, 119–20.

not merely an attribute of residence. What counts is being “under the power of another’s command.” Aristotle’s definition was, in Bodin’s view, “lame and defective,” because ruling is a function of princes, while citizens are marked by the enjoyment of legally granted rights and privileges. There is a hint that a fair trial is one of them, but the freedom to leave the country is not. The natural citizen-subject owes the sovereign obedience; the latter owes him “tuition, justice and defense.” The citizen is a protected subject. Man and citizen are identical; no special qualities distinguish the latter. He is a taxpayer. No moral qualities, whether natural or learned, are required. That makes exclusion and inclusion entirely a matter of law. Less philosophical than Hobbes, Bodin can claim to be the real inventor of the modern state and its limited but essentially equal and inclusive notion of citizenship.⁶ To be sure, in the early modern state subjects were equal only before the sovereign, and vast inequalities of caste, political standing, power, and wealth prevailed. With the decline of monarchical sovereignty, however, the egalitarian implications of Hobbes’s and Bodin’s doctrine became evident and were played out, especially in France.

Much as he excoriated them, Rousseau, the most coherent theorist of democratic citizenship, owed a lot to Hobbes and Bodin. His citizen is certainly not one who rules. The magistrates govern him, but he does legislate, and thus he is both sovereign and subject. By entering into a morally transforming contract, he becomes fit both to make and to maintain the rules that set the conditions of citizenship and that liberate him from personal dependence on other people. Not everyone can meet these stringent qualifications for citizenship. Women must certainly be excluded, because they are psychologically too powerful and too domineering to be allowed to share political authority. Nevertheless, his picture of a perfect citizen is of a woman, a Spartan mother who rushes to give

⁶Jean Bodin, *The Six Bookes of the Commonwealth*, ed. K. D. McRae (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), bk. 1, chap. 6, pp. 46–63.

thanks for victory in a battle in which all her sons were killed. To achieve such a character clearly requires incessant education and reinforcement and that is just what Rousseau envisaged.

When men become citizens, they acquire not only legally protected property but also a public conscience, a general will, which must often be at odds with the partial, personal will. And since republican citizenship is so entirely dependent on states of mind, it must both condition the beliefs of citizens and reject men who profess uncivil religious opinions. Xenophobia is helpful, while all manifestations of intellectuality are to be avoided in a society of peasant-patriots. Excessive differences in wealth invite dependence of the rich on the services of the poor and dependence of the poor on the favors of the rich. This citizen, unlike Hobbes's and Bodin's subject, expects more than mere tranquility; he demands legally secured independence and equality of political rights. As one "who shares in the sovereign power," he cannot be represented but must act for himself in legislating. And when he fails to obey the laws he has given himself, he is only "forced to be free," even in receiving capital punishment, since it is no more than a legal requirement which he agreed to impose on all citizens alike. The lawbreaking citizen is really a traitor.

In a republic the citizen may participate in electing magistrates, but Rousseau was ready to see that this right was diluted, as it had been in Rome, by voice voting in tribal assemblies. In a perfect democracy the lot would do. These provisions are all entirely compatible with exclusions on grounds of moral deficiency and lack of civic stamina. In his plan for Corsica, only quite mature, land-owning males who had fathered at least two children could qualify.⁷ This indeed is citizenship for the virtuous, and in the rhetoric of the Anti-Federalists it certainly found a place in eighteenth-

⁷ *Emile*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Pleiade, 1969), p. 249. *Contrat Social*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, bk. 1, chaps. 6, 7, 8; bk. 2, chaps. 4, 5, 11; bk. 3, chaps. 9, 14, 15; bk. 4, chaps. 2, 3. *Constitution pour la Corse*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3, p. 919. (I cite the chapters for the *Social Contract* because so many editions of it are in common use.)

century American politics, where it still has its admirers among participatory democrats.⁸ Moreover, as a voting legislator Rousseau's sovereign citizen clearly has his place in any theory of democracy, even if Americans have never been prepared to undertake the radical scheme of constant education required to keep him as virtuous as Rousseau thought he would have to be, if the general will and civic equality were to prevail.

A far less stringent view of citizenship and one more adapted to the modern age is the notion of a "citizen-proprietor" as Turgot called him.⁹ He came to America in Locke's earlier version. This citizen is normally expected to own external goods, but this is not logically necessary. What he must be able to claim is self-ownership; he must not be a slave. His life and the possessions that sustain it are not secure unless they are legally protected, and to ensure that this is the case, the citizen-proprietor must be represented in the lawmaking bodies. Otherwise he can be destroyed by taxation or other confiscatory measures. The citizen is an elector and a taxpayer. Access to citizenship might be open to only a few men, but such limitations were not inherent in the very idea of the citizen-proprietor, even though originally it did impose limited access to citizenship. Most Americans in the eighteenth century agreed with Blackstone that property qualifications for voting were reasonable in order "to exclude such persons as are of so mean a situation as to be esteemed to have no will of their own."¹⁰ The Declaration of Independence, however, speaks only of the rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" of all men and of the consent of the governed, and it was to be the rock upon which

⁸ In the one direct mention of Rousseau in the pamphlet literature of 1787, his argument against representation is, significantly, cited with approval. "Essay by a Newport Man," in *The Complete Anti-Federalist*, ed. Herbert J. Storing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 4:250–54.

⁹ Quoted in Keith Baker, *Condorcet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 208.

¹⁰ Quoted in Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage from Property to Democracy, 1760–1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 11.

all American opponents of exclusion from citizenship would stand. The moral stability gained from property was their opponents' strongest case. Both sides, however, accepted the importance of "independence" for citizenship.

Ruling, military valor, subjection by birth or consent, legislating directly or through representatives, property owning: these are merely the most celebrated qualifications for citizenship, and not the sum of those known to students of political theory. I have mentioned them partly as a background to American thinking about citizenship but especially to bring out just how distinctive it has been. No historically significant theory of citizenship is, in principle, incompatible with exclusion of large groups of people, but natural-rights theory makes it very difficult to find good reasons for excluding anyone from full political membership in a modern republic. Racism and sexism have had to do almost all the work of repudiation, and as they gave way to reality, the barriers, piece by piece had to come down. The inherent political logic of American representative democracy, based on political equality from the first, has made the struggle for the vote extremely intense. The whole rhetoric of the Revolution proclaimed the sole legitimacy of government based on elections by numerical majorities of "We, the People" and on the rejection of every other form of representation. Those who demanded the vote were not up against aristocratic or monarchical principles of government but a representative democracy that falsely ascribed personal deficiencies to them, in order to treat them as lesser beings than "We, the People."

That is not all. The easy acceptance early on of voting as an expression of personal interests and preferences made citizenship independent of virtue. It was more an act of self-promotion than of self-sacrifice, as Alexander Hamilton certainly recognized in his famous account of how elections worked and were expected to function in a free society. To rule, to fight, and to make laws are

¹¹ *The Federalist*, no. 35.

all civic activities, and so is voting to protect one's interests, but it alone can be performed by one and all. For all men have interests, and there is no obvious reason to exclude anyone from citizenship, since they are not expected to demonstrate virtue to qualify. The citizen-subject, to be sure, need not be particularly patriotic either, but he does nothing at all except obey. He finds his place in civil society, not in the public sphere, but he is no slave, as Hobbes was quick to note.¹² When, however, every living person is said to have rights to protect and interests to promote as a citizen, then exclusion from public life is a denial of his and her civic personality and social dignity. Indeed, the American Revolution was fought largely as a protest against such political conditions.

It has often been remarked that in the years before the Revolution, Americans were very quick to complain that if the British government did not meet their demands, they were little better than slaves. This rhetoric was in part borrowed from English sources, but as many a contemporary noted, the meaning of the word *slave* in America was not a mere metaphor for reduced political independence. It means something far more concrete, the actual condition of most American blacks. And that this was a nightmare, though not a probability, for whites in America was at least in part due to the condition of indentured servants, who, though far better off than black slaves, were close enough to them to engrave the terror of enslavement upon many minds.¹³ Dr. Johnson might well heap scorn upon the liberal ideology and pretensions of slaveholders, but as Edmund Burke observed, the two were intimately related.

In his famous speech on the American conflict, Burke turned to the peculiarities of the local culture: In "Virginia and the Carolinas," he observed, "they have a multitude of slaves. Where this is the case in any part of the world, those who are free are by far

¹² *De Cive*, p. 110.

¹³ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1975).

the most proud and jealous of their freedom. Freedom is to them not only an enjoyment, but a kind of rank and privilege. . . . In such a people, the haughtiness of dominion combines with the spirit of freedom, fortifies it and renders it invincible.”¹⁴ Or as a contemporary historian, Edmund Morgan, has put it, “Virginians may have had a special appreciation of the freedom dear to republicans, because they saw every day what life was like without it.”¹⁵ And so Americans saw slavery everywhere, in any diminution of what they regarded as their rights.

To be sure the southern mixture of extremes makes perfectly good psychological sense. But morally and politically it is incoherent and was seen as such by New England pamphleteers, especially by the most famous one, James Otis. The colonists “would be men, citizens and British subjects after all. No act of parliament . . . can make slaves, not only of one, but of two millions of the commonwealth. [The] colonists, black and white born here, are free born British subjects, and entitled to all the civil rights of such.”¹⁶ Here the logic of freedom is uniquely grasped. Perhaps it was because of his intellectual isolation that Otis was to end his life in a lunatic asylum. He certainly adopted the common republican rhetoric of slavery or freedom, but by invoking black men and their fate, he made it evident that he, at least, knew exactly what slavery meant.

