

A Nation Divided: Understanding Our Culture Wars

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Introduction: The Institutionalization of a Debate

America is still in the midst of a culture war. Many see America deeply divided and polarized by ethnicity and race, by moral values, by political parties, by class, by gender, and by a host of other variables. Public discourse in America ranges from vitriolic partisan denunciations to diplomatic relativism to scholarly argumentation to ignorance and apathy. Is there a path that will lead beyond this culture war? In order to address that question Americans first need to understand the root of the conflict. Fundamentally, the disagreement is over national identity: What is America, and who is an American? To understand this fundamental conflict one must listen to and embrace a heated debate in order to outline a diverse array of answers. But in order to outline a schematic of American nationalism, one must understand the origins of the American nation and its complex trajectory through history. In looking to American history one must ask: Are there antecedents to our current cultural war? Have there been older disagreements over American national identity?

If one examines the historical record, especially outside the boundaries of traditionally defined political authority, dissent and discord pervade American identity. According to the founding document announcing the birth of the American nation, “The Declaration of Independence,” “all men” were “created equal” and had certain “inalienable rights” given to them by their “creator.” Among the most important of these rights were “life,” “liberty,” “the pursuit of happiness,” and the right to a responsive representative government that would protect the people’s rights, as well as their “safety and happiness.” But even before this hallowed political document would be approved by the Continental Congress and announced to the world, the wife of one Congressman, Abigail Adams, wrote to her husband on March 31, 1776 and

scolded him and his fellow American congressmen for being hypocritical. How could these men proclaim “liberty,” inalienable political rights, and the “emancipation of nations” while they were depriving women of their liberty and rights. She pointed out to her husband that American men did not truly know what liberty or equality meant because their idea of liberty and equality were only for a privileged, male few. Abigail warned that women would not take the “tyranny” of men for long and they would rebel, free themselves, “subdue” their masters, and then “without violence throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet.”¹

And yet the assertive Abigail Adams was only willing to extend her critique so far. Just a year earlier she had written to her husband about the fearful “conspiracy of the Negroes,” by which she meant those slaves who had the audacity to petition for freedom in return for fighting along side the English against the insurrectionary colonists. Abigail apparently could not understand why black slaves wanted their freedom just as much as she did, nor could she understand that these blacks would do whatever they could to attain their liberty – including fighting against the hypocritical Americans (as Abigail herself threatened) whose “liberty” and “equality” were mainly for propertied, white men.² The black American David Walker would later address the American republic in 1829, “Do you understand your own language? Hear your language proclaimed to the world on July 4th 1776 – ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident – that ALL men are created EQUAL!!’” In 1850 Frederick Douglass asked, “What, to the Slave, Is the Fourth of July” – “This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*.”³

At the same time that diverse participants of the American nation were contesting the very meaning of America, there was also a solid tradition of self-assured Americans (ironically, many of them immigrants) trying to consolidate a single, unified vision of America. Not long after the revolution propagandists like J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur praised the “modern”

American nation as everything backward Europe was not. Crèvecoeur claimed the original English settlers were “enlightened” as they “discovered,” “settled,” “embellished,” and laid the foundation for what would become America. He also claimed that this new modern nation was being developed by and for white, Northwest Europeans who were busy creating “a new race of men” – “the American, this new man.” But to become American these Northwest Europeans (“English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans and Swedes”) had to not only leave behind their old culture, language, and customs, but also “embrace” the new American government and culture, which just so happened to be a highly Anglicized culture infused with Protestant and capitalist values.⁴

By 1811 the Anglo-Protestant John Quincy Adams could confidently write his father, “The whole continent of North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of religious and political principles.” Of course the “one nation” that Adams foresaw was a white man’s nation, a Protestant Christian nation, a capitalist nation, and these convictions would lead many white men to proclaim a new self-evident truth. The *Democratic Review* on July 1850 announced, “The fact that the dark races are utterly incapable of attaining to that intellectual superiority which marks the white race is too evident to be disputed.” It was a simple extension of deductive logic to thereby conclude, as did James De Bow in *De Bow’s Review* in 1854: “The Negro till the end of time will still be a Negro, and the Indian still an Indian. Cultivation and association with the superior race produce only injury to the inferior one. Their part in this mysterious world-drama has been played, and, like the Individual, the race must cease to exist.”⁵ But of course this drive for cultural unity, racial purity, and national solidarity as a white man’s nation was contested all the way. Elizabeth Cady Stanton addressed the New York State Legislature in 1860 and let them

know that the “white Saxon man[’s]” ridiculous “prejudice” against “color” and “sex” were not congruent with “The Declaration of Independence.” She declared sarcastically that “negroes” and women were not “monsters” and thus they too deserved liberty and political rights. She wanted the nation to remove all the prejudicial legislation against women and blacks and then to “strike the words ‘white male’ from all your constitutions.”⁶

This essay is an attempt to outline a historical schematic leading up to our late 20th/early 21st century culture war in order to historically contextualize our current debate within a much larger and older debate over American national identity. The central focus of this essay is the debate: a longstanding and contested deliberation over national identity and purpose. This essay will not and cannot bring any resolution to this debate; however, this essay will try to clarify the basic structure of the debate and attempt to historically contextualize it. The basic thesis that this essay will argue and demonstrate is that the democratic nation of America was founded on an irresolvable debate. It was and is a debate, to quote the historian Joseph J. Ellis, which “was not resolved so much as built into the fabric of our national identity. If that means the United States is founded on a contradiction, then so be it.”⁷ The United States of America was consecrated on debate and its foundational documents, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence, all were designed to protect and project that debate into the future – the American nation can be seen as the institutionalization of a heated, contradictory, often ugly, sometimes democratic, yet always deadly serious debate. Our 21st century culture wars are an important testament to the longstanding tradition that defines and unties the American people: the constitutional imperative to freely speak, debate, and at times fight over⁸ the identity and direction of the American nation. Issues, parties, perils, crises, and credos come and go, but the

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debate over our American identity continues to define who we *all* really are, have been, and will be. It is our inheritance – both a promise and a curse. America is dying! Long live America!

The Conservative Reaction to 20th Century Liberal Reforms

The conservative reaction to the liberal state, the rights movements of the 1960s, and the general unrest caused by counter-cultural uprisings was varied in temper, scope and accuracy. Many right wing polemics expressed only anger, condemnation, and righteous rage. Some mixed nostalgic fantasies with biased readings of the recent changes initiated in the 1960s. A few articles and books articulated reasonable claims backed with evidence in an attempt to put forth a scholarly argument for conservative policies. All conservative reactions were defensive as they implicitly or explicitly tried to uphold a particular conception of a unified and monocultural Anglo-Protestant based America, which they saw being damaged or destroyed by the legacies of the 1960s. Despite claims made by many dismissive liberal nationalists,”⁹ conservative defenders of a distinctly WASP America abound, and they have become arguably more vocal, more impassioned, and under the reign of George W. Bush, more empowered. However, it must be added that conservative arguments or rants for a monocultural America have been extremely repetitious in their uniform allegiance to a mythic golden age of WASP American glory, civic virtue, and harmony.

Allen Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) was perhaps one of the most important early salvos of reactionary conservative critics. Bloom’s “meditation on the state of our souls” was an angry conservative manifesto disguised as a metaphysical treaty on human nature, truth, and the classical virtues of a “liberal” education. The problem, as Bloom saw it, was a shift in cultural priorities and values, which had infected the classical “liberal” curriculum and was “indoctrinating” students to see “wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism” around every hallowed corner of Western history. The new “open” curriculum

lacked refinement and cultured discrimination because it accepted “all kinds of men, all kinds of life-styles, all ideologies.” It was nothing like the “old” American curriculum, built on an established liberal arts tradition, which taught refined students to “recognize and accept man’s natural rights” and the “fundamental basis of unity and sameness” that had been recently discarded by divisive liberal cant like “class, race, religion, national origin, or culture.” Bloom was very concerned that American students, and the country in general, were losing sight of the “natural human good” and the refined ability to “admire it when found” (like the traditional “heroes” of American history). Bloom thought that a revolution had taken place whereby “minorities” had “assaulted” and “weakened” “the sense of superiority of the dominant majority” (WASPs) in order to destroy the old order and set up relativistic “nation of minorities and groups each following its own belief and inclinations” in stead of following the traditional and objective “common good,” which was disappearing in a wave of relativistic “conformism:” it was the closing of the American mind.¹⁰

Bloom wanted to remind Americans that “culture is a cave” and every human being is raised within a particular traditionally defined “cave” in order to be inculcated into the “standards” that make us a “culture-being;” however, culture is limiting and keeps humans from the light of “nature” and “truth.” Western “science,” derived from the ancient Greek search for truth, is the only way to escape the Platonic cave of culture into the wider, permanent truth that is the “rational quest for the good life according to nature.” The current dogma of cultural relativism teaches “openness” to the “closedness” of cultural caves, which lock students in ethnocentric bias of cultural fallacies. According to Bloom, the traditions of Western science and the liberal arts (embedded and preserved in American culture) contain the superior and universal human truths that all “men” need to escape their limited cultural caves in order to gain

the eternal and universal truth of the human condition: “The active presence of a tradition in a man’s soul gives him a resource against the ephemeral.”¹¹

The Civil Rights movements of the 1960s had “dismantled” the “structure of rational inquiry” and “ideologized” the student population with “whatever intense passion moved the masses.” But Bloom warned his audience, “The nation was not ready for great changes.” The rush for social change only “radicalized” and “politicized” education, and the new heretical cry of “racist” was shouted irrationally from every campus at decent bastions of the old order. Bloom was quite dismayed and claimed, “so far as universities are concerned, I know of nothing positive coming from [the 1960s]; it was an unmitigated disaster;” it was a “crime.” The “old core curriculum” was dismantled and destroyed and replaced by a vapid “egalitarian self-satisfaction” that amounted to “nothing.” The 1960s was the “source of the collapse of the entire American educational structure” because “the knowledge of philosophy, history and literature” was “trashed,” and replaced with “dogmatic answers and trivial tracts.” The new dogma was derived from a “new moralism” (actually an older “antimorality”), which put forth the quasi-goods of “modern democratic thought:” “equality, freedom, peace, cosmopolitanism.” Lost in this democratic vulgarity were traditional social goods, like the “natural differences” of human beings, the “restraints” of liberty, the glories of war, and patriotic “devotion to family or country.” In fact, this new democratic dogma concealed a “covert elitism” that actively “suppressed” the “superiority” of certain peoples, especially rulers, in order to patronize the “ambition” of average commoners. It also ignored the plain facts that certain races are superior to others.¹² Bloom was quite clear in his assertion of American exceptionalism: “America tells one story: the unbroken, ineluctable progress of freedom and equality;” and now “is the American moment in world history...the fate of freedom in the world has devolved upon our

regime.” However, based on the cultural and political changes of the 1960s, America’s ability to seize its privileged destiny was in “doubt.”¹³

Another important conservative reaction was *Cultural Literacy* (1988) by E. D. Hirsch, Jr. Hirsch’s tone was much more subdued and scholarly than Bloom’s, and Hirsch restricted his reaction to the subject of literacy and its central importance to a democracy. Hirsch admitted that “flux” permeates culture, but that “stability not change” should be the educator’s primary obligation to the young and, thus, “cultural literacy” should be the primary object of education: “the persistent, stable elements belong at the educational core.” The primary purpose of schooling is to “acculturate” children into “our national life,” which Hirsch assumed to be a “shared culture.” But later in the book Hirsch asked a telling question, “Shall we aim for the gradual assimilation of all into one national culture, or shall we honor and preserve the diverse cultures implicit in our hyphenations?” Hirsch was able to admit the legitimacy of the “vocabulary of a pluralistic nation” and say, “American national culture is neither coherent nor monolithic, and no convincing attempt fully to define its character has ever appeared” and so he argues that the U.S. educational endeavor should be guided by a “value-neutral” “vocabulary.” Of course this raises the question about whether a “value-neutral” vocabulary or educational project is even possible. But Hirsch’s call for “neutrality” was disingenuous because he actually intended to promote a “conservative” “means of communication” so as to acculturate students into a “traditional culture.” He tried to defend his policy by stating, “Traditional information by no means indoctrinates [students] in a conservative point of view,” and that “teaching children national mainstream culture doesn’t mean forcing them to accept its values uncritically.” However, it is hard to see how the whole educative endeavor under the “primary and fundamental” direction of the “acculturative responsibility” to “teach the way’s of one’s own

community” cannot avoid using the soft-power of cultural hegemony. What safeguards do children have within the public schools when bureaucratic or professional functionaries fall back on a rigidly defined national curriculum and simply indoctrinate children so as to satisfy the predominant public good, which Hirsch believed at the time to be meeting “the needs of the wider economy.”¹⁴

While Hirsch is certainly more reasonable and reasoned than Bloom in his conservative arguments for a common culture and nationalist education, his position still boils down to conventional wisdom and traditionalist assumptions, bottoming out on the bedrock of preferring (without explaining or systematically arguing for) one set of values over another:

Although nationalism may be regrettable in some of its world-wide political effects, a mastery of national culture is essential to mastery of the standard language in every modern nation. This point is important for educational policy, because educators often stress the virtues of multicultural education. Such study is indeed valuable in itself; it inculcates tolerance and provides a perspective on our own traditions and values. But however laudable it is, it should not be the primary focus of national education. It should not be allowed to supplant or interfere with our schools’ responsibility to ensure our children’s mastery of American literate culture. The acculturative responsibility of the schools is primary and fundamental. To teach the ways of one’s own community has always been and still remains the essence of the education of our children.¹⁵

If “American national culture is neither coherent nor monolithic,” as Hirsch noted earlier, then how could he uphold abstract platitudes as “our own traditions and values,” while also admitting that communities have their own ways, which should be taught? Whose community or interests should be taught and who in the community should decide? What *part* of the diverse community decides the issue? Hirsch’s arguments seem to advocate a curriculum based on a unified and singular “national” U.S. culture, but the question then arises what exactly is a national culture, and is it ever a unified collection of clearly defined interests based on the desires of all parties involved? Whose culture, whose nation, whose values, whose world-view will dominate and

declare “our own traditions and values” as the uniform standard? Hirsch does not address these questions and seemingly takes it for granted, as did Bloom, that *his* national culture is the “common culture,” and thus the only national culture that should be taught.

