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*Reflections on Political Identity*

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*The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution*

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# *The Presence of the Past*

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Essays on the State  
and the  
Constitution

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## Two / Injustice and Collective Memory

The topic of collective memory has received relatively little attention from political scientists, political theorists, or social scientists generally. The major exceptions have been social or cultural anthropologists, especially those who have been influenced by the so-called *L'Année sociologique* school founded by Emile Durkheim and perpetuated by his nephew Marcel Mauss. This suggests that collective memory is part of a world we have lost, that as an analytical category or as an interpretative concept it is useful mainly for understanding or explaining primitive or traditional societies.

Another way of saying this would be that collective memory is a characteristic of societies in which custom or tradition plays a decisive role or in which change is assigned a negative value. Societies that place great value upon change and seek constantly for ways to promote it are most likely either to be indifferent to collective memory, even uncomprehending of its meaning, or to exhibit clear signs of a declining interest in the topic. We might call such societies post-mnemonic in the sense that collective memory is at best ritualistic and, more likely, treated as dysfunctional.

Hypothetically an anti-mnemonic society might seek to preserve a

place for memory by cultivating historical knowledge to serve as a functional equivalent and according to history something like the respect and deference that mnemonic societies display to custom and tradition. History that understood itself to be in the service of collective memory and to be engaged in the exploration of traditions in a society that actively discounted the value of tradition would, unfortunately, find itself relegated to a marginal role. It would be reduced to justifying itself as an activity that sought simply to understand the past or to reconstruct it *wie es ist eigentlich gewesen*. Or, alternatively, it might accept the basic premise of its society and declare that history is knowledge of past change. In the first alternative, history would be caught in the bleak position of speaking to a society that had no strong interest in remembering its past; in the second, it would be simply redescribing and reaffirming society's self-understanding.

This last point might be summarized by saying that in a post-mnemonic society most of the intellectual disciplines that study society, such as economics, political science, social psychology, and (more ambivalently) sociology have become or always were antihistorical in outlook; when they were not, they were reductionist, that is, they sought to translate historical categories into social scientific ones and to replace narrative by demonstration. In response, historians have tried to find legitimacy in a post-mnemonic society by borrowing the methods and categories of the social sciences.

In what follows I want to explore the notion of collective memory in relation to a certain form of collective injustice. Collective memory has to do with the formation, interpretation, and retention of a public past. In a preliminary way collective memory might be said to refer to the public past preserved in public art and architecture, public rites, ceremonies or rituals, the rhetoric of public authorities, the educational curricula, and the ideological themes that pervade these. What is retrieved from the past is some event, person, institution, or artifact. An example would be the celebration of the bicentennial of the ratification of the American constitution. The bicentennial celebration could be described as an attempt at a ritual of remembrance or, as I prefer to put it, a post-mnemonic society's ritualistic attempt at a ritual of remembrance.

Societies tend to memorialize heroic deeds or shaping events rather than acts of justice. But they also tend to want to suppress memories of collective injustice. In order to establish connections between collective memory and a class of unjust acts which might properly be called "collective," a useful starting point is a remark of the French historian Ernest Renan. In *What Is a Nation?* (1881) he wrote: "But the essence of a nation is that all the individuals share a great many things

in common and also that they have forgotten some things. Every French citizen should have forgotten the Saint-Bartholomew [massacre]."<sup>1</sup> As Benedict Anderson has noted, Renan's paradox is to claim that Frenchmen should have forgotten the massacre; yet the fact that Renan felt no need to explain what "the Saint-Bartholomew" referred to suggested that Frenchmen still remembered it.<sup>2</sup>

If we assume for the moment that Renan's advice was healthy; that it had been accepted by Frenchmen; and that a society which insisted upon periodically reviewing great historical wrongs it had committed would probably invite all the familiar metaphors about "obsessively picking at its own scabs," the acceptance of Renan's advice would also mean that the memory of a great wrong done to French Huguenots of the sixteenth century would have been suppressed.

