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## EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

### THE FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER

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IT IS OFTEN SAID that the first words of a character in a novel or play tell us much about the context, the underlying meaning, and what is to come. Hamlet's first words, "A little more than kin, and less than kind," tell us much about his character, his sense of humor and irony, his puns, his bitterness. We think too of Martha's opening line in the movie version of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*: "What a dump!" Thus we can attend to the opening line of the main character in that great icon of American movies, *The Godfather*, expecting to mine considerable ore, and we will not be disappointed. The movie is about gangsters, an early version of the Mafia. But the movie is also a running commentary about civil society and the failures of a particular kind of civil society, the failures of democracy. The movie is thus about what this book is about: what it takes to create and sustain a democratic civil society.

The main theme of *The Godfather* is thrust at us during the opening two minutes. On the day of his daughter's wedding, Don Corleone listens to the sad tale of the undertaker. The undertaker's daughter has been brutalized by thugs. The undertaker, being a good American, goes to the police. The case is thrown out of court, the thugs laughing at the undertaker. Now he has come to Don Corleone for justice. The don sets the scene for the

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whole with two short questions: "Why did you go to the police? Why didn't you come to me first?" There are at least two civil societies, the don implies. When the official one does not work, you either choose to come to me, or you opt out and suffer the consequences. The world of Don Corleone works, in some respects: the thugs who terrorized the undertaker's daughter are dealt with in a rough form of rough justice: an eye for an eye. The undertaker wants Don Corleone to have the thugs killed. But the don objects: the undertaker's daughter was not murdered, so the thugs cannot be murdered. Even in this undemocratic civil society, there are rules, some definition of what is just. But this model of a civil society is not one that should appeal to us. For all of its talk about honor and justice, it is a model of violence, of amorality, of an unwillingness to consider the welfare of others in noninstrumental ways. The world of the Godfather is a gated community. Don Corleone lives in a gated compound (although this does not protect him from an almost-successful assassination attempt). His son, as shown in the movie sequel, lives in a gated community near Lake Tahoe. He too comes close to being killed by an assassin's bullets fired into his bedroom: gated communities do not seem to provide much beyond the formalities of security. And in our own time and in the real world, gated communities are being offered with assurances of security—the kind of security, it is implied, that the regular municipalities and their police departments are unwilling or unable to provide.<sup>1</sup>

A similar kind of civil society, with similar circumstances, is found in another movie, another cultural icon, *The Magnificent Seven*. The opening scenes are a staple: the peasants in a small village in Mexico are being terrorized by a gang. The Mexican government is far away. The peasants heed the advice of a wise man in the village: hire gunfighters. And thus the peasants seek out Yul Brynner and his colleagues, who in time mete out a kind of justice to the gang. An earlier version of the same situation is found in the Japanese film *Yojimbo*. At the end of this magnificent Kurosawa production, our samurai hero has wiped out both warring factions in a village. As the poor peasants peer out from behind the few remaining huts, the samurai strides away, saying, "Now maybe there will be some peace and quiet around here." Stability, peace, and quiet, to be sure, but to what extent was the village destroyed in the process of saving it?

The motif of the failure of democratic civil society is played out repeatedly in American television and movie dramas. As crime rates rise or are perceived to be on the rise, the popular culture turns to alternative ways, alternative civil societies, to get the job done. One thinks of such television fare as *Have Gun, Will Travel* from the 1950s (a lax sheriff will not

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seek justice); *Mission Impossible* (government cannot do the job, so extralegal forces are needed); and *The Equalizer* (equalizing the struggles of victims against criminals, making a level playing field when the police fail to do so); as well as such movies as *Death Wish* (in its many forms, starring Charles Bronson as the revenge seeker) and *Star Chamber* (with Michael Douglas as a judge who engages in extralegal efforts to mete out justice because the courts cannot do the job).

Another kind of civil society that we can consider and reject is exemplified by the exchange, not in a movie but in "real life," between a London businessman and his agent in Belarus. The agent calls London with a problem. It seems that the local truck drivers are refusing to transport company merchandise. The trucks won't move until the drivers are bribed with huge sums. What are we to do? asks the businessman in London. Easy, says his agent. We shoot all the truck drivers. That way we not only don't have to pay their bribes, but we can also get all the trucks. And what's the alternative plan? Well, the agent says, we'll beat them up so badly they'll be afraid to try to blackmail us again. The third alternative? London agreed to pay the money. The civil society in Belarus as exemplified here surely lacks appeal.

Here is one final example of a civil society we would find repugnant: at his first meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden in November 1937, Lord Halifax was talking about England's problems with India. Hitler said the solution was simple. "Shoot Gandhi," he said. Lord Halifax apparently did not know quite what to make of this.<sup>2</sup> I trust that we do.

As these examples suggest, there are civil societies that are unappealing, ones that violate any reasonable sense of decency, fair play, and humanity. And there remains a kind of civil society, a kind of political and social democracy, that is more in keeping with our sense of what we want, what we think is right. It is not just any civil society that we want; what we want is a democratic civil society. But what is it that we want when we say we want a democracy or a democratic society? Again, we might start with what we do not or should not want. When we say we want democracy, we are talking about more than democracy as participation and majority rule. If that were all democracy involves, then all sorts of unlikely and unwanted group structures will qualify. A lynch mob can have lots of participation, with a majority in favor of the lynching, but what of that? We sometimes conflate democracy with collaboration, cooperation, and working well together, as if getting along and having good interpersonal relationships are all that matter. But again, a lynch mob can exhibit collaboration, cooperation, and good intragroup relationship skills. The mob in *The Ox-Bow Incident* worked together just fine.

