

UNIT 3

The Cold War and Beyond

World War II ended in 1945, but the peace that everyone had hoped for never came. By 1947 a “Cold War” between the Western powers and the Russians was in full swing. Three years later, American soldiers were fighting a hot war of “containment” against communist expansion in Korea. By 1968, President Lyndon Johnson had escalated America’s participation in the Vietnam War and then tried to negotiate peace, which was accomplished by President Nixon in January 1973.

From 1950 to 1974, most white American families were economically well-off. Many veterans had attended college under the G.I. bill, moved to the suburbs and worked in white collar jobs. The nuclear family was frozen in a state described by one historian as “domestic containment.” Ideally, Dad went to work, Mom stayed home, and the kids went to school. But fissures developed in the 1950s that affected African Americans who were segregated from the suburbs and most white collar jobs; women who questioned the role of stay-at-home mom; and children who felt alienated from the cultural values of their family. The first sign was the emergence of rock and roll and its white icon Elvis Presley. Was the music revolt the traditional acting out of children against their parents, or did it reflect a real change in values that would culminate in political protests and the establishment of a counterculture in the 1960s?

Did rock and roll reflect a real change in values and lead to the counterculture protests of the 1960s? Did the Brown decision, which outlawed “separate but equal” schools, pave the way for the elimination of a segregated society? Did the women’s liberation movement destroy the traditional American family, or did it provide opportunities for women to become physicians, lawyers, and CEOs of large corporations? Finally did the industrialization of the economy of the 1970s destroy the blue collar working class New Deal Democrats and create a more affluent middle-class of Reagan Republican voters? Or is America a declining power with a major wealth gap between upper middle class and the working poor?

- Was President Truman Responsible for the Cold War?
- Was Rock and Roll Responsible for Dismantling America’s Traditional Family, Sexual, and Racial Customs in the 1950s and 1960s?
- Did President John F. Kennedy Demonstrate a Strong Commitment to Civil Rights?
- Did President Nixon Negotiate a “Peace With Honor” in Vietnam in 1973?
- Has the Women’s Movement of the 1970s Failed to Liberate American Women?
- Is the United States a Declining Power?

ISSUE 13



Was President Truman Responsible for the Cold War?

YES: Arnold A. Offner, from "Another Such Victory": President Truman, American Foreign Policy, and the Cold War, *Diplomatic History* (Spring 1999)

NO: John Lewis Gaddis, from *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford University Press, 1997)

ISSUE SUMMARY

YES: Arnold A. Offner argues that President Harry S. Truman was a parochial nationalist whose limited vision of foreign affairs precluded negotiations with the Russians over cold war issues.

NO: John Lewis Gaddis argues that after a half century of scholarship, Joseph Stalin was uncompromising and primarily responsible for the cold war.

Less than a month before the war ended in Europe the most powerful man in the world, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, died suddenly from a brain embolism. A nervous, impetuous, and an inexperienced Vice President Harry S. Truman became the president. Historians disagree whether Truman reversed Roosevelt's relationship with Stalin or whether the similarities in policy were negated by Truman's blunt negotiating style compared with FDR's suave, calm approach. But disagreements emerged over issues such as control over the atomic bomb, Germany, Poland, and the economic reconstruction of Europe.

The question of Germany was paramount. During the war it was agreed that Germany would be temporarily divided into zones of occupation with the United States, Great Britain, and the newly liberated France controlling the Western half of Germany while the Russians were in charge of the Eastern half. Berlin, which was 90 miles inside of the Russian zone, would also be divided into zones of occupation. Arguments developed over boundaries, reparations and transfers of industrial equipment and agricultural foodstuffs between zones. In May, 1946, the Americans began treating the western zones as a separate economic unit because the Russians were transferring the food from their zone back to the Soviet Union. In September, 1946, Secretary of State James Byrnes announced that the Americans would continue to occupy their half of Germany indefinitely with military troops. By 1948, a separate democratic

West German government was established. The Russians protested by blocking ground access to the western zones of Berlin. But the Americans continued to supply the West Berliners with supplies through an airlift. After 10 months, because of the bad publicity, the Russians abandoned the Berlin blockade and created a separate communist East German government.

Roosevelt and Churchill had conceded Russian control over Eastern Europe during the World War II Conferences. The question was how much control. Stalin was not going to allow anti-Communist governments to be established in these countries. He had no understanding of how free elections were held. Consequently, when the cold war intensified in 1947 and 1948, Russian-dominated Communist governments were established in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.

In February 1946, Stalin delivered a major speech declaring the incompatibility of the two systems of Communism and Capitalism. The next month, Winston Churchill, now a retired politician, delivered his famous speech at a commencement in Fulton, Missouri, with the Truman administration's consent in which he complained about the "iron curtain" that Russia was imposing on Eastern Europe. At the same time, George Kennan, a bright multilingual American diplomat who spent years in Germany and Russia and would become the head of Truman's policy planning staff, wrote a series of telegrams and articles which set the tone for the specific policies the Truman administration would undertake. Kennan had coined the phrase "containment," a word that would be used to describe America's foreign policy from Truman to the first President Bush. Containment would assume various meanings and would be extended to other areas of the globe besides Europe in ways Kennan claims were a misuse of what his original intentions were. Nevertheless the Truman administration took steps to stop further Russian expansionism.

In 1947, a series of steps were undertaken both to "contain" Russian expansionism and to rebuild the economies of Europe. On March 12, in an address before a Republican-controlled Congress, Truman argued in somewhat inflated rhetoric that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." In the same speech in what became known as the "Truman Doctrine," the President requested and received \$400 million economic and military assistance to Greece and Turkey. Almost as an afterthought, American military personnel were sent to oversee the reconstruction effort, a precedent that would later be used to send advisers to Vietnam.

In June 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall announced a plan to provide economic assistance to all European nations. This included the Soviet Union, who rejected the program and formed its own economic recovery group. In April 1948, Congress approved the creation of the Economic Cooperation Administration, the agency that would administer the program. The Marshall Plan would be remembered as America's most successful foreign aid program, where a billion dollars were channeled to the Western European nations. By 1950, industrial production had increased 64 percent since the end of the war, while the communist parties declined in membership and influence.

When did the cold war begin? Was it inevitable? Or should one side take most of the blame?

“Another Such Victory”: President Truman, American Foreign Policy, and the Cold War

As the twenty-first century nears, President Harry S. Truman's reputation stands high. This is especially true regarding his stewardship of foreign policy although, ironically, he entered the Oval Office in 1945 untutored in world affairs, and during his last year in the White House, Republicans accused his administration of having surrendered fifteen countries and five hundred million people to communism and sending twenty thousand Americans to their “burial ground” in Korea. Near the end of his term, Truman's public “favorable” rating had plummeted to 23 percent.

Within a decade, however, historians rated Truman a “near great” president, crediting his administration with reconstructing Western Europe and Japan, resisting Soviet or Communist aggression from Greece to Korea, and forging collective security through NATO. In the 1970s the “plain speaking” Truman became a popular culture hero. Recently, biographers have depicted him as the allegory of American life, an ordinary man whose extraordinary character led him to triumph over adversity from childhood through the presidency, and even posited a symbiotic relationship between “His Odyssey” from Independence to the White House and America's rise to triumphant superpower status. Melvyn P. Leffler, in his *A Preponderance of Power*, has judged Truman to have been neither a naif nor an idealist but a realist who understood the uses of power and whose administration, despite serious, costly errors, prudently preserved America's national security against real or perceived Soviet threats.

Collapse of the Soviet Union and Europe's other Communist states, whose archives have confirmed Truman's belief in 1945 that their regimes governed largely by “clubs, pistols and concentration camps,” has further raised the former president's standing. This has encouraged John Lewis Gaddis and others to shift their focus to Stalin's murderous domestic rule as the key determinant of Soviet foreign policy and the Cold War. As Gaddis has contended, Stalin was heir to Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, responsible for more state-sanctioned murders than Adolf Hitler, and treated world politics as an extension of domestic politics: a zero sum game in which his gaining security meant depriving all others of it. For Gaddis and others, that is largely the answer to the question of whether Stalin sought or caused the Cold War.

But as Walter LaFeber has said, to dismiss Stalin's policies as the work of a paranoid is greatly to oversimplify the Cold War. Indeed, historians of Stalin's era seem to be of the preponderant view that he pursued a cautious but brutal *realpolitik*. He aimed to restore Russia's 1941 boundaries, establish a sphere of influence in border states, provide security against a recovered Germany or Japan or hostile capitalist states, and gain compensation, notably reparations, for the ravages of war. Stalin calculated forces, recognized America's superior industrial and military power, put Soviet state interests ahead of Marxist-Leninist ideology, and pursued pragmatic or opportunistic policies in critical areas such as Germany, China, and Korea.

Thus, the time seems ripe, given our increased knowledge of Soviet policies, to reconsider President Truman's role in the Cold War. As Thomas G. Paterson has written, the president stands at the pinnacle of the diplomatic-military establishment, has great capacity to set the foreign policy agenda and to mold public opinion, and his importance, especially in Truman's case, cannot be denied. But contrary to prevailing views, I believe that his policymaking was shaped by his parochial and nationalistic heritage. This was reflected in his uncritical belief in the superiority of American values and political-economic interests and his conviction that the Soviet Union and communism were the root cause of international strife. Truman's parochialism also caused him to disregard contrary views, to engage in simplistic analogizing, and to show little ability to comprehend the basis for other nations' policies. Consequently, his foreign policy leadership intensified Soviet-American conflict, hastened the division of Europe, and brought tragic intervention in Asian civil wars.

In short, Truman lacked the qualities of the creative or great leader who, as James MacGregor Burns has written, must broaden the environment in which he and his citizenry operate and widen the channels in which choices are made and events flow. Truman, to the contrary, narrowed Americans' perception of their world political environment and the channels for policy choices and created a rigid framework in which the United States waged long-term, extremely costly global cold war. Indeed, before we celebrate America's victory in this contest we might recall that after King Pyrrhus's Greek forces defeated the Romans at the battle of Asculum in 280 B.C., he reflected that "another such victory, and we are undone."

II

Truman's parochialism and nationalism, and significant insecurity, were rooted in his background, despite his claim to have had a bucolic childhood of happy family, farm life, and Baptist religiosity. In fact, young Harry's poor eyesight, extended illness, and "sissy" piano playing alienated him from both his peers and his feisty father and fostered ambivalence in him toward powerful men. On the one hand, Truman deferred to "Boss" Thomas Pendergast, his dishonest political benefactor, and to Secretaries of State George Marshall and Dean Acheson, whose manner and firm viewpoints he found reassuring. On the other hand, he denounced those whose style or ways of thinking were unfamiliar. This included the State Department's "striped pants boys," the military's "brass

hats" and "prima donnas," political "fakirs" [*sic*] such as Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt, and "professional liberals." For Truman, Charles de Gaulle, Josef Stalin, Ernest Bevin, and Douglas MacArthur were each, at one time or another, a "son of a bitch."

Truman's need to demonstrate his authority underlay his upbraiding of both Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov in April 1945 for Russia's alleged failure to keep its agreements and his secretary of state, James Byrnes, for allegedly exceeding his authority at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers (CFM) that December. Truman naively likened Stalin to Pendergast, who, like Harry's father, always kept his word, but then took great umbrage at the thought that the Soviet leader had broken his word over Poland, Iran, or Germany. Truman also blamed MacArthur for misleading him at their Wake Island meeting in 1950 about Chinese intentions in the Korean War, but this was equally Truman self-deception.

Truman's self-tutelage in history derived largely from didactic biographies of "great men" and empires. This enhanced his vision of the globe but provided little sense of complexity or ambiguity and instilled exaggerated belief that current events had exact historical analogues that provided the key to contemporary policy. The new president was "amazed" that the Yalta accords were so "hazy" and fraught with "new meanings" at every reading, which probably contributed to his "lackluster" adherence to them. Shortly, Truman uncritically applied analogues about 1930s appeasement of Nazi Germany to diplomacy with the Soviet Union and crises in Iran, Greece, Turkey, and Korea.

Further, young Harry's Bible reading and church going did not inspire an abiding religiosity or system of morals so much as a conviction that the world was filled with "liars and hypocrites," terms he readily applied to his presidential critics, and a stern belief, as he wrote in 1945, that "punishment always followed transgression," a maxim that he applied to North Korea and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Truman's early writings disdained non-Americans and minorities ("Chink doctor," "dago," "nigger," "Jew clerk," and "bohunks and Rooshans"), and in 1940 he proposed to deport "disloyal inhabitants." As president in 1945 he questioned the loyalty of "hyphenate" Americans, and in 1947 he signed Executive Order 9835, creating an unprecedented "loyalty" program that jettisoned basic legal procedural safeguards and virtually included a presumption of guilt.

Truman's command of men and bravery under fire in World War I were exemplary but not broadening. He deplored Europe's politics, mores, and food and sought only to return to "God's country." He intended never to revisit Europe: "I've nearly promised old Miss Liberty that she'll have to turn around to see me again," he wrote in 1918, and in 1945 he went reluctantly to Potsdam to his first and only European summit.

Nonetheless, Truman identified with Wilsonian internationalism, especially the League of Nations, and as a senator he supported President Franklin Roosevelt on the World Court, neutrality revision, rearmament, and Lend Lease for Britain and Russia. He rightfully said "I am no appeaser." But his internationalism reflected unquestioned faith in American moral superiority, and his foreign policy proposals largely comprised military preparedness. He

was indifferent to the plight of Republican Spain and too quickly blamed international conflict on “outlaws,” “savages,” and “totalitarians.” After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, he hastily remarked that they should be left to destroy one another—although he opposed Germany’s winning—and he likened Russian leaders to “Hitler and Al Capone” and soon inveighed against the “twin blights—atheism and communism.” Hence, while Truman supported the fledgling United Nations and the liberalization of world trade, the man who became president in April 1945 was less an incipient internationalist than a parochial nationalist given to excessive fear that appeasement, lack of preparedness, and enemies at home and abroad would thwart America’s mission (the “Lord’s will”) to “win the peace” on its terms.

President Truman inherited an expedient wartime alliance that stood on shaky ground at Yalta in February 1945 and grew more strained over Soviet control in Romania and Poland and U.S. surrender talks with German officials at Bern that aroused Stalin’s fears of a separate peace. Truman lamented that “they didn’t tell me anything about what was going on.” He also had to depend on advisers whose views ranged from Ambassador Averell Harriman’s belief that it was time to halt the Russians’ “barbarian invasion” of Europe to counsel from FDR emissaries Joseph Davies and Harry Hopkins to try to preserve long-term accord. Truman’s desire to appear decisive by making quick decisions and his instinct to be “tough” spurred his belief that he could get “85 percent” from the Russians on important matters and that they could go along or “go to hell.”

Initially, the president’s abrupt style and conflicting advice produced inconsistent policy. His mid-April call for a “new” government in Poland and his “one-two to the jaw” interview with Molotov brought only a sharp reply from Stalin, after which the United States recognized a predominantly Communist Polish government. In May, Truman approved “getting tough” with the Russians by suddenly curtailing Lend Lease shipments, but Anglo-Soviet protests caused him to countermand the cutoffs. He then refused Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s proposal to keep Anglo-American troops advanced beyond their agreed occupation zones to bargain in Germany and soon wrote that he was “anxious to keep all my engagements with the Russians because they are touchy and suspicious of us.”

Still, Truman determined to have his way with the Russians, especially in Germany. Tutored in part by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, he embraced the emergent War-State Department position that Germany was key to the balance of power in Europe and required some reconstruction because a “poor house” standard of living there meant the same for Europe, and might cause a repeat of the tragic Treaty of Versailles history. Truman replaced Roosevelt’s reparations negotiator, Isador Lubin, with conservative oil entrepreneur Edwin Pauley, who brushed off both Soviet claims to Yalta’s \$20 billion in reparations and State Department estimates that Germany could pay \$12–14 billion. Truman also said that when he met with Churchill and Stalin he wanted “all the bargaining power—all the cards in my hands, and the plan on Germany is one of them.”

The other card was the atomic bomb, which inspired Truman and Byrnes to think that they could win their way in Europe and Asia. Byrnes told the

president in April that the bomb might allow them to "dictate our terms" at the war's end and in May indicated his belief that it would make the Russians more "manageable." Stimson counseled Truman that America's industrial strength and unique weapon comprised a "royal straight flush and we mustn't be a fool about how we play it," that it would be "dominant" in any dispute with Russia over Manchuria, and a "weapon" or "master card" in America's hand in its "big stakes" diplomacy with the Russians.

The president readily analogized diplomacy with his poker playing and, as Martin J. Sherwin has shown, believed that use of his atomic "ace-in-the-hole" would allow him to wrest concessions from Stalin. Truman had incentive to delay a summit meeting until the bomb was ready and to take no steps to obviate its use. In late spring he passed over proposals to modify unconditional surrender that sought to induce Japan's quick capitulation, and he would not give the Japanese or Russians notice of the atomic bomb.

Truman set sail for Potsdam highly disposed to atomic diplomacy, albeit not "blackmail." His nationalist perspective shaped his thinking. He aimed to advance American interests only: "win, lose, or draw—and we must win." En route, he approved Pauley's policy to give "first charge" priority to German occupation and maintenance costs over reparations. "Santa Claus is dead," Truman wrote, and the United States would never again "pay reparations, feed the world, and get nothing for it but a nose thumbing." Further, after Stimson brought word on 16 July of the successful atomic test in New Mexico and urged an early warning and offer to retain the Emperor as means to induce Japan's rapid surrender, Truman and Byrnes refused. That ended the last, brief chance at atomic restraint.

After meeting Stalin on 17 July, Truman wrote that he was unfazed by the Russian's "dynamite" agenda because "I have some dynamite too which I'm not exploding now." The following day he asserted that the "Japs will fold up" before Russia entered the Pacific war, specifically "when Manhattan appears over their homeland." Truman agreed with Byrnes that use of the bomb would permit them to "out-manuever Stalin on China," that is, negate the Yalta concessions in Manchuria and guarantee that Russia would "not get in so much on the kill" of Japan or its occupation. Assured by 24 July that the bomb would be ready before Russia's entry, the president had to be persuaded even to hint to Stalin that he had a new weapon and afterward exulted in the mistaken belief that the Russian leader had not caught on to the bomb. Truman then hastened to issue the Potsdam Declaration without Soviet signature on 26 July and signed his "release when ready" order on the bombs on the 31st.

News of the bomb's power also greatly reinforced Truman's confidence to allow Byrnes to press European negotiations to impasse by refusing the Russians access to the Ruhr, rejecting even their low bid for \$4 billion in industrial reparations, and withdrawing the Yalta accords. Convinced that the New Mexico atomic test would allow the United States to "control" events, Byrnes pushed his famous 30 July tripartite ultimatum on German zonal reparations, Poland's de facto control over its new western border (including Silesia) with Germany, and Italy's membership in the UN. "Mr. Stalin is stallin'," Truman wrote hours before the American-set deadline on 31 July, but that was useless

because "I have an ace in the hole and another one showing," aces that he knew would soon fall upon Japan.

Truman won his hand, as Stalin acceded to zonal reparations. But Truman's victory was fraught with more long-term consequences than he envisioned. He had not only equated his desire to prevent use of taxpayer dollars to help sustain occupied Germany with the Russians' vital need for reparations, but also given them reason to think, as Norman Naimark has written, that the Americans were deaf to their quest for a "paltry" \$10 billion or less to compensate for Germany's having ravaged their nation. Further, America's insistence on zonal reparations would impede development of common economic policy for all of Germany and increase likelihood of its East-West division.

In addition, use of two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—the second was not militarily necessary—showed that for Truman and Byrnes, the prospect of political gain in Europe and Asia precluded serious thought not to use the bombs. And this may have led the Russians to conclude that the bombs were directed against them, or their ability to achieve their strategic interests. But Stalin would not be pressured; he was determined to pursue a Russian atomic bomb.

Shortly, Truman backed Byrnes's "bomb in his pocket" diplomacy at the London CFM, which deadlocked over Russian control in Eastern Europe and American control in Japan. Truman told Byrnes to "stick to his guns" and tell the Russians "to go to hell." The president then agreed with "ultranationalist" advisers who opposed international atomic accord by drawing misleading analogies about interwar disarmament and "appeasement" and by insisting that America's technological-industrial genius assured permanent atomic supremacy. Truman held that America was the world's atomic "trustee"; that it had to preserve the bomb's "secret"; and that no nation would give up the "locks and bolts" necessary to protect its "house" from "outlaws." The atomic arms race was on, he said in the fall of 1945, and other nations had to "catch up on their own hook."

In the spring of 1946, Truman undercut the Dean Acheson-David Lilienthal plan for international control and development of atomic resources by appointing as chief negotiator Bernard Baruch, whose emphasis on close inspections, sanctions, no veto, and indefinite American atomic monopoly virtually assured Russian refusal. Despite Acheson's protests, Truman analogized that "if Harry Stimson had been backed up in Manchuria [in 1931] there would have been no war." And as deadlock neared in July 1946, the president told Baruch to "stand pat."

Ultimately the UN commission weighing the Baruch Plan approved it on 31 December 1946. But the prospect of a Soviet veto in the Security Council precluded its adoption. Admittedly, Stalin's belief that he could not deal with the United States on an equal basis until he had the bomb and Soviet insistence on retention of their veto power and national control of resources and facilities may have precluded atomic accord in 1946. Still, Baruch insisted that the United States could get its way because it had an atomic monopoly, and American military officials sought to preserve a nuclear monopoly as long as possible and to develop a strategy based on air power and atomic weapons. As

David Holloway has written, neither Truman nor Stalin "saw the bomb as a common danger to the human race."

Meanwhile, Byrnes's diplomacy in Moscow in December 1945 had produced Yalta-style accords on a European peace treaty process, Russian predominance in Bulgaria and Romania and American primacy in China and Japan, and compromise over Korea, with Soviet disputes with Iran and Turkey set aside. But conservative critics cried "appeasement," and in his famous but disputed letter of 5 January 1946, an anxious president charged that Byrnes had kept him "completely in the dark"; denounced Russian "outrage[s]" in the Baltic, Germany, Poland, and Iran and intent to invade Turkey; and said that the Russians understood only an "iron fist" and "divisions" and that he was tired of "babying" them. In fact, Truman knew of most of Byrnes's positions; they had hardly "babied" Russia since Potsdam; and no Russian attack was imminent. The letter reflected Truman's new "get tough" policy, or personal cold war declaration, which, it must be emphasized, came six weeks before George Kennan's Long Telegram and Churchill's Iron Curtain speech.

Strong American protests in 1946 caused the Russians to withdraw their troops from Iran and their claims to joint defense of the Turkish Straits. In the latter case, Truman said he was ready to follow his policy of military response "to the end" to determine if Russia intended "world conquest." Once again he had taken an exaggerated, nationalist stance. No one expected a Russian military advance; America's action rested on its plans to integrate Turkey into its strategic planning and to use it as a base of operations against Russia in event of war. And in September, Truman approved announcement of a Mediterranean command that led to the United States becoming the dominant naval power there by year's end.

Meanwhile, Truman ignored Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace's lengthy memoranda during March–September 1946 that sought to promote economic ties with Russia and questioned America's atomic policies and global military expansiveness. The president then fired Wallace after he publicly challenged Byrnes's speech on 6 September in Stuttgart propounding West German reconstruction and continued American military presence there. The firing was reasonable, but not the rage at Wallace as "a real Commy" and at "parlor pinks and soprano-voiced men" as a "national danger" and "sabotage front" for Stalin.

Equally without reason was Truman's face value acceptance of White House special counsel Clark Clifford's "Russian Report" of September 1946 and accompanying "Last Will of Peter the Great." Clifford's report rested on a hasty compilation of apocalyptic projections of Soviet aim to conquer the world by military force and subversion, and he argued that the United States had to prepare for total war. He wrote in the "black and white" terms that he knew Truman would like and aimed to justify a vast global military upgrade and silence political critics on the left and right. Tsar Peter's will was an old forgery purporting to show that he had a similar design to conquer Eurasia. Truman may have found the report so "hot" that he confined it to his White House safe, but he believed the report and the will and soon was persisting that the governments of the czars, Stalin, and Hitler were all the same. Later he told a

mild critic of American policy to read Tsar Peter's will to learn where Russian leaders got their "fixed ideas."

It was a short step, Clifford recalled, from the Russian Report to Truman's epochal request in March 1947 for military aid to Greece and Turkey to help "free peoples" fight totalitarianism. Truman vastly overstated the global-ideological aspects of Soviet-American conflict. Perhaps he sought to fire "the opening gun" to rouse the public and a fiscally conservative Republican Congress to national security expenditures. But he also said that this was "only the beginning" of the "U.S. going into European politics," that the Russians had broken every agreement since Potsdam and would now get only "one language" from him. He added in the fall of 1947 that "if Russia gets Greece and Turkey," it would get Italy and France, the iron curtain would extend to western Ireland, and the United States would have to "come home and prepare for war."

Truman's fears were excessive. Stalin never challenged the Truman Doctrine or Western primacy in Turkey, now under U.S. military tutelage, and Greece. He provided almost no aid to the Greek rebels and told Yugoslavia's leaders in early 1948 to halt their aid because the United States would never allow the Greek Communists to win and break Anglo-American control in the Mediterranean. When Marshal Josip Broz Tito balked, Stalin withdrew his advisers from Yugoslavia and expelled that nation from the Cominform. Tito finally closed his borders to the Greek rebels in July 1949.

Perhaps U.S. officials feared that Britain's retreat from Greece might allow Russia to penetrate the Mediterranean, or that if Greek Communists overthrew the reactionary Greek regime (Turkey was not threatened) they might align Athens with Moscow. Still, the Truman administration's costly policy never addressed the causes of Greece's civil war; instead, it substituted military "annihilation of the enemy for the reform of the social and economic conditions" that had brought civil war. Equally important, Truman's rhetorical division of the world into "free" versus "totalitarian" states, as Gaddis once said, created an "ideological straitjacket" for American foreign policy and an unfortunate model for later interventions, such as in Korea—"the Greece of the Far East," as Truman would say—and in French Indochina.

The Truman Doctrine led to the Marshall Plan in June 1947, but they were not "two halves of the same walnut," as Truman claimed. State Department officials who drew up the European Recovery Plan (ERP) differentiated it from what they viewed as his doctrine's implications for "economic and ultimately military warfare." The Soviets likened the Truman Doctrine to retail purchase of separate nations and the Marshall Plan to wholesale purchase of Europe.

The Soviet view was narrow, although initially they had interest in participating and perhaps even harbored dreams that the United States would proffer a generous Lend Lease-style arrangement. But as the British quickly saw, Soviet participation was precluded by American-imposed financial and economic controls and, as Michael J. Hogan has written, by the integrated, continental approach to aid rather than a nation-by-nation basis that would have benefited war-devastated Russia. Indeed, in direct talks in Paris, U.S. officials refused concessions, focused on resources to come from Russia and East Europe, and insisted on German contributions to the ERP ahead of reparations payments or

a peace treaty—and then expressed widespread relief when the Soviets rejected the ERP for themselves and East Europe.

The Marshall Plan proved to be a very successful geostrategic venture. It helped to spur American–European trade and Western European recovery, bring France into camp with Germany and satisfy French economic and security claims, and revive eastern Germany industrially without unleashing the 1930s-style “German colossus” that Truman’s aides feared. The Marshall Plan was also intended to contain the Soviets economically, forestall German–Soviet bilateral deals, and provide America with access to its allies’ domestic and colonial resources. Finally, as the British said, the Truman administration sought an integrated Europe resembling the United States, “God’s own country.”

The Marshall Plan’s excellent return on investment, however, may have cost far more than the \$13 billion expended. “The world is definitely split in two,” Undersecretary of State Robert Lovett said in August 1947, while Kennan forewarned that for defensive reasons the Soviets would “clamp down completely on Czechoslovakia” to strengthen their hold on Eastern Europe. Indeed, the most recent evidence indicates that Stalin viewed the Marshall Plan as a “watershed” event, signaling an American effort to predominate over all of Europe. This spurred the Soviets into a comprehensive strategy shift. They now rigged the elections in Hungary, proffered Andrei Zhdanov’s “two camps” approach to world policy, created the Cominform, and blessed the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. Truman, in turn, concluded that the Western world confronted the same situation it had a decade earlier with Nazi Germany, and his bristling St. Patrick’s Day speeches in March 1948 placed sole onus for the Cold War on the Soviet Union. Subsequently, Anglo-American talks at the Pentagon would culminate in NATO in April 1949.

Meanwhile, the U.S. decision to make western Germany the cornerstone of the ERP virtually precluded negotiations to reunify the country. In fact, when Secretary of State Marshall proposed during a CFM meeting in the spring of 1947 to offer current production reparations to the Russians to induce agreement to unify Germany, the president sternly refused. Marshall complained of lack of “elbow room” to negotiate. But Truman would not yield, and by the time of the next CFM in late 1947 the secretary showed no interest in Russian reparations or Ruhr access. Despite America’s public position, Ambassador to Moscow Walter Bedell Smith wrote, “we really do not want nor intend to accept German unification on any terms that the Russians might agree to, even though they seemed to meet most of our requirements.”

The Americans were by then onto their London Conference program to create a West German state and, as Stalin said in February 1948, “The West will make Western Germany their own, and we shall turn Eastern Germany into our own state.” In June, the Soviet dictator initiated the Berlin blockade to try to forestall the West’s program, but Truman determined to “stay, period.” He believed that to withdraw from Berlin would seriously undermine U.S. influence in Europe and the ERP and destroy his presidential standing, and he remained determined to avert military confrontation.

But Truman saw no connection between the London program and the blockade, as Carolyn Eisenberg has written. Further, his belief that “there is

nothing to negotiate" and accord with General Lucius Clay's view that to withdraw from Berlin meant "we have lost everything we are fighting for" exaggerated the intent of Stalin's maneuver and diminished even slim chances for compromise on Germany, including Kennan's "Plan A" for a unified, neutralized state with American and Soviet forces withdrawn to its periphery. As Marshall said in August 1948, there would be "no abandonment of our position" on West Germany.

Eventually, Truman and the airlift prevailed over Stalin, who gave in to a face-saving CFM in May 1949 that ended the blockade, with nothing else agreed. The new secretary of state, Acheson, said that the United States intended to create a West German government "come hell or high water" and that Germany could be unified only by consolidating the East into the West on the basis of its incipient Bonn Constitution. Likewise Truman said in June 1949 that he would not sacrifice West Germany's basic freedoms to gain "nominal political unity."

Long convinced that the United States was locked in "a struggle with the USSR for Germany," the president showed no interest when Stalin made his most comprehensive offer on 10 March 1952, proposing a Big Four meeting to draft a peace treaty for a united, neutral, defensively rearmed Germany free of foreign troops. Whether Stalin was seeking a settlement to reduce great power conflict over a divided Germany has been debated. His note came only after the United States and its allies were near contractual accord on West German sovereignty and Acheson had just negotiated his "grand slam" providing for German forces to enter a proposed European Defense Community (EDC) linked to NATO. Acheson held that Stalin had thrown a "golden apple" of discord over the iron curtain to forestall a sovereign, industrially strong, and rearmed West Germany joining an American-led alliance system.

Truman gave full sway to Acheson, who hesitated to reject Stalin's offer out of hand. But he insisted that the allies "drive ahead" with the German contractals and EDC. He also got support from West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to shape uniform allied replies, with conditions, such as UN-supervised elections in all of Germany prior to negotiations and unified Germany's right to join any "defensive European community," that he knew Stalin would reject. Further, although Truman and Acheson had just coaxed Kennan to become ambassador to Moscow, they never asked his advice or gave him a policy clue despite meeting with him three times in April. This confirmed Kennan's view that "we had no interest in discussing the German problem with the Soviet Government in any manner whatsoever."

Stalin, meanwhile, told East German leaders in April 1952 that the West would never accept any proposal they made and that it was time to "organize your own state" and protect its border. The United States won the so-called battle of the notes, although exchanges continued. But the allies concluded the German contractals and the EDC in late May. And when the French then reverted to proposing a four power meeting on Germany, Acheson said that four power control was long past. He then shaped the note so that it "puts onus on Sovs sufficiently to make it unlikely that Sovs will agree to mtg on terms proposed." He was right, and in September the note writing drew to its anticlimactic closure.

Prospect for accord based on Stalin's note was remote, but not just because Stalin wanted, as Vojtech Mastny has written, either a unified "pro-Soviet though not necessarily communist" Germany or a full-fledged East German satellite. Truman had no interest in a unified, neutral, or demilitarized Germany and now believed that a rearmed FRG was as vital to NATO as West Germany was to ERR German unity was possible only on the basis of West over East. Thus, Ambassador Kennan said after talking to U.S. officials linked to NATO in the fall of 1952 that they saw no reason to withdraw U.S. forces from Germany "at any time within the foreseeable future under any conceivable agreement with Russia." This meant that the "split of Germany and Europe" would continue. And it did, for the next forty years. . . .



No one leader or nation caused the Cold War. The Second World War generated inevitable Soviet-American conflict as two nations with entirely different political-economic systems confronted each other on two war-torn continents. The Truman administration would seek to fashion a world order friendly to American political and economic interests, to achieve maximum national security by preventing any nation from severing U.S. ties to its traditional allies and vital areas of trade and resources, and to avoid 1930s-style "appeasement." Truman creditably favored creation of the UN, fostered foreign aid and reconstruction, and wished to avert war, and, after he recognized his "overreach" in Korea, he sought to return to the status quo ante.

Nonetheless, from the Potsdam Conference through the Korean War, the president contributed significantly to the growing Cold War and militarization of American foreign policy. He assumed that America's economic-military-moral superiority assured that he could order the world on its terms, and he ascribed only dark motives to nations or leaders who resisted America's will. Monopoly control of the atomic bomb heightened this sense of righteous power and impelled his use of atomic bombs partly to outmaneuver the Russians in China and over Japan. Truman also drew confidence from the bombs that he could deny the Soviets any fixed sum of German reparations despite their feasibility, the Yalta accords, and the apparent disregard of Russia's claim to compensation for its wartime suffering. American-imposed zonal reparations policy only increased the East-West divide and diminished prospects to reunite Germany, although Stalin evidently remained open to the idea of a united and neutralized Germany until 1949 and conceivably as late as 1952. But Truman, as Marshall learned in the spring of 1947, had little interest in negotiating such an arrangement, and his administration's decision that year to make western Germany the cornerstone of the Marshall Plan and Western Europe's reconstruction virtually precluded German unification except by melding East into West. Formation of NATO and insistence that a unified Germany be free to join a Western military alliance reinforced division of Germany and Europe.

It is clear that Truman's insecurity with regard to diplomacy and world politics led him to seek to give the appearance of acting decisively and reinforced his penchant to view conflict in black and white terms and to divide

nations into free or totalitarian societies. He shied from weighing the complexities of historic national conflicts and local or regional politics. Instead, he attributed nearly every diplomatic crisis or civil war—in Germany, Iran, Turkey, Greece, and Czechoslovakia—to Soviet machination and insisted that the Russians had broken every agreement and were bent on “world conquest.” To determine his response he was quick to reach for an analogy, usually the failure of the Western powers to resist Germany and Japan in the 1930s, and to conclude that henceforth he would speak to the Russians in the only language that he thought they understood: “divisions.” This style of leadership and diplomacy closed off both advocates and prospects for more patiently negotiated and more nuanced or creative courses of action.

Truman also viscerally loathed the Chinese Communists, could not comprehend Asian nationalism, demonized Asian opponents, and caused the United States to align itself with corrupt regimes. He was unable to view China’s civil war apart from Soviet–American conflict. He brushed off criticism of America’s intervention on behalf of the frightful GMD, refused to open channels of communication with the emergent PRC, and permitted the American-armed, Taiwan-based GMD to wage counterrevolutionary war against China’s new government, whose sovereignty or legitimacy he never accepted. The Korean War then overtook his administration. The president decided to preserve South Korea’s independence but set an unfortunate if not tragic precedent by refusing to seek formal congressional sanction for war. His decision to punish North Korea and implement “rollback,” and his disdain for the PRC and its concerns before and after it entered the war, brought unnecessary, untold destruction and suffering to Asians and Americans and proved fatal to his presidency. Still, in his undelivered farewell address Truman insisted that “Russia was at the root” of every problem from Europe to Asia, and that “Trumanism” had saved countless countries from Soviet invasion and “knocked the socks off the communists” in Korea.

In conclusion, it seems clear that despite Truman’s pride in his knowledge of the past, he lacked insight into the history unfolding around him. He often could not see beyond his immediate decision or visualize alternatives, and he seemed oblivious to the implications of his words or actions. More often than not he narrowed rather than broadened the options that he presented to the American citizenry, the environment of American politics, and the channels through which Cold War politics flowed. Throughout his presidency, Truman remained a parochial nationalist who lacked the leadership to move America away from conflict and toward detente. Instead, he promoted an ideology and politics of Cold War confrontation that became the *modus operandi* of successor administrations and the United States for the next two generations.

We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History

[Joseph] Stalin appears to have relished his role, along with [Franklin D.] Roosevelt and [Winston] Churchill, as one of the wartime Big Three. Such evidence as has surfaced from Soviet archives suggests that he received reassuring reports about Washington's intentions: "Roosevelt is more friendly to us than any other prominent American," Ambassador Litvinov commented in June 1943, "and it is quite obvious that he wishes to cooperate with us." Whoever was in the White House, Litvinov's successor Andrei Gromyko predicted a year later, the Soviet Union and the United States would "manage to find common issues for the solution of . . . problems emerging in the future and of interest to both countries." Even if Stalin's long-range thinking about security did clash with that of his Anglo-American allies, common military purposes provided the strongest possible inducements to smooth over such differences. It is worth asking why this *practice* of wartime cooperation did not become a *habit* that would extend into the postwar era.