In “Americanization and the Schools” (1999), E. D. Hirsch argued that Americanization should be a common function of the public schools for all children, immigrant and native alike.¹⁶ He also said that “ethnic identity” does not necessarily have “to be sacrificed in the course of Americanization,” but he did not explain how this can be avoided. He emphasized that “failure to master the nuanced use of English in speech and writing places a severe limit in the United States on one’s opportunity, and freedom, and the amount of money in one’s purse...Those Americans who lack effective mastery of English, including mastery of the shared background knowledge that enables its nuanced use, are destined to stay poor and alienated from mainstream social and political life.” Hirsch dismissed charges of “cultural and linguistic imperialism” because he viewed a shared language and culture as a “universal” practice and a “social necessity.” Everyone needed to be Americanized according to Hirsch: “New citizens and citizens-to-be deserve the same Americanization as other American children. All American children need to be Americanized in a deeper sense...This system of common knowledge and root attitudes needs to be imparted in school not just to achieve a citizenry competent to rule itself, but also to achieve community, social peace, and, not least, economic justice.” Hirsch invoked Horace Mann and argued for Americanization through a “common curriculum” that would articulate an Americanization program that would *not* be a “narrow, nationalist indoctrination” but a “special universalist sentiment appropriate to a nation of nations:” Patriotism, claimed Hirsch, “implies love of country without implying hostility to the other...American patriotism is built of shared knowledge, attitudes, loyalties, and values –

including values of non-exclusion and toleration.” The “need for a common language is the key to a trans-ethnic future.” Hirsch attacked “bilingual movement” and the “multicultural movement” as “education sisters” that articulate a program of “romantic particularism,” which he decried as the “mortal enemy” of “Enlightenment cosmopolitanism.” He also claims that these movements have “deepen[ed] the disadvantage” of “unassimilated” children and thus they helped “preserve the economic status quo and even widen the gap between rich and poor.” Hirsch argued that “militant bilingualism and multiculturalism” have made the schools “even more confused and rudderless places than they had already been.”

Another important conservative barrage, and perhaps the most important and significant conservative argument of the 1990s, came from noted liberal historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and his bestselling political tract, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1991, 1998). Schlesinger made a concession to the liberal camp and argued, “cultural pluralism is a necessity in an ethnically diversified society” such as the U.S., however, his book was an extended argument for a conservative common culture based on WASP values. One line of argument invoked Hirsch and explained that a “common language” is an “essential bond of cohesion in so heterogeneous a nation as America.” The other, more important line of argument focused on the “democratic principles” of America which he enveloped in a teleological grand narrative: American political history was the “persistent movement” from “exclusion” to “inclusion,” “openness,” and “tolerance.” However, he did make a nod to critics on the left by admitting that American principles have “too often” been “transgressed in practice” due to Anglo-American “domination” of “culture and politics” and WASP “convictions of racial superiority.”¹⁷

Schlesinger admitted that traditional U.S. history has been “invoked to justify the ruling class” composed of “white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males” who conceptualized American history to serve their own distinct “interests.” However, Schlesinger did not linger on this point or find it necessary to condemn. Instead he argued that Americans must embrace their past, “for better or worse,” and come to terms with the WASP tradition as the cultural foundation of America.

The smelting pot thus had, unmistakably and inescapably, an Anglocentric flavor. For better or worse, the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition was for two centuries – and in crucial respects still is – the dominant influence on American culture and society. This tradition provided the standard to which other immigrant nationalities were expected to conform, the matrix into which they would be assimilated.

Schlesinger used this conception of a foundational common culture to explain how it has become more inclusive because of the grand narrative of progress unfolding in U.S. history. He quoted the conservative historian of education Diane Ravitch who said, “Paradoxical though it may seem, the United States has a common culture that is multicultural.” The point he developed was that even though the WASP culture was a dominative and self-seeking culture that forced other peoples to conform to its standard, it was a self-critical culture, a culture defined by democratic principles, and above all else, it was a culture that was willing and able to “forge a single nation from people of remarkably diverse racial, religious, and ethnic origins.” American culture may be based on the foundation of an older WASP culture, but that WASP culture was able to facilitate “progress” towards a “new national identity:”

E pluribus unum: one out of many. The United States had a brilliant solution for the inherent fragility, the inherent combustibility, of a multiethnic society: the creation of a brand-new national identity by individuals who, in forsaking old loyalties and joining to make new lives, melted away ethnic differences – a national identity that absorbs and transcends the diverse ethnicities

The “brilliant solution” of the melting pot, which leads to a “new American culture,” was never fully documented or explained by Schlesinger, and his argument is complicated and confused as

he admitted that many ethnic groups were skeptical of the melting pot solution, especially considering the centuries of xenophobia, white supremicisim, and racism that has only recently been “acknowledge[d] and confront[ed].” Schlesinger noted how many minority groups throughout American history had to “demand” their political rights through “declarations of ethnic identity,” which gave rise in the 20th century to “ethnic politics” and has culminated in the denunciation of melting pot theory as nothing but “a conspiracy to homogenize America.” Instead of documenting and reconciling this melting-pot debate, however, Schlesinger rushed to a hasty and simple conclusion: a “new *American* culture” has been produced through the unfolding of historical progress, culminating in the Civil Rights amendment, but petty “cults” of ethnicity have mushroomed from the 20th century Civil Rights struggle. These ethnic cults “threaten to become a counter-revolution” and could destroy the hard-earned new national identity. These ethnic cults must conform to the “common American nationality” because America was, is, and must continue to be “‘one people,’ a common culture, a single nation,”¹⁸

By the presidential election race of 1992 the rhetoric of the culture war was being used by the radical and religious right. In order to scare up political support, conservative reactionaries took the debate to new levels of aggressiveness. Patrick J. Buchanan led a campaign for the presidency on the extreme political and religious right, but he eventually came back into the mainstream Republican fold to support George Bush. At the 1992 Republican National Convention he railed against liberals and the “failed liberalism of the 1960s and 70s” as the arbiters “of doom.” It was the noble Republican, Ronald Reagan, who returned American to the “Judeo-Christian values and beliefs upon which this nation was built” and he “made us proud to be Americans again.” Energized by eight years of a powerful Republican administration, religious and social conservatives loudly proclaimed that the socio-political change of the 1960s

and 70s were “not the kind of change America wants. It is not the kind of change America needs. And it is not the kind of change we can tolerate in a nation that we still call God’s country.” Buchanan argued that a “religious war” was being waged in America over “the soul of America:” “It is about who we are. It is about what we believe. It is about what we stand for as Americas...It is a cultural war.” Buchanan called for a new conservative movement that would use “force, rooted in justice, backed by courage” in order to “take back our culture, and take back our country.”¹⁹ Two months later, Buchanan expanded on this same theme and delivered another speech, “The Cultural War for the Soul of America” (1992). Buchanan was indignant over charges of his “divisive,” “hateful,” and “racist” speeches, and he thundered, “As polarized as we have ever been, we Americans are locked in a cultural war for the soul of our country.” He quoted a newspaper columnist and explained, “It is about power; it is about who determines ‘the norms by which we live, and by which we define and govern ourselves.’ Who decides what is right and wrong...Whose beliefs shall form the basis of law?” Buchanan argued that “our beliefs” grounded in “the Old and New Testament” and “natural law and tradition” were at war with a “destructive, degenerate, ugly, pornographic, Marxist, anti-American ideology.” The battle is over “family, faith, friends, and country. For the ashes of their fathers and the temples of their Gods.” And the battle was now “raging in our public schools” and the teaching of history. Buchanan claimed, “If a country forgets where it came from, how will its people know who they are?...The battle over our schools is part of the war to separate...all Americans from their heritage.”²⁰

Perhaps the penultimate book reflecting the most comprehensive articulation of conservative criticisms and concerns over American identity is Samuel P. Huntington’s *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (2004).²¹ Huntington’s fundamental premise

on which the whole book rests is America (“We”) is “different” and “distinct” from other nations (“thems”),²² which leads to a tenuous inductive argument: American cultural difference is notably superior because it has produced the most powerful nation on the planet, and that difference is due to a “distinct” Anglo-Protestant culture and its “religiosity.” This inductive argument is repeated in numerous forms throughout the book, but it is never proved through scholarly argument and substantial evidence; it is rather assumed to be true via faulty claims, historical inaccuracies, and topically referenced, highly selective, and superficially engaged reviews of the scholarly and polemical literature.²³ Huntington’s core claim is that America’s Anglo-Protestant culture is *alone* responsible for *all* things *distinctly* American: the English language, Christianity, religious commitment, republican concepts (the rule of law, the responsibility of rulers, the rights of individuals, individualism, and the work ethic), and the American creed of equality and freedom. Thus, the Anglo-Protestant culture must be preserved against the rising tides of multiculturalism (“ethnic separatism” and “reverse racism”) and Hispanic immigration (“Hispanization”) or America will dissipate and “transform” into “a country of two languages, two cultures, and two peoples.” And even though the Anglo-Protestant culture has traditionally been a homogeneous, “overwhelmingly white,” and white supremacist culture (a fact that Huntington does admit in subdued tones in several places), Huntington argues that “the importance of Anglo-Protestant culture” as *the* foundational cultural identity of Americans does not mean that America is only open to “Anglo-Protestant people.” But he is quite clear that ethnic minorities must become Americans on Anglo-Protestant terms (Americanization) or else they are a corrosive threat to a unified national identity: “There is no Americano dream. There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican-Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they *dream* in English” [my emphasis].²⁴

Huntington explained quite clearly in his Foreword that he was motivated by his “own identities as a patriot and a scholar” (it is very significant which identity he named first), and he acknowledged that “the motives of patriotism and of scholarship” could very easily “conflict” with each other. He claims that his scholarship is “detached and thorough” and that it is based upon “an analysis of the evidence,” and yet he does admit, “My selection and presentation of that evidence may well be influenced by my patriotic desire to find meaning and virtue in America’s past and in its possible future.” Throughout the book Huntington engages in the rhetorical fallacy of reifying a nationally unified, distinct, and unambiguously clear “We,” which is the voice of the “majority,” the American “public.” Throughout the book Huntington unproblematically speaks for *the* American people (“We Americans”) and claims *the* America “most Americans love and want” is the exact same as *the* America “I know and love,” which in turn is the exact opposite of the divisive “cults of multiculturalism” with their Anti-American (“left-wing, socialist, working-class”) vision.²⁵ But Huntington reveals evidence that his position may not be representative of *all* Americans.

In fact, the views and arguments put forth in Huntington’s book (and the views and arguments of *all* of the conservative critics surveyed in this essay) resemble very closely Huntington’s characterization of “white nativism.” One could make a strong argument that Huntington and the other conservative critics are in fact a type of white nationalist, which is arguably a small, but powerful and highly vocal minority in America. It is instructive to quote Huntington at length and then compare his words in relation to his central arguments discussed above:

One very plausible reaction [to multiculturalism fomented in the 1960s] would be the emergence of exclusivist sociopolitical movements composed largely but not only of white males, primarily working-class and middle-class, protesting and

attempting to stop or reverse these changes and what they believe, accurately or not, to be the diminution of their social and economic status, their loss of jobs to immigrants and foreign countries, the perversion of their culture, the displacement of their language, and the erosion or even evaporation of the historical identity of their country...the preservation or restoration of what they see as “white America” is a central goal...to defend one’s “native” culture and identity and to maintain their purity against foreign influences.

Huntington and the other cultural critics surveyed here seem to represent the “new white nationalists” who are “cultured, intelligent, and often possessing impressive degrees” and who fear that Hispanics and other ethnic and racial minority groups are a “threat to their language, culture, and power.” Huntington made it very clear that culture is a human invention and that cultures change, thus, based on his reasoning, Anglo-Protestant America must be preserved not because of some transcendent value, but because it is *his* culture and *he* loves it and he will fight “others,” like Hispanics, to keep *his* culture pure and powerful. It is not a noble sentiment, but it is certainly heartfelt.²⁶

The Liberal Defense of 20th Century Reform

By the mid 1990s left leaning academics began to more fully address the arguments and historiography of conservative critics. Liberal responses were drafted for a number of reasons. Most spent time analyzing conservative falsehoods and exaggerations. Many acknowledged and legitimated several conservative fears, albeit in less extreme and apocalyptic terms. Most put forth counter arguments to justify the essential cultural changes initiated in the 1960s, however, many incorporated conservative critiques in order to reframe and defuse the cultural war in terms of a liberal or multicultural nationalism. There have also been many voices from the political left who pushed for more radical changes. Radicals have often sought to extend the debate of the culture war beyond a narrow preoccupation with American identity, and have focused instead on larger issues of American imperialism, universal human rights, and ecological sustainability. Some radical voices have even suggested that the bounded community of the nation is itself an impediment to social justice as it is based on an exclusivity that can be used to deny human dignity and justice to those like “illegal” immigrants who lie beyond the protection of the nation.

