

Rebellious Citizens: 800 Years of Citizen Politics

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Why do we remember, misremember, or choose to unremember historical anniversaries? It is always because of our concerns in the present. To the government, the commemoration of the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta has been part of a campaign to promote the unifying and socially cohesive force of ‘British values’. Meanwhile, debates about the future of the Union and the very real possibility of Scottish independence have influenced contemporary analysis of Magna Carta, particularly given the results of the General Election in May 2015. And it has been torturous at times to see English politicians from both the left and the right try to shore up the Britishness of the charter and its relevance to the Scots and Welsh. To political commentators on the left and right, Magna Carta has had a mixed reception. On the left, perhaps no one has been more trenchant in his criticism of the adulation of Magna Carta than Owen Jones. Writing last year in the Guardian, he argued that the Great Charter ‘meant diddly squat to average English subjects, most of whom were serfs’. To Jones, the charter smacked of privilege and elitism; it was written in Latin, for goodness’ sake, and the king’s opponents were members of the aristocracy. Writing in the Daily Telegraph, Daniel Hannan responded to Jones’s article and took comfort in that hoary old myth of English exceptionalism: ‘In placing the law above the government, it established, in a written, contractual form, the precept that was to lift us above the run of nations.’ In a more recent article that appeared in the Wall Street Journal, Hannan proposed a neo-liberal reading of Magna Carta that he thought would speak easily to his American readership. Since several of the clauses of the Great Charter sought to defend the property interests of landowners, free from the intervention of the king and his officers, Hannan argued that Magna Carta

championed the privatisation of property rights: the sanctity and security of individual property ownership as the foundation of personal liberty.

And yet, beyond the power of the present to determine historical interpretation, there is something particular about Magna Carta that is sometimes forgotten and that has helped to make it the object of such fiercely opposed interpretations today. From the very moment of its creation, the Great Charter had different, antagonistic meanings. To start with, Magna Carta was an anti-royal document. The concessions contained in the 1215 charter were forced out of King John. He did not grant them willingly. He did so because he had no choice. A group of rebellious barons, including several from the north of England, took up arms against the king. They waged war. In the middle of May 1215 the barons captured the capital, London. A month later, the king applied his seal to the charter: Magna Carta. But within a few months of agreeing to the terms of the charter, the king declared it illegal and gained the support of the pope, who annulled it on the grounds that the king had sealed the charter against his will. War started again. But King John died in 1216, at which point the advisers of his young son and heir, Henry III, the new king, took the brilliant decision to reissue the charter in Henry III's name, with some of the really contentious clauses of the 1215 charter omitted. This is the charter that we have in Durham and that we are showing at the exhibition. The 1216 charter was published again in 1217 and in 1225, each time with slight changes. The key point is that Magna Carta was adopted by the crown; it was appropriated; what was originally an expression of resistance to authority became a piece of royal propaganda, disseminated in the name and interests of authority. The instability of meaning that surrounds Magna Carta today is a reflection of the inherently unstable character of the Great Charter; there is not one Magna Carta, but many. Magna Carta remains a

rallying-cry for individuals and groups of people demanding rights as ‘citizens’ today. And yet, it is perfectly possible for the Queen to be present, as she was on 15 June 2015, at the celebrations at Runnymede in Surrey to mark the anniversary of the charter, and to witness there the unveiling of a ten feet high statue of herself. There is also now a plaque, which reads, interestingly: ‘On this spot in this historic meadow of Runnymede, her Majesty the Queen celebrated 800 years of Magna Carta, together with her subjects and international guests.’ I shall come back to the word ‘subjects’ in a few moments. I like to think that the reinvention of Magna Carta began with the Durham Magna Carta of 1216.

My lecture this evening has four parts. First, I will look briefly at Magna Carta and set out an approach to the charter, which has shaped the design of the exhibition that you will have the opportunity to see later. Secondly, I shall make a connection between Magna Carta and the concept of citizenship, and I am going to spend a bit of time talking about how I conceive citizenship and why, I think, it has always been associated with – indeed, it has been a major cause of – resistance to authority. Thirdly, I will explore Magna Carta’s relevance in the period 1250 to 1500, which happens to be my own area of research interest, but which is also often neglected in the study of the charter. And finally, I will trace the story of citizen politics in the modern period and bring the narrative up to the present day.