The principal reason, it now appears, was Stalin's insistence on equating security with territory. Western diplomats had been surprised, upon arriving in Moscow soon after the German attack in the summer of 1941, to find the Soviet leader already demanding a postwar settlement that would retain what his pact with Hitler had yielded: the Baltic states, together with portions of Finland, Poland, and Romania. Stalin showed no sense of shame or even embarrassment about this, no awareness that the *methods* by which he had obtained these concessions could conceivably render them illegitimate in the eyes of anyone else. When it came to territorial aspirations, he made no distinction between adversaries and allies: what one had provided the other was expected to endorse. . . .

On the surface, this strategy succeeded. After strong initial objections, Roosevelt and Churchill did eventually acknowledge the Soviet Union's right to the expanded borders it claimed; they also made it clear that they would not oppose the installation of "friendly" governments in adjoining states. This meant accepting a Soviet sphere of influence from the Baltic to the Adriatic, a concession not easily reconciled with the Atlantic Charter. But the authors of that document saw no feasible way to avoid that outcome: military necessity required continued Soviet cooperation against the Germans. Nor were they themselves

prepared to relinquish spheres of influence in Western Europe and the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Latin America, and East Asia. Self-determination was a sufficiently malleable concept that each of the Big Three could have endorsed, without sleepless nights, what the Soviet government had said about the Atlantic Charter: "practical application of these principles will necessarily adapt itself to the circumstances, needs, and historic peculiarities of particular countries."

That, though, was precisely the problem. For unlike Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill would have to defend their decisions before domestic constituencies. The *manner* in which Soviet influence expanded was therefore, for them, of no small significance. Stalin showed little understanding of this. Having no experience himself with democratic procedures, he dismissed requests that he respect democratic proprieties. "[S]ome propaganda work should be done," he advised Roosevelt at the Tehran conference after the president had hinted that the American public would welcome a plebiscite in the Baltic States. "It is all nonsense!" Stalin complained to [Soviet Foreign Minister V. M.] Molotov. "[Roosevelt] is their military leader and commander in chief. Who would dare object to him?" When at Yalta F.D.R. stressed the need for the first Polish election to be as pure as "Caesar's wife," Stalin responded with a joke: "They said that about her, but in fact she had her sins." Molotov warned his boss, on that occasion, that the Americans' insistence on free elections elsewhere in Eastern Europe was "going too far." "Don't worry," he recalls Stalin as replying, "work it out. We can deal with it in our own way later. The point is the correlation of forces."

The Soviet leader was, in one sense, right. Military strength would determine what happened in that part of the world, not the enunciation of lofty principles. But unilateral methods carried long-term costs Stalin did not foresee: the most significant of these was to ruin whatever prospects existed for a Soviet sphere of influence the East Europeans themselves might have accepted. This possibility was not as far-fetched as it would later seem. . . . [Stalin] would, after all, approve such a compromise as the basis for a permanent settlement with Finland. He would initially allow free elections in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet occupation zone in Germany. He may even have *anticipated an enthusiastic response* as he took over Eastern Europe. "He was, I think, surprised and hurt," [W. Averell] Harriman [one of Roosevelt's closest advisors] recalled, "when the Red Army was not welcomed in all the neighboring countries as an army of liberation." "We still had our hopes," [Nikita] Khrushchev remembered, that "after the catastrophe of World War II, Europe, too, might become Soviet. Everyone would take the path from capitalism to socialism." It could be that there was another form of romanticism at work here, quite apart from Stalin's affinity for fellow authoritarians: that he was unrealistic enough to expect ideological solidarity and gratitude for liberation to override old fears of Russian expansionism as well as remaining manifestations of nationalism among the Soviet Union's neighbors, perhaps as easily as he himself had overridden the latter—or so it then appeared—within the multinational empire that was the Soviet Union itself.

If the Red Army could have been welcomed in Poland and the rest of the countries it liberated with the same enthusiasm American, British, and Free French forces encountered when they landed in Italy and France in 1943 and

1944, then some kind of Czech–Finnish compromise might have been feasible. Whatever Stalin’s expectations, though, this did not happen. That non-event, in turn, removed any possibility of a division of Europe all members of the Grand Alliance could have endorsed. It ensured that an American sphere of influence would arise there largely by consent, but that its Soviet counterpart could sustain itself only by coercion. The resulting asymmetry would account, more than anything else, for the origins, escalation, and ultimate outcome of the Cold War.



. . . It has long been clear that, in addition to having had an authoritarian vision, Stalin also had an imperial one, which he proceeded to implement in at least as single-minded a way [as the American]. No comparably influential builder of empire came close to wielding power for so long, or with such striking results, on the Western side.

It was, of course, a matter of some awkwardness that Stalin came out of a revolutionary movement that had vowed to smash, not just tsarist imperialism, but all forms of imperialism throughout the world. The Soviet leader constructed his own logic, though, and throughout his career he devoted a surprising amount of attention to showing how a revolution and an empire might coexist. . . .

Stalin’s fusion of Marxist internationalism with tsarist imperialism could only reinforce his tendency, in place well before World War II, to equate the advance of world revolution with the expanding influence of the Soviet state. He applied that linkage quite impartially: a major benefit of the 1939 pact with Hitler had been that it regained territories lost as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution and the World War I settlement. But Stalin’s conflation of imperialism with ideology also explains the importance he attached, following the German attack in 1941, to having his new Anglo-American allies confirm these arrangements. He had similar goals in East Asia when he insisted on bringing the Soviet Union back to the position Russia had occupied in Manchuria prior to the Russo-Japanese War: this he finally achieved at the 1945 Yalta Conference in return for promising to enter the war against Japan. “My task as minister of foreign affairs was to expand the borders of our Fatherland,” Molotov recalled proudly many years later. “And it seems that Stalin and I coped with this task quite well.” . . .



From the West’s standpoint, the critical question was how far Moscow’s influence would extend *beyond* whatever Soviet frontiers turned out to be at the end of the war. Stalin had suggested to Milovan Djilas that the Soviet Union would impose its own social system as far as its armies could reach, but he was also very cautious. Keenly aware of the military power the United States and its allies had accumulated, Stalin was determined to do nothing that might involve the USSR in another devastating war until it had recovered sufficiently to be

certain of winning it. "I do not wish to begin the Third World War over the Trieste question," he explained to disappointed Yugoslavs, whom he ordered to evacuate that territory in June 1945. Five years later, he would justify his decision not to intervene in the Korean War on the grounds that "the Second World War ended not long ago, and we are not ready for the Third World War." Just how far the expansion of Soviet influence would proceed depended, therefore, upon a careful balancing of opportunities against risks. . . .

Who or what was it, though, that set the limits? Did Stalin have a fixed list of countries he thought it necessary to dominate? Was he prepared to stop in the face of resistance within those countries to "squeezing out the capitalist order"? Or would expansion cease only when confronted with opposition from the remaining capitalist states, so that further advances risked war at a time when the Soviet Union was ill-prepared for it?

Stalin had been very precise about where he wanted Soviet boundaries changed; he was much less so on how far Moscow's sphere of influence was to extend. He insisted on having "friendly" countries around the periphery of the USSR, but he failed to specify how many would have to meet this standard. He called during the war for dismembering Germany, but by the end of it was denying that he had ever done so: that country would be temporarily divided, he told leading German communists in June 1945, and they themselves would eventually bring about its reunification. He never gave up on the idea of an eventual world revolution, but he expected this to result—as his comments to the Germans suggested—from an expansion of influence emanating from the Soviet Union itself. "[F]or the Kremlin," a well-placed spymaster recalled, "the mission of communism was primarily to consolidate the might of the Soviet state. Only military strength and domination of the countries on our borders could ensure us a superpower role."

But Stalin provided no indication—surely because he himself did not know—of how rapidly, or under what circumstances, this process would take place. He was certainly prepared to stop in the face of resistance from the West: at no point was he willing to challenge the Americans or even the British where they made their interests clear. . . . He quickly backed down when confronted with Anglo-American objections to his ambitions in Iran in the spring of 1946, as he did later that year after demanding Soviet bases in the Turkish Straits. This pattern of advance followed by retreat had shown up in the purges of the 1930s, which Stalin halted when the external threat from Germany became too great to ignore, and it would reappear with the Berlin Blockade and the Korean War, both situations in which the Soviet Union would show great caution after provoking an unexpectedly strong American response.

What all of this suggests, though, is not that Stalin had limited ambitions, only that he had no timetable for achieving them. Molotov retrospectively confirmed this: "Our ideology stands for offensive operations when possible, and if not, we wait." Given this combination of appetite with aversion to risk, one cannot help but wonder what would have happened had the West tried containment earlier. To the extent that it bears partial responsibility for the coming of the Cold War, the historian Vojtech Mastny has argued, that responsibility lies in its failure to do just that. . . .

Stalin's policy, then, was one of imperial expansion and consolidation differing from that of earlier empires only in the determination with which he pursued it, in the instruments of coercion with which he maintained it, and in the ostensibly anti-imperial justifications he put forward in support of it. It is a testimony to his skill, if not to his morality, that he was able to achieve so many of his imperial ambitions at a time when the tides of history were running against the idea of imperial domination—as colonial offices in London, Paris, Lisbon, and The Hague were finding out—and when his own country was recovering from one of the most brutal invasions in recorded history. The fact that Stalin was able to *expand* his empire when others were contracting and while the Soviet Union was as weak as it was, requires explanation. Why did opposition to this process, within and outside Europe, take so long to develop?

One reason was that the colossal sacrifices the Soviet Union had made during the war against the Axis had, in effect, "purified" its reputation: the USSR and its leader had "earned" the right to throw their weight around, or so it seemed. Western governments found it difficult to switch quickly from viewing the Soviet Union as a glorious wartime ally to portraying it as a new and dangerous adversary. President Harry S. Truman and his future Secretary of State Dean Acheson—neither of them sympathetic in the slightest to communism—nonetheless tended to give the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt well into the early postwar era. . . .

Resistance to Stalin's imperialism also developed slowly because Marxism-Leninism at the time had such widespread appeal. It is difficult now to recapture the admiration revolutionaries outside the Soviet Union felt for that country before they came to know it well. . . . Because the Bolsheviks themselves had overcome one empire and had made a career of condemning others, it would take decades for people who were struggling to overthrow British, French, Dutch, or Portuguese colonialism to see that there could also be such a thing as Soviet imperialism. European communists—notably the Yugoslavs—saw this much earlier, but even to most of them it had not been apparent at the end of the war.

Still another explanation for the initial lack of resistance to Soviet expansionism was the fact that its repressive character did not become immediately apparent to all who were subjected to it. . . .

One has the impression that Stalin and the Eastern Europeans got to know one another only gradually. The Kremlin leader was slow to recognize that Soviet authority would not be welcomed everywhere beyond Soviet borders; but as he did come to see this, he became all the more determined to impose it everywhere. The Eastern Europeans were slow to recognize how confining incorporation within a Soviet sphere was going to be; but as they did come to see this, they became all the more determined to resist it, even if only by withholding, in a passive but sullen manner, the consent any regime needs to establish itself by means other than coercion. Stalin's efforts to consolidate his empire therefore made it at once more repressive and less secure. Meanwhile, an alternative vision of postwar Europe was emerging from the other great empire that established itself in the wake of

World War II, that of the United States, and this too gave Stalin grounds for concern. . . .



What is there new to say about the old question of responsibility for the Cold War? Who actually started it? Could it have been averted? Here I think the “new” history is bringing us back to an old answer: that *as long as Stalin was running the Soviet Union, a cold war was unavoidable*.

History is always the product of determined and contingent events: it is up to historians to find the proper balance between them. The Cold War could hardly have happened if there had not been a United States and a Soviet Union, if both had not emerged victorious from World War II, if they had not had conflicting visions of how to organize the postwar world. But these long-term trends did not in themselves *ensure* such a contest, because there is always room for the unexpected to undo what might appear to be inevitable. *Nothing* is ever completely predetermined, as real triceratops and other dinosaurs discovered 65 million years ago when the most recent large asteroid or comet or whatever it was hit the earth and wiped them out.

Individuals, not asteroids, more often personify contingency in history. Who can specify in advance—or unravel afterwards—the particular intersection of genetics, environment, and culture that makes each person unique? Who can foresee what weird conjunctions of design and circumstance may cause a very few individuals to rise so high as to shape great events, and so come to the attention of historians? Such people may set their sights on getting to the top, but an assassin, or a bacillus, or even a carelessly driven taxicab can always be lurking along the way. How entire countries fall into the hands of malevolent geniuses like Hitler and Stalin remains as unfathomable in the “new” Cold War history as in the “old.”

Once leaders like these do gain power, however, certain things become highly probable. It is only to be expected that in an authoritarian state the chief authoritarian’s personality will weigh much more heavily than those of democratic leaders, who have to share power. And whether because of social alienation, technological innovation, or economic desperation, the first half of the twentieth century was particularly susceptible to great authoritarians and all that resulted from their ascendancy. It is hardly possible to imagine Nazi Germany or the world war it caused without Hitler. I find it increasingly difficult, given what we know now, to imagine the Soviet Union or the Cold War without Stalin.

For the more we learn, the less sense it makes to distinguish Stalin’s foreign policies from his domestic practices or even his personal behavior. Scientists have shown the natural world to be filled with examples of what they call “self-similarity across scale”: patterns that persist whether one views them microscopically, macroscopically, or anywhere in between. Stalin was like that: he functioned in much the same manner whether operating within the international system, within his alliances, within his country, within his party, within his personal entourage, or even within his family. The Soviet leader waged cold

wars on all of these fronts. The Cold War we came to know was only one of many from *his* point of view.

Nor did Stalin's influence diminish as quickly as that of most dictators after their deaths. He built a *system* sufficiently durable to survive not only his own demise but his successors' fitful and half-hearted efforts at "de-Stalinization." They were themselves its creatures, and they continued to work within it because they knew no other method of governing. Not until [Mikhail] Gorbachev was a Soviet leader fully prepared to dismantle Stalin's structural legacy. It tells us a lot that as it disappeared, so too did the Cold War and ultimately the Soviet Union itself.

This argument by no means absolves the United States and its allies of a considerable responsibility for how the Cold War was fought—hardly a surprising conclusion since they in fact won it. Nor is it to deny the feckless stupidity with which the Americans fell into peripheral conflicts like Vietnam, or their exorbitant expenditures on unusable weaponry: these certainly caused the Cold War to cost much more in money and lives than it otherwise might have. Nor is it to claim moral superiority for Western statesmen. None was as bad as Stalin—or Mao—but the Cold War left no leader uncorrupted: the wielding of great power, even in the best of times, rarely does.

It is the case, though, that if one applies the always useful test of counterfactual history—drop a key variable and speculate as to what difference this might have made—Stalin's centrality to the origins of the Cold War becomes quite clear. For all of their importance, one could have removed Roosevelt, Churchill, Truman, Bevin, Marshall, or Acheson, and a cold war would still have probably followed the world war. If one could have eliminated Stalin, alternative paths become quite conceivable. For with the possible exception of Mao, no twentieth-century leader imprinted himself upon his country as thoroughly and with such lasting effect as Stalin did. And given his personal propensity for cold wars—a tendency firmly rooted long before he had even heard of Harry Truman—once Stalin wound up at the top in Moscow and once it was clear his state would survive the war, then it looks equally clear that there was going to be a Cold War whatever the west did. Who then was responsible? The answer, I think, is authoritarianism in general, and Stalin in particular.





Was President Truman Responsible for the Cold War?

Offner takes issue with President Truman's recent biographers, Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (University of Missouri Press, 1994); Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (Oxford, 1995); and especially David McCullough's bestseller, *Truman* (Simon & Schuster, 1992), all of whom rank Truman among the near-great presidents. All of the most recent polls of presidents place Truman among the ten greatest. Offner calls Truman a "parochial nationalist." His outlook on foreign policy was ethnocentric in spite of his command in combat in a Missouri national guard unit in World War One. He deplored Europe's politics, customs and food. In his early writings, he expressed disdain for "chinks," "dagos," "niggers," "Jew clerks," "bohunks" and "Rooshans."

Brash and impulsive in temperament, Offner accuses Truman of making rash and quick decisions to cover over his insecurities. Truman, he says, often relied on strong personalities such as Boss Tom Pendergast, who pushed Truman up the ladder of Missouri politics and General George Marshall and career diplomat Dean Acheson among others who helped formulate "the containment policy" in 1946 to prevent the Russians from imposing an iron curtain around all of Europe.

Offner also charges the Truman administration of practicing "Atomic diplomacy" at the end of the war, when we were the sole possessor of the A-bomb, to make the Russians more manageable in Europe. He also argues that the Truman doctrine, the Marshall plan, refusing to compromise on the German questions, and the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) run roughshod over a country who suffered many more military losses and severe damage to its economy and physical infrastructure.

In his attempt to place most of the blame for the cold war on Truman, Offner overstates his case. He calls Truman a parochial nationalist, yet the former President, though not formerly educated, read widely biographies of great leaders and military history. He also, as Offner admits, performed heroically as an officer in a Missouri national guard unit in combat and as a United States Senator supported FDR's foreign policy "on the World Court, neutrality revision, rearmament and Lend Lease for Britain and Russian before America's Entrance into World War Two."

Offner also downplays the uncertainties facing American foreign policy at the end of the war. For example, FDR had hoped that a revised international organization such as the United Nations might succeed in preventing future world wars because it would be stronger and supported by the major powers than the failed League of Nations.

Offner plays up Truman's insecurities which was true, but then accuses him of making both rash decisions and relying on strong foreign policy advisers such as George Kennan, George Marshall, and Dean Acheson. But why wouldn't Truman be insecure? He was chosen as vice president in 1944 to replace the controversial Henry Wallace because he came from Missouri, a border state that made him acceptable to southern conservative democrats, yet with a voting record that supported FDR's New Deal liberal domestic programs.

When he became president after Roosevelt's sudden death on April 12, 1945, Truman knew very little of the intricacies of Roosevelt's agreements with Churchill and Stalin. In fact, both Henry Stimson, the Secretary of Defense and Senator James Byrnes both claim to have informed Truman about the "Manhattan Project's" development of atomic bombs which would be ready for use in the summer of 1945.

Professor John Gaddis accepts the fact that Truman was insecure. He also believes that for all of 1945 up to early 1946, the Truman administration was responding to the political and economic uncertainties of the post-World War Two environment. While the United States took the lead in creating the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to supply money for rebuilding Europe's destroyed infrastructure, these institutions were woefully inadequate to the task. It was also unclear whether the United States was going to re-enter its own recession as had occurred at the end of the First World War which turned into the great depression of the 1930s.

Gaddis believes that the United States created its Western European empire by invitation through the implementation of the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the rebuilding of West Germany, and the formation of NATO. On the other hand, Russia created its empire by force. Starting in Romania in 1945 and in Poland and Hungary in 1947 and ending with the murder or suicide of the Masuryk government in Czechoslovakia in 1948, the Russians imposed totalitarian governments on its citizens.

Gaddis places most of the blame for the cold war on Stalin, an authoritarian imperialist who "equated world revolution with the expanding influence of the Soviet state." Truman was constrained by the democratic electoral system of checks and balances and a Republican-controlled Congress from 1946 to 1948. But Stalin had no such constraints. He purged all his real and potential revolutionary opponents in the 1930s and also the late 1940s and pursued foreign policy objectives as a romantic revolutionary. What limits did Stalin have? Gaddis said Stalin was precisely where he wanted Soviet boundaries changed but was imprecise about how far Moscow's sphere of influence would extend without confronting Western resistance.

In summary, if Gorbachev was the Soviet leader in 1945, there may have been alternate paths to the cold war. But with Stalin in charge, says Gaddis, "there was going to be a cold war whatever the West did."

Gaddis' interpretation goes too far in blaming most of the cold war on Stalin. He argues that new sources from the former USSR and the Eastern European countries demonstrate the control that Stalin exerted. But as Tony Judt points out, these sources are quite limited and they do not tell us about the operations of the Politburo and the twelve men who along with Stalin made

decisions. See Tony Judt, "Why the Cold War Worked," *The New York Review of Books* (October 9, 1997) and "A Story Still to be Told," *The New York Review of Books* (March 23, 2006) for critical reviews of Gaddis' *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford University Press, 1997) and *The Cold War: A New History* (Penguin Press, 2005). The best critiques of Gaddis are three of his earlier books, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947* (Columbia University Press, 1972); *Russia, the Soviet Union and the United States: An Interpretative History*, 2nd ed. (McGraw Hill, 1990); and *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of America's Postwar Foreign Policy* (Oxford, 1978).

The literature on the cold war is enormous. Students who wish to study the cold war in greater detail should consult *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945–1950* edited by Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis (Columbia University Press, 1978). Another comprehensive work is Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford University Press, 1992). The two best readers to excerpt the various viewpoints on the cold war are Thomas G. Paterson and Robert J. McMahon, eds., *The Origins of the Cold War*, 3rd ed. (D. C. Heath, 1991) and Melvyn P. Leffler and David S. Painter, eds., *Origins of the Cold War: An International History* (Routledge, 1994). Finally David Reynolds has edited a series of essays in *The Origins of the Cold War: International Perspectives* (Yale University Press, 1994).

Bibliographies are contained in all the previous books. The most up-to-date is Melvyn P. Leffler, "Cold War and Global Hegemony, 1945–1991," *OAH Magazine of History* (March 2005). Gaddis' argument with the revisionists is nicely summarized in Karen J. Winkler, "Scholars Refight the Cold War," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 2, 1994), pp. 8–10.



ISSUE 14



Was Rock and Roll Responsible for Dismantling America's Traditional Family, Sexual, and Racial Customs in the 1950s and 1960s?

YES: Jody Pennington, from "Don't Knock the Rock: Race, Business, and Society in the Rise of Rock and Roll," in Dale Carter, ed., *Cracking the Ike Age: Aspects of Fifties America* (Aarhus University Press, 1992)

NO: J. Ronald Oakley, from *God's Country: America in the Fifties* (Dembner Books, 1986, 1990)

ISSUE SUMMARY

YES: Professor Jody Pennington believes that the emergence of rock and roll in the 1950s along with new forms of consumerism expressed "the inner conflict between conservative and rebellious forces for high school teenagers who wanted to rebel against their parents yet still grow up to be them."

NO: Writer J. Ronald Oakley argues that although the lifestyles of youth departed from their parents, their basic ideas and attitudes were still the conservative ones that mirrored the conservatism of the affluent age in which they grew up.

Most Americans assume that rock and roll has dominated American popular music since the 1950s, but this is not true. The phrase "rhythm and blues" was coined by the first white rock and roll Cleveland disc jockey Alan Freed who, when he went national, was pushed by a lawsuit in 1954 to abandon the name of his show from "The Moondog House" to "Rock 'n' Roll Party." A black euphemism for sexual intercourse, "rock 'n' roll" had appeared as early as 1922 in a blues song and was constantly used by black singers into the early 1950s. It's not clear whether DJ Freed consciously made the name change to cultivate a broader audience, but that is precisely what happened.

Rock and roll was a fashion of rhythm and blues, black gospel, and country-western music. It combined black and white music, which explains why so many of the early rock singers came from the south and recorded their hit songs in New Orleans or Memphis. Between 1953 and 1955, the first true rockers—Fats

Domino, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard—were African-American. Fats Domino came from New Orleans, sang from his piano, and sold over 65 million records between 1949 and 1960, including “Ain’t That a Shame,” “I’m Walking,” and “Blueberry Hill.” Even more influential because of his electric guitar riffs, body and leg gyrations, and songs full of wit and clever wordplay was Chuck Berry, whose lifestyle (he did two stints in prison) and songs (“Maybellene,” “Johnny B. Good,” and “Roll Over Beethoven”) influenced two generations of rockers, including sixties British rock bands the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Another rocker, Little Richard, known as “the Georgia Peach,” became famous as much for his flamboyant style of dress with his towering hair and multicolored clothes that reflected a teasing sexuality. He created a string of hits—“Tutti Frutti,” “Long Tall Sally,” and “Good Golly Miss Molly”—which were recorded as cover records by white artists like Pat Boone. Little Richard scared the hell out of the parents from white middle-class America.

More threatening to middle-class white American parents was Elvis Presley, the king of rock and roll, and the most influential pop icon in the history of America, but Elvis was not the inventor of rock and roll. His voice was average, and his songs (written by others) were often mediocre. But his rugged good looks and his sexy gyrations on the stage threw young girls into spasms. Most importantly, he was white. More than 30 years after his death, Elvis still defines the age of rock and roll. He continues to sell records, which number over a billion.

Presley was the first star to take advantage of the new teenage consumer market. By the middle 1950s there were 16.5 million teenagers, half in high school and the other half in college or the work force, who possessed a lot of disposable income, available via allowances or part-time jobs. Suburban teenagers had their own rooms replete with radios and record players. “By the end of 1957,” says Professor Altschuler, “seventy-eight Elvis Presley items had grossed \$55 million.”

There is little argument that a new generation of teenagers had emerged in the fifties. Historians can trace the adolescent generations to the early twentieth century. The gap between parent and child always existed, but the new value system that set apart the two generations might have occurred earlier had the great depression and World War II not intervened. Television shows were geared to the very young and the parents. Radio had lost its nightly sitcoms to television and switched to news and music formats. Teenagers were tired of croon and woon ballads that did not address their feelings. New DJs emerged, who played the rock and roll songs for teenagers who sat in their rooms pretending to do their homework.

Was rock and roll responsible for the revolution in values that took place in the 1960s? Professor Jody Pennington believes that the emergence of rock and roll in the 1950s along with new forms of consumerism expressed “the inner conflict between conservative and rebellious forces for high school teenagers who wanted to rebel against their parents yet still grow up to be them.” J. Ronald Oakley disagrees. “Although their lifestyle had departed from the conventions of their elders,” Oakley believes “their basic ideas and attitudes were still the conservative ones that mirrored the conservatism of the affluent age in which they grew up.”

Don't Knock the Rock: Race, Business, and Society in the Rise of Rock and Roll

Forty Miles of Bad Road

From the beginning, rock 'n' roll was geared for movement, for dancing: it sounded best in a car, cruising down the highway or cutting down the boulevard. You could buy the record and play it at home above the din of parents yelling 'turn that crap down!' or 'you call that music?' But that was never the same as hearing it suddenly on the car radio (even if for the tenth time in the same day) when some cool disc jockey dropped the needle in the groove. The music was everywhere: blaring out of every apartment, a radio in every car, turned on all the time. In 1956, the year rock 'n' roll peaked, it was the perfect accompaniment for bombing around in a '49 Ford or a new '55 Chevy: raked and flamed, decked and lowered, chopped and channeled with fins and tails on a Saturday night; burning rubber zero to sixty to the first red light and then on to the next, looking for another chump with overhead cams, a 4.56 rear end to cut out.

Cars and kids came together in the 1950s, and rock 'n' roll was best man at the wedding. This was the latest generation of American Huck Finns running from routine and convention. Their rivers were the roads, highways, boulevards, avenues, and streets of America's big cities and small towns. Their rafts were their cars, and their Nigger Jim was the latest hit on the radio. The night was all beginning and without end.

Mobility meant escape: from the rigidity of home, from high school, from authority. Suburban mothers abhorred deviant behavior in their children and had little patience with wild rock 'n' rollers who threatened their own interests or the creeds and symbols they cherished. Dad wanted stability and order on the home front so he could go about his daily bread-winning tasks. Parents restrained their kids with 'restriction', a form of Levittown house arrest meant to quash any interest in music, dancing, motorcycles, souped-up cars, violence, and sex.

Rock 'n' roll reflected the interests and needs of its young public; it moved them. This raucous new music appeared in young people's lives at the crucial

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intersection of the dependency of puberty and the autonomy of the post-teen years. To millions at this age, sitting with the family around the tube watching Milton Berle or Sid Caesar was a drag. Instead they kept to themselves in their own rooms, listening to the hi-fi or radio, with posters of Little Richard, Elvis, and Buddy Holly on the wall; or they went to concerts or dated or hung out with friends at diners and juke joints. Whatever they did, they got away from parents; wherever they went, rock 'n' roll was there: reinforcing and enhancing the sensation of independence. Mom and Dad stayed home, secure in their own opinions, values, and standards of conduct. They knew bikers, greasers, and rock 'n' rollers who flouted them were ignorant or wicked.

The attitudes embodied by the music were rebellious and provocative. That in itself was nothing new. Jitterbuggers in the 1930s had had their music labeled 'syncopated savagery'. Now as parents, twenty years later, these former savages were shocked at how seriously their offspring took rock 'n' roll. Parents saw in rock 'n' roll a destructive force, not just a symptom of awkward adolescence. Partly because the kids of the postwar era had wealth like none before them, however, the generational conflict sharpened as never before. As Greil Marcus would later write: 'it's a sad fact that most of those over thirty cannot be a part of it [rock 'n' roll], and it cannot be a part of them.' Who, then, were these parents, these over-thirty enemies of rock 'n' roll?

Squaresville

Following their victory over fascist Germany and Japan, returning vets felt like national heroes. It was now time to earn a little money, have a family, and prosper. Commuting along the paved highways of the golden fifties in MG-TCs, ex-GIs basked perkily in the suburban afterglow of battlefield heroism. The world was theirs for the conquering: a promotion here, a new house there; a barbecue grill, 2.5 kids who would some day go to college, a wife at home enjoying—or enduring—what Betty Friedan would later call the feminine mystique. Heroes made good neighbors: conservative, a bit artificial, and stiff. Jumpy at the mention of Alger Hiss and Whittaker Chambers, communist spies and Congressional committees, good Americans wore loyalty oaths on their sleeves . . .

High school: educational institution and model of life. A world all its own, filled with pep rallies and glee clubs, dress codes and demerits, school papers and assembly programs, field trips and drill teams; a complex of hall passes and phi-deltas, cheerleaders and team spirit, Big-Man-on-Campus and jocks, clicks and outsiders; a realm where one dressed for success in letter jackets, chinos, and penny loafers. Students were groomed to compete in the toughest of schools: popularity. You were either neat or gross, peachy keen or spastic. Lose in this game and you were a creep, a turkey, a *nothing*.

In many small towns and city neighborhoods, school was the focus of students' social lives. They were whipped into enthusiastic abandon by the marching band and wooed by the majorettes at the Friday night football games in the fall under stadium lights or wowed by the cheerleaders at basketball games. There were hockey games, track meets, and the wrestling team, as well as a

plethora of cultural activities, from car washes and banquets to brownie sells and parades. To cap it off there were the high school balls: Homecoming, the sock hops, and the Senior Prom, the culmination of four exciting, memorable years. Amidst all this there was still time for classes. Governed by the conservative norms and mores of the middle class, these were simulations of 'real life' designed to transfigure zitty-faced kids into government or company employees, replicas of what William H. Whyte's 1956 volume dubbed *The Organization Man*. Character was molded by disciplinary measures like restrictions and demerits, but the emphasis was always on the individual. American high schools in the 1950s churned out good citizens: members of the Key Club or the Beta Club, trained in the habits of good citizenship; good employees: members of VICA, prepared to enter the world of work, or DECCA, the future marketing leaders of America; and good wives: members of the Future Home-makers of America, a credit to their sex. Still bolstered by the legacy of McCarthyism, moreover, schools had little problem dishing out their version of the 'American Way'. More than any other age-group, teenagers felt under pressure to conform and to become achievers in a society preoccupied with belonging and success.

Off campus, teenagers were flooded with enticements to consume. If they turned on the television or the radio, flipped through a magazine, or went to the movies, they found themselves barraged with endless images of a stimulating world, one which appeared as the virtual antithesis of high school's drab halls, lockers, and desks. Hedonism beckoned, and teenagers from middle-class families responded with indulgence: girls filled their hope chests with the basics for a good marriage; boys filled the tanks of their cars. They bought radios, cameras, hoola-hoops, frisbees, pogo sticks, television sets, swim suits, clothes, i.d. bracelets, deo, 'greasy kid stuff—anything that brought them pleasure.

Rock 'n' roll hit this world like a bomb. The ultimate safety valve, the ultimate escape for anyone destined for a nine-to-five office job, it was music for the moment (it barely lasted longer). For two or three minutes anybody could be a rebel: speed the car up, hang an arm out the window, cop an attitude, moon a cop, *anything*. The best tracks could obliterate time, creating a world you could vanish into, lose yourself in, and then return from with the help of the disc jockey's patter. Maybe the nine-to-five world could serve as a means to an end: consumption. But it couldn't give life a purpose.

Rock 'n' roll fit perfectly into the conflict between the new patterns of the consumer society and the traditional Puritan work ethic of abstinence and industriousness. For these well-to-do teenagers the day was divided between the two worlds: in the classroom teachers propagated the traditional values; in their free time teenagers lived a life of impulse shopping. Just as the stop-and-jerk pace of Chuck Berry's 'Sweet Little Sixteen' swings the young girl from pretty young wild thing to Daddy's little girl, so their lives oscillated between obedience and indulgence. Through the works of writers like Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller (who wrote 'Hound Dog' and 'Jailhouse Rock' for Elvis Presley, and all the Coasters' hits); Felice and Boudleaux Bryant (who penned hits for the Everly Brothers); and especially rock 'n' roll poet laureate Chuck Berry, rock 'n' roll spoke to these teenagers: it dealt with their problems and frustrations, their dancing and dates, their likes, dislikes, and obsessions.

That'll Be the Day

As much medium as message, rock 'n' roll was one of the first strokes of cultural self-awareness to blossom in the 1950s. Maybe the lyrics were sometimes as trite or nonsensical as Tin Pan Alley's, maybe white kids had problems understanding the singing, but rock 'n' roll—with its solid backbeat and driving eighth-note rhythm—fit the pace and rhythm of a world which had grown modern during the war and which was now coming to grips with its modernity: coast-to-coast broadcasts, transatlantic jet flights, super highways, fast cars, transistors, the Bomb, roller derbies, instant coffee, Sputnik, desegregation, *Playboy*, the rat race, frisbees, and Sugar Ray Robinson. Let Mom and Pop Suburbia condemn the noise and the meaningless babble, let them fox-trot and cha-cha to Frank Sinatra and Rosemary Clooney: what a slow burn! For Junior, it was slow dancing with a rise in his Levis and a tale to take back to the guys: get much?

From the start rock 'n' roll had its prophets of doom: 'it'll never last' went the wisdom of schmaltz, and it seemed sound enough. This was, after all, *Leave it to Beaver-land*: fads came, fads went. In fact, rock 'n' roll never dominated the charts or musical tastes. As Charlie Gillet points out in *The Sound of the City*, even during its heyday 'from 1955 through 1959, just under half of the top ten hits . . . could be classified as rock 'n' roll'. During those years, according to Serge Denisoff, rock 'n' roll 'did not constitute all of popular music, and even in the heyday of Elvis Presley not all teenagers were into his music, as many rock histories seem to imply'. Nonetheless rock 'n' roll endured. It was exclusive and well-guarded, with a strong sense of awareness that the music was something special; it was almost elitist in its sense of being reserved for those hip enough to *dig it*. Rock 'n' roll was a fever, a craze; and a lot of kids in the 1950s were on the edge of a fighting mood: 'Your ass is grass! Get bent! You're cruisin' for a bruisin'! Don't give me any grief.' Rock 'n' roll caught the mood—'Blue Suede Shoes', 'That'll Be the Day', 'Too Much Monkey Business', 'Hound Dog', 'Rip it Up'. Chuck Berry summed up the new generation's disdain for the older: 'Roll Over Beethoven.'

Rock 'n' roll alone did not induce the new teenage behavioral patterns in the 1950s. Prosperity, new forms of distribution, the portable radio, and television made their presence felt. Still, something in the music sparked fires where cinders glowed. Rock 'n' roll was the matrix inside which middle-class teenagers played out fantasies of rebellion within the context of family, home, and future career. With rock 'n' roll's distribution through radio, television, and film, these kids became the standard image of teenagers' lives and values for the entire social spectrum. With the appearance of Elvis, *they*—white, American, middle-class teenagers—could dream of performing the music as well. Elvis expressed the inner conflict between conservative and rebellious forces for high school teenagers who wanted to rebel against their parents yet still grow up to be them.

Graceland

If rock 'n' roll was the dominant music of white teenagers during the second half of the 1950s, then the key was the King: Elvis Presley. An outsider and a success, he summed up and incarnated the contradictions of the teenager's

world. He was one of them: white and young. He had rejected the adult world and sneered his way to the pinnacle of stardom. Elvis not only got the Cadillac; Elvis was bigger and better than a Cadillac. In his music, in his stage act, in his voice, he demanded—and got—respect. As Peter Wicke puts it, he ‘embodied the uncertain and consuming desire of American high school teenagers in the fifties, the desire somehow to escape the oppressive ordinariness which surrounded them without having to pay the bitter price of conformity. His quick success seemed to be the proof that, in principle, escape was possible’.

