

## Port of Entry

Roles we play in society are forms of relationship with other people. They can be identified with some precision. Actions of and reactions to a Mother or a Child clearly differ; a Soldier is not the President and the President is not a Soldier. Of our many and overlapping roles, *Citizen* is the one that makes everyday life with others possible when no higher authority takes charge. Although it is the motor, and the heart, of democratic societies, Americans devote little time and less attention to specifying and caring for the role of the Citizen. More than any other of the many facts with which you have become familiar since September 11th 2001, this one is drawing us towards crisis.

Most of what comes to mind when you think of politics—those politicians, Congress, the White House, the perpetual return of elections—is just its shadow. Politics is first and foremost the activity of the Citizen. I do not mean by this *your* many and various *personal* activities, but rather what happens when any person, including you or I, assumes the role of the Citizen and we allow ourselves to be constrained by that role in order to gain its benefits. A subtle or imperceptible shift or slip can bring us into this character, can bring us into the political world.

The history of the word provides a compelling clue to its significance: the Citizen is the type of person who “lives in the city.” Less strictly but more precisely speaking, the Citizen takes full possession of those facts that appear most clearly in cities but that, in the modern world, characterize a wide range of human relationships in many different settings.

And what are these facts? That we do, and must, live together, not just one day, but every day; that this *we* is plural, and cannot be composed of reiterations of the same, and thus is, like a city, spread over space and

time in a complex order or organism that, if unified in perfect and perfectly stable consensus, would cease to exist; that within this plurality of humankind each, for better *and* for worse, depends on the others; that, wherever on the earth this “city” appears, from within its relative kind of space—a space more like the spontaneous and flexible formation of a team than like the field on which the team plays—problems necessarily arise and often take the form of conflicts over power, which is to say, since power is never one thing, conflicts over *differentials between powers*;<sup>\*</sup> that of the limited options we have for responding to the incessant problems of everyday life, politics begins with the use of language and the turning away from violence that entails, and it proceeds through the negotiation of differences between conflicting parties; that however metaphorical the “city” of the Citizen may be, it always involves more than the imagination of a single person or head-on conflicts within pairs or between two factions, and includes in an unpredictable mix the additional forces of fluctuating third parties.

From these facts it should be immediately clear that not all of what any person does is political and that no one is everywhere and at all times a Citizen. To act as a Citizen is, if *fortuna* permits us this, an option for when trouble comes knocking; sometimes we choose this role, sometimes we fall into it. It is just as easy, indeed easier, to fall out of it.<sup>†</sup>

That is the sense of the word *politics* as used in this book. The antithesis of politics is war, if by *war* is meant nothing but the brute experience of mass violence.

However, as a matter of social and historical fact politics and war are related in complex and ambiguous ways: yes, people fight when dialogue breaks down, or negotiate to end battles, but it is also true that modern states have been built on warmaking capacity, revolutions have overcome elites weakened by war, equality has flourished in times of emergency, and so forth.

It is the complementarity between politics and war, the agonizing entanglements of these two very different types of human relationship,

\* Thus the intimate affinity of politics with the topics of inequality and justice.

† All of these very general considerations will be spelled out in the sequel volumes of *Democracy in America after 9/11*. At that stage I take into account the contradictions inherent in all social roles, although I eventually drop that vocabulary altogether and show that what one does to be properly called “citizen” is to position oneself with respect to others in social space in particular ways.

that will lead our attention in this book. When the Citizen is called to ready for war, to make it possible, to make it, both sides of the equation are transformed. New types of war correspond to new positions for the Citizen.\*

A double transformation of this sort is occurring today at the center of American life. Almost no one has taken the full measure of this fact or assessed its impact on the constitution of power in democracy.

The book you have in your hands is not a comprehensive history or theory of these ongoing transformations of the American political landscape. It is a diagnosis, and it runs along intentionally narrow lines, the way a cardiologist would refrain from comments about the brain. In the following pages, every inspection and speculation is conducted with reference to the special characteristics and outlook of the Citizen. At each turn the guiding intention is to articulate some aspect of the position of the Citizen, a position that you, dear Reader, might imagine and adopt as your own.