A non-Frenchman might well be tempted to argue that over the centuries the fanaticism that produced Saint Bartholomew's Day had given way to widely shared social agreement upon the value of religious toleration. Therefore Renan need not have enjoined his countrymen to forget what had become a nonproblem. And although justice will forever be denied to the dead, it is rendered to the living in the form of religious toleration. So why should sharing be endangered; indeed, why wouldn't it be healthier for a society to remember its collective wrongs? Is there some fatal attraction toward likemindedness that led Renan to think that sharing is threatened by the experience of injustice recollected?

Collective memory seems thus to have some peculiarities that distinguish it from private or individual memory. In the *Confessions* Augustine likens memory to a trickster: I forget when I don't intend to and I cannot remember when I want to.<sup>3</sup> Renan's collective memory, however, seems more like an accomplice of injustice, forgetting or remembering—whichever is the more convenient.

Although the two notions are contradictory, they may not be mutually exclusive. What kind of memory is it that forgets though it still remembers? Renan seems to be saying that a society can ill afford to reexamine collectively a special class of political events in which the members of society feel tainted by a kind of corporate complicity in an act of injustice done in their name; and yet temporal distance and historical accommodations have so far removed them from it that they do not feel responsible, only uneasy. The event is not actually forgotten, only publicly unrecalled. We might call such events "collective wrongs" to mark their complicitous and historical character, their memorability as it were. Their wrongness seems to consist in singling out a particular group on the basis of its objective differences (Huguenots did hold different religious beliefs from Catholics); then drawing

unjust conclusions from these differences (e.g., that all Huguenots were disloyal subjects of the king); and, finally, encouraging the group's slaughter as a patriotic act.

Coming closer to home, is the Civil War America's Saint Bartholomew's Day? Although Americans easily celebrated the bicentennial of their Constitution, most of them ignored the centennial of the Civil War and could not even bestir themselves to protest when, on Lincoln's birthday, television commercials presented their martyred president as an automobile salesman hawking Japanese cars. Thus, Renan's principle seems vindicated: by forgetting the experience of a divided nation at war with itself, the nation was able to restore its sense of shared destiny.

That war seems to have been forgotten, however, without one of its main issues, the status of black Americans, being resolved. Nevertheless, it is possible that collective amnesia was induced by the trauma of fratricide and that the attempt to right the wrong of slavery was responsible for the terrible bloodletting. Society will be reluctant henceforth to want to confront radically the grievances of those who still carry the marks of the original wrong. By its silence collective memory will have signified the limits of justice.

It is not difficult to understand, therefore, why the public memory of the conflict is suppressed and goes unrepresented in civic rituals, even though few would want to say, as was said in the example of Saint Bartholomew's Day, that there is nothing to remedy, no apparent injustice to correct. And since the institutions of slavery were abolished by the so-called Civil War amendments, we might say that although justice was rendered to the dead, it is being denied to the living. If the limits of justice are thus dictated by the limits of public memory, what are those limits?

Consider the story of the interned American citizens of Japanese descent. For nearly three decades the vast majority of Americans repressed the memory of the so-called Japanese relocation camps where American citizens were "detained" throughout World War II on the grounds that because of their national origin and the war against Japan they constituted a potentially disloyal population. Yet over the past decade various official measures for indemnifying the detainees for some portion of their losses and for extending a national apology have been passed or are pending. In addition, several court cases have been reopened with the result that the legality of the original government decrees now appears highly questionable.

What dictated this about-face? Was it less a question of injustice remembered than of a radical change in the American perceptions of Japan rather than of the Nisei, an official recognition on the part of

American policy makers, both governmental and corporate, of the extraordinary power now possessed by Japan and hence of its vital importance to global political and economic strategies? Is it part of a gradual downgrading of World War II, which, although sometimes said to be the last just war, never was celebrated as World War I was? And is the depreciation of World War II connected with the apparent fact that ever since the cold war began in earnest, American policy makers have been as concerned to repress the fact that the Soviet Union was once an ally as to forget that among America's present allies are three former enemies (although the bizarre episode of Bitburg stirred memory to reassert the historical dissatisfactions of justice)?

To ask why public memory works in this way is to ask how forgetfulness is established as a condition, perhaps even a precondition, of a certain form of society. By "form of society" I mean the characteristic ways in which its hegemonic powers are constituted. But first we must establish a richer understanding of forgetfulness than expediency or oversight or blocked recollection provides. I want to propose instead that we consider it in a context where the self must renounce some part of itself or of its own experience if it wants to be accepted into political society. In the act of reconstituting the self into a civic self, forgetting becomes a rite of passage and as such a condition of membership.

