After Nationalism

After Nationalism

Being American in an Age of Division

Samuel Goldman

PENN

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS

PHILADELPHIA

Published by
University of Pennsylvania Press
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-4112
www.upenn.edu/pennpress

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Goldman, Samuel, author.
Title: After nationalism : being American in an age of division / Samuel Goldman.
Description: 1st edition. | Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, [2021] | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020043577 | ISBN 9780812251647 (hardcover)
Subjects: LCSH: Nationalism—United States. | National characteristics, American. | Cultural pluralism—United States. | United States—Civilization—1970–
Classification: LCC E169.1 .G633 2021 | DDC 320.540973—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020043577

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

1. The New English Covenant 14

2. Broken Crucible 40

3. A Warlike Creed 63

4. Memory, Nostalgia, Narrative 95

5. After Nationalism 117

Notes 129

Index 143

Acknowledgments 147

After Nationalism

Introduction

The traditional, although not official, motto of the United States is *E pluribus unum*—From Many, One. Suggested by the French designer Pierre Eugène du Simitière, the phrase seems to be derived from the Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero. In his treatise *On Duties*, Cicero writes that "when men have similar pursuits and inclinations, it comes about that each one is as much delighted with the other as he is with himself: the result is what Pythagoras wanted in friendship, that several be united into one."[1]

In Simitière's original proposal for the Great Seal of the United States, the motto refers clearly to the thirteen states, whose initials are included in the design. Since 1776, though, it has taken on a life of its own. We no longer think of the motto as describing the amalgamation of previously separate political entities. Instead, we believe it refers to the creation of a single people from many origins.

It is tempting to imagine that Americans have always thought this way. Yet our history is characterized by bitter debate about the proper relation between diversity and unity. We do not only disagree about how much *pluribus* is compatible with republican government; we also disagree about what kind of *unum* we should become.

Covenant. Creed. Crucible. These are recurring symbols by which Americans have tried to make sense of our differences—and our similarities. The first presents Americans as an essentially Anglo-Protestant people. Inspired by the Hebrew Bible, it places our beginnings in a special relationship between the English settlers of the Atlantic Coast and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

If the covenant emphasizes religion, the creed focuses on political philosophy. Here, America is defined by fundamental principles. Above all, it champions the equal individual rights proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence. America is defined less by who lives here than by the correspondence between its institutions and these universal ideals.

The crucible perspective accepts more conventional standards of nationality but projects them into the future. Americans might not yet be a cohesive people like the English, Germans, or French. Through an ongoing process of mixing, however, we could one day achieve a comparable level of incorporation. American life, on this account, is a simmering melting pot in which ethnic and cultural particularities are boiled down into a consistent alloy.

These images of unity recur throughout the American political tradition. In *Federalist* No. 2, Publius—in this case, diplomat and jurist John Jay—asserts that "Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs."[2] According to Publius, it is not enough that "we, the people" are subject to

the same government. We must be an integral community knit together by faith, descent, and tradition.

Frederick Douglass did not agree. Writing after the Civil War, Douglass promoted a creedal perspective. European nations, he argued, were characterized by the homogeneity Publius described. By contrast, America's "people defy all the ethnological and logical classifications."[3] For Douglass, the variety of the American population was not a weakness to be lamented or an obstacle to be overcome. It was an asset that would secure American greatness in the future.

If Publius suggested that plurality of factions and interests had to be constrained by unity of ethnicity and culture, Douglass contended that unity of principle could accommodate a wide range of backgrounds and identities. Ralph Waldo Emerson found the meaning of America somewhere in between these poles. Like Douglass, he celebrated the variety of people who made their homes within the United States. More like Publius, though, he dreamed that these strands would eventually be woven into a seamless national fabric comparable to those of the Old World. "In this continent," Emerson wrote, "the energy of Irish, Germans, Swedes, Poles, and Cossacks, and all the European tribes—of the Africans and of the Polynesians—will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature, which will be as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting-pot of the Dark Ages."[4]

Although they have found advocates at all periods of American history, these perspectives also follow a certain chronological pattern. Covenantal ideas were central to the American Revolution and early republic. Particularly in

New England, they supported an understanding of Americans as the new chosen people, modern counterparts to the biblical Israelites.

But this vision was too regionally and theologically limited to bind together a nation growing in population and geographic extent. The crucible emerged as a way of justifying and explaining mass immigration and territorial expansion. It broke down, though, as Americans came to believe that certain ethnic and cultural strands were too alien to blend into the national alloy. After the Civil War, many Americans abandoned dreams of amalgamation in favor of segregation and nativism.

In the ideological conflicts of the twentieth century, themes previously associated with the cause of racial equality were revived. Once feared as a threat to the union, a creed of equal rights became something like our official philosophy. Scholars found precedents for this creed in the words of great statesmen and thinkers. As an institutionalized consensus, however, it was a product of three world wars—two hot, one cold.

In the decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall, though, consensus has seemed dangerously absent. Our newspaper headlines, television chyrons, and social media feeds express deep anxiety that the fabric of our common life is coming apart. Did we ever share a stable vision of national character and purpose? Can we recover it? Those are the animating questions of this book.

* * *

Although it is largely an essay in cultural interpretation, this book is also an intervention in a very current debate.

A growing number of writers and activists make the case for a renewal of national solidarity. Mostly on the political right but also on the center-left, these figures contend that we have lost sight of the whole of the American people due to excessive concern with the interests of its parts. Whether they blame the group politics of multiculturalism or neoliberal individualism, the new nationalists argue that we should make America one again.

The impulses behind these arguments should not be dismissed as racism, xenophobia, or ignorance. Most scholars agree that democratic societies need some degree of agreement. In his 2004 book *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, political scientist Samuel Huntington worried that erosion of an Anglo-Protestant "core culture" might undermine constitutional government. Other analysts, such as Francis Fukuyama, reject Huntington's emphasis on a specific ethnoreligious configuration but posit that a shared ideology is necessary to the same purpose.

New nationalists have also developed powerful critiques of recent policies. Trade regimes that encourage the movement abroad of important industries, tax policies that reward financial speculation, and an arbitrary yet porous immigration system encourage the perception that an elite few benefit at the expense of many left behind. The success of anti-establishment politicians such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders is a warning sign that such grievances have become critical. Nationalists might develop some of the solutions.

Yet I am skeptical that we can restore a coherent and enduring sense of shared identity and purpose. First, I do not think it is our "normal" condition. American life was

no less polyglot in 1900 than it is today. At that time, Quebecois French was widely used in northern New England; a network of German-language schools, clubs, and newspapers flourished in the Midwest; and most cities contained Jewish ghettos, Chinatowns, or Little Italies, where Yiddish, Cantonese, or Neapolitan were heard more frequently than English.

The turn of the twentieth century was a historical high-point of immigration. But our politics were no less contentious in 1815, when New England politicians met to demand constitutional revisions to limit the power of western and southern states. Nor were they more morally admirable in 1877, when the end of military reconstruction enabled the systematic exclusion of African Americans from civil, economic, and political life.

Many of these tensions were eroded, if not eliminated, around the middle of the twentieth century. We tend to forget, however, just how much coercion was involved. The melting pot or crucible has been imagined as an automatic process involving intermarriage among ethnic groups, civic education, and voluntary cultural exchange. In many cases, however, "Americanization" took the form of official suppression, from compulsory public education intended to undermine Catholic schools to laws prohibiting teaching or publishing in German. It is a small but not irrelevant irony that hot dogs, now considered the most American of foods, had to be rebranded during the First World War to distance them from their origins as frankfurters or wieners.

It is theoretically possible to revive such policies—or adopt more rigorous ones common in other places and eras. Military conscription, standardization of education, and religious (or secular) establishments, among other

measures, have been successful in promoting national cohesion before and elsewhere. But the historical suspicion of centralized authority that is a longstanding feature of American politics and individualistic tendencies in American culture make it unlikely that they would be very popular here and now.

Nor is the implementation of strong nationalism likely to be found consistent with civil libertarian interpretations of the Constitution that have proliferated since the Second World War. Along with landmark decisions in cases like *West Virginia Board of Education* v. *Barnette*, which established that schoolchildren could refuse to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, wartime propaganda effectively and perhaps irrevocably promulgated the idea that the American system of government is defined by the preservation of individual rights.

Even if coercive nationalism were politically and legally viable, moreover, mandatory solidarity does not always succeed. In many cases, it encourages resistance from those whose identities, beliefs, or institutions are threatened. The breakdown of European attempts to enforce religious conformity, which played an important role in encouraging the settlement of North America, is a vivid example of this dynamic. So are modern separatist movements in Scotland, Catalonia, and Flanders, among other examples.

The disproportion between historical means and desired ends explains the distinctly rhetorical quality of the present nationalist revival. For the moment, one example will have to suffice. Soon after President Trump's inauguration, conservative journalists Ramesh Ponnuru and Rich Lowry published an essay titled "For Love of Country." It contains the following passage:

> The outlines of a benign nationalism are not hard to discern. It includes loyalty to one's country: a sense of belonging, allegiance, and gratitude to it. And this sense attaches to the country's people and culture, not just to its political institutions and laws. Such nationalism includes solidarity with one's countrymen, whose welfare comes before, albeit not to the complete exclusion of, that of foreigners. When this nationalism finds political expression, it supports a federal government that is jealous of its sovereignty, forthright and unapologetic about advancing its people's interests, and mindful of the need for national cohesion.[5]

At a sufficient degree of abstraction, it is hard to disagree with this account. There is a tradition of philosophical cosmopolitanism that stretches back to ancient Greece. But many scholars and practitioners of politics agree that nations are both a necessary vehicle for participatory government and a vital source of cultural inspiration. The world without countries that John Lennon famously imagined would not only be chaotic but also very boring.

The problem lies less in the concept of nationalism than in its content. Even if we agree that allegiance and solidarity are good, we often disagree about what they mean or what measures are appropriate to secure them. In his famous essay "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell identified the trouble with appealing to concepts rather than specific proposals, activities, or institutions: "The concrete melts into the abstract . . . prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of *phrases* tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house."[6]

The same tendency is present in the quoted passage from Ponnuru and Lowry. Rather than inviting definite responses, terms like *cohesion* evoke vaguely positive emotional associations. It is difficult to object to them because it is not clear what they mean.

One purpose of this book is to present some historically different ways such abstractions have been translated into details—and the tensions among them. A broader suggestion is that meaningful discussion is possible only at this level of specificity. But such discussions defy our hopes for consensus and stability. Like a world without countries, a benign, unchallenging nationalism that does not involve genuine moral and political dilemmas is an object of wishful thinking.

* * *

The revival of interest in nationalism is a response to the perception of crisis that has arisen over recent decades. Failed wars, legislative gridlock, and the rise in so-called deaths of despair encourage the belief that things simply cannot continue as they have done. As I write this, an almost biblical plague and iconoclastic movement against racism have gripped the nation. What are we to do in response to these and other challenges?

This is not a book of policy analysis—a genre to which academic humanists are ill-suited to contribute. In the final chapter, however, I suggest a general strategy for moving forward. Rather than trying to restore an elusive consensus, I propose that we strengthen institutions of contestation. Our problem, in other words, is not that we have forgotten how much Americans have in common, but that

we have undermined or abandoned structures and organizations that express and embody *disagreement*. Political parties, labor unions, and religious communities must be allowed to pursue their clashing views of public policy, economic issues, and the meaning of life. It is through their conflict that we will discover the terms on which we can live together.

An argument for disharmony and conflict may seem counterintuitive. If our problems include polarization, exploitation, and intolerance, shouldn't we seek more *unum*, less *pluribus*?

Not if uniformity in political agendas, economic assumptions, and moral perspectives is a cause of those problems rather than their solution. To the extent that nationalism involves centralization and homogenization, it can exacerbate the disorders it purports to solve. The erosion of institutions of disagreement doesn't make those disagreements go away. Rather, it removes the opportunity to channel those disagreements into compromises, while giving the losers a refuge from outcomes they cannot fully endorse. In this sense, organizational and communal autonomy are safety valves that help relieve the pressure of dispute on deeply controversial issues.

Moreover, smaller groups based on shared commitments are better suited to providing direction and order to the lives of specific persons. The scale of some modern states—certainly the United States—is simply too vast to permit the formulation and pursuit coherent purposes. As Catholic theologian Michael Novak once observed, that venerable phrase "the common good" conceals such a baffling variety of conflicting goals that it usually defies attempts at direct pursuit. It is better to approach national

politics as a tentative exercise in negotiation and compromise rather than as the formation of a community unified by faith, descent, or ideology.[7]

This pluralist perspective will not satisfy everyone. In particular, it may disappoint readers who believe that we possess a placid reservoir of national identity and purpose, waiting to be defended from its cultured despisers. The purpose of the historical analysis is to show that this is not the case. The covenant, crucible, and creed are all part of America, but none exhausts its past or prospects. On that, perhaps, we can learn to agree.

* * *

Like every work, this book is shaped by the personal commitments of its author. Because these commitments influence my choice of material and approach to analyzing it, two central ones should be explained.

First, I write as a *scholar*. This does not mean I claim omniscience or perfect neutrality, which belong to no human being. It means only that I have pursued and expressed the truth as best as I have been able to understand it. That includes cases in which my conclusions seem uncomfortable or inconvenient, even for my own presuppositions.

This conception of scholarship is the basis of my suspicion of myth. For millennia, theorists have argued that the survival of political communities depends on the promulgation of certain symbols, stories, or narratives that are useful, even though—or because—they are false. The most famous example is the so-called noble lie in Plato's *Republic*.

Under the influence of both Biblical theology and Enlightenment rationalism, Americans have often rejected

this instrumental approach to epistemology. Especially in the last half century, however, the erosion of those influences has encouraged a reevaluation of myth. This reevaluation is not limited to philosophical pragmatists or so-called postmodernists. A number of mainstream academics, dismayed by the erosion of the midcentury consensus, have argued that historians and other disciplinary experts should assume responsibility for shoring up the narratives of belonging. I discuss this trend in Chapter 4.

It is certainly true that societies generate shared myths, some of which I discuss in this book. It may also be true that they require them, although that is a hard proposition to test empirically. My assumption, however, is that it is not the task—or usually within the ability—of scholars to provide or sustain such narratives of belonging. In addition to considerations of intellectual probity, we are simply not very good at it. The language of myth comes naturally to poets, but college professors are rarely fluent. As a result, our carefully hedged professions of faith in ostensibly salutary opinions are not very convincing. By contrast, works of art like *Hamilton*, which could never survive peer review, can delight and inspire a large audience.

At the same time, I write as a *patriot*. In other words, I believe that this country is, if imperfect, worthy of loyalty, celebration, and, when necessary, defense. I also believe that citizens of the United States have obligations to each other that do not extend to members of other political communities.

I see no contradiction between these beliefs and the criticisms of nationalism that I develop in this book. It is worth noting that the term *patriotism* predates *nationalism* in the American lexicon. In fact, the latter was not

popularized until after the Civil War enforced the priority of national unity over the plurality of states.

The distinction between patriotism and nationalism can be polemical. Patriotism is thought to stand for a virtuous disposition, while nationalism designates nasty chauvinism and bigotry. This contrast often has a self-congratulatory aspect. Americans and our allies and admirers are patriots, while our rivals and critics are nationalists.

The frustrating reality is that our history contains examples of both admirable and deplorable attachment, whether described as patriotism, nationalism, or some other name. If there is a difference, it lies in whether one treats "we, the people" as generated and sustained by our interactions under specific institutions in a particular place, or bases the legitimacy of our institutions on an organic and previously existing community. It is a genuine insight of nationalist theorists that different peoples have different origins, histories, and needs. I leave to others, therefore, the question of whether there are nations for which the latter model is more accurate. At least for us, though, the former is closer to the truth.

CHAPTER 1

The New English Covenant

The Declaration of Independence begins with an assertion of national self-determination. The famous second paragraph emphasizes the rights of individuals, but the opening statement considers relations among nations. The "thirteen United States of America," the signatories insist, constitute "one people." As such, they are entitled to a "separate and equal station" among "the powers of the earth."

What are the defining features of this people? The Declaration does not say. A subsequent passage appeals to "our British brethren," suggesting an ancestral connection with the mother country. But the document gives few additional clues concerning their ethnic characteristics.

References to religion, another source of national identity, are equivocal. The statement of national autonomy is founded on a vaguely deistic appeal to "the laws of nature and nature's God." Subsequent passages invoke a more conventional deity: a "Creator" who is also "Supreme Judge of the World." There is no direct association, however, with the God of the Bible, let alone the person of Jesus.

Even the title of the new nation is vague. Unlike England or *Deutschland*, the United States does not derive its name from the people who live there. In the twentieth century, pluralist theorist Horace Kallen noted that "the United States of America" refers to an arrangement of political institutions—United States—in just one part of a larger continent. Canadians and Mexicans, after all, are also (North) Americans.[1]

Political reasons may have encouraged this "peculiar anonymity."[2] While the outcome of the Revolution remained uncertain, it would have been unwise to alienate potential supporters by defining the nation too narrowly. Many American patriots also entertained hopes that parts of Canada could be induced to join their cause. In fact, an invasion of Quebec was already under way when the Declaration of Independence was promulgated.

After the war, the task shifted from sustaining a military alliance to determining relations among now independent states. To make the case for a closer union than the wartime Articles of Confederation provided, some advocates of the Constitution appealed to preexisting homogeneity. In *Federalist* No. 2, John Jay presented an epitome of this argument. According to Jay, "Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs, and who, by their joint counsels, arms, and efforts, fighting side by side throughout a long and bloody war, have nobly established general liberty and independence."[3]

Jay was exaggerating the ethnic and cultural unity of the American population. To modern eyes, it is glaringly

obvious that he excluded people of African descent and Native Americans living under the jurisdiction of the United States. Even among whites, moreover, not all were descended from "the same ancestors." Jay's home state of New York, for example, included large Dutch and Huguenot populations. Some were members of his extended family.

But exaggeration is not fabrication. Sociologist Eric Kaufmann estimates that the citizen body was more than 60 percent English, almost 90 percent British, and 98 percent Protestant.[4] Proto-WASPs did not make up the whole of the American population. But they were politically and culturally dominant at the time of independence and for at least a century thereafter.

So was America essentially an Anglo-Protestant country? Some analysts argue that it was. According to political scientist Samuel Huntington, "Nation building in America differed from that in Europe, where political leaders created a state and then tried to create a nation out of the people they attempted to rule."[5] Instead, a community united by common descent "fought for and won their independence," then went to on to establish institutions to safeguard it. Legal scholar Sanford Levinson describes adherents of this view as "Federalist-2 Publians."[6] Moving from historical interpretation to cultural politics, Federalist-2 Publians believe continuing success of the United States requires the preservation of British, Christian traditions embraced by much of the white settler population in the eighteenth century.

Although it has become controversial, this argument cannot be entirely dismissed. What conservative theorist Russell Kirk called "British patrimony" remains important even for Americans who do not share British ancestry.[7] The

enduring influence of the original mother country is not limited to the English language. It also includes a voluntarist approach to religion, enthusiasm for commerce, and a history of participatory politics.

Yet projection of a coherent Anglo-Protestant identity onto colonial and early republican periods obscures important sources of variation and conflict. Historian David Hackett Fischer drew attention to intra-British sources of diversity in his classic study *Albion's Seed*. Tracing patterns of settlement, Fischer argued that early America was characterized by four distinct regional cultures: Puritans from southeast England who settled New England; Quakers from the Midlands who flocked to Pennsylvania and the Mid-Atlantic; the Anglican gentry that ruled the Tidewater South; and northern English and Scots-Irish "borderers" who populated the backcountry.[8]

Religious categories were also more fragmented than they appear in retrospect. Differences among Protestants were almost as deeply felt as those between Protestants and Catholics—or even between Christians and non-Christians. "Ties of blood, religion, and soil are not sufficient to hold us together as Americans, and they never have been," concludes historian Wilfred McClay. "We are forever in the business of making a workable unity out of our unruly plurality."[9]

The pattern of ideas and institutions that I place under the symbol of the covenant was one early project in the business of creating national unity. Emerging from New England, it ultimately sought to constitute all of America as an offshoot of the Puritan experience. Elements of this project survive in the celebration of Thanksgiving as a national holiday. When we commemorate the survival of

the *Mayflower* passengers, we symbolically place ourselves in that lineage.

But the religious, cultural, and political constraints of the New England covenant were already too narrow to define the newly independent people. They became even less fitting as that nation grew larger and more diverse. Initially a concrete program of government and culture, the New English covenant retreated through the nineteenth century into social snobbery and academic fixation. It is in these diminished forms that it survives today.

* * *

The case that early America was essentially Anglo-Protestant misses the extent of ethnic diversity even before the beginnings of mass European immigration in the 1840s. In addition to Native Americans, slaves, and free blacks, at least a third of the total white population was not of English descent. In some regions, English speakers were not even a majority. By 1751, Benjamin Franklin already wondered, "Why should *Pennsylvania*, founded by the *English*, become a Colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs."[10]

The number of non-Anglophones in Pennsylvania was unusual among the original thirteen colonies, although North Carolina also held large German and Swiss cohorts. But the predominance of British populations was no guarantee of cohesion. Reviewing the approaches to religion, family life, and social order that characterized different colonies, regions, and sects, libertarian scholar Charles Murray concludes that "the differences separating Yankees,

Quakers, Cavaliers, and Scots-Irish at the Founding were at least as many and as divisive as those that separate different ethnic groups in America today."[11]

Such distinctions were moderated by the passage of time, geographic distance from their British sources, and the shared struggle for independence. Even so, many observers of the American revolution doubted whether the several states belonged together as a single nation. In a popular 1781 pamphlet, the Welsh economist Josiah Tucker argued that "there is nothing in the Genius of the people, the Situation of their Country, or the nature of their different Climates, which tends to countenance such a Proposition." According to Tucker, "Every Prognostic that can be formed from a Contemplation of their mutual Antipathies, and clashing Interests, their Difference of Governments, Habitudes, and Manners,—plainly indicates, that the *Americans* will have *no Center of Union* among them, and *Common Interest* to pursue, when the Power and Government of *England* are finally removed."[12]

Looking backward, disagreements involving slavery seem fundamental. Knowing how the Civil War broke out, we are inclined to see tensions between the North and South as latent sources of disunion. In addition to academic discussions, this retrospective assessment features prominently in popular culture. The musical *1776* highlights friction between the South Carolina statesman Edward Rutledge, who objects to a clause criticizing the slave trade in drafts for the Declaration of Independence, and Massachusetts's John Adams, who supports it. The clause was eventually deleted, encouraging debates about the moral legitimacy of the Declaration that continue to this day.

In the early years of the United States, however, would-be national leaders were also concerned about relations between the old settlements along the Atlantic Seaboard and the western frontier. If Americans could claim to be a separate people from the British despite their many connections, westerners could do the same with regard to their eastern brethren. Thomas Jefferson worried that "if [Westerners] declare themselves a separate people, we are incapable of a single effort to retain them."[13] James Madison expressed the Virginia gentry's suspicion of backwoods folk, fearing that "the country beyond the mountains" would be filled by "white savages . . . more formidable than the tawny ones" already there.[14]

Along with continuing regional and religious variation, statements like these make it difficult to sustain the "Federalist-2 Publian" view of the Constitutional founding. Rather than a realistic account of who the American people actually were, Jay's statement is better understood as an argument about who they should be: a relatively homogeneous nation comparable to the great peoples of Europe. The New English covenant designates a version of this argument that stressed a strand of Christianity descended from Calvinism, relatively egalitarian social structure, and the political priority of the original states to the additions established in the West. Let us consider where it came from—and where it went.