For parents and high school principals in an era when these words still meant something, Elvis Presley was sinful and wicked. He set a bad example. He was a hood, with his long sideburns, ducktail haircut, and curled upper lip. His blatant sexuality, aggressiveness, and bumping and grinding troubled adults. Inside the music industry, though, Elvis was King. From late April 1956, when ‘Heartbreak Hotel’ dethroned Nelson Riddle’s ‘Lisbon Antigua’ and Les Baxter’s ‘The Poor People of Paris’ at the top of the charts (remaining there for eight weeks), to his late March 1958 induction into the U.S. Army, Elvis ruled the hit parade. He had the number one single in no less than fifty-five out of one hundred and four weeks: ‘I Want You, I Need You, I Love You’; ‘Don’t Be Cruel’ and ‘Hound Dog’ (eleven weeks at number one); ‘Love Me Tender’ (five weeks); ‘Too Much’ (three weeks); ‘All Shook Up’ (nine weeks); ‘Teddy Bear’ and ‘Jailhouse Rock’ (seven weeks); and ‘Don’t’ (five weeks).

Although his manager, ‘Colonel’ Tom Parker, and his record label, RCA, orchestrated his ascent to the top of the pop world, Elvis himself ultimately deserves credit. He had the charisma, the style, the personality, the voice, and (in contrast to Jerry Lee Lewis, who still hasn’t lost his rough edges) he could adapt. Elvis had it all. As Greil Marcus would write: ‘The version of the American dream that is Elvis’s performance is blown up again and again, to contain more history, more people, more music, more hopes; the air gets thin but the bubble does not burst, nor will it ever. This is America when it has outstripped itself, in all of its extravagance.’ . . .

The poverty and rural attitudes that were a part of life in the postwar South influenced the course of rock ‘n’ roll’s development. Although the population of the Deep South had shifted during the twentieth century from ninety per cent rural to more than fifty per cent urban, transplanted bumpkins like the Presleys, who had themselves only recently moved to Memphis from Tupelo, Mississippi, stayed ‘country’. They did so, moreover, in spite of an increase in their standard of living. (The New Deal and World War Two had been important stimuli to economic growth in the South, but by the 1950s the region’s average per capita income was still only half that of the national average). Like country truck driver Elvis, rock ‘n’ roll reflected this migration from the farm to the city. Elvis’s first single had a blues number on the A-side and a country song on the flip side. Bill Haley had his roots in Texas and Oklahoma country swing in the tradition of Bob Wills. Jerry Lee (as well as Elvis and the other Sun label stars) had his roots in country swing and white gospel. The Everly Brothers had theirs in bluegrass and the country duet singing of Charlie and Ira Louvin and the Delmore Brothers.

Both the R&B and the country elements of rock 'n' roll have origins in the folk music traditions of the outsiders and outcasts of twentieth century America: on the one hand, the African-Americans who picked the cotton; on the other, the so-called 'white trash' who worked it through the cotton mills. The folk blues, typically in a first-person voice, express the experience of African-Americans living in the South during the first half of the twentieth century. The vocabulary is minimal and filled with images of traveling and country roads, field workers and prisoners. Although the dialect and diction are slightly different, the lyrics of country music deal with the realities of rural and city life in the South and the West, again in simple, straightforward language that incorporates the colloquialisms of these regions. Images of truck stops and sunsets, honky-tonks and fields, gamblers and drinkers, cheating and working tell the sentimental stories of taxing, emotional circumstances. The lyrics, sentiments, and, frequently, religious undertones common to both country blues and country and western reflected the inanity of segregation: Southerners of any race had more in common with each other than with anyone from other regions of the USA. Both forms feature expressive vocals: on the one hand, the sharp, nasal sound of country; on the other, the minor pentatonic sound of the blues. An original American sound was heard in the meeting of the two: first in minstrels and then in the songs of Stephen Foster, who was influenced not only by the minstrels but by the music of the African-American churches as well. Generations later, rock 'n' roll would emerge as a sort of electrified Stephen Foster in the unlikely form of Bill Haley.

Although both blues and country had long been commercialized when they merged in the guise of rock 'n' roll, Decca was taking a chance on Haley. And while the label enjoyed great success—at his first session with Decca, Haley recorded both 'Rock Around the Clock' and 'Shake, Rattle and Roll'—taking chances was not the norm for the majors. Their standard operating procedure had long been to chum out 'cover versions' of songs that had already been recorded by someone else. In the 1950s, however, the majors gave cover versions a new twist. Just as in the 1920s Paul Whiteman's orchestra had set out, in his words, to 'make a lady' if hot jazz, so thirty years later the industry recast R&B in an all-white form: performed by whites (such as Steve Lawrence, Andy Williams, Pat Boone, or the Fontane Sisters), recorded by whites, sold by whites, bought by whites, and profited from by whites. (Otherwise rejecting African-American music, the majors would at best record so-called 'black sepias' like Nat King Cole, who appealed to the white mainstream with sentimental, melodramatic crooning.)

As part of this tactic, the majors thus recorded white artists covering R&B tunes originally cut by African-American artists for the independent labels or 'indies'. These white versions were arranged and performed to sound like banal pop music, with a unique beat but always in a simple 'sing-along' form that would be music to white ears. Working on assumptions derived from European classical music traditions, producers like Mitch Miller considered their cover versions to be an improvement on the originals, which they thought sounded like primitive jungle music: harsh, low-down, and dirty. Such assumptions were broadly shared by the white record-buying public. In mainstream America,

Bill Haley was thought of as having introduced a new music, a new rhythm; hardly anyone bothered to mention that 'his sound came from the music of the black population, a people whose "great sense of rhythm" had always been admired, but who, white America insisted, otherwise had nothing non-physical to contribute'.

A Choice of Colors

Cultural interaction between African-Americans and the white majority was never strictly a matter of black *or* white. An irreducible component of Southern culture was the mutual influence of the races upon one another. At shows in towns like Macon, Georgia, white kids would sneak in (behind the backs of their parents and white authorities) and slip upstairs to see the African-American kids down on the floor. At first, the white kids would just sit and watch. In the end, however, they were bound to come down and dance. When some young white performers—like Jerry Lee Lewis, sneaking into the 'nigra' clubs in Ferriday, Louisiana, with his cousin Jimmy Lee Swaggart to hear artists like B.B. King—took the music at face value, they helped transform popular music and thereby American youth culture.

Sometimes these Southern rockers covered R&B hits, but more often they brought elements of R&B into their own tunes. Instead of adapting African-American styles to white tastes, they tried to imitate the originals as closely as they could, as when Elvis covered Big Mama Thornton's 'Hound Dog'. Perhaps the swing disappeared in these white attempts at R&B: simplified in rock 'n' roll to a more rigid, basic rhythm under the influence of Hank Williams and the hard-driving style of country pickers like Merle Travis, Joe Maphis, and James Burton. Still, rock 'n' roll was noisy and aggressive because these musicians had been singing and playing that way all along. The rock 'n' roll played by their native sons, rockabilly, frightened white Southerners most. Long in touch with African-American music, these musicians had sufficient spirit to sell records in the R&B, country, and pop markets. Since they were white, moreover, they could get away with it to such a degree that by 1956 even genuine R&B records started to gain acceptance in the mainstream pop market, much to the horror of many white Southerners.

It was no surprise, therefore, that 'the most extreme and bizarre expressions of antagonism towards rock 'n' roll tended to take place in the South. In April 1956, the *New York Times* reported several attempts by white Southern church groups to have rock 'n' roll suppressed. The whole movement towards rock 'n' roll, the church groups revealed, was part of a plot by the NAACP to corrupt white Southern youth'. A stepchild of R&B, the music was known dismissively in the South during those years as 'nigger music'. Rock 'n' roll was music played by and for *niggers* (African-American or white): Little Richard, Fats Domino, and Chuck Berry; Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Buddy Holly. Renegade rednecks in the best Southern tradition, the white rock 'n' rollers were the very stuff of Southern nightmares. For although white Southerners deemed African-Americans rarely capable of attaining the same level of rectitude, white descent into blackness had to be averted. For decades

Southern whites had drawn arms against an unseen enemy, evincing a distrust of both mulattoes (who *looked* white) and whites who behaved 'black'. Whites who, like the Southern rock 'n' rollers, strayed too close to African-Americans were known as 'white niggers': genetically white but 'black' in their behavior. The music they played, rock 'n' roll, which sounded like R&B, was the 'jungle music' of burr-heads, blue-skins, tar-pots, spies, jigaboos, darkies, and shines.

The white South's image of African-Americans in the 1950s was much as it had been since the turn of the century. Generations had grown up believing Booker T. Washington to have spoken for all African-Americans and spoken the truth: that they were content to 'cast down their buckets' where they were, chop cotton, lay rails, and work, work, work until Saturday night. By the 1950s, Booker T. was long dead, but in white minds Sambo continued to shuffle contentedly along, bucket in hand. Even while insisting that 'our Nigras are good Nigras', white Southerners had nonetheless devised dogmas and institutions that assured the greatest possible distance between the races. Known collectively as Jim Crow, these had consisted of both legal and extra-legal means designed to keep African-Americans in their place and to compel them to behave 'properly' in the presence of whites. The legal measures—the poll tax, stiff residency requirements, literacy tests, and 'grandfather clauses'—kept African-Americans away from the polls and thus ensured the stability of a caste system which governed all aspects of African-American life. Extralegal steps helped guarantee the invisibility of most African-Americans and made those who were visible the Sambos whites needed to see: gullible children in grown-up bodies who slapped their knees, jumped, and turned, and whom whites could allow to run free within their own world without constant guidance after work on Saturday—as long as they showed up at work on Monday morning.

The white South's ability to sustain the system was, of course, challenged on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama, on 1 December 1955, when Rosa Parks refused to yield her seat to a white man. Although it took years to secure its greatest gains (after Montgomery there was a lull), with Martin Luther King, Jr. more than rising to the occasion the civil rights movement was in the ascendant.

From the Station to the Train

By the time of the civil rights movement, another movement, primarily geographical and cultural rather than social and political, had long since begun: the exodus of millions of African-Americans from the countryside to the nation's cities. Prompted partly by the decline and subsequent mechanization of Southern agriculture, partly by the attraction of often military-spawned jobs, and partly by the dream of a better life beyond Jim Crow, this vast folk migration took hundreds of thousands to Northern industrial cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit and, to a lesser degree, Southern cities like Memphis and New Orleans. Between 1860 and 1960 the African-American share of the total Southern population dwindled from almost fifty per cent to twenty-nine per cent.

Musical forms born and raised in the South—the blues, jazz, gospel, R&B, and soul—also traveled. On the road, gospel waited alongside the blues in bus depots; jazz and R&B rode together on trains. The movement to the cities helped turn the blue note electric, and African-American radio stations pumped it out. By the early 1950s, R&B stations dotted the urban landscape. Fans had only to turn their tuning knobs to hear the dance blues of singers like Amos Milburn, Roy Brown, Fats Domino, and Lloyd Price, and the ‘hot’ style of disc jockeys like Hamp Swain in Macon, Georgia, Zenas ‘Big Daddy’ Sears and ‘Jockey Jack’ Gibson in Atlanta, and ‘Sugar Daddy’ in Birmingham. Meanwhile, Alan Freed at WINS in New York set a precedent for white disc jockeys playing R&B; those who followed his lead included Al Benson in Chicago, Hunter Hancock in Los Angeles, and ‘Poppa Stoppa’ in New Orleans.

These and other artists and disc jockeys gave a voice to a nation of wanderers looking for home: a tricky concept, as James Brown once pointed out, for a people who had been told to move along for a century and a half. Newly-urbanized African-Americans faced a world very different from the one they had known before, but when it came to the question of color, they found themselves on familiar ground. Not surprisingly, when confronted by the racial prejudice of the North and West, they survived just as they and their predecessors had done in the South: by building up their community, families, clubs, and churches. Whether in the North or South, then, home was cut off from white society. White people may have heard R&B as it made its way across the air waves. What their ears didn’t hear, what their eyes didn’t see, what they wanted neither to hear nor to see, was the distinct *community* which it addressed, a largely self-contained world created by American apartheid: the chitlin’ circuit. . . .

Gospel music spoke for and sustained a distinct community, retaining collective and communal features which expressed something of the suppression which so many in that community had experienced. It also helped to transform that community. It did so partly through its influence on rhythm and blues.

Boogie at Midnight

Cacophonous vocals shouted explicit lyrics; loud saxophones, pianos, and guitars honked, rolled, and wailed while drums banged out the heavy rhythm; delirious artists expressed emotions and ideas which exhilarated their audience. Until 1949, when Jerry Wexler gave it the more sophisticated name ‘rhythm and blues’ while writing for *Billboard*, the white music industry branded all this ‘race music’. The lines between urban blues and R&B were tenuous (as are all popular musical categories), and the early R&B charts looked like a blues who’s-who: John Lee Hooker’s ‘Boogie Chillen’, Lonnie Johnson’s ‘Tomorrow Night’, shouter Wynonie Harris’s ‘Good Rockin’ Tonight’, as well as tunes by Howlin’ Wolf, Charles Brown, Muddy Waters, Bull Moose Jackson, and Ivory Joe Hunter.

R&B was updated and mellowed as the influence of gospel smoothed over its rougher edges. Technology played a crucial part. Although different

radio stations programmed specific genres, listeners were not so constrained; as a result gospel singles crossed over to the R&B charts: in 1950, for example, the Five Blind Boys' 'Our Father' was chasing Wynonie Harris's 'I Like My Baby's Pudding' up the charts. Quartet singing, long a crossover area for artists like the Mills Brothers and the Ink Spots, was the springboard for the 'bird groups' (the Ravens and the Orioles), who in turn inspired groups like the Clovers and the Dominoes. Founded in 1950 by Billy Ward, the Dominoes built their sound around the gospel-style vocals of Clyde McPhatter. Race restricted the success of songs like 'Do Something for Me' and 'Have Mercy Baby' to the R&B charts, until the appearance of rock 'n' roll enabled an R&B group, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, to hit the charts for sixteen weeks in 1956, peaking at number six, with 'Why Do Fools Fall in Love?' The original did better than the cover versions by the Diamonds and Gale Storm. The Platters, who had charted in 1955 with 'Only You' released three Top Ten pop and R&B hits in 1956. Many of the R&B acts that followed went on to become rock 'n' roll, rather than soul, stars. Imperial artist Fats Domino rode 'Blueberry Hill' and 'I'm in Love Again' into the Top Ten. Two other 'R&B' artists, Chuck Berry and Little Richard, hit the charts with 'Maybellene', 'School Days', and 'Sweet Little Sixteen'; and 'Tutti-Frutti', 'Long Tall Sally', and 'Rip it Up', respectively.

White listeners started to develop a better feeling for the music: they heard R&B differently. As it became familiar, it became acceptable on its own terms. In its initial cross over into white culture, R&B attracted a cult following among college and high school students. Its rhythm and forbidden thrills, though still contrasting sharply with the milquetoast sounds of Perry Como and company, had been made more palatable by gospel. White R&B fans could now accept the real thing, not covers.

Even though more and more people came to prefer R&B, the majors could not and did not start promoting the product; they seemed scarcely aware of the market. The indies—often using singers with regional appeal in a regional market—detected the trend more quickly. Largely through their efforts, some juke boxes began stocking R&B records, while white dance bands started to incorporate R&B hits in their sets. Whether through the efforts of the majors or the indies, singers and musicians like Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, and Little Richard found themselves able to play African-American music *as* African-American music: no crooning sepia nonsense. Racial barriers were dissolving as sons of slaves and sons of Pilgrims broke sonic barriers to create the sound of rebellion and deliverance: rock 'n' roll.

Whatever their race, these artists were dependent upon the various media to get their music to the widest possible audience. The people who played rock 'n' roll could not have known they were making history, but they did know they were on to something new, something that broke with musical traditions. These early rock 'n' rollers were no navel-gazers: they were carnival sideshow entertainers with a product to sell and a get-rich-quick scheme: a number one record. The world of rock 'n' roll was not only a cultural and social expression but also a commercial network of musical commodities—singles and albums—which had to be recorded, distributed, and promoted.

Have You Heard the News?

The music industry has survived despite the appearance of successive new media that at one time or another seemed capable of subjugating it. Radio initially made the need to buy records appear obsolete—until swing music became so popular in the 1930s that a rush on records ensued. Later, television appeared to threaten the industry. Again, however, it endured (most recently by becoming a part of television through MTV). Recorded music has survived because of its unique ability to create an emotional bond between the listener and recorded sound. Everything else—the technology, the marketing, the profits—have resulted from that bond and its basic power.

During and after World War Two, the record industry, radio, and television all experienced changes that together radically altered the modes of musical production: new recording techniques and small-group recording budgets; new companies and a redefinition of the target audience; reductions in record prices; and a new affiliation with broadcast radio. The shift from 78 revolutions per minute to the 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ and 45 rpm speeds, a change in the sizes of records, the substitution of shellac by vinyl, and television's influence on radio station programming—each had an impact on the industry. Although its story cannot be reduced solely to technical innovations, rock 'n' roll did evolve out of and along with the technology of these media. What was new about rock 'n' roll was its relationship with the means of mass communication: record, radio, television, and film. American rock 'n' roll depended on the existence of these media and accepted them without compromise as a condition of artistic creativity.

This Year's Model

Notable technological improvements associated with the introduction of magnetic tape resulted in recording techniques which were not only inexpensive but which made both overdubbing (with remarkably improved microphones) and the correcting of mistakes possible. One pioneer was guitarist Les Paul, who by 1947 had started making 'sound-on-sound' recordings. Real multitrack recording was first used in 1954. Employing just two tracks, it was far from today's sixty-four track digital studios; the basic principle of studio music production—sound-on-sound—nevertheless remains unaltered. Multitrack technology was to influence both the sound and the structure of rock music, since a producer could now assemble the music from individually recorded parts in a final mix instead of reproducing a single take of a song: records no longer needed to be exact copies of live performances, rendering the large rooms previously employed for recording big band orchestras unnecessary. . . .

When the majors finally realized that rock 'n' roll was here to stay, they restructured their A&R departments and hired men who had a better feel for the sound and who understood the new standards. From this point on, the A&R men from the majors picked from the same flock of producers, song writers, arrangers, and session men as the indies.

The most conspicuous technological innovation triggered the 'Battle of the Speeds'. By 1948 CBS engineer Peter Goldmark had perfected the high fidelity long-playing record (LP), which reduced the playing speed from 78 to 33½ rpm. With their low noise characteristics and extended duration, LPs transformed not only recording studios and the contents of records themselves, but also the industry's hierarchy, as Columbia first stole the lead on RCA only to see the latter respond with 45 rpm singles. The ascent of rock 'n' roll paralleled that of the 45 rpm single (along with the portable radio). Until the emergence of rock 'n' roll, and especially Elvis Presley, the 45 rpm single's role in popular music had been minimal. Aimed at the new teenage market and priced within reach of teenagers' pocket money, however, its popularity rose quickly.

Until rock 'n' roll appeared in the 1950s, radio programming had changed very little since the 1930s, when the friendly, conversational microphone styles of Al Jarvis at KFWB in Los Angeles, Martin Block at WNEW in New York, and Arthur Godfrey had first raised announcers to the status of 'personalities', who received as much attention from their listeners as the music they played. Jarvis pioneered the 'Make Believe Ballroom' format, which simulated the atmosphere of a ballroom through the use of real or contrived conversations with the performers and dancers. Block's use of this framework would engender *Your Hit Parade* and *Lucky Lager Dance Time*. Godfrey's irreverent style helped make the radio disc jockey someone not to be treated lightly; his early morning show attracted many listeners and thus numerous sponsors. Such sponsorship represented a commercialization of radio that would have profound consequences. When the American Tobacco Company started sponsoring *The Lucky Strike Hit Parade* nationwide, records began to be ranked according to their popularity. Air play became the most effective type of direct marketing. By the end of World War Two most singers, musicians, record companies, and sheet music publishers had become aware of the interaction between sales and air play. Record sales and taste trends increasingly engendered and reflected one another: each at once parasite on and host for the other; both having a symbiotic relationship with the charts (particularly *Billboard's*). A song could become a hit because a lot of people liked it and bought the record, and a lot of people liked a song and bought the record because it was a hit.

Since television during the 1950s rapidly took over the family entertainment role once held by radio, and since programs like *Monitor* (a weekend program of interviews, satire, and news features) proved failures, radio programming other than news broadcasts returned to the hands of station owners, who responded to the challenge of television by converting their stations to a 'Top-Forty' format in order to survive. Top-Forty programs shaped teenagers' perceptions of rock 'n' roll: music was ranked, and hits were important. Cheap, battery-driven portable radios made possible by transistor technology came on the market in 1954. Rock 'n' roll developed within a technological milieu increasingly beyond parental control. Teenagers' relative independence in deciding what they liked and what they wanted to listen to resulted in an age-specific audience, and rock 'n' roll developed on its audience's terms. . . . Between 1954 and 1959 the record industry increased its sales from \$213,000,000 to \$603,000,000. A large proportion of the increase in

sales accrued to the indies, who made their break into the market by providing assorted kinds of rock 'n' roll. After the majors had dropped their 'race' and 'new jazz' artists during World War Two, the indies had moved into the 'race' market and begun recording rhythm and blues. In 1954 they extended their market to white kids as they developed distribution networks sufficient to give them as good a chance of having a hit with a new record as any of the majors; once they saw the possibilities of profit in rock 'n' roll, they recorded almost anybody singing almost anything and put all their energy and money into promoting those records that seemed to stand a chance. The independents doubled their number of Top Ten hits between 1955 and 1956, then doubled them again by 1957. They succeeded in spotting and responding to the grass-roots signs of rock 'n' roll's popularity partly because, unlike the majors, the indies often signed singers with regional or local appeal. . . . Although lacking the sales figures, budgets, and distribution facilities of the major music publishers, record companies, and radio networks, the indies nevertheless changed the direction of popular music and the structure of the record industry.

The indies had produced twice as many hits by the end of the decade as the majors, yet the struggle for survival never eased up. Few would survive the 1960s. Plagued by competition from bootleggers (who pirated copies of their hits) and always fighting to collect from their distributors, indie labels still had to pay 'consultancy fees' to disc jockeys, and the monthly overheads of staff and offices, on top of the costs of pressings. Sometimes their wisest move was to license a likely hit to larger companies like Mercury, ABC, or Dot (all of whom formed fruitful relationships with independent producers).

Through their influence over distribution networks, the majors effectively controlled most record stores, juke boxes, sheet music sales, and radio airplay. Slow to realize the closing of the American racial gap which accompanied and followed World War Two, the majors thus adopted a conservative strategy, deploying their sizeable resources to fight for the success of their established performers, mostly older artists from the dance band era still under five year contracts. The singers who operated under such contracts had to be musical chameleons and appeal to just about anyone (unlike rock 'n' roll madmen like Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis who were, by contrast, anything but malleable). The majors used their contract singers for the cover versions recorded, released, and promoted hot on the tail of R&B hits. The majors did renovate their commercial policy by releasing singles more quickly, while strengthening their promotion work by marketing from coast to coast. Confident in their market domination, however, they underestimated the ways in which a few radio disc jockeys who appreciated the power of rhythm and blues (such as Danny 'Cat Man' Stiles, Hal Jackson, and George 'Hound Dog' Lorenz) could penetrate the cracks of segregation and discrimination by playing it to anyone who would listen.

The majors slowly came to understand teenage record buyers, drop their traditional sales categories of popular music and rhythm and blues, and call anything that appealed to teenage record buyers 'rock 'n' roll'. When the majors finally acted, rock 'n' roll devolved into teenybopper music, designed for and chiefly bought by people between the ages of nine and twenty four,

who determined what the record charts looked like by the manner in which they spent their own or their parents' money. When some seventeen-year-old Peggy Sue bought the latest hit single by the King, she cared little about the technology or money that had gone into its production and had little interest in knowing that she was dancing to a product made to be marketed and consumed for profit. She simply bought a record she *liked*. Her reasons for picking this particular record were, of course, influenced by many things—her age, gender, race, and social background as well as the forces of advertising and peer group pressure—which may have had little to do with the song itself. Later, as she grew older, the music would nevertheless bring back memories of those halcyon days and the experiences she and her friends had shared with a rock 'n' roll backdrop.

As the music industry itself matured, styles would change: from heavy to folk, from country to soft, from bubble gum to disco, from glitter to glam; all, however, were variations on the basic rock 'n' roll theme, products of industry attempts to sustain old or develop new markets, while kids tried to find a new sound that fit their world and their experiences. Musicians starting out as kids looking for new sounds came into the industry and developed new styles in the lacuna between the industry's creating and following trends. As a result, the various genres of rock music through the ages—and especially the records that came with them—had (and continue to have) one thing in common: what James Von Schilling has called the ability to 'capture in time a unique combination of music, performance, and artistry and then enable us to make this "timepiece" part of our personal experience'.

Afterword: Funeral Dirge

American Pie

Legend has it that rock 'n' roll died. Estimates of the precise date differ, but most agree that at some point in the late 1950s rock 'n' roll passed away, only to be reborn as 'rock' in 1964 when the Beatles arrived in New York and Dylan went electric. . . .



God's Country: America in the Fifties

Generation in a Spotlight

As the 1950s opened, America's adolescents were basically a conservative, unrebelligious lot. Although the word *teenager* had come into widespread circulation in the 1940s to describe this distinct age group mired in the limbo between puberty and adulthood, the teenagers of the early fifties had not yet developed a distinct subculture. They had few rights and little money of their own, wore basically the same kind of clothing their parents wore, watched the same television shows, went to the same movies, used the same slang, and listened to the same romantic music sung by Perry Como, Frank Sinatra, and other middle-aged or nearly middle-aged artists. Their idols were Joe DiMaggio, General MacArthur, and other prominent members of the older generation. In spite of what they learned from older kids and from the underground pornography that circulated on school playgrounds, they were amazingly naive about sex, believing well into their high school years that French kissing could cause pregnancy or that the douche, coitus interruptus, and chance could effectively prevent it. Heavy petting was the limit for most couples, and for those who went "all the way" there were often strong guilt feelings and, for the girl at least, the risk of a bad reputation. Rebellion against authority, insofar as it occurred, consisted primarily of harmless pranks against unpopular adult neighbors or teachers, occasional vandalism (especially on Halloween night), smoking cigarettes or drinking beer, and the decades-old practice of mooning. Although most families had the inevitable clashes of opinion between parents and offspring, there were few signs of a "generation gap" or of rebellion against the conventions of the adult world.

But all of this began to change in the early fifties, and by the middle of the decade the appearance of a distinct youth subculture was causing parents and the media to agonize over the scandalous behavior and rebellious nature of the nation's young people. The causes of the emergence of this subculture are not hard to find. One was the demographic revolution of the postwar years that was increasing the influence of the young by producing so many of

them in such a short period of time. Another was the affluence of the period, an affluence shared with the young through allowances from their parents or through part-time jobs. As teenagers acquired their own money, they were able to pursue their own life-style, and now American business and advertisers geared up to promote and exploit a gigantic youth consumer market featuring products designed especially for them. Then there were the effects of progressive education and Spockian child-rearing practices, for while neither was quite as permissive or indulgent toward the young as the critics claimed, they did emphasize the treatment of adolescents as unique people who should be given the freedom to develop their own personality and talents. Another factor was television and movies, which had the power to raise up new fads, new heroes, and new values and to spread them to young people from New York to Los Angeles. And finally, there was rock 'n' roll, which grew from several strains in American music and emerged at mid-decade as the theme song of the youth rebellion and as a major mold and reflector of their values.

One of the earliest landmarks in the history of the youth rebellion came in 1951 with the publication of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Infinitely more complex than most of its young readers or older detractors perceived, this novel featured the actions and thoughts of one Holden Caulfield, a sixteen-year-old veteran of several private schools, who roams around New York City in his own private rebellion from home and school. In colloquial language laced with obscenities absent from most novels of the day, Holden tells the reader of his rejection of the phoniness and corruption of the adult world, of how parents, teachers, ministers, actors, nightclub pianists and singers, old grads, and others lie to themselves and to the young about what the world is really like. *The Catcher in the Rye* was popular throughout the fifties with high school and college students, for while young people might not understand all that Salinger was trying to say, they did identify with his cynical rejection of the adult world and adult values. The book was made even more popular by the attempts of school boards, libraries, and state legislatures to ban it. It was one of the first books, if not the first, to perceive the existence of a generation gap in the supposedly happy, family-oriented society of the early 1950s.

Still another sign of the changes occurring in the nation's youth was the rise of juvenile delinquency. Between 1948 and 1953 the number of juveniles brought into court and charged with crimes increased by 45 percent, and it was estimated that for every juvenile criminal brought into court there were at least five who had not been caught. It was especially disturbing that juvenile crimes were committed by organized gangs that roamed—and seemed to control—the streets of many of the larger cities. Street gangs had existed before in American history, but in the fifties they were larger, more violent, and more widespread than ever before. Thanks to modern communications, they tended to dress alike, to use the same jargon, and share the same values all across the country. And they were not just in America—they appeared in England (Teddy Boys), Sweden ("Skinn-Nuttar" or leather jackets), and other industrial countries across the globe. The youth rebellion, including the criminal fringe that made up part of it, was international.

Learning about these gangs in their newspapers and weekly magazines, Americans were horrified by what they read and by how often they read it. It seemed that hardly a week went by without the occurrence of shocking crimes committed by teenagers or even younger children who did not seem to know the difference between good and bad—or worse, deliberately chose the bad over the good. Sporting colorful names like Dragons, Cobras, Rovers, and Jesters, they carried all kinds of weapons—zip guns, pistols, rifles, knives, chains, shotguns, brass knuckles, broken bottles, razors, lead pipes, molotov cocktails, machetes, and lye and other chemicals. They drank alcoholic beverages, smoked reefers, took heroin and other drugs, had their own twisted code of honor, and organized well-planned attacks on other gangs or innocent victims. They also had their own jargon, borrowed from the criminal underworld and spoken by gangs from coast to coast: *dig, duke, gig, jap, jazz, rumble, turf, cool, chick, pusher, reefer*, and hundreds of other slang terms.

To a nation accustomed to believing in the essential goodness of its young people, the behavior of these delinquent gangs was puzzling and frightening. They seemed to pursue violence for the pure joy of violence and to delight in sadistic actions toward other gangs or innocent victims. They engaged in shootings, stabbings, individual and gang rapes, senseless beatings, and unspeakable tortures. They extorted “protection” money from frightened merchants, sprayed crowds in streets or restaurants or subways with rifle fire, doused people with gasoline and set them ablaze, firebombed bars and nightclubs, stole automobiles, vandalized apartments and public buildings, and fought vicious gang wars over girls or invasion of turf or to avenge some real or imagined slight. They often terrorized and vandalized schools and assaulted teachers and students, leading the *New York Daily News* in 1954 to describe “rowdiness, riot, and revolt,” as the new three Rs in New York’s public schools.

It was particularly disturbing that these young hoodlums often showed no remorse for their actions, recounting with delight to police or social workers the details of a rape, murder, or torture in which they had been involved. One eighteen-year-old who had participated in the torture and murder of an innocent young man in a public park told police that “last night was a supreme adventure for me.” Describing his role in the killing of another gang member, one young man told police that “he was laying on the ground looking up at us. I kicked him on the jaw or someplace; then I kicked him in the stomach. That was the least I could do, was kick ‘im.” In another incident a gang member described his part in a stabbing by saying: “I stabbed him with a bread knife. You know, I was drunk, so I just stabbed him. [Laughs] He was screaming like a dog.”

The rise of juvenile delinquency, and especially its organized forms in the street gangs of the major cities, caused agonizing soul-searching among anxious parents, school authorities, psychologists, and other experts on adolescent and criminal behavior. Parents of delinquents anxiously asked, “What did we do wrong?” and many admitted to school, police, and court authorities that they could not control their children. The experts came up with a whole range of explanations of juvenile criminality, blaming it on

poverty, slum conditions, permissive parents, lack of religious and moral training, television, movies, comic books, racism, parents who were too busy working or pursuing their own pleasures to rear their children properly, the high divorce rate with the resulting broken homes, anxiety over the draft, and decline of parental discipline and control. Early in the decade most authorities tended to blame it on the problems of poverty and slum living, but as the decade wore on, it became very clear that many of the delinquents were from middle- and upper-class families that provided a good environment for their children. So then it was blamed on society or on simple "thrill seeking" by bored, pampered, and jaded youths. As the problem worsened, many were inclined to agree with Baltimore psychologist Robert Linder, who claimed that the young people of the day were suffering from a form of collective mental illness. "The youth of the world today," he told a Los Angeles audience in 1954, "is touched with madness, literally sick with an aberrant condition of mind formerly confined to a few distressed souls but now epidemic over the earth."

Whatever the causes of juvenile delinquency, and they were certainly multiple and complex, it was obvious that delinquent and criminal acts by individual adolescents and organized gangs were increasing every year and were making the streets of many large cities dangerous for law-abiding citizens. And while many people thought of the problem as one that plagued primarily the slums of the big cities of the Northeast or California, it soon became clear that it was spreading to large cities all across the country, to the new suburbs, to the rural areas which were so accessible now to middle-class teenagers with automobiles, and to the South, which had often prided itself on not having the problems of the big northern cities. In 1954 *New York Times* education editor Benjamin Fine wrote a much-discussed book on the problem, *1,000,000 Delinquents*, which correctly predicted that during the next year 1 million adolescents would get into serious trouble that would bring them into the courtroom. In that same year *Newsweek* published an article entitled "Our Vicious Young Hoodlums: Is There Any Hope?" By now, many people thought that there was none and found themselves in the unusual position of being afraid of their own children.

By the midfifties Americans had become so saturated with stories of juvenile delinquency that there was a tendency among many to stereotype all teenagers as bad, especially if they adopted the clothing, ducktail haircuts, or language of gangs. But the truth was that few teenagers were juvenile delinquents or gang members, very few used drugs (except for alcohol), and very few ever got into trouble with the police. And many teenagers resented the stereotyped image the adult world had of them. As one seventeen-year-old high school girl said in 1955, "I've never set a fire, robbed a gas station, or beaten a defenseless old man. In fact, I don't even know anyone who has. . . . I wish someone would think of the 95% of us who *aren't* delinquents. Because we're here, too." The young woman was correct, of course, for most teenagers were not delinquents. But they were changing in ways that were disturbing even the parents of "good" teens, and one of the major causes of these changes was the rise of a new musical form, rock 'n' roll. . . .

Born in the small town of Fairmount, Indiana, on February 8, 1931, James Dean led a life much like that of the troubled youth he later came to portray in his movies. His mother died when he was nine, and he was reared on the farm of his aunt and uncle with only brief glimpses of his father. A confused adolescent, he went to California after his graduation from high school, attended Santa Monica City College and UCLA, and played some small parts in movies before going back to New York to study acting in 1951. In 1954 he came back to Hollywood as an admirer of Marlon Brando, motorcycles, and fast cars. He quickly earned a reputation as a lazy, undisciplined, ill-mannered star who often stayed out all night long and then showed up on the set too tired to do good work. His first major film, *East of Eden* (1955), brought him instant fame through his portrayal of the sensitive son suffering from the fear that his father does not love him, but his rise as a teenage idol came later in the year through his performance as a misunderstood and rebellious teenager in *Rebel Without a Cause*. Costarring Natalie Wood and Sal Mineo, the film was released to the theaters in the fall of 1955, only two weeks after Dean's tragic death in a high-speed wreck between his Porsche and a Ford on a lonely California highway. By the time the just-completed *Giant* was released, in November of 1956, an astonishing cult had sprung up around the young star and his death, so senseless, at the age of twenty-four.

The legends that grew up around James Dean were the greatest since the death of Rudolph Valentino. Young people saw Dean as the embodiment of their restlessness, confusion, and rejections, as a rebel fighting, like them, against the rules and conformity the adult world was trying to impose upon them. But while Valentino and most other movie legends had appealed as sex symbols. Dean appealed to an age group—to young males and females between fourteen and twenty-four. Young males saw him as a symbol of their own rebellious and troubled nature, while young girls saw him as an attractive, sensual male who needed mothering as much as sexual love. Although Dean was a good actor with great promise, his acting reputation was exaggerated beyond all reality by the myths and legends that shrouded his life and acting career after his premature death.

Within a few weeks after Dean's death, Warner Brothers was swamped with hundreds of letters. Their number rose to 3,000 a month by January of 1956 and to 7,000 a month by July, some with money enclosed for a picture of the dead star. The fan magazines played the Dean legend for all it was worth, publishing thousands of pictures and stories. In these magazines and across the national teenage grapevine, the rumors flew: that he was not really dead, that he had been so disfigured from the wreck that he had gone into hiding or been sent to a sanatorium, that he was just a vegetable in a secret hospital room known only to his close friends, that he had talked to some of his fans from beyond his grave, and that his tomb in Fairmount, Indiana, had been emptied by grave robbers or by Dean's own miraculous resurrection. Several records appeared—"Tribute to James Dean," "The Ballad of James Dean," "His Name Was Dean." "The Story of James Dean," "Jimmy Jimmy," and "We'll Never Forget You." Dozens of biographies and other literary tributes were rushed to the market, along with the inevitable movie,

The James Dean Story. When the wreckage of his car was put on display in Los Angeles, over 800,000 people paid to view it. The adulation swept teens all across America and even in Europe. In England, a young man legally changed his name to James Dean, copied his clothing and mannerisms, went to America twice to visit the real Dean's family and grave, and claimed to have seen *Rebel Without a Cause* over 400 times. As *Look* magazine observed, the subject of this almost psychopathic adulation was "a 24-year old who did not live long enough to find out what he had done and was in too much of a hurry to find out who he was."