The most useful and possibly the most influential discussion of these matters is to be found in the early modern social contract theorists, specifically Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. I will focus my remarks solely upon Hobbes and Locke, and especially Hobbes, because of the continuities between some of their ideas and those of more recent writers such as Rawls and Nozick and because of some continuities with recent American practices. The excursion is of some value, not because social contract theories contain accurate descriptions of the actual constitution of contemporary society, but because they enable us to glimpse some of the inarticulate premises in the political practices and processes of our society.

Classical contract theory distinguishes between two states of affairs, one in which men live in civil society and under the legal rules of the state; the other in which men live in a pre-civil society, without a legal system, complex exchange relationships, a division of labor, settled domestic relations, or a system of political rulership. All social contract writers want to move men from the second condition to the first. The device that they use for that purpose, the social contract, is essentially an exchange in which individuals agree to obey political authority if authority will protect them. The differences among the three

writers mentioned, however significant they may be, need not detain us for the moment because I want to focus not so much on what the self promises but on what the self has to forget about itself in order for the promise to be acceptable to the other promisers. Most commentary on contract theory has concentrated its attention upon the rights that are retained and those that are surrendered rather than upon the question of identities. Stated slightly differently, the individual of contract theory is a bearer of rights and a rational subject. His identity is thus derived from a universal status, as when the Declaration of Independence asserts that "all men are created equal" and "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." He is not a bearer of particularized identities of, say, race, color, gender, community, or creed. His rights are, as the Fifteenth Amendment states, "regardless of race, color, and creed."

Each of the three great contractualists insisted upon equal conditions of entry for all of the parties to the contract: each made the same promise, which all contract writers put in the form of a surrender of certain kinds of freedom; each was offered the same guarantees; and each was to be subject to the same legal rules and under the same public authority.

But Hobbes was the one writer who insisted that men not only had to agree to a contract on "Equal terms," but, if they wanted the proposed political system to work effectively, they also had to agree to forget some matters. He listed a series of "laws of nature," which he argued that men would have to observe if the social covenant were to be effective. The sixth of those laws requires that we should pardon past offenses if the offender sincerely repents and wishes to be pardoned. The seventh stipulates that we should lay aside the desire to avenge past evils but calculate instead "the greatness of the good to follow."<sup>4</sup> These laws were extensions of the crucial fifth law of nature, which Hobbes called "compleasance" and which dictated that "every man strive to accommodate himselfe to the rest." A society, he argued, was like a building being constructed of stones; some stones have an "asperity and irregularity of Figure [and hence] take more room from others" and so have to be discarded. Some men, by "the stubbornness of [their] Passion cannot be corrected" and so they must be "cast out of society."<sup>5</sup>

The Hobbesian imagery of building blocks is significant, not only for its thinly veiled impulse toward suppressing differences, but for the implied connections between the suppression of difference and the suppression of memories of past wrongs. The way that Hobbes formulated the requirement of forgetting past offenses made it appear that

what was at stake was simply some individual acts of injustice committed in the past. This would be in keeping with the radically individualistic, even atomistic character of the Hobbesian subject.

But what Hobbes was suppressing by his laws of nature was not the memory of personal grievances but recollections by his contemporaries of historical and collective actions, the actions of kings, parliaments, judges, and armies, of Lord Protectors and Puritan zealots during the civil war and Interregnum, which had produced the upheavals that Hobbes rendered abstractly as "the poor, nasty, brutish, and short" condition of a "state of nature." The succession of different regimes with sharply contrasting visions of society and of policy seemed to Hobbes to have contributed to the accumulation of resentments without settling sharp disputes over basic principles of politics and religion. His covenant was a device to incorporate social amnesia into the foundation of society. If men could forget, mutual absolution was possible, allowing society to start afresh without inherited resentments. A necessary condition of social amnesia was, therefore, that men dehistoricize themselves.