* * *

Although it attracted adherents in different places, most advocates of covenantal accounts of American identity were from New England. A prosperous state with a mercantile

economy and powerful established church, Connecticut stood out as an early bastion of conservative nationalism. The centerpiece of this politics was a distinctive vision of the American future. Timothy Dwight, who would go on to serve as Yale University's president, outlined the goal in *Greenfield Hill*, an epic poem dedicated to John Adams:

> One blood, one kindred, reach from sea to sea;
> One language spread; one tide of manners run;
> One scheme of science, and of morals one;
> And, GOD's own Word the structure, and the base,
> One faith extend, one worship, and one praise.[15]

Like Jay, Dwight offered a strikingly homogenous account of national unity. Americans were not merely fellow citizens. They were "one blood, one kindred." Dwight also envisioned continuing territorial growth. At some point, the American nation would extend from one ocean to the other.

Yet the "much lov'd native land" Dwight presented as the source of American expansion was not New York, Pennsylvania, or Virginia—let alone California. It was "New Albion" of the northern Atlantic Coast.[16] Along with allies like Joel Barlow and Noah Webster, Dwight strove to establish New England as America's heartland, extending its distinctive manners, morals, and faith through the rest of the country. In order to do that, they had to reach into what was already the distant history of settlement.

The story begins in the 1610s when critics of the Church of England were subjected to increasing repression. Seeking a haven for true religion, Puritans and Separatists fled across the seas to the northern reaches of

Britain's American possessions. Between 1620 and 1640, they established settlements that became Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Propagated by what are still America's leading educational institutions, the New England origin myth has become so familiar that it is easy to forget how partial it is. In addition to ignoring non-British colonization of North America, which began more than a century earlier, it minimized the contributions of other Anglophone communities. In the New English covenant, America's decisive beginning was placed on the rocky shores of the North Atlantic rather than at Jamestown or St. Augustine. Alexis de Tocqueville, whose analysis of democracy was heavily influenced by New England informants, called Plymouth Rock America's "point of departure."[17]

Religious doctrine was essential to this interpretation of the national trajectory. In the Hebrew Bible, covenant designates God's relationship with the people of Israel, who became a chosen nation entitled to populate and rule a specific piece of territory. An analogy to the biblical exodus obsessed Puritan leaders in tense relations with the British Crown and Church of England. In "God's Promise to His Plantation," a sermon preached in 1630 upon the departure of a fleet bound for Massachusetts, minister John Cotton assured his audience that "what [God] hath planted he will maintaine, every plantation his right hand hath not planted shall be rooted up, but his own plantation shall prosper, & flourish."[18] As God had protected and guided the Hebrews, so would he do for New England.

A special relationship with the Lord was not unconditional. In exchange for God's favor, a chosen people had to demonstrate its worthiness by exemplifying virtue and

piety. This task was a central theme of John Winthrop's celebrated description of New England as a "city upon a hill" in "A Modell of Christian Charity," a sermon he composed at sea. Alluding to Jesus's Sermon on the Mount as well as the Hebrew prophets, Winthrop promised, "We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, may the Lord make it like that of New England."[19]

In the early twentieth century, German sociologist Max Weber developed an influential account of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. As a result, the Calvinists of New England have acquired a reputation for being obsessed with material prosperity. A favorable attitude toward commerce was certainly an aspect of New England culture. Yet this depiction obscures communitarian elements of Puritan thought. As novelist Marilynne Robinson has pointed out, Winthrop's emphasis in the "Modell" is on the mutual responsibility that bound together the new Israel. Rather than pursuing their own interests, its members were supposed to devote themselves to the common good in a spirit of Christian love.[20]

Participation in a covenant community was initially a matter of personal commitment. In order to join the church, prospective members had to describe a personal conversion experience to the satisfaction of ecclesiastical authorities. The goal was to ensure that the sacred community was composed only of "visible saints"—that is, true believers.[21]

Membership in the church was not only a matter of spiritual fulfilment, though. In early New England, it was also the basis for political participation. Church and state were theoretically separate. Yet only church members in

good standing were permitted to hold office or vote on shared decisions. Historian Mark Noll calls this pattern of overlapping religious and political institutions "Christian republicanism."[22]

Christian republicanism presumed a high degree of theological and social consensus. Always more ideal than reality, it began to break down in dramatic fashion within the first generation of settlement. The most famous of the dissenters whose teaching roiled New England was Roger Williams, who fled charges of sedition and heresy to found what became Rhode Island. Indeed, the conception of individual religious freedom now regarded as quintessentially American owes more to Williams's then-radical theories of toleration than to the Puritan covenant.

Many who remained in the original "plantations," meanwhile, proved unable to provide the testimony required for full membership in the community. Facing a crisis of commitment, some Puritan congregations adopted a policy known as the Halfway Covenant. Under this arrangement, descendants of church members enjoyed limited civic and religious rights even if they could not meet all the criteria for full participation.

While Puritan society was initially conceived as a voluntary association bound by faith, then, by its second generation it was being redefined as a community of blood. Like the Israel of the Bible, membership was transmitted by descent more than professed belief. New England had been imagined as a godly refuge from European corruption. Over time, it became more like the nations of the Old World.

The quasi-ethnic character of New England was enhanced by distinctive migration patterns. Unlike other regions of British North America, New England was largely

settled by intact families rather than by single men. The combination of demographic balance between the sexes with a harsh but salubrious climate encouraged a large native-born population. Rather than importing new members, New England reproduced itself. In fact, European immigration to the region almost entirely ceased after the conclusion of the "great migration" around 1640, recommencing only about two centuries later. As a result, the New England colonies were especially homogeneous, interrelated, and long-settled.

New Englanders were intensely proud of these distinctive features. In 1710, the minister Cotton Mather echoed Winthrop, describing New England as the *theopolis Americana*—the American "city of God." Over the course of the eighteenth century, though, economic, cultural, and political contacts encouraged a broader vision of collective purpose. The Seven Years' War, which was seen as pitting an ostensibly unified Anglo-Protestant people against Franco-Catholic tyranny, was a milestone in the emergence of a nationalized account of the covenant. Not only New England, but all the British colonies were part of a new chosen people in the Western hemisphere.

Descriptions of Americans as the modern elect continued during the War of Independence. From the pulpits and printing presses of Boston and New Haven, New England leaders argued that one people had providentially emerged from the old diversity of regions and colonies. The arguments varied in detail, but they converged around four major points.

The first element was a conception of the whole United States as a covenantal nation comparable to the biblical Hebrews. Recasting Puritan analogies, Yankee patriots

presented the thirteen states as counterparts to the tribes of Israel, destined for freedom in their own land. In a 1777 sermon titled "The American States Acting over the Part of the Children of Israel in the Wilderness," minister Nicholas Street argued the American states were comparable to the Hebrew tribes, wandering toward political unity and geographic security in their promised land. In 1785, Dwight published *The Conquest of Canaän*, an epic poem dedicated to George Washington, whom it characterized as a modern Joshua.

A second aspect of the covenantal vision was an affirmation of the religious guidance of national conduct. According to David Tappan, professor of theology at Harvard University, "Public worship of the deity, and stated instruction in religion and morality, appear as necessary and beneficial to the state, as they are to the souls of individuals."[23] In New England itself, the political centrality of religion meant established Congregational churches. In a national perspective, it promoted alliances between hierarchically organized denominations with institutional links to Britain, such as Episcopalians and Presbyterians.

Third, the New English vision of a well-ordered nation revolved around shared prosperity. In his 1785 *Sketches of American Policy*, Noah Webster insisted that "the great fundamental principle . . . by which alone the freedom of a nation can be rendered permanent, is an *equal distribution of property*. The reverse of this, an unequal distribution of lands, has been the cause of almost all the civil wars that have torn society in pieces, from the infancy of the Roman republic down to the revolution in England."[24] This egalitarian statement is limited to real estate, and thus compatible with unequal commercial fortunes. But Webster's

advocacy of an essentially middle-class political economy contrasted with the gentry model of Virginia and the frontier ethos of the West.

For reasons of both morality and political economy, finally, Yankee nationalists tended to oppose slavery. Human bondage was evil, to be sure. But it was also inefficient. In 1790, Dwight and other Connecticut leaders founded a Society for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Persons Holden in Bondage.[25] At the inaugural meeting, Jonathan Edwards Jr.—the son of New England's greatest theologian—preached that the "trade and the consequent slavery" were "contrary to every principle of justice and humanity, of the law of nature and of the law of God."[26]

These criteria converged in depictions of a unified, pious, egalitarian nation. In the Yankee Israel, one might:

> See the wide realm in equal shares possess'd! How few
> the rich, or poor! how many bless'd! O happy state!
> the state, by HEAVEN design'd . . .
> Where none are slaves, or lords; but all are men:
> No puisant drones purloin the earner's food;
> But each man's labour swells the common good.[27]

The aspiration to be God's modern chosen nation helps explain the ambiguous relation of the New English covenant to the Constitution. Before 1787, many New England statesmen agreed that a tighter frame of government was necessary to promote political and economic stability. Yet they were not entirely pleased with the result of the Philadelphia convention. Although ultimately a supporter, William Williams, a Connecticut minister and signer of the

Declaration of Independence, complained that the Constitution should have included "an explicit acknowledgement of the being of a God, his perfections, and his providence."[28]

In addition to its religious ambiguity, the Constitution oriented an already large federation toward rapid expansion. If not opposed to further settlement per se, New England critics worried that effective self-government required a relatively small citizen body constrained by shared faith and defined territory. The only person to sign the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution, Connecticut's Roger Sherman, warned that "each State like each individual has its peculiar habits, usages, and manners, which constitutes its happiness."[29] If improperly constructed, a national government could threaten the institutions and virtues that made New England special.

Promises that the first Congress would add a bill of rights that protected, among other liberties, the freedom of states to govern their own religious affairs helped smooth the way to ratification. Contrary to modern interpretations, the First Amendment was understood as protecting local religious establishments. More than revisions in law, though, international developments helped reconcile the New English covenant with the new Constitution. The French Revolution revived New England's old adversary in new and more alarming form. The response was not immediate; many New England clergymen and politicians were initially sympathetic to a political movement that apparently resembled their own. Faced with an increasingly vociferous ideological and religious rival, however, New England leaders again presented the American nation as the vehicle of cosmic struggle. According to the Boston

minister Samuel Morse, the French Revolution unleashed "fraud, violence, cruelty, debauchery, and the uncontrolled gratification of every corrupt and debasing lust and inclination of the human heart."[30]

In foreign affairs, the French Revolution encouraged a realignment of the United States toward Britain and against its erstwhile ally. By 1795, efforts to improve trans-Atlantic relations yielded the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation, negotiated by Jay. Reflecting disagreements about the French Revolution, the treaty catalyzed division of Washington's cabinet into rival parties, despite a theoretical aversion to faction among early American statesmen.

The party was subject to other influences, especially Alexander Hamilton's emphasis on industrial development. Yet the Federalists also became the primary vehicle for covenantal politics. Federalists promoted a stabilized currency, tariffs to encourage domestic manufacturing, and restrictions on immigration. Economic issues attract the most attention from historians, who trace the development of these policies from the Federalists to the "American System" promoted by Henry Clay and other nineteenth-century Whigs and sometimes to the foundation of the Republican Party in the 1850s. But debates about immigration shed more light on the cultural side of the Federalist agenda.

Bills to regulate immigration and naturalization were placed before Congress in 1790 and 1795. In both formal and informal debates, New England representatives defended restrictive entrance standards and long residency requirements for aliens seeking public office. Their arguments were based on the "Publian" assumption that self-government required a high degree of social homogeneity. Senator William MacClay complained, "We Pennsylvanians act as if we

believed that God made of one blood all the families of the earth; but the Eastern [east of the Hudson River] people seem to think he had made none but New England folk. . . . These are the men who affect the greatest fear of being contaminated with foreign manners, customs, and vices."[31]

The year 1798 was a high point of anti-foreign anxiety. With the support of the Adams administration, Congress passed a new naturalization act, which extended the residency period from 5 to 14 years. Associated measures empowered the executive branch to deport noncitizens and criminalized false statements about the federal government or public officials. The public justification for the act was national security, during a period when the United States and France were conducting an undeclared naval conflict (known as the Quasi-War). But it also had the domestic political function of undermining the rival Jeffersonian Republicans, who enjoyed the support of most immigrants.

Fears of subversion ebbed as the threat of war with France receded. And the election of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency compelled Federalists to accept the legitimacy of party competition. The restrictive naturalization law of 1798 was repealed in 1802, while restrictive statutes on aliens and ostensible libel were no longer enforced. In a letter reflecting on the period, Adams lamented the "immense Unpopularity" of many of his policies. He ironically congratulated Jefferson, saying, "Your Steady defence of democratical Principles, and your invariable favourable opinion of the [F]rench Revolution laid the foundation of your unbounded Popularity."[32]

Jefferson's favorable attitude toward the French Revolution diminished after he took office. As president, he

pursued several goals previously favored by Federalists, including a rebuilding of US naval power. Jefferson's oversight of the Louisiana Purchase also expressed an assertive conception of presidential authority defended by supporters of his predecessors. Now out of the executive branch and threatened by the addition of new states, it was Federalists' turn to object that a strong presidency verged on tyranny.

At the level of principle, though, it is true enough that Jefferson offered a more "democratical" interpretation of the American nation. While Adams read the Constitution as an adaptation of the British system of limited monarchy, Jefferson argued that it institutionalized a new form of government, answerable to the body of citizens alone. In religious matters, Jefferson promoted a more rigorous separation of church and state than required by the letter of the First Amendment. Although he paid rhetorical deference to Christianity and enjoyed the support of many dissenting sects, Jefferson never escaped suspicion that he was an atheist and enemy of all hierarchy and order—with the exception of slavery, which he continued to practice while admitting its immorality.

The revival of hostilities against Britain in 1812 gave new urgency to fears that a better, older America was slipping out of reach. Once a hotbed of enthusiasm for war, New England watched helplessly as a Virginian president and a Congress dominated by western states pursued a conflict it did not want. In the winter of 1814–1815, a convention was called to Hartford, Connecticut, to protest these developments. Attended by an array of Yankee leaders—including Timothy Dwight, who had been a bitter critic of the Jefferson administration and served as secretary—the convention expressed opposition to the war and proposed

constitutional modifications to resist the political eclipse of New England.

The Hartford Convention is most famous for adopting a theory of state authority to nullify federal laws that was later adopted by southern critics of Congressional authority to impose tariffs. But the proposals did not stop there. The convention also suggested a requirement for a two-thirds majority to add new states to the union, that public office be restricted to the native-born, and that Congress be apportioned on the basis of free population only (enhancing the representation of northeastern states). It was the New English covenant as a party platform.

It was also a doomed platform. The regional and sectarian character of the assumptions about national identity, and the appearance of disloyalty to a nation at war, undermined the convention's proposals before they were issued. As it was, the victory of Andrew Jackson in the Battle of New Orleans just a few weeks after the convention adjourned rendered them a dead letter. With the successful defense of the Louisiana Territory, America was committed to territorial expansion, cultural absorption, and slavery.

Henry Adams, a grandson of John Adams and the greatest historian of this period, acknowledged the shift: "In 1815 for the first time Americans ceased to doubt the path they were to follow. Not only was the unity of their nation established, but its probable divergence from older societies was also well defined." The form of this divergence was not Christian republicanism, but the Jeffersonian democracy New England leaders had bitterly resisted. "The South and West gave to society a character more aggressively American than had ever been known before," Adams concludes. "Opinions might differ whether the political

movement was progressive or retrograde, but in any case the American . . . was a new variety of man."[33] New England dreamed of entering Canaan but found the nation continued to seek its destiny in the wilderness.

* * *

Despite its recession as a political program, the New English covenant cast a long shadow. Down the Eastern Seaboard as far south as Virginia and west into Yankee-dominated areas of the Upper Midwest, it remained a force in regional affairs until the Civil War. In movements to enforce Sunday observance and dedicate national days of fasting and prayer, clergy and politicians continued to seek ways of honoring America's Anglo-Protestant origin. "When the faith by which the Puritan fathers were animated shall cease to inspire their descendants, then will the golden bowl of our institutions be broken at the fountain and hope itself take leave of a reprobate land," wrote Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen of New Jersey.[34]

Similar perspectives found a home in the academy and the judiciary. In the 1830s, Harvard Law School became an institutional refuge for many ex-Federalists. Figures linked with Harvard, like Massachusetts politician Rufus Choate, developed an account of New England as the source of all that was best in America.[35] To Choate, the natural rights portion of the Declaration of Independence was composed of "glittering and sounding generalities of natural right" that could not survive critical scrutiny.[36] The nation's true foundation was the Puritan inheritance, generalized throughout the nation by the influence of teachers, lawyers, and ministers.

The commencement of mass immigration threatened hopes that New England could serve as America's schoolroom, if not its political capital. For the first decades of the republic, annual entries numbered only in the thousands. By the 1840s, hundreds of thousands of immigrants were arriving in port cities. Primarily Irish and German, these immigrants combined large numbers with obvious ethnic and cultural differences.

Nativist movements applied elements of the covenantal tradition to this new problem. While they did not oppose all immigration, they revived old arguments that immigrants were not suited for immediate participation in American life. For many opponents of immigration, religion was the central issue.

A small number of elite, English-descended Catholics played leading roles in the revolution and early republic. The inspiring example of patriots such as the Carroll family of Maryland helped defeat efforts to extend colonial-era restrictions on Catholics' political participation. In New York, John Jay himself had argued unsuccessfully for the exclusion of Catholics from public office.

But subsequent Catholic immigrants were suspected of being ignorant, superstitious, and dangerously loyal to their clerical hierarchy. In Boston and other cities, Catholic institutions were attacked and burned by mobs. Minister and educator Lyman Beecher, who made Cincinnati his base of operations, insisted that "we should abhor the interposition of lawless violence to injure the property or control the rights of Catholics." Having chosen to join the American people, however, Catholics were responsible for adopting its ways—including Protestant faith. "Let the Catholics mingle with us as Americans and come with

their children under the full action of our common schools and republican institutions," Beecher proclaimed.[37]

If one strand of the New England covenant turned against religious pluralism, then, another came to focus on ethnic differences. As classical Calvinism waned, theological arguments about American purpose were replaced by theories about the historical origins of American institutions. Even Ralph Waldo Emerson, who elsewhere envisioned a national melting pot, speculated that American success was based on the "genius and national character of the Anglo-Saxon Race."[38]

After the Civil War, historians such as Herbert Baxter Adams developed a doctrine that American liberty was derived from Anglo-Saxon custom and epitomized by the New England township. The implication was that only Yankees could fully understand or participate in American life. Adopted by political leaders including Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, this so-called "germ theory" of American origins became dominant among the old-stock upper classes as they drifted away from traditional religion. In 1895, *Atlantic Monthly* editor Thomas Bailey Aldrich published a poetic reflection that he openly described as "misanthropic." America, and especially New England, had once been a beacon set apart from a corrupt world. But now:

> Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
> And through presses a wild motley throng . . .
> Flying the Old World's poverty and scorn:
> These bring with them unknown gods and rites,
> Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.
> In street and alley what strange tongues loud.

> Accents of menace alien to our air,
> Voice that once the Tower of Babel knew![39]

It is difficult to imagine a sharper contrast to Dwight's hopeful New Albion.

Despite its tendency to degenerate into Protestant supremacy or ethnic bigotry, though, the appeal of the covenant has endured. This is partly the result of the incredible literary productivity of the Puritans and their descendants. In surveying the vast literature on American national identity, it is easy to forget that the so-called great migration involved only about twenty thousand people and that New England has been shedding population relative to the rest of the country since the ratification of the Constitution. Perhaps never before has so much been written by so many about so few.

There is a deeper explanation for the grip of covenantal models than academic convenience, though. Covenant theology provides a way of avoiding the abstraction of an ideological or creedal nationalism without moving too far in the direction of blood and soil. By placing the community as a whole in a "vertical" relationship to God, covenant also establishes a "horizontal" responsibility among its members. This matrix of mutual obligation is the subject of John Winthrop's famous "A Modell of Christian Charity."

Covenant also offers a mechanism for the adoption of new members while preserving the existing nation. The Hebrew Bible recounts how Ruth the Moabite joins the people of Israel by promising "thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Like the New English model it inspired, the biblical account of covenant

does not exclude additions to the national community. It does suggest that they should embrace it fully, making its myths of origin and obligation their own.

These features make the New English covenant appealing to theorists who want a "thick" account of national belonging but are wary of ethnic criteria. Writers, including sociologist Philip Gorski, have evoked Hebraic sources, Puritan theology, and New England institutions as the wellspring of American identity. In his 2017 book, *American Covenant*, Gorski urges Americans to "remember the dream" of a righteous republic. The phrase evokes not only the Puritan heritage but also its appropriation by John F. Kennedy and Ted Kennedy, descendants of Irish Catholics who appropriated old New England tropes for more inclusive purposes.[40]

The New English covenant has admirers on the political right, as well. In addition to traditionalists inspired by Russell Kirk, Israeli scholars Ofir Haivry and Yoram Hazony have defended an "Anglo-American conservatism" heavily influenced by the Puritan intersection of Calvinist and Hebraic ideas. Like Rufus Choate, they present the Declaration of Independence as a metaphysical abstraction. As an alternative source of guidance and legitimacy, they emphasize religious and common law influences on American institutions.[41]

These arguments are a valuable corrective to creedal interpretations that exaggerate ideological influences on American life—particularly its early stages. Yet hopes that the New English covenant can be revived as the source of modern American identity are implausible. One reason is that its characteristic vision of a virtuous society is simply too limited to bind together a diverse people. Even if it was

open in principle to all, the covenant asked non-Yankees to give up too much of their own history and self-conception in order to join the national elect. We learned to enjoy Thanksgiving as a national celebration only after descendants of the early settlers gave up much of their political influence. Indeed, the holiday was not recognized in parts of the South until the middle of the twentieth century.

A second challenge is less obvious. The New English covenant assumed a high degree of theological consensus. Words like *covenant*, *providence*, and *thanksgiving* were more than evocative rhetoric. They held salvific meaning. In her novel *Old Town Folks*, Lyman Beecher's daughter, novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, described Yankees of her grandparents' generation as "Hebraistic in their form; they spoke of Jerusalem, of the God of Israel, the God of Jacob, as much as if grandfather had been a veritable Jew."[42] This was real faith, not merely narrative.

As Stowe vividly depicts, however, that Hebraic-Calvinist synthesis was already waning by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Even in its traditional strongholds, the old Calvinist faith was being supplanted by evangelical movements that emphasized personal rebirth or rationalistic Unitarianism that minimized divinity altogether. We do not know whether secularizing trends of recent years will continue in the near future, but there seems little prospect of a Calvinist revival no matter what occurs. In that respect, the New English covenant is a temple from which the gods have fled.

That is not to say that we cannot learn from the New English covenant. It was the most coherent attempt to develop American identity from within English history and Protestant political theology. At its best, it combined a

generous hope for national flourishing with a sophisticated appreciation for the social and economic preconditions of self-government.