Along with *The Wild One*, a 1954 film starring Marlon Brando as the leader of a motorcycle gang, *The Blackboard Jungle* and the films of James Dean helped to spawn a series of films aimed specifically at young people. In addition to the films of Elvis Presley and other teen idols, the second half of the fifties saw a spate of second-rate rock movies—*Rock Around the Clock*, *Don't Knock the Rock*, *Rock Pretty Baby*, *Rock Around the World*, and *Let's Rock*—and a series of shallow, trashy movies about young people and delinquency, such as *Girls in Prison*, *Eighteen and Anxious*, *Reform School Girl*, *Hot Rod Rumble*, and *High School Confidential*. For better or worse—mostly worse—teenagers were getting their own movies as well as their own music.

In 1955 teenagers had their music, their movies, their idols—dead and alive—but as yet they had no one who combined all three of these and served as a focal point for their growing consciousness as a subculture. But he was waiting in the wings, for in that year a young performer with a regional reputation was making records and gaining a wide following among teenagers, especially young girls, with live performances in southern cities that were often punctuated by desperate attempts by the police to prevent these screaming fans from rushing the stage to tear off his clothes. He was a James Dean fan, who had seen *Rebel Without a Cause* several times, could recite the script by heart, and had been wearing tight pants, leather jackets, and a ducktail haircut with long sideburns for several years. In 1956 he would burst on the national entertainment stage and proceed to become one of the most popular and influential musical performers of all time, rivaling Rudy Vallee, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, and other singers before him. His name was Elvis Presley, and he was destined to claim the title of King of Rock 'n' Roll. . . .

Record sales soared with the coming of rock 'n' roll. Aided by the affluence of the time, the invention of the 45 rpm and 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm records, and the introduction of high fidelity, record sales had steadily climbed from 109 million in 1945 to 189 million in 1950 and to 219 million in 1953, then with the arrival of rock 'n' roll rose to 277 million in 1955 and to 600 million in 1960. In 1956 alone, RCA Victor sold over 13.5 million Elvis Presley singles and 3.75 million Presley albums. By 1957, the new 45s and 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ s had driven the 78s out of production. Teenagers bought most of the inexpensive and convenient 45s and most of the long-playing rock 'n' roll albums, whereas adults bought most of the long-playing albums of traditional popular music, jazz, and classical music. While in 1950 the average record buyer was likely to be in his early twenties, by 1958, 70 percent of all the records sold in the United States were purchased by teenagers. Most of the popular singles were purchased by girls between the

ages of thirteen and nineteen, the group most receptive, as one critic said, to "little wide-eyed wishes for ideal love and perfect lovers, little songs of frustration at not finding them." Thanks to these revolutions in the musical world, record sales, which had stood at only \$7.5 million in 1940, had risen to a healthy \$521 million in 1960.

Why was rock 'n' roll so popular? One of the reasons, of course, was that it was written and performed by young people and was centered upon what was important to them: love, going steady, jealousy, high school, sex, dancing, clothing, automobiles, and all the other joys and problems of being young. The lyrics were just as silly, sentimental, and idealistic as the music of the crooners of the first half of the decade, but it was written just for the young and the singing styles, beat, electrical amplification, and volume of the music was much more dynamic than that of the earlier period. Teens were attracted to its celebration of sexuality, expressed in the more explicit lyrics, driving tempo, movements of the rock 'n' roll performers, and in new dances at high school hops and private parties. Perhaps Jeff Greenfield, a member of this first generation of rock 'n' roll fans, expressed it best in his *No Peace, No Place*. "Each night, sprawled on my bed on Manhattan's Upper West Side, I would listen to the world that Alan Freed created. To a twelve- or thirteen-year-old, it was a world of unbearable sexuality and celebration: a world of citizens under sixteen, in a constant state of joy or sweet sorrow. . . . New to sexual sensations, driven by the impulses that every new adolescent generation knows, we were the first to have a music rooted in uncoated sexuality." And very importantly, rock 'n' roll gave young people a sense of cohesion, of unity, all across the nation. It was *their* music, written for them and for them only, about their world, a world that adults could not share and did not understand. As such, it was one of the major harbingers of the generation gap.

It was not long after teenagers acquired their own music and movies that they also acquired their own television show. *American Bandstand* began as a local television show in Philadelphia in 1952, and in August of 1957 it premiered as a network show on ABC over sixty-seven stations across the country, from 3:00 to 4:30 in the afternoon, with twenty-six-year-old Dick Clark as the host. The first network show featured songs by Jerry Lee Lewis, the Coasters, and other top rock 'n' roll artists, and guest star Billy Williams singing "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter." Some of the early reviews of the show were not complimentary. According to *Billboard*, "The bulk of the ninety minutes was devoted to colorless juveniles trudging through early American dances like the Lindy and the Box Step to recorded tunes of the day. If this is the wholesome answer to the 'detractors' of rock 'n' roll, bring on the rotating pelvises." But by the end of 1958 the show was reaching over 20 million viewers over 105 stations, and had spawned dozens of imitations on local stations. This was a show about teens, and its consistent high rating and longevity proved that they liked it, regardless of what adults said about it.

American Bandstand had a great influence on popular music and on America's teenagers. Clark's good looks, neat clothing, and civilized manner helped reassure American parents that rock 'n' roll was not a barbarian invasion that was

turning the young into juvenile delinquents. All the dancers on the show in the fifties were white, adhered to a strict dress code (coats and ties for boys, dresses and skirts and blouses for girls, and no jeans, T-shirts, or tight sweaters), and followed a strict language code that even prohibited the use of the term "going steady." One of Clark's most embarrassing moments on the show came when a young girl told him that the pin she was wearing was a "virgin pin." Stars with unsavory reputations were not allowed on the show, so when the news of Jerry Lee Lewis's marriage to his thirteen-year-old cousin broke, Clark joined other disc jockeys and promoters across the country in canceling all future appearances of the pioneer rock 'n' roll star. The show also featured the biggest stars of the day and helped launch the careers of Connie Francis, Fabian, Frankie Avalon, and several other singers. The new dances performed on the show—such as "the stroll," "the shake," and "the walk"—were soon copied all across the country. Teenagers everywhere also imitated the slang and the dress of this very influential show and brought the records its regulars danced to. The success of this dance show brought popularity and wealth to its host, who freely admitted that "I dance very poorly," yet became a millionaire by the age of thirty.

The rise of rock 'n' roll, teen movies, teen television shows, and teen magazines helped create the teen idol. Many of the idols were singers, like Elvis Presley, Rick Nelson, Frankie Avalon, Bobby Darin, Fabian, Pat Boone, Connie Francis, and Annette Funicello. Others were movie or television actors, like James Dean and Marlon Brando, though, of course, many of the singers also went on to movie careers which might be called, at best, undistinguished. Most of the idols were teenagers themselves or in their twenties, and it is important to note here that while earlier generations had tended to create idols much older than themselves—like Bing Crosby, Perry Como, and Clark Gable—the teenagers of the late fifties made idols of people from their own generation. And although clean-cut starts like Ricky Nelson or Frankie Avalon were chosen as idols, many young people also idolized Brando and Dean, who seemed so much like them in their agonizing over the problems of life. The inclination of the young to idolize those who portrayed problem youth was puzzling and disturbing to parents who wanted their children to grow up to be clean-cut, middle-class kids who went to church, obeyed their parents and other authorities, drank nothing harder than a soft drink, had no sexual experience before marriage, saved and studied for college, hung around soda shops rather than pool rooms, and after college went into a respectable career with a good income and a secure future. In short, they wanted their children to be like Pat Boone.

Born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1934, Boone rose to fame while still a college student by winning first place on Ted Mack's *Original Amateur Hour* and *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* in 1954. He became a regular on Godfrey's morning show, and then began a career as a singer, movie star (*Bernadine* and *April Love*, both in 1957), and television star with his own show (*Pat Boone Chevy Showroom*). Many of his recordings were covers of original black songs like "Tutti-Frutti" and "Ain't That a Shame," and traditional romantic tunes such as "Friendly Persuasion," "April Love," and "Love Letters in the Sand." Boone

was an all-American boy, a dedicated Christian and family man who had not been spoiled by his success, although at the age of twenty-four he was already popular and wealthy, earning \$750,000 annually. He had an attractive wife, four pretty daughters, a baccalaureate degree from Columbia University, a love of milk and ice cream, and a severe distaste for strong drink, tobacco, and anything else immoral. He attracted wide publicity in 1958 when he refused to kiss Shirley Jones in the movie *April Love*, saying that "I've always been taught that when you get married, you forget about kissing other women." However, after talking it over with his wife, he agreed to do the kissing scene, although "she would prefer to keep that part of our lives solely to ourselves." This old-fashioned wholesomeness enabled him to hit the best-seller list in 1958 with *Twist Twelve and Twenty*, a moral and social guide for teenagers that reflected Boone's conservative view of sex and his deeply religious outlook on life. Some teenagers found Boone hopelessly "square," but many others admired his moral rectitude. He was immensely popular in the fifties, perhaps second only to Elvis.

In spite of the existence of clean-cut white performers like Pat Boone, much of the adult world was against the new rock 'n' roll. Many musicians and music critics condemned it on musical grounds, disliking its primitive beat, electrical amplification, witless and repetitive lyrics, loudness, and screams. But most adults opposed it for other reasons. Many objected to its suggestive lyrics and claimed that it fomented rebellion against parents and other authorities, bred immorality, inflamed teenagers to riot, and was unchristian and unpatriotic. They agreed with Frank Sinatra, who called it "the martial music of every sideburned delinquent on the face of the earth." Others objected to its racial background and content, even claiming, as many southerners did, that rock 'n' roll was a plot jointly sponsored by the Kremlin and the NAACP, and that rock musicians and disc jockeys were dope addicts, communists, integrationists, atheists, and sex fiends. To many whites, North and South, it was "nigger music," and as such was designed to tear down the barriers of segregation and bring about sexual promiscuity, intermarriage, and a decline in the morals of young whites.

The fears of parents and other adults were fed by the isolated incidents of rioting that accompanied rock 'n' roll concerts in Boston, Washington, D.C., and several other cities. As a result of these headline-getting events, rock 'n' roll concerts were banned in many cities or else accompanied by heavy police security and strict regulations as to what the performers could do or say on stage. In many cities, city councils and other local groups also tried to ban rock 'n' roll from record stores or jukeboxes. In San Antonio, Texas, the city council even went so far as to ban the music from the jukeboxes of public swimming pools, claiming that it "attracted undesirable elements given to practicing their gyrations in abbreviated bathing suits." A disc jockey in Buffalo was fired when he played an Elvis Presley record, and across the country disc jockeys were similarly punished for playing the new music or were pressured into boycotting it. Some disc jockeys broke rock 'n' roll records on the air, while radio station WLEV in Erie, Pennsylvania, loaded over 7,000 rock 'n' roll records into a rented hearse and led a funeral

procession to Erie Harbor, where the records were “buried at sea.” Ministers preached against it, claiming, like the Rev. John Carroll in Boston, that the music corrupted young people and that “rock and roll inflames and excites youth like jungle tom-toms readying warriors for battle,” and many churches held public burnings of rock ‘n’ roll records. Some were even willing to resort to the ugliest kinds of violence to try to stem the advance of rock music. On April 23, 1956, in Birmingham, Alabama, where the White Citizens’ Council had succeeded in removing all rock ‘n’ roll records from jukeboxes, five men connected with the council rushed the stage of the city auditorium and assaulted black ballad singer Nat King Cole, who was badly bruised before the police stopped the attack.

The debate over rock ‘n’ roll continued through the end of the decade, carried on in the press, over radio and television, in teachers’ meetings, pulpits, and city council meeting rooms. By 1960 the debate had begun to die down, with parents coming to see that the music was not going to fade away, that it had not made delinquents of their children, and that all the other dire predictions had not come to pass, either. Some even began to admit grudgingly that they liked some of it, though they wished that it were not played so loudly. Some of the older professional musicians had also come to defend it—Benny Goodman, Sammy Kaye, Paul Whiteman, and Duke Ellington had kind words for the new music from the very beginning, and Whiteman and Kaye publicly recalled that most new musical forms, including their own swing music, had been condemned when it first appeared. And in the May 1959 issue of *Harper’s*, critic Arnold Shaw noted that “perhaps it should be added (although it should be self-evident) that just as hot jazz of the twenties (then anathema to our grandparents) did not destroy our parents, and swing (anathema to our parents) did not destroy us, it is quite unlikely that rock ‘n’ roll will destroy our children.”

The spectacular rise of rock ‘n’ roll should not obscure the fact that the older music continued to thrive. In 1957, when rock ‘n’ roll claimed seven of the top ten records of the year, the number one song was “Tammy,” recorded by both Debbie Reynolds and the Ames Brothers, and Perry Como remained a favorite of young and old throughout the decade. In a 1956 poll by *Woman’s Home Companion*, teenage boys and girls chose Como as the best male vocalist, with Presley, Boone, and Sinatra trailing behind. Johnny Mathis, Paul Anka, Pat Boone, Bobby Darin, the Everly Brothers, and many other teen idols also continued to sing fairly traditional love songs, and in the late fifties, building on a tradition established early in the decade by the Weavers, the Kingston Trio brought a revival of folk music to college students with a touch of rock and protest in songs like “Tom Dooley,” “Tijuana Jail,” and “A Worried Man,” paving the way for the folk music explosion in the early 1960s. Rock music dominated from 1956 to 1960, but it did not completely push the older music aside.

In addition to obtaining their own music, movies, television shows, and idols, teenagers of the fifties also acquired their own fashions, and here they followed the trend toward casual dress that was characterizing the rest of society. The favorite dress of high school boys was denim jeans with rolled-up

cuffs, sport shirts, baggy pegged pants, pleated rogue trousers with a white side stripe, slacks with buckles in the back, V-neck sweaters, button-down striped shirts, blazers, white bucks, and loafers. In 1955 they also joined older males on college campuses and executive offices in the pink revolution, donning pink shirts, pink striped or polka dot ties, and colonel string ties. Hair styles ranged from the popular flat top or crew cut to the Apache or ducktail (banned at some high schools). "Greasers" of course shunned the Ivy League and pink attire as too effeminate, sticking to their T-shirts (often with sleeves rolled up to hold a cigarette pack), jeans, leather jackets, and ducktails. For girls, the fashions ranged from rolled-up jeans to casual blouses or men's shirts, full dresses with crinolines, skirts and sweaters, blazers, occasional experiments with the tube dress and sack dress and other disasters foisted upon older women by fashion designers, short shorts (with rolled-up cuffs) that got progressively shorter as the decade wore on, two-piece bathing suits (few were bold enough to wear the bikini, imported from France in the late forties), brown and white saddle shoes and loafers, and hair styles from the poodle to the ponytail. Couples who were going steady wore one another's class rings, identification tags, and necklaces or bracelets, and often adopted a unisex look by wearing matching sweaters, blazers, and shirts.

Like the generations before them, the teenagers of the fifties also had their slang. Much of it was concerned, of course, with the great passion of teens, cars. Cars were *wheels*, tires were *skins*, racing from a standing start was called a *drag*, the bumper was *nerf-bar*, a special kind of exhaust system was called *duals*, and a car specially modified for more engine power was a *hot rod* or *souped up car* or *bomb*. A drive-in movie was a *passion pit*, anything or anyone considered dull was a *drag*, and a really dull person was a *square* or a *nosebleed*. An admirable or poised individual or anything worthy of admiration or approval was *cool* or *neat* or *smooth*, someone who panicked or lost his *cool* was accused of *clutching*, and people admonished not to worry were told to *hang loose*. Teenagers also borrowed lingo from the jazz and beatnik world, such as *dig*, *hip*, *cat*, *bread*, and *chick*. A cutting, sarcastic laugh at someone's bad joke was expressed by a *hardeeharhar*. And teenagers also shared the jargon of the rest of society—*big deal*, *the royal screw* or *royal shaft*, *up the creek without a paddle*, *forty lashes with a wet noodle*, *wild*, *wicked*, *crazy*, *classy*, *horny*, *BMOC*, *looking for action*, *bad news*, *out to lunch*, *gross*, *fink*, *loser*, *creep*, *dumb cluck*, *doing the deed*, *going all the way*, or *coming across*. Many of these colloquialisms were borrowed from earlier generations, sometimes with modifications in meaning, while some had been regionalisms that now became national through the great homogenizing power of television.

By the mid-1950s there were 16.5 million teenagers in the United States. About half of them were crowding the nation's secondary schools, while the rest had entered college or the work world. Wherever they were, they had become, as Gereon Zimmerman would write in *Look* magazine, a "Generation in a Searchlight," a constant subject of media attention and a constant source of anxiety for their parents and the rest of the adult world. As Zimmerman observed, "No other generation has had so much attention, so much admonition, so many statistics."

Zimmerman might also have added that no other young generation had had so much money. One of the most revolutionary aspects of the teenage generation was its effects on the American economy, for by the midfifties teenagers made up a very lucrative consumer market for American manufacturers. By mid-decade teenagers of this affluent era were viewing as necessities goods that their parents, reared during the depression, still saw as luxuries, such as automobiles, televisions, record players, cameras, and the like. By the midfifties, teenagers were buying 43 percent of all records, 44 percent of all cameras, 39 percent of all new radios, 9 percent of all new cars, and 53 percent of movie tickets. By 1959, the amount of money spent on teenagers by themselves and by their parents had reached the staggering total of \$10 billion a year. Teenagers were spending around \$75 million annually on single popular records, \$40 million on lipstick, \$25 million on deodorant, \$9 million on home permanents, and over \$837 million on school clothes for teenage girls. Many teenagers had their own charge accounts at local stores and charge cards issued especially for them, such as Starlet Charge Account, Campus Deb Account, and the 14 to 21 Club. Like their parents, teenagers were being led by the affluence and advertising of the age to desire an ever-increasing diet of consumer goods and services and to buy them even if they had to charge them against future earnings.

Many adults had a distorted image of this affluent young generation, focusing too much on its delinquency, rock 'n' roll, unconventional hair styles and clothing, and dating and sexual practices. Only a very small percentage were delinquents or problem-ridden adolescents. Most were reasonably well-groomed, well-behaved, and active in school and extracurricular functions. Most were interested in sports, automobiles, movies, rock 'n' roll, dating, dancing, hobbies, radio, and television. Their major worries were the typical problems of youth in an affluent age: problems with their parents, their popularity with other teens, their looks and complexions, proper dating behavior, sex, first dates, first kisses, love, bad breath, body odors, posture, body build, friends, schoolwork, college, future careers, money, religion, and the draft.

These teenagers that parents worried so much about were remarkably conservative. Survey after survey of young people in the fifties found that over half of them—and sometimes even larger percentages—believed that censorship of printed materials and movies was justified, that politics was beyond their understanding and was just a dirty game, that most people did not have the ability to make important decisions about what was good for them, that masturbation was shameful and perhaps harmful, that women should not hold public office, and that the theory of evolution was suspect and even dangerous. Like their parents, they were also very religious as a group, tending to believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible, heaven and hell, and a God who answered the prayers of the faithful. They were suspicious of radical groups and were willing to deny them the right to assemble in meetings and to disseminate their ideas, and they saw nothing wrong with denying accused criminals basic constitutional rights, such as the right to know their accuser, to be free from unreasonable search or seizure of their property, or to refuse

to testify against themselves. Teenagers were also very conformist: They were very concerned about what their friends thought of their dress, behavior, and ideas, and they tried very hard to be part of the group and not be labeled an oddball or individualist. In short, in this age of corporation man, the country also had corporation teen.

Most teens were also conservative in their approach to dating, sex, and marriage. Religious views, social and peer pressure, and fear of pregnancy all combined to create this conservatism and to ensure that most teens kept their virginity until marriage or at least until the early college years, though heavy petting was certainly prevalent among couples who were engaged or “going steady,” a practice reflecting society’s emphasis on monogamy. These conservative attitudes toward sexual behavior were reinforced by the authorities teenagers looked to for guidance—parents, teachers, ministers, advice to the lovelorn columnists like Dear Abby and Ann Landers (both of whom began their columns in the midfifties), and books on teenage etiquette by Allen Ludden, Pat Boone, and *Seventeen* magazine. In his book for young men, *Plain Talk for Men Under 21*, Ludden devoted an entire chapter to such things as “That Good Night Kiss”—discussing whether to, how to, and the significance of it if you did. And in the very popular *The Seventeen Book of Young Living* (1957), Enid Haupt, the editor and publisher of *Seventeen* magazine, advised young girls to “keep your first and all your romances on a beyond reproach level” and to save themselves for the one right man in their lives. Acknowledging that “it isn’t easy to say no to a persuasive and charming boy,” she offered one answer for all potentially compromising situations: “No, please take me home. Now.”

The conservatism of the young would continue over into the college-age population, where it would remain entrenched for the rest of the fifties. The decade witnessed a boom in higher education, as rising prosperity, G.I. benefits, increasing governmental and private financial aid, fear of the draft, and a growing cultural emphasis on higher education all contributed to a great increase in the number of college students, faculty, programs, and buildings. The boom occurred at all levels—undergraduate, graduate, professional, and in the burgeoning junior- and community-college movement. The number of students, which had stood at 1.5 million in 1940 and 2.3 million in 1950, steadily rose in the decade and reached 3.6 million in 1960, and while the population of the country grew by 8 percent in the decade, the college population grew by 40 percent. By the end of the decade, almost 40 percent of the eighteen-to-twenty-one-year-old age group was attending some institution of higher education.

The conservatism of the college students of the 1950s led them to be called the Silent Generation. Why was it so silent? One of the most important reasons was that it mirrored the conservatism of the society at large, a society caught up in the materialistic and Cold War mentality of the decade. Like their elders, students were seeking the good life rather than the examined one, and as the Great Fear spread to the campuses, many were afraid of acquiring a radical reputation that might jeopardize their scholarships and their future careers in private industry, government service, or the military. Many were veterans,

and their military experience, especially for those who had served in Korea, had tended to confirm their conservatism. Many others were in college in order to evade or at least defer the draft, and did not want to do or say anything that might endanger their deferred status. And finally, most students were white and drawn from the middle and upper-middle classes of society. The doors of higher education were still closed to most minority groups and to the economically and socially disadvantaged—groups who might have brought questioning or even radical attitudes into the field of higher education had they been part of it. It is not surprising then that most college students were hardworking, conservative, and career-oriented, truly deserving of their Silent Generation label.

The conservatism of the college generation prevailed throughout the decade. In a study of the college generation in 1951, *Time* magazine noted that “the most startling thing about the younger generation is its silence. . . . It does not issue manifestoes, make speeches, or carry posters.” Most students, *Time* found, were worried about the Korean War and its effects on their plans for careers and marriage, but they pushed these fears into the background and concentrated on earning good grades and landing a good job. They were serious and hardworking, in rebellion against nothing, and had no real heroes or villains. Born during the depression years, they were primarily interested in a good job and security, and they did not want to do or say anything that would jeopardize these goals. “Today’s generation,” *Time* concluded, “either through fear, passivity, or conviction, is ready to conform.”

Soon after the end of the Korean War, *Newsweek* studied college students in seven institutions, and its findings were little different from those of *Time* two years before. In “U.S. Campus Kids of 1953: Unkiddable and Unbeatable,” *Newsweek* reported that students were hardworking, ambitious conformists who looked forward to secure jobs and a happy married life. Going steady was more popular than ever before, a sign of the period’s emphasis on marriage and of young people’s desire for the security that a going-steady relationship brought. Most students, *Newsweek* found, were not very interested in politics or international affairs, and they avoided being linked with unpopular causes. One Vassar girl told the magazine, “We’re a cautious generation. We aren’t buying any ideas we’re not sure of.” Another said that “you want to be popular, so naturally you don’t express any screwy ideas. To be popular you have to conform.” And a Princeton senior said that “the world doesn’t owe me a living—but it owes me a job.” *Newsweek* also saw a renewed interest in religion, as reflected in increasing enrollments in religion courses and frequent “religious emphasis weeks.” The magazine found much to admire in the hardworking materialistic class of 1953, although it did concede that “they might seem dull in comparison with less troubled eras.”

Similar collegiate characteristics were reported in a 1955 study by David Riesman, who found that students were ambitious, very sure of what they wanted to do, but also very unadventurous—they wanted secure positions in big companies and were already concerned about retirement plans. As one Princeton senior saw it, “Why struggle on my own, when I can enjoy the big psychological income of being a member of a big outfit?” Most males had already decided that they wanted middle-management jobs—they did not

want to rise to the presidential or vice-presidential level because that would require too much drive, take time away from their family life and leisure time, and force them to live in a big city. Most had already decided upon the kind of girl they would marry, how many kids they would have, and which civic clubs and other organizations they would join—and they would be joiners, for they liked the gregarious life and knew it would help their careers. They wanted educated wives who would be intellectually stimulating, yet they wanted them to be dutiful and obedient and to stay at home and raise the kids. Many said they wanted as many as four or five kids, because they felt that a large family would bring happiness, security, contentment. One Harvard senior said that “I’d like six kids. I don’t know why I say that—it seems like a minimum production goal.” They did not know or care much about politics, but they did like Ike and said that they would probably be Republicans because corporation life dictated that they should be.

These attitudes still seemed to prevail in 1957, when *The Nation* surveyed college and university professors about what their students were reading and thinking. Most reported that their students still read the standard authors—Hemingway, Wolfe, Lawrence, Orwell, Huxley, Faulkner, and Steinbeck—but shied away from fiction or nonfiction that dealt with economic, social, or political protest. One professor lamented that “the only young novelist I have heard praised vociferously is J. D. Salinger, for his discovery of childhood,” and complained that “when a liberal and speculative voice is heard in the classroom, it is more likely than not to be the professor’s, despite whatever caution the years may have taught him.” The director of the Writing Program at Stanford University claimed that students were “hard to smoke out. Sometimes a professor is baited into protest by the rows and circles of their closed, watchful, apparently apathetic faces, and says in effect, ‘My God, *feel* something! Get enthusiastic about something, plunge, go boom, look alive!’” A Yale English professor complained that “the present campus indifference to either politics or reform or rebellion is monumental.” And most agreed with a University of Michigan professor’s claim that to the student of 1957, “college has ceased to be a brightly lighted stage where he discovers who he is. It is rather a processing-chamber where, with touching submissiveness, he accepts the remarks of lecturers and the hard sentences of textbooks as directives that will lead him to a job.”

What did the members of the Silent Generation do when they were not studying, planning what company they intended to find a safe niche in, deciding what kind of mate they would marry or how many kids they would have, or planning for retirement? They played sports, drank beer, ate pizzas and hamburgers, went to football games and movies, participated in panty raids, dated, dreamed of the opposite sex, read novels and magazines, watched television, and listened to recordings of jazz, classical music, or the popular crooners of the day. For most, the hottest issues on campus were what to do about a losing football coach or who should be elected homecoming queen or student body president. Both sexes wore conservative preppy clothes, and at many coeducational institutions women were forbidden to wear jeans or shorts to class. Those who could afford to joined one of the fast-growing number of

fraternities or sororities in order to party, find identity and security, and form friendships that might later be useful in the business world they hoped to enter after graduation. College students were, indeed, an unrebelligious lot.

By the late fifties America's teenagers had acquired a distinct subculture of their own. They had their own money, music, movies, television shows, idols, clothing, and slang. In contrast to previous generations, they were more affluent, better educated, talked more openly about sex, had greater mobility through the widespread ownership of automobiles by their parents or themselves, demanded and received more personal freedom, had more conflicts with their parents, and were the subject of more media and parental concern. But they were not yet in rebellion, for although their life-style had departed from the conventions of their elders, their basic ideas and attitudes were still the conservative ones that mirrored the conservatism of the affluent age in which they grew up.

Still, their parents were worried. As *Look* magazine reported in 1958 in an article entitled "What Parents Say About Teenagers," "many parents are in a state of confusion or despair about their teenagers. And they don't exactly know what to do about it. They would like to sit down with their children and talk over their mutual problems, but often this desire is thwarted by the teenagers themselves." The much-heralded generation gap was coming into view. In the next decade, when the junior high and senior high school students of the fifties crowded the colleges, marched in civil rights demonstrations, protested the Vietnam War, and engaged in unconventional sexual and drug practices, it would take on the temper of a revolution.



POSTSCRIPT



Was Rock and Roll Responsible for Dismantling America's Traditional Family, Sexual, and Racial Customs in the 1950s and 1960s?

Between 1958 and 1963, rock and roll as a distinct form of music nearly disappeared. There were several reasons for this. First were the congressional investigations of 1959–1961 into payoffs to DJs to push certain records on their shows. “Payola” ruined the careers of a number of rock DJs, including Alan Freed, the original rock DJ, who lost his two major jobs in New York, was hounded by the IRS for back taxes, and succumbed to alcoholism in 1965. But Dick Clark of “American Bandstand” fame, was protected by the music establishment even though he became a multimillionaire with interests in a number of record companies whose songs he featured on his own show.

Second, payola McCarthyism receded in the early sixties as a result of rock and roll being fused into the mainstream of American popular music. Religious preachers appeared less worried about rock’s perversion of the country’s sexual moral values, southerners lost the fear of rock’s racial mongrelization, and American parents no longer associated rock music with subversives, communists, and other radicals. How could they, when Elvis Presley cut his hair, was drafted into the army, and sang ballads and religious songs that were often integrated into his two dozen forgettable movies? By the time Presley’s manager finished reshaping the King’s image, Elvis looked more like Pat Boone, a clean-cut handsome wide-toothed singer who “covered” Little Richard’s songs for white audiences in the early rock period. At the same time, Dick Clark turned his Philadelphia-based show, “American Bandstand,” into an afternoon phenomenon that featured well-groomed teenagers dancing to the latest songs.

In 1963, serious rock was replaced by folk music. Greenwich Village, in the heart of downtown New York City, was its epicenter, Bob Dylan was its creator by writing new folk songs instead of retreading old ones, and the group Peter, Paul, and Mary popularized the music into commercial success. At the same time, folk music became anthems for the civil rights and anti-war protest movements.

Meanwhile, a sixties rock revival came from two sources. First was the British invasion, symbolized by the arrival of the Beatles in 1963, followed by other groups, such as the Rolling Stones, who traced their roots to the early guitar riffs of Chuck Berry. Having come from working-class backgrounds in

Liverpool, the Beatles grew up in an environment that challenged authority and poked fun at some of the hypocrisy of middle-class values. Their later songs influenced the protest movements in the United States.

A second source of revival for protest rock music came from the counterculture movement in San Francisco. Bands such as the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane brought “underground” rock to the forefront. Soon, even the Beatles were imitating the San Francisco underground with their classic album, “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band,” a style that, according to one writer, combined “a peculiar blend of radical political rhetoric, of allusions to the drug culture, and of the excited sense of imminent, apocalyptic liberation.”

Two events in 1969 symbolized the high and low points of sixties rock. In August, 500,000 people converged on a farm in upstate New York for a three-day rock festival. Woodstock became a legendary symbol. There was scant political protest. Music was the common bond that united people sitting in the rain-filled mud, sharing food and drugs while drowning out the fears of participating in an endless war. In December, all the good will of Woodstock was destroyed at a free Rolling Stones concert in Altamont, California. Four people died, one of whom was clubbed, stabbed, and kicked to death by the Hell’s Angels, hired as body guards for the Stones on the advice of the Grateful Dead.

Would the sixties “new left” and counterculture movements have taken place without the emergence of rock and roll in the 1950s? Did rock help to reshape America’s values, or was it all one big commercial hustle?

The two best overviews of the early history of rock and roll are Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock and Roll Changed America* (Oxford University Press, 2003) and James Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll, 1947–1977* (Simon & Schuster, 1999). Four excellent overviews of the 1950s are Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (Doubleday, 1975); J. Ronald Oakley, *God’s Country: America in the Fifties* (Dembner Books, 1985–1990); David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (Villard, 1993); and William L. O’Neill, *American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945–1960* (Simon & Schuster, 1986). Earlier, O’Neill wrote *Coming Apart: An Informal History of the 1960s* (Times Books, 1971), a classic treatment of the 1960s replete with vignettes that still hold up. David Marcus examines the impact of the 1950s and 1960s upon present-day politics and pop culture in *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and Sixties in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (Rutgers University Press, 2004). Between 2000 and 2005, Greenhaven Press has published three readers with great selections on *The 1950s*, *The 1960s*, and *The 1960s: Examining Pop Culture*.

ISSUE 15



Did President John F. Kennedy Demonstrate a Strong Commitment to Civil Rights?

YES: Carl M. Brauer, from *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (Columbia University Press, 1977)

NO: Nick Bryant, from *The Bystander: John F. Kennedy and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Basic Books, 2006)

ISSUE SUMMARY

YES: Carl M. Brauer asserts that President John F. Kennedy carried out an unambiguous commitment to civil rights that far exceeded anything his immediate predecessors had done and which included efforts to end discrimination in voting, education, hiring practices, public facilities, and housing.

NO: Nick Bryant claims that President Kennedy took an overly cautious approach to civil rights matters to avoid a confrontation with white southern Democrats in Congress and relied too heavily on symbolic, largely cosmetic changes that left him with a meager legacy of civil rights accomplishments.

The image is one that is indelibly etched in the memory of virtually every American old enough to realize the monumental significance of the scene they were witnessing. Martin Luther King, Jr., the most prominent spokesman of the civil rights movement, stood at a podium and proclaimed to his audience, "I have a dream." For many Americans, black and white, King's speech at the March on Washington was the symbolic climax of the civil rights movement. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were merely denouement.

Actually, there was more that was symbolic at the March on Washington than King's electrifying oration. The call for the march had been issued by A. Philip Randolph, a long-time civil rights activist, who had threatened in 1941 to stage a similar protest march to bring attention to the economic inequality suffered by African Americans. Randolph's presence at the head of this march in 1963 reflected a realization of *his* dream. Moreover, several of the speakers that

day paid homage to W. E. B. Du Bois, the godfather of the twentieth-century black protest movement in the United States, who had died the previous day (at the age of 95) in Ghana, West Africa, an embittered exile from the land of his birth.

For generations, African Americans had endured an enforced second-class citizenship in a nation circumscribed by Jim Crow. But in the 1940s and 1950s, following constitutional victories spearheaded by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the areas of housing, voting, and education, black Americans awakened to the possibilities for change in their status. These victories coincided with the rise of independent nations in Africa, led by black leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, which encouraged pride in the African homeland among many black Americans. Finally, the nonviolent direct action movement, pioneered by interracial organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and individuals like Randolph, King, Ella Baker, James Farmer, and Fannie Lou Hamer, issued a clarion call to African Americans and their white supporters that full equality was around the corner.

Despite his idealistic predictions of the future, King's vision of a color blind society liberated from the harsh realities of prejudice and discrimination faced serious barriers, not the least of which was a federal government whose leaders offered an ambiguous response to the African American freedom struggle. President Harry S. Truman, despite the southern orientation of his own family background, insisted that "we shall not finally achieve the ideals for which this nation was founded so long as any American suffers discrimination as a result of his race," but Truman did not mount a campaign to eliminate racial segregation. Furthermore, he expressed some reluctance about anti-poll tax legislation in Congress. Truman's successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, signed the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 and appointed Earl Warren as Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, marking a liberal, activist direction for the highest judicial tribunal in the country, but Eisenhower also avoided any public expression of support for the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision and only reluctantly deployed members of the 101st Airborne Division to Arkansas to oversee the desegregation of Little Rock's Central High School in 1957. John Kennedy campaigned for the presidency in 1960 on behalf of a strong civil rights platform and benefited from the support of African American voters, but his record of accomplishment on this issue was irritatingly slow to many blacks.

What was John Kennedy's legacy in the realm of civil rights for African Americans? Did his actions match his campaign rhetoric? Was he able to improve appreciably the status of black Americans during his short time in office? These questions are addressed in the essays that follow.

Carl Brauer offers a very positive portrayal of Kennedy as a civil rights advocate. According to Brauer, JFK's activism in the field of civil rights far exceeded that of his predecessors and included broad-based efforts to end racial discrimination in the United States.

Nick Bryant, on the other hand, is far more critical of Kennedy's performance. Bryant believes that President Kennedy abdicated a responsibility to lead and that by the time of his assassination, Kennedy possessed only a meager record of accomplishment in the field of civil rights.

John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction

President Kennedy's murder stunned the nation. There are probably few adults today who cannot recall the exact circumstances of their hearing the news on November 22, 1963. Across the country people wept openly in the streets, and millions attended hurriedly called memorial services. Normal activities slowed and even ceased as a vast audience sat mesmerized in front of their television sets which broadcast little for three days other than films of Kennedy's career, eulogies, news about the assassination, and then, finally, his deeply moving funeral. Outside the United States the reaction to Kennedy's death often reached equal intensity.

The enormous impact of his death can be explained by a number of factors. Assassinations had become rare in American life; the last murder of a President (McKinley) had occurred sixty-two years before. Yet, even had Kennedy died suddenly of natural causes, the public reaction would have been great. Kennedy had been the picture of youth and vitality. He had two small children and a glamorous young wife. He belonged to a large, wealthy, and closely knit family, many of those members could be individually identified by the public. Indeed, the Kennedy family had a special aura, almost royal in aspect, which captivated the popular imagination. Over and above all this, Kennedy had become identified with hopes for peace and social and economic progress. In an age when humanity's very survival appeared to be at stake, the unexpected, violent death of the person who seemed to represent its best chances for the future shocked and frightened many millions of people.