What we must have in mind when we say we want democracy is more than participation or majority rule or some version of laissez-faire in the Old West. And what we must have in mind is necessarily difficult to achieve and to sustain. As Edmund Burke points out, government is easy to establish. Freedom is easy to have. Free government, on the other hand, is hard to accomplish.<sup>3</sup> In like manner, Alexander Hamilton argues that the great question is whether we can establish good government on the basis of reflection and choice, or whether we are condemned to have government on the basis of accident and force. It is good government, Hamilton reminds us,<sup>4</sup> that is at stake: good government that is in effect a liberal, constitutional, democratic republic. Such government has the features delineated by Robert Dahl:

1. Elected Officials. Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
2. Free and fair elections. Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
3. Inclusive suffrage. Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
4. Right to run for office. Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for the suffrage.
5. Freedom of expression. Citizens have a right to express themselves without danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socioeconomic order, and the prevailing ideology.
6. Alternative information. Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by laws.
7. Associational autonomy. To achieve their various rights, including those listed above, citizens also have a right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.<sup>5</sup>

For the sake of brevity, I will use the term *democracy* to denote this broader sense of a political regime that is characterized by freedom, constitutionality, and democracy (in the sense of self-rule by the people rather than rule by the one or the few) in a republican state (in the sense of

elected representatives chosen from parties presenting viable and significant alternative philosophies and programs).

### Democracy: Do We Want It?

We say we want a democracy. At least we think that is what we want. Francis Fukuyama argued that we were at the end of history, that democracy had indeed emerged as the great desideratum of political and social life.<sup>6</sup> For many reasons, critics assailed Fukuyama's position. One of the fundamental questions still being asked is whether people do indeed want a democracy and the responsibilities that go with that territory. This is not an idle question. Throughout many parts of the world, democracy is seen not as something to be desired but rather as something to be avoided. Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor insists that people do not want freedom, cannot handle freedom, and will do anything they can to avoid the responsibilities of freedom. At most, the Grand Inquisitor says, people want some sort of benevolent dictatorship or oligarchy, with the few telling the many what to do and what to believe. In our own time, the Grand Inquisitor's notions remain popular, with countries such as Singapore declining the adoption of democratic institutions in favor of security and economic development.<sup>7</sup>

When we talk about wanting a democracy, we have to talk about more than what it takes to establish a political regime. We need to understand that it is often more difficult to sustain a democracy than it is to create it.<sup>8</sup> As Dankwart Rustow reminds us, "The factors that keep a democracy stable may not be the ones that brought it into existence."<sup>9</sup> In trying to sustain a regime, it is easy to get sidetracked. There is a tendency to do "big things" for show rather than for real sustenance. As Tocqueville warned, France and England should not compensate for national malaise "by making railroads."<sup>10</sup> A regime can do more than build railroads. In 1958, the U.S. government conducted a study of the feasibility of exploding an atomic bomb on the moon. Officials apparently thought this would be a good way to compensate for our being behind in the space race with the Soviet Union. Another way to get sidetracked is to engage in various imperialistic campaigns. The costs can be considerable. Edward Gibbon could well be speaking of our own time as well as speaking of Rome:

There is nothing perhaps more adverse to nature and reason than to hold in obedience remote countries and foreign nations in opposition to their inclination and interest. A torrent of barbarians may pass over the earth, but an extensive empire must be supported by a refined system of policy and oppression: in the centre an absolute power, prompt

in action and rich in resources: a swift and easy communication with the extreme parts: fortifications to check the first effort of rebellion; a regular administration to protect and punish; and a well-disciplined army to inspire fear, without provoking discontent and despair.<sup>11</sup>

It is not an easy task to sustain a democracy.<sup>12</sup> To sustain a regime necessarily involves questions of succession. Note that the first four characteristics of good government outlined earlier in this chapter deal specifically with how new leaders are to be selected. Beyond mere questions of procedure and orderly succession, we must consider how, in a democracy, we are to get the best leaders—those who will be not only effective but also good and wise. The succession issue is difficult and complex, particularly because of the threat posed by the highly ambitious. In a provocative and disturbing speech, "Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions," the young Abraham Lincoln describes the danger to the Republic posed by the ambitious man, the new Caesar, who, if he cannot be accorded recognition by building things up, will be just as likely to seek recognition by tearing things down. For this kind of man, Lincoln tells us, mere perpetuation will not do: "Towering genius disdains a beaten path."<sup>13</sup>

And the regime is threatened by apathy, the kind of apathy that Tocqueville described so movingly near the conclusion of *Democracy in America*. He speaks of how people respond to the "immense, protective" power of government:

That power is absolute, thoughtful of detail, orderly, provident, and gentle. It would resemble parental authority if, fatherlike, it tried to prepare its charges for a man's life, but on the contrary, it only tries to keep them in perpetual childhood. It likes to see the citizens enjoy themselves, provided that they think of nothing but enjoyment. It gladly works for their happiness but wants to be sole agent and judge of it. It provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, makes rules for their testaments, and divides their inheritances. Why should it not entirely relieve them from the trouble of thinking and all the cares of living? . . .