Precisely because Otis did not use the word *slavery* loosely but in its exact meaning, his identification of his own situation as such seems like a particularly wild exaggeration. He was, after all, in not the slightest danger of being bought or sold. Nevertheless, because he was complaining not just about having less political power and influence than other Englishmen but also about a loss

¹⁴ Edmund Burke, “Speech on Conciliation with America,” in *Works* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1881), 2:123–24.

¹⁵ Morgan, *American Slavery*, p. 376.

¹⁶ James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (1764), in *Tracts of the American Revolution, 1763–1776*, ed. Merrill Jensen (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), pp. 20–40.

of social standing, of being degraded, his use of the word *slave* made good rhetorical sense. For there are two quite distinct elements in his assault on Parliament. He wanted American Englishmen to be represented in Parliament on the same “virtual” terms as European ones, because otherwise their interests were not properly protected and they could be taxed and regulated in unacceptable ways. This is representation, that is, full citizenship in the British Empire, as a means to an end, to the pursuit of one’s interests, and as a form of ongoing political activity. The second element was that having a voice in Parliament was a matter of prestige, of public recognition.

Otis did not call for equal representation or for a wider suffrage. He seemed to be content with the prevailing English system of highly unequal representation. He did, however, feel demeaned by being excluded altogether, as an American, in a way that men just like him in England were not. They had representatives for whom they might not have been able to vote personally but who were elected by members of their class and general locality. Moreover, eventually they might become electors. As an American he was permanently voiceless, and so counted for less than other Englishmen.

The revolutionary generation was soon to reject virtual representation in favor of the local, far more popular electoral system, and when they did so, the same two notes were sounded. The colonists were to be heard and served. If colonists must obey Parliament, then they must make sure that such laws are made in their interests and by men who understand and are well informed about them. “With regards to parliament, ’tis possible they may have been misinformed and deceived.” With local representation, “both countries [would have] a thorough knowledge of each other’s interests.”¹⁷ And in this context, knowledge meant political standing.

¹⁷ Jensen, *Tracts*, pp. 95–107. See Daniel Dulany, *Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies for the Purpose of Raising a Revenue, by Act of Parliament* (1765).

Though there were property qualifications for voting, representation was actual and not virtual in the American colonies. Most white men had the vote, and to be represented meant to be spoken for, but it was also a matter of being there, being heard, counting, having a sense of “somebodyness,” as a black voter was to say many years later.¹⁸ Certainly virtual representation by Europeans could not accomplish that for Americans. Englishmen were too remote from them culturally and politically to speak for them. In any case, by then they had rejected the old system in the name of the rights of man. They wanted not merely to be represented but to be electors.

In retrospect it seems clear that universal white manhood suffrage had been promised to all American citizens by their leaders from the onset of the conflict with Great Britain, but it took over half a century to fulfill that promise. In the debates about universal suffrage no name was invoked more often than Jefferson’s, and not surprisingly, since the Declaration of Independence was the best possible argument for democratic reform. It was, indeed, in the course of that second, democratizing era of American politics, the so-called Age of Jackson, that Jefferson became the “Saint of Monticello.” In fact, however, the ideas presented at the state constitutional conventions which were called to deal with demands for political democratization were far older than the American republic. Like so much else in American political thought they had their origins in Puritan England, and especially in the Putney Debates of 1647, in which Cromwell and his son-in-law, Henry Ireton, were confronted by the radical officers of their army.¹⁹

“We judge,” one of the officers said, “that all inhabitants that have not lost their birthright should have an equal voice in elections.” Moreover, they “[did] think that the poorest man in En-

¹⁸ Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944–1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 286.

¹⁹ “The Putney Debates,” in *Divine Right and Democracy*, ed David Wootton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 285–317.

gland is not at all bound in a strict sense to that government that he has not had a voice to put himself under." They "would fain know what we have fought for," since the laws that enslaved the people of England were still in force and "that they should be bound by the laws in which they have no voice at all." They felt not just excluded, but betrayed. "I wonder," one officer cried out, "we were so much deceived. If we had not a right to the kingdom, we were mere mercenary soldiers." They had certainly believed in the promise of a new order, "All here, both great and small, think we fought for something."

Against these claims of the citizen's "birthright," Ireton pitted a powerful argument for the primacy of property rights and a franchise limited to men who had freeholds. They alone had "a permanent, fixed interest in this kingdom." Moreover, if you "admit any man that has a breath and being . . . this will destroy property." How, indeed could one have any law at all, if it could be challenged in the name of just anyone's birthright? Landed property, especially, is fundamental. The men who owned the land owned England, and they certainly did have a stake in it. Ireton's case was surely not trivial, but neither was the cry of the soldiers, especially against the insult of being mere hired mercenaries, rather than citizen-soldiers who had fought for a just cause.

Quite apart from their intrinsic dramatic interest, these debates have a permanent significance, especially for American political thought. Not only did the soldiers claim that voting was a birthright, they proclaimed voting to be the most basic and characteristic political act of the citizen-soldier. Citizenship and voting had become inseparable. The future American citizen was born in the course of these exchanges. Nor is that all. The opponents of these views were to be just as important in the United States. All their arguments were repeated over and over again whenever yet another group of Americans demanded the right to vote. It is as if Ireton had given a permanent structure to the arguments of all opponents of universal suffrage, and of all who saw it as a threat

to property and who feared men who had no stake in their country. After the Civil War, race and gender replaced property as the qualities that uniquely qualified white males, and them alone, to vote in elections. And fear is as impervious to empirically grounded contradiction as it is to moral reproof. It nourishes itself. Not until very recently, when the last barriers to universal adult suffrage were removed, did this entire edifice of argument fall into disuse, to be all but forgotten.

One of the reasons why the ideology of the rebellious soldiers of Cromwell's army appealed so readily to Americans was that their situation was not at all dissimilar. Only Vermont had manhood suffrage in 1780, when many a veteran announced in vain that "we have fought for the right of voting and we will now exercise it."²⁰ Jacksonian radicalism received a powerful stimulus from the veterans of the War of 1812. The agitation for the abolition of property qualifications for voting and for equal representation according to population began shortly after the war ended, though it was completed only some twenty-odd years later, after state constitutional conventions finally could no longer stall in the face of the overwhelming popular clamor for reform.

The popularity of democratic reform, the fact that the new western states all had universal manhood suffrage with no ill effects, and the Jeffersonian legacy, all constituted a vast difference between Jacksonian America and England as it lurched toward the Reform Act and post-Napoleonic Europe. But the greatest difference of all between the two continents was American slavery. The very vocabulary of politics was molded by it, and distinguished it from European arguments. English radicals for centuries grumbled on occasion about being "enslaved," but their real problem was class, not race and slavery. Their cry was Colonel Rainborough's immortal "the poorest he that is in England has a life to live as the greatest he."²¹ Meanwhile, in every American

²⁰ Williamson, *American Suffrage*, p. 133.

²¹ *Divine Right and Democracy*, p. 286.

state, slavery, not mere poverty, hung like a cloud over every debate, even in states in which the peculiar institution did not exist. Thus in Massachusetts speakers on behalf of abolishing property qualifications for voting began by noting that the consequences of having the vote were insignificant but that it was “ardently desired” because without the vote “men who have no property are put in the situation of the slaves of Virginia; they ought to be saved from the degrading feeling.”²² It was a powerful argument.

To appreciate fully the degree to which slavery dominated these debates, however, one must turn to the Virginia Convention of 1829–30. Like their English forebears the reformers spoke eloquently of their military services to their country. “If landless citizens have been ignominiously driven from the polls, in time of peace, they have at least been generously summoned, in war, to the battlefield. Nor have they disobeyed the summons, or, less profusely than others, poured out their blood in defense of their country.”²³ Even this citizen-soldier plea, however, was conditioned by slavery. As another reformer reminded his fellow Virginians, “the slave-holding states are fast approaching a crisis . . . a time when every freeman will be needed —when every man must be at his post. . . . Let us give no reason for any to stand back, or refuse their service in the cause of their country.”²⁴ Good arms and good laws were urgently called for in defense of slavery some thirty years before the outbreak of the Civil War.

The most frequent and heartfelt cry of the disenfranchised Westerners in Virginia was, however, that without the vote they were slaves. The minority of easterners who owned slaves would grow ever smaller, and the weaker they would become, the more despotic would become their rule over the western majority, with

²² Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Democracy, Liberty, and Property: The State Constitutional Conventions of the 1820's* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 61.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 408–9.

few slaves. They “look to our perpetual slavery,” the Westerners complained. Eventually, out-of-state buyers of slave plantations would face the following prospect: they would behold “a hundred wretches exposed to sale, singly or in families, with their master’s land” and if they bought it all, “they would instantly become Sovereigns in this free land, and the present possessor would become their slave. . . . Your doctrine makes me a slave. So long as you hold political dominion over me, I am a slave.” This man clearly knew exactly what slavery was. It was no metaphor for him, it was the ultimate threat to his standing, and he feared it.²⁵

The vote was important to these men because it meant that they were citizens, unlike women and slaves, as they repeated over and over again. Their very identity as free males was at stake. Their opponents had taunted them with the reminder that if the vote was a natural right, then women and blacks should vote. The former were as good, if not better than men, and the latter, though certainly inferior, were men by nature. Together these people constituted a majority of the population, moreover. These were certainly very threatening arguments, and the answers were just what one might expect: that nature had made women so weak as to require male protection, and blacks so stunted that slavery was their true condition. The civil standing that these creatures could *not* have, defined its importance for the white male, because it distinguished him from the majority of his degraded inferiors.