White Southerners, many of whom had come to resent Kennedy's civil rights advocacy, nevertheless generally grieved his death. It was true that in a number of segregated school rooms in the South white children applauded word of Kennedy's death, but authorities went to great lengths to hide these displays of passion, which they considered shameful. White Southerners, segregationist or not, for the most part mourned the President's passing along with the rest of the country. "I thought it was terrible, I didn't think a thing like this could happen in this country," Bull Connor said. James Gray of Albany called the assassination "a stunning shock." "Our politics were miles apart, and getting further all the time. But we remained good friends," he went on. The day of the funeral many Southern government offices, schools, and businesses

closed down just as in the rest of the country. Over 1,200 people attended a memorial service at Ole Miss. More than 2,000, including the Governor-elect and many state officials, crowded into an interfaith service in the cathedral in Jackson, Mississippi. It became one of the most integrated gatherings in Mississippi history to that time. George Wallace described his attendance at Kennedy's funeral as "one of the saddest tasks I have ever performed."

Two public opinion studies completed soon after the assassination suggest that black Americans were particularly troubled by Kennedy's death. A national survey asked people to compare their own reactions with those of other people. Overall, 30 percent believed that they were more upset than "most people," but 49 percent of blacks thought they were more upset. Two-thirds of blacks, as compared to 38 percent of all respondents, agreed with the statement that they were "so confused and upset, they didn't know what to feel." Furthermore, half of the blacks surveyed, compared with one-fifth of the total sample, "worried how this might affect my own life, job and future." A study of 1,348 Detroit schoolchildren, 1,006 white and 342 black, produced complementary findings. Its director reported that Negro children were considerably more distraught and anxious. Many of them expressed concern about "how my folks will now get along," and 81 percent of black children, compared to 69 percent of white, said that they "felt the loss of someone very close and dear." Seventy percent of the black youngsters and 55 percent of the white "worried about how the U.S. would get along without its leader."

Kennedy's death hit many civil rights activists especially hard. "Nothing had ever affected me as deeply as President Kennedy's death, not even the news that Martin had been stabbed in Harlem," Coretta King wrote in 1969. The assassination confirmed her husband's private fears that America was a "sick society." Anne Moody, a courageous black activist who had virtually been run out of her native Mississippi, was working in a New Orleans restaurant on the day Kennedy was killed. In her poignant memoir, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, she recalled losing consciousness momentarily when she heard the news. She and the other black employees were afraid to contemplate what Kennedy's death might mean to Negroes. After entering the dining room, her shock and fear turned to anger. "When I turned around and looked at all those white faces—all of those Southern white faces—fire was in my eyes. I felt like racing up and down the tables, smashing food into their faces, breaking dishes over their heads, and all the time I would shout and yell MURDERERS! MURDERERS! MURDERERS!" Later, on the streetcar, she looked to see the expressions on the faces of blacks. "I knew they must feel as though they had lost their best friend—one who was in a position to help determine their destiny. To most Negroes, especially to me, the President had made 'Real Freedom' a hope." Addressing a dinner in New York on November 26, Fred Shuttlesworth, the black leader from Birmingham, began by paying tribute to Kennedy. "It would be impossible to think or speak of the Negro revolt—which has become in truth an American Revolution—and its impact upon our American Society at this time or even in the future, without saluting our martyred President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, whose understanding, skill and determination of purpose

helped in a positive way, to lay the groundwork for a better system of democracy than that which we now know," he said. "The dedication to freedom and desire for justice found in Negro leadership and the passionate yearnings of the oppressed masses in this country were matched by his own courage of convictions, grasp of the needs of the hour, and his devotion to making the U.S. Constitution become meaningful to all its citizens."

Kennedy's death probably frightened blacks, in part because his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, came from Texas and bore the identity—indeed stigma—of a white Southerner. Johnson, however, took pride in having gotten the 1957 Civil Rights Act through Congress. As Vice President, he had endeavored to erase his image as the candidate of the white South and had actively cultivated Negro support. Within ten days of assuming the Presidency, moreover, he publicly committed himself to fulfilling Kennedy's civil rights program. "We have talked long enough in this country about equal rights. We have talked for 100 years or more. It is time now to write the next chapter and to write it in books of law," the new President told a joint session of Congress on November 27. Early passage of the pending civil rights legislation, he declared, would be the most fitting memorial to President Kennedy. After a prolonged struggle, which included the successful invoking of cloture, Congress heeded Johnson's plea in June. Before Johnson left the White House in January 1969, he had guided additional pieces of important civil rights legislation through Congress, had secured enactment of a variety of other pieces of social and economic legislation which had a bearing on the lives of many blacks, and had established his own substantial record of executive action and moral leadership in the field of civil rights. In concrete accomplishments, Johnson eventually outstripped his predecessor's civil rights record. It is clear, however, that the foundations for Johnson's record—in Congress, through executive action, and through Presidential leadership—were laid by Kennedy.

In the quarter century before Kennedy became President, his predecessors initiated a number of measures to advance civil rights, but Kennedy's activism in this regard far surpassed any of theirs. Franklin D. Roosevelt tolerated civil rights advocacy among his lieutenants, although he cautiously refrained from using the Presidency or his own enormous personal prestige to promote equal treatment of blacks. Under considerable pressure from militant blacks on the eve of American entrance into World War II, Roosevelt created the Fair Employment Practices Commission, but invested it with meager enforcement powers. Harry S. Truman pioneered in the employment of Presidential power on behalf of racial progress, ordering the desegregation of the military, speaking out against the ill-treatment of blacks, and creating a blue-ribbon committee on civil rights. Overall, however, civil rights played a relatively minor role in his administration, with issues of foreign policy, the economy, and internal security predominating. An uncooperative Congress, meanwhile, blocked his legislative recommendations on civil rights. Dwight D. Eisenhower proceeded down the trails of executive action Truman had blazed, but displayed little enthusiasm for the task. His heart never belonged to the civil rights cause, and Eisenhower generally played a passive role in the gains that did occur during his Presidency, including the *Brown* decision and its follow-up, and the

enactment of civil rights legislation in 1957 and 1960. Kennedy, by contrast, turned Truman's trails into wide avenues. He used his executive powers broadly, promoting an end to racial discrimination in voting, schools, the federal government, jobs, public facilities, and housing. He committed the moral authority of the President to racial justice in the most clear-cut terms ever. And he proposed and made significant progress toward securing the most important piece of civil rights legislation in a century. Under Kennedy, civil rights became a focal point of public policy and political debate. Moreover, so unambiguous had Kennedy's commitment to civil rights been that it is hard to imagine any Vice President who succeeded him in November 1963, reversing it.

Kennedy's motives for proceeding as he did on the civil rights issue were complex, but for the sake of understanding may be divided into three types: political, attitudinal or intellectual, and personal. Naturally his actions at different times derived from different combinations of these and to different degrees. For example, politics dominated during the 1960 campaign, but when the Birmingham crisis erupted, factors of attitude and personality were most important. In addition, each kind of motive changed intrinsically over time; his political needs as a newly elected President, for instance, differed somewhat from the requirements of candidacy. Likewise his view of Reconstruction underwent a significant change. Looking briefly at each of these motives in isolation helps clarify Kennedy's actions and effects.

Kennedy was a consummate politician. As a Senator ambitious for the Presidency, he curried the favor of civil rights proponents and opponents. In the end he succeeded in winning critical support from both sides without trading away basic principle. He promised new Presidential leadership but assured the white South that he would not be vindictive. Once elected, he had to contend with a Congress in which the Southern wing of his party possessed disproportionate power. Consequently, he did not immediately carry through on his promise of civil rights legislation and compromised on his executive action program. Nevertheless, that program marked a significant break with the past, achieved some meaningful results, and, perhaps most important, raised the hopes of black people. Indeed, higher black expectations led ultimately to Kennedy's changing his approach in June 1963. The task of getting his proposed legislation enacted in turn presented a challenge to his political leadership, which he rose to meet. He rallied important segments of the public to his cause, and in time won several key Congressional skirmishes. Simultaneously, as a candidate for reelection, he began to mend his Southern fences preparatory to his next and expectedly last campaign. To the end, he neither abandoned nor excoriated the white South. Black voters, it appeared, had meanwhile given him nearly complete allegiance.

Certain ideas guided Kennedy. As an American nationalist, he was troubled by the damage racial intolerance was inflicting upon his country's image abroad, particularly in the Third World where he hoped to expand American influence. As a student of American history, on the other hand, he for a long time accepted a simplistic though widely held view of Reconstruction as a vindictive reign of terror and corruption which the North had visited upon the South. This perspective helped smooth his relations with Southern officeholders.

Eventually, confrontations with ardent segregationists led him to question his former assumptions about the first Reconstruction and eased the way toward his launching a second, though he never advocated punishing the region. In addition, Kennedy worried about the damaging effects racial discrimination had on the nation's economy and on the health and education of its citizens. He shared the modern liberal's faith that the central government, led by an active President, could and should solve pressing social problems, of which racial discrimination was a leading one. Finally, Kennedy believed that all citizens should receive the same treatment regardless of race. Racial discrimination offended him intellectually. Hence, he shared with the civil rights movement a fundamental belief.

Personal factors also shaped Kennedy's handling of civil rights. His grace and style charmed black delegates in personal meetings. Sensitivity and empathy contributed to his making symbolic gestures of significance, such as calling Coretta King, and permitted him to comprehend, on more than an intellectual level, the struggle for equal rights. Finally, Kennedy needed to feel that he was leading rather than being swept along by events. As President, he was uncomfortable playing a passive role. Therefore, when in the spring of 1963 he perceived that he was losing the reins of leadership, he boldly reached out to grasp them once again.

Kennedy's exercise of leadership probably helped instill in many potential civil rights activists a confidence and daring that they would not otherwise have had. In this regard it might be recalled that James Meredith applied to Ole Miss the day Kennedy was inaugurated and that for Anne Moody, Kennedy had made "'Real Freedom' a hope." Indeed, the spirit Kennedy conveyed may well have made possible the eruption of social protest to which he in turn responded. Certainly Kennedy did not create the civil rights movement, but he did affect its course. Some of the things that occurred during his years as President probably would have occurred in any case. Most definitely the Freedom Rides would have taken place and undoubtedly there would have been some other direct challenges to segregation. But what would have happened had Richard Nixon been elected President? Would he have sent marshals to Montgomery, would a Voter Education Project have been created, would the Justice Department have dramatically stepped up enforcement under the guidance of someone like Robert Kennedy, would thousands of blacks have demonstrated in Birmingham, and, most important, if they had, would Nixon have responded by proposing and working for enactment of sweeping civil rights legislation?

Those conservative critics who in 1963 charged Kennedy with encouraging massive law-breaking were in a sense not so wide of the mark. Kennedy, of course, never urged blacks to march in the streets, but he did foster an atmosphere where protests against the status quo could occur. He created that atmosphere through symbolic acts such as phoning Coretta King, appointing Thurgood Marshall to the federal bench, and opening the White House to blacks, and through more substantive deeds such as establishing a close working relationship between the Justice Department and the civil rights movement, sending marshals to Montgomery and Oxford, and using the executive powers of his office to combat discrimination. He also contributed to it in a

general way, for in his campaign and in office, he represented change, not continuity; the future, not the past.

One could well draw up a balance sheet of Kennedy's civil rights record. On the minus side, one might list the appointment of segregationist judges in the South, the delay in the housing order followed by the promulgation of the narrowest possible one, as well as numerous instances of executive cautiousness. Kennedy could be faulted for not making even more high-level appointments of blacks than he did, especially to the White House staff, and for failing to remove barriers to effective criminal enforcement that existed within the federal government, specifically within the FBI. One might also want to add the fact that Kennedy did not win enactment of his proposed legislation. Yet, to blame the murdered Kennedy for that implies a certain callousness.

The plus side of the ledger would be considerably longer. It would include a large number of executive actions, such as the appointment of blacks to high offices and the gains in federal employment generally. In the upper civil service ranks, black employment increased 88 percent from June 1961 to June 1963, as compared to an overall increase at these levels of under 23 percent. High on the list would belong the many accomplishments relating to law enforcement, including the use of marshals to prevent mob rule in Montgomery, the application of legal pressure to bring about desegregation of transportation terminals, and the persistent implementation of court orders to effect desegregation at the universities of Mississippi and Alabama. Between Robert Kennedy's swearing in and his resignation in the summer of 1964, the number of voting rights suits increased from ten to sixty-nine, including statewide cases in Mississippi and Louisiana. The administration also scored some gains by promoting voluntary action. For example, partly as a result of Justice Department efforts, between May and December 1963, some voluntary desegregation of public accommodations took place in 356 out of 566 cities in the South and border states; biracial committees were established in at least 185 of these cities. Because the administration played a role in the creation of the Voter Education Project, it might be afforded partial credit for its accomplishments. By April 1964, the VEP had registered nearly 580,000 new voters in the South. President Kennedy's proposal of a broad civil rights bill in 1963 and his preliminary successes in getting that bill through Congress would also deserve places on the plus side of the ledger. Finally, Kennedy's exercise of moral leadership, through rhetorical advocacy and through personal example, would certainly merit inclusion in the positive column.

A balance sheet does not convey Kennedy's full importance, however. Kennedy was significant not only for what he did, but for what he started. His Presidency marked a profound change from the inertia that had generally characterized the past. In a tragically foreshortened term of less than three years, he instituted a vigorous and far-reaching effort to eliminate racial discrimination in American life. Operating within the bounds of a democratic political system, Kennedy both encouraged and responded to black aspirations and led the nation into its Second Reconstruction.

The Bystander: John F. Kennedy and the Struggle for Black Equality

Had Kennedy lived, he would almost certainly have secured passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The key to the passage of the bill, after all, was the support of moderate Republicans, and Kennedy had already received firm assurances from Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen that they would stand with the president. "This program was on its way before November 22," Dirksen commented after its passage. "Its time had come." Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield agreed that the civil rights bill would still have passed, but "might have taken a little longer"—a reference perhaps to Kennedy's deficiencies as a legislative strategist as well as the skills with which [Lyndon] Johnson had transformed national grief over Kennedy's murder into support for the civil rights bill. But Kennedy had proposed the legislation, and he deserved much of the credit when it became law.

At the time of his death, however, Kennedy had only a small record of accomplishments in civil rights. Progress had been agonizingly slow in voting rights and employment reform, the areas where his administration had devoted most of its energy. By 1963, black registration had increased from five percent to just 8.3 percent of eligible voters in the 100 counties targeted by the Justice Department. Between 1961 and 1964, the number of blacks employed by the federal government had inched from 12.9 percent to 13.2 percent. The Plans for Progress, meanwhile, remained an embarrassment. Between May 1961 and January 1963, black employment in participating companies rose from 5 percent to 5.1 percent. The black share of white-collar jobs showed only a negligible gain, from 1.5 percent to 1.6 percent. Even so, the president continued to encourage new firms to sign up. In other areas of policy, too, the picture was much the same. The long-delayed housing order had proved to be a glaring failure in practice. After Kennedy's death, Robert Weaver estimated the order had covered less than three percent of existing housing. Most African diplomats continued to look on Washington as a hardship posting, because of their difficulties in finding adequate housing.

The administration had also adhered to a distinctly southern timetable in the implementation of *Brown*. By 1963, one hundred and sixty-six school

districts had been integrated, compared to just seventeen in 1960. But in Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina, not a single school district had been entirely desegregated. Georgia and Louisiana could claim just one. King estimated that if integration continued at the current pace, it would take until 2054 for southern schools to be completely desegregated. After all, by 1964 just one in a hundred black schoolchildren attended integrated schools in the south.

The Kennedy administration had made greater strides in less readily quantifiable areas. The White House became more welcoming to blacks, which in turn encouraged greater racial integration in much of American society. Kennedy's ease in the company of blacks, combined with his public denunciations of the capital's all-white gentlemen's clubs, helped to establish an unwritten code of racial acceptance. Washington hostesses adorned their cocktail and dinner parties with more black faces. It was now unthinkable to plan a major national event without guaranteeing the participation of blacks. Through his own powerful personal example, Kennedy had made it unfashionable to be racist. Up until the summer of 1963, it was arguably his greatest contribution to the struggle for equality.

Kennedy's inclusiveness represented a genuine paradigm shift in American racial politics. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a far more aloof politician, had earned the love of blacks through his success in ameliorating black poverty. Kennedy offered blacks something quite different, but no less empowering: a sense of acceptance. As his consistently high poll numbers among blacks demonstrated, and the thousands of black mourners at his funeral confirmed, many blacks felt a tremendously powerful connection to Kennedy. Some considered him to be the Great Emancipator of the twentieth century.

Of course, Kennedy's symbolic approach to the race problem meant that many of the changes he ushered in were largely cosmetic. And often they were restricted to the capital—where segregation had troubled him since his earliest days in Congress. Kennedy certainly had a keen eye for racial detail—as he demonstrated on his first day in office when he complained that the Coast Guard Academy honor guard did not include any blacks. But the episode was also emblematic of Kennedy's tendency to respond to examples of racial inequity that were directly in front of him, while he ignored the broader problems that fell outside of his limited range of vision. Far too often, Kennedy was content as long as problems simply disappeared from view. Sometimes, it was what he saw with his own eyes that disturbed him—as with the whites-only gentlemen's clubs in Washington. Other times, he wanted to hide segregation from the sight of others—African diplomats, the Kremlin, newspaper photographers.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given his privileged upbringing, Kennedy identified far more easily with middle-class blacks, who were more concentrated in the North, than with the far poorer blacks who populated the South. Middle-class blacks had already achieved a degree of financial success and longed primarily for social acceptance—something Kennedy could bestow through his highly publicized gestures of black outreach. Southern blacks still needed basic civil rights—access to jobs, education, voting booths. These demands were far harder to fulfill—particularly because in many cases whites would have to

pay the price for black advancement. And so Kennedy shied away from more controversial policy areas, such as schooling and public accommodations, which would be successfully implemented only with substantial white support. Instead, Kennedy steered his administration toward areas such as voting rights and employment reform, which emphasized black self-improvement and self-empowerment.

When it came to emotionally charged issues, such as school integration, Kennedy always advocated piecemeal reform. But his timetable was completely misaligned with that of the black leadership. In 1961, black leaders were initially prepared to accept the administration's nonlegislative strategy but expected other civil rights reforms to come at a quicker pace. By 1963, civil rights activists demanded "Freedom Now," and adopted more militant tactics in the hope of spurring the administration to act more quickly.

What if Kennedy had moved faster? In 1961, his administration could have dealt with many black demands—such as accelerated school integration, fair housing, greater employment opportunities, and greater presidential leadership on race—with only a relatively mild readjustment of policies. Had the administration released the housing order at an earlier date, pushed for a more active PCEEO [President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity], launched a greater number of voting rights suits, or sought to enforce the ICC ruling on interstate travel, it probably could have channeled the civil rights movement in a more peaceful direction. Instead, the most violent clashes—the Freedom Rides, Ole Miss, and the Birmingham crisis—all ignited as a result of the frustration of protesters, who wanted to jolt the administration into action. Had Kennedy done more, earlier, then many of these crises—along with the southern backlash they provoked—might have been averted.

Certainly, the race crisis would not have melted away—after all, the civil rights movement was trying to reverse the effects of an American institution that had endured for over 250 years. But bolder federal policies would almost certainly have had a calming effect and could have led to a sincere collaboration between black activists and white policymakers. When civil rights rose to the top of the presidential agenda in the summer of 1963, Kennedy finally helped to engineer a multipronged assault on southern segregation and northern discrimination that blacks had been demanding since the end of World War II. But it was too late for black leaders. Even Kennedy's civil rights bill, the boldest proposals ever put by a president before Congress, was not enough to satisfy black demands. Civil rights leaders attacked the administration for the absence of stronger Part III powers and a commitment to create a fair employment practices committee. And they raised the stakes far higher—now they called for quotas, affirmative action, reparations, and other compensatory governmental programs. Kennedy had lost so much credibility through his years of equivocation that there was now little he could do to appease black activists.

After Kennedy's death, black leaders plotted more aggressive protest campaigns. They did so partly to safeguard their own leadership positions within an increasingly radicalized movement but mainly to maintain pressure on the federal government. In 1964, CORE, SNCC, the SCLC, and the NAACP joined forces to mount the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, a voter registration

campaign that resulted in another upsurge of racial violence. Segregationists firebombed thirty buildings and razed twelve churches. A thousand protesters were arrested by police, and civil rights activists James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner were murdered. In January 1965, the SCLC launched a bold new voting rights campaign in Selma, in hopes of provoking a violent white backlash. Martin Luther King intended to "arouse the federal government," as he put it, into proposing new voting rights legislation. King was merely applying the central lesson that black activists had learned during the Kennedy years: that provoking racist violence was the best way to secure presidential attention.

By the mid-1960s, the movement had gained such momentum that it was now largely beyond presidential control. Legislative remedies held only limited value. On August 6, 1965, Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law. Five days later, rioting erupted in the Watts section of Los Angeles, during which thirty-four people were killed, hundreds injured, and almost 4,000 people arrested. In the years after Kennedy's death, there was an explosion of racial violence on the streets of the country's worst black slums—Rochester, Harlem, and Philadelphia erupted in 1964, and later Washington, Baltimore, San Francisco, Detroit, Cleveland, and Chicago.

In July 1967, President Johnson appointed a commission headed by Illinois Governor Otto Kerner to investigate the racial disorders in American cities. The Kerner Commission, as it became known, reported back the following year. The commissioners discussed urban violence—and the sense of disillusionment from which it sprang—in the context of broader national trends. They pointed out that the great judicial and legislative victories of the civil rights era had produced a new form of resentment as blacks realized that it would take far more comprehensive reforms to ensure genuine black equality. They also cited the "white terrorism directed against nonviolent protesters" as a precipitating factor in the riots, along with a prevailing sense of alienation and powerlessness among young black Americans, which had led many to believe that there was no effective alternative to violence. In many communities, the commissioners also noted, the police had come to symbolize "white power, white racism, and white repression." Every one of these trends cited in the report had been in evidence at various stages of the Kennedy presidency—from police brutality to white terrorism. But the Kennedy administration had done little to address these underlying problems. If anything, it had exacerbated them through its own inaction.



There are a number of explanations—political and temperamental—for Kennedy's distracted and often excessively and unnecessarily cautious approach to the civil rights agenda. But perhaps the most obvious explanation lies in Kennedy's own successes as a lawmaker and as a political candidate. From his very first congressional campaign, Kennedy had learned how to gain electoral advantage through manipulation—sometimes cynical, sometimes sincere—of black opinion. He had drawn on the same skills during his years

in Congress—had it not been for his adroit, and at times brilliant, handling of civil rights, Kennedy would never have risen so fast in the 1950s. Throughout his political career, up until and including his 1960 presidential campaign, Kennedy had reached out to black voters (as well as white liberal sympathizers) through symbolic gestures and tokenistic measures.

Kennedy believed he could enjoy much the same political success as president—and to some extent, he was right. At the very moment that SNCC activists were formulating their Montgomery Battle Plan, Kennedy enjoyed black approval ratings above eighty percent. Kennedy had good reason to believe that his policies were in step with the expectations of blacks nationwide. His sense that black activists such as King and Wilkins had gone beyond the constituency they claimed to represent was not entirely unjustified.

But over the long term, Kennedy's reliance on opinion polls proved to be politically myopic. High black approval ratings validated lackluster policies. Kennedy marginalized advisers like Harris Wofford and Louis Martin who tried to draw attention to the disaffection of black leaders and civil rights activists. He kept his distance from those who tried to confront him with less rosy assessments of the race problem—including members of the Civil Rights Commission. When criticized, Kennedy would lurch to the defensive. All too often, he would justify any perceived complacency by comparing his record on civil rights to that of his predecessors. But given the turbulent and rapidly changing political climate of the early 1960s, and the heightened expectations of civil rights activists, the comparison was meaningless.

There were other reasons for Kennedy's shortcomings when it came to civil rights. He was temperamentally averse to confrontation, which partly explained his preference for voluntary solutions to intractable problems of segregation and discrimination. He was chronically unwilling to endorse punitive action, particularly in the realm of employment reform and school integration.

Kennedy's convivial leadership style also meant that he was unwilling to do anything that would antagonize members of the Southern Caucus—he was afraid of souring his cordial personal relationships by conducting what he considered pointless arguments over race. He was endlessly ingratiating even when it came to negotiating with diehard segregationists—a tendency that proved particularly disastrous at the height of the Ole Miss crisis.

Kennedy could have accomplished a great deal by taking on the Southern Caucus early in his presidency. Had he done so, and thereby exposed their diminishing political power, radical figures such as George Wallace and Ross Barnett would never have had the confidence to defy the federal government so brazenly. But Kennedy's deference toward southern lawmakers emboldened diehard segregationists. It contributed to a culture of impunity in the Deep South, in which the most virulent proponents of segregation—Wallace, Barnett, and their ilk—were able to commit flagrant violations of basic civil rights on behalf of their shrinking constituency.

Kennedy was also emotionally limited—in many ways a product of his highly regimented Boston family and the exclusive schools he had attended. He took great pride in his coolness under pressure, and this detachment came to define his style of presidential leadership. At times, such as the Cuban missile

crisis, it was a tremendous asset. But when it came to civil rights, it meant that he was notoriously unresponsive even when confronted by the most heinous acts of racial violence. Images that affected most Americans on a visceral level—from the Birmingham photograph to Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech—elicited purely pragmatic responses from the president.

Kennedy's extraordinary personal charisma and the idealistic promise of his young administration often masked his cynicism and conservatism. His restless campaign rhetoric had created the false impression that he intended to usher in an era of fervent reform. The reality was less stirring. Kennedy could be an inspiring speaker, but he was no political visionary. As his congressional record demonstrated, he was an incrementalist with only limited ambitions in domestic policy. The Kennedy campaign had invented the phrase "New Frontier" specifically to tap into the deep well of American nostalgia for the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But when it came to civil rights Kennedy had no intention of offering the nation a genuinely new deal.

Kennedy had immense skill when it came to crafting his own image. But he was largely unwilling to lend this skill to the cause of civil rights. As the columnist James Reston once so aptly pointed out, Kennedy was much better at dramatizing himself than the issues. In the spring of 1963, when a delegation from the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] suggested a series of fireside chats to help defuse the civil rights crisis, Kennedy demurred on the grounds that he did not have Roosevelt's voice. The response spoke less of humility than of Kennedy's timid governing philosophy.

Kennedy compounded his deficiencies by surrounding himself with advisers who reinforced his instinctively conservative nature. Political operatives like Kenneth O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien shared not only Kennedy's cautious political instincts but also his contempt for moralizing liberals. During the summer of 1963, Kennedy started to rely more and more on the advice of his brother and Burke Marshall, who were pushing him to embrace reform. Nonetheless, O'Donnell and O'Brien repeatedly tried to restrain him.

By the time of his death, Kennedy had unquestionably become more sympathetic to the plight of black Americans. He had grown in office. He had started to question the version of southern history that had underpinned much of his thinking on federal power and had grown increasingly impatient with die-hard segregationists, who seemed ever more irrational to Kennedy and in some cases even deranged. He also showed some signs of increased emotional engagement—evident in his extemporaneous remarks during his nationwide television address on June 11, and his response to the death of Medgar Evers.

But Kennedy never seemed able to sustain this level of empathy for the black cause. Days after he invited Myrlie Evers to the White House, Kennedy spoke scornfully of how the black demonstrators who were arriving in the capital might "shit" on the Washington monument. He vacillated in much the same way in the aftermath of the Birmingham bombing. He released a fiercely worded statement on the Monday after the bomb attack but failed even to mention the murders when he addressed the nation the very next evening.

Martin Luther King was right to draw attention to Kennedy's "schizophrenic tendency" when it came to civil rights. There was, however,

something of a pattern to Kennedy's fluctuations. He tended to be cold and calculating when organized civil rights protesters tried to pressure him into taking a political stand. He was much more sympathetic to individuals who had suffered directly from the violent outrages of segregation. He offered no public support to King and the Birmingham protesters in April 1963, for instance, but hastened to offer private reassurances to Coretta King over the telephone. That same month, Kennedy publicly criticized the CRC for its interim report on the racial crisis in Mississippi but made a point of calling to the attention of journalists his revulsion at the murder of William Moore. The CRC was an abstract political entity that both criticized Kennedy and demanded of him an overtly political response. Moore's protest, by contrast, was far more understated. While he had also sought to focus attention on Mississippi, Moore did so by making a solitary march toward Jackson, with only a simple placard: "Equal Rights for All (Mississippi or Bust)." Because little in Moore's actions challenged Kennedy or his administration directly, the president was able to respond in purely human terms to this appalling murder.

Perhaps there is something more to Kennedy's pattern of response. At times, it seemed almost as if Kennedy found in these individual victims a means of expiating his guilt for his failure to speak and act more forcefully on the public stage. From his earliest days as a congressman, Kennedy had been personally committed to the cause of black equality—but he constantly made excuses for failing to push for it politically. Perhaps on some level, Kennedy wanted to be something more than he was—a stronger president, a more virtuous man.

Civil rights could certainly bring out the best in Kennedy—his personal warmth, his lack of prejudice, his gallantry, his natural skill as a speaker, and—belatedly—his extraordinary ability to inspire. But the issue also brought out the weaker side of his personality—his indecisiveness, his political cautiousness, his instinctive defensiveness in the face of criticism, and, above all, his lack of moral conviction.

In the final summer of his life, Kennedy seemed to be trying to resurrect the nobler ideals that motivated him in the early years of his career, when his views on civil rights were less corrupted by politics. But would that dedication have endured into his second term? Perhaps. By the time of his assassination, Kennedy had considerable support for civil rights reform throughout the country. And he was beginning to experiment with this new southern strategy, which had already shown early promise. But it is all too easy to imagine a real retrenchment. Throughout his political career, Kennedy had been willing—even eager—to abandon the cause of reform when he sensed it might lead to any sort of unpleasant confrontation. There is no way, of course, to know what Kennedy would have done in the next five years of his presidency. But his political history demonstrates that, at least when it came to civil rights, he almost always allowed the voice of political expedience to drown out the better angels of his nature. . . .



John Kennedy had never set out—as a legislator or as president—to dramatically overhaul race relations in the American South. For him, the defining struggle of the postwar era was not civil rights but the Cold War, and he not unreasonably believed that his presidency would be judged by his handling of the threat from the Soviet Union. From the outset of his career, Kennedy was primarily interested in foreign relations, and as president during the hottest years of the Cold War, he trained his gaze on Moscow far more often than on Birmingham or Atlanta. Consequently, Kennedy was almost perpetually distracted from civil rights issues. Even on the day of the momentous March on Washington, Kennedy spent more time chairing discussions on South Vietnam than he did with King and other march leaders.

But Kennedy's approach to civil rights was also deeply intertwined with his foreign policy. To a large extent, Kennedy's early interest in the problem of segregation derived from his fear that it would embarrass the United States on the international stage and provide the Soviets with a crucial propaganda tool in their battle for supremacy in the developing world. Kennedy spoke out vocally against segregation in many of his early speeches specifically for this reason, and his early presidential efforts to promote integration in both the federal government and the clubs and restaurants of the capital were all part of the broader Cold War strategy.

Because his anticommunism drove so much of his thinking about civil rights, however, Kennedy could also quickly turn against the black cause when it suited the exigencies of international politics. During the Freedom Rides, Kennedy was almost paralyzed by his fear of handing Khrushchev, a public relations victory, which partly explained why his personal role during the first civil rights crisis of his presidency was so very limited. He later infuriated civil rights leaders when it became clear that his early support for black nationalist movements in Africa had given way to purely strategic geopolitical considerations. Even in the final year of his presidency, Kennedy continued to refer to civil rights in the context of the Cold War. But the rhetoric began to sound hollow. Transfixed by the fierce spiritual energy of Martin Luther King, a new generation of black Americans needed a president who spoke with the same kind of moral force.

Kennedy was all too often tone deaf when it came to civil rights. He was never able to provide the kind of principled leadership that black activists so desperately needed. Instead, the president leaned heavily on his highly effective strategy of association—a strategy that his successors quickly learned to imitate. The Kennedy administration taught Washington an ugly political lesson: that politicians could win black support through grand symbolic gestures, which obviated the need for trolly substantive reforms.

Kennedy's strategy ultimately transformed the politics of race in America. Lyndon Johnson pressed for fresh civil rights legislation, but he also acutely understood the value of symbolic change. He awarded Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, and A. Philip Randolph the Presidential Medal of Freedom, elevated Thurgood Marshall to the Supreme Court, and made Robert Weaver the head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Jimmy Carter relied more heavily on this tactic. In the absence of a forceful civil

rights program, he appointed Andrew Young as his ambassador to the United Nations, made a pilgrimage to Martin Luther King's tomb at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, and even had a White House adviser who was nicknamed the "Secretary for Symbolism." The strategy also worked in reverse, of course. When Richard Nixon wanted to court the George Wallace constituency during the 1972 election campaign, he asked Alexander Haig, his chief of staff, to explore of possibility of securing federal funding for a statute of Robert E. Lee and a memorial to Confederate soldiers. Kennedy had demonstrated that racial politics could be played out at the level of spectacle—it was far less dangerous than a serious battle of ideas.

Kennedy had become president at a turning point in American history. By the end of the 1950s, many segregationists had come to accept the vulnerability of their position. Southern blacks looked forward to the day—just around the corner it seemed—when they would finally enjoy first class citizenship. An optimistic civil rights movement remained resolutely committed to the idea of nonviolent, peaceful change. A majority of Americans were favorably disposed toward racial reform.

At the time of his presidential victory, Kennedy had a unique opportunity to secure a peaceful transition toward a more integrated and equitable society. Instead, Kennedy stood aside. The battle for the revision of Rule XXII in 1960, the New Orleans school crisis, the Freedom Rides, the Battle of Ole Miss, D-Day in Birmingham—all were opportunities for Kennedy to hasten the downfall of southern segregation. But up until the Birmingham riot in 1963, when the crisis in race relations finally threatened to overwhelm the country, Kennedy abdicated his responsibility to lead the great social revolution of his age. And by then it was too late. At the time of his death, America was already moving inexorably toward what the Kerner Commission would later vividly describe as "two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." For far too long, Kennedy had remained a bystander.



POSTSCRIPT



Did President John F. Kennedy Demonstrate a Strong Commitment to Civil Rights?

Writing against the backdrop of John Kennedy's assassination in Dallas on November 22, 1963, the first generation of biographers of the 37th President of the United States tended to write glowingly of the fallen leader's accomplishments. The earliest full-length assessments came from the President's inner circle. They include Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Houghton Mifflin, 1965); Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (Harper and Row, 1965); and Kenneth P. O'Donnell and David F. Powers, with Joe McCarthy, *"Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye": Memories of John Fitzgerald Kennedy* (Little, Brown, 1970). More critical appraisals can be found in Henry Fairlie, *The Kennedy Promise: The Politics of Expectation* (Doubleday, 1973); Garry Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power* (Little, Brown, 1982); and Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (Simon & Schuster, 1993). Newer, balanced studies include Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917–1963* (Little, Brown, 2003) and David Burner, *John F. Kennedy and a New Generation* (2nd ed.; Pearson Longman, 2005). For additional works that treat JFK's civil rights record, see Burke Marshall, *Federalism and Civil Rights* (Columbia University Press, 1964); Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1980); Irving Bernstein, *Promises Kept: John F. Kennedy's New Frontier* (Oxford University Press, 1991), especially chapters 2 and 3; and Mark Stern, *Calculating Visions: Kennedy, Johnson, and Civil Rights* (Rutgers University Press, 1992). Important insights also can be gleaned from John Hart, "Kennedy, Congress, and Civil Rights," *Journal of American Studies* 13 (August 1979): 165–178; and Robert E. Gilbert, "John F. Kennedy and Civil Rights for Black Americans," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 12 (Summer 1982): 386–399.

The literature on the civil rights movement is extensive. August Meier, Elliott Rudwick, and Francis L. Broderick, eds., *Black Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* (2nd ed.; Bobbs-Merrill, 1971) present a collection of documents that places the activities of the 1950s and 1960s in a larger framework. The reflections of many of the participants of the movement are included in Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South* (G. P. Putnam, 1977). August Meier's contemporary assessment, "On the Role of Martin Luther King," *Crisis* (1965), in many ways remains the most insightful analysis of King's leadership. More detailed studies include David J. Garrow's Pulitzer-Prize winning *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (William Morrow, 1986); and Harvard Sitkoff, *King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop* (Hill and Wang, 2008).

Taylor Branch's award-winning trilogy *America in the King Years* (Simon & Schuster, 1988, 1998, 2006) is a wonderful read.

The black nationalist critique of King and the nonviolent direct action campaign is effectively presented in Malcolm X (with Alex Haley), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Grove Press, 1964); and Peter Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X* (Harper and Row, 1974). James H. Cone's *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Orbis, 1991) is a valuable analysis that emphasizes the convergence of these two leaders' ideas.

For an understanding of the major civil rights organizations in the 1960s, see August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942–1968* (Oxford University Press, 1973); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Harvard University Press, 1981); Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (University of Georgia Press, 1987); and Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New Press, 2009). Finally, the texture of the civil rights movement is captured brilliantly in Henry Hampton's documentary series "Eyes on the Prize."





Did President Nixon Negotiate a “Peace with Honor” in Vietnam in 1973?

YES: Richard Nixon, from *The Real War* (Warner Books, 1980)

NO: Larry Berman, from *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam* (The Free Press, 2001)

ISSUE SUMMARY

YES: Former president Richard Nixon believes that the South Vietnamese government would not have lost the war to North Vietnam in 1975 if Congress had not cut off aid.

NO: According to Professor Larry Berman, President Nixon knew that the Paris Peace Accords of January 1973 were flawed, but he intended to bomb North Vietnamese troops to prevent the collapse of South Vietnam until he left office.