Having thus taken each citizen in turn in its powerful grasp and shaped him to its will, government then extends its embrace to include the whole of society. It covers the whole of social life with a network of petty, complicated rules that are both minute and uniform, through which even men of the greatest originality and the most vigorous temperament cannot force their heads above the crowd.

It does not break men's will, but softens, bends, and guides it; it seldom enjoins, but often inhibits, action; it does not destroy anything, but prevents much from being born; it is not at all tyrannical, but it hinders, restrains, enervates, stifles, and stultifies so much that in the end each nation is no more than a flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as its shepherd.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to ambition and apathy, political regimes are threatened by the plain fact that things go wrong. The successful maintenance of a regime depends to some extent on the successful functioning of the day-to-day activities, but as any planner will acknowledge, things are more likely to go wrong than to go right. The challenge in human affairs is not to have things go perfectly. The challenge is how to maintain equilibrium while things are falling apart. Just as the maintenance of individual relationships depends on knowing how to recover and reconstitute when things go wrong, so does the maintenance and improvement of a regime depend on processes for recovery and reconstitution. And when we think of reconstitution, we need to remind ourselves of Tocqueville's shrewd admonition:

The most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seeks to mend its ways. Only consummate statecraft can enable a King to save his throne when after a long spell of oppressive rule he sets to improving the lot of his subjects. Patiently endured so long as it seemed beyond redress, a grievance comes to appear intolerable once the possibility of removing it crosses men's minds. For the mere fact that certain abuses have been remedied draws attention to the others, and they now appear more galling; people may suffer less, but their sensibility is exacerbated.<sup>15</sup>

There is a further challenge. We do not—or should not—want merely to create, sustain, and recover. We need also to focus on improving the democratic regime and not be content with maintaining or recovering the status quo, holding frozen in amber a now-distant past.<sup>16</sup>

### Conditions for Democracy

Let us assume that despite the challenges, we want democracy. And let us assume that we want to sustain it and improve it. Then the next question we must ask is: Are there conditions necessary for the functioning of a healthy democracy, or can a democracy somehow exist without recourse to context?

The notion of conditions is critical. Consideration of conditions tells us what is necessary for proper functioning of systems and helps us under-

stand relationships among elements of systems. John Goodlad has reminded many of us of what analysis of conditions means through his example of what to do about mosquitos. If you want to get rid of mosquitos, you do not go after individual mosquitos. You go after the pond. The pond is a necessary condition for the mosquitos.

Consideration of conditions also points us toward the normative. An example of conditions defining a desired good can be found in the world of Islam. By Koranic law and cultural tradition, five conditions are specified for a village to be considered a village: (1) bakery, (2) fountain, (3) mosque, (4) *hammam*, or public bath, and (5) elementary school. A village needs bread. It needs clean water. People must be clean, they must involve themselves with a sense of the sacred (rather than pure self-interest), and they must assume the responsibilities of enculturation of the young. Without these five things, a village might be some sort of village, but it would not be a good and virtuous place, an authentic and productive Muslim village. In like manner, we might specify conditions of our own towns and villages in the United States that will help us understand what is necessary for a good life and how we are to sustain it.

Conditions do not automatically appear. As Dewey reminds us:

If we want individuals to be free we must see to it that suitable conditions exist:—a truism which at least indicates the direction in which to look and move. It tells us among other things to get rid of the ideas that lead us to believe that democratic conditions automatically maintain themselves, or that they can be identified with fulfillment of prescriptions laid down in a constitution.<sup>17</sup>

Democracy does not simply exist in some sort of pure sense, unconnected to conditions in its environment. We need to delineate the necessary conditions. From these, we can develop a reasonable sense of the kind of character we as a people must have in order to sustain the kind of democratic regime we want to have.<sup>18</sup>

Assuming that there are such conditions, what are they? Elsewhere, I have in brief suggested eleven conditions.<sup>19</sup> I present them here in expanded form.

### Trust

If there is no trust, people will not be able to enter into the kinds of long-term relationships necessary for political and social interaction in a democracy.<sup>20</sup> It is necessary to establish trust. Without trust, we find ourselves

no further along than the people at Corcyra whom Thucydides described so compellingly:

Oaths of reconciliation, being only proffered on either side to meet an immediate difficulty, only held good so long as no other weapon was at hand. . . . Religion was in honour with neither party; but the use of fair phrases to arrive at guilty ends was in high reputation. . . . The ancient simplicity into which honour so largely entered was laughed down and disappeared; and society became divided into camps in which no man trusted his fellow. To put an end to this, there was neither promise to be depended upon, nor oath that could command respect; but all parties dwelling rather in their calculation upon the hopelessness of a permanent state of things, were more intent upon self-defence than capable of confidence.<sup>21</sup>

An equally important question deals with the recovery of trust. Given that trust is probably going to be violated, a question of critical importance focuses on recovery: how do you reconstitute trust once it has been violated?