With this in mind, being a voter became the ambition of all disenfranchised Virginians and made some of them eloquent. The right of suffrage, they argued, should not be understood in “its technical and confined sense, the right to vote for public functionaries only. . . . in an enlarged sense it is the right by which a man signifies his will to become a member of Government, of the social compact.” In short it is what makes him a citizen. “Suffrage,” this speaker went on to say, “is the substratum, the para-

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 335–36.

mount right” upon which all the other rights —to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness —rest.²⁶

The opponents of universal manhood suffrage did nothing to diminish its social importance. Quite the contrary, they thought it too valuable to be shared with men who had no property and no stake in their country. No one expressed their fears better than Chancellor Kent of New York:

The tendency of universal suffrage is to jeopardize the rights of property and the principles of liberty. . . . there is a tendency in the poor to covet and to share the plunder of the rich. . . . there is a tendency in ambitious and wicked men to inflame these combustible materials. The notion that every man that works a day on the road, or serves an idle hour in the militia is entitled as of right to an equal participation in the whole power of government . . . has no foundation in justice. . . . Society is an association for the protection of property as well as of life, and the individual who contributes only one cent to the common stock, ought not to have the same power and influence . . . as he who contributes a thousand.²⁷

There are several arguments involved in the conservative case. Voting was not one of the privileges and immunities of American citizenship in this view. It was a special grant to be conferred by state law as a matter of public policy. Moreover, it was to be given only to property owners, who automatically gained prudence and probity through possessions. Finally, they did not see America as an association of citizens but as a joint-stock company in which each partner received benefits in proportion to his investments.

It did not turn out to be very difficult to rebut these fears. There had been no threats to property in the states that already had universal manhood suffrage. Virtue did not, moreover, come with property; on the contrary, wealth corrupted men, according to the traditional republican ideology. If one wanted to create upright

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 399–400.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 194–96.

citizens, one ought to support public education, real schooling for citizenship, rather than reduce the poor to semislavery. The republic was an association of persons united by a contract, not a business corporation, and citizens had an equal claim to their rights.

These arguments prevailed, within limits, for while the Victorious democrats rejected wealth as a sign of virtue, they instantly replaced it with color. The citizen-soldiers of New York complained that blacks did not serve in the militia and were unfit to vote as a result. They were reminded that this was not the fault of blacks but of the militia, but this argument proved unavailing. The radicals who had just voted for universal male suffrage instantly disenfranchised the free blacks of the state, who had had the right to vote until then. Their argument was simple racism. It imputed a lack of virtue to all blacks as such, though the worst white scoundrel was declared fit to vote, as the conservative opponents of this measure noted. The year was 1821, and it established the unyielding political habits of democratic racism, which are still with us.

However, while the Jacksonian Democrat was untrue to his own principles, his arguments served black Americans well after the Civil War, when America was transformed. Perhaps even more than their predecessors, the freedmen saw the vote as a mark of social standing. It was, after all, *the* public sign that their years of servitude were over and that they were citizens at last. It is extraordinary, in fact, how very American these ex-slaves had become. All they wanted was to be citizens like everyone else, and that meant voting.

We need only to listen to Frederick Douglass to grasp the intensity of black feeling on the subject. "Slavery is not abolished until the black man has the ballot."²⁸ The black man could, moreover, now claim to be a genuine citizen-soldier, after his services in the Civil War. "It is dangerous to deny any class of people the

²⁸ *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 55:167.

right to vote. But the black man deserves the right to vote for what he has done, to aid in suppressing the rebellion, both by fighting and by assisting the Federal soldier wherever he was found. He deserves to vote because his services may be needed again," noted Douglass.²⁹ "If he knows enough to shoulder a musket and to fight for the flag, fight for the government, he knows enough to vote." And finally, "Shall we be citizens in war, and aliens in peace?"³⁰ Nothing could come closer to the cry "Are we mercenaries?" hurled at Ireton in the Putney Debates. Here as there the citizen-soldier was democratized. He no longer was a virtuous martial hero but a voter, a bearer of rights, and not of a remarkable social character. Nor was Douglass alone. "The logical result of military service," a Republican senator insisted, "was that the black man is henceforth to assume a new status among us."³¹

For northern Republicans it seemed to be a matter of simple equity. It was their duty "to see that no man who had voted for the flag should be under that feet of him who had insulted it," according to one senator. To be sure, party interest was also involved in Republican support of the Fifteenth Amendment, since they expected to get the black vote in the North.³²

In spite of these expectations the black citizen-soldiers did not really achieve parity of status, and in the Second World War they again had to remind white Americans that they had heeded Douglass's call, "Men of color —to arms!" They had fought for the four freedoms and against fascism abroad, and now these veterans returned to claim as much at home.³³ It is a tribute to their faith

²⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 162–63.

³¹ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp. 8–9.

³² William Gillette, *The Right to Vote: Politics and the Passage of the Fifteenth Amendment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), p. 40.

³³ Rayford W. Logan, ed., *What the Negro Wants* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), esp. the essays of Charles H. Wesley and Mary McLeod Bethune; Lawson, *Black Ballots*, p. 65.

in the ideal of the citizen-soldier that after so many years of disappointment they should have once again raised this claim. It was a demand for their rightful public standing in a republic, and not just a debt that was owed them for their services in a terrible war.

Standing was not all that Douglass and the Republican radicals expected from the ballot. Douglass rejected educational qualifications for the freedmen or any other citizen, because the vote would have in itself a moral impact upon the newly enfranchised voter; it was a path to his maturity. "Education is great but manhood is greater. The one is the principle, the other the accident. Man was not made as an attribute to education, but education as an attribute to man. . . . Take the ballot from the Negro and you take from him the means and motive that make for an education."³⁴ And in his famous essay "What the Black Man Wants," he summed up the whole case for black suffrage and its primary importance to the freedmen as an instrument of social advancement. "Without (enfranchisement), his liberty is a mockery; without this you might as well almost retain the old name of slavery for his condition; for in fact, if he is not the slave of the individual master, he is the slave of society and holds his liberty as a privilege, not as a right. He is at the mercy of the mob, and has no means of protecting himself."³⁵

In this passage Douglass is thinking of the vote as a means of self-protection, as a form of political agency, which would empower the black man and allow him to promote his interests. "The ballot was a tool; upon its use would depend its real value," in this common view.³⁶ Even the veteran abolitionist Wendell Phillips thought that "a man with a ballot in his hand is the master of the situation. . . . The ballot is opportunity, education, fair play, right

³⁴ Douglass, *Life*, p. 509.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

³⁶ Quoted in Gillette, *Right to Vote*, p. 162; James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 240.

to office, and elbow room.” The black population could now take care of its own interests.³⁷

Voting as effective political action proved less than practical. It was, in fact, a thoroughly dangerous assumption. Abolitionists like Senator Richard Yates believed quite genuinely that “the ballot will finish the negro question; it will settle everything. . . . the ballot is the freedman’s Moses.”³⁸ What the winning of the vote permitted him and many other war-weary abolitionists to do was to forget about the black man, since he was now all set to take care of himself by himself, with the ballot in hand. Black enfranchisement may indeed have touched every portion of the southern social fabric, but not for long. The vote could not protect black southerners against grotesque registration requirements, literacy tests, poll taxes, grandfather clauses, white primaries, and more chicanery than they could possibly defeat.

When these impediments to voting and representation were finally lifted, one by one, it was by court decisions, not legislation, and of necessity, the discussion was limited to the Constitutional rights of citizens. The vote was “the right preservative of other basic civil and political rights,” too fundamental to be limited by the imposition of personal conditions or by historic anomalies.³⁹ In actuality, however, the reason why the right is fundamental is not that it secures many benefits or other rights. To promise that is to ensure the disappointment of the newly enfranchised voters and to make voting a futile and frustrating gesture for them. Their social circumstances and daily lives will not be altered by voting. Voting in itself is not enough, it requires additional forms of social and political action to promote and protect the interests and rights of ordinary citizens.⁴⁰ The deepest impulse for demanding

³⁷ Quoted in Gillette, *Right to Vote*, pp. 87–88.

³⁸ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 278–79.

³⁹ *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*, 383 US 663, 1966, and *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 US 533, 1964. The quotation is from Justice Douglas’s majority opinion in the former case.

⁴⁰ Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 106–14, 341–42.

it arises from the recognition that it is the characteristic, the identifying feature, of democratic citizenship in America. It is enough to say with W. E. B. Du Bois that “voting is necessary to modern manhood.”⁴¹ To promise more is bound to lead to disillusionment and to a sense that voting is pointless after all.

“We want (the vote),” Douglass wrote, “because it is our *right*, first of all. No class of men can, without insulting their own nature, be content with any deprivation of their rights. We want it again, as a means for educating our race. Men are so constituted that they derive their conviction of their own possibilities largely from the estimate formed of them by others. If nothing is expected of a people, that people will find it difficult to contradict that expectation. By depriving us of suffrage, you affirm our incapacity to form intelligent judgments respecting public measures. In a monarchy it does not matter if I, along with everyone else do not have the vote, but our government is based on the idea of universal suffrage; “to rule us out . . . is to brand us with the stigma of inferiority.”⁴² No clearer staminate of the idea of citizenship as standing could be imagined. This is hardly surprising, since the fear of slavery had always been at the very core of this particular conception of citizenship. Who should express it better than an American ex-slave?

If the Fifteenth Amendment did not do nearly enough for the black voter, it did nothing at all for women. And the result was bitter resentment. The women’s suffrage movement had grown directly out of abolitionism, but when disenfranchised women saw black men achieve a right that they still lacked, their deep racism quickly asserted itself and it grew worse as they began to seek the support of southern women. This disgraceful and revolting chapter in the women’s suffrage movement is particularly relevant to my story, because it illuminates the darker side of citizenship as standing.