At the end of World War II, imperialism was coming to a close in Asia and anti-imperialist movements emerged all over Asia and Africa, often producing chaos. The United States faced a dilemma. On the one hand, America was a nation conceived in revolution and was sympathetic to the struggles of the Third World nations. On the other hand, the United States was afraid that many of the revolutionary leaders were Communists who would place their countries under the control of the expanding empire of the Soviet Union. By the late 1940s, the Truman administration decided that it was necessary to stop the spread of communism. The policy that resulted was known as “containment.”

The first true military test of the “containment” doctrine came soon. Korea, previously controlled by Japan, had been temporarily divided at the 38th Parallel at the end of World War II. Communists gained control of North Korea while anticommunist revolutionaries established a government in South Korea. When neither side would agree to a unified government, the temporary division became permanent. After North Korea attacked South Korea in late June 1950, President Truman led the nation into an undeclared war under United Nations auspices. The Korean War lasted 3 years and was fought to a stalemate.

Vietnam provided the second test of the “containment” doctrine in Asia. Vietnam had been a French protectorate from 1885 until Japan took control

during World War II. Shortly before the war ended, the Japanese gave Vietnam its independence but the French were determined to reestablish their influence in the area. Conflicts emerged between the French-led nationalist forces of South Vietnam and the Communist-dominated provisional government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam established in Hanoi in August 1945. Ho Chi Minh was the president of the DRV. An avowed Communist since the 1920s, Ho had also become the major nationalist figure in Vietnam and managed to tie together the Communist and nationalist movements in Vietnam.

A full-scale war broke out in 1946 between the Communist government of North Vietnam and the French-dominated country of South Vietnam. The war lasted 8 years. After the Communists had inflicted a disastrous defeat on the French at the battle of Dienbienphu in May 1954, the latter decided to pull out. At the Geneva Conference the following summer, Vietnam was divided at the 17th Parallel pending elections.

The United States involvement in Vietnam came after the French withdrew. In 1955, the Republican President Dwight Eisenhower refused to recognize the Geneva Accords but supported the establishment of the South Vietnamese government. Its leader was Ngo Dinh Diem. In 1956 Diem, with United States approval, refused to hold elections that would have provided a unified government for Vietnam in accordance with the Geneva agreement. The Communists in the South responded by again taking up the armed struggle. The war continued unabated for another 19 years.

Both President Eisenhower and his Democratic successor, John F. Kennedy, were anxious to prevent South Vietnam from being taken over by the Communists. Economic assistance and military aid were given to the South Vietnamese government. A major problem for President Kennedy lay in the unpopularity of the South Vietnamese government. He supported the overthrow of the Diem regime (though not his murder) in October 1963, and hoped that the successor government would establish an alternative to communism. It didn't work. Kennedy himself was assassinated 3 weeks later. His successor Lyndon Johnson changed the character of American policy in Vietnam by escalating the air war and increasing the number of ground forces from 21,000 in 1965, to a full fighting force of 550,000 at its peak in 1968.

The next president, Richard Nixon, adopted a new policy of "Vietnamization" of the war. Military aid to the Republic of South Vietnam was increased to ensure the defeat of the Communists. At the same time, American troops were gradually withdrawn from Vietnam. The bombing raids in the fall and winter of 1972 probably convinced the North Vietnamese to negotiate a peace settlement. In the first selection, Nixon argues that South Vietnam had defeated the Communists by the time of the cease-fire in January 1973 and that the victory was short-lived because after North Vietnam violated the accords in 1975, the United States Congress refused to give South Vietnam the aid that would have prevented its fall to the communists. Professor Larry Berman argues there was no peace and no honor. President Nixon knew the Paris Peace Accords were flawed, but once he got the prisoners of war home, when the cease-fire collapsed, he intended to bomb North Vietnam to prevent the collapse of South Vietnam until he left office.

The Vietnam Syndrome

The final chapters have yet to be written on the war in Vietnam. It was a traumatizing experience for Americans, a brutalizing experience for the Vietnamese, an exploitable opportunity for the Soviets. It was also one of the crucial battles of World War III. . . .

Vietnam was partitioned in 1954, with a communist government in the North under Ho Chi Minh and a noncommunist government in the South with its capital in Saigon. Between the two was a demilitarized buffer zone—the DMZ. Soon Ho's government in Hanoi was infiltrating large numbers of agents into the South, where they worked with guerrilla forces to set up networks of subversion and terrorism designed to undermine the Saigon government.

The interim premier of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, became its first president in 1955. He proved to be a strong and effective leader, particularly in containing the communist guerrilla forces that were directly supported by the North in violation of the 1954 Partition Agreement. The Eisenhower administration provided generous economic assistance and some military aid and technical advisers, but Eisenhower rejected proposals to commit American combat forces.

Large-scale infiltration from the North began in 1959, and by 1961 the communists had made substantial gains. Sir Robert Thompson arrived in Vietnam that year to head the British Advisory Mission. Thompson had been Secretary of Defense of the Malayan Federation when the communist insurgency had been defeated there. He and the CIA people on the scene understood the importance of local political realities in guerrilla war. In putting down the rebellion in Malaya over the course of twelve years, from 1948 to 1960, the British had learned that local, low-level aggression was best countered by local, low-level defense. Britain had used only 30,000 troops in Malaya, but had also employed 60,000 police and 250,000 in a home guard.

With the excellent advice he was getting, Diem was able to reverse the momentum of the war and put the communists on the defensive. Just as the war in Malaya had been won, the war in Vietnam was being won in the early 1960s. But then three critical events occurred that eventually turned the promise of victory into the fact of defeat.

The first took place far from Vietnam, in Cuba, in 1961: the Bay of Pigs invasion. That disastrous failure prompted President John F. Kennedy to order

a postmortem, and General Maxwell Taylor was chosen to conduct it. He concluded that the CIA was not equipped to handle large-scale paramilitary operations and decided that the American effort in Vietnam fit into this category. He therefore recommended that control of it be handed over to the Pentagon, a decision that proved to have enormous consequences. The political sophistication and on-the-spot "feel" for local conditions that the CIA possessed went out the window, as people who saw the world through technological lenses took over the main operational responsibility for the war.

Another key turning point came the next year, in 1962, in Laos. At a press conference two months after his inauguration Kennedy had correctly declared that a communist attempt to take over Laos "quite obviously affects the security of the United States." He also said, "We will not be provoked, trapped, or drawn into this or any other situation; but I know that every American will want his country to honor its obligations." At the Geneva Conference in July 1962 fifteen countries signed an agreement in which those with military forces in Laos pledged to withdraw them and all agreed to stop any paramilitary assistance. All the countries complied except one: North Vietnam. North Vietnam never took any serious steps to remove its 7,000-man contingent from Laos—only 40 men were recorded as leaving—and the United States was therefore eventually forced to resume covert aid to Laos to prevent the North Vietnamese from taking over the country.

North Vietnam's obstinacy in keeping its forces in Laos—which had increased to 70,000 by 1972—created an extremely difficult situation for the South Vietnamese. The communists used the sparsely inhabited highlands of eastern Laos, and also of Cambodia, as a route for supplying their forces in South Vietnam. These areas also gave them a privileged sanctuary from which to strike, enabling them to concentrate overwhelmingly superior forces against a single local target and then slip back across the border before reinforcements could be brought in. The "Ho Chi Minh Trail" through Laos enabled the communists to do an end run around the demilitarized zone between North and South and to strike where the defenders were least prepared.

If South Vietnam had only had to contend with invasion and infiltration from the North across the forty-mile-long DMZ, it could have done so without the assistance of American forces. In the Korean War the enemy had had to attack directly across the border; North Korea could hardly use the ocean on either side of South Korea as a "privileged sanctuary" from which to launch attacks. But Hanoi was able to use sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia as staging grounds for its assault on South Vietnam. In addition to making hit-and-run tactics possible, these lengthened the border the South had to defend from 40 to 640 miles, not counting indentations. Along these 640 miles there were few natural boundaries. The North Vietnamese were free to pick and choose their points of attack, always waiting until they had an overwhelming local advantage, in accordance with the strategy of guerrilla warfare. Our failure to prevent North Vietnam from establishing the Ho Chi Minh Trail along Laos' eastern border in 1962 had an enormous effect on the subsequent events in the war.

The third key event that set the course of the war was the assassination of Diem. Diem was a strong leader whose nationalist credentials were as solid

as Ho Chi Minh's. He faced the difficult task of forging a nation while waging a war. In the manner of postcolonial leaders, he ran a regime that drew its inspiration partly from European parliamentary models, partly from traditional Asian models, and partly from necessity. It worked for Vietnam, but it offended American purists, those who inspect the world with white gloves and disdain association with any but the spotless. Unfortunately for Diem, the American press corps in Vietnam wore white gloves, and although the North was not open to their inspection, the South was. Diem himself had premonitions of the fatal difference this might make when he told Sir Robert Thompson in 1962, "Only the American press can lose this war."

South Vietnam under Diem was substantially free, but, by American standards, not completely free. Responsible reporting seeks to keep events in proportion. The mark of irresponsible reporting is that it blows them out of proportion. It achieves drama by exaggeration, and its purpose is not truth but drama. The shortcomings of Diem's regime, like other aspects of the war, were blown grossly out of proportion.

"The camera," it has been pointed out, "has a more limited view even than the cameraman and argues always from the particular to the general." On June 11, 1963, the camera provided a very narrow view for the television audience in the United States. On that day, in a ritual carefully arranged for the camera, a Buddhist monk in South Vietnam doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire. That picture, selectively chosen, seared a single word into the minds of many Americans: repression. The camera's focus on this one monk's act of self-immolation did not reveal the larger reality of South Vietnam; it obscured it. Even more thoroughly obscured from the television audience's view were the conditions inside North Vietnam, where unfriendly newsmen were not allowed.

Recently, in the Soviet Union, a Crimean Tartar set himself on fire to protest the thirty-five-year exile of his people from their ancestral homeland. A picture of this did not make the network news; it did not even make the front pages; I saw a story about it, with no pictures, buried on page twenty-one of the Los Angeles *Times*.

Communist regimes bury their mistakes; we advertise ours. During the war in Vietnam a lot of well-intentioned Americans got taken in by our well-advertised mistakes.

Some Buddhist temples in Vietnam were, in effect, headquarters of political opposition, and some Buddhist sects were more political than religious. The fact that Diem was a devout Catholic made him an ideal candidate to be painted as a repressor of Buddhists. They also played very skillful political theater; the "burning Buddhist" incident was an especially grisly form. But the press played up the Buddhists as oppressed holy people, and the world placed the blame on their target, Diem. The press has a way of focusing on one aspect of a complex situation as "the" story; in Vietnam in 1963 "the" story was "repression."

President Kennedy grew increasingly, unhappy at being allied with what was being portrayed as a brutal, oppressive government. Apparently without seriously considering the long-term consequences, the United States began putting some distance between itself and Diem.

On November 1, 1963, Diem was overthrown in a coup and assassinated. Charges that the U.S. government was directly involved may be untrue and unfair. However, the most charitable interpretation of the Kennedy administration's part in this affair is that it greased the skids for Diem's downfall and did nothing to prevent his murder. It was a sordid episode in American foreign policy. Diem's fall was followed by political instability and chaos in South Vietnam, and the event had repercussions all over Asia as well. President Ayub Khan of Pakistan told me a few months later, "Diem's murder meant three things to many Asian leaders: that it is dangerous to be a friend of the United States; that it pays to be neutral; and that sometimes it helps to be an enemy."

The months of pressure and intrigue preceding the coup had paralyzed the Diem administration and allowed the communists to gain the initiative in the war. Once Diem was disposed of, the gates of the Presidential Palace became a revolving door. Whatever his faults, Diem had represented "legitimacy." With the symbol of legitimacy gone, power in South Vietnam was up for grabs. Coup followed coup for the next two years until Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky took over in 1965. The guerrilla forces had taken advantage of this chaotic situation and gained a great deal of strength in the interim.

President Kennedy had sent 16,000 American troops to Vietnam to serve as combat "advisers" to the regular South Vietnam units, but after Diem's assassination the situation continued to deteriorate. In 1964 Hanoi sent in troops in order to be in a position to take over power when the government of South Vietnam fell. By 1965 South Vietnam was on the verge of collapse. In order to prevent the conquest by the North, President Johnson, in February started bombing of the North, and in March the first independent American combat units landed in Danang. As our involvement deepened, reaching a level of 550,000 troops by the time Johnson left office, fatal flaws in the American approach became manifest.

In World War II we won basically by out producing the other side. We built more and better weapons, and we were able to bombard the enemy with so many of them that he was forced to give up. Overwhelming firepower, unparalleled logistical capabilities, and the massive military operations that our talent for organization made possible were the keys to our success. But in World War II we were fighting a conventional war against a conventional enemy. We also were fighting a total war, and therefore, like the enemy, we had no qualms about the carnage we caused. Even before Hiroshima an estimated 35,000 people were killed in the Allied firebombing of Dresden; more than 80,000 perished in the two-day incendiary bombing of Tokyo a month later.

Vietnam, like Korea, was a limited war. The United States plunged in too impulsively in the 1960s, and then behaved too indecisively. We tried to wage a conventional war against an enemy who was fighting an unconventional war. We tried to mold the South Vietnamese Army into a large-scale conventional force while the principal threat was still from guerrilla forces, which called for the sort of smaller-unit, local-force response that had proved so successful in Malaya. American military policy-makers tended to downplay the subtler political and psychological aspects of guerrilla war, trying instead to win by throwing massive quantities of men and arms at the objective. And then, the

impact even of this was diluted by increasing American pressure gradually rather than suddenly, thus giving the enemy time to adapt. Eisenhower, who refrained from publicly criticizing the conduct of the war, privately fumed about the gradualism. He once commented to me: "If the enemy holds a hill with a battalion, give me two battalions and I'll take it, but at great cost in casualties. Give me a division and I'll take it without a fight."

In Vietnam during that period we were not subtle enough in waging the guerrilla war; were too subtle in waging the conventional war. We were too patronizing, even contemptuous, toward our ally, and too solicitous of our enemy. Vietnamese morale was sapped by "Americanization" of the war; American morale was sapped by perpetuation of the war.

Democracies are not well equipped to fight prolonged wars. A democracy fights well after its morale is galvanized by an enemy attack and it gears up its war production. A totalitarian power can coerce its population into fighting indefinitely. But a democracy fights well only as long as public opinion supports the war, and public opinion will not continue to support a war that drags on without tangible signs of progress. This is doubly true when the war is being fought half a world away. Twenty-five years ago the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu wrote, "There has never been a protracted war from which a country had benefited. . . . What is essential in war," he went on, "is victory not prolonged operations." Victory was what the American people were not getting.

We Americans are a do-it-yourself people. During that period we failed to understand that we could not win the war for the South Vietnamese: that, in the final analysis, the South Vietnamese would have to win it for themselves. The United States bulldozed its way into Vietnam and tried to run the war our way instead of recognizing that our mission should have been to help the South Vietnamese build up their forces so that they could win the war.

When I was talking with an Asian leader before I became President, he graphically pointed out the weakness in what was then the American policy toward South Vietnam: "When you are trying to assist another nation in defending its freedom, U.S. policy should be to help them fight the war but not to fight it for them." This was exactly where we had been going wrong in Vietnam. As South Vietnam's Vice President Ky later said, "You captured our war."

When I took office in 1969 it was obvious the American strategy in Vietnam needed drastic revision. My administration was committed to formulating a strategy that would end American involvement in the war and enable South Vietnam to win.

Our goals were to:

- Reverse the "Americanization" of the war that had occurred from 1965 to 1968 and concentrate instead on Vietnamization.
- Give more priority to pacification so that the South Vietnamese could be better able to extend their control over the countryside.
- Reduce the invasion threat by destroying enemy sanctuaries and supply lines in Cambodia and Laos.
- Withdraw the half million American troops from Vietnam in a way that would not bring about a collapse in the South.

- Negotiate a cease-fire and a peace treaty.
- Demonstrate our willingness and determination to stand by our ally if the peace agreement was violated by Hanoi, and assure South Vietnam that it would continue to receive our military aid as Hanoi did from its allies, the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, China.

En route to Vietnam for my first visit as President, I held a press conference in Guam on July 25, 1969, at which I enunciated what has become known as the Nixon Doctrine. At the heart of the Nixon Doctrine is the premise that countries threatened by communist aggression must take the primary responsibility for their own defense. This does not mean that U.S. forces have no military role; what it does mean is that threatened countries have to be willing to bear the primary burden of supplying the manpower. We were already putting the Nixon Doctrine into effect in Vietnam by concentrating on Vietnamization. This meant, as Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird put it, helping South Vietnam develop "a stronger administration, a stronger economy, stronger military forces and stronger police for internal security."

The most important aspect of Vietnamization was the development of South Vietnam's army into a strong, independent fighting force capable of holding its own against the communists—both the guerrilla forces and the main-force units from the north that were then waging conventional war.

In October 1969 I sent Sir Robert Thompson to Vietnam as my special adviser, with instructions to give me a candid, first-hand, independent evaluation of the situation. He reported that he was able to walk safely through many villages that had been under Vietcong control for years. He was so impressed with the progress that had been made that he thought we were in "a winning position" to conclude a just peace if we were willing to follow through with the efforts we were making.

After giving sharply increased emphasis to Vietnamization and pacification, the first order of military business was to hit at the enemy sanctuaries and supply lines in Laos and Cambodia. . . .

Cambodia

In March 1969, in response to a major new offensive that the North Vietnamese had launched against our forces in South Vietnam, I ordered the bombing of enemy-occupied base areas in Cambodia. The bombing was not publicly announced because of our concern that if it were, Sihanouk would be forced to object to it. However, even after it was disclosed by leaks to the *New York Times* in April, Sihanouk did not object. On the contrary, in May 1969, two months after the bombing had started, he said, "Cambodia only protests against the destruction of the property and lives of Cambodians. . . . If there is a buffalo or any Cambodian killed, I will be informed immediately . . . (and) I will protest."

In June 1969, Sihanouk said at a press conference that one of Cambodia's northeast provinces was "practically North Vietnamese territory," and the next month he invited me to visit Cambodia to mark the improvement of relations between our two countries. But Sihanouk's tilt toward the United States

did not satisfy Cambodian public opinion. The Cambodians strongly objected to North Vietnam's violation of their sovereignty. In a series of rapidly moving events in March 1970, demonstrations against North Vietnamese occupation of Cambodian territory led to the sacking of the North Vietnamese and Vietcong embassies in Phnom Penh. Within a matter of days the North Vietnamese were given forty-eight hours' notice to vacate the country. Tiring of Sihanouk's careful balancing act, the Cambodian Parliament voted unanimously to depose him. . . .

Throughout April we showed restraint while the Vietnamese communist forces ran rampant through Cambodia. Our total military aid delivered to Cambodia consisted of 3,000 rifles provided covertly. The communists did not show similar restraint; they made it clear that their sole objective was domination of Cambodia.

Finally, on April 30, I announced our decision to counter the communist offensive by attacking North Vietnamese-occupied base areas in Cambodia bordering on South Vietnam. Our principal purpose was to undercut the North Vietnamese invasion of that country so that Vietnamization and plans for the withdrawal of American troops could continue in South Vietnam. A secondary purpose was to relieve the military pressure exerted on Cambodia by the North Vietnamese forces that were rapidly overrunning it. The North Vietnamese had been occupying parts of eastern Cambodia for over five years and returned there after we left; in contrast we limited our stay to two months and advanced only to a depth of twenty-one miles. It is obvious to any unbiased observer who the aggressor was. . . .

The joint operations by the U.S. Army and ARVN wiped out huge stores of North Vietnamese equipment—15 million rounds of ammunition (a full year's supply), 14 million pounds of rice (four months' supply), 23,000 weapons (enough for seventy-four full-strength North Vietnamese battalions), and much more.

Thanks to this and the following year's Lam Son operation in Laos by the South Vietnamese forces, Hanoi was unable to stockpile enough supplies for a full-scale attack on South Vietnam until two years later—in 1972. Valuable time had been won with which to complete the task of Vietnamization. And even when the 1972 offensive came, it was weakest and easiest to contain from the direction of the sanctuaries in Cambodia, a testimony to the effectiveness of our measures. . . .

The 1972 Invasion

The American and South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia and Laos in 1970 and 1971 successfully prevented major North Vietnamese and Vietcong offensives in South Vietnam during those years and made it possible for the United States to continue to withdraw its forces on schedule.

By the spring of 1972 Hanoi recognized that it could not conquer South Vietnam through guerrilla war tactics, even with the help of conventional units, and that it could not win the support of the South Vietnamese people. There was no creditable way for Hanoi to claim any longer that the war in the South was a

civil war between the Saigon government and the Vietcong, so North Vietnam dropped the facade of "civil war" and launched a full-scale conventional invasion of the South. Fourteen divisions and twenty-six independent regiments invaded the South. This left only one division and four independent regiments in Laos and no regular ground forces at all in North Vietnam.

As Sir Robert Thompson put it, "It was a sign of the times that this Korean-type communist invasion, which twenty years before would have prompted united Western action and ten years before a Kennedy crusade, immediately put in doubt American resolve and probably won the Wisconsin primary for Senator George McGovern."

U.S. mining of Haiphong Harbor and the use of our airpower against targets in North Vietnam helped save the day, but the fighting on the ground was done exclusively by South Vietnamese forces. North Vietnam lost an estimated 130,000, killed and disabled. The invasion was a failure. . . .

[Our] actions in 1972 strengthened rather than weakened our new relationship with the Soviets and the Chinese. They both could see that we had power, the will to use it, and the skill to use it effectively. This meant that we were worth talking to. We could be a reliable friend or a dangerous enemy. This did not mean that they could publicly abandon their communist allies in Hanoi. However, their support for Hanoi noticeably cooled, which increased the incentive for Hanoi's leaders to make a peace agreement.

As a result of their decisive defeat in the 1972 offensive and their growing concern about the reliability of their Soviet and Chinese allies, the North Vietnamese finally began to negotiate seriously. But they were as stubborn at the conference table as they were on the battlefield. They wanted victory more than they wanted peace. Despite the overwhelming defeat of the peace-at-any-price candidate in the U.S. November elections, they continued to balk at our minimum terms.

On December 14 I made the decision to renew and increase the bombing of military targets in North Vietnam. The bombing began on December 18. It was a necessary step, and it proved to be the right decision. Although it was a very difficult choice, the realities of war, and not the wishful thinking of the ill-informed, demanded this action. The bombing broke the deadlock in negotiations. The North Vietnamese returned to the negotiating table, and on January 23, 1973, the long-awaited peace agreement was finally achieved.

After their decisive defeat on the ground by South Vietnamese forces in the spring offensive and the destruction of their war-making capabilities by the December bombing, the North Vietnamese knew that militarily they were up against almost impossible odds. As the South Vietnamese economy continued to prosper far more than that of the North, Hanoi's communist ideology had less and less appeal. Thieu's Land to the Tiller program, for example, had reduced tenancy from 60 to 7 percent by 1973, a truly revolutionary development that undercut the communists' argument that the government allied itself with the rich and oppressed the people. Also, the North Vietnamese knew that both the Soviets and the Chinese had a stake in their new relationship with us and might not be willing to endanger that relationship by providing military supplies in excess of those allowed by the Paris peace agreement of January 1973.

From Victory to Defeat

We had won the war militarily and politically in Vietnam. But defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory because we lost the war politically in the United States. The peace that was finally won in January 1973 could have been enforced and South Vietnam could be a free nation today. But in a spasm of shortsightedness and spite, the United States threw away what it had gained at such enormous cost. . . .

On January 2, 1973, the House Democratic Caucus voted 154-75 to cut off all funds for Indochina military operations as soon as arrangements were made for the safe withdrawal of U.S. troops and the return of our prisoners of war. Two days later a similar resolution was passed by the Senate Democratic Caucus, 36-12. This, it should be noted, was before Watergate began to weaken my own position as President, and only three months before withdrawal of American forces was completed, and the last of the 550,000 American troops that were in Vietnam when I took office in 1969 were brought back. . . .

If the peace agreement was to have any chance to be effective, it was essential that Hanoi be deterred from breaking it. In a private letter to Thieu I had stated that "if Hanoi fails to abide by the terms of this agreement, it is my intention to take swift and severe retaliatory action." At a news conference on March 15, with regard to North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam and violation of the agreement, I stated, "I would only suggest that based on my actions over the past four years, the North Vietnamese should not lightly disregard such expressions of concern, when they are made with regard to a violation."

In April, May, and June of 1973, with my authority weakened by the Watergate crisis, retaliatory action was threatened but not taken. Then Congress passed a bill setting August 15 as the date for termination of U.S. bombing in Cambodia and requiring congressional approval for the funding of U.S. military action in any part of Indochina. The effect of this bill was to deny the President the means to enforce the Vietnam peace agreement by retaliating against Hanoi for violations.

Once Congress had removed the possibility of military action against breaches of the peace agreement, I knew I had only words with which to threaten. The communists knew it too. By means of the bombing cutoff and the War Powers resolution passed in November 1973, Congress denied to me and to my successor, President Ford, the means with which to enforce the Paris agreement at a time when the North Vietnamese were openly and flagrantly violating it. It is truly remarkable that, for two years after the signing of the peace agreement in January 1973, the South Vietnamese held their own against the well-supplied North, without American personnel support either in the air or on the ground and with dwindling supplies.

Throughout 1974 the Russians poured huge amounts of ammunition, weaponry, and military supplies into North Vietnam, and the North in turn poured them into the South. In March 1974 Hanoi was estimated to have 185,000 men, 500 to 700 tanks, and 24 regiments of antiaircraft troops in the South. With the threat of American air power gone, the North Vietnamese built

new roads and pipelines to move their armies and supplies about. At the same time, that the Soviet Union was arming Hanoi for the final assault, the United States Congress was sharply curtailing the flow of aid to South Vietnam. U.S. aid to South Vietnam was halved in 1974 and cut by another third in 1975. The United States ambassador to South Vietnam, Graham Martin, warned the Senate foreign Relations Committee that such cuts in military aid would "seriously tempt the North to gamble on an all-out military offensive." His warning was tragically prophetic.

The original plan of the North Vietnamese was to launch their final offensive in 1976. But then they stepped up their timetable. At the start of 1975 Phuoc Long province fell to the communists, the first province South Vietnam had lost completely since 1954. There was relatively little reaction in the United States. Hanoi decided to make larger attacks in 1975 in preparation for the final offensive in 1976. On March 11, Ban Me Thout fell, and on the same day the U.S. House of Representatives refused to fund a \$300 million supplemental military aid package that President Ford had proposed. Together with the earlier cut-back of aid, this had a devastating effect on the morale of the South Vietnamese, as well as denying them the means with which to defend themselves; they were desperately short of military supplies and dependent for them on the United States. It also gave a tremendous psychological boost to the North. The North threw all of its remaining troops into the battle. Thieu tried to regroup his undersupplied forces in more defensible perimeters, and the hastily executed maneuver turned into a rout. By the end of April it was all over. Saigon became Ho Chi Minh City.

Hanoi had suffered an overwhelming defeat when it launched a conventional attack on the South in 1972. Then the North Vietnamese had been stopped on the ground by the South Vietnamese, while bombing by our air force and mining by our navy crippled their efforts to resupply their forces in the South. B-52 strikes could have had a devastating effect on the large troop concentrations that Hanoi used in its final offensive, but in 1975 Hanoi did not have to reckon with our air and naval forces, and thanks to ample Soviet military aid they had overwhelming advantages in tanks and artillery over South Vietnam's ground forces. After North Vietnam's victory General Dung, Hanoi's field commander in charge of the final offensive, remarked that "The reduction of U.S. aid made it impossible for the puppet troops to carry out their combat plans and build up their forces. . . . Thieu was then forced to fight a poor man's war. Enemy firepower had decreased by nearly 60 percent because of bomb and ammunition shortages. Its mobility was also reduced by half due to lack of aircraft, vehicles and fuel."

Our defeat in Vietnam can be blamed in part on the Soviets because they provided arms to Hanoi in violation of the peace agreement, giving the North an enormous advantage over the South in the final offensive in the spring of 1975. It can be blamed in part on the tactical and strategic mistakes made by President Thieu and his generals. It is grossly unfair to put the blame on South Vietnam's fighting men, the great majority of whom fought bravely and well against overwhelming odds. A major part of the blame must fall on the shoulders of those members of the Congress who were responsible for denying to

the President, first me and then President Ford, the power to enforce the peace agreements, and for refusing to provide the military aid that South Vietnamese needed in order to meet the North Vietnamese offensive on equal terms.

But Congress was in part the prisoner of events. The leaders of the United States in the crucial years of the early and mid-1960s failed to come up with a strategy that would produce victory. Instead, first they undermined a strong regime, and then simply poured more and more U.S. troops and materiel into South Vietnam in an ineffective effort to shore up the weaker regimes that followed. They misled the public by insisting we were winning the war and thereby prepared the way for defeatism and demagoguery later on. The American people could not be expected to continue indefinitely to support a war in which they were told victory was around the corner, but which required greater and greater effort without any obvious signs of improvement.

By following the strategy I initiated in 1969, we and the South Vietnamese were able to win the war militarily by the time of the Paris accords of January 27, 1973. The 550,000 American troops that were in Vietnam when I came into office in 1969 had been withdrawn and South Vietnam was able to defend itself—if we supplied the arms the Paris accords allowed.

But the public had been so misinformed and misled by unwise government actions and the shallow, inflammatory treatment of events by the media that morale within the United States collapsed just when the North was overwhelmingly defeated on the battlefield. We won a victory after a long hard struggle, but then we threw it away. The communists had grasped what strategic analyst Brian Crozier said is the central point of revolutionary war: “that it is won or lost on the home front.” The war-making capacity of North Vietnam had been virtually destroyed by the bombings in December of 1972, and we had the means to make and enforce a just peace, a peace with honor. But we were denied these means when Congress prohibited military operations in or over Indochina and cut back drastically on the aid South Vietnam needed to defend itself. In the final analysis, a major part of the blame must be borne by those who encouraged or participated in the fateful decisions that got us into the war in the 1960’s, and who then by their later actions sabotaged our efforts to get us out in an acceptable way in the 1970’s.

By inaction at the crucial moment, the United States undermined an ally and abandoned him to his fate. The effect on the millions of Cambodians, Laotians, and South Vietnamese who relied on us and have now paid the price of communist reprisals is bad enough. But the cost in terms of raising doubts among our allies as to America’s reliability, and in terms of the encouragement it gives to our potential enemies to engage in aggression against our friends in other parts of the world, will be devastating for U.S. policy for decades to come. . . .

No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam

To date, there have been two quite different explanations for the failure of the Paris Accords and the subsequent end of the country known as South Vietnam.

Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger have always maintained that they won the war and that Congress lost the peace. The treaty itself, they said, although not perfect, was sound enough to have allowed for a political solution if North Vietnam had not so blatantly violated it. North and South Vietnam could have remained separate countries. When the North did violate the agreement, Watergate prevented the president from backing up his secret guarantees to President Thieu. Kissinger goes even further, insisting there was nothing secret about the promises Nixon made to Thieu. In any case, by mid-1973 Nixon was waging a constitutional battle with Congress over executive privilege and abuse of powers; he could hardly start a new battle over war powers to defend South Vietnam. "By 1973, we had achieved our political objective: South Vietnam's independence had been secured," Nixon later told Monica Crowley, former foreign policy assistant and confidante, "But by 1975, the Congress destroyed our ability to enforce the Paris agreement and left our allies vulnerable to Hanoi's invading forces. If I sound like I'm blaming Congress, I am."

Kissinger has put it this way: "Our tragedy was our domestic situation. . . .

In April [1973], Watergate blew up, and we were castrated. . . . The second tragedy was that we were not permitted to enforce the agreement. . . . I think it's reasonable to assume he [Nixon] would have bombed the hell out of them during April."

The other explanation for the failure of the Paris Accords is known as the "decent interval." This explanation is far less charitable to Nixon or Kissinger because it is premised on the assumption that by January 1973, U.S. leaders cared only about securing the release of American POWs and getting some type of accounting on MIAs, especially in Laos. The political future of South Vietnam would be left for the Vietnamese to decide; we just did not want the communists to triumph too quickly. Kissinger knew that Hanoi would eventually win. By signing the peace agreement, Hanoi was not abandoning its long-term objective, merely giving the U.S. a fig leaf with which to exit. In

his book *Decent Interval*, Frank Snepp wrote: "The Paris Agreement was thus a cop-out of sorts, an American one. The only thing it definitely guaranteed was an American withdrawal from Vietnam, for that depended on American action alone. The rest of the issues that had sparked the war and kept it alive were left essentially unresolved—and irresolvable."

Kissinger was asked by the assistant to the president, John Ehrlichman, "How long do you figure the South Vietnamese can survive under this agreement?" Ehrlichman reported that Kissinger answered, "I think that if they're lucky they can hold out for a year and a half." When Kissinger's assistant John Negroponte opined that the agreement was not in the best interests of South Vietnam, Kissinger asked him, "Do you want us to stay there forever?"

Nixon yearned to be remembered by history as a great foreign policy president; he needed a noncommunist South Vietnam on that ledger in order to sustain a legacy that already included détente with the Soviets and an opening with China. If South Vietnam was going down the tubes, it could not be on Nixon's watch. "What really matters now is how it all comes out," Nixon wrote in his diary in April 1972. "Both Haldeman and Henry seem to have an idea—which I think is mistaken—that even if we fail in Vietnam we can survive politically. I have no illusions whatsoever on that score, however. The US will not have a credible policy if we fail, and I will have to assume responsibility for that development."



No Peace, No Honor draws on recently declassified records to show that the true picture is worse than either of these perspectives suggests. The reality was the opposite of the decent interval hypothesis and far beyond Nixon's and Kissinger's claims. The record shows that the United States *expected* that the signed treaty would be immediately violated and that this would trigger a brutal military response. Permanent war (air war, not ground operations) at acceptable cost was what Nixon and Kissinger anticipated from the so-called peace agreement. They believed that the only way the American public would accept it was if there was a signed agreement. Nixon recognized that winning the peace, like the war, would be impossible to achieve, but he planned for indefinite stalemate by using the B-52s to prop up the government of South Vietnam until the end of his presidency. Just as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution provided a pretext for an American engagement in South Vietnam, the Paris Accords were intended to fulfill a similar role for remaining permanently engaged in Vietnam. Watergate derailed the plan.

The declassified record shows that the South Vietnamese, North Vietnamese, and the United States disregarded key elements of the treaty because all perceived it was in their interest to do so. No one took the agreement seriously because each party viewed it as a means for securing something unstated. For the United States, as part of the Nixon Doctrine, it was a means of remaining permanently involved in Southeast Asia; for the North Vietnamese, it was the means for eventual conquest and unification of Vietnam; for the South Vietnamese, it was a means for securing continued support from the United States.

The truth has remained buried for so long because Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger did everything possible to deny any independent access to the historical record. As witnesses to history, they used many classified top-secret documents in writing their respective memoirs but later made sure that everyone else would have great difficulty accessing the same records. They have limited access to personal papers, telephone records, and other primary source materials that would allow for any independent assessments of the record pertaining to the evolution of negotiating strategies and compromises that were raised at different stages of the protracted process. The late Admiral Elmo "Bud" Zumwalt, Jr., former chief of naval operations, said that "Kissinger's method of writing history is similar to that of communist historians who took justifications from the present moment and projected backwards, fact by fact, in accounting for their country's past. Under this method, nothing really was as it happened." This is how the administration's history of "peace with honor" was written.

The personal papers of Henry Kissinger are deposited in the Library of Congress with a deed of gift restricting access until five years after his death. For years we have been denied access to the full transcripts of Kissinger's negotiations. Verbatim hand-written transcripts of the secret meetings in Paris were kept by Kissinger's assistants, Tony Lake, Winston Lord, and John Negroponte. Negroponte gave a complete set of these meeting notes to Kissinger for writing his memoirs, but they were never returned. In his deposition to the Kerry Committee investigation, which examined virtually all aspects of the MIA issue and gave special attention to the Paris negotiations, Winston Lord stated that there were "verbatim transcripts of every meeting with the Vietnamese. I'm talking now about the secret meetings, because I took, particularly toward the beginning, and we got some help at the end, the notes as did Negroponte or Smyser or Rodman and so on." Only now have notes of these secret back-channel meetings become available. Furthermore, the North Vietnamese have published their own narrative translation of the Kissinger-Tho negotiations.

This is the story of a peace negotiation that began with Lyndon Johnson in 1968 and ended with the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. Many secret meetings were involved. The principal sources include transcript-like narratives of documents from Hanoi archives that have been translated by Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu and published as *Le Duc Tho-Kissinger Negotiations in Paris*; declassified meeting transcripts from a congressional investigation of MIAs in Southeast Asia; declassified meeting notes from the papers of Tony Lake and memoranda of conversations from recently declassified materials in the National Archives or presidential libraries. These three have been triangulated to connect minutes as well as linkages between events. In many cases, I have been able to fill in classified sections through materials in back-channel cables from Kissinger to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker or President Nixon.

Here, then, is the emerging story of what Nixon called "peace with honor" but was, in fact, neither. This story of diplomatic deception and public betrayal has come to the light only because of the release of documents and tapes that Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger sought to bury for as long as possible. Prior to these declassifications, we knew only what Nixon or Kissinger wanted us to

know about the making of war and shaping of the so-called honorable peace in Vietnam. . . .



It has been over thirty years since the United States and Vietnam began talks intended to end the Vietnam War. The Paris Peace Talks began on May 13, 1968, under the crystal chandeliers in the ballroom of the old Majestic Hotel on Avenue Kleber and did not end until January 27, 1973, with the signing of the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam at the International Conference Center in Paris. Despite the agreement, not a moment of peace ever came to Vietnam. This book uses a cache of recently declassified documents to offer a new perspective on why the country known as South Vietnam ceased to exist after April 1975.