### *Exchange*

People must be able to exchange goods and services in order to survive in a democracy. The act of exchange is a way of building and sustaining relationships.<sup>22</sup> It is often difficult to maintain balanced exchange relationships. Montaigne reminds us of the dangers of unbalanced relationships:

When some years ago I read Philippe de Commines, certainly a very good author, I noted this remark as uncommon: That we must be very careful not to serve our master so well that we keep him from finding a fair reward for our service. I should have praised the idea, not him; I came across it in Tacitus not long ago: "Benefits are agreeable as long as they seem returnable; but if they go much beyond that, they are repaid with hatred instead of gratitude." And Seneca says vigorously: "For he who thinks it is shameful not to repay does not want the man to live whom he ought to repay." Q. Cicero, in a weaker vein: "He who thinks he cannot repay you can by no means be your friend."<sup>23</sup>

In considering exchange, then, we must be aware not only of the functions of giving, receiving, and repaying but also of the dangers of unbalanced exchange, and we must be adept at finding ways to redress the unbalance.

### *Social Capital*

People need to have social and political skills in order to work together to understand problems and create solutions—as opposed to simply accepting orders.<sup>24</sup> Social capital seems to work within the bounds of the "Matthew effect," with the rich getting richer. Thus, a difficulty in a democracy is how to secure and sustain social capital for all rather than for a select few.

### *Respect for Equal Justice Under Law*

If there is no justice, we have no recourse other than self-interest, which is ultimately self-defeating.<sup>25</sup> Incurable self-interest reaches its apotheosis with Faust. His bet with Mephistopheles makes little sense from the perspective of group (as well as individual) interest or from an ecological perspective. Faust's proposition—if you can ever satisfy me, you can have my soul—is not a proposition that makes sense, not even, in the end, to Faust. What happens when justice loses to self-interest is described by Thucydides in the Melian dialogue. The Athenians, in their struggle against Sparta during the Peloponnesian War, have lost their sense of justice and are now defining themselves solely in terms of self-interest. They prepare to invade the neutral island of Melos. Why are you invading us? ask the Melians. Because we are stronger than you are, say the Athenians (in language similar to that used by Thrasymachus in *The Republic*, that is, justice is whatever is in the interests of the stronger). But, say the Melians, what of our rights? The Athenians laugh, replying that "rights are only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they will, and the weak suffer what they must."<sup>26</sup> In our own time, we have problems in trying not only to secure but to sustain equal justice under law.<sup>27</sup>

### *Respect for Civil Discourse*

If people cannot talk to each other, advance ideas, adduce evidence, and weigh and consider options without resorting to physical or verbal violence, democracy will have difficulty surviving.<sup>28</sup> As Goodlad notes, "We are not born knowing the art of conversation that is central to the moral art of democracy."<sup>29</sup> Respect for civil discourse is difficult to sustain, especially given campaign financing practices and pervasive corporate control of the media.<sup>30</sup>

### *Recognition of the Need for E Pluribus Unum*

The American democracy is not experienced simply by isolated groups, each celebrating its own peculiar identity. There must be some sort of glue

that holds the whole together. But there must also be respect for individual and group differences. The trick here is to acknowledge and deal with the constant tension between the *unum* and the *pluribus*.<sup>31</sup> In our own time, we seem to place considerable emphasis on the *pluribus*, resulting in self-limiting politics of identity and group self-calculation.<sup>32</sup>

### *Free and Open Inquiry*

This condition is central to a democracy. People will not be able to participate in any thoughtful way in a democracy unless they have the ability and inclination to inquire into all aspects of the workings of society.<sup>33</sup>

### *Knowledge of Rights*

If we do not know what our rights are, we will have difficulty exercising them. A people without knowledge of its rights can hardly participate effectively in a democracy.<sup>34</sup> In his First Annual Address to Congress, George Washington speaks of the need to teach “the people themselves to know and to value their own rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish between oppression and the necessary exercise of lawful authority.”<sup>35</sup>

### *Freedom*

As many have said, you have to have the power to exercise freedom and the insight to value it. Both conditions are necessary.<sup>36</sup> Herodotus gives us an early sense of what is at stake in his account of the Spartan envoys’ meeting with Hydarnes, a Persian satrap, during a lull in the war between Persia and Greece. Hydarnes advises the Greeks to surrender, telling them that the king “knows how to honor merit.” “Hydarnes,” they answer, “you are a one-sided counsellor. You have experience of half the matter, but the other half is beyond your knowledge. A slave’s life you understand, but never having tasted liberty, you do not know whether it be sweet or no. Had you known what freedom is, you would have bidden us fight for it, not with the spear only, but with the battleaxe.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Recognition of the Tension Between Freedom and Order*

Leo Strauss reminds us that we have to deal with the “freedom that is not license and the order that is not oppression.”<sup>38</sup> If we maximize freedom and ignore order, we end up with anarchy. But if in our desire for order,

we move beyond reasonable order to oppression, then we are no better off. The tension between freedom and order is a constant. We have to distinguish, as George Washington reminds us, “between burthens proceeding from a disregard to their convenience and those resulting from the inevitable exigencies of Society.”<sup>39</sup>

### *Recognition of the Difference Between a Persuaded Audience and a More Thoughtful Public*

We must know this ourselves, and we must demand that our leaders know it too.<sup>40</sup> As Ralph Lerner notes, “As sure as ‘a great empire and little minds go ill together’ [from Burke, “On Conciliation with America”], so too might it be said more generally that the conduct of the public’s business demands enlarged views both from the few charged with that business and from the many empowered to select them. An electorate that expects its representatives to behave like lapdogs will get what it deserves—creeping servility—not what it most needs.”<sup>41</sup> A thoughtful public is difficult to sustain, especially in times of stress. When things are not going well, we have a tendency, as said earlier, to build railroads—or to succumb to demagoguery.