⁴¹ Quoted in Lawson, *Black Ballots*, pp. 16–17.

⁴² Douglass, *Life*, p. 159.

There is nothing equal about social standing in general. Nothing is more unequally distributed than social respect and prestige. It is only citizenship perceived as a natural right that bears a promise of equal political standing in a democracy. It is, however, always possible to make a claim for the vote on grounds of superior, not equal, standing, as the advocates of property qualifications had done in the past. Women demanding the suffrage found that their cause might be better served by treating voting as a privilege limited to the educated and respectable, such as their own middle-class selves. It was in vain that Douglass, their supporter, pointed out the greater needs of the freedmen, compared with the many advantages enjoyed by these women. They did not see the difference between someone who can exercise all the privileges of legal citizenship except the vote, and someone who had no rights that a white man need respect, in the celebrated phrase of the *Dred Scott* decision.

When Wendell Phillips said, "One question at a time. This hour belongs to the Negro" the suffragettes walked out on him.⁴³ They saw their standing as above the black man's, and they acted accordingly. It was a shortsighted move. Having themselves so often spoken of voting as a privilege, when they compared themselves to freedmen and new immigrants, they need hardly have been surprised when in 1875 the courts told them that it was not a right and that they could do without it, since they already possessed all civil rights.⁴⁴

Standing was as much an issue for the women's suffrage movement as it had been for its predecessors in the history of the battle for the vote, but there were many quite novel features to this last of the campaigns for legal enfranchisement. For one thing, after the Emancipation Declaration, slavery was at last reduced to a figure of speech. Political inequality, however, did survive, and

⁴³Quoted in Ellen Carol Du Bois, *Feminism and Suffrage* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 59.

⁴⁴*Minor v. Happersett*, 21 Wall. 162, 1874.

it was particularly galling for women in a country where every male now had the vote, and where to be without it put one below the human norm. If not slaves, exactly, they were politically degraded, as slaves had once been. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton put it, "To deny political equality is to rob the ostracized of self-respect; of credit in the market place; of recompense in the world; of voice in (the choice) of those who make and administer the law; a choice in the jury before which they are tried, and in the judge who decides their punishment."⁴⁵ Not to be heard is not to exist, to have no visibility and no place politically.

There were, however, some arguments that women could not really make. They were not and did not want to be soldier-citizens, as they now can be. Instead they emphasized their contribution to the war effort of the North.⁴⁶ It was not a wholly satisfactory substitute. As for the ancient claim that they were the mothers of republican heroes, it had only confined women to the home in both theory and practice. It was not a serviceable proposition for radical women and it was not revived. Indeed, virtue arguments, long the staple of conservatives, were especially problematic for women. If they were superior without the vote, why give it to them? Nevertheless, women did use virtue arguments of one kind. Both Stanton and Susan Anthony argued that since Africans, Irish, and other inferior alien males had the vote, why not "women of wealth, education, virtue and refinement?"⁴⁷

Natural rights and the Declaration of Independence continued to be invoked by women, but the second half of the nineteenth century was generally not hospitable to these remnants of the Enlightenment. Social Darwinism, reforms in the areas of health and hygiene, and the Social Gospel were notably undemocratic paths

⁴⁵Quoted in Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Anchor Books, 1971), pp. 40-41.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Women as Patriots," in *Reminiscences*, ed. Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Black (New York: Harper, 1922), pp. 193-203.

⁴⁷ Ellen Carol Du Bois, *Feminism*, p. 178.

to progress, and the women's movement became a part of this intellectual mainstream. Liberalism had also altered, moving from civic freedom to a concern for self-development and the nurture of the individual personality. For women interested in the suffrage, voting increasingly was just one step toward the fulfillment of these immensely personal ends. If the cry "no taxation without representation" still meant much to the more radical and economically astute feminists, it had come to mean less than the more personal demand to be recognized as a full individual. To be sure, this ideology also reflected the domestic situation of these women and the stifling myths that encased it. The real irony was that because they had adopted the dominant attitudes of their time and place so completely, their final victory led to no noticeable political change at all. When women finally went to the polls it turned out to be the biggest nonevent in our electoral history. Women wanted their standing as citizens, but they were neither an ascriptive social group nor a distinct political class. They were just like the men of their families, until quite recently.

Unlike blacks, women were never again deprived of the vote, but it did not alter their social lives significantly. Those members of the suffrage movement who had seen it as an instrument of social transformation were wholly unrealistic. The vote did not raise the social opportunities of women either. What it achieved was the removal of a stigma that weighed particularly heavily upon them. And it did so because of the promise of democracy and because of the knowledge that they had, in one respect at least, shared the degrading lot of the slaves, whose half-enfranchised descendants were not entirely invisible or forgettable. Above all, the rejection of hereditary distinctions, the very core of the American political credo, made disenfranchisement on grounds of color and sex intolerable. From the first it was universally accepted that America would have no titles of nobility and no inherited political privileges. Race and slavery are, however, hereditary conditions, and one is born a woman. These are all birthmarks, and

they could not forever limit the birthright of American citizens. And so the vote was won, but not that other emblem of equal citizenship, the opportunity to earn one's livelihood. The Great Society was a triumph for voting, but its struggle against poverty and unemployment was not a success. All adult Americans are now constituents, equal voters in their districts, but they are not equally independent.

EARNING

Modern citizenship is not confined to political activities and concerns. As important as governing, voting, military service, and taxpaying are, they are not nearly as significant as the endeavors that constitute what Hegel called "civil society."⁴⁸ It is in the marketplace, in production and commerce, in the world of work in all its forms, and in voluntary associations that the American citizens find their social place, their standing, the approbation of their fellows, and possibly some of their self-respect.⁴⁹ The spheres designated as public and as private are always shifting, and civil society, which combines both, has no set contours. In America it has generally been treated as the sphere of private choices, but the legal structure, meaning, and character of these transactions are public, and they affect the whole republic. Economic exchanges and entitlements are ultimately subject to public sanction, and so are the activities of the many voluntary organizations that have always been a feature of American public life. Earning and spending are hardly private, in the sense that prayer or love might be.

The individual American citizen is in fact a member of two interlocking public orders, one egalitarian, the other entirely unequal. To be a recognized and active citizen at all he must be an equal member of the polity, a voter, but he must also be independent, which has all along meant that he must be an "earner,"

⁴⁸ *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), secs. 182–256.

⁴⁹ Robert E. Lane, "Government and Self-Esteem," *Political Theory* 10 (1982): 5–31.

a free remunerated worker, one who is rewarded for the actual work he has done, neither more nor less. He cannot be a slave or an aristocrat. I do not today want to touch upon the much vexing discussion of the extent and implications of the republican ideology that may or may not have flourished, before the Civil War, as an expression of the ideal of independence. But unless both aristocracy and slavery are fully recognized as constitutive parts of the language of republicanism, the ideology that informs it is fundamentally misrepresented. It is not, in any event, my topic, which is centrality of inclusion and exclusion in the history of American citizenship.

Aristocrats and slaves are both anomalies in a republic of equal citizens. The first are proscribed in name by the Constitution, which prohibits titles of nobility and all that they imply. That does not mean that aristocratic aspirations and assertions disappeared entirely in actuality from civil society. Slavery was a public and private curse that distorted the politics of a modern republic from the first, and its evil consequences still mar it, long after its legal repudiation. It was in the context of these two incongruities that the model of the independent citizen-earner developed, and against them that those who aspired to realize it had to assert their standing. The American work ethic, which seems so odd now, becomes perfectly comprehensible when it is understood, not as a reflection of the class values of preindustrial artisans, but as the ideology of citizens caught between racist slavery and aristocratic pretensions. It has endured because the political conditions to which it responded from the first have not disappeared. No less enduring has been the dream of self-employment, which is the very epitome of social independence.

The men who forged the work ethic in Jacksonian America did not shun these facts; on the contrary, they were deeply aware of them and of the novelty of their situation. They were consciously new men, born with a new and imperfect republic, and they said so. I shall argue that their understanding of their situation, be-

tween the equally unacceptable conditions of the idle elites and unpaid slaves, was true to their actual situation and that it has survived for the same reason. If I am right about the nature of this ideology, then, as I shall suggest in the end, the work ethic has some direct implications for the right to work in contemporary America.

From the first, the new American citizen was a modern, not a classical, republican. Traditionally it had been thought that republics needed virtuous, wholly public citizens in order to remain free. When the modern extended, representative republic was created in 1787, it was not based on virtue, however, but on independent agents and the free play of their interests. In this they would follow the pattern of unfettered religious sectarianism to the general benefit of all. The most celebrated defense of this view of citizenship was Madison's contribution to the *Federalist Papers*, but soon there were many more, and it became the dominant view, as Anti-Federalist anxieties were duly calmed. A representative democracy, it was agreed, depends on the fluid interaction of multiple interests to function freely, and these interests were generally sectional and economic. To have an interest and protected rights to pursue it, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called virtue, but it does imply that its bearers have a recognized public standing. Such citizenship requires that they be independent persons in both their political and civil roles, who give and withdraw their votes from their representatives and political parties as they see fit, and sell their labor but not themselves. No slave can have an interest, because he has no public or civil standing. Neither can a political monopolist, because he actively threatens the entire political order.

Persons and groups that pursue interests and ideologies that are designed to destroy the republic cannot be recognized, though they cannot usually be proscribed. From the first, Americans feared conspiratorial aristocratic and monarchical cabals. And to these, fear of Jacobins and other European revolutionary ideologies were

soon added. In the Jacksonian period apprehension of a new aristocracy of monopolists, and especially of the men who ran the Bank of the United States, flared up with exceptional vigor. The campaign against the bank and the long struggle for universal white manhood suffrage aroused enormous resentments, but they also forged an ideology of work that has never lost its preeminence.