As sons of New England like Emerson would recognize, though, there was something indelibly naïve and optimistic about the American character. The experience of life on a vast and underpopulated continent could not be defined by the bonds of blood and piety that the New English covenant used to situate the nation in the providential order. A different symbol was necessary to express the territorial expansiveness, ethnic heterogeneity, and orientation toward the future that increasingly characterized American experience. That symbol was the crucible, or melting pot.

CHAPTER 2

Broken Crucible

"America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming! . . . These are the fires of God. . . . Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American."[1] In this ecstatic vision, British-born journalist and playwright Israel Zangwill presented an enduring symbol of American identity. Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Zangwill saw America as more than one people entitled to a "separate and equal station" among "the powers of the earth." Instead, he understood it as a process of transformation leading to a new human type, destined to redeem the world.

As a result of Zangwill's talent for public relations, the term *melting pot* indelibly evokes a turn-of-the-century, urban milieu. Yet the idea dates to the early days of American independence and a location far removed from New York City's Lower East Side, where Zangwill's play *The Melting-Pot* is set. In 1782, French émigré Jean Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur published an account of life in the New World, ostensibly by "James," a "genuine farmer" in

Pennsylvania. Faced with the question "What is an American?" James answers in words that could almost have appeared in Zangwill's script. "He is neither a European, nor the descendent of a European: hence that strange mixture of blood which you will find in no other country," James explains. "Here, individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world."[2]

Scholars dispute how accurate Crèvecoeur's account of America as the cradle of a new people has ever been. Their arguments tend to come in waves, as moments of optimism about national cohesion alternate with periods of increased attention to group differences. In the 1960s, sociologists Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan inaugurated a wave of criticism that continues to influence both scholarly and journalistic accounts of American society. Their study *Beyond the Melting Pot* contended that "the point about the melting pot is that it did not happen."[3]

Half a century later, other writers argue that Americans are still forging a distinct nationality. Israeli scholar Azar Gat argues that "the cultural identity of the so-called 'hyphenated-Americans' past the first one or two generations after immigration is overwhelmingly American, with the search for origins and tradition playing a symbolically important but mostly secondary role."[4] This process of fusion may be ethnic as well as cultural. Noting increased rates of interracial marriage, some observers forecast the "browning of America." Eric Kaufmann responds that Americans of mixed origins often identify as white, regardless of their appearance or background.[5]

Yet the significance of the melting pot lies less in its sociological accuracy than as shorthand for a distinctive

account of American purpose. In a polemic published in the 1920s, the immigration restrictionist Henry Pratt Fairchild acknowledged that the image of a melting pot or crucible is powerful because it is not an empirical claim. It is a "symbol, like a portent in the heavens."[6]

The optimistic, open-ended qualities of this portent make it a very different symbol of American origin and purpose to the New English covenant. The covenant is oriented toward patriarchs who established a sacred community. It is retrospective and filiopietistic, insisting on deference to great ancestors. The crucible shifts emphasis to the future. It envisions a new kind of human being living in a new world, in which arbitrary borders and boundaries will be dissolved. Paradoxically, progress toward this future is at the same time a recovery of human goodness. The future restores an original innocence that has been lost in the history of corruption.

Herman Melville presented this development as an inversion of the biblical narrative. Rather than nations succeeding human unity, unity would replace national division. "Thus shall the curse of Babel be revoked," he wrote. "On this Western hemisphere, all tribes and peoples are forming into one federated whole; and there is a future which shall see the estranged children of Adam restored as to the old hearth-stone in Eden."[7]

* * *

To the extent that the crucible carries temporal or regional associations, it is with the Eastern ports and Midwestern industrial cities where immigrants and their children

approached 75 percent of the population in the early twentieth century.[8] Most of this cohort was composed of "new immigrants" from southern and eastern Europe, who arrived in vast numbers after the American Civil War. Returning to his home city of New York in 1904 after years abroad, the novelist Henry James found it a "terrible town." He was horrified by the "denizens of the New York Ghetto, heaped as thick as the splinters on the table of a glass-blower."[9]

James's assessment is more ambiguous than it appears. By comparing its operation to the glassblower's art, James suggested that the crucible might yield beautiful new colors and forms. But it also produced dangerous industrial waste. Like many old-stock Americans, James worried that the new America had little place for its New English past. The "New Jerusalem" he observed in the Lower East Side seemed antithetical to the one Puritans established three centuries earlier.

James wrote during a moment of crisis, when the melting pot seemed to be on the verge of explosion. More than a century earlier, Crèvecoeur gave a more optimistic account. Describing his rural neighbors, Crèvecoeur's narrator offers to "point out you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations."[10] A bit later, he describes "whole counties where not a word of English is spoken" as the best cultivated in America.[11] These were regions inhabited by the Germans who had distressed Benjamin Franklin a generation earlier.

For Crèvecoeur, though, the crucible was hardly an industrial process at all. Although he writes of "melting"

peoples into a new alloy, his preferred metaphors are agricultural. "Men are like plants," he suggests, echoing the influential political theorist Montesquieu and pioneering naturalist Buffon. "The goodness and flavor of the fruit proceeds from the peculiar soil and exposition in which they grow."[12]

The regional setting is also crucial. Crèvecoeur concentrates on the Mid-Atlantic, which received large numbers of immigrants throughout the eighteenth century. He specifically excludes New England from his description. "The Eastern provinces," he writes, "must indeed be excepted, as being the unmixed descendants of Englishmen."[13]

The comparison of the nation to an organic growth gave Crèvecoeur's image an affinity with contemporary arguments about the priority of agriculture to commerce and industry. According to Thomas Jefferson and other agrarian theorists, the character of the American people would be established through a productive relationship with the land. Prefiguring Melville, Jefferson argued that farming represented a return to Eden after millennia of corruption. Americans could recover their original innocence and universal humanity through the cultivation of the soil.[14]

If a truly American people were to grow up from the earth, the population had to be dispersed beyond the original settlements. In "On the Emigration to America and Peopling the Western Country," the journalist and Jefferson supporter Philip Freneau urged newcomers to settle in sparsely populated lands to the west. Echoing Thomas Paine, who employed similar language in *Common Sense*, Freneau depicted this migration as a flight from oppression to freedom:

> From Europe's proud, despotic shores
> Hither the stranger takes his way,
> And in our new found world explores
> A happier soil, a milder sway.[15]

Freneau's depiction of the American wilderness as an asylum from persecution would become a theme of partisan politics in the early republic. Federalists contended that the cultural and ethnic character of the nation was fixed in the past and concentrated along the northern parts of the Atlantic littoral. Jeffersonians insisted its destiny lay in the future and in the West. In extending settlement beyond its colonial boundaries, the new Americans would transform themselves by transforming nature. The tension between repetition and self-creation was dramatized in James Fennimore Cooper's popular Leatherstocking novels, which depict the encroachment of civilization on the wilderness.

By the 1830s, political and literary gestures toward a truly unique American identity coalesced into a counterpart to the Romantic nationalism of Europe. Dubbed "Young America" in a reference to the Junges Deutschland and La Giovine Italia movements, supporters, mostly Democratic partisans, defended open immigration, western expansion, and a distinctively American aesthetic culture.[16] "The American people having derived their origin from many other nations," wrote journalist John L. O'Sullivan, our "national birth was the beginning of a new history." Invigorated by the combination of native and foreign blood, the nation would forge an identity that would define the modern age. "The far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness," he concluded.[17]

Orientation toward the future promoted skepticism toward geographic constraint. Stephen A. Douglas, the future senator and Lincoln adversary who began his career as an associate of O'Sullivan, offered a grandiose interpretation of God's intentions. According to Douglas, "He would blot out the lines on the map which now marked our national boundaries on this continent, and make the area of liberty as broad the continent itself." The people in the process of formation through expansion would find their limit only in a border that, as it seemed, no foreign influence could cross. The Pacific Ocean was the boundary "which the God of nature has marked out."[18]

Along with the shift in political and regional emphasis, then, goes a change in religious key. As Nathaniel Hawthorne depicted in his brooding fictions, the covenant was haunted by Calvinist obsessions with sin and predestination. The crucible, by contrast, is associated with voluntarism and rebirth. These motifs were open to a Christian interpretation. The transformative fluid in the crucible evokes the baptismal font. In many cases, however, they were linked to a shift from the God of the Bible to a kind of impersonal transcendence. Like Douglas, Ralph Waldo Emerson urged "the Young American" to seek God in the natural splendor of the continent rather than inside the nation's churches.

Yet cultivation of the nation required more than vigorous exercise. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which provided for the addition of new states to the union, affirmed that "religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." To constitute the American people, formal

schooling seemed necessary. In the first half of the nineteenth century, a movement to establish free education with a standardized curriculum spread from New England to the upper Midwest (public education was virtually nonexistent in the South until after the Civil War).

Yet the promotion of education exposed a limit of the melting pot. Reformers denied that they were biased against any belief or sect. At the same time, they relied on Protestant texts and assumptions, often in the belief that American Catholics would eventually abandon their mother church. In 1844, New York and Philadelphia suffered rioting provoked by the use of the King James Version of the Bible in public schools. These riots contributed to the growth of nativist movements that tried to secure Anglo-Protestant supremacy against ethnic and religious threats.

Street fighting between immigrants and natural-born citizens was only one expression of the violence that helped fuel the American crucible. When it came to aboriginal peoples, the relatively soft coercion of education was less important than outright conquest. In his paean to the West, Freneau applauded how "the unsocial Indian far retreats / To make some other clime his own."[19] He did not consider the relentless pressure of white settlement or its military support by the government.

A series of unsuccessful incursions dating back to the War of Independence had eventually forced Americans to accept a British colony in the North. Western and southern borders had no such status. Indian nations and Mexico lacked both the force necessary to defend their borders and the legitimacy many Americans attributed to the British Empire. O'Sullivan coined the term *manifest destiny* to describe the "continent allotted by Providence for the free

development of our yearly multiplying millions."[20] In order to weld together its constituent parts, America had to grow.

The challenge was not only to add territory. Critics of expansion worried that placing ethnically and culturally alien people under US sovereignty would undermine the unity of the American nation. Although he echoed popular accounts of Mexican society as degenerate and priest-ridden, O'Sullivan rejected these fears as unnecessary obstacles to expansion. The son of Irish immigrants and raised Catholic, he insisted that Mexicans and Indians would "amalgamate and be lost" in the new people being born.[21]

Even Emerson, who opposed the violent conquest of the West, saw its success as providential. Considering the unintended benefits of the Mexican War, he concluded that while "the agencies by which events so grand as the opening of California, of Texas, of Oregon, and the junction of the two oceans, are effected, are paltry . . . most of the great results of history are brought about by discreditable means."[22] In Europe, brutal violence had been the forge of nations that mellowed over the centuries. The same would be true, Emerson hoped, in the New World.

* * *

Emerson's hope was put to the test sooner and more directly than he would have preferred. Before the Civil War, melting-pot symbolism was conditioned by a progressive understanding of history. Influenced by German idealist philosophy, it posited that time was moving toward a period of redemption in which all contradictions and conflicts would be reconciled. The United States was the instrument of this divine process—not a chosen people

set apart from other nations, but the whole of humankind reaching consciousness of itself.

The crisis caused by slavery challenged this millenarian hope. Rather than a single chosen people, Americans seemed divided by irreconcilable loyalties. "The Civil War became the crucible in which the nature and existence of that nationalism would either be preserved and redefined, or lost forever," writes historian David W. Blight.[23]

Yet the war was a very different kind of crucible to the vaguely agrarian mixed metaphor from earlier in the century. Rather than melting disparate elements at a gentle simmer, it was an apocalypse of fire and blood. Crèvecoeur imagined a new race of Americans growing up from the fields like thriving crops. Still-shocking images by Mathew Brady and other war photographers show them being plowed under like fertilizer.

For many immigrants and their children, though, combat was the womb from which they were reborn as Americans. In battle, ethnic and cultural distinctions counted for little. The valor of units such as the so-called Irish Brigade of New York's Sixty-Ninth Infantry became a synecdoche for the bravery and sacrifice of thousands of immigrants who served the Union. A number of smaller formations with Irish affiliations fought for the Confederacy.

German Americans provided an even greater number of troops. According to some estimates, as many as two hundred thousand men in uniform were born in Germany or to German parents. German Americans also achieved roles of individual prominence. In addition to filling the ranks, they served as highly visible general officers, including Carl Schurz, who went on to serve as Illinois's governor and US senator.

The war did not eliminate social snobbery against immigrants, which was especially tenacious in eastern cities. But it confirmed that Irish, Germans, and other northern Europeans were American for all civic purposes. "Every people, every creed, every class of society has contributed its share to that wonderful mixture out of which is to grow the great nation of the new world," insisted Schurz. "It is true, the Anglo-Saxon establishes and maintains his ascendancy, but without absolutely absorbing the other national elements. They modify each other, and their peculiar characteristics are to be blended together by the all-assimilating power of freedom. This is the origin of the American nationality, which did not spring from one family, one tribe, one country, but incorporates the vigorous elements of all civilized nations on earth."[24]

This achievement of inclusion, however, raised the question of whether the melting pot had any limits. Paradoxically, the inclusion of non-Anglo-Protestants heightened the importance of racial categories in American national identity. What did the descendants of Englishmen, Scots, Germans, and Scandinavians have in common except being white? Before the war, Douglas proposed in his famous debates with Abraham Lincoln that "the signers of the Declaration of Independence had no reference to negroes at all when they declared all men to be created equal. They did not mean negro, nor the savage Indians, nor the Fejee Islanders, nor any other barbarous race. They were speaking of white men. . . . This Government was established on the white basis. It was established by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever, and should be administered by white men, and none others."[25] Douglas spoke for many Americans who were

open to immigration, but saw whiteness as the bond among otherwise disparate national backgrounds. "It would seem that the White race alone received the divine command, to subdue and replenish the earth!," agreed Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton.[26]

Lincoln's views on these matters are elusive. On the one hand, he rejected both nativism and slavery from an early stage of his career. In this respect, he diverged from some Whigs whose covenantal vision combined a preference for natural-born citizens of English descent with antislavery sentiments. "As a nation we began by declaring 'all men are created equal,'" Lincoln wrote. "We now practically read it, 'all men are created equal, except Negroes.' When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read 'all men are created equal, except Negroes, and foreigners, and Catholics.' When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty—to Russia, for example, where despotism can be taken pure and without the base alloy of hypocrisy."[27]

On the other hand, Lincoln's dislike of slavery did not prevent him from flirting with proposals for the physical removal of black Americans. Initially a supporter of the Liberia project patronized by Henry Clay and other statesmen, he later became interested in proposals for a colony in South America. As late as 1862, Lincoln told a delegation of free African Americans, "You and we are different races. . . . Whether it is right or wrong I need not discuss, but this physical difference is a great disadvantage to us both, as I think your race suffer very greatly, many of them by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence."[28]

Yet Lincoln seems to have rejected racialized accounts of American national community by the end of his

presidency. He not only adopted abolitionist policies he had once opposed but also pursued the ultimate goal of African American citizenship. Contrary to a popular misunderstanding, Lincoln's assassin was not provoked by the Emancipation Proclamation or the victory of Union arms, but by a speech in which the president advocated enfranchisement of black veterans. Multiracial citizenship, not the end of slavery, was the point of no return for John Wilkes Booth.

After the war, some Republicans, including Frederick Douglass and Charles Sumner, continued to defend this principle. Moving beyond the idea of the melting point, they argued for an American nationality based on political equality rather than cultural or ethnic fusion. In the twentieth century, these ideas would be rediscovered as sources of creedal nationalism. At the time, they were considered extreme and divisive.

By the 1870s, so-called Liberal Republican politicians like Schurz, with the support of Brahmin intellectuals including Henry Adams, were calling for the end of Reconstruction. Considering the war's aim achieved, they proposed to shift attention to issues including civil service and tariff reform, which offered opportunities for renewed cooperation between northern and southern elites. The price of national reconciliation for whites was allowing the construction of a racial caste system.

Even whites, though, had reasons to doubt whether they were still one people after the war. Between 1870 and 1900, around twelve million immigrants entered the United States. This cohort was larger than the total number of immigrants to the United States and British North America in all their previous history. In a country with a

population of only about thirty-five million at the conclusion of the Civil War, it was an extraordinary demographic transformation.

The challenge to national identity was not limited to the immigrants' large numbers. It also involved their origin. Their predecessors hailed mostly from northwestern Europe. This was no guarantee of acceptance—as discrimination experienced by the Irish, and to a lesser extent the Germans, demonstrated. Even so, these groups were relatively familiar to the native-born and connected with religious and cultural communities that predated independence.

That was not the case for the so-called "new" immigrants. For most Americans, the regions of eastern and southern Europe were not even names they could associate with well-known characters, stories, or symbols. According to journalist Daniel Okrent, Italians in particular were "completely incomprehensible" to the native-born elite.[29]

Some historians argue that Italians and other new immigrants had to undergo a long process of "becoming white." These arguments tend to conflate social and legal status. "Wops" or "dagos" might not have been welcome in certain jobs—or even many neighborhoods—but they were never excluded from citizenship under clauses that limited naturalization to "free whites," which figured in US law since the first naturalization act of 1790.

Jews had a longer history of residence in North America and had once been celebrated as covenantal proto-Americans. Before the Civil War, a few Jews entered the upper reaches of politics and, to some extent, high society. Particularly in the South, descendants of Sephardic Jews like Florida Senator David Levy Yulee and Louisiana

Senator (and later Confederate Secretary of State) Judah P. Benjamin were able to enter the governing class. But the growth of the Jewish population and the shift in its origins from western to eastern Europe encouraged a visceral anti-Semitism that had little antebellum precedent. Henry Adams, whose mounting hatred of Jews alarmed even his friends, sardonically claimed that "not a Polish Jew fresh from Warsaw or Cracow—not a furtive Yacoob or Ysaac still reeking of the Ghetto, snarling a weird Yiddish to the officers of the customs—but had a keener instinct, an intenser energy, and a freer hand than he—American of Americans, with Heaven knew how many Puritans and Patriots behind him, and an education that had cost a civil war."[30] For Adams, the melting pot was a replacement for the old republic—not its fulfillment.

Equally important to the change of input, was the change of environment. The problem, argued the influential Congregationalist minister Josiah Strong in his 1885 polemic *Our Country*, was not just the number and character of the immigrants but also their location. The agrarian West was fertile soil for planting Americans, but this process could not take place in overcrowded, impoverished ghettos. In the heroic days of expansion, lamented Theodore Roosevelt in his bestselling *The Winning of the West*, harsh conditions "made a mould which turned out all alike in the same shape."[31] But the closing of the frontier eliminated these favorable conditions, pitting ethnic and cultural groups against each other rather than melting them together.

Increasingly pessimistic assessments of the possibility of forging an ethnically and culturally unified people encouraged demands for immigration restriction. Popular

memory revolves around the urban Babels of the eastern cities. But the impetus emerged from the Pacific states, where an ocean once regarded as impermeable became increasingly open to trade and immigration.

Even before the Civil War, both parties in California adopted an anti-immigration agenda. In 1862, Leland Stanford, the state's first Republican governor, declared his commitment to "the repression of the immigration of the Asiatic races."[32] Despite Sumner's opposition in Congress, this commitment achieved legislative success with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In the legal arena, a string of decisions beginning with the Ah Yup case of 1878 found that people of "Mongolian" descent were nonwhite and therefore ineligible for naturalization.

The expansion of the category of "unmeltables" was accompanied by enthusiasm for new techniques of classification. Sociologist William Z. Ripley popularized the view that cranial shape and volume were physical markers of racial identity. Biological categories were nothing new: in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson speculated that the difference between whites and blacks was "fixed in nature."[33] But their association with modern science lent them an appearance of objectivity they had previously lacked.

Race science also made it possible to envision the future with greater precision than the ecstatic visions of literary men. Economist Edward A. Ross coined the term *race suicide* to describe the divergence between lower birth rates among Americans of northern European descent and the higher fertility of immigrants. Lacking the will or capacity to make themselves Americans, Ross dismissed the new immigrants as "masses of fecund but beaten humanity from the hovels of far Lombardy and Galicia."[34]

In his essay collection *The Souls of Black Folk*, African American sociologist W. E. B. DuBois predicted that the "problem of the color line" would be the problem of the twentieth century. He was right about immigration debates, which were increasingly sublimated into racial categories. Optimism about the possibilities of national fusion had turned into a pessimistic assessment that the races of the world were too various to be included in a single nation—particularly one that aspired to self-government. Encapsulating elite disappointment with the crucible ideal, Harvard's president A. Lawrence Lowell admitted, "We know now that in carrying on popular government in the South, the negroes have been disfranchised. . . . So far as the Chinese are concerned, we have kept this country homogeneous by excluding them. I used to think when I was young that that was all wrong, but I have come to the conclusion that, on the ground . . . of the need for homogeneity in democracy, [it] was absolutely right."[35]

It is important to recognize that belief in racial hierarchy was not incompatible with progressive politics. To the contrary, promoters of biological racism including economists John R. Commons and Richard T. Ely were also passionate reformers. Hope that scientific techniques could resolve the problems of modern society sustained rather than contradicted their support for segregation, disenfranchisement, and—most shocking by today's standards—eugenics.[36]

Such radical doubts about the possibility of self-government by an ethnically heterogenous population distinguished racialist critiques of the melting pot from more economically grounded opposition to immigration by labor groups. Although they feared that immigration reduced the wages of workers already in the country,

figures such as Samuel Gompers, leader of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), did not deny the possibility of integrating non-Anglos into the American body politic. He even noted the irony of recent arrivals adopting restrictionist views, recalling hearing "a [union] member, who had left the Emerald Isle scarcely three years, denounce the evils the toilers suffer from immigration."[37]

But Gompers and other labor leaders made an exception for Asians. In the notorious 1901 pamphlet *Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion*, the AFL contrasted "American Manhood Against Asiatic Coolieism" in urging renewal of the 1882 exclusion act.[38] Despite O'Sullivan's optimism that they would be melted into the American people and long-established Iberian communities in areas included in the Louisiana Purchase, Latinos—particularly Mexicans, although not usually *criollos* of European appearance—were also suspect. Although legally white, they were subject to de facto segregation in California and parts of the Southwest.

Scientific and pragmatic skepticism about the melting pot converged in proposals to limit immigration. Recurring efforts to establish a literacy test for admission failed, partly due to the opposition of industrialists who relied on cheap labor. In 1907, however, Congress established a commission under Vermont senator William P. Dillingham to investigate the situation.

Its 1911 report concluded that assimilation was failing—particularly in regard to eastern and southern Europeans. In response, the Dillingham Commission proposed measures including quotas on national origins. These proposals would be adopted in a series of statutes culminating in the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. Explicitly designed to keep America's ethnic balance as stable as possible, it

brought the phase of mass immigration that began after the Civil War to an end.

It would be a mistake, though, to dismiss opposition to the melting pot as coming only from those who favored higher barriers to entry. As Glazer and Moynihan documented in their influential survey, immigrants themselves resisted assimilation with varying degrees of success. An enduring myth suggests that most immigrants arrived in the United States with the intention of staying forever and abandoning their ancestral language, customs, and affinities. In fact, movement back and forth between America and the country of origin was common. A study from 1908—the first year that the government systematically tracked outmigration as well as arrivals—found that around 30 percent of European migrants returned home, with some moving back and forth several times.[39]

Immigrants also constructed institutions to promote their interests and preserve their religion or culture. Foreign-language newspapers, branches of national churches, and parochial schools served concentrated immigrant populations in neighborhoods, and sometimes whole regions, that struck observers as extensions of foreign lands rather than American soil.