The story begins, as we are, in *medias res*, in the middle of things. That is the one sure feature of political life. Dancing, as it were, on the landslide of events, you, should you be a Citizen, have only what is at hand, meager resources and flawed beliefs, the beat of everyday life, with which to position yourself.

The author of this book is not, cannot be, an expert in *your* life. Or even in *our* common life. The special knowledge here concerns conditions that make the role of the Citizen possible, that sustain it, or that destroy it utterly. Thus has the imperative *should* been scrupulously excised from these sentences. Only *you* can know what *you should do*. Where the Moralists would in the following pages insert his smug and chastising prod, a different voice appears.

It is because we have knowledge of politics, of the nature of political relationships that constitute the role of the Citizen, that I am authorized to write not that *the Citizen should* but that *the Citizen had better* do this or that. The *better* is measured by the most basic facts of political life, the possibility of living in splendid plurality, living with a dominion of words over violence. How minuscule and mighty that hope.

You can choose otherwise, but *you had better* know what it means to live with that ramifying and sometimes irreversible choice.

\* This does not diminish the specificity of the political.

With everything here tuned to project a way of thinking you might imagine and adopt as your own, and in that way with fresh vigor position yourself as a Citizen, it is natural that the topics brought forward for consideration gravitate towards *what people say*.<sup>\*</sup> That is because *speaking to one another in public* is the single most important activity of the democratic Citizen. *Speech* is what positions us. *Speaking* is how we carve out our positions. Indeed, it is not an event or events *as such* that reshape American democracy. The political effect of every incremental change or explosive novelty depends on how events are seized upon, reacted to, represented, and deployed; effect grows out from the significance with which events are endowed and the frames of interpretation that connect them to other facts of our lives. Blindly or with insight, by cool habit or with heated anger, events are woven into the fabric of history by the energies and actions of the Citizen. In this process, nothing bodes more clearly for defeat than bad interpretations.<sup>†</sup>

A forest of bad interpretations looms around us. Did, as they say, “everything change on September 11th”? Obviously not, for we live in the same world, and the old facts of political life are still with us. What about the chicken-or-egg question incessantly posed: “Is terrorism about ‘us’ or ‘them’?” It evades the primordial experience of the Citizen, which is his or her relation to other citizens, and thus we had better see “September 11th” as the symbolic field in which a particularly noxious future for America has been emerging. And when they tell us it is “natural to be afraid”? We should hesitate again, for now as always our fears, the needles of terror, depend on what we believe about the past and what we hope for the future. Perhaps, as they say, “America is still the land of opportunity,” but can it be so when war gives a free hand to public and private opportunists? And when fingers are pointed towards an “imperial presidency” grown again under the Bush administration? We had better respond that the power of the Executive matters less in absolute terms

\* In the following pages you will find an abundant use of quotation marks. I differentiate between the majority of words for which I take direct responsibility and the expression of the social fact that common ways of speaking and recalling words appear in the public sphere. To mark this social fact I occasionally place quotation marks around a single word and thus urge you to hear a voice that is familiar but anonymous, and not my own.

† Bad interpretations are sometimes also malicious ones: the claim that “weapons of mass destruction” threatened the United States in 2003 was for everyone but the ones who told the lie a bad interpretation.

than in relation to its constitutionally defined counterparts and counter-powers; the complicity of Congress has been an even deeper scandal of the first decade of the new millennium.

While the Citizen is a role and a form of relationship, a position vis-à-vis others, it is also an interpretive framework. What I mean is that to position oneself as a Citizen is to adopt a particular way of seeing the world and one's own place within it. This interpretive framework is not a superfluous benefit that one gains in addition to taking on the role. Just as *being* a doctor is constituted by seeing, thinking, and acting like a doctor, so being a citizen is constituted by distinctive ways of seeing, thinking, and acting.