In the wake of the Jacksonian assertion of democratic beliefs, America was left not an egalitarian but a republican ethos that saw the independence of the working and earning many constantly threatened by the idle, aristocratic few at one end of the spectrum and by slavery on the other. Both were anomalies in a republic that was based on the premise that independent citizens acted in a republican economy in which each had an equal opportunity to get ahead by his own efforts and could earn his bread without fear or favor. This vision of economic independence, of self-directed "earning," as the ethical basis of democratic citizenship, took the place of an outmoded notion of public virtue and it has retained its powerful appeal. We are citizens only if we "earn."

The most general nineteenth-century ideology that originally sustained this public view of earning in America has been aptly called "parallelism."⁵⁰ The individual citizen may expect to improve his social position by hard work because he lives in a democratic and constantly progressing society, and uninterrupted social progress is in turn assured, because Americans are hardworking and public-spirited democrats. They create the public wealth which each one of them may hope to share. No one doubted the labor theory of value which declared that labor had created all wealth, and each citizen expected to benefit from the products of his work. If a citizen was to gain he had to produce, and the more the better, both for himself, his family, and the republic as a whole.

The addiction to work that this induced was noted by every visitor to the United States in the first half of the nineteenth cen-

⁵⁰ Robert E. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), pp. 264–90.

ture. So was the passion for money, which, as the most astute noted, meant not just gain, but also independence, the freedom to do with one's life as one pleased. To have money is to spend and save and give as one chooses, without asking leave of any superior. It had taken the place that honor occupied in aristocratic societies.⁵¹ And indeed, independence had replaced honor as the object of social aspiration. It was an enormously radical change. Independent citizens in a democratic order had now not only to be respected for working, they also had a right to self-improvement, to education and unblocked opportunities for self-advancement. These rights partly fulfilled the promise of equality enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, and partly they were the necessary corollary of the duty to contribute to the progress and prosperity of the republic. For the individual citizen that also meant that socially he was what he did as an earner at any given moment in his life.

The sheer novelty of the notion of the dignity of labor in general, and as an essential element of citizenship, can scarcely be exaggerated. It was one of the many contributions of the Enlightenment to American public culture that flourished here far more than it ever could in Europe.⁵² In the past it had been almost universally believed that physical work defiles us, that those who labor are impure. Certainly the philosophers of antiquity regarded productive and commercial work as so deeply degrading that it made a man unfit for citizenship. Nor did these attitudes disappear with slavery. European society was for centuries separated into three orders: those who pray, those who fight, and those who labor. The last were the despised peasantry, hardly to be distinguished from the beasts. Nor is biblical religiosity reassuring. We

⁵¹ Michel Chevalier, *Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States* (1839; New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), pp. 296–304. I shall use this work rather than Tocqueville's celebrated book, because the latter is now treated with excessive reverence. In many ways Chevalier was a more direct and undidactic observer.

⁵² One need only look at the plates on the crafts in the *Encyclopédie* and at some of Goya's paintings to recognize the intensity of the aspiration to dignify work in the Enlightenment.

must work as a punishment for sin, and the Pauline injunction to work hard at one's calling does nothing to diminish the sense of pain, confinement, and oppression implied in the obligation to bear the yoke of industry.

Of all these inducements to look at labor as a disgrace and a curse, none has lasted longer than aristocratic and intellectual disdain. The atavistic contempt for physical work has never died out. To be "in trade" was a real social stigma throughout the last century and is hardly admired even now in England. One need only recall that Grace Kelly's father could not row at Henley because he had worked with his hands as a young man. Nor were these attitudes unknown in America, as many an amazed visitor was to note. There has certainly always been enough quasi-aristocratic pride in America to dismay democrats. And there is a degree of silliness in the fact that the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution should be such colossal snobs.

Admiration for inherited family "names," rooted in the most primitive beliefs about the transmission of "noble blood," has been no less enduring than the contempt for work. Only the divine right of kings and their vicarious political authority did not outlast the eighteenth century. In political philosophy, however, utility had for some time been the real ground of governmental legitimacy. The social policies of mercantilist states, whether Protestant or Catholic, keenly encouraged industriousness and work, but that did not impinge upon their political values necessarily. In England, to be sure, economists excoriated not only the idle poor but also the idle rich as a "general leprosy," particularly when compared with the hard-working Dutch.⁵³

And in John Locke's writings we can see an even more fateful novelty. In his plan for the education of a young gentleman, a boy who was expected to grow up to become a member of a governing class, manual work and accounting play an important part. They

⁵³ John Garraty, *Unemployment in History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 38–42.

are useful, Locke noted, and it is rational and becoming to be useful.⁵⁴ Moreover, while government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed, in Locke's view the purpose of government is to make itself useful to them. That is why they decide to form a political order in the first place. The implications of these propositions were fully accepted only in America, and then only gradually. That nothing is more useful than productive work and that nothing can, therefore, be better, has been so radical an idea and one so much at odds with inherited attitudes that few people have ever really accepted it fully, even those who proclaim it enthusiastically.

In prerevolutionary America there were many Puritans to preach the gospel of hard work, but it was really Benjamin Franklin who divorced the worth of work from its religious context and gave it a new civic meaning. He has been much misunderstood, thanks to Max Weber's misreading. Weber was so obsessed by the link between Protestantism and the work ethic that he ignored every other connection, and among these were democracy and personal independence. Why, after all, have Chinese, Irish, and Jewish Americans worked as maniacally as they have? Not because they were Protestants. Weber could only see a secularized Puritan capitalist in Franklin, who was "dominated by the making of money and by acquisition as the ultimate end of life" and "completely devoid of any hedonistic admixture."⁵⁵ In fact, Franklin was a bon vivant and quit business at the age of forty to do other things with his life. What was unique about his view of work was that it alone could make one independent, and that it was a source of pride to be "self-made," that is, the product of one's own labors.

Consider his last will and testament, "I, Benjamin Franklin of Philadelphia, printer, late Minister Plenipotentiary of the United

⁵⁴ *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, vol. 9 of *Works* (London, 1823), secs. 202–12.

⁵⁵ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948), pp. 50–57.

States of America to the Court of France, now President of the State of Pennsylvania.”⁵⁶ There is enormous pride in those words and not only in his achievements, extraordinary though they were, but also in having accomplished them himself and by working at trade, the ground of all his later glory. Even in the trite maxims of Poor Richard we can find a bold spirit. If you want to be free, “serve yourself.” “Your Creditor has Authority at his pleasure to deprive you of your liberty, by confining you in Gaol for life, or to sell you for a servant if you should not be able to pay him. . . . The borrower is a slave to the Lender and the debtor to the Creditor, disdain the chain, preserve your freedom and maintain your independency. Be industrious and free.” If you want to be your own master, don’t be idle. “Be industrious and *free*.”⁵⁷

There was, finally, a civic aspect to the idea of work as well. One worked for oneself and for the community simultaneously. The experiences of daily life were, moreover, to be put to civic use by the apprentices and journeymen whom Franklin organized into a network of clubs, called *juntos*. These clubs began by discussing public events and went on to promote every sort of civic improvement in Philadelphia: the first lending library, cleaner and better-lighted streets, volunteer fire-brigades, and more. Rotarianism is the most democratic of nonofficial civic activities and it was Franklin’s invention. But it is the interplay of productive work, self-improvement, and public concern, the integration of these lives into a sphere half-private and half-public that made these clubs such enduring institutions and also constitutes their peculiar character and significance. Together with the workplace, they make up American civil society.

Benjamin Franklin was held up as an example to every Jacksonian youth, but politically the author of the Declaration of Inde-

⁵⁶ Esmond Wright, *Franklin of Philadelphia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 358.

⁵⁷ “Father Abraham’s Speech,” in *The Complete Poor Richard’s Almanacks* (Boston: Imprint Society, 1970), 2:14.

pendence became their patron saint in their struggle against the “paper aristocracy.” What did aristocracy mean to radical Jacksonian journalists and politicians?⁵⁸ Aristocracy meant more than just the possession of wealth. The essence of the democratic definition of aristocracy was, in President Jackson’s words, *any* group that by its use of its wealth “exercises more than its just proportion of influence in political affairs.” It was not wealth as such that was reprehensibly aristocratic, but wealth either gained through governmental favor or used to buy political power and influence. All monopolists and holders of licenses and charters were aristocrats because they owed their wealth to a governmental grant and had not earned it by their own efforts. They enjoyed unearned advantages. This was illegitimate or an “artificial inequality of wealth and power” which a democratic government is duty-bound to prevent. However, “equality of talents or of wealth cannot be produced by human institutions,” said Jackson. A democratic, egalitarian government of a highly unequal society does not attempt to alter the natural economic order, but it cannot abide legal privileges, smacking ultimately of titles of nobility.

In the Jacksonian view, the European aristocracy had begun as the beneficiaries of royal grants of land and of political monopolies. “The royal bastard,” as Tom Paine called William the Conqueror, had distributed the land to his ruffian band. That may not be what Marc Bloch has told us, but it encapsulated all the fears of these republican citizens. How was any repetition of the European pattern to be avoided? And how were the remnants of this barbarous feudal past to be eliminated. Even Emerson worried that “our government still partakes of that element” of feudalism, because “the public mind lacks self-respect,” and that, as he had surely taught his fellow citizens, can come only with self-reliance.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Unless otherwise noted all the following remarks about the beliefs of Jacksonian democrats are drawn from the anthology of Joseph L. Blau, ed. *Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1954).