Michael Walzer wrote an important essay, “Pluralism: A Political Perspective” (1980), in which he argued that “national and ethnic pluralism has been the rule, not the exception” in American history. Revolutionary leaders (and many political ideologues and activists since) tried to argue that democracy was only possible if it was accompanied by “cultural unity;” however, as Walzer pointed out, history has shown that democracy and claims for political and social equality have “proven to be the great solvents” of cultural unity rather than its champions. The cultural unification of many peoples under a single nation-state, Walzer argued, “is possible only under tyrannical regimes...except in the United States.” The United States is exception in

human history because it has been built on the foundation of a “multiracial society,” albeit one where most “minority races were politically impotent and socially invisible” for a great part of its history. But Walzer argued that the “repression” of these minority groups did not negatively effect the system of American pluralism constructed through immigration (although he did admit that “racism is the great barrier to a fully developed pluralism”). America has been an “immigrant society” bound by patriotism to political ideals, according to Walzer, not a nation defined by ethnicity or territory. The rise of political pluralism in the 20th century was a reaction to the coercive power of the expanded modern state, which often demanded cultural Americanization on top of political patriotism from immigrants. Pluralists like Horace Kallen defended and celebrated diversity, and argued that America was a “nation of nationalities” and, therefore, in no need of hegemonic unity. This inspired the “ethnic self-assertion” of cultural and racial groups in America during the 20th century, which Walzer claimed were the “functional equivalent of national liberation in other parts of the world.” But cultural diversity does not threaten American political identity, argued Walzer, because civil society and the state “though they constantly interact, are formally distinct.” Thus, while individuals find solace in cultural group identity in civil society, those same individuals identify with the state of America in politics: “Politics forces [ethnic groups] into alliances and coalitions, and democratic politics, because it recognizes each citizen as the equal of every other, without regard to ethnicity, fosters a unity of individuals alongside the diversity of groups.” Besides, the power of the individualism produced by American nationalism has a destabilizing effect on group identity, argued Walzer, and thus pluralism is an “experiment” that “will prove to be a temporary phenomenon, a way-station on the road to American nationalism.”²⁷

Walzer also wrote another influential essay in 1990, “What Does It Mean to Be an ‘American?’” In this essay he claims that “anybody can live [in America], and just about everybody does.” American identity is not based on an ethnic or territorial nationalism, but on the “virtue” of immigrants and natives coming together into a single yet diverse people: “the manyness of America is cultural, its oneness is political.” America is composed of many ethnic groups but American is not itself an ethnic group. Immigrants retain their former identity but add onto it a hyphenated American identity, which is a political affiliation to a political nation. The hyphen is a “plus sign,” not a disavowal of ethnicity. Americans can live “on either side of the hyphen” and still be Americans. National unity comes from citizenship in the nation and “pledging allegiance to the ‘one and indivisible’ republic,” not from cultural conformity. Walzer argued that American nationalism is uniquely “complex” because it is based on the ideas of tolerance and inclusion, “incorporating oneness and manyness in a ‘new order.’” This creates for a sort of national “incoherence,” but Walzer argues that is part of the distinctive American nation, which is still “radically unfinished” in its nature.” Americans are free to “choose” their own cultural location on either side of the hyphen and this freedom keeps America vibrant and unfettered from a “singular national destiny.”²⁸

Liah Greenfeld took a few pages at the end of her historical study, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (1992), to say a few words about American nationalism for her contemporary context.²⁹ Greenfeld argued that American nationalism was based on civic nationalist principles of freedom, democracy, and equality enshrined in *The Declaration of Independence*. Not everyone agreed with these principles and these principles were not always practiced, but these were the ideals that defined a nation. The “people” of America were not defined by any ethnic unity because “America has been a nation of immigrants from the

beginning.” Instead, American nationalism was defined by an association of individuals who gave allegiance to a set of principles and, thus, “pluralism was built into the system” because culture and ethnicity mattered less than the affirmation of nationalist principles. The combination of a pluralist people and a civic nationalism has tended to create a tumultuous yet somehow united republic: Our “national commitment” to the ideals of freedom, equality, and democracy “remains the main source of social cohesion and the main stimulant of unrest in it.” Greenfeld argued, “To be an American means to persevere in one’s loyalty to the ideals, in spite of the inescapable contradictions between them and reality, and to accept reality without reconciling oneself to it.”

Jennifer L. Hochschild defined and contextually explored the American Dream, the most pervasive and powerful nationalist ideology in the U.S.³⁰ Like all ideologies the American Dream resists a formulaic definition or prescriptive power in terms of predicting the behaviors of Americans who subscribe to its ideological tenets; however, Hochschild attempted to get past the vagueness of the general idea of working hard for material success in order to tease out a more analytical conception of the American Dream. She broke the ideology into four tenets corresponding to four descriptions questions: (1) Who may pursue success? – Everyone can pursue success; (2) What does one pursue? – One pursues “success;” (3) How does one pursue success? – Success is the result of an individual’s hard work and self sacrifice; (4) Why is success worth pursuing? – Success is a virtue, which both constitutes and demonstrates an individual’s worthiness. The pursuit of success is complicated by the ambiguity of “success,” which can be defined in absolute, relative, and competitive terms. An absolute definition rests the basic achievement of an individual; a relative definition depends upon the contextual evaluation of success relative to an external marker like another person’s level of success; and a

competitive definition corresponds to a capitalist marketplace where only the best will win success. The American dream promotes a “radical individualism” which completely overlooks social and structural mediators like “economic processes, environmental constraints, or political structures.” This factor is especially dangerous because American capitalist society is structurally set up to “ensure that some fail, at least relatively, and the dream does nothing to help Americans cope with or even recognize that fact.” Hochschild especially looks at the structure of racism in American society and she demonstrated how it has constrained and *continues to constrain* African American success in relation to white Americans and white European immigrants. Many African Americans remain deeply entrenched in poverty and well beyond reach of achieving any measure of the American Dream, and this has caused many African Americans, especially middle-class blacks, to reject the American Dream in order to promote separatist black nationalisms or self-defeating nihilisms. Hochschild argued that the ideology of the American dream is “flawed at the core” because it obscures the structural factors like racism and class that create and sustain inequality. Thus the ideology “under the cloak of individual agency” both gives people “unjustified hopes” and also ensures “unwarranted feelings of failure.” The American dream has the capacity to both “deceive” and “liberate” by encouraging “everyone to win” while structurally setting up many to loose. Despite the “inherent flaws” of the ideology of the American dream and Hochschild’s “ambivalence” toward the concept, she argued: “For better or for worse, it is *our* ideology, and we are stuck with it. We had better make the best of our situation, and strive to use the strictures of the American dream to enable more Americans to achieve the fantasies lurking within it.” However if American society is not structurally transformed, Hochschild delivered a serious warning: “If it can be construed as an *ideal*, a broad, generous, inclusive vision that encourages people to be the best

they can be however they define that best, then transformative pluralism and open channels of mobility are direct and plausible extensions of Americans' core tradition. But if it is only an *ideology* in the narrow sense, a self-righteous club that winners use to justify their own actions and to push away, blame, or brainwash losers, then white separatism will continue to flourish, black separatism to grow, and class barriers to harden.”³¹

An important liberal response was made in 1995 by Todd Gitlin, a founding member of SDS in the 1960s who had become a sociologist at the University of California, Berkeley.³² Gitlin framed his discussion of recent culture wars by arguing that certain Americans “who have imagined themselves to be *real* Americans, *normal* Americans” have repeatedly over the course of U.S. history engaged in “purification crusades” to address and combat those groups or individuals who “threaten the integrity of the nation” [his emphasis]. Gitlin argued that the periodic culture wars in American history have tended to obscure contested realities rather than clarify or settle them. Thus, Gitlin argued that all positions and controversies needed to be re-examined in order to not only understand American identity, but also (from his leftist vantage point) to understand “the contemporary incapacity of American politics,” by which he meant the failure of the American Left to effectively redirect attention away from symbolic battles and onto more important and pressing social and economic issues.

Gitlin discussed at length many cultural controversies over the politics of identity. Gitlin argued that all sides focused exclusively on symbolic representations instead of concrete social and economic realities: Conservatives, liberals, and minority groups spoke from positions of “moral conviction” and argued over competing “emotional meanings” attached to historical symbols instead of focusing on “rock-bottom class inequalities and racial discrimination.” Gitlin argued that the culture wars boiled down to verbal battles over “real and imagined symbols of

insult,” which did nothing to address the concrete realities of power, racial discrimination, and economic injustice. Both sides simply battled over symbols. Both sides won and lost “symbolic victories.” All the while racial discrimination remained, economic injustice increased, and the American public became more divided. Gitlin was especially hard on liberals and the “so-called Left” who had seemingly renounced its older mission of changing material inequalities (especially the oppression of certain classes and races). Gitlin argued that the divisive symbolic battles over “identity politics,” the primary arena of the culture wars, marked the “decline” of the American Left. The Left once had a historical mission based on the “universal values” of freedom, justice, equality and the “common good,” but after the 1970s it had been fractured and demoralized by “sectarianism,” “petty” debates over rhetoric and representation, and the impotence of “false solutions proclaimed for real problems.”³³

While America has always been divided by classes and races, Gitlin argued, there was still a shared moral vision based on the sacred “ideas” consecrated in *The Declaration of Independence*, which framed the debated contours of the nation. For most of American history the debate between radicals and conservatives was over inclusiveness, not nationality. Conservatives made many attempts to “compress differences” into a “single,” normative American WASP identity, which invariably was complicated not only by internal “contradictions,” but also by “those *other* Americans” (immigrants, aliens, slaves, radicals, and sects) who had been marginalized, ignored, or eliminated in order to manufacture a *selective* national unity. These “other Americans,” the “despised outsiders,” constructed their own “unmelted,” “torn,” and sectarian American identities in opposition to exclusive crusades for a “common culture,” but invariably these outsiders sought for political inclusion within the nation. Gitlin pointed out a long tradition of “democratic Americanism.” This was a leftist/liberal

version of American nationalism, which used the universal moral vision of *The Declaration* to help extend political rights and equality to these outsiders.³⁴

However, this democratic Americanism, as Gitlin argued, began to unravel in the 1960s because protest movements and the New Left began to reject both “conventional versions of American identity” and American ideals. This resulted in a reactionary “anti-Americanism” which celebrated diversity, anti-establishmentarianism, and individualism as new ideals. The New Left relinquished all claim to “the idea of a common America” and, thereby, Americanism “was ceded, by default, to the Right.” Republicans were able to use revised notions of a common culture and Americanism in order to marshal organized political reaction to the rights revolution of the 1960s. The American Left was fractured into a “collection of interest groups” with no “vocabulary for the common good,” and the Democratic party could offer no compelling counter-nationalist vision: “no commonality, no alternative crucible, no compelling rhetoric, no political culture – only a heap of demands piled on demands.” Thus, after securing a solid political block based on a nationalist agenda, gaining more and more political power, and eventually claiming victory in the Cold War, the Republican party and social conservatives initiated an all out attack on the liberal welfare-state and declared a wider “war for the soul of America.” The Left was fragmented into “partisans of identity politics” and, as Gitlin argued, it could not effectively respond to the powerful conservative reaction. The culture wars were not only initiated by the conservative right, but fought over territory (national identity) that only the right could effectively defend. Thus Gitlin’s book is an extended critique of the Left by a Leftist in order to marshal a new universal Leftist vision with which to protect and justify the liberal welfare state and the rights revolution against the onslaughts of conservative cultural warriors. Gitlin argued that the Left needs to find a way “to cultivate the spirit of solidarity across the lines

of difference” in order to “build bridges” and find a common, democratic moral vision.