The Hobbesian individual steps forward as the first of a long series of blank individuals who fake their nature by denying historically acquired and multiple identities. Every contract theorist posits a person who is initially defined without reference to gender, family, local community, social class, religious commitment, or vocation. Twentieth-century writers are not much better. They may stipulate "veils of ignorance" as a condition of contract, but in the presence of distinctions of color and gender that stipulation strikes one as incoherent. What can it mean to say that for the moment I must forget that I am a person of color or a woman so that I may think about the basic conditions of a just society, when for me what matters most is how that difference will be treated?

The individual who contracts or covenants is thus an artifact, a constructed being whose attributes appear as unconditioned by the kind of resentments at past offenses which were and are the notorious accompaniments to the categories of gender, etc. referred to a moment ago. All social categories are power-laden; some are complacent, some apologetic, others protestant. Hobbesian and Lockean men have passions, interests, even experiences, but they seem not to have, or only barely to have had, the searing experiences of those for whom social categories have symbolized social wounds.

The trade-off is equality for remembrance, or rather a certain kind of equality—not equality as an ideal that is necessarily at war with power (because power presupposes inequality) but equality as a fiction that serves to legitimate power. Societies that understand themselves

in large measure through the categories of contract theories are committed to inequality because they value a conception of justice that justifies individual acquisitions if these can be shown to be due to merit. Even so strong a critic of liberal meritocracy as John Rawls conceded that "the basic structure contains social and economic inequalities" that "are necessary and highly advantageous."<sup>6</sup>

Justice will therefore mean equal protection of inequalities. As Madison put it in the tenth *Federalist*, "the protection of different and unequal faculties of acquiring property . . . is the first object of government." It means that covenanters must forget notions of natural equality. The question of who is "the better man," Hobbes wrote, has no meaning in the state of nature.<sup>7</sup> But as Hobbes was quick to insist, that question takes on a ferocious quality in society: in the competition for power, wealth, and status it is virtually the only question.

The trick for the contract theorist was to get equality to serve the ends of inequality. To accomplish this, memory was enlisted and told that it had to forget the social categories that were the marks, in some cases ineradicable marks, of inequality. By divesting the person of his or her multiple identities and replacing them with the single identity of "the individual," then declaring that each individual would enter society on the same terms as every other individual, the way was prepared for the modern liberal solution to the problem of justice. In Locke's proviso: "That all Men by Nature are Equal, I cannot be supposed to understand all sorts of Equality. . . . Excellency of Parts and Merit may place [some] above the Common level."<sup>8</sup> Neither Hobbes nor Locke argued that the social categories had been abolished by the state of nature and would no longer operate when civil society was established. Rather, they were only temporarily suspended. Thus social classes were not abolished, much less distinctions between rich and poor; family and gender relations resumed. But there was an important change, for now these social categories could be judged by the equal justice requirement implicit in the terms of the covenant. What this means, however, is that the burden of rectifying injustice was now placed squarely and solely on the shoulders of the state. Hobbes asserted this in the most unequivocal fashion: justice does not even exist outside the state's law and authority. In the absence of state authority, and power there are only private versions, which have no objective standing.<sup>9</sup>

Hobbes's formulation may seem extreme, but even for those writers who are identified with more liberal conceptions of limited government, the main instrument of justice remains the state. This seems a straightforward matter until we ask whether the individual of contract theory has been so reconstituted as to make him conformable to

a society in which all look to the state for justice. What has he been asked to forget?

Interestingly, for Hobbes the emphasis falls upon recollection rather than forgetting. If the individual can remember the fear and terror of life when there is no effective authority to protect him, then he will be more apt to treasure the security brought by the covenant and be all the more ready to observe his promise to obey the sovereign. At the same time, for Hobbesian man there can be no recollection of injustice in the state of nature. For in that condition every man has the right to do whatever he thinks will advance his own security and protect his life. He cannot, therefore, commit injustice; in the state of nature, no one can.

For Locke, however, there is justice in the state of nature, and hence there is potentially available a recollection of justice and of a prior practice of it which, by definition, did not depend upon the existence of the state. In the Lockean state of nature, every individual is responsible not only for observing the law of nature but for enforcing it.<sup>10</sup> Thus, individual responsibility for justice preceded the responsibility of the state. What, then, happens to this experience with justice? Is it forgotten? Suppressed?