The potentials inherent in the position of the Citizen derive from the additional social fact that these political modes of perception, cognition, and activity are relatively stable over time and, crucially, shared in common with others. Like the language we speak, the role of Citizen is larger than any individual and outlives each of us because it belongs as much to others as it belongs to any person who lives in and through it. No one alone can be a Citizen; the role of the Citizen is channeled and delimited on all sides by others. How the potentials of the Citizen are realized depends on the times in which one lives.

A, perhaps *the*, central feature of our times is war. A book that offers diagnosis for the position of the Citizen must therefore find adequate ways to draw connections between America's experience with war and the opening and closing of potentials manifest in the position of the Citizen. Many obstacles stand in the way. The forms of and occasions for war have multiplied. As a social practice war is increasingly open-ended. These and other new circumstances are deeply related to ongoing and long-term transformations in American society.

Of course, not everything can be taken into account. The first task is to discover what is essential to the political diagnosis I undertake here. While other writers have examined dimensions of war *that bear on* the position of the Citizen, the leading concern of this book will be to balance such considerations by focusing on features of war *that may be seized, deciphered, and engaged by* the Citizen.

In many or most other times and places, war tangles together social roles: Citizen, Soldier, Bystander, Victim, and other types constantly cross paths; it is not uncommon for one person to alternate vertiginously among several of these roles.

In the United States the experience of war has for a full century and a half been decisively different: among us, only soldiers have been touched by or delivered military violence, only soldiers have stood by the field of battle, and only they have been maimed or laid low in its roiling fury and wake. In our country today, the Soldier may be a Citizen, but the vast majority of citizens are not soldiers.\*

Thus when an American says *we have decided to go to war* or *we are at war* or *the war is the challenge of our generation* or *we need to escalate or withdraw*, that *we* does not have its finger on the trigger or its boots on the ground. The subject in such sentences is the fabric of life among citizens, where each of us every day goes to work, to school, to the market, and to war.

What to make of this fact? This is a central topic of this book. We may be relieved to see on one side a “politics of war” as the clear province of the Citizen and on the other side the violent clash of armed forces, the “warfighting” of the Soldier. In the United States, these roles and their operations remain relatively distinct.

The problem here lies in how we evaluate this distinction. Most of us suppose that the Soldier’s experience exhibits the real identity of war, and that the great mass of socially ordered human energies and resources is just its system of supply.

But as a matter of political fact, as something that citizens live and can lay their hands on, *our war occurs right here, right now, in repetition and design that generates and permits the pursuit of violence elsewhere.*

This fact, which I will demonstrate later, is bound to irritate subscribers to common sense. Even those familiar with centuries of debate con-

\* In 2002, 1.2 million people were on active military duty in the U.S. armed forces. In 2004, the total number of military veterans in the United States was 24.5 million, or 8.5 percent of the population; one-third of that total served in Vietnam and half as many served in World War II; although I do not have precise numbers, it is safe to assume, given the foreign basing strategy of the American military (702 bases in 2003; Department of Defense, *Base Structure Report*), that a substantial number of these people did not see combat. The other group with high potential for having direct experience of military violence is foreign-born residents of the United States. Census Bureau figures (Y2000) for foreign-born residents from sixty countries where they might have been party or witness to the violence of war suggest an upper threshold of about 7.9 million people who might not fit within my assumption, or just over 2.86 percent of the total population (277 million); about a quarter of these date from World War II or the Korean War. This calculation is extravagantly rough and the real figure is likely to be very substantially smaller. The rate of naturalization of the foreign-born population (about 37 percent in 2000) is not relevant here, given my broad and nonjuridical definition of the Citizen.

cerning the republican citizen-soldier, the modern professionalization of armies, or the tightening military-industrial weave of the social fabric by “total war” will be taken aback by this radical observation.

So let us be clear. The stark analytic apparatus that guides this book is meant to push thinking this way: *real* war is not immediate violence but rather a form of politics; politics is an active relationship among citizens; war is thus a certain modality and inflection of the way *we live together*; since the nineteenth century in the United States, this war-as-a-way-of-life no longer necessarily depends on armed forces local or expeditionary battling it out somewhere in the world; the operations of the Soldier have become an occasionally catalytic but generally auxiliary fact; therefore the paradigm for American war in the twenty-first century is not—as so many assert in abetting the “Bush Doctrine”—World War II but rather the Cold War; that is why what is happening to democracy in America after September 11th had better be understood as *a continuation of the Cold War*, even as this occurs under the amazingly successful covering myth that “the Cold War is over.”