Otherwise, Gitlin warned, the American Left will cease to exist as a political force of any consequence and the conservative counter-revolution will know no bounds.³⁵

Michael Lind published a widely read “manifesto” of liberal nationalism called *The Next American Nation* (1995).³⁶ Lind’s central argument: America was and continues to be a “real nation” – “a concrete historical community, defined primarily by a common language, common folkways, and a common vernacular culture.” He argued that most Americans identify more with a national identity than they do with any political affiliation, but American nationalism has been poorly defined outside the older chauvinistic boundaries of a “white Christian nation,” which was the foundational ethos of the first two “Republics” of America. Lind conceptualized American history as three distinct “Republican” regimes, each defined by specific nationalist ethos and specific nationalist policies. The “First Republic” of “Anglo-America” (1584 to 1850) built upon the strong ethnocultural Anglo-Saxon national community in place before the revolution and it used Protestant Christianity and federal-republicanism to create a national community – the United States of America. The “Second Republic” of Euro-Christian America (1850 to 1960), infused by a nationalist religion of democracy, capitalism, and a Pan-Christian ethic, expanded the national community to include most white Europeans (and after World War II, both Catholics and Jews were accepted); however, the expanded second republic was built on the foundation of a white supremacist Herrenvolk (master-race) caste-system, which actively excluded and subjected non-white races. The “Third Republic” of multicultural America (1960s to current) was a minority led reaction to the white supremacy of the first two Republics. Multicultural America began as a Civil Rights Revolution, which sought to open up the American nation by securing formal legal and political rights for all American citizens; however,

in an effort to further extend equality-as-opportunity to equality-as-result, a federal system of racial categorization and an institutionalized “racial preference system” was put into place (affirmative action) to “force racial quotas” on American society. What Lind called “The Second Radical Reconstruction” was a federally enforced system of minority preference, which meant to “remedy” racial, class, and gender discrimination in social spheres like schooling and employment. While Lind was sympathetic to the rationale of affirmative action, he criticized it as an intrusive, unfair, divisive, and dangerous policy.³⁷

Lind specifically took issue with multicultural America’s obsession with race and culture as *the* foundational source of identity: He claimed it was not in the best interests of the American people. Lind argued that discussion of culture was often a veiled reduction of race, and thus, cultural authenticity and cultural pride were often calls to adhere to a certain biologically defined and essentialist identity. He called the priorities of multiculturalism divisive because “identity politics” were eclipsing identification with a larger national community and with larger national issues (like economics and health care). Like Gitlin, Lind also called multicultural identity politics a dangerous distraction from identifying the real and continued source of inequality in America: the “white power structure.” Lind argued that the white power structure used multiculturalism and racial preferences fraudulently to “provide the illusion of integration, while imposing minimal costs on the white overclass:” it was a classic imperial case of divide and rule.³⁸ This explains why during the supposedly more equal and fair regime of multicultural America, there was a silent “revolution of the rich,” whereby, income inequality increased dramatically. Lind argued that multiculturalism socially and politically fragmented the majority of Americans by allowing “culture wars” to displace “class wars,” and thus, unified elites were able to initiate and win “a generation-long class war,” which has led to a “new Feudalism.” Lind

argued that multiculturalism was destroying the national integrity of America, it was fragmenting the American people, and it was solidifying the power structure of a white overclass.³⁹

To renew and rebuild America, Lind argued for a revised liberal nationalism, which would be the foundational ethos for a new “fourth republic” of the United States of America. Liberal nationalism would build on the notion that America is an ethnocultural nation unified by a common language, folkways, memories, and mores, but it would also be an inclusive “mixed-race culture” symbolically defined as a “transracial melting pot,” which Lind called “Trans-America.” Lind argued that the U.S. should be a “multiracial and multireligious but unicultural American ethnic nation.” He held up blacks as the quintessential Americans because they not only left behind their older cultures, but mixed and blended into the emerging American identity, which prefigured their actual inclusion into the political state as citizens. Lind argued that nationalism has often been the tool of the political left in efforts to promote “greater political, social, and economic equality among all members of the national community.” In an effort to bring Americans together, Lind argued that a shared set of ancestors is unimportant. The important factor for a renewed America is sharing a contemporary cultural and political union – a national community – in order to produce shared common descendants: Americans.⁴⁰

David A. Hollinger wrote a widely influential work called *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (1995).⁴¹ Hollinger argued that the ideology and socio-political movement of multiculturalism has served a useful purpose in attacking a racist Anglo-Protestant based American culture; however, he argued that the blunt race/culture (“ethno-racial”) based framework of multiculturalism is limited in understanding and dealing with “the problem of boundaries” in what is *becoming* a “postethnic,” “cosmopolitan,” and trans/multinational world, which is developing more acute globalized problems that need global solutions. The traditional

conceptions of ethnicity have posited assumed, often monolithic, and sometimes racialized “identities,” which mask the degree of actual “affiliation” any given individual psychologically and socially invests in a particular ethnic group to which that individual is supposed to belong. Hollinger uses the example of Alex Haley and conceptualized “Haley’s choice,” by which he theorized the choice Haley made in tracing his “roots” back to his black mother’s ancestors in Africa rather than identifying with his white father’s ancestors in Ireland. Now while Hollinger did admit that a racialized and racist America circumscribed and forced Haley’s choice, Hollinger went on to argue that in a less segregated and increasing mixed ethno-racial world, individuals are becoming freer to choose ethnic, mixed ethnic, or non-ethnic identities, but the ethno-racially infused multicultural ethos is unprepared to handle these new volitional and mixed identity formations. Hollinger’s conception of a hybrid, postethnic America recognizes the complexity of identity, whereby, individuals constantly shift between many situationally defined and sometimes conflicting identities. Hollinger argued that America should shed its “*ethnic* history” and embrace its “*nonethnic* ideology of the nation” as a means to embrace and foster a “*postethnic* future.” Hollinger asked his readers to take seriously the national motto *E Pluribus Unum* as a way to conceptualize cultural diversity united by a national commitment to a common creed of liberty and justice. “Individuals should be allowed to affiliate or disaffiliate with their won communities of descent to an extent that they choose,” argued Hollinger, “while affiliating with whatever nondescent communities are available and appealing to them.” What unites these highly diverse and hybrid individuals is a democratically organized state “defined by a civic principle of nationality” and enacted in a shared “national culture” where diverse individuals democratically deliberate and work towards a “common future:” “The national community’s fate can be common without its will being uniform, and the nation can constitute a common project

without effacing all of the various projects that its citizens pursue through their voluntary affiliations.”⁴²

Gary Gerstle’s “Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans” (1997) looked at the Crevecoeurian myth of Americanization and how it affected the historical and sociological study of cultural assimilation and Americanization.⁴³ Gerstle argued that Crevecoeur’s conception of assimilation in *Letters from an American Farmer* was one of the “most influential mediations on what it means to become an American.” Not only did the Crevecoeurian myth help define the early 20th century ideal of the “melting pot,” but it also influenced the way 20th century sociologists and historians conceptualized theories of assimilation, which in turn had an influence on public policy and debate. Invoking radical scholars of the 1960s and the new scholarship of David R. Roediger and others, Gerstle criticized neo-Crevecoeurian scholars for not focusing enough on the complexity and constraints (class, gender, race, nation) of the Americanization process by which “social forces external to the immigrant” play a very significant, if not the most significant, role in the Americanization of immigrants. Gerstle argued that these “structure of power” limited the options of immigrants (and also often coerced) during the assimilation/Americanization process. Gerstle criticized the overly optimistic accounts made by Fuchs, Sollors and Hollinger who seemed to argue for a theory of personal agency and a fluidness to identity that did not take into account the restrictiveness of structural constraints (especially race, as Gerstle argued, “race, even more than class and gender, still limits the options of those who seek to become American”). Gerstle clearly believed that “historical circumstances and social structures undermined experiments in the fashioning of identity.” Gerstle looked to newer studies on gender and working class Americanism (including his own), which have created a “synthesis between agency and structure” and, thereby, demonstrated how

“Americanization involves both inventiveness and constraint:” America was not “simply a Crevecoeurian land of possibility,” it was also “a land of constraint.”

becoming American cannot be understood in “emancipationist” terms alone, for immigrants invariably encountered structures of class, race, gender, and national power that constrained, and sometimes defeated, their efforts to be free. Coercion, as much as liberty, has been intrinsic to our history and to the process of becoming American.

Gerstle also critiqued liberal American nationalism via David Hollinger’s *Postethnic America*.

Gerstle agreed with Hollinger that liberal nationalism infused and largely defined Progressivism, the New Deal, the civil rights movement, and the Great Society by “deriv[ing] legitimacy from their claim to speak ‘on behalf of the American nation’ as a whole.” However, Gerstle also argued that nationalism by definition means “boundaries” and “internal and external opponents,” and thus the “equality” gained over 1930 to 1960 was “made possible by the coercion of the 1910s and 1920s:”

America had shrunk its circle of the ‘we’ and had substantially narrowed the range of acceptable cultural and political behavior...The success of this liberal nationalist project, I would argue, depended on the earlier deployment of the coercive power of the state against Germans, new immigrants, Asians, and political radicals. Liberal progress, in this instance, profited from the earlier period of repression and exclusion...Historians have yet to take full measure of the powerful nationalism that settled over American in the 1910s and 1920s, suffocating the hyphenated identities...weaken[ing] the pluralist character of pre-1917 America and accelerat[ing] national integration.

Gerstle is but one example of many leftist critiques of liberal nationalism. Historians have begun to examine the artificial boundaries of the nation, what Robert Wiebe called “fictive kin composites,” and they have started to historically contextualize nations in relation to other nations and in relation to non-national and transnational paradigms of a global age.⁴⁴ Bonnie Honig has looked into multiple versions of immigrants myths in relation to nationalism, and she argued that nationalist discourses that focus on immigrants do so in order to “renationalize” the

state by justifying the inclusiveness of a bounded and exclusivist national community that still derives its identity by “pitting ‘us’ against ‘them.’” She argued instead for a “democratic cosmopolitanism” by which “citizenship is not just a druidical status distributed (or not) by states, but a *practice* in which denizens, migrants, residents, and the allies hold states accountable for their definitions and distributions of goods, powers, rights, freedoms, privileges, and justice...denationalize the state in order to make room for the generation of alternative sites of affect and identity against which states often guard.”⁴⁵ John Exdell has criticized liberal nationalism for “legitimiz[ing] a policy of exclusion,” which leaves open the possibility of further nationalist exclusions based on ethnicity and race. Liberals claim that solidarity and justice within the bounded community are produced and protected by nationalist identity; however, Exdell demonstrated that national solidarity in America has been and continues to be undermined by the divisive power of race via a long tradition of white supremacist American ethnonationalism. Exdell questions the liberal assumption that a reformation of “national self-understanding” is enough to truly “unite” American citizens and overcome a long tradition of American racism. Exdell instead asked if new infusions of Latino immigrants might “renew” and “revitalize” American identity by developing a “new post-national identity” that might redefine American citizenship as a situated democratic performance conducted by *any* free, productive, and contributing agent within the national territory.⁴⁶

Culture Wars in Context: Transformations of the American Nation, 1776 to 1990

The modern usage of the terms “nation” and “nationalism” comes from 16th century England. The political discourse of a “nation” became associated with a “people.” Reference to a “people” before this time was usually derogatory (“rabble,” “plebs,” or “mass”), but within the context of 16th century England a “people” became glorified as the source of sovereignty and the sole object of political loyalty. This political definition of a nation stressed a civic conception of individual sovereignty (as opposed to monarchical sovereignty) constituted by a constitutional law (as opposed to divinity or monarchical absolutism). However, national identity was also an ideological and social construction. The notion of a sovereign people was an “imagined community” that gave its members identity, affiliation, community, and purpose. Isaiah Berlin described nationalism as manufacturing a “kind of homogeneity” out of “common ancestry, common language, customs, traditions, memories, continuous occupancy of the same territory” so as to create “solidarity” while marking off “differences” (usually in the form of an “aggressive chauvinism”) between political and social groups. As a political and social ideology, nationalism reveres and reifies the “unity” and “self-determination” of the sovereign people. Loyalty and fidelity to the nation qua people, Berlin argued, is assigned a “supreme value.” This secular reverence for a distinct people often leads to an exclusive “ethnic” chauvinism, whereby, membership in a “unique,” special, or exceptional people is restricted to an inherited and biologically based group. Nationalism can also be used for more aggressively expansionist political purposes. Powerful ethnic groups or nations can engage in hegemony through which they aggressively (though not necessarily imperialistically) drive for an expanded territory or nation under the banner of “unification” for economic, political, and/or military purposes. This

type of nationalism can lead to a federation, an empire, and or “irredentism,” whereby, territory and peoples are coercively agglomerated under the control of a centralized and often authoritarian state. But rhetorically conceptualizing nations and peoples as a distinct and uniform social entity needs to be qualified. Nations are rarely based on a distinctly singular “people,” a single national ideology, a single state, a single language, or a single territory. Nor does the existence of nationalism necessarily predict the ideological affiliations or standardized behavior of the people within a nation. Nations are imagined communities that represent an idealized and normative “people” that can never actually exist.⁴⁷

The political need to establish and legitimate a people – a *nation* – was a relatively novel and very radical political problem in the 18th century. Nationhood was influenced by the rise of Enlightenment republican/democratic political philosophy and capitalism, and forged through the republican revolutions in England (17th century), America, and France (late 18th century).⁴⁸ While the study of nationalism is currently a young social-scientific field of study,⁴⁹ the evidence seems to suggest that prior to the late 18th century, only one nation-qua-nation existed: the British. Liah Greenfeld explained how an English national consciousness developed in the 16th century through the power politics of aristocracy, which led to a redefinition of nobility as “service to the nation.” In the 17th century affiliation with the British nation expanded due to several factors: the rising middle class who exuded a strong sense of political ownership and entitlement, the expansion of literacy through Protestantism, counter-Reformation repression by Catholic monarchs, and finally a republican revolution.⁵⁰ American nationalism was in many ways, but not all, derivative of English nationalism because as Greenfeld and others have argued, “The English settlers came with a national identity;” however, the development of a specific American national identity (as with all national identities) was a highly unique and non-

transferable process. American nationalism took almost a century after the Revolution to develop and diffuse because while the colonists had an emerging “American identity,” it was not linked with “a sense that Americans constituted a unity” and, thus, the highly diverse and localized colonies were always “in perpetual peril of dissolving.” As Liah Greenfeld argued, “The forces that could (and eventually did) bring the United States to the brink of disintegration were at least as strong as those which fostered unity.”⁵¹

Polemicists from the political left and right have claimed that an American identity has existed from the first settlements in the 16th and 17th centuries;⁵² however, most historians and sociologists have traced the origins of a distinctly American national identity to the mid 19th century, especially after the Civil War, although some historians like Robert Wiebe place the formation of a *national* American identity closer to the end of the 19th century.⁵³ Before the Revolution, the largely English colonies were divided by diverse ethnic identities, dispersed regional settlements, and highly localized economies connected more with Europe than each other. American nationalists had to contend with and overcome what became a highly diverse colonial federation.⁵⁴ A rhetorically imagined national public – “We the people” – was first manufactured by Revolutionary leaders as a means to unify the diverse and fragmented colonies during the Revolutionary War and again during the debates over the Constitution.⁵⁵ Citizenship was a divisive issue from the very start. Noah Pickus argued that most early leaders agreed that civic principles and a “shared sense of nationhood” needed to be at the core of the new country and its founding documents, but many “differed deeply as the meaning of that nation and whether it could change.”⁵⁶

Federalists wanted a small and homogeneous republic with narrowly defined rights of citizenship limited to self-governing, propertied, “virtuous” men, while Anti-Federalists and

Jeffersonian Republicans wanted a more “broadly defined national identity” based on universal civic principles and open to all who embraced and abided by those principles. Although the early nation was quite diverse and divisive, Federalists, like John Jay, tried to manufacture consent for a more homogeneous nation and a more circumscribed citizenship by rhetorically invoking a “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 manners and customs.”