Little Italies and Jewish ghettos remain vivid due to their prominence in twentieth-century popular culture. But the geographically largest, most populous, and most culturally independent communities were in the Midwest. In the "German triangle" between Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and St. Louis, immigrants and their descendants maintained an almost autonomous network of businesses, cultural institutions, and schools. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr not only grew up speaking German at home but

also received no formal education in English until he began graduate studies at the Yale Divinity School. Encountering old-stock Americans for the first time, he reported feeling like a "mongrel among thoroughbreds."[40]

These conditions suggest that Zangwill's play emerged at a moment when the national crucible seemed at risk of shattering like fragments of glass. Rather than introducing a metaphor for a new, urban, heterogeneous America, Zangwill was borrowing one from a very different situation. How well did it fit?

* * *

It is not clear whether British-born Zangwill was aware of the history of the crucible symbol. In an interview with the *New York Times*, he recalled, "I shut my eyes one night; and there before me saw in one vivid flash the whole play, just as it shall be on stage."[41] As Henry Pratt Fairchild perceived, this is less an account of artistic creation than divine revelation.

The play itself does not live up to its dramatic origin story. A formulaic melodrama, it revolves around a love affair between David Quixano, a Jewish musician and refugee from the Kishinev pogrom, and Vera Revendal, the daughter of a Russian nobleman. Both immigrants despite their different religious and social status, David and Vera reject ethnic roles and ancestral constraints to make a life together. At the climax, David declares that their struggle is emblematic of a greater drama:

> East and West, and North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the

> cross—how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame! Here shall they all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God. Ah, Vera, what is the glory of Rome and Jerusalem where all nations and races come to worship and look back, compared with the glory of America, where all races and nations come to labour and look forward![42]

This language echoes the proto-ethnography of Crèvecoeur and the enthusiastic speculations of the Young Americans. In a moment of mounting suspicion regarding the possibility of the national crucible, Zangwill could be understood as insisting that it was, despite everything, still operating. Such was Theodore Roosevelt's view, expressed when he leaned from his box at the play's Washington, DC, premiere and called out, "That's a great play, Mr. Zangwill."[43]

At the same time, *The Melting-Pot* contained elements that subverted its traditional features. For one thing, its religious status is rather dubious. Zangwill makes clear that "the God of our children" presides over no conventional church. Surveying David's books, Vera notices that he shelves the works of Friedrich Nietzsche next to the Bible.

More important than David's heterodox religious opinions is the fact that the central metaphor of the play is not the melting pot. It is the "American symphony" that David dreams of performing on Independence Day. The crucible poses difficult questions of whether matter or mold is primary and whether the constituents are entirely melted down or retain some of their original integrity. The symphony, by contrast, is a harmonic arrangement of distinct elements, none of which can be subtracted from a finished product that exceeds them all.

In these passages, Zangwill does not sound like Roosevelt, who praised immigrants in general but denounced "hyphenated" Americans' efforts to sustain distinctive cultures and communities. His argument—or at least suggestion—is much closer to ideas being developed around the same time by Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne. For these progressive intellectuals, the old vision of a homogeneous American was incompatible not only with its present reality but also, and more importantly, with its distinctive future. What was needed was a system of accommodation to various ethnic and religious identities that Kallen dubbed "cultural pluralism."[44]

Grasping for alternatives, these writers experimented with the orchestra as a better metaphor for an entirely new kind of community. "American civilization," Kallen wrote, "may come to mean . . . an orchestration of mankind."[45] Bourne was more explicit: "As long as we thought of Americanism in terms of the 'melting pot,'" he insisted, "our American cultural tradition lay in the past. It was something to which the new Americans were to be moulded. In the light of our changing ideal of Americanism, we must perpetrate the paradox that our American cultural tradition lies in the future. It will be what we all together make out of this incomparable opportunity of attacking the future with a new key."[46]

The metaphor of polyphonic composition, to which DuBois also alluded in his provocative juxtapositions of Romantic poetry with transcriptions of Negro spirituals, was premature. Contrary to Kallen's and Bourne's hopes, the fifty years that followed the First World War were characterized by the most intense assimilative pressure of any in American history. Yet the theoretical and practical

limitations of the melting pot could not be ignored by a country increasingly defined by ideological conflict rather than by national expansion. In its confrontation with imperial militarism, Nazism, and Communism, the dominant motif of American nationalism was not the crucible. It was the creed.

CHAPTER 3

A Warlike Creed

In the summer of 1937, the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal was commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation to conduct a "comprehensive survey of the Negro in the United States."[1] Supplied with resources that included the assistance of African American political scientist Ralph Bunche, Myrdal devoted the next five years to this study. The result was *An American Dilemma*: *The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, published in 1944. Despite its being fifteen hundred pages long, the two-volume report sold more than a hundred thousand copies.

The significance of *An American Dilemma* goes beyond its popular success or exposé of aspects of African American life unfamiliar to white readers. Myrdal's contribution also lay in the particular way he framed "the Negro problem." According to Myrdal, the exclusion and subordination of blacks was not a central feature of American history or character. It was a glaring contradiction to the "social ethos" shared by Americans of "all national origins, classes, regions, creeds, and colors."[2]

Myrdal called this ethos "the American Creed," but he did not invent the phrase.[3] It was used occasionally in the nineteenth century and popularized during the First World War. In 1916, a forty-nine-year-old clerk in the House of Representatives named William Tyler Page won a national contest for the best short statement of "American political faith." His hundred-word entry, titled "An American's Creed," was published and circulated around the country by patriotic societies such as the Daughters of the American Revolution.[4] Until the Second World War, it even served as an alternative to the pledge of allegiance composed by socialist Francis Bellamy in 1892.

Looking beyond the term *creed*, the claim that Americans are united by principles despite their ethnic, cultural, and religious plurality has a longer history. Since the eighteenth century, domestic statesmen and foreign observers alike have presented an inchoate theory of equal rights as characteristically American. Page's statement was a tribute to this history. Rather than an original composition, it was a pastiche of language from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, speeches by Lincoln and the Whig politician Daniel Webster, and Edward Everett Hale's 1863 short story "The Man Without a Country," among other sources.

Yet there is something special about the prominence of the "American Creed" or "American idea" in the middle of the twentieth century. Always in the background of American thought and experience, a series of global conflicts brought the creed to the center of national life. During World War II and the early Cold War, an ideological account of national identity came to be seen as a more than just a strand of intellectual history. Politicians, scholars,

even Hollywood celebrities insisted that it defined what it means to be American.

The creedal vision of the American nation was associated with a specific agenda. At home, it pointed toward the realization of racial equality through gradual but consistent reform. Abroad, it involved the defense of democracy against totalitarian enemies: first fascists, then communists. With some variation in detail and emphasis, this agenda defined postwar liberalism. Ostensibly the bond among all Americans, the creed was effectively the orthodoxy of midcentury liberalism.

Subsequent events revealed the tension between the presumption of creedal unity and the actual plurality of American life. The civil rights movement and Vietnam War exposed underlying disagreements about American meaning and purpose. Those disagreements have never really been resolved. The search for a creedal nation was a failure.

* * *

The articulation of the American Creed owes as much to foreigners like Myrdal as to Americans. Visitors and observers have often been struck by the normative consistency they found. Even before independence was declared, Edmund Burke noted that in the "character of the Americans, a love of freedom is the predominating feature which marks and distinguishes the whole."[5]

Alexis de Tocqueville offered similar observations of the young republic. Notwithstanding disagreements on particular issues, Americans agreed "about the general principles that ought to rule human societies. From Maine to Florida, from Missouri to the Atlantic Ocean,

everyone believes that all legitimate power originates with the people. Everyone shares the same ideas about liberty and equality."[6]

Like Burke, Tocqueville distinguished these ideas from a systematic ideology. Americans, he noted, were not inclined to abstract reasoning. Later in the nineteenth century, British journalist and diplomat James Bryce agreed that philosophical terms "[do] not happily describe the doctrines that prevail in the United States, for the people are not prone to form or state their notions in a philosophic way." He found, though, that "certain dogmas or maxims . . . are in so far fundamental that they have told widely on political thought and that one usually strikes upon them when sinking a shaft, so to speak, into an American mind."[7]

Despite the ambiguity of their expression, it was possible to identify these dogmas. Bryce enumerated individual rights, popular sovereignty, limited government, and preference for decentralized administration. Other writers provided overlapping lists. Looking back over two centuries of the literature on American political traditions, Samuel Huntington found convergence around "liberty, equality, individualism, democracy, and the rule of law under a constitution."[8]

If travelers and scholars largely agreed on the content of the creed, there was less agreement about its sources. Myrdal noted a longstanding tendency "in the writing of the early history of American ideas" to emphasize the influence of Enlightenment rationalism.[9] In 1955, Harvard professor Louis Hartz published *The Liberal Tradition in America*, perhaps the most influential expression of this

approach. According to Hartz, the "American Way" was little more than a "nationalist articulation" of John Locke's social contract theory.[10]

Other analysts highlighted religious sources. Influenced by New England informants, Tocqueville emphasized covenantal themes derived from Calvinism. Max Weber, by contrast, recognized the contribution of revivalist sects that flourished in the backcountry. For Weber, preferences for free expression, voluntary association, and nonhierarchical social structures were derived from Low Church Protestantism.[11]

This religious quality impressed many foreign observers. "America," wrote the British litterateur G. K. Chesterton in 1922, remained "a nation with the soul of a church." "England is English as France is French or Ireland Irish. . . . The national unity is preserved by the national type," Chesterton contended. In America, however, membership in the nation was based on a profession of faith.[12]

Chesterton worried the American Creed was an ersatz religion that threatened Christianity. Yet most Americans perceived no contradiction. Myrdal was astonished that "political leaders are continuously deducing the American Creed out of the Bible."[13] Rather than displacing Scripture, they added the Declaration of Independence and other documents as a kind of supplementary revelation.

Because they are so often quoted as historical proof texts, it is important to emphasize that these accounts do not describe the American Creed as a fully coherent ideology. Instead, it was a rhetorical device to make sense of a loose set of assumptions and ideals. Those elements were ostensibly shared by nearly all Americans for nearly all of

American history. So why were they affirmed so vigorously around the middle of the twentieth century?

* * *

A surge of attention to creedal themes was partly a response to the crisis of the melting pot. Confidence in America's capacity to absorb immigrants had been waning since the Civil War. In 1924, the Johnson-Reed Act achieved a long-sought goal of restrictionists. The act did not end immigration entirely, but it banned further immigration from Asia and sharply capped "new" immigration from eastern and southern Europe.

Some Americans saw the end of mass immigration as an opportunity to restore Anglo-Protestant supremacy. Although they were careful to insist that immigrants could be as American as anyone else, patriotic associations promoted acceptance of an Anglocentric identity and history. The *Book of the American's Creed* circulated by a consortium including the Daughters of the American Revolution reflected this bargain. Translated into various languages for the benefit of "our foreign-born citizens," the slim volume made a point of Page's descent from Carter Braxton, a Virginia planter and signer of the Declaration of Independence.[14]

Other groups questioned whether voluntary assimilation was sufficient—or even possible. Established in Georgia in 1915, the so-called Second Ku Klux Klan deployed the symbolism of southern resistance to Reconstruction against a wider array of threats. By the 1920s, the revived Klan attracted hundreds of thousands of members, including a strong presence in the Midwest. Imperial Wizard H. W. Evans explained that the new task was to defend

"Americanism" not only against blacks, but also against "the clamor of the alien and the alien-minded liberal."[15]

Immigration restriction and coercive "Americanization" were partly successful policies. Reducing the flow of newcomers and discouraging expression of foreign cultures encouraged a degree of cohesion that had been absent when immigration was at its peak. Marriages between members of different groups and exclusive use of English became more common. If the "crucible" ever truly worked, it was probably during this period.

The melting of immigrants into the American people did not involve the elimination of differences, though. While ethnic divisions softened, religious ones became more salient. Sociologist Will Herberg described this phenomenon as the "triple melting pot."[16] Rather than a seamless national identity, white Americans tended to identify as Protestants, Catholics, or Jews.

Yet this process of sorting did not yield the political balkanization or cultural dislocation that advocates of "100% Americanism" feared. There was considerable dispute about issues including the enforcement of prohibition, the presidential candidacy of New York's Irish Catholic governor Al Smith, and the refusal of the Republican majority in Congress to conduct reapportionment on the basis of the 1920 census, which found that a majority of Americans lived in cities for the first time in history. Even so, governing institutions continued to function and many Americans enjoyed civil peace. During this period, so-called hyphenated Americans drifted toward a more generic "white ethnic" identity, in which urban living conditions and an increasingly nationalized popular culture were more powerful influences than ancestral languages or customs.

Here, again, it is important to note how social experience reflected racial categories. While many whites enjoyed relative calm and prosperity, the 1920s were a period of heightened terror for African Americans, especially in the South. Their great migration to Northern cities, prompted by the prospect of jobs in wartime industries, was accelerated by a surge in lynching and massacres in places like Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Rosewood, Florida, a majority black town in the rural Florida county named for the state's pioneering ethnically Jewish senator, David Yulee Levy.

Creedal nationalism was an attempt to explain the continuity of American institutions despite the transformation of its population. The nation could absorb so much immigration, liberal theorists reasoned, because its essence lay in ideas rather than in blood, soil, or religious confession. Unlike European nations, argued philosopher John Dewey, American "nationalism" was distinct from "nationality" as it was understood elsewhere.[17] "The United States might not comprise a single nationality wholly distinct from every other nationality," agreed Columbia University historian and interfaith activist Carlton J. H. Hayes, yet "in the zeal of its citizens for nationalism, no matter how artificial such nationalism might be, it was not to be outdone by any European country."[18]

The viability of ideological or "artificial" nationalism seemed to be confirmed by developments in the social sciences. Influenced by the German American scholar Franz Boas, a new school of anthropologists contended that differences between human communities were the product of culture. Rather than being determined by their genes, they asserted, human behavior was primarily determined

by *values*—a scrupulously nonjudgmental term only then entering common use.

For Boasians, such as Ruth Benedict, respect for the variety of cultures required their independence. This argument became an important justification for attempts to preserve what remained of Native American traditions. One application of cultural theory, then, led to a kind of defensive relativism. Cultures had to be kept separate in order to flourish on their own terms.

The University of Chicago sociologist Robert E. Park took a different approach. On his view, cultures were not discrete, stable entities. Instead, they were dynamic phenomena that could be enriched and transformed through exchange. To describe this process, Park proposed a model in which participants in different cultures gradually accept some shared norms. He called the culminating stage of this process "assimilation."[19]

The term *assimilation* is important because Park's account of this process did not require the future abandonment of earlier associations into a seamless whole, as in older conceptions of the melting pot. Instead, he proposed that group differences could persist indefinitely within a common social framework. This suggestion provided a theoretical basis for new ways of defining American nationality in terms of principles or beliefs rather than ethnic or religious homogeneity, even if that homogeneity were projected into the future rather than treated as an accomplished fact.

For most people, of course, academic concepts were incomprehensible or irrelevant. Whatever its status in academic journals or small magazines, the idea that the nation was a community of values entered public awareness in a

different way. The decisive factor was war. "War educates the senses, calls into action the will, perfects the physical constitution, brings men into such swift and close collision in critical moments that man measures man," wrote Emerson. "On its own scale, on the virtues it loves, it endures no counterfeit, but shakes the whole society until every atom falls into the place its specific gravity assigns it."[20]

* * *

A complete account of the relation between war and American national identity would begin earlier than the establishment of the United States. Historian Jill Lepore argues that King Philip's War of 1675–1676 was a turning point in the constitution of a distinct New England identity.[21] For Puritan leaders such as Increase Mather, the bloody conflict confirmed settlers' understanding of themselves as simultaneously English and a modern counterpart to the biblical chosen people. His *Brief History of the Warre with the Indians in New-England* begins with the observation that "the Heathen People amongst whom we live, and whose Land the Lord God of our Fathers hath given to us for a righftull Possession have at sundry times been plotting mischievous devices, against . . . the English Israel."[22]

Mather did not consider all colonists of North America part of this elect nation. The idea that they were engaged in a common enterprise emerged nearly a century later during the Seven Years' War, which pitted Anglo-Americans against the French. Revolutionary patriots again appealed to this latent community to make the case for independence from Britain.

The War of 1812 and the Mexican War had more enduringly polarizing consequences than the War of Independence. Because they threatened to shift the balance of domestic power as well as pursuing controversial strategic goals, each provoked sustained opposition. Even so, these conflicts extended connections among citizens from different regions and generated a symbolism of national unity. For example, the Stars and Stripes flag was unfamiliar to most Americans before the Mexican War.[23]

The victory of the Union in the Civil War settled the priority of the national government to its constituent parts while vastly expanding its administrative capacity. As an "essential, indestructible Unity," Charles Sumner argued, the United States deserved "all those central pervasive powers which minister to national life."[24] These powers included a professional civil service, national policies to promote economic growth, and other features of European states many Americans had previously resisted.

In addition to legitimizing the national state, the Civil War heightened existing ideological elements in American nationalism. Even before his election to the presidency, Lincoln rejected Rufus Choate's dismissal of the Declaration of Independence as a collection of "glittering generalities." "All honor to Jefferson," wrote Lincoln, "to the man who, in the concrete pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people, had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document, an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times."[25] In office, Lincoln recast the United States as the intentional application of this truth rather than merely an offshoot of England—or of the Christian church. That is

the meaning of his insistence in the Gettysburg Address that America began in 1776 as "a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Although he drew on covenantal motifs, Lincoln was careful to distinguish Americans from the biblical Israel. Rather than a modern elect nation, they were an "almost chosen" people accountable for their own conduct.[26] In his second inaugural address, his most profound mediation on this theme, Lincoln warned Americans against confidence that they had a special claim on divine favor or understood God's ways. Confronted by a disaster few had foreseen, they could only affirm, "as was said three thousand years ago" that "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."[27]

Not all of Lincoln's admirers shared this religious and moral caution. Inspired by Protestant eschatology, many supporters of the Union developed an account of America as the "redeemer nation" that would determine the fate of liberty for the whole world.[28] "In this blood our unity is cemented and forever sanctified," insisted minister Horace Bushnell in his oration in memory of Yale College's war dead.[29] "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," composed by abolitionist Julia Ward Howe, is an even more explicit version of Bushnell's political theology of human sacrifice. It culminates in the millenarian injunction "as [Jesus] died to make men holy, let us die to make men free."

A conception of America as bearer of a messianic task to promote equality and freedom was an inspiring vision but also a demanding one. Although it was sustained by some Republican politicians in the 1870s, it held waning appeal to a nation exhausted by war. In intellectual life,

the pragmatist movement was an attempt to justify the practice of democracy without appealing to fixed principles, whether derived from reason or from God. In politics, progressive nationalists such as Herbert Croly argued that shopworn theories of individual rights prevented the United States from assimilating immigrants and marshaling the energy necessary for competition with European great powers.

Far more than Theodore Roosevelt, whose "new nationalism" drew on anticreedal arguments by Croly and other progressives, it was Woodrow Wilson who adopted a nationalism of ostensibly universal ideals. The nation's purpose, he asserted in his first inaugural address, was "no mere task of politics but a task which shall search us through." Americans were required to do more than consider the national interest. They had to subject "everything that concerns our life as a Nation to the light that shines from the hearthfire of every man's conscience and vision of the right." [30]

Lincoln was a central figure in Wilson's revival of the American Creed. As a Democrat with southern roots, Wilson had the personal credibility necessary to recast Lincoln as a national hero rather than the partisan and regional icon of the decades following the Civil War. According to historian Barry Schwartz, Wilson invoked Lincoln as the model for his own commitments to individual dignity, accessible government, and personal leadership.[31]

Wilson also echoed Civil War–era presentations of the United States as vehicle of a grand historical struggle. This moralized vision of America guided his policy during the First World War. Declaring that the world "must be made safe for democracy," he presented the conflict as a

struggle between the forces of good and evil. The task, he argued, was not to promote efficiency or secure some narrow interest. It was "to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power and to set up among the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth ensure the observance of those principles."[32] As early as 1914, Wilson said that the Stars and Stripes would one day serve as "not only the flag of America, but of humanity."[33]

Wilson's conception of "a culminating and final war for human liberty" informed an unprecedented campaign of propaganda as the United States mobilized for the great conflict.[34] Americans were encouraged to see themselves as a particular people endowed with a universal mission. "The American Revolution," Wilson chided the Daughters of the American Revolution, was not merely a war for the independence of a specific branch of the English nation. It "was the creation of a great free republic based on traditions of personal liberty which theretofore had been confined to a single little island, but which it was purposed should spread to all mankind."[35]

Wilson's policies often belied the idealism of his rhetoric. During his 1912 campaign against the Republican incumbent William Howard Taft and Progressive challenger Theodore Roosevelt, he promised African American leaders, "Should I become President of the United States they may count upon me for absolute fair dealing for everything by which I could assist in advancing their interests of the race."[36] As president, though, Wilson segregated the federal service, a source of economic opportunity and political

legitimacy for blacks since Reconstruction. While neither met the standards of midcentury liberalism, Wilson's record on race compares unfavorably with Roosevelt's inconsistent but apparently genuine hope for inclusive progress.[37]

During the war, Wilson approved the conscription of black men and commissioning of black officers—against the objections of some southern Democrats. But the military remained segregated, and African American troops were mostly assigned to noncombat duties. As in the Civil War, black units, including the 369th Infantry (or "Harlem Hellfighters"), became a symbol of African Americans' commitment to American ideals. Yet their treatment remained a glaring contradiction to the proposition consecrated at Gettysburg.

Wilson's brand of nationalism also turned against political dissenters. The Espionage Act of 1917 and Sedition Act of 1918 made it a crime to interfere with the war effort, which newspapers and other media presented as a modern crusade. Interpreting this prohibition to include speech, the Department of Justice prosecuted pacifists, anarchists, and socialists for criticizing US involvement in the European conflict. The most famous target was Eugene V. Debs, the socialist party presidential candidate who was sentenced to ten years in prison for obstructing the draft. (The harsh sentence was commuted by President Warren Harding in 1921.)

Antisubversion campaigns overlapped with existing suspicion of immigrants and so-called "hyphenated Americans." Once oriented toward patriotic education and civic inclusion, the National Americanization Committee (NAC), led by progressive activist Frances Kellor, changed

its motto from "Many people, but one nation" to "America first." The NAC had initially encouraged measures of practical assimilation such as learning English. It now suggested the internment of potentially disloyal noncitizens.[38]

Unlike the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War, these proposals were not adopted. Yet immigrant and ethnic communities were subjected to both official and unofficial harassment and violence. Towns such as Berlin, Iowa adopted more patriotic names—in that case, ironically, Lincoln. In Collinsville, Illinois, a German born citizen named Robert Prager was lynched by an angry crowd. Under intense pressure, the distinctive German American culture of the Midwest virtually ceased to exist by war's end. Although national restrictions failed, some localities and states even outlawed teaching and publishing in German.[39]

The implications of the First World War were contradictory, then. On the one hand, it revived and extended an ideological conception of American identity from the Civil War. The United States was fighting not merely for its own soul, but for that of the human race. Lincoln foreshadowed this view in his first annual message to Congress, in which he described the Union as the "last, best hope of earth."[40] Wilson made it a fighting faith.