So, how should we think about Magna Carta? What is its relevance to the theme of my lecture: citizen politics? Magna Carta has nothing to say about democracy or about parliament, but we certainly could consider the charter through a ‘constitutional’ lens. We could use it to provide an account of the emergence of parliament and the history of parliamentary democracy, for the 1215 charter did affirm that taxation could be levied only after common consent; and that consent

would eventually, over the course of the thirteenth century, be given in parliament. On the other hand, we could focus upon the ‘legal’ meaning of Magna Carta. Previously the king had been able to rule as he wished; he could make things up as he went along and exercise his will through the royal prerogative. Now, the king was subject to the law of the land: the charter itself was the law that the king could not break. A commission of 25 barons was appointed to ensure that the terms of the charter were enforced. So, we can talk about Magna Carta in relation to a vitally important principle of government: the rule of law.

But Magna Carta was about politics and conflict, not just law and the constitution. It was the consequence of rebellion. And it is when we think about the relationship between Magna Carta and protest that things start to get interesting. The unusual aspect to the rebellion that preceded and followed the 1215 Magna Carta is that the rebels had a written programme, a manifesto. There had never before been a revolt like this in English history. Instead of just trying to get rid of the king, in favour of someone else, who had a claim to the throne, the barons said: okay, you can still be the monarch, but you can only remain in power if you agree to certain conditions. The rebellious barons drew up their own demands in a document known as the ‘Articles of the Barons’. The rebels then sat down and negotiated with King John. In the act of asserting and securing rights, of holding government to account, the barons were acting not as subjects, but as citizens. They did not believe that they should passively owe the duty of obedience to the ruler; they demanded better government. There was a distinction between ‘citizen’ and ‘subject’. And, in making the step from subject to citizen, the barons of 1215 also crossed the line between loyalty and disobedience.

But I need to say more about citizenship. This is the second section of my lecture. What is citizenship? The last twenty to thirty years have seen repeated ‘crises

of citizenship'. Current debates about citizenship have been animated by the global economic recession brought about by the financial crisis of 2008. There has been a belief that the promotion of an active notion of citizenship might tackle the conditions of political alienation, economic insecurity and social polarisation that exist in many parts of the world. But go back to the turn of the century, at the millennium, and there were initiatives such as the American Democracy Project or Canada's 'Citizenship Education' programme, which were prompted by similar fears about the consequences of declining participation in elections and apathy towards politics among young people. The rationale behind these various enterprises was the desire to transform young people into good citizens. To be a good citizen was to be politically engaged. Let's go further back, and turn to Britain. In 1988 an all-party parliamentary Commission on Citizenship was established, the patron of which was the then Speaker of the House of Commons, the Right Honourable Bernard Weatherill MP. The commission produced a report in 1990, entitled *Encouraging Citizenship*, the premise of which was that 'young people' should 'learn how to be good citizens'. To be a good citizen was to embody an ethos of 'Active Citizenship', and active citizenship meant the ability of citizens to 'participate fully and effectively in society'. What was the aim of all of this participation? To be a good citizen was to do your bit to help your community. People were not naturally disposed towards the pursuit of the common good. They had to be educated. Citizenship, wrote the Speaker of the House of Commons, 'like anything else, has to be learned'. The place of learning was, primarily, the classroom. Citizenship has been taught in English schools in the state sector since 1990 and as a compulsory element of the National Curriculum since 2002. How you teach citizenship has been an endless source of disquiet among school teachers. Do you have special citizenship classes? Or do you teach it across the

curriculum, through other subjects? I wonder whether citizenship has proved so difficult to teach because no one is quite sure what it means. And, for good reason.

The idea behind the exhibition is that citizenship has never had a single meaning. Does it relate principally to rights? And, if so, what kinds of rights? What, in fact, do we mean by rights? Are rights special privileges, to which some are privy, but from which others are exempt? Or should we approach rights as the freedom from constraint, the ability to act without the encroachment and intrusion of an external agency, such as the arbitrary power of government? In short, do we define rights positively or negatively? Are rights natural freedoms that belong to us by virtue of our humanity, as the radical political group, the Levellers, argued in the British Civil Wars of the 1640s in their *Agreement of the People*, when they spoke of ‘freeborn’ rights? Or are rights those that only governments can grant, often reluctantly and not without struggle, and rights, therefore, that governments can take away? Is citizenship something that is bestowed by the state? Can people enjoy freedoms knowing that they are at the mercy of those in power? The writers of the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 did not think so. Are rights universal – as in universal human rights – which belong equally to everybody? Or are they defined in territorial, mainly national, terms, pertaining solely to those who live in a particular community? If we move away from rights, is citizenship really about responsibilities and duties? Is there a balance, a *quid pro quo*, between freedoms and obligations? Or, like universal human rights, are rights to be held unconditionally? If we think, as the examples of initiatives from Britain, America and Canada suggest, that citizenship is essentially about popular engagement and activism, how do we square this with the obvious danger that participation can lead to the active questioning of authority? When

authority is challenged, when government is disobeyed, does the citizen stop being a good citizen?