While the Constitution seemed to sidestep this debate (there is no formal definition of citizenship in the Constitution) The Declaration of Independence implied a “volitional and contractual” approach to citizenship, which the Constitution did not limit in any way (for instance, there were no “cultural, religious, or linguistic tests for citizenship”). George Washington even went so far as to declare America “open to receive not only the opulent and respectable strange, but the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions.” But he also gave hint to certain limitations by stating, “We shall welcome [them] to a participation of all our rights and privileges, if by decency and propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment.” This ambivalence infused the parameters of the first Naturalization Law of 1790, which limited citizenship to “free white persons” with two years of residency a good character, and sworn allegiance to the Constitution.⁵⁷ The central limitation of free “white” persons was borrowed from the colonial laws of many states and was deliberately used to exclude blacks⁵⁸ and Native Americans from the American nation, although overall, Pickus notes, the Naturalization Act was “remarkably inclusive for its time, in bestowing citizenship on all European immigrants.” Pickus argued that while European immigrants were considered “central” to the “national-building task of Americanizing the Americans,” he also acknowledged

that “belonging to the nation and reverence for its traditions mattered,” which, in combination with the racial classification of citizenship, definitely circumscribed the bounds of citizenship in the U.S. and seemed to lean more towards legitimating the definition of America in terms of the Federalists’ homogenous white republic.⁵⁹

For the next one hundred years there was “no single standard for membership” in the U.S. as “modes of citizenship” were “multiple,” “often contradictory” due to their regulation and facilitation by state and local governments, and they were “contested in many ways” by individuals and groups. Citizenship opened up considerably in 1868 with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, which enshrined the notion of birthright citizenship to help enfranchise blacks. The Expatriation Act of 1868 reinforced the notion that citizenship was the right of Americans by birth and “relinquishing” it depended on the “consent of the individual.” However, Congress also passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which narrowed the boundaries of U.S. citizenship by denying Chinese (and most Asians in general) from citizenship (although the Supreme Court in 1886 and 1898 did allow Chinese the principle of rights while in American and did affirm that Chinese children born in America were by right Americans). But citizenship was highly dependent upon “local discretion” as some states extended rights like voting to non-citizens, while other states circumscribed and limited the rights of particular groups who were entitled to full citizenship. Pickus argued that “both the civic and the nationalist dimensions of citizenship had inclusionary and exclusionary consequences.” The courts used a nationalist framework and affirmed “whiteness” as the core value of American citizenship, but broad definitions of whiteness allowed more and more Europeans to be accepted as potential citizens. The nationalist principle of birthright citizenship also extended the bounds of citizenship. It even had the ability to circumvent the “whiteness” clause. At the same time

civic notions of citizenship based on individual virtue and consent were used to limit or exclude blacks and Native Americans from becoming citizens. And many nativists used a white supremacist version of nationalism to call into question the more open nationalist conception of birthright citizenship.⁶⁰

Throughout the 19th century, national identity and citizenship were ideologically contested battlefields wherein different factions vied for legitimacy, justice, and power.⁶¹ Perhaps the most important, complex, and emotionally charged 19th century debate over American nationalism was the Civil War and the issue of slavery, which boiled beyond words into violent confrontation.⁶² The Civil War enlarged the powers of the nation-state via an expanded bureaucracy, an aggressive executive branch, a conscripted and mobilized federal army, and coordinated communication systems. After the war a new sense of American qua Republican identity, nationality, and purpose was consecrated (and federally enforced in the South), and it would be refined and reinforced through Indian wars, increased immigration, and westward expansion. If the American Revolution and the ratification of the Constitution marked the first crisis in American nationalism, then the Civil War marked the second. Arguably the third major crisis of American nationalism emerged at the end of the 19th century. The Populist, labor and Progressive movements initiated in the late 19th century represented a diverse and widespread sense of national emergency, and their congealed efforts aimed at nothing less than a redefinition of American national identity and purpose, which reverberated an ethos of liberal reform throughout the 20th century.

Nell Irvin Painter's award winning treatment of the Progressive Era, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877 – 1919*,⁶³ argued that the central political conflict of the late 19th century was a “struggle over the distribution of wealth and power” – a constant struggle

in American history. In 1890 the super rich (0.01% of the population or about 125,000 families) earned an income of about \$264,000 and owned over 50.8% of the national wealth. The upper-middle class (11% of the population and about 1.3 million families) made on average about \$16,000 per year and owned about 35% of the national wealth. The remaining 88% of the population (11 million families) earned under \$1,500 a year and owned just over 14% of the national wealth, and half of these families (44% of the population) were impoverished, earning less than \$150 a year (the poverty level is estimated at around \$544 a year for a family). Painter stressed that while income does provide the “single clearest indicator of class standing,” the notion of class needs to be seen as a complex, “fluid” and ever changing classification. There was no single “middle class,” but rather several “middle classes” and also “many ethnicities and races” within each class. The elite classes at the time had the most at stake in the structure of society because they benefited from the distribution of political and economic resources. To protect their interests, the socially and politically powerful and their agents liked to put forth ideological arguments for the “identity of interest.” This belief conceptualized society as a smoothly functioning and united organism, wherein, the interests of the great capitalists and property owners were supposedly the best interests of all in society, and further, it was put forth that society operated in harmony with “laws of God or Science.”

Reformers of various social and political stripes put forth a counter-conception of society in order to justify what they saw as needed reform. Seeing their own middle-class or working-class interests at odds with those of capitalists and industrialists, democratizers saw society torn by a “conflict of interests.” Reformers often, but not always, tried to point out the interests of the “disadvantaged” within the social system and, thereby, argue for “the ideal of equity” and democracy, in order to confront the dangerous extremes of wealth and privilege. But lurking at

the periphery of all calls for reform was the specter of working class unrest, which from time to time had boiled into a froth and caused conflicts of interest to turn into real (and often violent) social and political struggles for power. The so called “Progressive Era” was marked by a widespread call for reform and social change, however, as Painter pointed out, “the broadening consensus that change was necessary did not include agreement on the direction or extent of these changes.”

In the 1960s another generation of reformers pointed out not only the inequality between the rich and the poor, but also the differential wealth between racial groups, especially between whites and blacks. In the early 1960s the top 20% of Americans possessed 77% of the nation’s wealth, while those in the bottom 20% owned only 0.05%. In 1959 22.4% of the population lived in poverty. However, the situation was worse for African Americans. In 1965 43% of all black families earned less than \$3,000 a year and were living in poverty (the national rate was 15%). In 1967 39.3% of all black persons in America lived in poverty compared to only 11% of whites. In 1962 the average black income was about 55% of the average income of whites and black unemployment was double the rate of white unemployment. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s addressed the larger issues of wealth and poverty in America, but the main part of the early movement focused mostly on the legal and social segregation of African Americans and the unjust social and economic treatment they received as second-class citizens. One of the early sparks of the Civil Rights movement was indicative of blacks’ oppressed social and political position in U.S. society: in 1955 a young fourteen-year old African American boy named Emmett Till was abducted, bound with barbed wire, mercilessly beaten until his face began to fall off, and thrown into a river to die. His crime was whistling a white woman.⁶⁴

But the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s did not confine itself to just the platforms of economic inequality or the oppression of African Americans. One Civil Rights organization at the time, Students for a Democratic Society, published a widely printed and influential manifesto called *The Port Huron Statement* (1962), which discussed both economic inequality and racial discrimination, but it also outlined issues for reform in both educational and foreign policy as well as larger values along with a political vision of American society. This manifesto even reached beyond American politics and professed support for reform and revolutionary movements around the globe, particularly anti-colonial uprisings in Africa and Asia.⁶⁵ The reformist and revolutionary rhetoric of the 1960s inspired many minority groups in America who felt their voices and socio-political issues were being excluded by the mainstream Civil Rights platform. Women played an important role in both the African American Civil Rights programs and in Students for a Democratic Society, however, many women eventually branched off into their own “women’s liberation movement” in order to address “the woman question.”⁶⁶ Mexican Americans drew on a history of organizational efforts in America and several Chicano Civil Rights organizations were formed, including the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), which worked for the “economic, political, and social rights for all Mexican Americans.” The Chicano “movimiento” specifically addressed the second-class citizenship of Mexican Americans who were often portrayed as “dehumanized” “commodities” of the American economy.⁶⁷ Many other minority social groups in America also became inspired by the large Civil Rights reform movements, including Native Americans, homosexuals, various European ethnic groups, political radicals, many stripes of cultural radicals, and what some called the “youth” culture.⁶⁸ The diversity of movements, reform issues, protests, and alternative cultural practices propagated during the 1960s led to “radical cultural disjuncture[s],” which

created what many at the time called a “counter culture,” which mainstream America believed to be “a barbaric intrusion” and an “invasion of centaurs.” Besides a “common enemy” in mainstream WASP American culture and corporate capitalism, there was also a common personalization of political objectives, whereby, to paraphrase the feminist Carol Hanisch, *the personal became political*. What was heretofore assumed to be a “common” American culture, had now fractured along the lines of many distinct, disgruntled, and dissenting counter cultures, each with its own vision and agenda, and each assuming the liberal state would be responsive by expanding the parameters of Civil Rights legislation.⁶⁹

Both the Progressive era and the 1960s Civil Rights reform movements were able to influence and use the federal government as a way to initiate and preserve social changes through the law, enforcement of the law, and federal funding of policy initiatives. However, historians like Alan Dawley have demonstrated that the democratic veneer of the liberal state has also allowed elites to “maintain their rule against popular discontent” by mediating the seemingly democratic processes of a representative and responsive government. Beneath the surface of elite mediated democratic politics lay “deep structures” of corporate capitalism, racism, sexism, and economic inequality, which have been rarely touched by reformist federal policies. Dawley argued that these deep structures, which have selectively “apportioned” liberty according to one’s “class, gender, and race,” have never been seriously altered by any 20th century reform movement.

Dawley went on to argue that American liberal elites had devised three “governing strategies” to deal with social change in terms of containing social and economic conflict, and in terms of negotiating the new relationships between “society” and the “state.” The older strategy of liberalism (free markets, laissez faire, white supremacy, private property, government by

elites) was a staple of the 19th century, but it was not a sufficient governing strategy for modern times (although it would be refurbished in the late 20th century as neo-liberalism). The first new strategy of the early 20th century was progressivism (in broader terms of “government regulation of society in the public interest”). The second was managerial liberalism, which sought to “avoid state bureaucracies by coordinating corporations and other large-scale institutions.”⁷⁰ The third strategy was New Deal liberalism, which created the welfare state and followed Keynesian economic policies in order to both regulate society and allow corporate control over the economy.⁷¹ The defining “unity” of this historical period (roughly from the 1890s to the 1930s) was the “persistent efforts of elites to remake the liberal state in the context of the new social forces.”⁷²

The coherence behind these unifying conceptions of liberal government was “the most potent ideology of all:” nationalism. It was described by many during the early 20th century as a “new nationalism” and its broad based goal was a directed expansion of Americanism through a welfare state and more explicit Americanization initiatives to unite the citizenry and keep them loyal to the state. World War I helped legitimize and spread nationalism and patriotic fervor in order to manufacture the consent of the American people. Nationalism was the most powerful ideological force to create both unity and loyalty in a diverse society, mobilizing the masses, industry, and modern technology for state sponsored projects. Liberal elites used nationalism, reformism, and state interventionism to hold society “together against its own inner contradictions.”⁷³

Both Dawley and Alan Brinkley have documented the liberal accommodationist and nationalist strategy at work in the New Deal period as well.⁷⁴ In “The New Deal and the Idea of the State,” Brinkley explored how liberals did not seek to transform the economic structures that

created economic injustice, they sought instead to regulate the market and control it through the state, which created the appearance of reform without actually changing the structure of society. However, controlling the market proved a difficult, “unrealistic,” and “perhaps even dangerous” intrusion into the economic realm, and besides, many American liberals assumed that progressive reforms and New Deal policies had “eliminated the most dangerous features of the capitalist system.” The economic boom and triumphant nationalism caused by World War II reinvigorated a return to laissez faire free market policies by which many elites thought that unregulated economic growth would create the conditions for social and economic progress, which would then reduce the role of the state to “compensate[ing] for capitalism’s inevitable flaws and omissions without interfering with its internal workings.”⁷⁵ Ira Katznelson argued that this legacy defined the parameters of Johnson’s Great Society legislation as well, whereby, the government was used “in unprecedented ways for social ends,” but within a compensating framework that did not alter the larger structure of society and the economy. Katznelson also argued that the political climate of the 1960s became more focused on race and cultural pluralism due to the diverse and fractured political movements of various identity groups, and thus, the Great Society programs were seen by many elites to be temporary capitulations to particular groups because of “emergency” situations, not permanent political reforms.⁷⁶