For Locke, it was the inadequacies inherent in individual dispensation of justice that made the state necessary. Men judge subjectively, especially in cases where their own interests are involved. Justice demands objectivity, detachment, and dispassion—or in Locke's formulation, "a known law," "an indifferent judge," and an executive who will enforce the law impartially. Ideally, justice is best served by the suppression of the self. The reason for this is not simply that the self is self-interested. That is part of it. The deeper reason is multiplicity, the sheer variety of selves. According to Hobbes, "Divers men differ not onely in their Judgement, on the senses of what is pleasant, and unpleasant to the taste, smell, hearing, touch and sight; but also of what is conformable, or disagreeable to Reason, in the actions of common life. Nay, the same man in divers times, differs from himself."<sup>11</sup>

Memory, we might say, is the guardian of difference. The individual acquires and accumulates his or her different selves, and memory allows for re-collection. Difference within the self and between selves is not merely received; we may not choose our genders or our skin color, but we do choose in some measure how we are going to interpret that difference, how we are going to live it along with the other differences we receive or acquire in the course of our lives. But, as the excursion through contract theory suggests, memory is being enlisted as a suppressant of multiplicity because the kind of society of which contract theory is and was the expression seeks a different kind of self, a self

that has to operate under what one might call conditions of pure power. The classic statement of it comes from Hobbes: "The Value, or WORTH of a man, as of all other things, his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power; and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependant on the need and judgement of another. . . . And as in other things, so in men, not the seller, but the buyer determines the Price."<sup>12</sup>

The radical character of Hobbes's formulation lies partly in the transvaluation of value into economic value and hence in the reduction of all forms of individual identity to one saleable power, and partly in the incoherence that the formulation introduces into Hobbes's laborious attempt to erect an awesome sovereign power. On the first point, the transvaluation of all value into economic value means, among other things, that the diverse identities of the person could be discarded because all that mattered was his or her usable power. The buyer did not ask for a narrative of "who are you?" and "where did you come from?" but simply "what can you offer me that I can use?" As Paul Hazard pointed out, the capitalist never looks at people to see who they are; he is willing to sell regardless of personal biography.<sup>13</sup>

On the second point, the incoherence that begins to undercut this "greatest of human Powers," as Hobbes called his construction, comes from a rival form of power which Hobbes's sovereign is committed to encouraging. It has its basis in another kind of contract of exchange, between buyers and sellers. What Hobbes had done inadvertently was to expose a different system of power, one in which the concept of equality was never mentioned and could not be without making nonsense of the new system. The novelty of that system is its hybrid character, partly economic in its reference to "buyer" and "seller" and partly political in that the fundamental transaction consists of a power relationship. We can call that new system a "political economy" and Hobbes its founding father.

Although Locke introduced significantly different political emphases from Hobbes, he enlarged rather than rejected the idea of a political economy. "Government," Locke declared, "has no other end but the preservation of Property."<sup>14</sup> One of the basic arguments used by Locke in defending the rightness of private property is that it contributes to greater productivity. Indeed, the limits to the amount of property one can accumulate are set either by consumption or by productivity. Thus, while property was a right for Locke and was intimately connected with personhood, it also had a deep economic structure. How deep was suggested by Locke's deliberate attempt to widen the meaning of property to include life and liberty as well as estate.<sup>15</sup> Lockean government was thus to be concerned primarily with the po-

litical economy of property, not only with the institution of property in its narrow sense of material acquisitions but also with human life and liberty in their economic involvements.

Defined in a preliminary way, the concept of a political economy is a mode of life in which society is conceived primarily as "the economy." Further, instead of economic relationships being viewed as embedded in and conditioned by a complex of social and political relationships and moral norms, they are treated as forming a distinct system of power that is at once autonomous and determinative of all other social and political relationships. The limits of justice are dictated by the condition of the economy as interpreted by those who are the authorities of political economy.

The system of political economy was to have profound effects upon collective memory and notions of collective injustice. These effects have been overlooked by critics of capitalism, who have concentrated primarily upon the institution of private property and the distinction between the propertied and the propertyless. In so doing they have missed the effects that the system of political economy had upon the status of membership in contractualist societies. From roughly the nineteenth century onward, the political economy was rapidly established as the defining structure of membership. For Hobbes and Locke the contract had established equal political membership, in the form of the citizen, as the fundamental category of society. At its best, it was a political vision of individuals freely binding themselves into a new collective relationship. That relationship had one radically democratic element: it was a vision of society in which all were included, in which everyone was in. No one was excluded, and all who accepted the terms were permanently incorporated.