The questions don't invite easy answers. And the fact that I have asked so many questions underline the ambiguity, tension, and divergence that lies at the heart of citizenship. The definition of citizenship also depends on one's perspective. It has meant different things to different people: in particular, it has meant different things to those in authority from those subject to authority. Its meaning has also changed over time. Moreover, the identity of the citizen is contested. In the past, as today, citizenship has included some people and excluded others. The question of who is a citizen – and who is not a citizen – is divisive and contentious. Therefore, to cut a long story short, to those who imagine that a renewed notion of citizenship can provide cohesion and consensus, it is worth reflecting upon the ways in which citizenship has been – and continues to be – a source of conflict and resistance. It has been a force for exclusion as well as inclusion, and popular empowerment and agency have not just encouraged participation, they have threatened stability and order.

Okay, so how can I make demonstrate, historically, the consequences of this contested nature of citizenship? Well, the exhibition presents an argument about the *Changing Face of Revolt*. What I want to do here is to explore the ideas and approaches behind the argument that you will see in the exhibition. The economist Guy Standing, who came to speak in Durham a few weeks ago, is the author of a thought-provoking book entitled *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (2014), in which he argues that what we are seeing all around the world today is the appearance of a new social class, the precariat, which is partly made up of members of the old working class, whose chief characteristic is their social and economic insecurity. They are denizens, not citizens. They are resident in different countries,

but they have no rights and no sense of belonging within those countries. The premise of Guy's book is that, if the precariat could have a charter, what would be in it? What sort of demands would they make against, and to, the state? In the opening pages of the book, Guy summarises the history of citizenship. He writes, 'The idea of citizenship goes back to ancient Greece. It made a stride forward in 1789 with the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, that stirring emancipatory call stemming from the Renaissance and its message of escape from a slavish "God's will". Henceforth a citizen was someone who had *rights*.' I find this telescopic sense of history deeply problematic. First, there is the assumption that we must understand citizenship solely through a classical lens. Secondly, there is the ignorance of the Middle Ages, written off as a kind of intellectual dark ages, which had to be rescued from its irrationality and superstition by the Enlightenment.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle believed that the active contribution of the citizen to the political life of the city-state was imperative to the realisation of the 'good life' and to the achievement of human happiness. In chapter one of book three of his *Politics* he defined the citizen as the person who had access to office. It was what separated the citizen from the non-citizen. The citizen's 'special characteristic', wrote Aristotle, 'is that he shares in the administration of justice, and in offices'. He could be both judge and legislator; he could attend the assembly or occupy a seat on the council. The duty to hold office could and did fall on any citizen; he had no choice. The principle of equality supported the rotation of office. Citizens took it in turns sometimes to be rulers and sometimes to be ruled. Politics was not about representation, it meant direct participation. Writing much later, the Roman philosopher and politician Cicero similarly praised the ideal of the active, participatory and articulate citizen in his treatise *De Officiis* ('On Duties').

It would appear to be impossible for historians to write about citizenship without mention of the city states of ancient Greece or the Roman republic. Historians of early modern England have written extensively upon the implications of the English Renaissance: the rediscovery and translation of Greek and Latin texts into English, and the study of Greek and Latin in the classically-inspired curriculum of the newly-established grammar schools of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Historians have paid attention to the ways in which the urban world of ancient Greece and Rome was adapted and translated to a different setting: that of a kingdom. And what scholars have shown is that citizenship could be a prop to monarchy. Despite its classical roots, it did not have to be anti-monarchical. Education in classical humanism encouraged members of England's social and political elite in Tudor and Stuart England to see themselves as virtuous citizens, who were committed to public service and who were able to deploy their training in rhetoric and eloquence on behalf of the commonwealth and in the interests of monarchy.

I have two problems with this approach to citizenship, which privileges a learned and humanist model of citizenship. First, it was available only to the few: an elite preoccupation confined to those who attended grammar schools and who had access to Latin and Greek. Secondly, it imagines citizenship – like governments and political think tanks over the last twenty or thirty years – as though it was something that had to be learned. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that meant the study of formal expressions of political thought by authors such as Aristotle and Cicero. But the English Renaissance, which rediscovered the rhetorical treatises and philosophical texts of ancient Greece and Rome, did not give birth (rebirth?) to citizenship.