Thus, when the liberal coalition ran out of political capital in the 1970s due to Civil Rights reforms, Great Society reforms, Vietnam, and an unruly counter-cultural movement, it “exploded” and “burst into its constituent shards.” A revitalized and powerful conservative reaction co-opted the liberal rhetoric of nationalism and progressive reform in order to orchestrate a conservative rollback of 20th century liberal policies, especially the enlarged and empowered federal government. As Jonathan Rieder notes, no policy was resented more than

the effort to “dismantle” the racial “caste system” in America with court orders, federal troops, and enforced integration. Eric Foner noted that many conservatives saw “racial reform [as] being promoted against the will of the democratic majority,” who had the right to protect their own interests and to discriminate against those who posed a threat. Anti-Communism, anti-radicalism, and fundamentalist Christianity were also used to refine an older form of patriotism that “demanded a simple, unreflective loyalty.” Rieder characterized the conservative backlash as a multifaceted, racist, “proto-fascist revolt of the little man, animated by fearful resentment:” “populism with a vengeance, literally.” Widespread discontentment and resentment due to grievances “too varied to be captured in a single category” mobilized large numbers of white working and middle class Americans who were longing for a nostalgic return to a simpler, fairer, whiter, less restrictive, more patriotic, more Christian, and more homogeneous American society. The Republican Party was able to mobilize and unite these fearful Americans, and turn disgruntlement into valuable political capital that was used by Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, the Newt Gingrich led congress of 1994, and later George W. Bush. The Republican’s overarching policy was to dismantle the New Deal welfare state and initiate reactionary neo-liberal “reforms” (a return to free markets, laissez faire, white/Western supremacy, small/limited government) and national unity/defense (patriotism, WASP culture and values, expanded military-industrial complex).

Conservative reactions and calls for unity often precipitated militant minority reactions and calls for racial and cultural separatism. These rhetorical battles often ignited violent confrontations between radicals and conservatives, between whites and racial minorities, and between racial minorities and law enforcement (the most noticed being the riots of 1965, 1968, and 1992). Liberals who had initiated social change in the 20th century were often associated

with the various minority groups who battled against conservatives and law enforcement, and this association “transformed the folk imagery of liberalism” into the poisoned source of conservative angst. Jonathan Rieder argues that America became a “culture of incivility” as “tension” between conservatives and liberals and between conservatives and minority groups turned from impassioned argument to “outright feuding” and “unabashed denunciation.”⁷⁷ This angry debate would come to be called a “culture war” and the reactionary conservative rhetoric seemed to define the parameters of this war of words. Eric Foner noted that by the 1990s “virtually no politician would admit to being a liberal,” while “conservative assumptions” about the benefits of the free market, the evils of “big government,” and the unquestioned good of conservative values (like the family, national unity, and patriotism) were taken for granted in public discourse as gospel truths. Conservatives began using their political capital and rhetorical appeal to attack not only the liberal welfare state, but more visibly the symbols of liberal decadence and national decline: funding for the arts and humanities, the national public school curriculum and curricular standards, and the decline of higher education due to multicultural policies.⁷⁸

A Rhetoric of Debate: Towards a Sociology of American Culture Wars

In the midst of the cultural wars, some academics (with mostly liberal sympathies to be sure) were more interested in understanding the nature of the conflict and how both sides might be brought into a more socially productive exchange. In 1991 James Davison Hunter published *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*.⁷⁹ At the time this book was the most comprehensive sociological and historical treatment of America's culture wars. Hunter's objective was to sort through the charges and accusations on both sides of the debate in order to come to a sociological understanding of why the culture war was taking place and, further, to draw conclusions about what the culture war meant for American society, institutions, and politics.

According to Hunter, the cultural war⁸⁰ was a root a moral debate over "what is fundamentally right and wrong about the world we live in – about what is ultimately good and what is finally intolerable in our communities:" "At stake is how we as Americans will order our lives together." It was a debate over "national identity," the very "meaning of America," and perhaps more importantly "who we, as a nation, will aspire to become." Many of the participants in the cultural war were sincere and "reasonable" people who felt themselves "thrust into controversy" because their "moral commitments," their "bases of moral authority," and their "world views" "compelled" them to defend fundamental truths they held dear. For most participants and viewers of the debate, all knowledge of the issues, the participants, and the war itself were filtered through the various mass media, which by their very forms are highly limited in their coverage and overly focused on the "personalities and events of the moment." Hunter explained that the deeply "personal disagreements that fire the culture war were deep and

perhaps un-reconcilable.” But he also suggested that “*these differences are often intensified and aggravated by the way they are presented in public.*”⁸¹

Hunter traced the historical roots of the culture war to the presence of “various minority cultures” (based on religion, sexuality, and race) that have confronted and competed with a “Protestant-based populism” for control over definitions of American “social reality.” Over the last two centuries of U.S. history there has been a general “expansion of cultural tolerance” that has accompanied the “slow but steady expansion” of “political and ideological tolerance,” “racial tolerance,” and “sexual tolerance.” One of the most dynamic transformations has been the recent emergence of the “Judeo-Christian consensus” in the 20th century. However, Hunter argued that this consensus was “collapsing” because of a broader “expansion of pluralism,” which included many communities beyond the ideological boundaries of the Judeo-Christian worldview (secularists, non-Judeo-Christian religions, feminists, and homosexuals). Hunter explained that “tension” between religious, racial, and ideological groups has always existed in various degrees and will mostly likely never subside because “cultural conflict”⁸² continues to evolve “along new and in many ways unfamiliar lines,” and because competing ideological and moral visions are rarely “coherent, clearly articulated, sharply differentiate world views.”⁸³ Hunter simplified the culture war into a broad, polarized debate between “the orthodox” (cultural conservatives) and “the progressive” (liberal or libertarians).⁸⁴ The debate was over whose culture will “dominate” and, thereby, who will have the “power to define reality.” Because the debate focused on competing definitions of reality, it was by its nature a highly *symbolic* war where competing symbols were used to define and legitimate different practices, ideals, and virtues in the public realm. This war over symbols has taken place on various battlefields: the family, education, media and the arts, law, and electoral politics.⁸⁵ At the heart of this symbolic war were

competing “moral visions” of American history, American identity, and American freedom – all based on competing sources of “moral authority.” The orthodox Americans saw America as the embodiment of Judeo-Christian Providence, exceptionalism, and destiny. To them American liberty is based on righteousness and all personal and economic freedom is based on the bounty and grace of God as documented in the sacred text of the *Bible*. Progressives place faith in human reason and social responsibility, and they place moral authority in the rule of law, philosophical principles, and democratic politics – both of which are “living” and malleable human creations that “must evolve as society evolves and matures.” To progressives, American liberty is the freedom from all constraints (under the conditions of liberal philosophies set by John Stuart Mill and Charles Taylor) based on the political rights of individuals. Because of the deep ideological and moral divide based on competing moral authorities and expressed in different “moral languages,” Hunter argued, “In the final analysis, each side of the cultural divide can only talk past the other” because “what both sides bring to this public debate is, at least consciously, non-negotiable.”⁸⁶

Hunter basically agreed with Pat Buchanan that fundamentally the culture wars were a religious war because “what is ultimately at issue are different conceptions of the sacred.” But unlike Buchanan (who took up arms to defend his group in the war), Hunter asked a question: Can the American republic survive without a “common agreement as to what constitutes the ‘good’” because without such an agreement, “all that remains are competing interests, the power to promote those interests, and the ideological constructions to legitimate those interests?” Hunter argued, no, some common ground must be found. He put forth the possibility of a “new, common rationality, a new *unum* wherein public virtue and public civility can be revitalized.” But to achieve common ground, Hunter argued, Americans must first come to an agreement over

“how to publicly disagree,” i.e. formalizing disagreement within the “virtues” of an “authentic” democratic debate. And from there, he argued, Americans must come to terms with a “principled pluralism” and a “principled toleration” with which to guide future negotiation over the parameters of a deeply divided American culture.⁸⁷

A year later Gerald Graff published his award winning⁸⁸ *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (1992). Graff’s book tried to outline the very techniques and virtues of authentic democratic debate in an effort to encourage people to really engage the debate through listening to their opponents. He argued that too many Americans were sheltered in their own ideological cocoons, and thus, were shut out from opposing points of view. Because of a heightened sense ideological warfare, many Americans adopted a siege mentality by which they withdrew into safe intellectual communities, but this was creating a dangerous “communicative disorder:” “a good deal of American life is organized so as to protect us from having to confront those unpleasant adversaries who may be just the ones we need to listen to.” Graff attempted to address and understand some heated debates within his own field (literary studies) in order to find a common ground that can only be gained through an honest appraisal of the merits and limitations of both sides of the debate. His technique was also a pedagogical demonstration of how the culture wars can be taught in classrooms as a way to both understand and defuse the tensions produced by competing points of view.⁸⁹

Graff chastised many conservative critics for their “apocalyptic posturing” and their refusal to see opponents’ positions as “legitimate” and “worthy of debate.” Graff also took conservative critics to task for their “degree of exaggeration, patent falsehood, and plain hysteria,” which boiled down to a “simple fear of change.” For instance, Graff singled out the

prominent critic Dinesh D'Souza whose *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (1991) claimed that universities were “expelling” and “stripping” away all the old liberal arts classics to make way for new multicultural texts. Through a close examination of the actual state of university reading lists, Graff pointed out that this claim and its various offspring were based on “recycled evidence” that was “wildly inflated,” “grossly exaggerated,” and “provably false.” Graff concluded, “To put it simply, the critics have not been telling the truth.” What was actually happening to the literary canon was a process of change by “accretion at the margins,” which had been going on for at least a century or more. Graff argued that the “caricaturing practice” and “political polemics” of conservative critics “obscured the fact that virtually every major advance in humanistic scholarship over the last three decades is indebted to the movements that are widely accused of subverting scholarly values.” Graff was not saying that every new theory or academic school of thought delivers an unquestionable truth, but he did argue that new perspectives should be welcomed and honestly evaluated to see if they can expand the boundaries of and add to human knowledge. Graff used the example of Chinua Achebe’s critical reading of Joseph Conrad’s famous conical work *Heart of Darkness*. While Graff does not completely agree with Achebe’s criticism, Graff does admit that Achebe has a good point, which stems from Achebe’s different but valid cultural perspective. In Graff’s classroom, he does not present one reading of Conrad’s novel as *the true* interpretation, but instead teaches the novel “as part of a critical debate about how to read it, which in turn is part of a larger theoretical debate about how politics and power affect the way we read literature.”⁹⁰ Graff’s technique acknowledges and investigates some of the debates at the heart of the cultural war in an effort to legitimize the very real conflict that does exist in America and, thereby, teach his students to democratically debate the issues as “a debate, not a monologue” through an

examination of multiple perspectives. Graff argued, “I think frank discussion of these conflicts is more likely to improve our handling of them than pretending they do not exist.”⁹¹

Graff argued that America’s system of education was put into a tough position with the culture wars. Many people, especially conservatives, viewed education as a “conflict-free” and value neutral tradition. However, as Graff pointed out, education has always been effected by the conflicts of the wider culture, especially higher education, which in the 20th century has had the “deeply contradictory mission” of both preserving honored traditions while also producing new knowledge by questioning those very traditions. The educational system has reflected changes due not only to the “democratization of culture” produced by the counter-cultures of the 1960s, but also due to advancement of knowledge produced by the structure of the academy. Graff argued that the boundaries of a culture and the frontiers of knowledge have always been contested and debated. Many conservative critics talk of a “consensus” or a “common culture” as if “it were already finished and completed, something that people just ‘affirm’ or don’t affirm rather than something people struggle to create through democratic discussion.” The 1960s did not create “divisiveness and difference” in America. Multiple cultures have always been a part of the landscape. Graff argued that the culture war boils down to the very stuff that democracies are made of: a diverse “common discussion” over the public good and public policy. Thus, Graff framed his solution in terms of understanding, realizing, and practicing an inclusive democracy: “We need to distinguish between a shared body of national beliefs, which democracies can do nicely without, and a common national debate about our many differences, which we now need more than ever...[multiculturalists] are not rejecting the idea of a common culture so much as asking for a greater voice in defining it.”⁹²

Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin have tried to point scholars in the direction of Americanism. The nationalist ideology of Americanism is not only “vast” and “protean,” but “famously contested.”⁹³ In a broad sense Americanism represents both a “distinctive” socio-political identity of U.S. citizens and also a particular brand of “loyalty” to the American nation. More particularly Americanism is a “bundle of ideals” with “shifting content” that has “always” been fought over; however, the parameters of Americanism seem to roughly cohere due to a civic foundation of “shared political ideas.” Kazin and McCartin claim that the concept of Americanism dates back to the first European settlements. John Winthrop’s “city upon a hill,” John Adams’ invocation of “Providence,” and Tom Paine’s notion of America as “an asylum for mankind” all represent a particular redemptive and exceptional conception of America and its socio-political ethos. Since then Americans “has been put to a variety of uses, benign and belligerent, democratic and demagogic,” and while Americanism is often most associated with more conservative forms of nationalism and patriotism in the service of protecting the status quo, it also contains a “vital countertradition” of dissent.