In correspondence with these facts, war will be considered in this book almost exclusively as something that *happens to and among citizens* and *happens to us where we live*.

This fact and perspective has no proper name. Although it is the property of the Citizen it is not *civil war*; indeed, one of its most striking characteristics is the appearance of *civil peace*, an uncanny consensus and absence of conflict. Nor is it a reiteration of the *total war* that ground populations into and with the pervasive machinery of industrialized warfare in the twentieth century.\*

*Civic war*—a mongrel name suggesting a neoplastic attraction of opposites in which the political facts of the Citizen come to serve exactly that devastating form of human relationship they were meant to avoid—is what we had better call our object of inquiry. My imposition of this odd invention is, I insist, prerequisite if the Citizen is to get anywhere in thinking through the new political landscape of our time.

The scene studied in this book appears at the intersection of basic conditions of political relationship and the growth of *civic war*. Within

\* The language of “total war” that entered our vocabulary in the first half of the twentieth century does not adequately address the phenomena discussed in this book; I say more about this in chapter 3.

this space, at once chaotic and rigidly constraining, we will imagine the Citizen inserted. More precisely, this book adopts the perspective of the Citizen so inserted, so chaotic, so constrained, and from that position attempts to reinvent guiding political questions of our time.

What, dear Reader, would you ask in that position? With what words and deeds, fellow Citizen, would you reply?

Every question is provoked by an event and reiterated with its repetition. The path of inquiry here begins, likewise, with an event, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11th, 2001.

We will distinguish from other effects the initial shock and, in the first chapter, follow its transformation into fear and terror.

The next step, where terror is made into war, is articulated in chapter 2.

We will then see, in chapter 3, how enormous expansions of the power to make war in the twentieth century occurred within an even more encompassing constitutional development: the growth of general emergency powers. Indeed, when viewed from the perspective of the Citizen, war powers *are* emergency powers. The latter are applicable throughout society, and this is a major mechanism by which even an expeditionary war is made into a *civic war*.

The larger purpose of this third chapter is to bring to light ways in which war feeds on emergency and emergency on war. Within this circular relationship between war and emergency the question of violence returns. What is the function of violence in American *civic war*?

Chapter 4 responds by pointing to ways in which violence—the fact and its representation—blurs boundaries that normally define social roles and common beliefs. It is a vehicle for highly exploitable modes of confusion and disorder. Violence suspends disbelief. In the specific experience of the Citizen—who encounters combat neither as Soldier nor as Victim—the function of war’s violence is to maintain the high-pressure immediacy of emergency. Therefore violence—whatever its sources and purveyors—sustains the powers invoked in the name of emergency.

Pundits and politicians told us then and still repeat that the “end of the Cold War” paved the way for the “new world of September 11th.” Chapter 5 will make clear that nothing could be farther from the truth: characteristic patterns and political pathologies of the Cold War continue as essential and even amplified features of the American scene today.



By the beginning of chapter 6, the major pieces of the puzzle—for it is a puzzle to ask by what sort of questioning one can position oneself as a Citizen in America today—will be on the table and begin to fit together. The emerging picture is not the one anticipated by even the most vocal critics of the “war on terror” and its well-catalogued excess.

Although President Eisenhower famously pointed to a new “elite” of power and “military-industrial complex” born of the Cold War, neither he nor those who have drawn out implications from this insight went far enough. The specifically *political* significance of these changes of society, institutions, and belief remain to be identified.

The danger for the Citizen is not primarily the erosion of constitutional rights here and there descried by dissenters. This erosion is a painful and important symptom; it is not the root cause of democracy’s disease after September 11th.<sup>1</sup>

What is the deeper problem? To bring it into view, we will have to acknowledge that civil and political rights are not a simple or unambiguous good. Although they are necessary for the operation of any modern democracy, they are also accompanied by costs. Some costs can be paid with money—as when enforcement agencies like the Department of Justice are armed with the means to sanction and police social interactions—but the most intractable costs arise from the way that rights operate within the field of politics more generally. Any appeal to rights as a way out of or remedy for conflict has inherent in it a basic paradox.