We need a different approach to citizenship. My approach is to examine the ways in which ideas about citizenship were worked out, debated, and fought over

through social and political practice. People did not learn to be citizens through their reading of classically-based texts, they became citizens at first hand, through an *experiential* mode of citizenship. And evidence of this ‘vernacular’ (indigenous) citizenship can be found in the Middle Ages.

In the late 1980s the historian Patrick Collinson described the inhabitants of Elizabethan England (1558-1603) as ‘citizens ... concealed within subjects’. The English kingdom in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, he wrote, was a ‘monarchical republic’. ‘Elizabethan England’, according to Collinson, ‘was a republic which happened also to be a monarchy: or vice versa’. People were subjects in the sense that there was a monarch, and that monarch was divinely appointed, and the monarch and crown officers expected obedience and loyalty above all else. But people were also citizens. And he made this point by highlighting the quasi-republican elements of the political system in Elizabethan England. People of sometimes quite low social status served in local administration and held office; they shared in the government of their local communities. In the early modern period, people became citizens through their co-operation in the routine business of local government, from the parish to the village to the town to the county. They ruled themselves. Now, it is customary for medievalists to blame early modernists for never looking backwards and for assuming that history started again in 1500, but what is undisputable is that what Collinson said of the sixteenth century holds true of late medieval England, let’s say, the period after Magna Carta. As John Watts argued in a paper he gave in Durham a few weeks ago, ‘a conception akin to citizenship’ was forged in the period 1215 to 1500 through the practice of office-holding and a tradition of political participation. The lower orders were not just ruled by others; they were present at, and involved in, their own

governance. They had agency as constables of the peace, tax collectors, jurors, etc. They were, as John said, somewhere between subjects and citizens.

Citizenship was generated, then, through engagement and association at the local level. But a sense of citizenship was also generated through struggle and dispute. When I speak of the *experience* of citizenship, what made ordinary people really feel that they were citizens was their involvement in individual and collective acts of resistance and opposition. Why do I say this? Because these power struggles revolved around what it meant to be a member of a community. And what drove these power struggles was the assertion of rights. While classical authors on citizenship spoke more readily about duties, in practice, citizens preferred to think of rights. Political participation was not – is not – the defining feature of citizenship. It was – and is – the claim to possess rights.

Where might we find evidence of struggle? The main gallery in the exhibition is constructed around a series of national conflicts: from Magna Carta, to the Wars of the Roses in the fifteenth century, to the British Civil Wars of the seventeenth century, to the Jacobite risings of the eighteenth century, to the Chartist movement of the nineteenth century. Here, in the third section of the lecture, I am going to focus on the period 1250 to 1500 and to talk about an element of citizen politics that is absent from the exhibition. In this period, and beyond, there were many different settings for citizenship. I want to suggest that it was primarily at the local level, through the more habitual and less dramatic power struggles about local rights, that ideas about citizenship took shape. And here, Magna Carta had a part to play. This perspective is useful, I hope, because the generally accepted narrative of Magna Carta is that it lost its political significance between the thirteenth century and the seventeenth century, when the charter was then rediscovered by opponents of the

Stuart kings James I and Charles I. This view holds only if we focus on national politics, and the disputes centred upon the crown and the exercise of royal authority.

I am going to give two examples, taken from different parts of the country. In the exhibition there is a time line showing the history of Magna Carta, from its creation in 1215, to the memory of the Great Charter in the seventeenth century, to the mythology surrounding the charter in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Next to it is a short piece of text entitled: 'Durham and Magna Carta'. There is a line that is deliberately separated from the rest of the writing: it reads 'But Durham was different'. This is not just a statement of local patriotism, but an acknowledgement that Durham, in the Middle Ages, was very different from the rest of England. It was ruled not by the king, who resided at Westminster, but by the bishop of Durham, whose main residence, from the thirteenth century, was Auckland Palace. Durham was pretty much autonomous. The city of Durham was part of the palatinate of Durham, which stretched between the rivers Tees and Tyne, and citizens of Durham city were expected to swear an oath of obedience to the bishop, whose jurisdiction over the whole of County Durham they were to support and uphold. The people who lived in this area, between Tyne and Tees, were called the *Haliwerfolc*: an Old English word meaning 'the people of the saint', the saint being, of course, Saint Cuthbert. The word *Haliwerfolc* also referred to the geographical area between Tyne and Tees: both the people and the place were under the saint's special protection. But Saint Cuthbert, though he could be a vengeful saint in defence of the independence of the bishop's subjects (the king's tax collectors who came north were quickly turned away thanks to Cuthbert), was more problematic and, perhaps, less useful, in conflicts between the people of the local area and the bishop, for the bishop was also the heir to Saint Cuthbert, the founder of the church of Durham. In Durham, the bishop's