⁵⁹Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Young American,” *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), pp. 213–30.

To a true Jacksonian radical it was clear that the best way to prevent the spread of such feudal blemishes was simply to have as little government as possible. The fewer civil service jobs there are, the less taxes collected, and the smaller the number of projects undertaken by government, the less harm it can do. And above all, less government means less artificial inequality because the government is deprived of the means to establish an aristocracy of idle drones. The president, however, did have a new and important part to play. He alone represents the people as a whole. All other elected officials speak for only a section or party of the nation. Only the president can act as the tribune of the people and protect them against the predatory assaults of the money power and the aristocracy, to whom the laboring classes are always in danger of losing their fair influence in the government. The independent spirit and the rights of the industrious classes were being sapped by crafty and indolent bankers, and it was the office of the president to protect the rights of democratic citizens against this menace.

The aristocrat is not only a political monopolist, he is a moral and cultural threat to the republic as well. The aristocrat is idle and shows a contempt for work. The merely rich were unobjectionable, but the “*idle* rich” were intolerable. The great division among men in society was not between poor and rich, but between the “do-somethings” and the “do nothings.” Failure to work was not merely immoral in and of itself, it also expressed a social ideology, the contempt for labor. Jacksonian democrats were acutely aware of the traditions that treated work as defiling. That is why so many insisted that by “we the people we mean emphatically the class which labors with its hands.”

The Democratic party of America, according to William Legget, was composed of producers, while the aristocrats were consumers, rich and proud. The working classes were the majority, and their “sole reliance” was the equality of rights. That alone stood between them and the aristocracy of “vested interests” and

idle wealth. According to Stephen Simpson, another Jacksonian journalist and unsuccessful politician, the Declaration of Independence means that, "Labor brings neither disqualification nor stigma upon the citizen of the United States in a political capacity." In actuality that promise had not been realized, because as long as there was feudal prejudice and slavery in America, work would be despised and aristocrats would be able to bring both idle manners and monopolistic privileges to a country which had been invented to do away with both. Only education, radically reformed, could eliminate the "prejudice of occupations."

Here the links between work, democracy, and public education were forged into a coherent ideology, with its own history, policy, and sense of the future. It also corresponded to the manners and aspirations of a wide public. A European visitor to the United States wrote, "Life in America is delightful in the eyes of him who prefers work to everything else, and with whom work can take the place of everything else. . . . the habits of life are those exclusively of working people. . . . Woe to whatever is inactive and unproductive. Work and you shall be rich."⁶⁰ Everyone was on the make and seemed convinced, in the words of the *Cleveland Leader*, that "one may as well be dead as idle."⁶¹ To be useful was the dominant principle of a nation of laboring republicans, but many democrats were far from sanguine about the loyalty of their wealthy fellow citizens to this ethos.

Jacksonian democrats took the dignity of work to be a fighting faith because there were Americans around who openly showed their scorn for honest work. Nor were they honest, these "ruffle-shirted counter-hoppers, rolling in wealth acquired by driving shrewd bargain . . . and (becoming) princely exclusives."⁶² These idlers clubbed together not only to protect their monopolies but

⁶⁰ Chevalier, *Society, Manners, and Politics*, pp. 205–6, 282–88.

⁶¹ Wiebe, *Opening of American Society*, p. 286.

⁶² John Ashford, *"Agrarians" and "Aristocrats"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 91 and passim.

to wall themselves off from the people. They “live without labor,” deny that all wealth comes from those who produce, and look upon its creation as disgraceful. American workers, moreover, were beginning to have very good and specific reasons for their worries about the Europeanization of America. The first factory workers in New England might well fear that the aristocrats were turning Lowell into another Manchester.⁶³

To avoid the calamity of European degradation, and the specter of artificial inequality generally, there must not only be less government altogether but also far more *free* education. It was the one public activity that did not worry democrats. Education was looked at entirely as an aspect of citizenship, and it was designed to democratize the young and to prevent aristocratic tendencies.

Important as education was for democratic status, it was no replacement for personal effort in the race of life. Nothing was more democratic than the ideal of the self-made man. Not, necessarily, the man who builds a fortune by hard work only, but more expansively the model of a perfect human character, of what was called “Young America.” This truly new man, whom Emerson idolized, is a youth who has no fixed place in society, nothing inherited, who does not stick to a single role in life, and who rejects all efforts to restrict and bind him to a place and status. He is self-reliant because he is socially unfettered, immensely self-created, and the master of many skills. “Who can tell how many Franklins may be among you?” asked the president of the New York Mechanics Society in the 1830s. “Your opportunities are great and liberal. This is a country of self-made men than which nothing better could be said about any state of society.”⁶⁴ But it was not nearly open enough for a genuine Jacksonian idealist and a truly democratic radical.

⁶³ Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 51.

⁶⁴ Wiebe, *Opening of American Society*, p. 165.

Among other things, workers needed a history of their own. It would begin by recognizing that it is only “the mechanical arts” that have raised man’s condition above that of the animals. Not property but “mechanical arts” have civilized us. History is made by the producers, not by the consumers, just as the West was visibly being developed by the industrious many. Certainly there had been progress, especially in the modern world, but it was not due to the famous scientists but to the mechanics. Printing, which is “the preservation of all the arts,” was invented by a mechanic. So was the mariners’ compass, without which America would not have been found. After that it was the steam engine, again the work of an “artificer,” and one that has made his life far easier. History books should also stress how many of the distinguished generals and statesmen of the Revolutionary era began life as blacksmiths, bookbinders, and other kinds of manual workers.

The point of such a history was to remind the working youth of America of their real place in their country and in the modern world and to make all they could of it. Opportunity was the one thing, it was thought, they did not lack, but they did need a better sense of their own worth, and a people’s history would certainly encourage them. It is important to note that technology was seen as both the creation, the great historical achievement, and the best hope of the workingman in America. It would make life easier for him and everyone else and would also increase the value of his work by improving it. Without nostalgia the technological age seemed full of possibilities.

Jacksonian democrats were generally opposed to slavery, but they were far from being abolitionists. Still, they could see perfectly clearly that slavery did more than any other institution to bring labor into contempt. The very word *slavery* struck fear into the worker’s heart. “Because bondage degrades, cramps, and degenerates man, labor shares in the same disgrace because it is a part of the slave.” Where there is slavery, toil is associated with

baseness.⁶⁵ That southern planters were aristocrats unfit for republican government had long been known. Among the Anti-Federalists Richard Henry Lee had spoken of them as a dissipated and idle aristocracy, Jefferson had bewailed their despotic temper, and every European traveler commented on their feudal airs.“ Among abolitionists it was commonly understood that the planters were ferocious, improvident, inactive, effeminate, and poorly educated, all thanks to their self-inflicted forced idleness. They too were victims of the slave system.⁶⁷

The specter of slavery could never be entirely dispelled in the North. It was an ever-present anxiety. When the wage system first came under scrutiny, the dependence of the worker was instantly likened to that of a slave. Nor were the defenders of southern slavery reassuring. George Fitzhugh's *Cannibals All* describes the southern slave as a capital investment that the owner nourishes carefully. His lot is thus a far happier one than that of the “white slave” of the North, exposed to uncaring poverty as a wage earner. It is hardly surprising, however, that Fitzhugh was not particularly popular in the North. Workers might complain that they were the victims of “wage slavery,” but the suggestion that they might be better off as *real* slaves, as a form of capital, did not appeal to them.

Even if slavery was limited to black people, the institution as such remained threatening. Racism was scarcely enough to reassure the free worker, and that is why by 1858 many saw that the question of spreading slavery was really this: “Shall labor be degraded”?⁶⁸ To make labor honorable was the whole object of the

⁶⁵ Stephen Simpson, in Blau, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–46.

⁶⁶ “The Federal Farmer,” in *The Complete Anti-Federalist*, ed. Herbert J. Storing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 2:236; *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Viking Press, 1975), pp. 214–15.

⁶⁷ This list and more appears in the best of all abolitionist tracts, Richard Hildreth's *Despotism in America* (1854; New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970), pp. 14248.

⁶⁸ Daniel Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 30–31 and *passim*.

Free Soil and Republican parties from 1850 onward. And this work certainly was meant to gain money. That is what made the American an alert and intelligent citizen, rather than a dull European proletarian or a slave. To live on the unrewarded labor of others and to make the worker a brute was the curse of southern culture. Lincoln did not think that a black woman was his equal in all respects, but “in her natural right to eat the bread she earns with her own hands without asking leave of anyone else, she is my equal and the equal of all others.”⁶⁹

There was, as we know, no enthusiasm for the Civil War among urban northern workers and plenty of racism. They feared slavery but hated the slave. Yet the ethos of work was alive among slaves. “We understand freedom to mean industry and the enjoyment thereof,” a spokesman for the freedmen declared. “Indeed, for no group of Americans did the connection between earning and citizenship appear closer. When Frederick Douglass got his first paying job in New Bedford after escaping from the South, he rejoiced, though it was very hard labor. “I was now my own master — a tremendous fact. . . . The thought, ‘I can work! I can work for a living; I am not afraid of work; I have no Master Hugh to rob me of my earnings’ — placed me in a state of independence.”⁷¹

In fact, Douglass was a witness to the tenacity of Jacksonian ideology. “All that any man has a right to expect, ask, give or receive in this world, is fair play. When society has secured this to its members, and the humblest citizen of the republic is put into the undisturbed possession of the natural fruits of his own exertions, there is really very little left for society and government to do.” “The spirit of caste,” was the black man’s greatest enemy. “We are opposed to all aristocracy, whether of wealth, power or learning. . . . Equality before the law is to the colored man the

⁶⁹ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 11, 15–16, 40–72, 296, and passim.