### *Ecological Understanding*

The unit of survival is the organism plus its environment.<sup>42</sup> The organism that destroys its environment destroys itself. As John Goodlad, Stephen Goodlad, and Paul Theobald and Clif Tanabe have noted in their respective chapters in this book, the only way for democracy to survive is for the larger environment to survive.

### *The Conditions Considered*

Some of these conditions could be applied equally to a dictatorship. Survival of a dictatorship depends on respect for law (although what might motivate the respect is fear of the secret police as opposed to a thoughtful understanding of the relationship among freedom, order, and law). But just because a condition might be useful to a dictatorship as well as a democracy does not mean that we should reject it as a condition for a democracy. There are, on the other hand, conditions that are peculiar to a democracy. Civil discourse or deliberation, for example, is critical to a democracy (and critically threatening to a dictatorship).

It should be noted that these are postulated conditions. One might well come up with a variation of this set or an entirely different set.

Nonetheless, once we accept the notions that we want a democracy and that a democracy has necessary conditions, we are obligated to come up with a set of conditions.

Assuming that we agree that conditions are necessary for a healthy democracy, and assuming that we either accept the conditions postulated here or reject them and construct a different set, the next question is: Are people born knowing about these conditions and how to create and maintain them, or do they have to learn about them?

Let us assume that there is no genetic programming that enables us to know about such matters as justice and law and freedom from the time of birth, and let us assume that we choose learning. The next question, then, is obvious. Where are people to learn these things? The response to this question depends in part on the kind of regime you want to have. If you want a democratic regime, then you will want all people, as a matter of principle, to have a working knowledge of the conditions necessary to creating and maintaining the regime. So we have to determine where it is most likely that the greatest proportion of the people will be able to gain that working knowledge. Mary Ann Glendon indicates a similar concern: "Where do citizens acquire the capacity to care about the common good? Where do people learn to view others with respect and concern, rather than to regard them as objects, means, or obstacles? Where does a boy or girl develop the healthy independence of mind and self-confidence that enable men and women to participate effectively in government and to exercise responsible leadership?"<sup>43</sup>

Some might argue that the conditions I have set out (or an alternate set) can and should best be learned at home. Others will say that such matters are best dealt with in community organizations such as the Boy Scouts or Camp Fire Girls. Others might argue that much of what matters in dealing with these conditions stems from religious character, and thus young people should learn about the conditions in religious places of learning and worship. All of these sources for learning about the conditions may seem appealing. But in considering any of them, the question still must be addressed: Where will the greatest proportion of people in a democracy be likely to learn about these conditions? It is in response to this question that many have concluded that the public schools remain the most likely place that most people will be able to learn about what is necessary to establish and sustain and improve our democracy. The fundamental purpose of schools, on this view, is to teach children their moral and intellectual responsibilities for living and working in a democracy. This is the public function of schools.<sup>44</sup> If this public function is paramount, then there are significant implications for schools and those who teach and learn in them. Schools must be structured in ways that reflect

the teaching of the conditions necessary for a democracy, and the curriculum in the schools must focus both directly and indirectly on the teaching of these conditions. Moreover, if teachers are to teach children moral and intellectual responsibilities, then the teachers themselves must have gained, through their own education in the liberal arts and professional preparation programs, a reasonable, subtle, and extensive understanding of just what those moral and intellectual responsibilities entail.

### Characteristics of a Democratic People

Let us recapitulate. We have acknowledged the desire for a democracy, we have set forth twelve conditions (and, again, there could be some variation of the twelve) necessary to secure and sustain a democracy, and we have argued that public schools represent the most likely source of learning about these conditions. But our task is not yet complete. Learning or talking about conditions for a democracy is necessary but hardly sufficient. We have to act. *Conditions are created by people.* Therefore, we must ask, What must be the character of a people such that it can create and sustain the conditions necessary for a democracy? We must recognize that, as Ralph Lerner suggests, "In the last analysis, what matters is the character of the people. Those who prize liberty only instrumentally for the externals it brings—ease, comfort, riches—are not destined to keep it long."<sup>45</sup> Here Lerner is close to Tocqueville: "I am quite convinced that political societies are not what their laws make them, but what sentiments, beliefs, ideas, habits of the heart, and the spirit of the men who form them, prepare them in advance to be, as well as what nature and education have made them."<sup>46</sup>

Accordingly, we have to talk about characteristics of a democratic people, about democratic character, if you will. It might be tempting to talk about democratic character in general terms. But if we say we want a democracy and postulate the necessary conditions, then we are bound at least to begin our discussion within the framework of the postulated conditions. The question, still, is: If conditions are created by people, what kind of characteristics in a people are necessary to achieve the greatest likelihood that the conditions will indeed be created? Let us turn, then, to a brief exploration of characteristics in terms of these conditions.