subjects had their own charter from the crown, which they viewed as their own Magna Carta. And they made a connection between *their* Magna Carta and *the* Magna Carta, a connection that legitimised their own collective claims and rights within the palatinate of Durham against the bishop of Durham. In 1208, when the see of Durham became vacant, on the death of Bishop Philip of Poitou, the ‘knights and free tenants of Haliwarefolc’ obtained a charter from King John which granted them various legal privileges, including the right to trial by a sworn jury drawn from the local inhabitants. The charter was later remembered as a charter for ‘the community of the liberty of St Cuthbert’ and, in the early fourteenth century, Ralph Lord Neville of Brancepeth and Raby, one of the leading figures in a dispute between that community and Bishop Antony Bek, had a copy. In the 1430s, when the bishop’s subjects were at loggerheads with Bishop Thomas Langley, the charter was recalled again. The charter was revered by the local community in the fifteenth century and was copied and enrolled in one of the cartularies (collections of charters) of Durham cathedral priory. Here, significantly, in the records of the priory, the charter was followed immediately by a copy of Magna Carta, the charter with which it was so closely associated in the minds of local people. The 1208 charter predated, but derived its legitimacy from attachment to, the Great Charter.

My second example is London, where the citizens also looked to Magna Carta to buttress their rights in their periodic struggles against the mayor of London.

London, like Durham, had its own version of Magna Carta. The ‘great charter of the city’, as it was known, dated not from 1215 but from 1319, and was issued by King Edward II. The ‘charter’ consisted of articles for the annual election and rotation of mayors and aldermen, and enshrined the principle of common consent to civic taxation. London’s Magna Carta was venerated and reimagined by later generations of

London citizens as a document championing the rights of ordinary freemen against the tyrannical leanings of civic government. A grocer William Cottisbrook was said in October 1443 to have carried ‘with him’ around the streets of London the ‘great charter’, with which he rebuked the mayor and aldermen for their misgovernment of the city. And the intensity of popular attachment to the city’s Magna Carta did not diminish. In 1517, in an otherwise unremarkable micro-struggle about a piece of property – a bench no less – in a London parish, a couple of the parishioners justified their opposition to the demands of the mayor and aldermen to remove the bench upon the contents of the 1319 charter. The chamberlain’s officer who had been sent to speak to the disobedient parishioners was given a simple message to relay to his political masters by a haberdasher: ‘the Chamberleyn & the mayr & his brethren marred [i.e. destroyed] all & lost the liberties ffor ther ys a poynt in the Chartre that ther shall no thing be made within the Citie to the noysaunce [i.e. nuisance] of the Comminalte’. There was no such point in the 1319 charter; but the haberdasher’s words expressed a widespread sentiment that the document was a bulwark of the liberties of the citizen against oppressive rule. The messenger queried this reading of the charter, but this provoked a swift and scornful retort from an apothecary who claimed both knowledge and understanding of the manuscript: ‘What spekest thou of the Chartre I can Shewe euery article in the Chartre with a wete ffynger & can tell what yt menyth aswell as the mayr & all thaldremen’. The citizen would not stand to be corrected in his interpretation by an emissary of the mayor and aldermen. So, in these local struggles, in County Durham and in London, we can discern a charter consciousness and a prickly and aggressive awareness of popular rights that stretched far down the social ladder. To be a citizen was to be the opposite of orderly, obedient and passive. And I wonder whether it was in such conflicts that the memory of Magna

Carta – in its first incarnation as a rebel manifesto – was sustained and kept alive, through association and emulation, among different groups of citizens and within different communities.