On the other hand, the conduct of the war was characterized by policies that seemed inconsistent with that hope. Political centralization, official propaganda, and the repression of dissent made America more like the European nations from which Americans once sought to distance themselves. In the 1930s and 1940s, creedal nationalists attempted to reconcile these contradictions.

In the Second World War, the United States could finally live up to its ideals.

* * *

Many Americans responded to the emergence of fascism with a mixture of indifference, condescension, and, in some cases, approval. If not dismissed as foreign oddities, burgeoning nationalist movements could be interpreted by progressives as models of political solidarity and by economic and religious conservatives as bulwarks against socialism and cultural decadence. In some cases, the admiration was mutual. Adolf Hitler praised the Johnson-Reed Act as an exemplar of racial self-defense and dispatched a team of Nazi legal experts to study whether elements of American race policy could be exported to Germany.[41]

As European nationalisms became increasingly exclusive, authoritarian, and aggressive, though, fundamental distinctions became more appealing. Both to hold together an ethnically diverse electoral coalition and for reasons of foreign policy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration combined Wilsonian moralism with new academic theories about assimilation under shared values. By the late 1930s, the executive branch was producing radio broadcasts and educational materials to promote "the preservation of the aims, ideals, and spirit for which our democracy stands." One series of radio broadcasts bore the resonant title "Americans All . . . Immigrants All."[42]

The phrase is notable because it is often associated with postwar arguments for repealing the Johnson-Reed Act, including then-senator John F. Kennedy's 1958 book

A Nation of Immigrants. But major public figures' embrace of immigration under common political principles goes back to the years preceding World War II. When Kennedy spoke of a nation of immigrants, his audience would have recalled similar phrases, fondly or otherwise, from the Roosevelt administration.

In 1938, President Roosevelt imitated Wilson by using the national convention of the Daughters of the American Revolution as a platform for explaining his ideological reconfiguration of American national identity. He insisted that Americans were not ethnically or culturally monolithic but a composite of "immigrants and revolutionists" unified by "the common spirit of democracy." Connecting the present crisis with the Declaration, he called for greater appreciation of "some of the underlying fundamentals, the reasons that brought our immigrant ancestors to this country, the reasons that impelled our Revolutionary ancestors to throw off a fascist yoke."[43] The looming world war was a continuation of a single struggle that extended back to 1776.

Popular media echoed the president's message. As the United States moved toward war, journalist Kenneth Umbreit published a book titled *Founding Fathers: Men Who Shaped Our Tradition*. Amazingly, the term *Founding Fathers* had been coined as recently as 1920s and was still unfamiliar to most Americans.[44] In creedal nationalism, a philosophical kinship with figures like Jefferson and Lincoln replaced more exclusive fixations on the Puritans or first families of Virginia. Not everyone could be descended from the New England or Upper Southern elite. But all could be assimilated into an extended family constituted by political principles.

When the United States entered the war, such loosely coordinated efforts became official policy. With sixteen million people in uniform and eight million deployed overseas, it was imperative to sustain the unity in plurality that the creed promised. For newly inducted servicemen, the message was emphasized by dramatic training films including the *Why We Fight* series directed by Frank Capra. A strategic commitment to inclusion also helps explain why German and Italian Americans were not brought under the same kind of scrutiny as in World War I. Despite significant profascist and pro-Nazi sentiment in some communities before 1941, the Roosevelt administration insisted that European-born citizens were presumptively loyal.

The exclusion of Japanese Americans from this strategic tolerance reflects the limits of that assumption. While European immigrants or their descendants were assured that creedal faith made them good Americans, citizens of Japanese origin (all native-born, due to race clauses in naturalization law) were subject to internment along with so-called enemy aliens. Strictly speaking, Executive Order 9066, which provided for internment, was subject to military necessity and made no mention of persons of Japanese ancestry. But statements in newspapers and by local politicians left little doubt that many Americans saw them as inherently dangerous.

Recalling the role of black units in other conflicts, the performance of Japanese American troops helped undermine these suspicions. The 442nd Regimental Combat Team, recruited from Japanese American communities, became the most decorated units of the war. Paradoxically, some of the most dramatic departures from equality under the law helped publicize the American Creed. The

postwar civil rights movements would make effective use of this tactic.

Indeed, the systematic subordination of African Americans became far harder to publicly defend during this period. In "an ideological war fought in defense of democracy," Myrdal noted, "the principle of democracy had to be applied more explicitly to race." Racial attitudes did not change overnight. But racism and discrimination were at least theoretically acknowledged as a contradiction to the nation's war aims: "In fighting fascism and Nazism, the United States had to stand before the whole world in favor of racial toleration and cooperation and of racial equality."[45]

The military itself was the object of intensive efforts to bring American institutions in line with ostensible American principles. While the armed forces remained segregated, black servicemen were increasingly admitted to positions from which they had once been excluded. Writer James Gould Cozzens vividly depicted this process in his Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *Guard of Honor*. Set on a fictional Florida air base in 1943, the book depicts the controversial desegregation of officers' facilities when an all-black bomber squadron is assigned there for training.

So-called platoon movies attracted even wider audiences. In the popular film *Bataan*, an ethnically mixed group of GIs confronted a Japanese enemy so monolithic that its members were indistinguishable. Other films used exotic settings to emphasize the possibility of interracial and intercultural cooperation. In the Humphrey Bogart vehicle *Sahara*, African American Rex Ingram portrayed a Sudanese soldier in a much more heroic role than black actors usually received.

Even Native Americans, whose citizenship had been regularized only in 1924, were celebrated as integral to the nation. After helping raise the Stars and Stripes over Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima, the Pima Indian and US marine Ira Hayes was dispatched on a national tour to sell war bonds. He eventually played himself in the 1949 film *Sands of Iwo Jima*, starring John Wayne.

In view of the subsequent deployment of the American Creed as an ideological counterpoint to Marxism, it is ironic that communists and socialists played a disproportionate role in its wartime promulgation. One example is the successful film *The House I Live In* and its title song, in which Italian American icon Frank Sinatra crooned "All races and religions, that's America to me." Originally part of the stage show *Let Freedom Ring*, the music and lyrics had been composed by Communist Party members Earl Robinson and Abel Meeropol. Robinson was later blacklisted from screen work, while Meeropol adopted the children of executed spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

Although their primary audience was domestic, depictions of multiethnic, multicultural forces united by a shared creed also had a geopolitical purpose. They broadcast to the world that, despite its military presence on every continent save Antarctica, the United States was not pursuing the imperial policy of its British, French, or Soviet allies—or its own past. Instead, it was fighting for a new order in which an approximation of the American way of life would be available everywhere. "This nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of its millions of free men and women; and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God," Roosevelt informed the world in his

"Four Freedoms" speech. "Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere."[46]

* * *

If intellectuals' search for a new way of understanding America shaped wartime propaganda, the causes of that war provoked reconsideration of the very concept of nationalism. Rather than conceding the term to Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo, postwar scholarship argued that nationalism came in two different varieties, one based on unchosen features including race or place of birth, the other on subjective commitment to political principles. America was the exemplar of the latter variety. "The American nation has not been determined by 'natural' factors of blood and soil, nor by common memories of a long history," asserted the Prague-born Jewish émigré Hans Kohn. "It was formed by an idea."[47]

Kohn's account was appealing because it projected distinctive aspects of twentieth-century America into the past. Relying heavily on formal rhetoric, Kohn argued that America had *always* been defined by equal freedom and voluntary assimilation. This interpretation abstracted from notions of American purpose that emphasized English origin, territorial expansion, or racial homogeneity—to say nothing of evidence that American principles were not consistently upheld. Despite his own selective use of evidence, Kohn contended that American identity avoided the sort of historical myths and legends that he saw as central to German nationalism.

Whatever its academic merits, Kohn's ideas helped moderate the tension between unity and plurality that

troubled critics of the melting pot. By presenting a vision of the nation that was not defined by descent and embraced individual freedom, creedal or "civic" nationalism allowed Americans to argue that the violence and exclusion that once seemed inseparable from nation-building were European problems that could be overcome by the example and leadership of the United States. In 1943, Horace Kallen, the leading theorist of cultural pluralism, claimed all he ever meant by the term was the "material and spiritual intent of the four freedoms."[48]

In addition to reconciliation with certain forms of consensus, the concept of civic nationalism permitted an intellectual rapprochement with religion. Rather than a mystification, theorists presented a generalized version of biblical faith as a powerful source of cohesion. Balancing his account of denominational sorting in the "triple melting pot," Will Herberg concluded that "a realistic appraisal of the values, ideas, and behavior of the American people leads to the conclusion that Americans . . . do have a 'common religion' and that that 'religion' is the system familiarly known as the American Way of Life. It is the American Way of Life that . . . provides the framework in terms of which the crucial values of American existence are couched."[49]

Herberg was a former member of the Communist Party who had turned to an idiosyncratic form of Judaism, and his analysis was not exactly praise. Americans' faith, he noted, could be "intolerant," "materialistic," and theologically empty. Nevertheless, the sanctification of national principles was the only way to draw together a people of diverse origins—a task more necessary than ever. With Nazism vanquished, Herberg hoped to concentrate

Americans' energy on combatting "the demonic threat of Communist totalitarianism."[50]

Drawing on his wartime experience as commander of a vast international force and commitment to resisting communism, Dwight Eisenhower appealed more explicitly to ideology than any American leader since Lincoln. Before entering office, he pledged to devote himself to "the American Creed" of "human freedom and all eternal values."[51] His first inaugural address asserted, "We who are free must proclaim anew our faith. This faith is the abiding creed of our fathers. . . . It establishes, beyond debate, those gifts of the Creator that are man's inalienable rights, and that make all men equal in His sight."[52] As President, Eisenhower approved the addition of the phrase "under God," used by Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address, to the originally secular Pledge of Allegiance. Combining creedal rhetoric, religious affirmation, and classic nationalist symbolism, the pledge suggested that Americans had at last become "one nation" by finally realizing the promises of the Declaration.

* * *

Just a few decades later, that belief lay in ruins. In 1972, the historian Sydney Ahlstrom mourned that "the traditional grounds of American loyalty are rapidly dissolving." Nearly half of Americans, he noted, feared imminent "national breakdown." Creedal identity now seemed insufficient to constitute a national community. "We are threatened," Ahlstrom concluded, "by the snapping of those bonds of loyalty and affection essential to the health of any collective enterprise."[53]

Why did creedal nationalism prove so brittle? Observers of American politics had long noticed that simultaneous commitments to liberty and equality, the pursuit of justice and respect for the Constitution, the universality of moral principles, and particularity of the nation did not entirely hang together. Under social and political stress, one aspect could be pitted against another. The result was internal conflicts Huntington called moments of "creedal passion."[54]

The War of Independence and the conflict over slavery were such moments. The 1960s seemed to be another. "We live at present in a time of trial at least as severe as those of the Revolution and Civil War," wrote sociologist Robert Bellah. The upheavals of the decade were tests of "whether our inherited institutions can be creatively adapted to meet the 20th century crisis of justice and order at home and in the world."[55]

One test revolved around race. In *An American Dilemma*, Myrdal denied that white Americans were cynics about the creed. Instead, they tended to place their political principles in a separate "compartment" from their racial views.[56] One benefit of the Second World War, he argued, was that its ideological character was making this compartmentalization more difficult to sustain. The "main trend" of American society was the gradual realization of the creed.

Myrdal's optimism about the future of race relations was itself an element of the creed. If America was a moral enterprise with a redemptive purpose, then injustice, however glaring, should be only a temporary detour. In 1853, the abolitionist Theodore Parker envisioned "a continual and progressive triumph of the right." "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe," Parker admitted; "the arc

is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways. . . . But from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."[57]

Some historians emphasize realist motives for the continuation of creedal nationalism from the Second World War into the Cold War. In the worldwide struggle against communism, it was seen as important that the United States not only proclaim universal values but that domestic practice exemplify those values. Religious prejudice and, especially, racial hierarchy undermined America's moral authority.[58] In 1960, presidential candidate and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People member Richard Nixon explained the situation to a southern voter: "I am deeply concerned with the impact of racial division in terms of world power. . . . If we of the United States are considered racists, then we may lose to the Communist camp hundreds of millions of potential friends and allies. That would leave us disastrously isolated in a hostile world."[59]

But arguments that the American Creed demanded the transformation of race relations were not necessarily cynical. At least for liberals, the emergence of the modern civil rights movement confirmed sincere expectations of progress. America, as they saw it, had already won two wars for democracy and was bitterly contesting a third. It was only appropriate for those struggles abroad to be continued at home.

The hope that African Americans could prove their worthiness of citizenship through military sacrifice was a theme in black thought going back at least to the Civil War. Attacks on returning veterans, sometimes in uniform, were a key element in galvanizing resistance to segregation in the following decades. During World War II, black newspapers

adopted a "double V" campaign for victory against fascism abroad and segregation at home.

The association of political struggle with religious struggle is another motif of creedal politics that became closely linked to postwar civil rights movements. The motto of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded in 1957, was "to redeem the soul of America." This link is sometimes remembered as a distinctive aspect of the civil rights movement, which had deep roots in black churches. In many ways, though, it is consistent with conventions of the Eisenhower era, which stressed interfaith piety as the moral anchor of American institutions.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous invocation of creedal tropes should be placed in this broader frame. Rather than crafting a novel language of moral urgency, he was appealing to creedal symbols and arguments that had been at the center of public discussion since the Second World War. It is no diminution of King's achievements to see him as employing a relatively conventional rhetorical style. The best way to convince an audience is often to begin from familiar premises or terms.

King's murder led to his posthumous adoption, alongside Lincoln, as a martyr of the American Creed. Along with the Declaration of Independence and Gettysburg Address, his 1963 address on the national mall has become a sort of proof text of civic nationalism. "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," he memorably announced.

Yet repetition of this famous line obscures the obstacles to racial equality that King always recognized and found increasingly frustrating as his career continued. As Myrdal

and his team documented, many whites were troubled by legal segregation, which made a mockery of America's wartime rhetoric. They were more comfortable with social segregation. Other studies of public opinion found broad support among whites for formal equality but hostility to close contact between races.[60]

This reluctance was not limited to the stereotypical poor whites of the South. In Northern cities, white working-class critics of policies such as educational busing accurately pointed out that liberal elites shielded their own children from integration by means of private schools, residential zoning, and other subtle tactics. The issue was not simply bigotry, although there certainly were bigots among opponents of busing and affirmative action. Rather "white ethnics" saw themselves as unwilling subjects of expansive antidiscrimination apparatus that richer, better educated whites had the influence to work around.

As the civil rights debate shifted from legal exclusion and murderous violence in the South to *de facto* segregation in the North, King's diagnosis became less optimistic. In 1967, he insisted, "It is necessary to refute the idea that the dominant ideology in our country even today is freedom and equality while racism is just an occasional departure from the norm on the part of a few bigoted extremists." Racism, King argued, was not an exception to the rule laid down in 1776. It was a "congenital deformity" that "crippled the nation from its inception."[61]

King's doubts about the creed were partly a response to more militant voices in black communities. "I don't even consider myself an American," Malcolm X insisted. "Those Honkies that just got off the boat, they're already Americans. . . . As long as you and I have been over here, we aren't

Americans yet."[62] The creed was a source of national unity, Malcolm X admitted. But it functioned only for whites, who were not called upon to prove that they deserved freedom.

Developing this line of argument, coauthors Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton contended there was no conflict between "the so-called American Creed and American practices." Myrdal's dilemma was an illusion because equality and liberty "were not even originally intended to have applicability to black people."[63] For black-power theorists, appeals to moral values were impotent. Only through economic, social, and perhaps political autonomy could blacks achieve dignity.

Racial separatism was always a minority position. Yet the conclusion of major civil rights legislation after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, increasing urban disorder, and the breakdown of educational desegregation led many liberals to question whether the creed was sufficient to bind up the nation's historic wounds. In 1963, the sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset published *The First New Nation*, an account of American identity influenced by Myrdal and Kohn. In the revised edition of 1979, Lipset acknowledged that his sweeping historical analysis was largely a product of the immediate postwar era: those "bygone, almost bucolic days" when America could be uncritically identified as the great bastion of equality and freedom. For better or worse, "the rise of militant social movements concerned with the status of various minority groups . . . seemingly changed the perception which Americans had of their country."[64] The sources of the creed were old, but its public authority was concentrated in the midcentury interlude.

Journalist Paul Cowan presented a more personal account of the same development. In his investigations

of the rival "tribes of America," he concluded: "I've been witnessing the dissolution of the consensus that developed during the New Deal and continued, unchallenged, through World War II and the Kennedy years. That consensus was built on the bright hope of America's promise. It foundered when it became clear that the era of limitless growth had ended, that the melting pot—with its wondrous dream of upward mobility for all—was a promise that couldn't be fulfilled. Then groups became convinced that they would be involved in an endless, brutal competition for the most rudimentary benefits."[65]

* * *

As much as racial tensions, the Vietnam War also undermined confidence in American ideals. It was "cruelly ironic," King observed, to watch "Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools." Military mobilization generated a "brutal solidarity" that peace could not offer. But this was a mockery of the deeper solidarity "of longing, of hope" to which King tried to recall his "beloved nation."[66]

Speaking from the pulpit of the Riverside Church in New York City, King positioned his criticism of the war in the tradition of Lincoln. Rather than a celebration of American exceptionalism, it was a condemnation of the nation for failing to uphold its responsibilities. Reinhold Niebuhr and his coauthor, historian Alan Heimert, contrasted this "prophetic" style with the self-worship the American Creed could encourage. "If the spiritual moral hazard of a dedicated nation," they wrote, "is its inclination to regard its

sense of mission as proof of its virtue, the political hazard . . . is to fashion its policies too slavishly in accordance with the original content of its messianic vision."[67]

For Niebuhr, the purpose of prophetic religion was to humble the nation before God. Americans, as Lincoln had warned, were an "almost chosen people" responsible for recognizing and amending their failures. Criticism from a transcendent standard, Bellah agreed, was the proper function of religion in American politics. "Time and again there have risen prophets to recall this people to its original task," he noted.[68]

Yet this was not the lesson that all Americans had derived from their experiences of successive world wars, both hot and cold. To many descendants of the new immigrants, America was "almost a religion," wrote the Catholic theologian Michael Novak. Their willingness to fight was the evidence that they truly belonged: "The flag alone proves that they are not stupid, cloddish, dull, but capable of the greatest act men can make: to die for others."[69] For many liberals, the creed was betrayed when America sent its boys to die in the jungle for dubious purposes. For many of the Americans Novak sardonically described as "PIGS"—Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slavs—opposition to the war looked like rejection of the blood sacrifices that made them Americans.

These tensions became unsustainable when focused on the draft. Movies such as *Bataan* were not merely propaganda. Military service really was a powerful institution for promoting social integration, civic education, and a shared sense of loyalty and sacrifice. These accomplishments extended to race as well as ethnicity. After the military was desegregated by presidential order in 1947, it became the

most racially egalitarian institution in American life—far more so than the universities that served as nurseries to the antiwar movement.

Yet conscription in undeclared wars was hard to square with creedal principles. Rather than promoting national unity, concluded a presidential commission appointed to study an all-volunteer force, "the draft erodes ideals of patriotism and service by alienating many of the young who bear the burden. American youths are raised in an atmosphere where freedom and justice are held dear. It is difficult for them to cope with a situation that falls far short of these ideals just as they enter adulthood."[70] As with race, the tension between the theory and practice of Americanism seemed too great to bear.

It is ironic, then, that the decision to end the draft was justified by what the commission called "basic national values."[71] Consistency with the creed eliminated one of the main practices through which it had been articulated, institutionalized, and propagated. The creed promised domestic cohesion and ideological struggle abroad. The frustration of racial progress, erosion of public order, and defeat abroad made a mockery of that promise.

CHAPTER 4

Memory, Nostalgia, Narrative

In 1989, the State of New York began the process of revising its social studies curriculum. Under its commissioner of education, Thomas Sobol, a panel of scholars, teachers, and administrators considered existing standards and offered recommendations for improvement. To address dissatisfaction about the appointment of Sobol, who earned degrees at Harvard and served as superintendent in affluent Scarsdale, a "task force on minorities" was empaneled.[1]

The task force released its report in July. Despite chairman Harry Hamilton's announcement stating, "We're on the brink of something very important for New York and the nation," the document attracted little immediate attention. Yet Hamilton was right, if not in the way he expected. By November, "A Curriculum of Inclusion" was the focus of national debate.

The bulk of "A Curriculum of Inclusion" was anodyne. Among other proposals, the committee recommended increased attention to the large migration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland US after World War II, when they became an important "immigrant" community despite their

technical citizenship. Rather than matters of detail, the controversy revolved around the report's extraordinary judgment of traditional scholarship, "European Americans," and the United States in general. According to the first sentence: "African Americans, Asian Americans, Puerto Ricans/Latinos, and Native Americans have all been the victims of an intellectual and educational oppression that has characterized the culture and institutions of the United States and the European American world for centuries."[2]

This indictment made "A Curriculum of Inclusion" a symbol of the "culture war." Originating in the campaign against the Roman Catholic Church by the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the term *culture war* was revived by the American sociologist James Davison Hunter. Unlike contests for territory, wealth, or political authority, the culture war was, according to Hunter, a "competition to define social reality."[3]

Hunter contended that the twentieth century left Americans unprepared for culture war. The succession of the First World War, Second World War, and Cold War created an expectation for political unity and moral consensus. But the collapse of the Soviet Union removed the pressure from an external adversary that was such a powerful source of internal solidarity. In the aftermath, the nation turned its energies inward—and often against itself. In his address to the 1992 Republican National Convention, commentator and presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan pronounced, "This election . . . is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as was the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America."[4] Liberal columnist Molly Ivins quipped that the speech "probably sounded better in the original German."[5]

As historian Andrew Hartman has documented in his study *A War for the Soul of America*, which takes Buchanan's speech as its point of departure, the culture war was fought on fronts including crime, sexual morality, and environmental policy. To a striking degree, however, it revolved around education. For culture warriors on the right and left, college curricula and high school textbooks were the means for making or breaking the social order. "History is to the nation rather as memory is to the individual," wrote the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. "As the means of defining national identity, history becomes a means of shaping history."[6]

Most skirmishes in culture wars long ago slipped into the realm of trivia. Who now remembers the controversial Pepsi commercial featuring Madonna's then-shocking song "Like a Prayer"?[7] In 1989, an assistant director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation wrote an official letter denouncing the "gangsta" rap group NWA.[8] In 2020, former member Ice Cube worked with President Trump on an economic plan for African Americans.

But Schlesinger's concern about the role of writing, teaching, and dramatizing what happened long ago in determining the conditions of the present has not gone away. Americans turn to history to explain who we should be. The most it can really tell us, however, is who we were. The culture wars continue because we want interpretations of the past to stand as proxies for political argument in the present. And that is a burden history cannot bear.