### *Trust, Exchange, and Social Capital*

These three conditions are closely related, as are the dispositions necessary to secure them; as such, they are considered here as one. First, we must encourage as a disposition a general willingness to trust. As with all

other dispositions, moderation is the key. Thus, a general willingness must be tempered by a prudent skepticism (perhaps, as was said about disarmament, “trust, but verify”). Given the frequency of trust violation, we must also encourage people to be willing to recover trust and help others with the struggle of trust recovery. Second, we must encourage people to engage in exchange, honor the obligations exchange implies, and be mindful of the dangers of unbalanced exchange. We must encourage the desire to create opportunities for exchange, especially among individuals and groups of individuals traditionally left out of the process. Third, we must encourage understanding of social capital as a tool, skill, and process open to all. We must encourage patience to allow others the opportunity to learn how to exercise newly found social capital.

#### *Respect for Equal Justice Under Law*

We must encourage respect for the law, even when decisions go against perceived self-interest. We must encourage the rejection of temptations to take the law into our own hands.

#### *Respect for Civil Discourse*

We must encourage people to be willing to entertain propositions, consider evidence, and accept ambiguity as inevitable. They must embrace the sentiments of Pericles: “Instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all.”<sup>47</sup>

#### *Recognition of the Need for E Pluribus Unum*

We must encourage a willingness to accept the tension between the *pluribus* and the *unum* as a positive good rather than a problem to be solved. People need to reject the tendency to resolve the tension by trying to choose either one or the other.

#### *Free and Open Inquiry*

We must encourage critical inquiry as a personal and civic virtue. We must therefore encourage a willingness to be a minority of one and acceptance of democracy as a manifestation, in the words of Dewey, of the “capacity of the intelligence of the common man to respond with commonsense

to the free play of facts and ideas which are secured by effective guarantees of free inquiry, free assembly, and free communication.”<sup>48</sup>

#### *Knowledge of Rights*

We must encourage a willingness to believe that human rights are essential and that rights are natural rather than positive. We must encourage a willingness for a democratic people to be “alert, assertive, and mindful of its honor, interest, and happiness.”<sup>49</sup>

#### *Freedom*

We must encourage people to recognize freedom as an inherent part of what it means to be a human being. We must encourage a willingness to consider—but to reject—the claims that all or even some people do not want or cannot deal with freedom.

#### *Recognition of the Tension Between Freedom and Order*

We must encourage a willingness to accept and support the enduring tension between the two goods of freedom and order. The strength of character needed here is, as with recognition of the need for *e pluribus unum*, a willingness to understand and act on the need to balance the tension rather than to seek an either-or solution.

#### *Recognition of the Difference Between a Persuaded Audience and a More Thoughtful Public*

We must encourage a willingness to select and support leaders and representatives who will not pander to ephemeral public tastes or the immediately gratifying. Frederick Douglass argued that “the limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”<sup>50</sup> In like manner, if we have venal, calculating, servile, or otherwise unprincipled leaders, we must look to our own character and not transfer the blame to those who take advantage of our ignorance and lack of virtue. Moreover, given the threats to a democracy posed by at least some of the highly ambitious, we must be able to distinguish between those who value their reputations for probity and ability to benefit the community—for such valuation will temper their ambitions—and those who want only to benefit themselves.



### *Ecological Understanding*

We must encourage a willingness to look beyond the immediate horizon and change our time frame accordingly.<sup>51</sup> We must encourage a willingness to look for the patterns that connect and a willingness to understand the connectedness of the ecology of mind.<sup>52</sup> And along these lines, we must encourage acceptance of the notion that, as Wendell Berry put it, "To think better, to think like the best human beings, we are probably going to have to learn again to judge a person's intelligence, not by the ability to recite facts, but by the good order or harmoniousness of his or her surroundings."<sup>53</sup>

### *Concluding Comments*

Perhaps these characteristics or traits or dispositions deemed necessary to ensure creation and sustenance of the conditions necessary for our democracy are best summed up by Thomas Jefferson in the Rockfish Gap Commission Report. Jefferson argued that what is needed is to enable the citizen

To improve, by reading, his morals and faculties;

To understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either;

To know his rights; to exercise with order and justice those he retains, to choose with discretion the fiduciary of those he delegates; and to notice their conduct with diligence, with candor, and with judgment;

And, in general, to observe with intelligence and faithfulness all the social relations under which he shall be placed.<sup>54</sup>

We can derive overlapping core elements from the characteristics outlined here. For example, a recurring motif in our listing of conditions and related characteristics is the notion of contradiction, tension, and dilemma. Thus, it would seem that one overlapping element centers on patience, on tolerance for ambiguity, and an unwillingness to leap to either-or "solutions" because of discomfort with problems that in fact are not problems. A second element is a willingness to act on the basis of reasoned probabilities rather than to refrain from action until one has ultimate and absolute truths. A third element focuses on the notions of conflict between individual and group, and on how to satisfy individual needs while helping to meet the needs of the larger community. A fourth element deals with keeping the idealistic desire to improve within bounds

of reason and prudence: citizens need to avoid intemperate actions destructive of the very democratic republic that provides succor for improvement in the first place.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps in reflecting on the characteristics needed for the conditions offered here, I am left in the end with a notion of modesty, of moderation, in keeping Talleyrand's wise cautions of not too much zeal, and in keeping with the wise observation in the *Tao Te Ching*: "If you know when you have enough, you will not be disgraced. If you know when to stop, you will not be endangered."<sup>56</sup>

Others might well derive a different set of characteristics or common elements of characteristics from the conditions offered here. The argument nonetheless still stands. There must be conditions in place for democracy to be created, sustained, recovered, and improved. Conditions are created by people. People must have a given set of dispositions or characteristics that will most likely lead to the creation of those conditions.