In the last section of the lecture, I want to take the story of citizen politics up to the present day. Is it possible to provide a broad overview of the period from 1800? Some have thought so. One of the most influential accounts of citizenship is that of T.H. Marshall, a sociologist at the London School of Economics, whose *Citizenship and Social Class* was published in 1950, in the years that saw the establishment of the modern welfare state under the Labour leader, Clement Attlee. Marshall was interested in the development of ‘national’ citizenship, that is, citizenship linked to the nation state. And he divided the concept of citizenship into three parts: ‘civil’ citizenship, ‘the rights necessary for individual freedom – liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith’; ‘political’ citizenship, ‘the right to participate in the exercise of political power’, such as the right to vote; and ‘social’ citizenship, ‘the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security’. Marshall coupled the different forms of citizenship to successive historical periods and, importantly, argued that in these distinct periods the struggles to achieve particular rights (civil, political, social) were won. The long eighteenth century, from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to the Great Reform Act of 1832, was the time when civil rights, including religious freedom, were achieved. From 1832 to the Representation of the People Act of 1918 political rights were gained, including the extension of the franchise to women. Social and educational rights were acquired with the post-war welfare state.

There is an appealing quality to this notion of evolutionary change, in which an ever growing number of citizens, irrespective of social status, or gender, secured new rights. In the main gallery of the exhibition, there is a similarly broad narrative

arc. Over time, citizenship encompassed ordinary people as well as the aristocracy, and non-elites successfully demanded greater political rights. Yet the history of citizenship is much more complicated and more contentious than Marshall's model of citizenship might suggest. Because what we also demonstrate in the exhibition is that if citizenship does mean membership of a community – and I think that it does – community has been, and remains, one of those superficially beguiling and attractive words which, in truth, and on closer inspection, excludes as much as it includes. In other words, there are people who stand outside the community, who don't have rights. We can speak of the invention of a sense of British identity and of British citizenship from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The Act of Union of 1707 united the parliaments of Scotland and England, under a single, Protestant ruler. Britishness, as Linda Colley argued, was constructed on the back of a profoundly and energetically Protestant religious faith. But, in the process, British Catholics, including those supporters of the deposed Stuart kings known as Jacobites, were denied what we might think of as basic rights of citizenship. We tell their story in the main gallery of the exhibition.

This polarised character of citizenship – at once inclusive and exclusive – marks citizenship today. Who is a citizen? Are we citizens by virtue of our passport, or is citizenship less about nationality than residence? The concept remains, as ever, not just ambiguous, but contested. At the end of the Middle Ages, in the early sixteenth century, the rulers of English towns and cities began to speak explicitly of 'good citizens': townspeople who did as they were told, who were obedient in word and deed, who did not speak or act out of line, who were compliant rather than questioning. But if there could be 'good' citizens, presumably there could be 'bad' citizens. And whether they were good or bad depends upon whether we think that a

good citizen is always an obedient citizen. And isn't this still true today? Chelsea Manning, formerly Bradley Manning, the US soldier who leaked confidential military information from the United States government onto the internet in 2010, wrote a recent article in a British newspaper, published in May 2015. Under the headline, 'We're citizens, not subjects. We have the right to criticize government without fear', Manning defended his disclosures on the grounds that, 'when the public lacks even the most fundamental access to what its governments and militaries are doing in their names, then they cease to be involved in the act of citizenship.' 'There is a bright distinction', Manning maintained, 'between citizens, who have rights and privileges protected by the state, and subjects, who are under the complete control and authority of the state.' Yet Manning was condemned by the American government nonetheless as a traitor and his activities deemed un-American.

What does citizen politics look like in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

What we have seen over the last five years, in protests across the world, is a pattern of street politics, examples of which – from the Arab Spring between 2010 and 2011, to the 'Occupy Movement' in Washington DC, Boston and New York in 2011, to the Occupy London camp outside St Paul's Cathedral in 2012, to the ongoing *indignados* movement in Spain that started in 2011 – you will see in the last gallery of the exhibition. In the Middle East, the authorities tended to view the large gatherings of people as armed insurrections which had to be confronted and put down by force, rather than as legitimate protests and a public means of holding to account rulers who were perceived to be corrupt and authoritarian. But everywhere, governments and sections of the media have worked to undermine street protests and to present them as potential or actual riots: spontaneous, violent and destructive, without purpose, goal, without legitimacy. But the occupation of public spaces is a feature of citizen politics

that goes all the way back to the Middle Ages, when people assembled in marketplaces and city streets to register their grievances and to make their demands before, and against, those in authority. And then, just as now, there were voices that denounced and discredited the actions of the participants. In remembering that these forms of collective action have an ancient lineage of their own, and an equally long history of official suspicion and opposition, we are reminded, once more, that the definition of citizenship has always been in the eye of the beholder.