* * *

Schlesinger's warning was a variation on themes from the French philosopher and historian Ernest Renan. According

to Renan, the "spiritual principle" of a nation consists of two elements: the present and the past. In the present lie ongoing acts of affirmation that he describes as a "daily plebiscite." In the past lies "a rich legacy of memories" shared by members of the nation, binding them together as a community.[9]

We must be careful not to take appeals to national memory literally. For one thing, they are always selective. "A heroic past with great men and glory," Renan writes, "is the social capital upon which the national idea rests." But no nation has a past that is entirely glorious. The record always includes injustice, suffering, and defeat. In order to preserve our accumulated capital, we tend to ignore or minimize these episodes. Renan concludes that not only remembering but also "the act of forgetting" is "an essential factor in the creation of a nation."[10]

Selectivity is not the only dubious aspect of national memory. Another is the fact that no one literally remembers events they did not experience. Instead, we imagine the past based on the information available to us. The imaginary quality of national memory is a clue to the importance of historical education in the culture wars. If we could truly remember the Battle of Gettysburg, it would be less important how that event was described in textbooks or depicted in films.

Even if one had genuine memories of historical events, moreover, there is no guarantee that they would be consistent with others' recollections. The classic film *Rashomon* depicts how differently people can perceive and recall the same event. Journalist David Rieff argues that the variety of perspectives make it "impossible to speak of a people's collective memory in the same way that we speak of an individual memory." Rather than an objective reality, national

memory "is a metaphor meant to interpret reality and carries with it all the risks inherent in the metaphoric understanding of the world."[11]

The point is not that collective memory is fake. Rather, it is that "memory" in the historical imaginary has different meanings for individuals and for groups, for direct witnesses and for those who have read or heard about a distant event. The complexity of these relationships gives historians a special role in the maintenance of nations. Unlike artists who acknowledge no obligation to imagine the past as it was, historians appeal to the possibility of collective memory even as they recognize its limits.

* * *

The development of modern historiography is closely linked to the success of nationalism. As nation-states became the dominant political form in Europe, patriotic writers turned to history to explain their origins, characteristics, and prospects. The titles of works such as Thomas Babington Macaulay's *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, Jules Michelet's *The History of France*, and Leopold Ranke's *Nine Books of Prussian History* advertise this purpose.

The ambition to weave together coherent national memories extended across the Atlantic. Timothy Dwight, the poet laureate of the New English covenant, hoped that epic verse would express a distinctively American identity. A subsequent generation of literary men that came to prominence in the early nineteenth century turned to regional histories, like Washington Irving's *A History of New York*, and biographies, including Mason ("Parson") Weems's biographies of Benjamin Franklin, William Penn,

and George Washington. It was not until what Schlesinger was to call, over a century later, the "age of Jackson," though, that Americans were offered an ostensibly complete national history. In ten volumes, George Bancroft presented a *History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent to the Present*.

Bancroft avoids the moralizing and mythologizing for which Weems has become notorious. Yet his *History of the United States* aims to do more than narrate the past "as it really happened," as Ranke claimed to do. From the very first pages, it sets out a political aim. Like Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Bancroft refuted disparaging accounts of the United States, its physical setting, its population, and its culture that Bancroft found in European studies. So long as Americans learned their own history from foreigners, they would remain captive to foreign prejudices. An independent nation needed its own memory.

Beginning the story with Christopher Columbus was a step toward this goal. By starting in 1492, Bancroft depicted the establishment and expansion of the United States as the inevitable result of a centuries-old, globe-spanning process. Although he had an impeccable Yankee background and was married to a relative of Timothy Dwight, Bancroft rejected the Puritan origin story. His America was from its beginnings an international power subject to polyglot influences and linked with the great affairs of peoples.

While it may appear to look inward, then, national history also keeps an eye on the rest of the world. It aims not only to constitute the nation from internal sources but also to place it in a favorable relationship with its foreign counterparts and rivals. Bancroft's lifework was to give Americans a history as big and glorious, if not as long, as that of

the English or French. In doing so, he hoped to secure the "separate and equal station" the Declaration claimed.

* * *

A Jacksonian Democrat who embraced the idea that God had cleared the continent for American expansion, Bancroft believed history was subject to divine guidance. A "favoring Providence" was responsible for the success of the American people and their institutions.[12] More than his antique style or the immense length of his books, it is this teleological element of his work that seems most antiquated.

In the last century, scholars have become reluctant to interpret the past as moving toward an intelligible goal. Politicians and ministers might still talk about the arc of history. Historians, broadly speaking, do not. Even so, the course of human events sometimes seems more purposive than contingent. To explain the astonishing rise of the United States to leadership of the "free world," therefore, many scholars turned to the power of American ideals. After the Second World War, various writers, including Louis Hartz, Daniel Boorstin, and Edmund Morgan, developed interpretations of American history that revolved around liberal principles derived from Enlightenment philosophy. Even if these principles were only imperfectly realized at the outset, the trend was toward broader understanding of their meaning and greater consistency in their application, culminating in victory over the Nazis.

This reassuring account was appealing to a country engaged in an ideological struggle against totalitarian enemies. Whether or not God favored America, history demonstrated the efficacy of the American Creed. Boorstin

proposed that "the facts of our history made it easy for us to assume that our national life . . . has had a clear purpose."[13] That purpose was the perfection and promulgation of a political theory enunciated in the Declaration and realized by the Constitution.

It is important to emphasize that Boorstin was not exactly advocating this view. He was describing a belief about the nature and significance of American experience about which he held reservations. In particular, Boorstin feared that the American penchant for teleology encouraged indifference to moral and political dilemmas—in other words, a belief that America had somehow escaped history. A persistent irony of history writing is that description is easily mistaken for endorsement.

In more popular presentations, such as the works of Henry Steele Commager, the biographer of Theodore Parker who produced a series of studies in political and intellectual history, the distinction between description and celebration could be genuinely difficult to perceive. By the end of the Eisenhower administration, John Higham denounced the "cult of the 'American consensus'" that ostensibly dominated the field.[14] According to Higham, who would become a leading expert on nativism and immigration, an emphasis on agreement and continuity in the national past obscured the reality of conflict between ideals, interests, and loyalties.

Despite its rebellious rhetoric, Higham's challenge to so-called consensus history came from within the intellectual establishment. While he saw conflict as the proper subject of research, Higham assumed historians of his generation had little personally at stake. Until recently, "militant southerners, confident westerners, defiant Brahmins,

and . . . self-conscious representatives of various ethnic minorities were turning up facets of our history reflective of their claims or grievances, and championing regionalism, Puritanism, or cultural pluralism, as the case might be." As products of an "increasingly homogeneous society," however, scholars were no longer motivated to "vindicate their respective subjects" as a personal cause.[15]

If consensus historians were wrong about the past, then, they were substantially right about the present. Since the Second World War, Higham suggested, Americans really were coming to agree on important issues. The consensus historians' mistake was to project backward onto American history the consensus of their own time.

As the contemporary erosion of creedal nationalism also indicates, expectations of academic homogeneity turned out to be radically misplaced in the 1960s. Within a few years, a more profound challenge to consensus history arose from outside conventional scholarship. Rather than transferring matters of personal commitment to the past, black-power and other minority-group theorists argued that American identity remained subject to contestation. "African-American history means a long history . . . not taught in the standard textbooks of this country," wrote Carmichael and Hamilton.[16] If African Americans were to take their place in national life, the textbooks would have to change.

Rather than telling a shared story of progressive triumph, these critics of national memory presented the development of the United States and its colonial precursors as a series of defeats for native populations, for blacks, for workers, and for disfavored immigrants. Wealthy Americans, white Americans, and male Americans had

won freedom and equality by taking them from others. The continuing reinterpretation of Columbus, the founding hero in Bancroft's account, is a concentrated example of this project in reinterpretation. Presented by Bancroft as the inauguration of a new world of liberty, 1492 was transformed into a signifier of brutality and oppression.

The struggle over American memory began in relatively limited circles. The turbulent 1969 meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA) that pitted left-wing scholars against an allegedly pro-consensus establishment did not rival the Woodstock festival or the moon landing among the year's major events. Topics such as "Pre-Columbian Contacts with the New World" or "Ethnic Influences on Austro-American Relations, 1885" were not calculated to set public passions aflame.[17]

But the arcane nature of these disputes did not mean they were irrelevant. Scholars formed by academic battles—and often very real battles on college campuses and in the Jim Crow South—went on to challenge Americans' understanding of their past in fundamental ways. Among the academic malcontents was Boston University professor Howard Zinn. Published in 1980, Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* synthesized and popularized—perhaps vulgarized—the kind of radical scholarship on display at the 1969 meeting. It remains a staple of high school and college reading lists, becoming the new kind of textbook that Carmichael and Hamilton demanded.

In one sense, *A People's History* was in the tradition of national history. A chronological narrative written in an accessible style, it was closer in approach to Bancroft than to most academic research. Rather than fixating on

archives or methods, Zinn told a story. And a riveting story it was: doughty bands of regular folks standing up against villainous oppressors.

At the same time, Zinn suggested that it was impossible to write a truly national history. "Seeing the country as divided between oppressors and oppressed," comments historian Daniel Immerwahr, "[Zinn] made little room for common cause, for shared dreams, for even a common history."[18] While Zinn's title refers to a singular national people—a vaguely Marxist allusion to the end of class conflict after a proletarian revolution—his account could also be described as a *peoples'* history of the United States. Rather than coalescing in a single story, however idealized, the experiences and struggles of component groups remained distinct.

For some Americans, the disaggregation of collective memory was liberating. Blacks, women, and ethnic minorities had reason to believe that their experiences and contributions were unjustly neglected. So-called "white ethnics" also began to search for a usable past that distinguished them from the historical Anglo-Protestant elite. Reflecting on his education in industrial Pennsylvania in the 1940s, Michael Novak wrote, "Nowhere in my schooling do I recall any attempt to put me in touch with my own history. . . . English literature, American literature, and even the history books, as I recall them, were peopled mainly by Anglo-Saxons from Boston."[19] For all their attempts at inclusion, conventional stories forgot too much about too many.

At the same time, the proliferation of identities and narratives was disorienting. Rather than a basis for unity, memory became a source of conflict. Some Americans

embraced that conflict as a step toward more accurate, if sometimes painful, understanding of the past. Others took refuge in nostalgia.

* * *

Nostalgia was originally a medical concept. Coined by a Swiss physician named Johannes Hofer in 1688, the term *nostalgia* designated crippling homesickness. Early patients diagnosed with the condition included soldiers on foreign deployment and college students.[20]

Americans initially considered themselves impervious to nostalgia. Unlike effete Europeans, members of a rugged young nation thought themselves indifferent to home comforts. When an epidemic of nostalgia broke out during the Civil War, Union doctor Theodore Calhoun recommended battle as "the great curative agent of nostalgia in the field."[21] If the afflicted survived combat, Calhoun prescribed a dose of ridicule.

It was only in the twentieth century that nostalgia lost its pathological connotations for Americans. Instead of a disease, it came to mean fond remembrance of an unrecoverable past. This sentimental conception of nostalgia became a theme of popular culture in the 1920s, as writers including F. Scott Fitzgerald evoked the innocence lost in World War I.

Accepted in the arts, nostalgia remained suspect in politics. If not an outright psychological disorder, nostalgia came to designate prejudice, ignorance, and even authoritarian tendencies. In this vein, Schlesinger contended in 1955 that writers such as Russell Kirk who mourned the Anglo-Protestant past were "severed from the American

reality." The "new conservatism," he argued, was merely a "politics of nostalgia."[22]

The national mood had changed by the 1970s. Recurring crises provoked a yearning for an untroubled past. "Nostalgia," writes Rick Perlstein, "was becoming a national cult."[23] The historian David Lowenthal described the phenomenon as a "preoccupation with heritage." He noticed its contemporary prominence in Britain, as well as in North America.[24]

Not all nostalgia was nationalist. In the arts, descendants of immigrants or outsiders reclaimed symbols of difference as badges of pride—to the enthusiastic approval of large audiences. The richly romantic depiction of organized crime in *The Godfather* is one example. The book and television series *Roots* encouraged in "Afro Americans"—at the time, a still novel substitute for "Negroes" in polite usage—an interest in their ancestral cultures. For Jews, the celebration of shtetl life in *Fiddler on the Roof* was a nostalgic affirmation of particularity.

But much of the new nostalgia aimed to recover a stable, affirmative American identity. The renewed popularity of wartime anthems such as "God Bless America," proliferation of merchandise associated with the two-hundredth birthday of the United States, and a fad for reenactment of Revolutionary and Civil War battles celebrated national pride battered by domestic unrest and international instability. In 1975, the *New York Times* reported that the whole state of New Jersey was in the grips of "bicentennial fever."[25]

Jimmy Carter attempted to respond to the nostalgic mood. Borrowing a phrase from the historian Christopher Lasch, Carter proposed that the nation was suffering from a "crisis of confidence." He assured the nation, "We are

strong. . . . We are the heirs of generations who survived threats much more powerful and awesome than those that challenge us now."[26] As Ernest Renan described, the capital accumulated by past heroism was drawn down to meet present challenges.

But no politician appealed to this moment with greater skill than Ronald Reagan. Running on the slogan Let's Make America Great Again, he placed nostalgia at the center of his campaign. Reversing the old confidence that America's destiny lay undetermined in the future, Reagan suggested that it had already been achieved. The challenge was to preserve and secure it against subversive forces in the present.

In making this case, Reagan relied on a technique Daniel Rodgers calls the "wrinkle in time." Rather than merely describing the great events of American history, Reagan encouraged his audiences to imagine that they were actually there. In a 1981 commemoration of the Battle of Yorktown, Reagan minutely described the British surrender "on a day very like today," right down to the brilliant colors of the turning leaves.[27] As part of the formal conclusion of bicentennial celebrations, armies of reenactors wearing period uniforms marched past spectators to make the words real.[28]

It is easy to dismiss such performances as "Bicentennial Schlock."[29] But at a moment of widespread yearning for stability, Reagan embraced the capacity of historical speculation to transform individuals into one people and a vast territory into a common home. As President Reagan was preparing to run for reelection in 1983, the sociologist Benedict Anderson published an influential account of this function under the title *Imagined Communities*. Challenging Renan, Anderson argued that it is not literally memory but the imagination that binds together nations.

Anderson's argument is often mischaracterized as claiming that national identities are simply "made up," as a recent *New York Times* online video feature asserted.[30] His point was that all communities that include more members than know each other face-to-face depend on connections that exist partly in the mind, as well as in direct experience. The past, on this account, is not just an objective reality to be discovered and preserved or buried and forgotten. Instead, it is raw material that can be shaped to promote particular social or political effects.[31] Critics of Anderson's constructivist approach to nationalism often neglect its focus on the Western hemisphere, rather than such traditional case studies as France. In diverse, ethnically stratified societies that adopted verbal and symbolic languages from an overseas metropole—such as the United States, Brazil, and the former Spanish colonies—the creation and maintenance of shared identity had to be a more intentional and self-conscious project than in more continuously populated and acculturated regions.[32]

Despite its nostalgic tone and politically conservative implications, then, there was something richly imaginative about Reagan's approach to history. He promised to restore America to lost virtue and an old understanding of identity and purpose. What he actually did was tell a version of the national story that echoed old themes but was closely tailored to its own moment. Nostalgia promises a return to a home that stands unchanged by the vicissitudes of time. A more pragmatic strategy attempts to construct a comfortable shelter wherever the voyager stands.

* * *

One criticism of national history was driven by concern about the correct balance of memory and forgetting. For practitioners of the so-called social history, important facts about violence, exploitation, and coercion had been ignored or forgotten and needed to be brought to light. In *Red, White, and Black*, a pioneering reevaluation of early American history that was an important source for Zinn's more accessible presentation, Gary B. Nash promised to renarrate the past from bottom up rather than top down.

Nash went on to play a role in a major battle of the culture war. Commissioned by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), he led a team to produce national guidelines for teaching history. Initially praised by academics and program officers, the project was unceremoniously denounced by the head of the NEH, Lynne Cheney, in the *Wall Street Journal.* According to Cheney, the proposed national standards advanced a "politically correct" account that denigrated American leaders and accomplishments.[33] Her objections were subsequently taken up by Rush Limbaugh, Newt Gingrich, Pat Buchanan, and other influential conservatives.

The timing of Cheney's denunciation just a few weeks before the 1994 congressional elections suggests a degree of bad faith. As she acknowledged in the op-ed, the standards were technically only proposals. Errors or omissions could still be corrected.

Cheney's arguments stuck, though, because they were partly accurate. The standards gave relatively short shrift to traditional political history, leading statesmen, and the benefits of American enterprise, while paying more attention to previously marginal figures. It was one thing to honor Harriet Tubman, but it struck Cheney as odd to develop

"an outline for the teaching of American history in which George Washington makes only a fleeting appearance and is never described as our first president. Or in which the foundings of the Sierra Club and the National Organization for Women are considered noteworthy events, but the first gathering of the U.S. Congress is not."[34]

If Cheney could be accused of political calculation, Nash was guilty of convenient ingenuousness. Defending the standards from criticism, he placed heavy emphasis on the correspondence between the standards and recent scholarship. The battle, as he presented it, was between experts and ignoramuses who demanded "sugar-coated history."[35]

Yet advocates of teaching the raw truth did not always reckon with the fact that schoolchildren are not scholars in training. Cheney and her supporters seemed to reduce history instruction to a patriotic fable. Many academic historians, on the other hand, seemed to imagine civic education as a massive graduate seminar. The Cheney alternative was intellectually dubious but politically useful. Nash's seemed, at best, utopian.

Despite their feud, Nash and Cheney implicitly agreed that accuracy in describing the past was possible, provided that one consulted the right sources and applied the proper analytic tools. A different approach called the very category of truth into question. According to theorist Hayden White, a work of historiography was a "verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse."[36] White did not mean that a historical account was simply fictional or subject to the arbitrary whims of its creator, but it was, he argued, a genre of literature that had to be assessed according to its own logic rather than for its correspondence to the past.

The so-called linguistic turn was associated with European philosophical currents. Colloquially described as postmodernism and linked to the influence of French thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, who delivered a famous lecture on the topic at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, these ideas emphasized the ways that social practices are justified by structures of words rather than grounded in human nature. The implication was that by criticizing or replacing those structures, social reality could also be transformed. It was the underlying theory of the culture war.

Many on the political left celebrated the emancipatory implications of this theory, especially in regard to sex and gender. But the critique of historical objectivity is also open to a more conservative application. The discovery that social existence is partly constituted by narratives does not imply that they must be debunked or transformed. To the contrary, it may suggest that they should be defended even more jealously from criticism. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates argues that the best political community depends on a "noble lie"—specifically, that all citizens share a common origin but are born with different kinds of souls that correspond to their class position.

William McNeill offered a version of this argument in a 1982 essay in *Foreign Affairs*. Chastising the academic community for its indulgence in debunking and provocation, McNeill defended "public myth." "A people without a full quiver of relevant agreed-upon statements," he wrote, "accepted in advance through education or less formalized acculturation, soon finds itself in deep trouble, for, in the absence of believable myths, coherent public action becomes very difficult to improvise or sustain."[37] Rather than broadcasting upsetting truths or pursuing social

transformation, McNeill argued, scholars should uphold the myths that sustain the national community.

McNeill did not acknowledge the affinity between his call to civic responsibility and ancient or modern theories of epistemology, but philosopher Richard Rorty did. Appealing to American pragmatism as well as European sources of postmodernism, he embraced imaginative and mythological elements of national memory. In a 1994 op-ed, Rorty denounced the "unpatriotic academy" for repudiating "the idea of a national identity, and the emotion of national pride."[38] In place of litanies of oppression and corruption like Zinn's best seller, he proposed an egalitarian "image" of America that would justify progressive policies.[39]

Despite his early doubts about consensus history, Higham came to agree. Reflecting on apparently endless controversies about textbooks, curricula, museum exhibitions, and the like, Higham found more value in consensus than earlier in his career. "For thirty years," Higham noted, "nation-building virtually disappeared from the agenda of academic historians." Until scholars undertook "the construction of national and universal as well as ethnic, racial, and particularistic loyalties . . . they [were] unlikely to reconnect with a baffled and leaderless people."[40]

This new interest in constructive narration was not an outgrowth of the conservative movement. Most enthusiasts, like Schlesinger, were centrist liberals seeking a truce between nostalgists and radical critics. The problem is that persuasive myths cannot easily be constructed in the light of day. Once they are recognized, and even celebrated, as useful fabrications, they lose their power over the imagination.

* * *

In 1998, Rorty offered a bold prediction of the consequences of abandoning national history. In some future economic downturn, he argued, "the nonsuburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for—someone willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodernist professors will no longer be calling the shots."[41] Rorty did not venture to predict what such a "strongman" would actually do. But he ventured that "the gains made in the past forty years by black and brown Americans, and by homosexuals, will be wiped out."[42]

This dire speculation was mocked at the time. The journalist David Brooks described it as "loopy, paranoid, idiotic."[43] Following the election of Donald Trump under Reagan's repurposed slogan, however, Rorty's prophecy was rediscovered. According to historian Jefferson Cowie, his "nightmare of the nationalist demagogue has come to pass."[44]

What responsibility did historians bear for this scenario? Cowie argued that failure to cultivate a salutary form of collective memory encouraged "the backward-looking—often reactionary—search for an America in arrested decay that has too often informed politics since Ronald Reagan first promised to make America great again."[45] Jill Lepore, Harvard professor and contributor to the *New Yorker*, agreed. Claiming Bancroft, Schlesinger, and Higham among her models, Lepore made the case for a new national history that would both enlighten Americans about their past and reconcile their differences in the present.[46]

Lepore actually delivered on her promise. Her 932-page volume *These Truths* explicitly follows in Bancroft's footsteps by beginning in 1492 but brings the story all the way to 2016. Blending political history with vivid accounts of ordinary people and daily life, *These Truths* incorporates social history without allowing the high to disappear in the low. The volume is impressive both in the broad learning it displays and in its literary quality.

But it is also a failure in its goal of restoring the liberal consensus Lepore evidently admires. One reason is that the imperative of inclusion leads to an unwieldy presentation. Nathan Glazer concluded, after a frustrating involvement with the committee that revised the New York State standards for teaching history, that "we are all multiculturalists now."[47] He meant that virtually all mainstream academics and political figures accepted the increased attention to ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities. At least in public education, it was no longer possible to defend a curriculum limited to "dead white men."

In a rebuttal to Cheney, Nash insisted inclusion did not come at the expense of more traditional topics. But the fight over the national standards for teaching history demonstrated why this was not true. There are limits to what can be included in a given book or taught in a particular year. A page devoted to one figure or issue cannot be devoted to another. In that respect, the selection really is a "zero-sum game."[48] The increasing visual and structural complexity of textbooks beginning in the 1970s was an attempt to get around this problem by cramming as much information as possible onto a single page.[49]

Although it is a narrative rather than a textbook, *These Truths* suffers from the same defect. More than 900 pages,

it is bursting at the seams. Lepore does not attempt to include everything or everyone—nor could she do so. Even so, the focus zooms in and out, backward and forward at a dizzying pace.

The second and more significant problem arises from Lepore's invocation of "these truths." In a companion volume, *This America: The Case for the Nation*, Lepore quotes historian Michael Kazin's observation that successful political reformers have usually appealed to the "national belief system."[50] But this begs the question: Are doctrines of "political equality, natural rights, and the sovereignty of the people" true? Or are they only just useful delusions?[51]

Lepore mounts a biting critique of postmodernism as corrosive of civic responsibility and shared meaning. Yet she rejects the transcendent element that defined the old national history. When he finally reached the period of independence in the eighth volume of his monumental *History*, Bancroft insisted that the rights enumerated by the Declaration "are older than human institutions, and spring from the eternal justice that is anterior to the state."[52] This claim is not a matter of memory, storytelling, or framing. It is a statement of philosophical, even religious conviction. Lepore admires the conviction that led Lincoln, Douglass, and her lesser heroes to stake their lives on "these truths" but cannot express the same faith herself. Far from opposing postmodernism, Lepore's history is narrative all the way down.