These dispositions or characteristics are taught and reinforced in homes, churches, private associations, street corners—and schools. I continue to believe that it is to the schools that we must look for sustained attention to the development of the character of a democratic people. Keeping in mind the conditions and characteristics offered here, we might then be able to address more thoughtfully issues of school structure and curriculum and the preparation of teachers. That thoughtful attention must be our focus in the years to come if we are indeed to deserve and sustain a free society.

### NOTES

1. Theodore White tells us of what he learned in 1930s China about civil society, government, and protection in his *In Search of History: A Personal Adventure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978):

"What I learned was that people accept government only if the government accepts its first duty—which is to protect them. This is an iron rule, running from bombed-out Chungking to the feudal communities of the Middle Ages to the dark streets of New York or Rome where the helpless are so often prey. Whether in a feudal, modern, imperial or municipal society, people choose government over nongovernment chiefly to protect themselves from dangers they cannot cope with as individuals or families. . . .

"I had learned the first real lesson of politics, government and history: governments are instituted among men in the first instance, and accepted by men gratefully, to protect them from random violence and killing. I had begun to observe that when the central government replaced the local

government of Chungking after the bombings. But I had not seen what government meant in the hills of Shansi, where the Communists, not yet calling themselves government, were becoming government. They offered protection" (pp. 83, 101).

For a current useful discussion of the privatization of protection, see Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

2. William Manchester, *The Last Lion* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988), p. 243. According to Manchester, Chamberlain was amused by Halifax's report of Hitler's advice: "It occurred to neither of them that the Führer had been serious."
3. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 374.
4. Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist No. 1," in Garry Wills (ed.), *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).
5. Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 221.
6. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). See also Fukuyama, "Second Thoughts," and Harvey Mansfield, E. O. Wilson, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Robin Fox, Robert J. Samuelson and Joseph S. Nye, "Responses to Fukuyama," *National Interest* 56 (Summer 1999): 16-44.
7. See Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76 (November-December 1997): 22-43, and responses by John Shattuck and J. Brian Atwood, and Marc F. Plattner, *Foreign Affairs* 77 (March-April 1998): 167-181; Gordon P. Means, "Soft Authoritarianism in Malaysia and Singapore," *Journal of Democracy* 7 (October 1996): 103-117; and Marcin Krol, "Where East Meets West," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (January 1995): 37-43. For an interesting debate, see Fareed Zakaria, "Culture Is Destiny?: A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew," *Foreign Affairs* 73 (March-April 1994): 109-126, and the response by Kim Dae Jung, "Is Culture Destiny: The Myth of Asia's Anti-Democratic Values," *Foreign Affairs* 73 (November-December 1994): 189-194. For a larger perspective, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 1996.
8. The careful student can ask for no better guide to the questions of sustaining a regime than Ralph Lerner's, *Revolutions Revisited: Two Faces of the Politics of Enlightenment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

9. Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy," *Comparative Politics* 3 (April 1970): 346.
10. Tocqueville to John Stuart Mill, March 18, 1841, in Roger Boesche (ed.), *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 150-151.
11. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 2 (New York: Modern Library, 1932), chap. 49, p. 627.
12. See, for example, Jean-François Revel, *How Democracies Perish* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), and *Democracy Against Itself: The Future of the Democratic Impulse* (New York: Free Press, 1993). See also Robert D. Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War* (New York: Random House, 2000), especially chap. 2, as well as Adam Przeworski and others, "What Makes Democracies Endure?" *Journal of Democracy* 7 (January 1996): 39-55.
13. See Abraham Lincoln, "Address to the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois: The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions," in Don E. Fehrenbacher (ed.), *Speeches and Writings*, vol. 1 (New York: Library of America, 1989), pp. 28-36. For a detailed commentary on this most disturbing speech, in which, at least for me, Lincoln delineates a fundamental problem (the designs and threats of the highly ambitious) while eschewing any ready solution other than an apparent reliance on cold reason, see Harry V. Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), especially chap. 9.
14. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), part iv, chap. 6, p. 692.
15. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Anchor Books, 1955), pp. 176-177. Frederick Douglass made a similar point in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 135: "I have observed this in my experience of slavery—that whenever my condition was improved, instead of its increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom. I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceases to be a man."
16. Readers will likely have their own notions of where improvements need to come. One of many recent and compelling suggestions can be found in