On its face, a right is a defense against the abuse of power. At the same time, it takes power to make a right effective. There is in this sense always the lurking possibility that application of a right will need to presuppose the solution of the problem it is meant to address. Rights sometimes depend on the powers they seek to control.

From case to case there are ways to manage this paradox. In multiplying powers a cautious political system can refer the defense against one power to another power. At best, this ensures that no entity is the “judge of its own acts,” following the ancient principle that “no man may be a judge in his own case.”

But nothing can dissolve this paradox altogether. When big questions arise the paradox presses us with urgency. And it is in just such situations that the more fundamental problem comes into view. The *most* infectious political virus is a steady reduction of many powers to few, of multiple powers to just one, which, when it wants to transgress rights or justice

or decency, meets no effective opposition. In a moment we shall find the proper name for this tendency.

You will want to say, if common sense has its steady grip upon you, that it is just this terrible prospect of uninterrupted power that must draw all our attention and energy to rights, and that it is imperative to reinforce an unbreachable wall of *right*, the Citizen's ultimate line of defense. And, indeed, only the foolhardy would deny that when power runs rampant the Citizen must move quick and bold to the defense of rights under attack.

Nonetheless, the paradox of rights complicates the significance of both the attack and the defense against it. It provides an interpretive frame within which the "abuse of executive power" and the "assault on our rights" had better be understood.

For, however grave this situation may be, however much spying and lying and free-handed arrogance may roam the land, *what counts more against democracy are encroachments not on the rights but on the powers of the Citizen. What counts most is abdication of those powers by the Citizen*, even while our energies and vitality remain nonetheless and always the spring of the powers applied, here and there unchecked, against us.

Nowhere is the necessary vigilance in favor of rights so tragically misleading as it is in the great discursive game, the master formula of contemporary common sense, that cajoles us day in and day out to find a balance between "liberty" and "security," to unhappily but unavoidably trade one for the other.

It takes a citizen to see that "liberty" and "security" are not opposites. To speak of "trading" one for the other obscures a much more important fact: when national defense collides with democracy, the challenge is not so much to liberty as to "publicity," or "publicness."\*

Thus, while few failed to notice the Bush and Cheney administration's obsessive attachment to secrecy, most have misinterpreted this offense. The major problem is not violation of a "right to know" (as a general fact, there is no such right).

For the Citizen, what matters more is that American constitutional democracy generates its most fundamental power by making things public. *Publicity* serves to amplify diffuse human energies into the political

\* The general fact of publicness is properly called *publicity*; in this book, I do not use the word in the narrow sense of self-promotion.

power of the Citizen. *Publicity*, not liberty in the abstract, is therefore the essential mode for balancing the powers of the other constituents of the constitutional order and its administrative State. *Publicity* had better be the primary concern for anyone who, as Citizen, aims to impede the degeneration of democracy.\*

It is here that the most sinister demon of “September 11th” casts its shadow over the American republic. Terrorism is not its source. It is more basic than the erosion of our rights. Even extravagant abuses of power and rampant corruption—to be expected in times of war, *military* or *civic*—pale by comparison. The most fundamental and insidious threat is *monocracy*.

This word—born in the palaver of the French Revolution, hashed out by luminary figures like Sieyès and Tom Paine, carried home and spread about by Thomas Jefferson, familiar to his generation but not ours—names the aspiration to or achievement of a form of government in which just one power is decisive. It is the black hole of political life. Nothing is more dangerous to democracy. *Monocracy*, with its common complement *civic war*, is the second characteristic feature of our times.

Now, every American is educated to see the vaunted genius of our Constitution. A machinery of different functions—executive, legislative, judicial—is supposed to play one kind of power and its interests against the others, checking the growth of each and balancing all together. This “separation of powers” multiplies them. It requires, generates, exalts pluralism. It impedes monocracy.