CHAPTER 5

After Nationalism

In a series of works published in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre sought to discover why social, political, and cultural debates had become so bitter. He proposed that disputes about particular issues arise from tensions between fundamentally different perspectives. The reason we cannot agree about the right policies, MacIntyre argued, is not that we lack good will or factual information; it is that "our society is not one of consensus, but of division and conflict."[1]

This conflict is partly the result of clashing starting points. A conservative Catholic and a secular liberal might begin with very different presuppositions about what it means to be human. Even if each presented formally perfect arguments, they could still reach incommensurable conclusions. That is why disputes about abortion, for example, seem intractable.

Yet MacIntyre pointed out that the divisions that characterize modern societies are not just clashes between consistent alternatives, each supported by a unified constituency.

The conflict also lies within ourselves. Rather than reasoning unswervingly from explicit premises to logically necessary conclusions, most us of piece together fragments drawn from a wide range of intuitions and sources. The result is that our beliefs are not just incompatible with the beliefs of others; they are often internally incoherent.

MacIntyre's focus was on ethics. His classic study *After Virtue* argued that a shared vocabulary of moral terms concealed long-running disputes about their content. The title of the book describes a condition in which people mean different things by the same words. The point is not that virtue is bad or obsolete. It is that the meaning of virtue has become a matter of shifting, subjective opinions rather than the enduring basis of a shared way of life.

We face a similar condition when it comes to the nation. We do not merely disagree with each other about its origin and purpose. We disagree with ourselves, relying on rickety amalgams of words, authorities, and examples that crumble under scrutiny. Even more frustrating, we are not always aware of this instability, for we are educated to believe that all the fragments of national history and experience would somehow fit, if only they were placed in the appropriate frame.

This condition is not unique to the United States. In some measure, it is an unavoidable feature of our time. No modern society has escaped the phenomenon that sociologist Peter L. Berger called "pluralization."[2] In other words, its members do not merely embrace different moral, religious, and political perspectives—a condition that was thoroughly familiar to the ancient world. We also recognize that we face choices among a range of viable (if not equally desirable) alternative ways of life. This recognition of personal

freedom, not the mere fact of cultural or ethical plurality, is the distinctively modern element of pluralization.

Yet plurality seems especially characteristic of Americans, who have long been depicted as the quintessentially modern people. Among Western societies, the British colonies from which the United States emerge were unusually diverse in religion, culture, and ethnicity. The pressures of assimilation were stronger and weaker at different periods, but efforts to squeeze this diversity into a single national mold were never fully successful. "Our Babel is not one of tongues," admitted the philosopher John Dewey. It is a cacophony "of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible."[3]

This book is a meditation on the cacophony Dewey described. We live "after nationalism," in the sense that our public discourse is characterized by appeals to various and potentially incompatible conceptions of the nation. The debate is not only between "America first" and those who would rank it second or lower in their order of loyalties. It is between rival accounts of what America is—and thus where its interests lie.

Yet incompatibility cannot be the last word. Even if a high degree of plurality is unavoidable, it is reasonable to wonder about its limits. Surely residents of the same places, subject to the same laws, must share some answers to the question of who we are. Perhaps the alternative to consensus is chaos.

* * *

Fear of impending chaos is at the root of recent proposals for a reinvigorated American nationalism. Admitting the

shortcomings of historical models for a "unifying understanding of American nationhood," journalist Reihan Salam concludes that "the alternative to a new melting pot is, I fear, an even more dangerously divided society."[4]

For many conservatives, the key lies in tighter limits on immigration. If the influx of newcomers is slowed, they argue, those already here will experience greater pressure to use English, seek mates among other ethnic groups, and focus their loyalty on American institutions. There is evidence that these developments are already occurring. Further reductions of the inflow might hasten their progress.

Some arguments for immigration restriction are "ethnotraditional." In other words, they seek to preserve the current demographic balance, in which self-identified whites are the majority. For most of the last few decades, such arguments were distinctly fringe positions associated with so-called paleoconservatives.[5] Since the rise of Donald Trump, they have achieved wider circulation among the online "alt-right" and more prominent figures. At a conference on "national conservatism" in 2019, Amy Wax, a University of Pennsylvania law professor, proposed that "our country will be better off with more whites and fewer nonwhites."[6]

But most advocates of immigration restriction avoid ethnic arguments. Instead, they emphasize the adoption of American cultural identity without regard to appearance or origin. Samuel Huntington famously adopted a version of this position, rejecting his early confidence in the "promise of disharmony."[7] In *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Huntington argued that America is defined by an "Anglo-Protestant" culture based on the English language, the nuclear family, and a commitment to work.

Huntington's proposal was attacked as racist. Speaking formally, the criticism is not accurate: Huntington distinguishes between "two very different conceptions of national identity: ethnic-racial, on the one hand, and cultural, on the other."[8] In fact, Huntington was adopting a premise from Boasian anthropology, which played an important role in undermining racialized visions of American identity. Under the right conditions, he argued, anyone can assimilate to the national culture, whatever their biological origin.

In practice, though, it is not so easy to isolate culture from ethnicity. Even if anyone can adopt "Anglo-Protestant" norms, the argument implies that WASPs enjoy constitutive status. The rest of us can only be imitators or late adopters. In his memoir *Making It*, Norman Podhoretz described this arrangement as a "brutal bargain." Minorities and outsiders could hope for upward mobility so long as they were willing to become "a reasonable facsimile of an upper-class WASP."[9]

Further, the brutal bargain was not open to everyone. Changing clothes or accents might have been enough to win acceptance for many immigrants or their descendants. For African American descendants of slaves, however, this was rarely an option. Podhoretz's intellectual adversary, James Baldwin, famously described the sense of Americanness that he discovered while living in France. Yet he also argued that there was no way for African Americans to escape racial difference and stigma at home. The enduring race problem, much more than renewed immigration, undermined the old understanding of assimilation.

American culture has not remained static, moreover. In a review of *Who Are We?*, Nathan Glazer observed

that Huntington failed to show that immigrants were not assimilating—only that they were not assimilating to the America of the past.[10] There is no reason to expect new Americans, many of whom live in Sunbelt suburbs that are as politically and culturally remote from Harvard Yard as they are geographically distant, to see themselves as descendants of New England WASPs.

Nor is there anything uniquely Anglo-Protestant about hard work or devotion to family. To the contrary, Asian Americans have acquired the status of a "model minority" for displaying precisely these characteristics. The success of Asian Americans demonstrates how much ethnic stereotypes change. A century ago, immigrants from China or Japan were regarded as fundamentally incompatible with America, while most Latinos were legally white and considered assimilable despite the social disfavor they experienced in some regions.

Huntington and other cultural nationalists emphasize the English language as a minimal source of common culture and historical continuity. Ironically, the process of globalization that weakens political borders has raised the importance of English by making it the standard language of business and technology. Whether or not immigrants wish to adopt ostensibly Anglo-Protestant norms, economic and social mobility requires that they and their descendants learn English. There is no evidence that its future is endangered in America—or anywhere else.

These criticisms of a particular brand of nationalism should not be mistaken as a case for any specific immigration policy. The right volume and character of immigration is a matter of prudence that requires careful balancing of cultural, economic, and political considerations. And

whatever the appropriate number of immigrants, they should be subject to explicit, consistently enforced rules. That procedural demand is sufficient to justify reform of an arbitrary, inconsistent, sometimes brutal system.

Even so, there are historical reasons to doubt that immigration restriction necessarily promotes cohesion. A vivid example is the growth of anti-Semitism in the 1930s. Despite drastically reduced immigration and an intensely patriotic Jewish population, hostility to Jews actually increased during this period. It was thwarted by the discrediting association of anti-Semitism with the Nazi enemy, more than by further cultural assimilation.

It is true that the two decades that followed the Second World War were characterized by an unusual level of social consensus. I have tried to show, however, that these conditions were results of an unprecedented campaign of mobilization for a declared world war followed by an undeclared Cold War, that is, a continuous series of military and ideological conflicts that extended to virtually every part of the globe. Beyond the conscription and intensive training of millions of young men and supervision of media by government, this enterprise extended to such mundane matters as children's meals. In the 1940s, a government committee headed by the anthropologist Margaret Mead proposed a national school lunch program that would promote solidarity by offering "food that is fairly innocuous and has low emotional value"—a principle that apparently excluded any seasoning but salt.[11]

This degree of centralized control is not very appealing today—to say nothing of more coercive policies deployed against German Americans during the First World War or against Native Americans for much of US history. More

consistent respect for individual freedom, the multiplication of independent media, and easier travel and communication all work against any restoration of 1950s-style consensus. No matter how few immigrants we receive, laws and government officers are probably not going to dictate what they eat, what they watch, how they talk, or where they go in ways that were routine within living memory.

And even these policies proved unable to sustain the appearance of harmony beyond the early 1960s. Our deepest conflicts—past and present—have their origins in conflicts about the systematic exclusion of African Americans—who have lived in North America as long as any other non-native group—and the Vietnam War. The cracks in the foundations of creedal America predate the new era of mass immigration enabled by the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, which repealed quotas that had been in place for the previous four decades. Rather than causing our cultural and political fragmentation, today's anxieties about immigration reflect it.

* * *

Other writers seek to live with these changes rather than to overcome them. We cannot reverse the cultural, social, and political revolutions of the last half century, argues political theorist Francis Fukuyama. So we must seek shared values broad enough to accommodate them. These values include "substantive ideas such as constitutionalism, rule of law, and human equality."[12]

Fukuyama's account of a "proper creedal identity" resembles the "civic nationalism" suggested by Hans Kohn and further developed by many later scholars. In other

words, it revolves around a way of governing rather than inherited characteristics, such as ethnic origin or family religious affiliation.

I agree that this is the most promising basis for sustaining America in the twenty-first century. Of the historical precedents discussed in this book, it comes closest to Frederick Douglass's vision of a "composite nationality." "In what ever else other nations may have been great and grand," Douglass argued, "our greatness and grandeur will be found in the faithful application of the principle of perfect civil equality to the people of all races and of all creeds."[13]

Yet this vision has to be disentangled from the myth of a stable American idea, handed down intact since 1776. Rather than a historical account of what America was, Douglass presented an almost utopian description of what America might be. As the historian David Blight points out, Douglass was too optimistic. Delivered at a high point of enthusiasm after the Civil War, Douglass's hope for equality was overtaken by Jim Crow, Chinese exclusion, and overseas imperialism.[14]

It was really only around the middle of the twentieth century that civic nationalist principle began to be applied with anything resembling consistency—partly due to the pressures of international conflict. From that standpoint, many historians wrote the American past as a progressive march toward justice, ignoring or downplaying contrary events as temporary aberrations. Although many of their claims are tendentious, critics of this so-called freedom narrative, such as the contributors to the *New York Times*'s controversial 1619 Project, have a point. There was nothing predetermined or inevitable about the recent victories of an ostensibly venerable doctrine.

Finally, the ideological character of the creed can have perversely intolerant consequences. If America rests on the endorsement of specific moral doctrines and historical interpretations, anyone who challenges, rejects, or modifies them is presumptively "un-American." That reasoning, which also reached a height of popularity during the Cold War, leads to the conclusion that critics of the creed either misunderstand the nation or are hostile to it. The result is willful blindness to important traditions of thought and practice on the political right as well as the left.

Rather than treating it as a quasi-religious orthodoxy, then, we might regard the creed in a more modest light. Constitutionalism, the rule of law, and civic equality can be seen as rules of coexistence for people who otherwise don't share much. The political philosopher John Rawls described this practical compromise as a "constitutional consensus." Narrower than a shared cultural ethos, a constitutional consensus is limited to "the political procedures of democratic government."[15]

It is easy to say that we should agree to democratic political procedures while agreeing to disagree on everything else. Political scientists have found that ethnic and cultural diversity can erode social trust and confidence in governing institutions. So-called constitutional patriotism is a high-stakes bet that we can get along after nationalism. Such a bet can be wrong, as Douglass and other post–Civil War optimists found out.

But the alternatives are wagers too—and it is not clear that they offer better odds. Attempts to impose a monolithic understanding of national unity risk undermining the legitimacy of the political system, decrease trust among members of different social groups, and encourage

extreme, even violent measures of self-protection. They are also in tension with the variety and decentralization that are important aspects of America's past. Daniel Immerwahr points out that before the twentieth century, it was more common to describe the United States by reference to its constitutional structure—as the republic or the union—than as the nation-state of "America."[16]

This historical observation is a useful reminder of how flexible national identity can be. The American nation is often treated as if it were a preexisting reality with fixed characteristics. The result is endless debate about who we "really" are, as if there were only one answer that was equally valid for everyone.

Political theorist Patrick Deneen, borrowing a phrase proposed by the British philosopher J. N. Figgis, suggests that the nation is better understood as a "community of communities."[17] In other words, its basic units are not individuals who stand in interchangeable relations to the national state, but a variety of overlapping and sometimes contending groups that reflect and cultivate different conceptions of identity, responsibility, and purpose. These smaller, more coherent groups, rather than abstractions of loyalty and solidarity, are the appropriate setting for cultivating particular virtues that we cannot reasonably expect more than three hundred million people spread over much of a continent to share.

* * *

What might American plurality look like in the twenty-first century? That is a question that other writers have already begun to consider in recent works. The political theorist

Jacob Levy attempts to recover arguments for associational freedom that extend from the Middle Ages through the twentieth century.[18] Economics journalist Michael Lind emphasizes the importance of class-based organizations such as labor unions.[19] Legal scholar John Inazu argues that religious communities should retain control of their affairs, even when their decisions defy public opinion.[20] And political theorist Yuval Levin defends the importance of political institutions, such as membership parties and representative legislatures.[21]

All these suggestions could form part of the answer, which goes beyond the mostly analytic purpose of this book. While they disagree on specifics, these and other writers imagine a society composed of both chosen and unchosen associations with distinctive purposes, structures, and rules. The common good is a result of the negotiation and sometimes conflict between these purposes, mediated by representative legislatures and the rule of law. It is not a blueprint that can be determined in advance.

The decision of the future is between acceptance, however grudging, of messy, frustrating plurality and pursuit of a unity that continues to elude us. To conclude, I can only repeat that this dilemma is nothing new. An unwieldy combination of external sovereignty and internal diversity was the original meaning of the motto *E pluribus unum*. You might even say that's what America is all about.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23.
2. John Jay, *Federalist* No. 2, in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Signet, 1999), 32.
3. Frederick Douglass, "Our Composite Nationality," in *The Essential Douglass*, ed. Nicholas Buccola (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2016), 226.
4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 9, *1843–1847*, ed. Ralph H. Orth and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 299.
5. Ramesh Ponnuru and Rich Lowry, "For Love of Country," *National Review*, February 20, 2017, https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2017/02/20/donald-trump-inauguration-speech-and-nationalism/.
6. George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol. 4, *In Front of Your Nose, 1946–1950* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 129–130.
7. Michael Novak, *Free Persons and the Common Good* (New York: Madison Books, 1988), 88.

Chapter 1

1. Horace M. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924), 51.
2. Michael Walzer, "What Does It Mean to Be an 'American'?," *Social Research* 71, no. 3 (2004): 633.
3. *Federalist* No. 2, 32.
4. Eric P. Kaufmann, *The Rise and Fall of Anglo-America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 13.

5. Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to American National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 113.
6. Sanford Levinson, *An Argument Open to All: Reading "The Federalist" in the Twenty-First Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 14.
7. Russell Kirk, *America's British Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 9–11.
8. David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 6.
9. Wilfred M. McClay, *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story* (New York: Encounter Books, 2019), 69.
10. Benjamin Franklin, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, 1751," Founders Online website, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0080. Original source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 4, *July 1, 1750, through June 30, 1753*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961), 225–234.
11. Charles Murray, "The United States of Diversity," *Commentary*, June 2015, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-united-states-of-diversity/.
12. Josiah Tucker, *Cui Bono?* (London, 1781), 117–118.
13. "From Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 30 January 1787," Founders Online website, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-11-02-0095. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 11, *1 January–6 August 1787*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 92–97.
14. Quoted in Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 11.
15. Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill: A Poem in Seven Parts* [. . .] (New York: Childs and Swaine, 1794; Ann Arbor, MI: Text Creation Partnership, 2011), 168, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=evans;cc=evans;rgn=main;view=text;idno=N20525.0001.001.
16. Ibid.
17. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 36.
18. John Cotton, "God's Promise to His Plantation," (London, 1630), 20.
19. John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity (1630)," Hanover Historical Texts Collection (online), History Department, Hanover College, https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html.
20. Marilynne Robinson, "Which Way to the City on a Hill?," *New York Review of Books*, July 18, 2019, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/07/18/which-way-city-hill/.
21. Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Puritan New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18.
22. Mark A. Noll, "Christian Republicanism," chap. 5 in *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 73–92.

23. Quoted in Benjamin Park, *American Nationalisms: Imagining Union in the Age of Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 87.
24. Noah Webster, *Sketches of American Policy* (Hartford, CT, 1785), 18.
25. Kenneth P. Minkema and Harry S. Stout, "The Edwardsean Tradition and the Antislavery Debate, 1740–1865," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (2005): 57–58.
26. Jonathan Edwards Jr., *The Injustice and the Impolicy of the Slave Trade and of the Slavery of Africans* (New Haven, CT, 1833), 9.
27. Ibid.
28. Quoted in Daniel Dreisbach, "The Constitution's Forgotten Religion Clause," *Journal of Church and State* 38, no. 2 (1996): 274.
29. Madison Debates, June 20, 1787, in *The Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787, Which Framed the Constitution of the United States of America, Reported by James Madison, a Delegate from the State of Virginia*, ed. Gaillard Hund and James Brown Scott (Oxford University Press, 1920; Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, accessed October 15, 2019, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_620.asp.
30. Quoted in Gary B. Nash, "The American Clergy and the French Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (1965): 392.
31. Quoted in Noah Pickus, *Truth Faith and Allegiance: Immigration and American Civic Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 30.
32. "John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 13 July 1813," Founders Online website, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0238. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 6, *11 March to 27 November 1813*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 286–288.]
33. Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of James Madison*, ed. Earl Harbert (New York: Library of America, 1986), 1331–1332.
34. Henry Whiting Warner and Theodore Frelinghuysen, *An Inquiry into the Moral and Religious Character of American Institutions* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1838), 183. See Gillis J. Harp, *Protestants and American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 78–84.
35. Rufus Choate, *The Political Writings of Rufus Choate*, ed. Thomas E. Woods Jr. (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2002), 185.
36. Rufus Choate, *The Works of Rufus Choate, with a Memoir of His Life*, by Samuel Gilman Brown, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1862), 2:215.
37. Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1838), 63.
38. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "New England: Lecture I: 'The Genius and National Character of the Anglo-Saxon Race,' 10 January 1843," in *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson 1843–1871*, ed. Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 7.

39. Quoted in Vincent J. Cannato, "Immigration and the Brahmins," *Humanities* 30, no. 3 (2009) https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2009/mayjune/feature/immigration-and-the-brahmins.
40. Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 223–224. See also Joshua Mitchell, "A Renewed Republican Party," *American Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2017): 7–30.
41. Ofir Haivry and Yoram Hazony, "What Is Conservatism?," *American Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2017), https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/05/what-is-conservatism/.
42. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Oldtown Folks* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 306.

Chapter 2

1. Israel Zangwill, *The Melting-Pot* (New York: American Jewish Book Company, 1921).
2. Jean Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 44.
3. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and Harvard University Press, 1963), 290.
4. Azar Gat, *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 272.
5. Eric Kaufmann, *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities* (New York: Abrams, 2019), 441–449.
6. Henry Pratt Fairchild, *The Melting-Pot Mistake* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1926), 10.
7. Herman Melville, *Redburn* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 196.
8. Niles Carpenter, *Immigrants and Their Children 1920*, Census Monographs VII (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1927). https://doi.org/10.1177/000271622713400118.
9. Henry James, *The American Scene* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1994), 65.
10. Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 44.
11. Ibid., 60.
12. Ibid., 45.
13. Ibid., 42.
14. See Jean Yarbrough, *American Virtues: Thomas Jefferson on the Character of a Free People* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 64.
15. Philip Freneau, "On the Emigration to America and Peopling the Western Country," 1784, in *Poems of American History*, ed. Burton Egbert Stevenson (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1908), 331.
16. For a broader account, see Yonatan Eyal, *Young America and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828–1861* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

17. John L. O'Sullivan, "The Great Nation of Futurity," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 6, no. 23 (1839): 428.
18. Quoted in Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 166.
19. Philip Freneau, "On the Emigration to America," in *The Poems of Philip Freneau*, ed. Fred Lewis Pattee, vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 1903), 280.
20. John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no. 85 (1845): 5.
21. John L. O'Sullivan, "The War," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 20, no. 104 (1847): 100.
22. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life* (Cambridge, MA, 1860), 201.
23. David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 111.
24. Carl Schurz, "True Americanism," in *Speeches of Carl Schurz* (Philadelphia, 1865), 57.
25. Seventh Debate: Alton, Illinois, October 15, 1858, The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858, National Park Service website, https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/debate7.htm.
26. Thomas Hart Benton, *The Life of Thomas Hart Benton*, ed. William Montgomery Meigs (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1904), 309, https://archive.org/details/thomashartbenton00meigrich/page/308/mode/2up?q=divine+command.
27. Abraham Lincoln to Joshua F. Speed, August 24, 1855, in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 2 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Digital Library Production Services, 2001), https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln2/1:339?rgn=div1;singlegenre=All;sort=occur;subview=detail;type=simple;view=fulltext;q1=base+alloy.
28. Abraham Lincoln, Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes, August 14, 1862, in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 5 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Digital Library Production Services, 2001), https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln5/1:812?rgn=div1;view=fulltext.
29. Daniel Okrent, *The Guarded Gate: Bigotry, Eugenics, and the Law That Kept Two Generations of Jews, Italians, and Other European Immigrants out of America* (New York: Scribner, 2019), 98.
30. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1918), 238.
31. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West: The Spread of the English-Speaking Peoples* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), 142. For context, see Gary Gerstle, "The Divided Character of American Nationalism," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1280–1307.
32. Quoted in Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 92.
33. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 138.

34. Quoted in Adam Serwer, "White Nationalism's Deep American Roots," *Atlantic*, April 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/04/adam-serwer-madison-grant-white-nationalism/583258/.
35. Quoted in Tichenor, *Dividing Lines*, 120.
36. Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), xii, 12–13, 50.
37. Samuel Gompers, *Vol. 3: Labor Signal*, March 17, 1893, The Samuel Gompers Papers website, http://www.gompers.umd.edu/quotes.htm#IMMIGRATION.
38. *Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion* (Washington, DC: American Federation of Labor, 1901).
39. Bandiera Oriana, Rasul Imran, and Viarengo Martina, "The Making of Modern America: Migratory Flows in the Age of Mass Migration," *Journal of Development Economics* 102 (2013): 23–47.
40. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "Reinhold Niebuhr's Long Shadow," *New York Times*, June 22, 1992, https://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/22/opinion/reinhold-niebuhr-s-long-shadow.html.
41. Quoted in Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 66.
42. Zangwill, *Melting-Pot*, act 4.
43. Neil Baldwin, *The American Revelation: Ten Ideals That Shaped Our Country from the Puritans to the Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 159.
44. Horace Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (New York: Boni Liveright, 1924), 126–129.
45. Horace M. Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot," *Nation* 100, no. 2590 (February 25, 1915): 190–194, https://archive.org/details/1915DemocracyVersusTheMeltingPot/page/n4.
46. Randolph S. Bourne, "Trans-national America," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1916, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1916/07/trans-national-america/304838/.