- David Cole, *No Equal Justice: Race and Class in the American Criminal Justice System* (New York: Free Press, 1999).
17. John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (New York: Putnam, 1939), pp. 34–35.
  18. For further discussion of conditions, see Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, p. 7.
  19. Roger Soder, "To Ourselves and Our Posterity," in Wilma F. Smith and Gary D. Fenstermacher (eds.), *Leadership for Educational Renewal: Developing a Cadre of Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), pp. 49–71.
  20. Of the extensive literature on trust, the following have been particularly useful to me: Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (New York: Blackwell, 1988). See also Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Free Press, 1995), as well as his *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (New York: Free Press, 1999); Adam B. Seligman, *The Problem of Trust* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Barbara A. Misztal, *Trust in Modern Societies: The Search for the Bases of Social Order* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 1996); and Bernard Barber, *The Logic and Limits of Trust* (New Brunswick, N.Y.: Rutgers University Press, 1983).
  21. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, book 3 (New York: Modern Library, 1951), chap. 10, par. 82, p. 190.
  22. For a useful discussion of exchange, see Peter Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New York: Wiley, 1964); Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: Norton, 1967); John Davis, *Exchange* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992); and Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967), chap. 5.
  23. Michel de Montaigne, "On the Art of Discussion," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 718.
  24. In *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), Robert Putnam and his colleagues argue that the three conditions so far stated (trust, exchange, and social capital) are critical to a healthy democracy. For additional considerations of the notion of social capital, see James Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1990), chap. 12.
  25. Useful here is James Boyd White, *The Legal Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), as well as his *Acts of Hope: Creating Authority in Literature, Law, and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

- 1994), and *Justice as Translation: An Essay in Cultural and Legal Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
26. Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, book 5, chap. 16, pp. 330–337. See also James Boyd White, *When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions in Language, Character, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), especially chap. 3.
  27. See Cole, *No Equal Justice*.
  28. See, among others, Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: Free Press, 1991).
  29. John I. Goodlad, "Democracy, Education, and Community," in Roger Soder (ed.), *Democracy, Education, and the Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), p. 105.
  30. See, for example, Robert W. McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).
  31. Conversations about these matters might best begin (and end) with Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.
  32. See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); see also Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1998).
  33. For this matter of free and open inquiry, Socrates and Galileo come to mind. Of the many texts useful and inspiring, I keep returning to Herbert J. Muller, *The Uses of the Past: Profiles of Former Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), chap. 3.
  34. A most useful discussion is found in Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner (eds.), *The Founders' Constitution: Major Themes*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), chap. 14.
  35. George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 30, ed. J. C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), p. 493.
  36. See Donald Treadgold, *Freedom: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 1990). See also Herbert J. Muller's trilogy, *Freedom in the Ancient World* (New York: Harper, 1961), *Freedom in the Western World: From the Dark Ages to the Rise of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), and *Freedom in the Modern World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), as well as his *Issues of Freedom: Paradoxes and Promises* (New York: Harper, 1960). Also useful is Orlando Patterson, *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Isaiah

- Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); and Ruth Nanda Anshen (ed.), *Freedom: Its Meaning* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940). For a discussion of the connection between economic freedom and political freedom, see Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999). Robert Nisbet's *The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in Modern America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) presents a useful analysis of threats to freedom; see especially chap. 2 on the growth of invasive government. Also useful for its discussion of threats to freedom by invasive government is James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).
37. Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, book 7, trans. George Rawlinson (New York: Modern Library, 1942), chap. 135, p. 547.
38. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 37.
39. Washington, *Writings*, vol. 30, p. 493.
40. For the notion of the distinction between the two, see Lerner, *Revolutions Revisited*, p. 59.
41. Lerner, *Revolutions Revisited*, p. 67.
42. See Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972; reissued with an introduction by Mary Catherine Bateson, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For an exceedingly useful explication of Bateson's thought, see Peter Harries-Jones, *A Recursive Vision: Ecological Understanding and Gregory Bateson* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).
43. Glendon, *Rights Talk*, p. 129.
44. See John I. Goodlad and Timothy J. McMannon (eds.), *The Public Purpose of Education and Schooling* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), and John I. Goodlad, *In Praise of Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997) for discussions of the distinction between public and private purpose.
45. Lerner, *Revolutions Revisited*, p. 127.
46. Tocqueville to Claude-François de Corcell, September 17, 1853, in *Selected Letters*, pp. 293–294.
47. Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, p. 105.
48. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us," in Jo Ann Boydston (ed.), *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 14, 1939–1941 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), p. 227.

49. Ralph Lerner, *The Thinking Revolutionary: Principle and Practice in the New Republic* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 25.
50. Frederick Douglass, "West India Emancipation," speech delivered at Canandaigua, New York, August 4, 1857, in Philip S. Foner (ed.), *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, vol. 2, *Pre-Civil War Decade, 1850–1860* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), p. 437.
51. For a telling discussion of the need for longer time frames, see Stewart Brand, *The Clock of the Long Now* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
52. See Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: Dutton, 1979); Gregory Bateson and Mary Catherine Bateson, *Angels Fear: Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred* (New York: Macmillan, 1987); and Gregory Bateson, *A Sacred Unity: Further Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, edited by Rodney Donaldson (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).
53. Wendell Berry, *Standing by Words* (San Francisco: North Point, 1983), p. 77.
54. Thomas Jefferson, "Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Fix the Site of the University of Virginia, &c.," quoted in Gordon C. Lee (ed.), *Crusade Against Ignorance: Thomas Jefferson on Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1961), p. 117.
55. For insightful, if depressing, discussions of the dangers of improvement based on utopian schemes, massive social engineering, and ideologies of perfection, see Robert Conquest, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century* (New York: Norton, 2000), and Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
56. *Tao Te Ching*, no. 44, trans. Thomas Cleary (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 36.

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