The political economy, not the institution of private property, cut short the political possibilities of contractualist societies. The first development was sketched by Karl Polanyi in his classic, *The Great Transformation*. There he traced the emergence of the economy as an autonomous entity independent of history, religious values, moral constraints, and political regulation. In its early form, the political element in the political economy appeared as "administration." This marked a significant evolution away from the participatory implications of Locke's state of nature, where each person was responsible for interpreting and enforcing the law of nature. Adam Smith provides a convenient measure of how much political experience has been forgotten as attention is now focused upon the state, not as the locus of political life but as the servant of a higher order: "Commerce and manufacture can seldom flourish in any state which does not enjoy a regular administration of justice, in which the people do not feel themselves

secure in the possession of their property, in which the faith of contracts is not supported by law, and in which the authority of the state is not supposed to be regularly employed in enforcing the payment of debts from all those who are able to pay."<sup>16</sup>

As careful readers of Adam Smith have long recognized, he advocated a state with well-defined functions, not a negative state. Certainly the dominant economic interests and social classes of early modern capitalism consistently sought as much state power as they thought was needed to promote and defend their interests. In the early years of the Republic, owing primarily to the genius of Alexander Hamilton, a powerful state was established. Public policies quickly laid the basis for a neomercantilist program through which the state actively nurtured and promoted capitalism while cultivating a distinct state interest in the form of a bureaucracy, a military establishment, and a vigorous foreign policy. The United States, it might be said, was fairly launched as a political economy. Although the most spectacular growth of state power occurred only with the Civil War and afterward, the most profound effects upon collective memory and notions of collective injustice were the result initially of economic developments.

Stated in a highly schematic way, the close collaboration between science, industry, and the state, which began in the seventeenth century, was perfected by the end of the nineteenth. It resulted in forms of power which produced a series of technological revolutions that dramatically altered the human capacity for collective memory. The system of production drew men, women, and children from the countryside and gathered them into cities of strangers; old skills and crafts had to be forgotten and new ones acquired; the rhythms of the factory replaced those of the natural seasons; tradition and custom as arbiters of existence gave way to rational calculation of utility. The pace of change grew ever more intense, and survival came to depend upon rapid adaptation. Those who traveled fastest and farthest were those who traveled with the least baggage inherited from the past. Memory was transformed into nostalgia, the longing for that which had once been but could be no more. Ronald Reagan would prove to be the consummate master of that genre. Stated differently, late modern economic development was on the way to accomplishing the social amnesia that the seventeenth-century contractualists had only glimpsed.

What does justice look like in the era of the political economy? The answer is that although for Locke and Hobbes justice meant first and foremost that political authority should protect each person in his or her rightful possessions, this is no longer a primary concern. Instead, the principal preoccupation of the state is to protect and nurture the economy. This takes the form of policies for money supply and credit,

taxation, investment, and trade. Justice means guarding that which forms the basis of national power, security, and prosperity.

But in the political economy justice has also come to mean distributive justice. Distributive justice is most commonly associated with various programs designed to assist individuals who are unemployed, disabled, retired, or prevented from working by virtue of parental responsibilities. The political economy mentality sees the problem of distributive justice in terms of payments derived from the incomes of those who work and transferred to those who mostly do not. The currently favored rationale for distributive justice is supplied by John Rawls: "The higher expectations of those better situated are just if and only if they work as part of a scheme which improves the expectations of the least advantaged members of society."<sup>17</sup>

Distributive justice owes less perhaps to principles of justice than it does to the workings of the political economy. The need for distributive justice arises not because the system, or some agent of it, behaves aberrantly and departs from accepted norms. The ills that distributive justice seeks to remedy are the result of the normal operation of a healthy political economy. No one predicts that full employment will be achieved, for in the normal workings of the American political economy a superfluous population is produced. The reasons for this are numerous and complex, as are the forms of unemployment. But the fact of at least fifteen million unemployed is not disputable. Nor is the fact that in certain sectors of the population the cycle of unemployment thus far resists solution. The significance of this is that the old contractualist understanding of membership has tacitly been redefined. To be a member or citizen in the political economy is to be employed. To be unemployed is to be in the political economy but not of it; it is to be denied participation in the central civic activity.