Historians like David Hollinger have argued that scholars must understand and deal with Americanism because it has become “the most successful nationalist project in all of modern history.” Kazin and McCartin argue that Americanism must be studied on “its own terms” so as to understand it as a “well-developed, internally persuasive ideology” and, thereby, “concerned” citizens could shape it towards “more benevolent” ends by “learning how to speak effectively within its idioms.” Ultimately Kazin and McCartin suggest that “the ideals of Americanism” could be the “foundation of a new kind of progressive politics” – a politics where the left can “speak convincingly to their fellow citizens” and thus “pose convincing alternatives for the nation as a whole.” While thoughtful scholars like Martha Nussbaum have argued that

patriotism and nationalism are “morally dangerous,” Kazin and McCartin argue that nationalism is a fixture of the modern world and thus “instead of raging against their persistence, we should view them empathetically, doing what we can to help realize the best rather than the worst possibilities of faith in a country and its people...we must do more than rail against patriotic ideals and symbols. For to do so is to wage a losing battle...progressives should claim, without pretense or apology, an honorable place in the long line of those who have demanded that Americanism apply to all and have opposed the efforts of those who have tried to reserve its use for privileged groups and belligerent causes.”

Understanding and subscribing to a shared concept of Americanism implies a sense of national identity, but it does so more in terms of *place* and *procedure* than ideology. Americanism is an ambiguous and conflicting bundle of attitudes and ideological commitments, and it holds within it’s diversity a common commitment to a shared sacred ground. America as a social, political, cultural, and economic territory is the ground over which various American parties have physically and ideologically wrestled over for centuries. Americanism is not an identifiable ideology per se, but it is the identification of an individual or group as “American” in order to stake one’s territorial right for freedom, opportunity, and justice. Thus, as I mentioned in the introduction, America is in essence an institutionalized debate wherein Americans have verbally and physically fought over what America is and should be. Given the complex dynamics of the history of human society and the ecological flux of the natural world, I don’t think that there has ever been a stable, unified, or traditional notion of Americanism. I don’t agree with much of what Crevecoeur wrote, but I do think he was right when he said that America produced a “surprising metamorphosis.” Crevecoeur invoked the notions of *patria* and *alma mater* as a way of saying that America was the sum of its individuals interacting with the

land and producing a nation through their work, their conflict, and their claims of “consequence.”⁹⁴ In this sense the creation of an American nation is the compound and conflicting interaction of diverse parties staking their claim to a single territory. Not all parties have been equally powerful, just, successful, or free, but all parties have verbally and physically struggled with the land and its inhabitants to survive, and in surviving laying a claim of consequence in this nation as one of its own.

Thus, as I mentioned earlier, the disagreement over national identity (What is America, and who is an American?) is the true essence that unites all Americans. An American is one who stakes claim of consequence *in America* and contributes their voice and their demands to the never ending debate over Americanism. There will always be diversity and calls for unity. There will always be culture wars and disagreement. The hope of Americans, if hope is to be found, lies in what the philosopher, linguist, and literary critic Kenneth Burke once called *Ad Bellum Purificandum* – “Towards the Purification of War.” By this phrase Burke meant to direct attention to language as the “critical moment” at which human motives take form. Burke argued that a purification of the human ability (and need) to articulate identity, ideology, and purpose into language would be a great help in developing personal agency and social cooperation.⁹⁵ It seems to me that while the debate over national identity and purpose can never be resolved, there is the possibility that the method of debate – the tools of discussion and deliberation – might themselves be perfected, as Burke maintained, and thereby, if we as Americans cannot erase our disagreement, we may learn to more productively and peacefully disagree.

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Notes

¹ Abigail Adams, "Letter to John Adams 31 March 1776" & "Letter to John Adams 7 May 1776," in *The Letters of John and Abigail Adams*, Frank Shuffelton, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2004): 147-49, 168. For John Adams reply to Abigail see "Letter to Abigail Adams 14 April 1776" (154).

² Mia Bay, "See Your Declaration Americans!!! Abolitionism, Americanism, and the Revolutionary Tradition in Free Black Politics." In *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal*, ed. Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 25-52.

³ Mia Bay, "See Your Declaration Americans!!!, Ibid.

⁴ De Crevecoeur, J. Hector St. John, "Letter III: What is an American," in *Letters from an American Farmer*, Susan Manning, ed. (1782; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 40-82.

⁵ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Address to the Legislature of New-York, Adopted by the State Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Albany, Tuesday and Wednesday, February 14 and 15, 1854* in *The Norton Anthology: Literature by Women, The Tradition in English*, 2nd ed., Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds. (1854; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1996):466-68.

⁷ Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Vintage, 2000): 16.

⁸ In the *Declaration of Independence* Jefferson clearly declared the right of Americans to "alter" or "abolish" any government that did not represent and protect the people's natural rights. While not explicitly advocating violence, any abolishment of an existing institution would arguably necessitate force or violence of some kind, and thus, forcibly defending one's rights is arguably a right of the people. This statement seems to thereby justify and institutionally consecrate the right of political violence directed at securing and protecting other natural rights.

⁹ David A. Hollinger claimed that "virtually no one defends monoculturalism." David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (1995; reprinted & expanded, New York: Basic Books, 2005): 80.

¹⁰ Allen Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Touchstone, 1987): 19, 26-27, 30-31.

¹¹ Bloom, Ibid., 36, 38-39, 247.

¹² "The fact is that the average black student's achievements do not equal those of the average white student in the good universities, and everybody knows it. It is also a fact that the university degree of a black student is also tainted, and employers look on it with suspicion, or become guilty accomplices in the toleration of incompetence (96). Bloom stated flatly: blacks are "manifestly unqualified and unprepared" for good universities (94).

¹³ Bloom, Ibid., 313-15, 318, 320-22, 326, 329, 55, 97, 382.

¹⁴ E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987; reprinted, New York: Vintage, 1988): 12, 29, 110, xvii, 95, 102, 23, 24, 18, 73.

¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶ E. D. Hirsch Jr., "Americanization and the Schools," *The Clearing House* 72:3 (Jan/Feb, 1999): 136-39.

¹⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, revised ed. (1991; revised, New York: W. W. Norton, 1998):80, 115, 142, 123, 19, 54.

¹⁸ Ibid., 158, 34, 144, 132, 17, 46, 34, 142-47, 49.

¹⁹ Patrick J. Buchanan, "1992 Republican National Convention Speech," Republican National Convention, Houston, TX (August 17, 1992) <www.buchanan.org>.

²⁰ Patrick J. Buchanan, "The Cultural War for the Soul of America" (Sept 14, 1992) <www.buchanan.org>.

²¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

²² Huntington's discussion of identity is very confused because he tries to meld essentialist Cartesian dualism with modern constructivism, and then hold it together with a fascist militarism. Huntington tells his readers that identities and cultures are "constructed" by people, adapted to environments, and change as environments and peoples change. However, he also posits an unproblematic "substance" or "qualities" of "self" that are "possessed" by a person and which make that individual "distinct." But he further muddies his discussion by saying that identities are not substantial, but contextual, i.e. "to define themselves, people need an other." This contextual discussion argues against a "substantial" core of human identity and instead posits identity as an I/we contextually defined against a you/them, which according to Huntington inevitably leads to "competition," "antagonism," "demonization," and finally the transformation of the "other" into an "enemy" that must be fought and killed (21-26). Without invoking

the concept, Huntington is replicating Sartre's critical master/slave dialectic by which Sartre pointed out how human identity and society are replicated through ego-centrism, intolerance, antagonism, violence, and war. Throughout the book Huntington celebrates war as the primary source for national cohesion, unity, and identity, and he devotes a section on "The Search for An Enemy." In this section Huntington claims that that "peace" and the absence of an "enemy" produces "internal disunity," and thus, in order to protect national identity America needed to find an enemy after the Cold War, which turned out to be "militant Islam," "America's first enemy of the twenty-first century" (258-64). Throughout the book Huntington reminds his readers with nationalist glee that it was only after 9-11 and America's militaristic response that a heightened sense of patriotism and nationalism produced a sense of national unity not seen since World War II or the early Cold War (3-4, 199, 264).

²³ I will provide two examples of Huntington's numerous flawed argumentation and historical inaccuracies. First, Hunting claims that slavery "and its legacies" have been "*the American dilemma*" [author's emphasis], which is demonstrably false. He then sets up a dichotomy. On the one hand laudable and self-less nationalist black leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. sought "equal rights for all" in order to solve this central dilemma. On the other hand there were negative black leaders like Bayard Rustin who helped institute "affirmative discrimination"/"reverse discrimination" through narrow-minded and self-interested demands for "material benefits to blacks as a distinct racial group" (146-158). Huntington admits that the American creed of equal rights for all was "ignored and flouted in practice" for "over two hundred years." The Civil Rights legislation made things truly equal for the first time in American history and yet he has the audacity to argue that it was black people and affirmative action policies that "reintroduced racial discrimination into American practice" (157). He basically makes the argument that racism disappeared overnight in 1965 only to be reintroduced by greedy blacks who only wanted to profit off the displacement of innocent white Americans. The second flawed argument is representative of his treatment of much of the scholarly literature in this book. Huntington cites Milton Gordon's seminal yet outdated (1964) sociological study of assimilation in America. Instead of a close read of Gordon's central arguments, Huntington just lists off several quotes and makes the claim that while assimilation has "never been complete," it has worked extremely well and is "a great, possibly the greatest, American success story" (183). Huntington's claim completely misrepresents Gordon's argument, which was all successful assimilation in America has been superficial "cultural assimilation" (by which immigrants and minorities adopt the culture and language of the dominant culture), but Gordon went on to demonstrate that many ethnic minorities, especially dark skinned racial minorities, still suffer prejudice and discrimination, and were kept from the more significant "structural assimilation." Huntington makes the demonstrably false claim that all immigrants between 1820 and 1924 were "almost totally assimilated into American society" on equal and welcoming terms (178), and he uses his unfounded assertion to severely criticize newer immigrants as threats to American society, like Mexicans, because there are not assimilating as completely as older generations of immigrants.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 365, 9, xv-xvii, 256.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xvii, 10-11, 171-73, 144. Huntington engages in classical populist/progressive rhetoric throughout the book by breaking the culture was into a dichotomous debate between the interests of *the* "America people" and the special "minority" interests represented by the "elites." Throughout the book this debate is rhetorically described in terms of a zero-sum competition, whereby, what is good for minorities (multiculturalism) must be detrimental and detracting from *the* American people (nationalism). His rhetorical characterization of multiculturalism-as-minority-rights runs from simplistic-and-unfair ("the idea that diversity rather than unity or community should be America's overriding value") to unfair half-truths ("reverse discrimination") to outright distortions and lies (multiculturalism comes only "at the expense of teaching the values and culture that Americans have had in common") (142, 154, 173).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xvii, 10-11, 171-73, 144, 309-16.

²⁷ Michael Walzer, "Pluralism: A Political Perspective," in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1980). Reprinted in Michael Walzer, *What It Means to Be an American: Essays on the American Experience* (New York: Marsilio, 1996).

²⁸ Michael Walzer, "What Does it Mean to Be an 'American?'" *Social Research* (1990); Reprinted in Michael Walzer, *What It Means to Be an American: Essays on the American Experience* (New York: Marsilio, 1996).

²⁹ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992): 482-84.

³⁰ Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (1995; reprint, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³¹ *Ibid.*, xiv, 15-58, 249, 252, 259.

³² Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1995): 2-3.

³³ Ibid., 20, 23, 29-36.

³⁴ Ibid., 45, 48-51, 56-59.

³⁵ Ibid., 68-73, 79, 82, 100-01, 146, 165, 198-99, 207, 217, 236-37.

³⁶ Michael Lind, *The Next American Nation: The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1995). Lind claimed that his book was “the first manifesto of American liberal nationalism” (15).

³⁷ Ibid., 5-9, 20-27, 55, 65-70, 89, 97-115, 119.

³⁸ Lind argued, “Racial preference is in reality a conservative policy, a form of elaborate but ultimately superficial tokenism that is much less costly, to affluent whites in general and the business class in particular, than expensive universal programs designed to improve the educations and standard of living of the bottom half of the population, of all races. Compared to color-blind liberalism, racial preference is cheap” (179).

³⁹ Ibid., 123, 130-31, 139, 141, 181-85, 188-215, 245.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 259-98.

⁴¹ David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (1995; reprinted & expanded, New York: Basic Books, 2005).

⁴² Ibid., 1, 6-7, 19-28, 82-84, 106, 116, 132-34, 143, 157.

⁴³ Gary Gerstle, “Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans,” *The Journal of American History* 84:2 (Sept 1997): 524-58.

⁴⁴ Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁴⁵ Bonnie Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 74-75, 104-5, 122.

⁴⁶ John Exdell, “Liberal Nationalism, Immigration, and Race,” at *Reclaiming Democracy: Visions and Practices from the Radical Left*, Radical Philosophy Association, 7th Biennial Conference, Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska, November 4, 2006.