But the democratic project of our national constitution and character extends beyond the “branches” of government. Citizens—our energies and dreams—are the essential power that underpins the others. It is the Citizen who, by adding or withholding support, ultimately modulates and transforms public and private powers alike. The balancing wheels and checking levers of a watch are no metaphorical match for this; what the Citizen disposes is metamorphosis, where the grounds of action become at turns rock or magma, concrete or quicksand, welcome beach or foundering shoal. This process, this power, is complex almost beyond imagination. It varies with every scene of our actions, every association

\* Thus, in this book I will not make much use of the familiar and heated but not very illuminating terms “liberty versus security” in which much debate has been conducted.

and faction, every capacity and incapacity to believe, to judge, to strive, to resist.

You know that many have called this the *sovereignty of the people*. But to do so begs every important issue and draws the veil of one pithy and impressive phrase over the true nature of political life; it deflates the potentials of the Citizen—*your* potentials—in the process. *Sovereignty* once looked—in the seventeenth century—like just one thing because there was so often one king. Even then it mistook the person for the social fact of his power. Applied to the flux of everyday life among citizens, the idea of *sovereignty* makes an even bigger mistake: it urges us, if only for a dangerous and decisive moment, to see the essentially plural as one. *E pluribus unum* proclaims a monarchy of many, the stern communitarian face of the “tyranny of the majority.”

It is, however, the special case of Executive power that will occupy the major part of our attention in this book. Again *sovereignty*, with its image of sword and scepter, is a falsifying name for this power. Thus you will find in the following pages, as a subplot of the main story about the position of the Citizen in the moment of *civic war*, a search for different concepts and language, a search for alternative ways to figure the constitution of power.

In whichever hands the title or reins of power are held, one of its primary tendencies, like monopoly in the economic sphere, is towards consolidation and the elimination of rivals. As a fact not of personal ambition but of system, this tendency is towards the elimination of “checks and balances.” When barriers are weak, power surges forward in a rising tide. With each monocratic advance, the rebuilding of levees is more difficult.

Where is the breach? Where does *just enough* become *too much*? On this key point the inexactitude of political diagnostics taunts us. There is no rule or measure to indicate the tipping point into monocratic power. Everything depends on the imprecise and undependable judgment of the Citizen. Judgment serves not just the tenor of analysis but also, because what we lean into and pull back from depends on our beliefs, as the motive for action.

Monocracy grows from bad judgment, where fanatics are admired, where complicity is rewarded, where the conformist is a hero, where megalomania and stupidity are hidden from view. Closed societies experience monocracy as usurpations of power; it is something the strong take

from the weak. In an open society, monarchy is a self-destructive sort of gift that citizens give to those who, behind extravagant praise, despise them; it is a convergence of many factors into a pervasive and unchecked form of agreement in favor of the few.

The hope and the flaw of democracy is that it boils down, not to “the Will of the People,” but to the judgment of the Citizen, which is to say the capacity of each person to size up a situation and pitch his or her energies one way or another. The list of impediments and constraints in this practice is as long as a lifetime. This book, in its own eccentric way, urges engagement in your own life; lived as it is, this is almost bound to bring you to the position of the Citizen. For every day is something new. Thresholds for action are constantly shifting ground. In the weave of lives lived together with others, the power of the Citizen is as simple as it is unpredictable: Shall I let *this* pass—or shall I stand against it? Is *this* abuse, *this* lie, *this* outrage, the one that will bring me into the street—or will I avert my eyes, my ears, again, and close my door?

Such a possibility of resistance to power in any form is the most elemental substance of our constitutional “separation of powers.” The failure of citizens to hold back the tide of monarchy, to sap its strength and inflect its flow, is the most fundamental sort of political corruption. Every other venality and arrogance can be tolerated today only if tomorrow or the day after something or someone will raise itself up to oppose them.

In the end, only the Citizen can make effective this oppositional—“checking and balancing”—role. Abdication from it is the *corruption of the Citizen*. The specific development and new shape of this corruption since September 11th is the subject of this book.