Chapter 3

1. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1996), lix.
2. Ibid., 3.
3. Ibid., 3.
4. William Tyler Page, *The Book of the American's Creed* (National Patriotic Organizations, 1921), 56.
5. Edmund Burke, "Speech on Conciliation with America," March 22, 1775, Teaching American History website, https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/speech-on-conciliation-with-america/.
6. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Library of America, 2004), 431.

7. James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, vol. 2 (London, 1889), 417–418.
8. Samuel Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 14, 21.
9. Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, 1181.
10. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, 1991), 11.
11. James L. Nolan Jr., *What They Saw in America: Alexis de Tocqueville, Max Weber, G. K. Chesterton, Sayyid Qutb* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 98–100.
12. G. K. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922), 10.
13. Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, 15.
14. Page, *Book of the American's Creed*, 63.
15. H. W. Evans, "The Klan's Fight for Americanism," *North American Review* 223, no. 830 (1926): 34.
16. Will Herberg, "The Triple Melting Pot," *Commentary*, August 1955, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/will-herberg/the-triple-melting-pot/.
17. John Dewey, "The Principle of Nationality," *Menorah Journal* 3, no. 4 (1917): 203.
18. Carlton J. H. Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), 56–57.
19. Quoted in Phillip Gleason, "Americans All: World War II and the Shaping of American Identity," *Review of Politics*, 43, no. 4 (1981) : 490–491.
20. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "War," in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 11, *Miscellanies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2006), 152. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/emerson/4957107.0011.001/1:10?rgn=div1;view=fulltext.
21. Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage, 1999).
22. Increase Mather, *A Brief History of the Warre with the Indians in New-England* (Boston, 1676), 9.
23. Wilbur Zelinsky, *Nation into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 202.
24. Charles Sumner, *Are We a Nation?* (New York, 1867), 3.
25. Abraham Lincoln, Letter to Henry L. Pierce and others, April 6, 1859, Abraham Lincoln Online website, http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/pierce.htm.
26. Abraham Lincoln, Address to the New Jersey State Senate, Trenton, New Jersey, February 21, 1861, Abraham Lincoln Online website, http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/trenton1.htm.
27. Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, Washington, DC, March 4, 1865, Abraham Lincoln Online website, http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/inaug2.htm.

28. Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).
29. Horace Bushnell, "Our Obligations to the Dead," *Building Eras in Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 327.
30. Woodrow Wilson, First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1913, Avalon Project website, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson1.asp.
31. Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 161–163.
32. Woodrow Wilson, Request for Declaration of War on Germany, Washington, DC, April 2, 1917, UVA Miller Center, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/april-2-1917-address-congress-requesting-declaration-war.
33. Quoted in Richard M. Gamble, *A Fiery Gospel: The Battle Hymn of the Republic and the Road to Righteous War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).
34. President Wilson's Message to Congress, January 8, 1918, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=62#.
35. Ibid.
36. Quoted in Richard Wormser, *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 119.
37. Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 65–80.
38. Noah Pickus, *True Faith and Allegiance: Immigration and American Civic Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 112–115.
39. Tina Stewart Brakebill, "From 'German Days' to '100 Percent Americanism': McClean County Illinois, 1913–1918," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 95, no. 2 (2002): 159–161.
40. Abraham Lincoln, Annual Message to Congress—Concluding Remarks, December 1, 1862, Washington, DC, Abraham Lincoln Online website, www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/congress.htm.
41. James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Laws* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 34–42.
42. Gleason, "Americans All," 500.
43. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Remarks to the Daughters of the American Revolution, Washington, DC, April 21, 1938, American Presidency Project website, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-daughters-the-american-revolution-washington-dc.
44. Sam Haselby, "The Legend of the 'Founding Fathers,'" *Boston Globe*, July 4, 2010, http://archive.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2010/07/04/the_legend_of_the_founding_fathers/.

45. Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, 1004.
46. Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1941 State of the Union Address, "The Four Freedoms," January 6, 1941, Voices of Democracy: US Oratory Project website, https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/fdr-the-four-freedoms-speech-text/.
47. Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Collier, 1967), 324.
48. Quoted in Gleason, "Americans All," 505.
49. Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 75.
50. Ibid., 60.
51. "Eisenhower Dedicates Columbia to 'American Creed' of Freedom," *New York Times*, June 9, 1950, 1.
52. Dwight D. Eisenhower, First Inaugural Address, January 20, 1953, Miller Center website, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-20-1953-first-inaugural-address.
53. Sydney Ahlstrom, "Requiem for Patriotic Piety," *Worldview* 15, no. 8 (1972): 9–10.
54. Huntington, *American Politics*, 85–104.
55. Robert Bellah, *Broken Covenant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.
56. Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, lxxx.
57. Theodore Parker, *Ten Sermons of Religion* (Boston, 1853), 84–85.
58. See Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).
59. Quoted in Nikil Pal Singh, *Race and America's Long War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 4–5.
60. Donald Devine, *The Political Culture of the United States* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), 340–345.
61. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here? Chaos or Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 81.
62. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet," speech, Cleveland, Ohio, April 3, 1964, EdChange website, http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm_x_ballot.html.
63. Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael] and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage, 1992).
64. Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003), v–vi.
65. Paul Cowan, *The Tribes of America* (New York: New Press, 2008), 301.
66. Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam," speech, April 4, 1967, New York, NY, Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute website, Stanford University, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam.
67. Reinhold Niebuhr and Alan Heimert, *A Nation So Conceived* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 145.

68. Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 2.
69. Michael Novak, *Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in American Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1995), 77.
70. *The Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1970), 31.
71. Ibid., 10.

Chapter 4

1. Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 263–264. See also Nathan Glazer, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 22–25.
2. New York State Board of Regents Task Force on Minorities, Equity and Excellence, "A Curriculum of Inclusion," executive summary, *Social Contract* 1, no. 4 (1991): 179, https://www.thesocialcontract.com/pdf/one-four/Sobol.pdf. The appendix by Leonard Jeffries, professor at the City College of New York, would also become notorious.
3. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 39.
4. Patrick Joseph Buchanan, "1992 Republican National Convention Speech," Houston, TX, August 17, 1992, Patrick J. Buchanan—Official Website, https://buchanan.org/blog/1992-republican-national-convention-speech-148.
5. Molly Ivins, *Letters to "The Nation"* (New York: The Nation, 2013), 11.
6. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 51–52.
7. Hartman, *War for the Soul of America*, 183.
8. Steve Hochman, "Compton Rappers Versus the Letter of the Law: FBI Claims Song by N.W.A. Advocates Violence on Police," *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1989, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-10-05-ca-1046-story.html.
9. Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?," in *"What Is a Nation?" and Other Political Writings*, trans. M. F. N. Giglioli (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 258.
10. Ernest Renan, *What Is a Nation and Other Political Writings*, trans. M. F. N. Giglioli (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 251.
11. David Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 106.
12. George Bancroft, *History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent to the Present*, vol. 1 (Boston, 1848), 4.
13. Daniel Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 11.
14. John Higham, "The Cult of the 'American Consensus': Homogenizing Our History," *Commentary*, February 1959, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-cult-of-the-american-consensushomogenizing-our-history/.

15. John Higham, "Beyond Consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic," *American Historical Review* 67, no. 3 (1962): 610.
16. Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael] and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: Politics of Liberation* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 38.
17. David Donald, "Radical Historians on the Move," *New York Times*, July 19, 1970, 190, https://www.nytimes.com/1970/07/19/archives/radical-historians-on-the-move-radical-historians.html?searchResultPosition=3. Years later Peter Novick would complain that these critics were "tacitly homogenized" as "New Left historians," despite strong disagreements among them. See Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 418. For a more recent assessment, see Rich Yeselson, "What New Left History Gave Us," *Democracy*, no. 35, Winter 2015, https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/35/what-new-left-history-gave-us/.
18. Daniel Immerwahr, "The Center Does Not Hold," *Nation*, October 29, 2019, https://www.thenation.com/article/jill-lepore-these-truths-this-america-review/.
19. Michael Novak, *Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in American Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1995), 55.
20. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 3.
21. Quoted in Susan J. Matt, "You Can't Go Home Again: Homesickness and Nostalgia in U.S. History," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 2 (2007): 483.
22. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "The New Conservatism: Politics of Nostalgia," *Reporter*, June 16, 1955, 9, 12. Reprinted in *The Politics of Hope* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 9–12.
23. Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 166.
24. David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 4.
25. Joan Cook, "Bicentennial Fever Is Gripping State," *New York Times*, December 7, 1975, https://www.nytimes.com/1975/12/07/archives/bicentennial-fever-is-gripping-state.html.
26. Jimmy Carter, "A Crisis of Confidence," speech, July 15, 1979, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/carter-crisis/.
27. Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Age of Fracture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 223.
28. Jim Norvelle, "The American Bicentennial Closes: Reagan, Mitterand at Yorktown in October," *UPI Archives*, October 3, 1981, https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/10/03/The-American-Bicentennial-Closes-Reagan-Mitterand-at-Yorktown-in-October/3104370929600/.
29. Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past*, 4.
30. Max Fisher, Josh Keller, Mae Ryan, and Shane O'Neill, "National Identity Is Made Up," video, The Interpreter, *New York Times*, February 28, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/100000005660651/national-identity.html.

31. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), 6.
32. Ibid., 49.
33. Lynne Cheney, "The End of History," *Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 1994, http://online.wsj.com/media/EndofHistory.pdf.
34. Ibid.
35. Gary B. Nash, "Reflections on the National History Standards," *National Forum*, Summer (1997): 16.
36. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), xxxix.
37. William H. McNeill, "The Care and Repair of Public Myth," *Foreign Affairs*, September 1, 1982.
38. Richard Rorty, "The Unpatriotic Academy," *New York Times*, February 13, 1994.
39. Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 11.
40. John Higham, "History in the Culture Wars," *OAH Newsletter* 25, no. 2 (1997): 4.
41. Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 90.
42. Ibid.
43. David Brooks, "Achieving Richard Rorty," *Weekly Standard*, June 1, 1998, https://www.weeklystandard.com/david-brooks/achieving-richard-rorty.
44. Jefferson Cowie, "Reclaiming Patriotism for the Left," *New York Times*, August 21, 2018.
45. Ibid.
46. Jill Lepore, "A New Americanism: Why a Nation Needs a National Story," *Foreign Affairs*, February 5, 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2019-02-05/new-americanism-nationalism-jill-lepore.
47. Glazer, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*.
48. Nash, "Reflections on the National History Standards," 16.
49. Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1996), 20–21.
50. Jill Lepore, *This America: The Case for the Nation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 36.
51. Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), xiv.
52. George Bancroft, *History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent to the Present*, vol. 8 (Boston, 1860), 472.

Chapter 5

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 1–2.
2. Peter L. Berger, "Secularization Falsified," *First Things* 180 (February 2008), 23.

3. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1988), 142.
4. Reihan Salam, *Melting Pot or Civil War?* (New York: Sentinel, 2018), 18.
5. Eric Kaufmann, *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities* (New York: Abrams, 2019), 90–91.
6. "Here's What Amy Wax Really Said About Immigration," *Federalist*, July 15, 2019, https://thefederalist.com/2019/07/26/heres-amy-wax-really-said-immigration/.
7. Samuel Huntington, *America Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
8. Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 30.
9. Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2017), 26, 45.
10. Nathan Glazer, "The Newest Americans," *Education Nex*t 4, no. 4 (2004), https://www.educationnext.org/the-newest-americans/.
11. Margaret Mead quoted in Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 68.
12. Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 2018), 158.
13. Frederick Douglass, "Our Composite Nationality," in *The Essential Douglass*, ed. Nicholas Buccola (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2016), 226.
14. David W. Blight, "Frederick Douglass's Vision for a Reborn America," *The Atlantic*, December 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/12/frederick-douglass-david-blight-america/600802/.
15. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 159.
16. Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019), 75.
17. Patrick J. Deneen, "Can There be a National Conservatism?," *Front Porch Republic*, August 19, 2019, https://www.frontporchrepublic.com/2019/08/the-perils-and-possibility-of-the-nation-for-the-future-of-conservatism/.
18. Jacob Levy, *Rationalism, Pluralism, and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).
19. Michael Lind, *The New Class War* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2020), 141–145.
20. John D. Inazu, *Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving Through Deep Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
21. Yuval Levin, *A Time to Build: From Family and Community to Congress and the Campus, How Recommitting to Our Institutions Can Revive the American Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

INDEX

1965 Hart-Celler Act, 124

"A Curriculum of Inclusion," 95–96
Adams, Henry, 32, 52, 54
Adams, John, 19, 21, 30–32
African American citizenship, 52, 88
American Civil War, 3–4, 12–13, 33, 35, 43, 47–49, 53–55, 57–58, 68, 73, 75, 77–78, 87–88, 106–107, 125–126; Confederacy in, 49; Union in, 49, 52, 73–74, 78
American independence, 40, 65; American Revolution, 3, 15, 19, 34, 76, 87; War of Independence, 25, 47, 73, 87
Anderson, Benedict, 108–109
anti-immigration policy: Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, 55–57; Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, 57, 68, 79
anti-Semitism, 54, 123
Articles of Confederation, 15, 28
Asian: -Americans, 96, 122; immigration, 57
assimilation, 50, 57–58, 61, 68, 71, 75, 78–79, 84, 119–123
Atlantic (region), 2, 20–22, 45

Babel, 36, 42, 119
Bancroft, George, 100–101, 114–116
Boas, Franz, 70–71, 121

Calvinism, 20, 35, 67; Calvinist(s), 23, 37–38, 46; Calvinist revival, 38
Canaan (Land of Israel), 26, 33. *See also* Hebrew Bible
Catholic(s), 6, 17, 25, 34, 47, 51, 69
Cheney, Lynne, 110–111, 115. *See also* National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)
Choate, Rufus, 33, 37, 73
Christian republicanism, 24, 32
Christian(s), 16–17, 23, 31, 46, 67, 73
Church of England, 21–22
Cold War, 64, 88, 96, 123, 126
collapse of the Soviet Union, 96. *See also* Cold War
common descent, 16, 21
Communism, 62, 86, 88; Communists, 65, 83, 85–86, 88
Congregational churches, 26
Congressional authority 32. *See also* United States Congress
Constitution of United States of America, 7, 15, 27–31, 64, 87, 102
de Crèvecoeur, Jean Hector St. John, 40–41, 43–44, 49, 60
cultural pluralism, 61, 85, 103; plurality, 3, 17, 64–65, 81, 84, 119, 127–128; pluralization, 118–119

Daughters of the American Revolution, 64, 68, 76, 80
Declaration of Independence, 2, 14–15, 19, 28, 33, 37, 50, 64, 67–68, 73, 80, 86, 89, 101–102, 116
Democratic Party, 45
Democratic-Republican Party, 30
desegregation: of education, 90–91; of military, 82, 93
Dillingham Commission, 57
(Divine) Providence, 28, 38, 46–48, 50–51, 74, 101
Douglass, Frederick, 3, 52, 125–126
DuBois, W. E. B, 56, 61
Dwight, Timothy, 21, 26–27, 31, 36, 99–100

Eisenhower, Dwight, 86, 89, 102
Emancipation Proclamation, 52
Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 3, 35, 39, 46, 48, 72
English language, 16–17, 120–122; anglicization, 18; anglophones, 18, 22
Episcopalian(s), 26
Espionage Act of 1917, 77; Sedition Act of 1918, 77

fascism, 79, 81–82, 89; fascists, 65, 80; Nazism, 62, 82, 85
Federalist No. 2, 2–3, 15, 16, 20
Federalists, 29–31, 33, 45
First Amendment, 28, 31. *See also* United States Bill of Rights
Founding Fathers, 80
Franklin, Benjamin, 18, 43. *See also* English language
French Revolution, 28–30
Fukuyama, Francis, 5, 124

German-Americans, 18, 43, 49–50, 53, 78, 81, 123; immigration, 34; language, 6, 58, 78
Gettysburg Address, 74, 77, 86, 89. *See also* Abraham Lincoln

Halfway Covenant, 24. *See also* Puritan(s)
Hartford Convention, 31–32. *See also* War of 1812
Hebrew Bible, 2, 22, 36. *See also* Canaan (Land of Israel); Israel (People of Israel)
Huntington, Samuel, 5, 16, 66, 87, 120–122

Ice Cube (rapper), 97
imperial militarism, 62; overseas imperialism, 125
Independence Day, 60
internment of Japanese-Americans, 78, 81; Executive Order 9066, 81
interracial marriage, 41; inter-group marriage, 69
Irish: -Americans, 49–50, 53; immigration, 34
Israel (People of Israel), 22–26, 36, 74. *See also* Hebrew Bible
Italian: -Americans, 81; Italian immigration, 53, 93; Little Italy, 6, 58

Jefferson, Thomas, 20, 30–32, 44–45, 55, 73, 80,
Jewish: -Americans, 53, 70; immigration, 54, 123; ghettos, 6, 58
Jim Crow, 104, 125. *See also* segregation

Kennedy, John F., 37, 79–80, 92
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 89–90, 92
Ku Klux Klan, 68

labor unions, 10, 56–57, 128
Lepore, Jill, 72, 114–116
liberalism, 65, 70, 77, 101

Lincoln, Abraham, 46, 50–52, 73–76, 78, 80, 86, 89, 93. *See also* Gettysburg Address
Louisiana Territory, 31–32, 57

MacIntyre, Alasdair, 117–118
Malcolm X, 90–91
Manifest destiny, 47. *See also* Divine Providence
melting pot, 2, 6, 35, 39, 40–43, 47–50, 54, 56–58, 60–62, 68–69, 71, 84–85, 92, 120
Mexican-American War, 48, 73
Mid-Atlantic, 17, 44
Midwest 6, 33, 42–43, 47, 58, 68, 78
multiculturalism, 5, 115
Myrdal, Gunnar, 63–67, 82, 87, 89–91

Nash, Gary B., 110–111, 115. *See also* National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), 110. *See also* Lynne Cheney; Gary B. Nash
Native Americans, 16, 18, 47–48, 50, 71, 83, 96, 103, 123
native-born, 25, 81; natural-born, 32, 47, 51, 53
nativism, 4, 34, 47, 51, 102
naturalization, 29–30, 53–55, 81; Naturalization Act of 1790, 29, 53,
New England, 3–4, 6, 17–18, 20–39, 44, 47, 67, 72, 80, 122
New York (state), 16, 21, 34, 95, 115
New York City, 40, 43, 47, 92
Niebuhr, Reinhold, 58–59, 92–93
Northwest Ordinance of 1787, 46
nostalgia, 106–109

Philadelphia, 47
Philadelphia Convention, 27. *See also* Constitution of United States of America
Pledge of Allegiance, 7, 64, 86
post-modernism, 111–113, 116
Presbyterian(s), 26
Protestant(s), 16–17 23, 34, 36, 38, 47, 69, 74; Anglo-, 2, 5, 16–18, 25, 33, 47, 50, 68, 105–106, 120–122
Puritan(s), 17, 21–25, 33, 36–37, 43, 72, 80, 100, 103. *See also* Halfway Covenant

Quaker(s), 17–19

race: biological racism, 55–56, 121; black, 18, 51–52, 55, 63, 69, 77, 82, 88–91, 103, 105, 114; eugenics, 56; race science, 55; racial hierarchy, 52, 56, 88; racism, 82, 87–92; white, 16, 18, 20, 41, 47, 50–53, 55–57, 69–70, 87, 90–92, 103, 105, 120–122
Reagan, Ronald, 108–109, 114
Reconstruction, 6, 52, 68, 77
Renan, Ernest, 97–98, 108
Republican Party, 29, 55, 69, 74, 76, 96
Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 79–81, 83–84
Roosevelt, Theodore, 54, 60–61, 75–77

Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr., 97, 100, 106, 113
segregation, 4, 56–57, 76–77, 88–90; in the military, 77, 82
Seven Years' War, 25, 72
slavery, 19, 27, 31–32, 49, 51–52, 87. *See also* race
South (region), 17, 19, 32, 38, 47, 53, 56, 70, 90, 104

Thanksgiving, 17, 38
de Tocqueville, Alexis, 22, 65–67
Trump, Donald, 5, 7, 114, 120

United States Bill of Rights, 28. *See also* First Amendment

United States Congress, 28–32, 55, 57, 69, 78, 101. *See also* Congressional authority

Vietnam War, 65, 92–93, 124
Voting Rights Act of 1965, 91

War of 1812, 31, 73. *See also* Hartford Convention
Washington, George, 26, 100, 111
Weber, Max, 23, 67
Wilson, Woodrow, 75–80
Winthrop, John, 23, 25, 36
World War I, 61, 64, 75, 78, 96, 106, 123
World War II, 7, 64, 78–81, 87–89, 92, 95–96, 101, 103, 123

Zangwill, Israel, 40–41, 59–61. *See also* melting pot
Zinn, Howard, 104–105, 110, 113

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been said that victory has a hundred fathers while defeat is an orphan. Whether or not this observation is accurate concerning military affairs, it is certainly true of books. Good books require criticism, suggestion, and encouragement from friends, colleagues, and editorial professionals. Bad books are the responsibility of an author alone.

I do not know whether this is a good book. If it is, it owes any merits it possesses to the assistance I have received throughout the process of conception, writing, and revising.

From early stages of the project, Zoe Garbis worked as an undergraduate research assistant. In addition to reviewing sources and compiling the index, she copyedited and helped me find the argument in my earliest efforts. Michael Weiner also assisted with proofreading, thanks to a timely grant from the Institute for Humane Studies Hayek Fund. Jim Antle, Donald Devine, Shadi Hamid, Sam Haselby, Yoram Hazony, Gene Healy, Daniel McCarthy, James M. Patterson, Miles Smith IV, William Ruger, Aaron Sibarium, and Richard Yeselson read and offered bracing critiques of various chapters. Joseph Kochanek, Yuval Levin, Damir Marusic, Jerry Muller, Jonathan Silver, and Stephanie Slade

participated in workshop review of the complete manuscript. I am grateful to all for their insight and generosity.

Versions of several chapters were presented in academic forums: Chapter 1 at a Claremont Institute panel at the 2019 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association; Chapters 3 and 4 at the Harvard Political Theory Colloquium in February 2020; and Chapter 5 at the Stockdale Center for Ethical Leadership at the US Naval Academy in April 2020. Members of the George Washington University faculty from several departments joined a meeting of the GWU Political Theory Workshop in February 2020 to discuss the manuscript. I thank the organizers of these events for their generous invitations and the participants for their valuable comments and suggestions.

This is the second book I have had the pleasure of publishing with the University of Pennsylvania Press. When my original editor, Damon Linker, moved on to another job, he passed the manuscript on to Robert Lockhart. Bob brought the project to a conclusion without a hitch. The rest of the team have also been, without exception, gracious and helpful.

Above all, I thank my wife, Sarah; my son, Henry; and my daughter, Eleanor.