⁷⁰ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 102–10.

⁷¹ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York, 1855), pp. 349, 424.

crowning point of political wisdom,” he wrote in 1871.⁷² If the absence of “hereditary distinctions” was the essence of the American political heritage, then racism was bound to disfigure the republic by opening the door to aristocracy.⁷³ Nor was that all. As Douglass’s heir, W. E. B. Du Bois, was to ask, “Can the modern organization of industry, assuming as it does free democratic government and the power of the laboring classes to compel respect for their welfare — can this system be carried out in the South when half its laboring force is voiceless in the public councils and powerless in its own defence?”⁷⁴ If citizenship had from the first demanded free earners, industry now demanded citizens. In truth, the two had always been identical in the aspirations of slaves and radical democrats.

It is hardly surprising that the middle-class feminists who came to resent being excluded from the world of gainful employment should have been quite aware of the intimate bond between earning and citizenship. And the image of the slave was certainly at work in the feminist imagination. John Stuart Mill claimed that, after reading *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, he felt that the subjugation of women was worse even than that of an American slave.⁷⁵ The revolt against the twin evils of workless masters and forced labor, as much as any aspect of abolitionism, came to reverberate among those middle-class women who suffered from unwanted idleness and from dependence on men. They too took up and were sustained by the Jacksonian ideology.

Labor historians have been at pains to show how remote the independent, self-directing “operative” was from the reality of the wage-earning industrial worker in post-Civil War America

⁷² Douglass, *Life*, 4:271–72.

⁷³ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 114–15.

⁷⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: New American Library, 1982), p. 198.

⁷⁵ John Stuart Mill, *On the Subjection of Women* (London: Everyman’s Library, 1929), p. 248.

with its factories and unemployment. And they have been puzzled by the fact that even when workers came to associate work only with the money they might earn, their old Jacksonian ideology survived unabated.⁷⁶ If, as I have argued, the source of the ideology of earning is not in the conditions of employment but in political perceptions, then there is really nothing surprising in its endurance. Resentment of the idle monopolist and aristocrat, and fear of being reduced to the condition of a black slave, or of a black second-class citizen, have not disappeared, because they are grounded in lasting political experiences. The Constitution still prohibits titles of nobility, and idle and snobbish elites are still resented, and the memory of slavery, rendered ever potent by racism, still arouses predictable fears among white workers and haunts blacks. This interpretation of the ethos of earning not only makes sense of its centrality as a social value, it also corresponds to what its proponents have said in the past and continue to say.

Thus the resentment of unproductive aristocrats was as lively in the years following the Civil War as it had been in the Age of Jackson. A highly visible plutocracy could be seen with all its idle luxuries, stupendous vulgarity, and upper-class European pretensions in every penny newspaper in fin-de-siècle America, not to mention the writings of Mark Twain. It was in this context that the most trenchant social critic of the time, Thorstein Veblen, came to expose their unwholesome effect upon the productive organization of American society. To the extent that he continued the Jacksonian's assault upon the idle rich he was, in spite of all his iconoclasm, a thoroughly traditional radical, and so were the feminists of his time.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Veblen were exact contemporaries, and the gospel of work that they taught was very similar. Both had left the rights-based democratic creed of earlier generations behind them. Their philosophical assumptions were grounded in ideas about social evolution, especially the belief that societies

⁷⁶ Rodgers, *Work Ethic*, pp. 30–93.

were organic wholes that followed laws of natural development. The whole object of public policy was to keep in step with the demands of this preestablished order. Since it was a movement toward improvement, any group or institution that was a throw-back to an earlier age and retarded adaptation to the needs of a changing social order was by definition socially evil. Natural rights were no longer intellectually appealing at a time when organic necessity looked like a scientific grounding for ethics, even though it could underwrite liberal as easily as authoritarian policies.

The case for earning, in Gilman's view, was not that free labor had an intrinsic dignity. The injustice was that a woman's economic status, high or low, had no relation to her work, which was confined to the household. This had not been the case on the farm, where husband and wife were real working partners, but it had become the condition of middle-class women, who were essentially idle slaves. Their situation was degrading for them, and it was also a dysfunctional refusal to accede to the laws of the division of labor. Domestic work should be done by specialists.

In the modern world, moreover, with its intricate economic arrangements, our real loyalty must be to our work. The duty to work is paramount. Work was the primary social act if it was in keeping with the real needs of the economic order. Women as inefficient domestic workers or as wholly unproductive consumers were the relics of an outdated family system, remnants of an agrarian and feudal past, and wholly out of step with a democratic society geared to efficient production. Gilman was, in short, not primarily asking for women's individual rights but for their opportunity to participate as equals in the economic process, for that was where citizenship and its rewards and duties now rested.⁷⁷ To the extent that she was protesting against the conditions that prevented women from reaching their full economic potential, she was also pointing to the personal cost of their domestic slavery

⁷⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 17, 22, 93–94, 117–18, 152, 211, 218, 245–47, 276–79, 333.

and stunted self-development. In this respect, in spite of her evolutionary historicism, she resorted also to a more traditional individualism.

Veblen evidently approved of Gilman's aspirations. But he made a more negative argument, less for labor than against the atavism of the idle rich, the aristocrats so excoriated by earlier democrats. He was less concerned to get work for those who needed it than to expose the primitive social habits of the leisure classes. Their crime was to evade industrial occupation in favor of "exploit," like sports, or other useless and highly damaging activities, such as religious observance, governing, and war. Against them stands the "instinct of workmanship, to which we owe all that is best in productive and cooperative society. The difficulty is that it may not be a match for the leisurely values of the rich and their aversion to all useful employment.

Unlike Gilman, Veblen had no interest at all in the personal value of work for the unemployed individual. Nor did he belabor the idle rich as exploiters and oppressors. He was simply very orthodox in his polemics against the unproductive rich. However, increasingly, in a world in which the taming of a continent and the creation of wealth for all were not public ends, the call to work was no longer relevant in the old way. Why should the rich work? Who would benefit from it? Indeed there was a strong movement to persuade them to be less busy and to devote themselves to charity, the arts, and the refinement of manners.⁷⁸ Noblesse oblige has, however, not been an overwhelmingly popular ideal in America, and Veblen was on solid native ground when he resorted to the rhetoric of the Jacksonians.

It seemed obvious, to Veblen at least, that inherited wealth and inherited gentility should no longer exercise their glamour. That they still did so was in no small measure due to the scholarly classes, who aped and promoted the values of the leisured. They did this not out of any obvious need to fawn upon their patrons,

⁷⁸ Rodgers, *Work Ethic*, pp. 94–124.

but because they were prone to aristocratic nostalgia and romantic fantasies about the past. The mania for handicrafts, with all their inefficiency, was but a symptom of their general cultural lag. They also took innovation and efficiency to be bad form. The traces of feudal Europe, in short, were still visible in America.

Tom Paine's Norman banditti still had heirs all over America, in Veblen's view. The predatory instincts of the rich had declined, so that in addition to degrading labor, these latter-day aristocrats were also extremely competitive. When they entered industry, as "captains," they retarded it with archaic devices of exploit and competition, when cooperation and workmanship were the real economic demands of an advanced industrial order. "Archaism" and "waste" were remnants of aristocratic virtue, and America could ill afford them.⁷⁹

It is not always easy to understand why Veblen was so angry. If the idle classes were mere leftovers from an earlier stage of civilization, history was bound to sweep them away, and often he seemed to suggest just that. If they retarded progress, then they were, to be sure, a genuine obstacle, but one that could and would be removed by social legislation. He did not appear to think such an outcome likely, as it indeed was not. Finally, and most plausibly, his was the voice of a simple moral outrage, that in republican, hardworking, industrial America there should still be so much aristocratic disdain for productive work.

Infuriating as these primitive survivals were, it was no longer possible to argue that universal productivity as such was a collective good because it would raise everyone's standard of living. Nor was it psychologically obvious that the spirit of workmanship was either as common or as powerful as Veblen took it to be, or that it would have all those beneficent public consequences that he ascribed to it. Sheer labor is not workmanship. The Progressive reformers who continued to preach the dignity of work did so for

⁷⁹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: New American Library, 1953), pp. 21, 29, 64, 75–76, 87, 116–17, 138, 158, 256.

more plausible reasons. They claimed that to remain competitive in a world market America needed self-reliant, educated, and respected workers. And like Locke before them they thought that teaching manual skills and cookery to middle-class pupils in school would contribute to creating the appropriate ethos in an increasingly class-differentiated America. That was not, however, Veblen's case. To the extent that he made an argument at all, it was that the idle were out of step with history. Perhaps the most interesting thing about his famous book is the acute anxiety that idleness aroused in its author. No contemporary advocate of workfare has expressed it with greater intensity. Only the classes that inspire these fears and animadversion are different.

Most labor historians have confirmed the truth of what was being said about industrial labor as soon as it became prevalent in the United States. Workers disliked their work and did it solely for the sake of their earnings. The discontent of people who do gainful work solely in order to consume is not a new phenomenon. It is the permanent condition of industrial work. It should, however, not surprise students of American culture that the work ethic remains perfectly intact among these contrary impulses. The fear of unemployment has simply worked to reinforce the realization that only earning offers citizens their standing. The fears originally inspired by slavery, laced by racism and resentment of idleness at the top, are only enhanced by the fear of being laid off. The result is not perhaps a coherent ideology, but it is certainly an intelligible one.