Since the very first days of his presidency in January 1969, Richard Nixon had sought an "honorable peace" in Vietnam. In January 1973 he characterized the Paris agreement as having achieved those lofty goals: "Now that we have achieved an honorable agreement, let us be proud that America did not settle for a peace that would have betrayed our allies, that would have abandoned our prisoners of war, or that would have ended the war for us, but would have continued the war for the 50 million people of Indochina."

A speakers' kit assembled within the White House on the evening of the president's announcement of the cease-fire described the final document as "a vindication of the wisdom of the President's policy in holding out for an honorable peace—and his refusal to accept a disguised and dishonorable defeat. Had it not been for the President's courage—during four years of unprecedented vilification and attack—the United States would not today be honorably ending her involvement in the war, but would be suffering the consequences of dishonor and defeat. . . . The difference between what the President has achieved and what his opponents wanted, is the difference between peace with honor, and the false peace of an American surrender."

A White Paper drafted for distribution to members of Congress offered more barbed attacks on his critics.

For four agonizing years, Richard Nixon has stood virtually alone in the nation's capital while little, petty men flayed him over American involvement in Indochina. For four years, he has been the victim of the most vicious personal attacks. Day and night, America's predominantly liberal national media hammered at Mr. Nixon, slicing from all sides, attacking, hitting, and cutting. The intellectual establishment—those whose writings entered America into the Vietnam war—pompously postured from their ivy hideaways, using their inordinate power to influence public opinion. . . . No President has been under more constant and unrelenting harassment by men who should drop to their knees each night to thank the Almighty that they do not have to make the same decisions that Richard Nixon did. Standing with the President in all those years were a handful of reporters and number of newspapers—nearly all outside of Washington. There were also the

courageous men of Congress who would stand firm beside the President. But most importantly there were the millions upon millions of quite ordinary Americans—the great *Silent Majority* of citizens—who saw our country through a period where the shock troops of leftist public opinion daily propagandized against the President of the United States. *They were people of character and steel.*

Meanwhile, the North Vietnam heralded the Paris agreement as a great victory. Radio Hanoi, in domestic and foreign broadcasts, confined itself for several days to reading and rereading the Paris text and protocols. From the premier's office in Hanoi came the declaration that the national flag of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) should be flown throughout the country for eight days, from the moment the cease-fire went into effect on January 28 through February 4. For three days and nights, Hanoi's streets were filled with crowds of people celebrating the fact that in 60 days there would be no foreign troops in Vietnam.

The *Nhan Dan* editorial of January 28, titled "The Great Historic Victory of Our Vietnamese People," observed, "Today, 28 January, the war has ended completely in both zones of our country. The United States and other countries have pledged to respect our country's independence, sovereignty, reunification, and territorial integrity. The United States will withdraw all U.S. troops and the troops of other foreign countries and their advisors and military personnel, dismantle U.S. military bases in the southern part of our country and respect our southern people's right to self-determination and other democratic freedoms."

Premier Pham Van Dong was more forthcoming to American broadcaster Walter Cronkite that "the Paris Agreement marked an important victory of our people in their resistance against U.S. aggression, for national salvation. For us, its terms were satisfactory. . . . The Paris agreement paved the way for our great victory in the Spring of 1975 which put an end to more than a century of colonial and neo-colonial domination over our country and restored the independence, freedom and unity of our homeland."

Perhaps the most honest response came from a young North Vietnamese cadre by the name of Man Duc Xuyen, living in Ha Bac province in North Vietnam. In a postcard, he extended Tet New Year wishes to his family. "Dear father, mother and family," the letter began. "When we have liberated South Viet-Nam and have unified the country, I will return."

Only in South Vietnam was there no joy or celebration over the signing of the Paris agreement. By the terms of the deal, over 150,000 North Vietnamese troops remained in the South, whereas the United States, over the course of Nixon's presidency, had unilaterally withdrawn over 500,000 of its own troops. President Nguyen Van Thieu and his fellow countrymen understood that the diplomatic battle had been won by Le Duc Tho. President Thieu was agreeing to nothing more than a protocol for American disengagement. True, President Nixon had guaranteed brutal retaliation if the North resumed any aggression. But could these guarantees be trusted? The fate of his country depended on them. Twenty-eight months later, South Vietnam would disappear. . . .

James Reston wrote on March 18 that, "once the withdrawal of American prisoners and troops is complete—and it will be within a few weeks—there will be an interesting legal question: what legal authority would the President then have to order American men and bombers back into battle?" The administration was quick to respond. Secretary of Defense Richardson stated that the president retained "residual authority" to bomb in order to maintain the peace and that such bombing was merely a "mopping up exercise." He provided an elaboration on this crucial point: "If he had the authority up to the moment the documents were signed, he has the authority in the following weeks to see that those agreements are lived up to."

But there would be no strikes in March after all. Nixon decided he did not want to jeopardize the return of the final group of American POWs, which finally occurred on March 29, 1973.

By April 1973 Nixon and Kissinger were again considering bombing Khe Sanh. On April 16, Bunker tried to talk Kissinger and Nixon out of it because it would "effectively destroy the cease-fire. I question whether the ICCS would survive bombing attacks in SVN or Laos. . . . Our resuming the bombing of SVN or Laos would also destroy the cease-fire in the minds of the South Vietnamese." Besides, in Bunker's view, the rainy season was about to start and there was no need to restart the bombing in South Vietnam. "In fact, the communists may regard this infiltration effort as compensating for our Enhance and Enhance Plus."

On April 17, Bunker backed off a bit: "I have no problem with 'massive strikes' in Laos and Cambodia. . . . I question the effectiveness of bombing the Trail in Laos and the advisability of bombing either the Trail or Khe Sanh before your meeting with Le Duc Tho." (Kissinger was scheduled to meet again with Le Duc Tho in order to hammer out problems in the agreement.) Kissinger cabled right back with his long-held belief that "it is our judgment that the North Vietnamese will break the cease-fire whenever and however it suits their purpose. They need no provocation. We are therefore considering massive strikes in Laos [to] leave no doubt as to their chances of getting away with flagrant disregard of the agreements."



Five days before he had been sworn in for his second term as the nation's thirty-seventh president, Nixon had written in his diary, "It is ironic that the day the news came out stopping the bombing of North Vietnam, the Watergate Four plead guilty." Unbeknown to anyone, as Henry Kissinger was negotiating with Le Duc Tho in Paris, "Watergate was changing from amber to red," recalled Admiral Zumwalt. "The private commitments made by Nixon to Thieu were unraveling alongside Nixon's presidency."

More than a private commitment was at stake; a secret plan was being overtaken by events. By April 30, Nixon had told the country that he accepted responsibility for the Watergate incident, but he also denied any personal involvement in either the break-in or cover-up. He said that he had been misled by subordinates who had made an "effort to conceal the facts." Nixon announced the

nomination of Elliot Richardson as attorney general and that Richardson would have authority to appoint a special prosecutor. The White House also announced that the president had accepted the resignations of Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, and the president's counsel, John Dean. As Kissinger later told Stanley Karnow, "After June 1973 I did not believe that the cease-fire would hold. I certainly did not after July 1973. Watergate was in full strength. We had intelligence documents from North Vietnam decoded that Nixon could not honor his pledge and do what he had done in 1972 because of domestic situations."

Watergate would have another effect. Kissinger later stated that this was a "different Nixon. He approached the problems of the violations in a curiously desultory fashion. He drifted. He did not hone in on the decision in the single-minded, almost possessed manner that was his hallmark. The rhetoric might be there, but accompanied this time with excuses for inaction. In retrospect, we know that by March, Watergate was boiling."

There is no question now, nor was there then, that Watergate sapped any resolve that Nixon may have had to bomb again. For decades, Henry Kissinger has used that fact to justify his argument that the administration—including himself—never intended to abandon South Vietnam. Yet something is hard to swallow in that argument. Nixon, the die-hard anticommunist, may have convinced himself that the American people would support South Vietnam in the face of the new—and newly illegal—Northern aggression no matter what. But most Americans were weary of the war, and the public no longer held the same zeal for anticommunism that it had had in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Could Kissinger, the realist, the pragmatist, have failed to see this? Indeed, two newly released records of conversations at meetings suggest a more devious plan. The first, a meeting with Lee Quan Yew, prime minister of Singapore, on August 4, 1973, reveals, in Kissinger's own words, the belief that bombing was the only way to make certain that the South would not fall.

The secret meeting occurred in the Captain's Conference Room of the New York Port Authority Policy Building at Kennedy Airport. The euphoria of January's peace with honor was now a distant memory. Lee had just returned from meeting Nha.

Kissinger told Lee that "[Nha] dislikes me intensely!"

"That is not important—personal likes and dislikes. The important thing is the job to be done. I told him it would be useful if Thieu met me. He said, 'why not just meet me?'"

"What is your impression of Nha?" asked Kissinger.

"He is bright, ambitious. With full confidence that what he says will carry weight with the President," said Lee.

"That is true. He is also immature. Emotional," concluded Kissinger.

But Kissinger had come to talk about Watergate and Vietnam, not Mr. Nha. "Our objectives are still the same. We have suffered a tragedy because of Watergate. . . . We were going to bomb North Vietnam for a week, then go to Russia, then meet with Le Duc Tho. Congress has made it impossible." Then Kissinger made the tell-tale confession of his dashed hopes: "In May

and June I drew the conclusion that the North Vietnamese were resigning themselves to a long pull of 5-to-6 years. . . . And it would have been a certainty if we had given them one blow." In other words, a little bombing now might have slowed them down, which would be a decent interval before losing the South. Nixon and Kissinger would not be directly tied to it.

One more blow was a far more realistic expectation on Kissinger's part. Kissinger told Lee that "the last three months were the most difficult period for us. We couldn't say anything because we could never be sure what some junior aide would say next. But as soon as the hearings are over, we will go on the counter-offensive. We are already in the process. While we are in these difficulties, we have to stay cool. But we won't give up our foreign policy. We will regain the initiative. In Southeast Asia, we haven't gone through all this for four years to abandon it. Sixty-one percent voted in November 1972 not to abandon Southeast Asia. It was a clear issue."

The meeting ended with Lee Kuan Yew's saying how important it was that South Vietnam survive through 1976. "My concern is to have it last through 1976 so that you will have a strong President. If it falls, you will have a new President who says, 'that's what tore American society apart.'"

Kissinger must have been reassured, because he told Lee, "You are an asset to us in that part of the world and we have no interest in destroying you. We won't leave any documents around. They stay in my office."

A little more than a month later, on September 26, Kissinger met with Nguyen Phu Duc in the Waldorf Towers in New York. Kissinger was now secretary of state, and Duc asked Kissinger what the United States planned to do with respect to the North's violations of the Paris Accord. "If it were not for domestic difficulties, we would have bombed them. This is now impossible. Your brothers in the North only understand brutality," said Kissinger. The secretary then spoke about how the Congress had acted "irresponsibly" by cutting off support for bombing, but North Vietnamese "suspiciousness is playing into our hands. They don't completely understand the restrictions placed on us by Congress. President Nixon has fooled them so often that they are probably more concerned that you believe. It is important that you show confidence and behave strongly." He ended with a joke: "Treat them like you treat me."

The conversation then got much more revealing. Kissinger made a startling admission: "I came away from the January negotiations with the feeling that we would have to bomb the North Vietnamese again in early April or May." He did not say, "If the North violated the accord, we would bomb." He confirmed what Haig had told Phouma, what Nixon had said to Thieu and what Zumwalt had concluded in November 1972 at the JCS meeting: it was a sham peace held together with a plan to deceive the American public with the rhetoric of American honor. He knew the North would cheat and was planning on resuming the bombing.

As Kissinger toasted Le Duc Tho with words of peace in January 1973, and as Richard Nixon addressed the nation with news of an honorable peace in Vietnam, both men knew that as soon as the last American POW was home, the bombing would be renewed. For Nixon, the bombing would continue

right through 1976, and for Kissinger, just long enough to pick up his Nobel Peace Prize.

Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* on April 27, 1975, William Buckley noted that Watergate had derailed the president's plan to pulverize Hanoi and that Nixon at the time was too emotionally unstable to renew the bombing: "What would Nixon, under Kissinger's prodding, have done, if his reactions had been healthy, when only a few weeks after the Paris Accord was executed, North Vietnam began its blatant disregard of it. My own information is that it was planned, sometime in April, to pulverize Hanoi and Haiphong," wrote Buckley. Indeed, the plans were made even earlier.

One final question remains: Would even short-term bombing support for the South have been accepted by the public? In interviewing done on the day of the Vietnam agreement, a Gallup Poll asked the following questions:

- "When United States troops are withdrawn from Vietnam, do you think a strong enough government can be maintained in South Vietnam to withstand Communist political pressure, or not?" Fifty-four percent believed that government in the South would not survive; 27 percent believed South Vietnam would last; 19 percent had no opinion.
- "After United States troops are withdrawn from Vietnam, do you think North Vietnam in the next few years is likely to try to take over South Vietnam again, or not?" Seventy percent thought that the North would try to take over the South, 16 percent thought no, and 14 percent had no opinion.
- "Suppose when the United States troops are withdrawn, North Vietnam does try to take over South Vietnam again, do you think the United States should send war materials to South Vietnam, or not?" Fifty percent believed the U.S. should not send war materials, while 38 percent said yes, and 12 percent had no opinion.
- "If North Vietnam does try to take over South Vietnam again, do you think the United States should bomb North Vietnam, or not?" Seventy-one percent said no to bombing, while 17 percent said yes, and 12 percent had no opinion.
- "If North Vietnam does try to take over South Vietnam again, do you think the United States should send troops to help South Vietnam, or not?" Seventy-nine percent were opposed to sending troops, while 13 percent favored such an action, and 8 percent had no opinion.

Kissinger later acknowledged that he had misjudged the willingness of the American people to defend the agreement. "But I admit this: we judged wrong. And what we judged wrong above all was our belief that if we could get peace with honor, that we would unite the American people who would then defend an agreement that had been achieved with so much pain. That was our fundamental miscalculation. It never occurred to me, and I'm sure it never occurred to President Nixon, that there could be any doubt about it, because

an agreement that you don't enforce is a surrender; it's just writing down surrender terms."

Twenty-five Years Later

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Paris agreement, the Nixon Center in Washington, D.C., convened a conference, "The Paris Agreement on Vietnam: 25 Years Later." Noticeable by their absence were those who in the intervening years had questioned "peace with honor." Kissinger attended and spoke about the many letters and private assurances given by Nixon to Thieu in which he promised to enforce the agreement: "I would simply ask some honest researcher sometime to compare the letters that President Nixon wrote to Thieu with the letters that still have not been published that President Kennedy or Johnson wrote to other leaders to see who made the bigger commitments. Or even other Presidents, in other circumstances. These were never treated as national commitments. These were expressions of the intentions of the President. Every senior member of the administration—including myself, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State—is represented in compendiums of statements that said publicly every week that we intended to enforce the agreement. There was nothing new about that. . . . If I had any idea that all this was possible, I would not have participated in, and President Nixon would never have authorized, any sort of agreement. I believe it could otherwise have been maintained for a long enough period of time to give the South Vietnamese an opportunity, as the South Koreans were given, to develop their own future."

With respect to consultations with President Thieu, Kissinger's position remained unchanged: "There were all kinds of proposals that we made during that period—the last one made publicly in January 1972 by President Nixon when he disclosed the secret talks which had been going on, and which had been preceded by a secret proposal in May 1971 (all of which, incidentally, President Thieu, approved, probably thinking they would never be accepted). It was not as if we just slipped a proposal to the North Vietnamese that the South Vietnamese had never seen. In fact, I believe that Al Haig took every proposal to Saigon before we made it, and that was approved—although I will admit that the speed with which we moved at the end undoubtedly surprised the South Vietnamese."

The records that Kissinger and Nixon chose to omit from their respective memoirs offer a far more devious explanation. Hoang Duc Nha once employed a Vietnamese proverb to describe his dealings with Kissinger, translated as, "We are like frogs looking up from the darkness at the bottom of the well," meaning that the Vietnamese were in the dark about Kissinger's motives and intentions. Ever today, almost three decades since the Paris Accords were signed, Kissinger would prefer that we all remain, like the South Vietnamese, in the dark.

POSTSCRIPT



Did President Nixon Negotiate a “Peace with Honor” in Vietnam in 1973?

President Nixon presents his own version of the Vietnam fiasco. His contention is that despite policy failure by the prior president, the Nixon administration stemmed the tide. When the last United States troops were withdrawn and the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January 1973 between the two Vietnams, the South Vietnamese had achieved military victory. Although the victory was short-lived, Nixon argues that South Vietnam would have been saved except that the United States Congress, under the influence of the anti-war protestors and the liberal press, refused to send aid or support to any United States bombing missions.

Both Nixon and Kissinger have tried to control their tapes and papers in giving their own accounts of the Nixon presidency. In addition to *The Real War*, see the former president's *No More Vietnams* (Arbor House, 1985); and his autobiography *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (Warner Books, 1978). Kissinger has condensed his two volumes of memoirs pertaining to Vietnam in *Ending the Vietnam War* (Simon and Schuster, 2003); condensed even further in his history of *Diplomacy* (Simon and Schuster, 1994). While both men argue that South Vietnam could have been saved, they give different accounts of the peace negotiations leading to the withdrawal of American troops in the winter of 1973. The rivalry between the two is fully explored in Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (Harper Collins, 2007).

In the second reading, Larry Berman, professor of history at the University of California, Davis, has challenged the Nixon–Kissinger version of the ending of the Vietnam War. Through a careful use of declassified notes of key presidential advisers, that are located in the National Archives or Presidential libraries as well as translations of transcript-like narratives of documents from the Hanoi archives, Berman describes a story of “diplomatic deception and public betrayal” regarding the Paris Peace Accords supposedly ending the Vietnam War in January 1973.

Berman accepts the “decent interval” interpretation first advanced by CIA agent Frank Snepp in a book of the same title published in 1973. Both Kissinger and Nixon realized that once American troops were withdrawn, both sides would violate the cease-fire agreements and South Vietnam would lose the war within 2 years. Berman, however, adds a new twist to this view. Both Nixon and Kissinger knew that the South Vietnamese government was doomed to fail. But Nixon expected to resume bombing the North Vietnamese military to prevent the collapse of South Vietnam until after the president left

office in 1977. But Congress refused to resume the bombing in the spring of 1973, and the president became embroiled in the Watergate scandal. Nixon resigned in August 1974, and the South Vietnamese government collapsed on April 30, 1975. The new president, Gerald Ford, had been unable to get Congress to send bombs, troops, or increased aid to South Vietnam.

The Vietnam War remains controversial both among historians and policy makers. President Nixon's interpretation gets support from Lewis Sorley, a third-generation graduate from West Point, a Ph.D. holder from Johns Hopkins, and a former CIA agent. *A Better War, the Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999), argues that Nixon's policy makers and, in particular General Creighton Abrams, "dropped General Westmoreland's war of attrition and search-and-destroy missions in favor of a holistic approach aimed at 'pacifying' the population of South Vietnam." (Jeff T. Hay, *The Greenhaven Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, Greenhaven Press, 2004.) Militarily, the war was won, says Sorley, but Congress and a politically weakened Nixon negotiated a one-sided peace to ensure defeat for South Vietnam. Another military historian and former Vietnam War military commander, James H. Willbanks, supports some of Sorley's interpretation. *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War* (University Press of Kansas, 2004) argues that the South Vietnamese, with the aid of United States advisers and air power, held off the North Vietnamese military advances in 1972. But the Paris Peace Accords, negotiated by a politically weakened Nixon along with corrupt South Vietnamese political leaders and incompetent senior military leadership caused the demise of South Vietnam.

Professor Berman's interpretation is also challenged by Jeffrey Kimball who has written a comprehensive and detailed interpretation of *Nixon's Vietnam War* (University Press of Kansas, 1998). In his article for *The SHAFR Newsletter* (September 2001) "The Case of the 'Decent Interval': Do We Now Have a Smoking Gun?", Kimball feels that Berman misinterpreted some of his evidence. The "decent interval" was adopted in the fall of 1970 after his initial plan for a quick victory and withdrawal had failed and not in 1973 at the Paris Peace Talks as Berman claims.

Perhaps we will have a better assessment of Nixon's policies when all of his tapes along with Kissinger's correspondence are placed in the National Archives or the Nixon Presidential library.

The Vietnam War remains politically controversial. In the 2004 election, President George Bush had to prove he served in the Alabama National Guard during the war, while Senator John Kerry had to defend his patriotism as a former leader of the Vietnam Veterans against the War. In the summer of 2009, President Obama was weighing his options in Afghanistan. Should he send troops there? Republicans were reading Lewis Sorley's book for lessons on how to win while Democrats, including Obama, were reading Gordon M. Goldstein's *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (Henry Holt and Co., 2008). Bundy was head of the National Security Council under both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson who, like former Secretary of Defense Robert F. McNamara, had second thoughts about escalating the war in 1965. See "A Battle of Two Books Rages," *The Wall Street Journal* (October 7, 2009).

There are thousands of books on the Vietnam War. The two best overviews are George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*, 3rd ed. (McGraw Hill, 1996); and David L. Anderson, ed., *Shadows on the White House: Presidents and the Vietnam War, 1945–1975* (University Press of Kansas, 1993), which provide historical essays on the role of every President from Truman through Ford as regards to the Vietnam War.

Professor John Milton Cooper's monumental and massive *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (Knopf, 2009) is now the definitive biography of the current generation of historians. His earlier book *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Harvard University Press, 1984) presents Wilson as the realist and Theodore Roosevelt as the idealist. Cooper acknowledges his debt to the great diplomatic historian Thomas A. Bailey whose two books on *Woodrow Wilson and the Lost Peace* (The Macmillan Co., 1944) and *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (The Macmillan Co., 1945) were written as guidance for President Franklin Roosevelt to avoid the mistakes that Wilson made at home and abroad in his failure to gain ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. See also Bailey's summary of the second book from "Woodrow Wilson Wouldn't Yield," in *Essays Diplomatic and Undiplomatic of Thomas A. Bailey* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), which is also reprinted in volume 2 of the 13th edition of *Taking Sides . . . United States History*. Cooper's emphasis is different from Bailey. Where the latter wrote his books in the shadow of World War II, Cooper is responding to the emphasis placed on Wilson's psychological and physical well-being. In his last chapter of *Breaking the Heart of the World . . .*, part of which is reprinted here, Cooper believes the League fight boils down to three interlocking propositions. "First, Wilson was ahead of his time. Second, Americans were not ready after World War I to make the full-scale commitment to collective security and international enforcement that Wilson demanded. Third, it took World War II to drive home the lessons that Wilson had tried to teach."

Cooper suggests some interesting alternatives to propositions two and three. In the 1920s, the country was divided between isolationism and internationalism with the majority holding no opinions. Could President Theodore Roosevelt have moved the country toward a stronger role in international affairs if he, instead of Harding, was elected president in 1920? As regards the lessons of World War II, did the Cold War mitigate the role of the United Nations in lessening tensions between the American and Soviet blocs?

In the end, Cooper lays most of the blame for the failure of the United States to satisfy the Treaty of Versailles and enter the League of Nations on Wilson. Lodge, says Cooper, was not responsible because playing politics like reading the entire treaty to an empty Senate and adding his 14 reservations were part of the Republican party's role as the loyal opposition.

Here Cooper departs from Bailey's critique of Lodge. In the final analysis, Cooper believes Wilson failed to compromise because of his stroke. If he was in better health, Wilson might have negotiated with Lodge as he had done on passing his New Freedom bills through Congress. Wilson was a high stakes gambler, but a more physically fit president would have called in Lodge's chips.

The most recent scholarship on Wilson can be found in two collections: John Milton Cooper, Jr., ed., *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism,*

Internationalism, War and Peace (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) where the editor considers Wilson "to be one of the greatest legislators to sit in the White House." See also Cooper, Jr., "Whose League of Nations? Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and World Order," in William N. Tilchin and Charles E. New, eds., *Artists of Power: Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Their Enduring Impact on U.S. Foreign Policy* (Praeger Security International, 2006). All the essays are worth reading.

The four best bibliographies of Wilson are as follows: the introduction to Lloyd E. Ambrosius's *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), which is a collection of his articles from the leading realist Wilsonian scholar. John A. Thompson, a British scholar, has an up-to-date analysis of the Wilson scholarship in *Woodrow Wilson* (Pearson Education, 2002), a short, scholarly sympathetic study in the "Profiles in Power" series designed for student use. Advanced undergraduates should consult David Steigerwald, "The Reclamation of Woodrow Wilson," *Diplomatic History* (Winter 1999). Political science majors should consult Francis J. Gavin, "The Wilsonian Legacy in the Twentieth Century," *Orbis* (Fall 1997).



ISSUE 17



Has the Women's Movement of the 1970s Failed to Liberate American Women?

YES: F. Carolyn Graglia, from *Domestic Tranquility: A Brief Against Feminism* (Spence, 1998)

NO: Sara M. Evans, from "American Women in the Twentieth Century," in Harvard Sitkoff, ed., *Perspectives on Modern America: Making Sense of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2001)

ISSUE SUMMARY

YES: Writer and lecturer F. Carolyn Graglia argues that women should stay at home and practice the values of "true motherhood" because contemporary feminists have discredited marriage, devalued traditional homemaking, and encouraged sexual promiscuity.

NO: According to Professor Sara M. Evans, despite class, racial, religious, ethnic, and regional differences, women in America experienced major transformations in their private and public lives in the twentieth century.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy established the Commission on the Status of Women to examine "the prejudice and outmoded customs that act as barriers to the full realization of women's basic rights." Two years later, Betty Friedan, a closet leftist from suburban Rockland County, New York, wrote about the growing malaise of the suburban housewife in her best-seller *The Feminist Mystique* (W.W. Norton, 1963).

The roots of Friedan's "feminine mystique" go back much earlier than the post-World War II "baby boom" generation of suburban America. Women historians have traced the origins of the modern family to the early nineteenth century. As the nation became more stable politically, the roles of men, women, and children became segmented in ways that still exist today. Dad went to work, the kids went to school, and Mom stayed home. Women's magazines, gift books, and the religious literature of the period ascribed to these women a role that Professor Barbara Welter has called the "Cult of True Womanhood." She describes the ideal woman as upholding four virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.

In nineteenth-century America, most middle-class white women stayed home. Those who entered the workforce as teachers or became reformers were usually extending the values of the Cult of True Womanhood to the outside world. This was true of the women reformers in the Second Great Awakening and the peace, temperance, and abolitionist movements before the Civil War. The first real challenge to the traditional values system occurred when a handful of women showed up at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 to sign the Women's Declaration of Rights.

It soon became clear that if they were going to pass reform laws, women would have to obtain the right to vote. After an intense struggle, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified on August 26, 1920. Once the women's movement obtained the vote, there was no agreement on future goals. The problems of the Great Depression and World War II overrode women's issues.

World War II brought about major changes for working women. Six million women entered the labor force for the first time, *many* of whom were married. "The proportion of women in the labor force," writes Lois Banner, "increased from 25 percent in 1940 to 36 percent in 1945. This increase was greater than that of the previous four decades combined." Many women moved into high-paying, traditionally men's jobs as policewomen, firefighters, and precision tool-makers. Steel and auto companies that converted over to wartime production made sure that lighter tools were made for women to use on the assembly lines. The federal government also erected federal childcare facilities.

When the war ended in 1945, many of these women lost their nontraditional jobs. The federal day-care program was eliminated, and the government told women to go home even though a 1944 study by the Women's Bureau concluded that 80 percent of working women wanted to continue in their jobs after the war.

Most history texts emphasize that women did return home, moved to the suburbs, and created a baby boom generation, which reversed the downward size of families in the years from 1946 to 1964. What is lost in this description is the fact that after 1947 the number of working women again began to rise, reaching 31 percent in 1951. Twenty-two years later, at the height of the women's liberation movement, it reached 42 percent.

When Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, both working-class and middle-class college-educated women experienced discrimination in the marketplace. When women worked, they were expected to become teachers, nurses, secretaries, and airline stewardesses—the lowest-paying jobs in the workforce. In the turbulent 1960s, this situation was no longer accepted.

In the following selection, F. Carolyn Graglia defends the traditional role of women in contemporary America. Women, she contends, should stay at home and practice the values of "true womanhood." Contemporary feminists, she argues, have devalued traditional homemaking, encouraged sexual promiscuity, and discredited marriage as a career for women. In the second selection, Sara M. Evans argues that in spite of class, racial, religious, ethnic, and regional differences, women in America experienced major transformations in their private and public lives in the twentieth century.

Domestic Tranquility

Introduction

Since the late 1960s, feminists have very successfully waged war against the traditional family, in which husbands are the principal breadwinners and wives are primarily homemakers. This war's immediate purpose has been to undermine the homemaker's position within both her family and society in order to drive her into the work force. Its long-term goal is to create a society in which women behave as much like men as possible, devoting as much time and energy to the pursuit of a career as men do, so that women will eventually hold equal political and economic power with men. . . .

Feminists have used a variety of methods to achieve their goal. They have promoted a sexual revolution that encouraged women to mimic male sexual promiscuity. They have supported the enactment of no-fault divorce laws that have undermined housewives' social and economic security. And they obtained the application of affirmative action requirements to women as a class, gaining educational and job preferences for women and undermining the ability of men who are victimized by this discrimination to function as family breadwinners.

A crucial weapon in feminism's arsenal has been the status degradation of the housewife's role. From the journalistic attacks of Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem to Jessie Bernard's sociological writings, all branches of feminism are united in the conviction that a woman can find identity and fulfillment only in a career. The housewife, feminists agree, was properly characterized by Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan as a "parasite," a being something less than human, living her life without using her adult capabilities or intelligence, and lacking any real purpose in devoting herself to children, husband, and home.

Operating on the twin assumptions that equality means sameness (that is, men and women cannot be equals unless they do the same things) and that most differences between the sexes are culturally imposed, contemporary feminism has undertaken its own cultural impositions. Revealing their totalitarian belief that they know best how others should live and their totalitarian willingness to force others to conform to their dogma, feminists have sought to modify our social institutions in order to create an androgynous society in which male and female roles are as

identical as possible. The results of the feminist juggernaut now engulf us. By almost all indicia of well-being, the institution of the American family has become significantly less healthy than it was thirty years ago.

Certainly, feminism is not alone responsible for our families' sufferings. As Charles Murray details in *Losing Ground*, President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, for example, have often hurt families, particularly black families, and these programs were supported by a large constituency beyond the women's movement. What distinguishes the women's movement, however, is the fact that, despite the pro-family motives it sometimes ascribes to itself, it has actively sought the traditional family's destruction. In its avowed aims and the programs it promotes, the movement has adopted Kate Millett's goal, set forth in her *Sexual Politics*, in which she endorses Friedrich Engels's conclusion that "the family, as that term is presently understood, must go"; "a kind fate," she remarks, in "view of the institution's history." This goal has never changed: feminists view traditional nuclear families as inconsistent with feminism's commitment to women's independence and sexual freedom.

Emerging as a revitalized movement in the 1960s, feminism reflected women's social discontent, which had arisen in response to the decline of the male breadwinner ethic and to the perception—heralded in Philip Wylie's 1940s castigation of the evil "mom"—that Western society does not value highly the roles of wife and mother. Women's dissatisfactions, nevertheless, have often been aggravated rather than alleviated by the feminist reaction. To mitigate their discontent, feminists argued, women should pattern their lives after men's, engaging in casual sexual intercourse on the same terms as sexually predatory males and making the same career commitments as men. In pursuit of these objectives, feminists have fought unceasingly for the ready availability of legal abortion and consistently derogated both motherhood and the worth of full-time homemakers. Feminism's sexual teachings have been less consistent, ranging from its early and enthusiastic embrace of the sexual revolution to a significant backlash against female sexual promiscuity, which has led some feminists to urge women to abandon heterosexual sexual intercourse altogether.

Contemporary feminism has been remarkably successful in bringing about the institutionalization in our society of the two beliefs underlying its offensive: denial of the social worth of traditional homemakers and rejection of traditional sexual morality. The consequences have been pernicious and enduring. General societal assent to these beliefs has profoundly distorted men's perceptions of their relationships with and obligations to women, women's perceptions of their own needs, and the way in which women make decisions about their lives.

Traditional Homemaking Devalued

The first prong of contemporary feminism's offensive has been to convince society that a woman's full-time commitment to cultivating her marriage and rearing her children is an unworthy endeavor. Women, assert feminists, should treat marriage and children as relatively independent

appendages to their life of full-time involvement in the workplace. To live what feminists assure her is the only life worthy of respect, a woman must devote the vast bulk of her time and energy to market production, at the expense of marriage and children. Children, she is told, are better cared for by surrogates, and marriage, as these feminists perceive it, neither deserves nor requires much attention; indeed, the very idea of a woman's "cultivating" her marriage seems ludicrous. Thus, spurred on by the women's movement, many women have sought to become male clones.

But some feminists have appeared to modify the feminist message; voices—supposedly of moderation—have argued that women really are different from men. In this they are surely right: there are fundamental differences between the average man and woman, and it is appropriate to take account of these differences when making decisions both in our individual lives and with respect to social issues. Yet the new feminist voices have not conceded that acknowledged differences between the sexes are grounds for reexamining women's flight from home into workplace. Instead, these new voices have argued only that these differences require modification of the terms under which women undertake to reconstruct their lives in accordance with the blueprint designed by so-called early radicals. The edifice erected by radical feminism is to remain intact, subject only to some redecorating. The foundation of this edifice is still the destruction of the traditional family. Feminism has acquiesced in women's desire to bear children (an activity some of the early radicals discouraged). But it continues steadfast in its assumption that, after some period of maternity leave, daily care of those children is properly the domain of institutions and paid employees. The yearnings manifested in women's palpable desire for children should largely be sated, the new voices tell us, by the act of serving as a birth canal and then spending so-called quality time with the child before and after a full day's work.

Any mother, in this view, may happily consign to surrogates most of the remaining aspects of her role, assured that doing so will impose no hardship or loss on either mother or child. To those women whose natures make them less suited to striving in the workplace than concentrating on husband, children, and home, this feminist diktat denies the happiness and contentment they could have found within the domestic arena. In the world formed by contemporary feminism, these women will have status and respect only if they force themselves to take up roles in the workplace they suspect are not most deserving of their attention. Relegated to the periphery of their lives are the home and personal relationships with husband and children that they sense merit their central concern.

Inherent in the feminist argument is an extraordinary contradiction. Feminists deny, on the one hand, that the dimension of female sexuality which engenders women's yearning for children can also make it appropriate and satisfying for a woman to devote herself to domestic endeavors and provide her children's full-time care. On the other hand, they plead the fact of sexual difference to justify campaigns to modify workplaces in order to correct the effects of male influence and alleged biases. Only after

such modifications, claim feminists, can women's nurturing attributes and other female qualities be adequately expressed in and truly influence the workplace. Manifestations of these female qualities, feminists argue, should and can occur in the workplace once it has been modified to blunt the substantial impact of male aggression and competitiveness and take account of women's special requirements.

Having launched its movement claiming the right of women—a right allegedly denied them previously—to enter the workplace on an *equal* basis with men, feminism then escalated its demands by arguing that female differences require numerous changes in the workplace. Women, in this view, are insufficiently feminine to find satisfaction in rearing their own children, but too feminine to compete on an equal basis with men. Thus, having taken women out of their homes and settled them in the workplace, feminists have sought to reconstruct workplaces to create “feminist playpens” that are conducive to female qualities of sensitivity, caring, and empathy. Through this exercise in self-contradiction, contemporary feminism has endeavored to remove the woman from her home and role of providing daily care to her children—the quintessential place and activity for most effectively expressing her feminine, nurturing attributes.

The qualities that are the most likely to make women good mothers are thus redeployed away from their children and into workplaces that must be restructured to accommodate them. The irony is twofold. Children—the ones who could benefit most from the attentions of those mothers who do possess these womanly qualities—are deprived of those attentions and left only with the hope of finding adequate replacement for their loss. Moreover, the occupations in which these qualities are now to find expression either do not require them for optimal job performance (often they are not conducive to professional success) or were long ago recognized as women's occupations—as in the field of nursing, for example—in which nurturing abilities do enhance job performance.

Traditional Sexual Morality Traduced

The second prong of contemporary feminism's offensive has been to encourage women to ape male sexual patterns and engage in promiscuous sexual intercourse as freely as men. Initially, feminists were among the most dedicated supporters of the sexual revolution, viewing female participation in casual sexual activity as an unmistakable declaration of female equality with males. The women in our society who acted upon the teachings of feminist sexual revolutionaries have suffered greatly. They are victims of the highest abortion rate in the Western world. More than one in five Americans are now infected with a viral sexually transmitted disease which at best can be controlled but not cured and is often chronic. Sexually transmitted diseases, both viral and bacterial, disproportionately affect women because, showing fewer symptoms, they often go untreated for a longer time. These diseases also lead to pelvic infections that cause infertility in 100,000 to 150,000 women each year.

The sexual revolution feminists have promoted rests on an assumption that an act of sexual intercourse involves nothing but a pleasurable physical sensation, possessing no symbolic meaning and no moral dimension. This is an understanding of sexuality that bears more than a slight resemblance to sex as depicted in pornography: physical sexual acts without emotional involvement. In addition to the physical harm caused by increased sexual promiscuity, the denial that sexual intercourse has symbolic importance within a framework of moral accountability corrupts the nature of the sex act. Such denial necessarily makes sexual intercourse a trivial event, compromising the act's ability to fulfill its most important function after procreation. This function is to bridge the gap between males and females who often seem separated by so many differences, both biological and emotional, that they feel scarcely capable of understanding or communicating with each other.