Thus, membership in the political economy is constantly in jeopardy. Technological innovation is continually rendering large numbers of citizens obsolescent and superfluous—noncitizens, in effect. Further, recurrent cycles of recession, depression, and recovery introduce an uncertainty into the notion of citizenship that was unknown to the contractualist. By the contractualist's terms, "once a citizen, always a citizen"; but in the political economy, full citizenship is a temporary state of affairs because the economy is in the business of periodically producing and reproducing noncitizens.

The political economy does commit acts of injustice, but there seems to be no conception of collective injustice of the kind we saw in mnemonic societies. This is most poignantly evident in the case of factory closures and relocations. A worker may have invested much of his adult life in a particular job and in a particular community. Even

the most modest conception of justice might seem forced to acknowledge that he has earned a claim, but that claim is overridden by political economy's version of "reason of state," namely, that in the interests of efficiency a firm is justified in closing down a plant and relocating it or eliminating it altogether. At the same time, there is mirrored in this controversy a vision of the good citizen in the political economy: he or she is one who is mobile, who is willing to tear up all roots and follow the promptings of the job market. What is being denied is the narrative structure of justice: the worker had come to possess a claim to a way of life which he had helped to found and nurture over time and perhaps even over generations. That claim thus has a story. It is, however, denied, not by a counternarrative but by a demonstration of the costs and benefits involved in the decision to relocate.

In a political economy justice is replaced by a concern for social discipline.<sup>18</sup> This is natural, because the political economy produces a surplus population of economically useless people; however, under the notions of electoral democracy inherited by the political economy there is always the danger that the poor might mobilize politically and use their ballots to extract benefits that might endanger the economic priorities of a society threatened by fierce competition from abroad. Disciplining the poor becomes a major function in the political economy, and social theorists respond obligingly by rediscovering the need for strong authority. According to one recent writer, government needs "to set norms for the public functioning of citizens," because previous social programs for the "disadvantaged and unemployed" have not been sufficiently "authoritative." The poor, he continues, lack a proper sense of social obligations, preferring handouts rather than work, and so "they must be made less free in certain senses rather than more." A "paternalist kind of program" should be used to force them into "'dirty' low wage jobs" rather than allowing them to follow their "self-interest," and "employment must become a duty, enforced by public authority."<sup>19</sup>

If a political economy signifies that notions of political community and collective memory have been rendered anachronistic, it may well be the case that we are entering an era in which justice no longer figures as the main category of collective existence. Perhaps accident and risk are the proper terms for analyzing existence in the post-mnemonic polity. Perhaps insurance is, as the eminent legal theorist Ronald Dworkin has already suggested, the appropriate substitute, distributing risks rather than justice. It would be appropriate because collective wrongs are not so much perpetrated as inherent in the system, or represented as such. Pollution, toxic wastes, choosing low inflation over employment, making education a scarce value, and a score of other



problems testify, however, that wrongs exist in abundance and that many of them have aroused widespread indignation. One can even say that numerous publics have emerged in response to these wrongs. Publics do not, unfortunately, a collectivity make; they do, however, point in the right direction, that of the need to subordinate economy to polity.

### Three / Elitism and the Rage against Postmodernity

At a time when professors of literature find "politics" abounding in the most obscure seventeenth-century poems and assume without argument that politics existing outside texts can nonetheless be read as though it is a text, it is difficult to gain a hearing to protest that some matters really *are* political and others not, and that if the distinction is systematically neglected it is possible to trivialize politics even beyond the dreams of media advisers and political consultants.

Education is one of those truly political matters and has been recognized as such for a long time. Since antiquity many philosophers, including twentieth-century figures such as James, Dewey, Whitehead, and Russell, have insisted that the level of public life and the wisdom of public actions depend primarily upon the quality of education in society and its ready availability. Most of them defined education as a principal, even *the* principal, public responsibility.

The connection between education and politics has seemed of special importance to political societies that think of themselves as democratic or liberal. For more than two centuries, countless commentators have pointed out that education was *the* necessary condition for the intelligent practice of self-government and for the exercise and defense