Historical accretions have thus produced a mixed set of beliefs. The conviction that it is a duty to earn, that one can get ahead by one's own efforts, and that opportunities are open to those who seek them out nestles beside the knowledge that unemployment is generally not the fault of the worker but of the economy as a whole. Job satisfaction is low, but no one enjoys being out of work, and even the poor on welfare profess to prefer work to idleness. If there are any idle rich, they certainly do not flaunt

their wasteful lives, and when they do they are not admired by the rest of the wealthy. Sport may be as atavistic an activity as Veblen thought, but its pleasures are not class-specific.

Both the dignity of work and the public obligation to work are most universally preached. Seventy-five percent of the American public think that there is something wrong with not wanting to work. A good citizen is an earner, because independence is the indelibly necessary quality of genuine, democratic citizenship. But few people blame either the poor or the system for poverty and unemployment. They are just facts of life, like the weather. Does this mishmash of social values and the realities of industrial society merely reveal that Americans are massively confused in their attitudes to earning?⁸⁰ Perhaps that is the case, but it may be more instructive to ask whether these apparently incoherent views do not express real social experiences. Surely it is possible that people who do not enjoy work may find unemployment even worse, and not only because of lowered income. The unemployed may feel that they have been disgraced for no particular fault of their own, and that they have become less than citizens. You can think the boss is a slavedriver, but you may feel more like a real slave when you are unemployed. And there is nothing illusory about these experiences. You have been expelled from civil society, reduced to second-class citizenship, a condition rendered all the more galling for white workers, since it is associated with the normal lot of black people. For the latter it is a doubling of unjust burdens.

The group to whom both these views make perfect sense are the unemployed, that is, people who have been fired, or laid off, as it is now more delicately called, and who are looking for a job. Unemployment is itself a very complex notion, implying both freedom and dependence. A slave cannot be unemployed or dismissed, though he may be used inefficiently. The free worker, who sells his labor but not himself, is nevertheless dependent on others for

⁸⁰ Herbert McClosky and John Zaller, *The American Ethos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), *passim*.

work.⁸¹ A democratic citizen is, however, supposed to be entirely his own man. That is why wage earning, with its dependence upon employers, was from the first looked upon with suspicion and fear by republicans in the last century. And in the best of the studies of unemployed men during the Great Depression, we find that the loss of independence was keenly felt.

Few of the unemployed workers of the Great Depression claimed that they had liked their jobs. They missed the paycheck and the companionship of their fellow workers, but not their bosses or foremen. Nevertheless, they knew that to have a decent job, to be a producer and a good provider, was the sole ground of their social standing, and they certainly knew what it meant to lose that. They hated being unemployed. "What's life like without a job? You are nobody." When the depression began this was particularly humiliating, because it was not until about 1933 that it was finally grasped by the public that unemployment was a national calamity, not the fault of the individual worker. Even so, the unemployed worker lost his family's respect and that of those around him. To accept relief, private or public, was painful, and many tried to rationalize it by recalling that they were veterans, or had paid taxes and contributed to charity in better times. The vast majority preferred the WPA and work-relief to what were regarded as handouts.⁸²

These attitudes are far from dead and they survive especially strongly among the most successful children of the once hard-pressed blue-collar workers.⁸³ It may well be that the sheer fear of

⁸¹ Garraty, *Unemployment in History*, pp. 5–6.

⁸² E. W. Bakke, *The Unemployed Worker* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1969), pp. 39, 84, 87–89, 316–28; Mirra Komarovsky, *The Unemployed Worker and His Family* (New York: Dryden Press, 1940), passim; Kay Lehman Schlozman and Sidney Verba, *Insult to Injury* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 4–84.

⁸³ When the sons of blue-collar families who were engineers and scientists lost their jobs in the Boston high-tech industries in the seventies, they were often too ashamed to tell their friends and neighbors (Paula Goldman Leventman, *Professionals Out of Work* [New York: Free Press, 1981], passim).

unemployment, rather than any views about work itself, has come to sustain the work ethic and the ideal of the earning citizen. It is certainly not Veblen's instinct of workmanship, nor any noticeable contentment with work as such that has kept it alive in an impersonal economy. Jacksonian ideology in contemporary America has attached itself not to the worker who demands respect and an honest day's wage for an honest day's work, but to the unemployed.

The locus of ideological conflict has shifted from a struggle between workers and aristocrats to a quarrel among governing parties. One side accuses its opponents of being parentalistic elites who want to eliminate poverty at all costs. The latter charge the other side with being harsh populist achievers who want everyone to work at any price and to no good end. More than either side would admit, they are all still caught up in the Jacksonian web of ideas. The defender of the poor wants to protect them against an army of predatory aristocrats who are denying them their rights. The poor are being denied racial equality, opportunities for decent work and education, and access to normal public goods. The second party is dedicated to independence, to work as the source of all value and all dignity, and to the ideal of a society of self-supporting democratic citizens, who, like Frederick Douglass, hope that the government will do nothing but ensure fair play for all.

These survivals from the Jacksonian past evidently color attitudes to welfare in obvious ways. The welfare recipients who are told that they must work at whatever job is available, see the specter of slavery and indentured servitude come to haunt them again, returned from a not-so-distant past. And the persistence of racism makes that fear plausible. To those who want to see workfare made compulsory, the idle poor are no longer citizens. They have forfeited their claim to civic equality and are well on their way to behaving like unemployed slaves, consumers who do not produce. It is not claimed by either one that the work to be performed is likely to be socially useful or personally satisfying or well paid. Workfare has nothing to do with economics. It is about citizen-

ship, and whether able-bodied adults who do not earn anything actively can be regarded as full citizens. If they are not, may they not, as is now often the case, be treated with that mixture of parentalism and contempt that has always been reserved for the dependent classes? They are not citizens of civil society and they are not accepted as such.⁸⁴ Unlike the unemployed they are not trying to reestablish their standing, for they generally had none to lose in the first place.⁸⁵ What workfare is expected to achieve is to force them to maintain acceptable standards of civic conduct.

In many ways earning is like voting. Almost one-half of the voting-age population does not vote, though they would certainly resent disenfranchisement. With the exception of those lucky few who have a vocation for their work, or at least a sense of workmanship, Americans labor in order to be able to spend their wages. It is obviously ridiculous to speak of work as if it were an undifferentiated activity.⁸⁶ When they cease to earn, however, whatever the character of their work, Americans lose their standing in their communities. It is irrational and unfair, but it is a fundamental fact of life constituted of enduring and deeply entrenched social beliefs. They are not the best possible public values, nor do I wish to suggest that their being shared improves them in any way or endows them with any moral worth.⁸⁷ Above all, I do not mean to say that we should abstain from criticizing these habits of mind, simply because they are so old and so prevalent. But if my account of the origins, antiquity, and continuing prevalence and rele-

⁸⁴ For the most perfect account of these views, see Lawrence M. Mead, *Beyond Entitlement* (New York: Free Press, 1986), pp. 12–13, 41–45, 211–12, 238.

⁸⁵ Their negative experiences in the workplace may account for their passivity, at least according to Leonard Goodman, *Do the Poor Want to Work?* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1972), pp. 112–18.

⁸⁶ Gregory E. Pence, “Towards a Theory of Work,” *Philosophical Forum* 10 (1978–79): 306–11.

⁸⁷ I emphasize this point because I do not want this argument to be identified in any way with Michael Walzer’s endorsement of shared values as a general ethical justification of social practices. Nothing in these lectures should be taken as support for the leading notions of his *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

vance of the Jacksonian faith is correct, as I think it is, then it creates a presumption of a right to work as an element of American citizenship.

In a polity of interest and rights-claiming individuals, only those who act on their own behalf and are recognized as competent in civil and political society can count as full citizens. If they lack the identifying marks of citizenship, they must fall into a proscribed category. With that in mind there are good reasons for claiming that there is a right to remunerated work in America. The case against such a right is not trivial. There is no self-evident moral right and no enforceable legal one, it is said. Moreover, self-respect is too vague and too subjective a state of mind to be the ground for any public policy.⁸⁸ Instead of thinking about rights at all, one should think in terms of general policies designed to eliminate unemployment and to raise the standard of living of the poor. One can, however, concede most of these points and still argue for a right to work in America. It would be a right derived from the requirements of local citizenship, not a primary human right. As a jury trial is drawn from the primary right to a fair trial in Anglo-American legal practice, so earning is implicit in equal American citizenship.⁸⁹ As such it must be entirely separated from relief, now misnamed *welfare*, which is based on need, however that may be estimated. And relief should be recognized as a basic service due to both those who are and to those who are not earners at any given moment. We ought to learn to think of it in the same terms as public roads and sanitation.

The right to earn, in this view, is not based on personal responses, such as loss of self-respect among the unemployed, but on the loss of public respect, the reduction of standing and demotion to second-class citizenship to which the public ethos, overtly

⁸⁸ Jon Elster, "Is There (or Should There Be) a Right to Work," in *Democracy and the Welfare State*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 53–78.

⁸⁹ James W. Nickel, "Is There a Human Right to Employment?" *Philosophical Forum* 10 (1978–79): 149–70.

and traditionally, condemns them. It is not a right to self-respect, but a right not to be deprived of one's standing as a citizen that is at stake here. And the minimal political obligation must be the creation of paying jobs geographically close to the unemployed and offering them a legally set minimum wage and the chance of advancement.⁹⁰ Like any right, the right to earn can be forfeited, but that does not render it worthless. And even if it is not feasible to enforce the right fully, the consciousness of the claim can have a political effect.

With that I have come to the end of my sketch of American democratic citizenship as standing. It is not meant to be a full account of all that citizenship is or might be but only an attempt to illuminate two of its most elementary and essential components: voting and earning, as they have emerged out of the stress of inherited inequalities in a society committed to political equality, or more accurately, to the principle of inclusion.

⁹⁰ William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 159–63.