⁴⁷ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992): 4-14; Guido Zernatto, “Nation: The History of a Word,” *Review of Politics* 6 (1944): 351-66; Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. (1946; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 171-79; Louis Wirth, “Types of Nationalism,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 41 (May 1936): 723-37; Hans Kohn, “The Nature of Nationalism,” *The American Political Science Review* 33 (Dec 1939): 1001-21; Chong-Do Hah and Jeffrey Martin, “Toward a Synthesis of Conflict and Integration Theories of Nationalism,” *World Politics* 27 (April 1975): 361-86; Isaiah Berlin, “Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power,” *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, in *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer, eds. (1979; reprint, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997): 581-604; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; reprint, London: Verso, 1991); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (1990; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789 – 1848* (1962; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848 – 1875* (1975; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875 – 1914* (1987; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (1990; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Anthony Smith, “Nationalism and Classical Social Theory,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 34 (Mar 1983): 19-38; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (1990; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Louis Wirth, “Types of Nationalism,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 41 (May 1936): 723-37; Hans Kohn, “The Nature of Nationalism,” *The American Political Science Review* 33 (Dec 1939): 1001-21; Liah Greenfeld, “The Trouble with Social Science,” *Critical Review* 17:1-2 (2005): 101-16.

⁵⁰ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Ibid., 27-87.

⁵¹ Ibid., 400-02, 424, 426, 431, 444.

⁵² Robert A. Carlson, *The Quest for Conformity: Americanization through Education* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975); Michael Lind, *The Next American Nation: The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1995); Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

⁵³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, trans. & eds. (1835, 1840; reprint, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1992; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, “History Makes a Nation,” in *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994): 91-125; David M. Potter, “The Historian’s Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa,” *The American Historical Review* 67 (July 1962): 924-50; Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*

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⁵⁴ Thomas J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York: The Free Press, 1983); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “International at the Creation: Early Modern American History,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, Thomas Bender, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): 103–22; Linda K. Kerber, “The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation,” *American Quarterly* 37 (Autumn 1985): 474-495; Daniel T. Rodgers, “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept,” *The Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 11-38; Joyce Appleby, “Republicanism and Ideology,” *American Quarterly* 37 (Autumn 1985): 461-473; Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Robert Shalhope, “Anticipating Americanism: An Individual Perspective on Republicanism in the Early Republic,” In *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal*, Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, eds. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 53-72.

⁵⁵ As John Jay famously wrote: Americans were one 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.” However, Michael Walzer has argued that the American constitution embodied the fragmented cultural diversity of the new republic. The constitution is not one, but “two texts” (the Constitution and the Bill of Rights). Walzer argues that the Bill of Rights actually “opposes” the Constitution by securing protection for diversity. Michael Walzer, “Constitutional Rights and the Shape of Civil Society,” *What it Means to Be an American: Essays on the American Experience* (New York: Marsilio, 1996): 105-24. Linda K. Kerber, “The Revolutionary Generation: Ideology, Politics, and Culture in the Early Republic,” in *The New American History*, Eric Foner, ed., 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997): 31-59; Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (2000; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 2002); Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist*. Benjamin Fletcher Wright, ed. (1787-1788; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961; reprint, New York: Metrobooks, 2002): see especially #1, #2, #6, and #10; G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992): 422-23.

⁵⁶ Noah Pickus, *True Faith and Allegiance: Immigration and American Civic Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁵⁷ The Naturalization Act of 1795 extended the residency requirement to five years and added the requirement that the immigrant declare intention to naturalize at least three years in advance. It also required applicants to renounce all family titles and titles of nobility. Citizenship was restricted further through the Sedition Act, Alien Enemies Act, Alien Friends Act, and the Naturalization Act of 1798 whereby residency requirements were extended to 14 years and new powers gave the president wide latitude to arrest and deport aliens (34-51).

⁵⁸ Pickus explained that many of the Founding generation believed that slavery was immoral and should be discontinued, but this did not mean that they wanted to extend citizenship rights to freed blacks or welcome them into civil society. Even most abolitionists who believed blacks to be inherently equal to whites did not think that freed black slaves could assimilate into American society. The “free white” clause in the Naturalization Act was meant to forestall any thought of incorporating blacks into civil society should slavery eventually be abolished (56-58, 61-62).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 15, 17, 19, 22-23, 24-25, 34-51, 53-62.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 64-71.

⁶¹ Michael Kazin & Joseph A. McCartin, “Introduction,” In *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal*, Michael Kazin & Joseph A. McCartin, eds. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 1-21; Robert James Branham, “‘Of These I Sing’: Contesting ‘America,’” *American Quarterly* 48:4 (1996): 623-52; Linda K. Kerber, “The Revolutionary Generation: Ideology, Politics, and Culture in the Early Republic,” in *The New American History*, Eric Foner, ed., 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997): 31-59; Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Mia Bay, “See Your Declaration Americans!!! Abolitionism, Americanism, and the Revolutionary Tradition in Free Black Politics,” In *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal*, Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, eds. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 25-52.

⁶² David M. Potter, "The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa," *The American Historical Review* 67 (July 1962): 924-50; Roger L. Ransom, *Conflict and Compromise: The Political Economy of Slavery, Emancipation, and the American Civil War* (1989; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

⁶³ Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877 – 1919* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987): xii-xiii, xix, xxiv, xl, xliii, 279-80.

⁶⁴ William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 2nd ed. (1986; revised, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991): 146-76, 236-37. Stanley Nelson (director & producer), *The Murder of Emmett Till*, American Experience (produced by WGBH Educational Foundation, distributed by PBS Home Video, 2003). Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Sylvia Allegretto, *The State of Working America 2006/2007*, An Economic Policy Institute Book (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2007): 283-91. Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962; revised, New York: Penguin Books, 1981): 185-202, Ch 4.

⁶⁵ Tom Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement: the Visionary Call of the 1960s Revolution* (1962; reprinted, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

⁶⁶ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000): Ch 4.

⁶⁷ Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Ribera, *Mexican Americans, American Mexicans: From Conquistadors to Chicanos* (1972; revised, New York: Hill and Wang, 1993): Ch 14-15; Arnoldo De Leon and Richard Griswold del Castillo, *North to Aztlan: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States*, 2nd ed. (1996; revised, Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2006): Ch 8.

⁶⁸ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1998): Ch 12; Cal Jillson, *Pursuing the American Dream: Opportunity and Exclusion over Four Centuries* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Vine Deloria, Jr., *Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr., Reader* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999): Ch 20; Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, "The Failure and Success of the New Radicalism," *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 212-42. Tom Wolfe: *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1999).

⁶⁹ Theodore Rosak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969): 42-43, 57. I am using Rosak's conception of the "counter culture" in a much broader way than he did in this book (xii, 56, 68). Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*, Ibid. 196-97.

⁷⁰ Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991). From the perspective of workers, Dawley explained the "corporate rationalization" as "something less than an exercise in pure reason. What the new breed of scientific managers liked to present as a rational system of efficiency and merit nonetheless contained all the irrationalities of class, race, and gender. The supposedly impartial bureaucratic hierarchy was also an axis of unequal power between managers and workers...Rationalization introduced new forms of male dominance" (77-78).

⁷¹ Dawley argued that the New Deal reforms actually "preserved social hierarchy:" "Even as the New Deal responded to popular demands for social justice, it was careful not to infringe too much upon the privileges of wealth...the Roosevelt administration had crafted a compromise between privileged elites and subordinate groups that restrained liberty in the name of security without upending the social order...While the first New Deal tried to save the capitalist system *for* big business, the second tried to save it *from* big business...Although Roosevelt popularized his program with populist rhetoric, the new governing system did not redress the balance of class power or redistribute wealth so much as mediate social antagonisms by creating a new set of bureaucratic institutions. Building on Hoover's initiatives, Roosevelt's New Deal expanded state intervention in the market and launched a welfare state" (385, 394, 395).

⁷² Ibid., 31, 62, 64. Dawley further explained his notion of the new models of elite governance: "National elites had to look elsewhere for models of how to govern. In fact, they experimented with three models. The first was old fashioned liberalism – a state of courts and parties, a policy of laissez faire on social issues, the use of troops to police industrial disturbances, and the ruling myths of private property right, separate spheres, and white supremacy. Still the dominant model, it hardly presented an innovative path to the future. The other two models – progressive and managerial – were rival attempts to resolve the contradiction between emerging social forces and the existing liberal state, and they would compete with each other through the First World War into the New Era and all the way

to the New Deal. They represented alternative revisions in the American liberal tradition of self-government. Managerial liberals redefined it to mean self-government in industry, emphasizing the public benevolence of the private corporation. Progressives redefined it in social terms, emphasizing government as the benevolent influence balancing the claims of selfish private interests” (163).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1-13, 30-31, 62, 71-73, 105, 114-16, 128-38, 163-65, 175-77, 184-96, 276, 370, 394.

⁷⁴ Dawley, *Ibid.*, 370, 385-86, 394.

⁷⁵ Alan Brinkley, “The New Deal and the Idea of the State,” in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 85-121.

⁷⁶ Ira Katznelson, “Was the Great Society a Lost Opportunity?” in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 185-211. Both Katznelson and Alan Dawley place the origins of identity politics to the early 1940’s “ethnic pluralism” exemplified in Roosevelt’s invocation of a “nation of nations” (*Struggles for Justice*, *Ibid.*, 389).

⁷⁷ Jonathan Rieder, “The Rise of the ‘Silent Majority,’” in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 243-68; Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, *Ibid.*, Ch 13; Cal Jillson, *Pursuing the American Dream: Opportunity and Exclusion over Four Centuries*, *Ibid.*, Ch 8

⁷⁸ Richard Jensen, “The Culture Wars, 1965-1995: A Historian’s Map,” *Journal of Social History* 29 (Oct 1995): 17-37.

⁷⁹ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle To Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991). See also, James Davison Hunter, “The Discourse of Negation and the Ironies of Common Culture,” *Hedgehog Review* 6:3 (Fall 2004): 24-38.

⁸⁰ Hunter has also indicated the much larger issue at stake that transcends the American and contemporary context. He has taken a position at odds with the homogenizing conception of culture made by cultural anthropologists like Clifford Geertz. Hunter has argued, “Culture is, *by its very constitution*, contested...always and everywhere, even when it appears most homogeneous...Where there is culture, there is struggle” [author’s emphasis]. Culture is often a battle over who has “the power to project one’s vision of the world as the dominant, if not *the only* vision of the world.” The creation of “law” or public “policy” is to “create and sustain a normative universe...it is, in short, to take sides on the matter of the public good.” James Davison Hunter, “Culture Wars Revisited,” *Insight* 10, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture and Center for Religion and Democracy (Spring 2004): 5-6.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31-34, 42-43, 49-51. Davison argued that due to the nature of broadcast media, the culture war is oversimplified and represented as “more polarized than the American public itself...The polarization of contemporary public discussion is in fact intensified by and institutionalized through the very media by which that discussion takes place...Midling positions and the nuances of moral commitment, then, get played into the grid of opposing rhetorical extremes” (159-61). See also: Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “Marketing Public Discourse,” *Hedgehog Review* 6:3 (Fall 2004): 39-54.

⁸² Hunter defined “cultural conflict” as the “political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding. The end to which these hostilities tend is the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others.” These “systems of moral understanding” are “not merely attitudes that can change on a whim but basic commitments and beliefs that provide a source of identity, purpose, and togetherness for the people who live by them. It is for precisely this reason that political action rooted in these principles and ideals tends to be so passionate.” Hunter argued that older forms of cultural conflict have given way to a larger clash between “worldviews:” competing groups are battling over “our most fundamental and cherished assumptions about how to order our lives – our own lives and our lives together in this society. Our most fundamental ideas about who we are as Americana are now at odds” (42). At root, Hunter argued, “cultural conflict is ultimately about the struggle for domination...[it] is about power – a struggle to achieve or maintain the power to define reality” (52). When a dominant group secures and exercises this power over sub-groups it is called “cultural hegemony” (57).

⁸³ Hunter argued that “the significant divisions on public issues are no longer defined by the distinct traditions of creed, religious observance, or ecclesiastical politics” (105).

⁸⁴ Hunter defined “orthodoxy” as “the commitment on the part of adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent authority,” which clearly defines “a consistent, unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and identity.” He defined “progressivism” as a “modern” world view built from “a spirit of rationalism and subjectivism:” “Truth tends to be viewed as a process, as a reality that is ever unfolding,” and thus, progressives adapt and “re-symbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life” (44-45).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 173-291. Hunter devoted a chapter to each one of these cultural battlefields.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 67-106, 39-43, 52-55, 107-32.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 106, 312-14, 318, 325.

⁸⁸ Winner of the 1993 American Book Award.

⁸⁹ Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992): viii. Graff characterized his teaching-the-conflicts model as a way to turn “the poisonous divisions of the culture war into educationally valuable discussion” (62). Graff’s technique is a way to teach “critical literacy,” which he used Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary* (1989) to define as, “framing an argument or taking someone else’s argument apart, systematically inspecting a document, an issue, or an event, synthesizing different points of view, applying a theory to disparate phenomena, and so on” (91).

⁹⁰ Graff argued that “literature is a social product, enmeshed in a system of more mundane cultural assumptions, texts, and ‘discourses,’ not an autonomous creation springing full-blown from the brain of an unconditioned genius. The jargon [of a literary theory] is a way of shifting attention to the ‘cultural work’ done by the text, suggesting that the text does not stand above its culture but acts on and is acted on by it. It points to the conflicts, contradictions, and struggles in works of literature rather than the unifying elements” (79).

⁹¹ Ibid., 3-5, 8, 16-36.

⁹² Ibid., 6-8, 44-46.

⁹³ Michael Kazin & Joseph A. McCartin, “Introduction,” In *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal*, Michael Kazin & Joseph A. McCartin, eds. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 1-21.

⁹⁴ Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, Ibid., 43-44.

⁹⁵ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (1945; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969): 318-20.