Because of the urgency of sexual desire, especially in the male, it is through sexual contact that men and women can most easily come together. Defining the nature of sexual intercourse in terms informed by its procreative potentialities makes the act a spiritually meaningful event of overwhelming importance. A sexual encounter so defined is imbued with the significance conferred by its connection with a promise of immortality through procreation, whether that connection is a present possibility, a remembrance of children already borne, or simply an acknowledgment of the reality and truth of the promise. Such a sex act can serve as the physical meeting ground on which, by accepting and affirming each other through their bodies' physical unity, men and women can begin to construct an enduring emotional unity. The sexual encounter cannot perform its function when it is viewed as a trivial event of moral indifference with no purpose or meaning other than producing a physical sensation through the friction of bodily parts.

The feminist sexual perspective deprives the sex act of the spiritual meaningfulness that can make it the binding force upon which man and woman can construct a lasting marital relationship. The morally indifferent sexuality championed by the sexual revolution substitutes the sex without emotions that characterizes pornography for the sex of a committed, loving relationship that satisfies women's longing for romance and connection. But this is not the only damage to relationships between men and women that follows from feminism's determination to promote an androgynous society by convincing men and women that they are virtually fungible. Sexual equivalency, feminists believe, requires that women not only engage in casual sexual intercourse as freely as men, but also that women mimic male behavior by becoming equally assertive in initiating sexual encounters and in their activity throughout the encounter. With this sexual prescription, feminists mock the essence of conjugal sexuality that is at the foundation of traditional marriage.

Marriage as a Woman's Career Discredited

Even academic feminists who are considered "moderates" endorse doctrines most inimical to the homemaker. Thus, Professor Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, regarded as a moderate in Women's Studies, tells us that marriage can no

longer be a viable career for women. But if marriage cannot be a woman's career, then despite feminist avowals of favoring choice in this matter, homemaking cannot be a woman's goal, and surrogate child-rearing must be her child's destiny. Contrary to feminist claims, society's barriers are not strung tightly to inhibit women's career choices. Because of feminism's very successful efforts, society encourages women to pursue careers, while stigmatizing and preventing their devotion to child-rearing and domesticity.

It was precisely upon the conclusion that marriage cannot be a viable career for women that *Time* magazine rested its Fall 1990 special issue on "Women: The Road Ahead," a survey of contemporary women's lives. While noting that the "cozy, limited roles of the past are still clearly remembered, sometimes fondly," during the past thirty years "all that was orthodox has become negotiable." One thing negotiated away has been the economic security of the homemaker, and *Time* advised young women that "the job of full-time homemaker may be the riskiest profession to choose" because "the advent of no-fault and equitable-distribution divorce laws" reflect, in the words of one judge, the fact that "[s]ociety no longer believes that a husband should support his wife."

No-fault divorce laws did not, however, result from an edict of the gods or some force of nature, but from sustained political efforts, particularly by the feminist movement. As a cornerstone of their drive to make women exchange home for workplace, and thereby secure their independence from men, the availability of no-fault divorce (like the availability of abortion) was sacrosanct to the movement. *Time* shed crocodile tears for displaced homemakers, for it made clear that women must canter down the road ahead with the spur of no-fault divorce urging them into the workplace. Of all *Time's* recommendations for ameliorating women's lot, divorce reform—the most crying need in our country today—was not among them. Whatever hardships may be endured by women who would resist a divorce, *Time's* allegiance, like that of most feminists, is clearly to the divorce-seekers who, it was pleased to note, will not be hindered in their pursuit of self-realization by the barriers to divorce that their own mothers had faced.

These barriers to divorce which had impeded their own parents, however, had usually benefited these young women by helping to preserve their parents' marriage. A five-year study of children in divorcing families disclosed that "the overwhelming majority preferred the unhappy marriage to the divorce," and many of them, "despite the unhappiness of their parents, were in fact relatively happy and considered their situation neither better nor worse than that of other families around them." A follow-up study after ten years demonstrated that children experienced the trauma of their parents' divorce as more serious and long-lasting than any researchers had anticipated. *Time* so readily acquiesced in the disadvantaging of homemakers and the disruption of children's lives because the feminist ideological parameters within which it operates have excluded marriage as a *proper* career choice. Removing the obstacles to making it a *viable* choice would, therefore, be an undesirable subversion of feminist goals.

That *Time* would have women trot forward on life's journey constrained by the blinders of feminist ideology is evident from its failure to question any feminist notion, no matter how silly, or to explore solutions incompatible with the ideology's script. One of the silliest notions *Time* left unexamined was that young women want "good careers, good marriages and two or three kids, and they don't want the children to be raised by strangers." The supposed realism of this expectation lay in the new woman's attitude that "I don't want to work 70 hours a week, but I want to be vice president, and *you* have to change." But even if thirty hours were cut from that seventy-hour workweek, the new woman would still be working the normal full-time week, her children would still be raised by surrogates, and the norm would continue to be the feminist version of child-rearing that *Time* itself described unflatteringly as "less a preoccupation than an improvisation."

The illusion that a woman can achieve career success without sacrificing the daily personal care of her children—and except among the very wealthy, most of her leisure as well—went unquestioned by *Time*. It did note, however, the dissatisfaction expressed by Eastern European and Russian women who had experienced, as a matter of government policy, the same liberation from home and children that our feminists have undertaken to bestow upon Western women. In what *Time* described as "a curious reversal of Western feminism's emphasis on careers for women," the new female leaders of Eastern Europe would like "to reverse the communist diktat that all women have to work." Women have "dreamed," said the Polish Minister of Culture and Arts, "of reaching the point where we have the choice to stay home" that communism had taken away. But blinded by its feminist bias, *Time* could only find it "curious" that women would choose to stay at home; apparently beyond the pale of respectability was any argument that it would serve Western women's interest to retain the choice that contemporary feminism—filling in the West the role of communism in the East—has sought to deny them.

Nor was its feminist bias shaken by the attitudes of Japanese women, most of whom, *Time* noted, reject "equality" with men, choosing to cease work after the birth of a first child and later resuming a part-time career or pursuing hobbies or community work. The picture painted was that of the 1950s American suburban housewife reviled by Betty Friedan, except that the American has enjoyed a higher standard of living (particularly a much larger home) than has the Japanese. In Japan, *Time* observed, being "a housewife is nothing to be ashamed of." Dishonoring the housewife's role was a goal, it might have added, that Japanese feminists can, in time, accomplish if they emulate their American counterparts.

Japanese wives have broad responsibilities, commented *Time*, because most husbands leave their salaries and children entirely in wives' hands; freed from drudgery by modern appliances, housewives can "pursue their interests in a carefree manner, while men have to worry about supporting their wives and children." Typically, a Japanese wife controls household finances, giving her husband a cash allowance, the size of which,

apparently, dissatisfies one-half of the men. Acknowledging that Japanese wives take the leadership in most homes, one husband observed that “[t]hings go best when the husband is swimming in the palm of his wife’s hand.” A home is well-managed, said one wife, “if you make your men feel that they’re in control when they are in front of others, while in reality you’re in control.” It seems like a good arrangement to me.

Instead of inquiring whether a similar carefree existence might appeal to some American women, *Time* looked forward to the day when marriage would no longer be a career for Japanese women, as their men took over household and child-rearing chores, enabling wives to join husbands in the workplace. It was noted, however, that a major impediment to this goal, which would have to be corrected, was the fact that Japanese day-care centers usually run for only eight hours a day. Thus, *Time* made clear that its overriding concern was simply promoting the presence of women in the work force. This presence is seen as a good *per se*, without any *pro forma* talk about the economic necessity of a second income and without any question raised as to whether it is in children’s interest to spend any amount of time—much less in excess of eight hours a day—in communal care. . . .

The Awakened Brünnhilde

. . . Those who would defend anti-feminist traditionalism today are like heretics fighting a regnant Inquisition. To become a homemaker, a woman may need the courage of a heretic. This is one reason that the defense of traditional women is often grounded in religious teachings, for the heretic’s courage usually rests on faith. The source of courage I offer is the conviction, based on my own experience, that contemporary feminism’s stereotypical caricature of the housewife did not reflect reality when Friedan popularized it, does not reflect reality today, and need not govern reality.

Feminists claimed a woman can find identity and fulfillment only in a career; they are wrong. They claimed a woman can, in that popular expression, “have it all”; they are wrong—she can have only some. The experience of being a mother at home is a different experience from being a full-time market producer who is also a mother. A woman can have one or the other experience, but not both at the same time. Combining a career with motherhood requires a woman to compromise by diminishing her commitment and exertions with respect to one role or the other, or usually, to both. Rarely, if ever, can a woman adequately perform in a full-time career if she diminishes her commitment to it sufficiently to replicate the experience of being a mother at home.

Women were *never* told they could *not* choose to make the compromises required to combine these roles; within the memory of all living today there were always some women who did so choose. But by successfully degrading the housewife’s role, contemporary feminism undertook to force this choice upon all women. I declined to make the compromises necessary to combine a career with motherhood because I did not want

to become like Andrea Dworkin's spiritual virgin. I did not want to keep my being intact, as Dworkin puts it, so that I could continue to pursue career success. Such pursuit would have required me to hold too much of myself aloof from husband and children: the invisible "wedge-shaped core of darkness" that Virginia Woolf described as being oneself would have to be too large, and not enough of me would have been left over for them.

I feared that if I cultivated that "wedge-shaped core of darkness" within myself enough to maintain a successful career, I would be consumed by that career, and that thus desiccated, too little of me would remain to flesh out my roles as wife and mother. Giving most of myself to the market seemed less appropriate and attractive than reserving myself for my family. Reinforcing this decision was my experience that when a woman lives too much in her mind, she finds it increasingly difficult to live through her body. Her nurturing ties to her children become attenuated; her physical relationship with her husband becomes hollow and perfunctory. Certainly in my case, Dr. James C. Neely spoke the truth in *Gender: The Myth of Equality*: "With too much emphasis on intellect, a woman becomes 'too into her head' to function in a sexual, motherly way, destroying by the process of thought the process of feeling her sexuality."

Virginia Woolf never compromised her market achievements with motherhood; nor did the Brontë sisters, Jane Austen, or George Eliot. Nor did Helen Frankenthaler who, at the time she was acknowledged to be the most prominent living female artist, said in an interview: "We all make different compromises. And, no, I don't regret not having children. Given my painting, children could have suffered. A mother must make her children come first: young children are helpless. Well, paintings are objects but they're also helpless." I agree with her; that is precisely how I felt about the briefs I wrote for clients. Those briefs were, to me, like helpless children; in writing them, I first learned the meaning of complete devotion. I stopped writing them because I believed they would have been masters too jealous of my husband and my children.

Society never rebuked these women for refusing to compromise their literary and artistic achievements. Neither should it rebuke other kinds of women for refusing to compromise their own artistry of motherhood and domesticity. Some women may agree that the reality I depict rings truer to them than the feminist depiction. This conviction may help them find the courage of a heretic. Some others, both men and women, may see enough truth in the reality I depict that they will come to regret society's acquiescence in the status degradation of the housewife. They may then accept the currently unfashionable notion that society should respect and support women who adopt the anti-feminist perspective.

It is in society's interest to begin to pull apart the double-bind web spun by feminism and so order itself as not to inhibit any woman who *could* be an awakened Brünnhilde. Delighted and contented women will certainly do less harm—and probably more good—to society than frenzied and despairing ones. This is not to suggest that society should interfere with a woman's decision to follow the feminist script and adopt any form

of spiritual virginity that suits her. But neither should society continue to validate destruction of the women's pact by the contemporary feminists who sought to make us all follow their script. We should now begin to dismantle our regime that discourages and disadvantages the traditional woman who rejects feminist spiritual virginity and seeks instead the very different delight and contentment that she believes best suits her.



American Women in the Twentieth Century

In 1900, our foremothers predicted that the twentieth century would be the “century of the child.” It might be more accurate, however, to call it the “century of women.” Among the many dramatic changes in American society, it is hard to find an example more striking than the changes in women’s lives on every level.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, women were challenging the confines of an ideology that relegated them to the private realm of domesticity. Despite the reality that thousands of women could be found in factories, offices, and fields—not to mention in a wide variety of political and reform activities—those ideas still held powerful sway both in law and in dominant notions of propriety. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, women in America emerged fully (though still not equally) into all aspects of public life—politics, labor force participation, professions, mass media, and popular culture. As they did so, they experienced a transformation in the fundamental parameters of their private lives as well—marriage, family, fertility, and sexuality. In complex ways, women transformed the landscapes of both public and private life so that at century’s end we are left with a deeply puzzling conundrum about just what we mean by the terms *public* and *private*.

Women, of course, are part of every other social group. Deeply divided by race, class, religion, ethnicity, and region, they don’t always identify with one another, and as a result women’s collective identity—their sense of solidarity as women—has waxed and waned. Twice in this century, however, there has been a massive wave of activism focused on women’s rights. We can trace the surges of change in women’s status that accompanied each of these, one at the beginning and another near the end of the century.

Changes in women’s lives were certainly driven by large structural forces such as the emergence of the postindustrial service economy, rising levels of education, and the exigencies of two world wars. Yet they have also been due to women’s own self-organized activism in two great waves and in numerous ripples in between. In some instances, women fought for the right to participate in public life. In other instances, already present in public spaces, they struggled for equity. As a result of these struggles, American political and public life has undergone a series of fundamental transformations. Not only are women in different places at the end of the

century then they were at the beginning, but also all Americans enter a new century shaped by the complexities of women's journey.

1900—Dawn of the Twentieth Century

At the beginning of the twentieth century, women's lives were defined primarily by their marital status, linked to race and class. If we take a snapshot (understanding that we are capturing a moment in a dynamic process of change), the normative adult woman—both statistically and in the images that pervaded popular culture—was married, middle class, and white. On average, women lived to 48.3 years; they married around age 22 and bore approximately four children. The vast majority of households consisted of male-headed married couples and their children.

In 1900 women's legal standing was fundamentally governed by their marital status. They had very few rights.

- A married woman had no separate legal identity from that of her husband.
- She had no right to control of her reproduction (even conveying information about contraception, for example, was illegal); and no right to sue or be sued, since she had no separate standing in court.
- She had no right to own property in her own name or to pursue a career of her choice.
- Women could not vote, serve on juries, or hold public office. According to the Supreme Court, Women were not "persons" under the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution that guarantees equal protection under the law.

These realities reflected an underlying ideology about women and men that allocated the public realms of work and politics to men and defined the proper place of women in society as fundamentally domestic. Confined to the realm of the home, women's duty to society lay in raising virtuous sons (future citizens) and dutiful daughters (future mothers). Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, women had pushed at the boundaries of their domestic assignment, both by choice and by necessity. They invented forms of politics outside the electoral arena by forming voluntary associations and building institutions in response to unmet social needs. In the 1830s, when women like Sarah and Angelina Grimké began to speak publicly against slavery, the mere appearance of a woman as a public speaker was considered scandalous. By 1900, however, women appeared in all manner of public settings, setting the stage for change in the twentieth century.

Signs of Change

A closer look at women's status in 1900 reveals trends that signal imminent change particularly in the areas of education, labor force participation, and sexuality. The coexistence of new possibilities alongside ongoing restrictions and discrimination laid the groundwork for challenges to the norms of female subordination.

Education Women in 1900 had achieved a high degree of literacy. In fact, more girls than boys actually graduated from high school, probably because boys had access to many jobs that did not require significant education. When it came to higher education, however, women were seriously disadvantaged. They were overtly excluded from most professional education: only about 5 percent of medical students were women, and women's exclusion from legal education shows up in the fact that in 1920 only 1.4 percent of lawyers in the United States were female.

It is crucial to note, however, that in 1900 women constituted about 30 percent of students in colleges and universities, including schools for the growing female professions of nursing, teaching, librarianship, and social work. In the long run, this was a potent mix, as thousands of middle-class women embraced the opportunity to pursue higher education, which in turn generated new expectations. Education was a crucial force in creating the key leadership as well as a highly skilled constituency for the feminist mobilizations at either end of the century.

Labor Force Participation In 1900, though wage labor was defined as a fundamentally male prerogative, women could be found in many parts of the labor force. Women's work outside the home, however, was framed by their marital status and overt discrimination based on race as well as sex.

- Approximately one in five women worked outside the home, a figure that was sharply distinguished by race: 41 percent nonwhite; 17 percent white.
- The average working woman was single and under age 25.
- Only 11 percent of married women worked outside the home (up to 15% by 1940), though the proportion among black women (26%) was considerably higher because discrimination against black men made it much harder for blacks to secure a livable income from a single wage.
- Available occupations were sharply limited. Most women who worked for wages served as domestics, farm laborers, unskilled factory operatives, or teachers. In fact, one in three women employed in nonagricultural pursuits worked in domestic service.
- Some new female-dominated professions, such as nursing, social work, and librarianship, were emerging. In addition, the feminization of clerical work, linked to the new technology of the typewriter and the record-keeping needs of growing corporate bureaucracies, signaled a dramatic trend that made the "working girl" increasingly respectable. By 1920 the proportion of women engaged in clerical work (25.6%) had surpassed the number in manufacturing (23.8), domestic service (18.2%), and agriculture (12.9%).

Sexuality and the Body Late Victorians presumed (if they thought about it at all) that female sexuality should be confined entirely to marriage. Compared with today, there was very little premarital sex, and women were understood not to have much in the way of sexual desire. It

was illegal to transmit information about contraception, though women clearly conveyed it anyway through networks of rumor and gossip. Within the dominant middle class even the simplest acknowledgments of female sexuality were suppressed into euphemism and other forms of denial. Body parts could not be named in polite company, so chicken “legs” and “breast,” for example, became “dark meat” and “white meat.” Female attire covered women’s bodies with clothing that revealed some shape but very little skin.

Yet, as the twentieth century dawned with its emerging consumer culture, sexuality could no longer be so easily contained. Popular culture included vaudeville, dance halls, and a growing variety of public amusements (such as the brand-new movie theaters). In the past, women who frequented such places risked having a “bad reputation.” Yet the growing popularity of public amusements within the “respectable middle class” was beginning to challenge such perceptions.

Women’s bodies were also finding new visibility in athletics. In the wildly popular arenas of public competition such as baseball and boxing, athletics were virtually synonymous with masculinity. And yet women were beginning to play lawn tennis, field hockey, and gymnastics. Some even rode bicycles.

Race, Class, and Gender Ideals Within the gender ideology of the urban middle class that emerged over the course of the nineteenth century, the “good woman” (and her antithesis) took on distinct characteristics associated with race and class. “Good” (white, Protestant, middle class) women embodied private virtues. They were chaste, domestic, pious, and submissive. “Bad” women were “low class”—immigrants, racial minorities—presumed to be promiscuous, bad mothers, and improper housewives largely on the basis of their presence in previously male-only public spaces (factories, saloons, dance halls). Such perceptions multiplied in the case of southern black women subjected to a regime of racial/sexual domination that included the constant threat of rape and the public humiliations of segregation. Yet, the denigration of lower-class and minority women on the basis of their presence in public was getting harder to sustain as growing numbers of supposedly “respectable” women showed up in the same, or similar, spaces.

The First Wave

This brief sketch of women’s condition at the beginning of the century points to several forces for change that would bear fruit in the first few decades. The growth in women’s education, their move into a wide variety of reform efforts as well as professions, laid the groundwork for a massive suffrage movement that demanded the most basic right of citizenship for women. The claim of citizenship was in many ways a deeply radical challenge to the ideology of separate spheres for men and women. It asserted the right of the individual woman to stand in direct relation to the state rather than to be represented through the participation of her husband or father. The growing power of the

women's suffrage movement rested both on women's collective consciousness, born in female associations, and on increased individualism among women in an urbanizing industrializing economy.

While a small but crucial number of upper-middle-class women attended college, where they developed a transformed awareness of their own potential as women both individually and collectively, working-class immigrant and African-American women experienced both individualism and collectivity in very different ways. Forced to work outside the home in the least-skilled, lowest paying jobs, both they and their employers presumed that women's labor force participation was temporary. Unions objected to their presence and blocked them from apprenticeship and access to skilled jobs. Despite these obstacles, when wage-earning women organized their own unions, often in alliance with middle-class reformers, they exhibited awesome courage and militancy. In the garment district of New York, for example, the "uprising of the twenty thousand" in 1909 confounded the garment industry and led to a new kind of industrial unionism.

By 1910, middle-class white reformers had formed increasingly effective alliances with black and working-class women around the issue of women's suffrage. The massive mobilization of American women in the decade before the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920 included rallies of thousands of "working girls" and the organization of numerous African-American women's suffrage clubs. Shared exclusion from the individual right of civic participation symbolized their common womanhood. Following their victory, leaders of the National American Woman Suffrage Association joyfully dismantled their organization and reassembled as the newly formed League of Women Voters. Their new task, as they defined it, was to train women to exercise their individual citizenship rights.

Such a reorientation seemed congruent with the popular culture of the 1920s, which emphasized individual pleasures along with individual rights. The development of a consumer economy, emphasizing pleasure and using sexuality to sell, offered women other paths out of submissive domesticity and into more assertive forms of individualism, paths that did not require solidarity, indeed, undermined it. The female subculture that relied on a singular definition of "woman" eroded. Female reform efforts remained a powerful force in American politics—laying much of the groundwork for the emergence of a welfare state—but a broad-based movement for women's rights no longer existed after 1920. The pace of change in areas like education and labor force participation also reached a plateau and remained relatively unchanged for several decades after 1920. Modern women were individuals. And "feminism" became an epithet.

The loss of female solidarity meant that women's organizations in subsequent decades drew on narrow constituencies with very different priorities. Professional women, lonely pioneers in many fields, felt the continuing sting of discrimination and sought to eradicate the last vestiges of legal discrimination with an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The National Women's Party, one of the leading organizations in the struggle, first proposed the ERA in 1923 for the vote. But they were opposed by

former allies, social reformers who feared that the protections for working women, which they had won during the Progressive era, would be lost. Though fiercely opposed to the ERA, reformers continued to advocate a stronger role for government in responding to social welfare. Many of them—with leaders like Eleanor Roosevelt—assumed key positions in the 1930s and shaped the political agenda known as the New Deal. In particular, their influence on the Social Security Act laid the foundations of the welfare state. Even among female reformers, however, alliances across racial lines remained rare and fraught with difficulty. As the progressive female reform tradition shaped an emergent welfare state, African-American voices remained muted, the needs of working women with children unaddressed.

The Second Wave

By mid-century the conditions for another surge of activism were under way. During the Second World War women joined the labor force in unprecedented numbers. Most significant, perhaps, married women and women over age 35 became normative among working women by 1950. Yet cold war culture, in the aftermath of World War II, reasserted traditional gender roles. The effort to contain women within the confines of the “feminine mystique” (as Betty Friedan later labeled this ideology), however, obscured but did not prevent rising activism among different constituencies of women. Under the cover of popular images of domesticity, women were rapidly changing their patterns of labor force and civic participation, initiating social movements for civil rights and world peace, and flooding into institutions of higher education.

The President’s Commission on the Status of Women, established in 1961, put women’s issues back on the national political agenda by recruiting a network of powerful women to develop a set of shared goals. They issued a report in 1963, the same year that Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. That report documented in meticulous detail the ongoing realities of discrimination in employment and in wages, numerous legal disabilities such as married women’s lack of access to credit, and the growing problems of working mothers without adequate child care. In 1964, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act gave women their most powerful legal weapon against employment discrimination. An opponent of civil rights introduced Title VII, and many members of Congress treated it as a joke. But Title VII passed because the small number of women then in Congress fiercely and effectively defended the need to prohibit discrimination on the basis of “sex” as well as race, religion, and national origin.

The second wave emerged simultaneously among professional women and a younger cohort of social activists. Professionals, with the leadership of women in labor unions, government leaders, and intellectuals like Friedan, created the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 to demand enforcement of laws like Title VII. A second branch of feminist activism emerged from younger women in the civil rights movement and

the student new left. Civil rights offered a model of activism, an egalitarian and visionary language, an opportunity to develop political skills, and role models of courageous female leaders. Young women broke away in 1967 to form consciousness-raising groups and build on the legacy of the movements that had trained them.

The slogan, "the personal is political," became the ideological pivot of the second wave of American feminism. It drove a variety of challenges to gendered relations of power, whether embodied in public policy or in the most intimate personal relationships. The force of this direct assault on the public/private dichotomy has left deep marks on American politics, American society, and the feminist movement itself. Issues like domestic violence, child care, abortion, and sexual harassment have become central to the American political agenda, exposing deep divisions in American society that are not easily subject to the give-and-take compromises of political horse-trading.

From 1968 to 1975, the "Women's Liberation Movement," using the techniques of consciousness-raising in small groups, grew explosively. The synergy between different branches of feminist activism made the 1970s a very dynamic era. Feminist policymakers dubbed the years 1968 to 1975 "the golden years" because of their success in courtrooms and legislatures. These included the Equal Rights Amendment, which passed Congress in 1972 and went to the states; the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion (*Roe v. Wade*); Title IX of the Higher Education Act, which opened intercollegiate athletics to women; the Women's Equity Education Act; and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act.

Women formed caucuses and organizations in most professional associations and in the labor movement. By the mid-1970s there were feminist organizations representing a broad range of racial groups as well—African-American women, Chicanas and Hispanic women, Asian-American women, Native American women. Women also built new organizations among clerical workers to challenge the devaluation and limited opportunities of traditional women's work.

With their new strength, women challenged barriers to the professions (law, medicine), to ordination within mainstream Protestant and Jewish denominations, and to the full range of traditionally male blue-collar occupations, from carpenters to firefighters and police. They filed thousands of complaints of discrimination, mounted hundreds of lawsuits, and also built thousands of new institutions—day-care centers, shelters for battered women, bookstores, coffeehouses, and many others. The new feminism drew on women's stories to rethink the most intimate personal aspects of womanhood including abortion rights, sexual autonomy, rape, domestic violence, and lesbian rights.

The second wave of feminism also changed the American language both through its own publications (of which there were hundreds, the largest of them being *Ms.*, first published in 1972) and through pressure on commercial publishing houses and mass media. New words entered the American lexicon—"Ms.," "firefighter," "sexism"—while uses of the generic

masculine (mankind, brotherhood, policeman) suddenly seemed exclusive. In Women's Studies programs, which grew rapidly in the early 1970s, young scholars rethought the paradigms of their disciplines and initiated new branches of knowledge.

The second wave provoked a strong reaction, of course, revealing not only male hostility but also deep fissures among women themselves. Antifeminism became a strong political force by the late 1970s with the mobilization of Phyllis Schlafley's Stop-ERA and antiabortion forces. In the face of widespread cultural anxiety about equality for women and changing gender roles, the Equal Rights Amendment stalled after 1975 and went down to defeat in 1982 despite an extension of the deadline for ratification. Antifeminism drew on the insecurities of a declining economy in the wake of the Vietnam War and on the growing political power of the New Right which made cultural issues (abortion, the ERA, "family values," and homophobia) central. The 1980s, framed by the hostile political climate of the Reagan administration, nourished a growing backlash against feminism in the media, the popular culture, and public policy. As public spending shifted away from social programs and toward the military, female poverty increased sharply. The Reagan boom after 1983 did not touch the poorest, disproportionately female and racial minority, segments of the population.

At the same time, the 1980s witnessed the continued growth of women's presence in positions of public authority: Supreme Court justice, astronaut, arctic explorer, military officer, truck driver, carpenter, Olympic star, bishop, rabbi. Mainstream religious denominations began to rewrite liturgies and hymn books to make them more "inclusive." Despite regular announcements of the "death" of feminism, it would be more accurate to say that in the 1980s feminism entered the mainstream with new levels of community activism, sophisticated political fundraisers like EMILY's List, and broad political alliances on issues like comparable worth. Experimental "counterinstitutions" started in the 1970s (battered women's shelters, health clinics, bookstores, etc.) survived by adopting more institutionalized procedures, professionalized staff, and state funding. Women's Studies took on the trappings of an academic discipline.

Feminism was broad, diffuse, and of many minds in the 1980s. Legal and cultural issues grew more complex. Feminist theorists wrestled with the realities of differences such as race, class, age, and sexual preference, asking themselves whether the category "woman" could withstand such an analysis. The multifaceted activities that embraced the label "feminist"—policy activism, research think tanks, literary theory, music, art, spirituality—signaled the fact that the women's movement had lost some cohesiveness.

The testimony of Anita Hill during the 1991 hearings on the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, however, catalyzed a new round of national conversation, complicated by the deep fissures of race and sex. The sight of a genteel black woman being grilled by a committee of white men who made light of this "sexual harassment crap" mobilized thousands of women to run for office and contribute to campaigns. In 1992 an unprecedented number of women were elected to public office.

2000—Dawn of a New Millennium

If we return to our original categories to describe women's situation at the end of the twentieth century, the contrast with 1900 could hardly be more dramatic. The average woman now can expect to live 79.7 years (65% longer than her great-grandmother in 1900), marry at age 24.5, and bear only about two children (if any at all). There are now decades in women's lives—both before and after the years of childbearing and child care—which earlier generations never experienced. As a result of the second wave of women's rights activism in the final decades of the twentieth century, in politics and law, labor force participation, education, and sexuality, women live in a truly different world. Yet, in each instance equity remains an elusive goal, suggesting the need for continued and revitalized activism in the twenty-first century.

Politics and Law

No longer defined by their marital status, women enjoy virtually the full range of formal legal rights. In addition to winning the right to vote in 1920, they achieved equal pay (for the same work) in 1963 and guarantees against discrimination in housing and employment in 1964 (Title VII of the Civil Rights Act). Since 1970 women have won the right to a separate legal identity; privacy rights regarding reproduction and bodily integrity; and rights to sue for discrimination in employment, to work when pregnant, to equal education, and to equal access to athletics. Whole new bodies of law have developed since the 1970s on issues like domestic violence and sexual harassment. Nonetheless, the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1982 means that women still have no constitutional guarantee of equality.

In the last twenty-five years we have also seen a dramatic growth in the numbers of female elected officials. In 1997 there were 60 women in Congress (11.2%)—14 of them women of color; 81 statewide executive officials (25%); 1,597 state legislators (21.5%); and 203 mayors of cities with population over 30,000 (20.6%). There are two women on the Supreme Court, 30 female circuit court judges (18.6%), and 107 female district court judges (17.2%).

Education

At the end of the twentieth century, 88 percent of young women ages 25 to 34 are high-school graduates. The transformations in primary and secondary education for girls cannot be captured in graduation numbers, however. They also reside in the admission of girls to shop and other vocational classes (and boys to cooking and sewing courses), in girls' participation in athletics, in curricula that—at least sometimes—emphasize women's achievements in the past, and in school counselors who no longer single-mindedly socialize girls for domesticity and/or nonskilled stereotypically female jobs.

In the arena of higher education women are closing in on equity. Today, 54 percent of all bachelor of arts degrees go to women; 25 percent of women aged 25 to 34 are college graduates. Most striking, the proportion of women in professional schools is now between 36 and 43 percent. The revolution of the late twentieth century is evident in these figures, as most of the change occurred in the last three decades. Compare current numbers with those of 1960, when the proportion of women in law school was 2 percent (today 43%); medicine 6 percent (today 38%); MBA programs 4 percent (today 36%); Ph.D. programs 11 percent (today 39%), and dentistry 1 percent (today 38%).

Labor Force Participation

In stark contrast to a century ago, more than 61 percent of all women are in the labor force, including two-thirds of women with preschoolers and three-fourths of women with school-age children. Though African-American women continue to work at a higher rate than average (76% overall), the gap is clearly shrinking as the patterns that they pioneered are becoming the norm. With overt discrimination now outlawed, women practice virtually every occupation on the spectrum from blue collar to professional.

Yet alongside change, older patterns persist. Women remain concentrated in female-dominated, low-paid service occupations despite their presence in many professions and in traditionally male blue-collar occupations such as construction or truck driving. Although the exceptions are highly visible (tracked in the popular media frequently as interesting and unusual phenomena), 70 percent of women work either in the services industry (health and education) or in wholesale or retail trade. Women's median weekly earnings are still only 75 percent those of men—though there has been a dramatic gain since 1970 when they were 62.2 percent. (Note, however, that this change represents a combined gain for women of 17% and a 3% decline for men.)

Sexuality, Fertility, and Marriage

The late twentieth century has witnessed a sharp increase in single motherhood even as overall fertility has declined. One birth in three is to an unmarried woman; in 1970, that proportion was only one in ten. Sixty-nine percent of children live with two parents; 23.5 percent with mother only (for African Americans this is 52%).

Some of this single parenthood is due to divorce, something that was relatively rare in 1900 and today affects nearly one in every two marriages. The divorce rate seems to have peaked in 1980, however, and has declined somewhat since that time (in 1980 there were 5.2 divorces/1,000 population; today there are 4.4). Single motherhood is not the source of shame that it was in 1900, but it remains highly correlated with poverty.

If female sexuality was suppressed in 1900 (even though incompletely), at the end of the century sexual references and images saturate

American culture. It was not until the 1930s that birth control became legal in most states. In 1961 the birth control pill introduced the possibility of radically separating sexual experience from the likelihood of procreation. Then in 1973, the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision legalized abortion. Today, premarital sex is common, even normative. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, in the early 1990s, 56 percent of women and 73 percent of men had sex by age 18.

As dramatic, homosexuality has become an open subject of public discourse, and lesbians—once completely hidden, even to one another—are creating new public spaces and organizations, fields of intellectual inquiry and theory, and families that rely on voluntary ties in the absence of any legal sanction. Lesbians have been a major constituency and source of leadership in the second feminist wave. Twenty years of visibility, however, is just a beginning. American society remains deeply, and emotionally, divided on the issue of homosexuality. Opposition to gay rights marks a key issue for the religious right, and open violence against lesbians and gay men continues.

Race and Class

The second wave grew directly from and modeled itself on the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. That movement, itself, relied heavily on the grass-roots (if relatively invisible) leadership of African-American women. In the last decades of the century, the voices of minority women have become increasingly distinct and powerful. Diversity among women, as in the society at large, has taken on new dimensions with a surge of immigration since the 1960s from Southeast Asia, East Africa, Central America, and other parts of the Third World. Predictions based on immigration and fertility suggest that by the middle of the next century whites will be only half the U.S. population. Women of color will become the new norm. Women remain deeply divided on racial grounds, but race is no longer defined as black and white.

Challenges to traditional conceptions of gender have also shaken the previous consensus on what constitutes a "good woman" (except perhaps to the right-wing traditionalists who still hold to a set of ideals quite similar to those that dominated American culture a century ago). Yet discomfort with women's move into public life is still widespread, and race and class stigmas remain. The massive growth of a welfare system whose clients are disproportionately women and children combines racial and gender stereotypes to create a new category of "bad women": single, minority, poor mothers. And wherever women appear in previously male-dominated environments, they remain suspect. In particular, the sharply polarized emotional response to Hillary Rodham Clinton during her time as first lady illustrates the undercurrent of anger at powerful, professional women. Radio talk shows have filled thousands of hours with hosts and callers venting their hostility toward this woman who, in their view, did not stay "in her place." But, of course, that is the open question at century's end: just what is "woman's place"?

Conclusion

This brief discussion of women in the twentieth century does not trace a smooth arc from the beginning of the century to the end. It is not simply about “progress” toward “equality.” But it is, indeed, about a kind of sea change with unanticipated consequences and with dramatic acceleration in the last thirty years.

In the nineteenth century women created much of what today we call civil society. In the twentieth century they used that layer of society—which lies between formal governmental structures and private familial life—in an amazing variety of ways to reshape the landscape of American life. Virtually all of the public spaces previously presumed to belong properly to men—paid labor, higher education, electoral politics and public office, athletics—now incorporate a large and visible proportion of women. This theme of participation in public life, and the concomitant politicization of issues previously considered personal, runs through the entire century.

Such spectacular shifts have clearly been driven by large structural forces: the emergence of a postindustrial service economy, rising levels of education, two cataclysmic world wars, global power and national wealth on a level never imagined, changing patterns of marriage, fertility, and longevity. Yet the most dramatic changes can clearly be traced in equal measure to two large waves of women’s activism.

The suffrage movement, by the 1910s, involved hundreds of thousands of women, branching out both tactically with the use of massive public parades and street corner speeches (females occupying public, political spaces) and in composition as it reached out to working women, immigrants, and minorities. That movement won for women the fundamental right of citizenship, the right to vote. And the Progressive movement on which it built laid the groundwork and provided many key players for the subsequent emergence of the welfare state. The impact of the second wave shows up in the astonishing acceleration of change in the last three decades of the century.

Each of these waves continued to surge forward in the decades after cresting. But each was also followed by a period in which the multiplicity of women’s voices reasserted itself along with debates over the real meaning of equality. And each left much work undone for subsequent generations that face new issues and new dilemmas.

In the twenty-first century women will have choices that have never before been available, but they will not be easy. The twentieth century challenged our very definitions of male and female. Many of the signs of manhood and womanhood no longer function effectively. Work is no longer a manly prerogative and responsibility. Families are no longer constituted around a male breadwinner, a wife, and their children. More often they are two-income households (same or different sexes) or single-parent households. Large numbers of single men and women live alone. Yet “family values” have become a political code for attacks on welfare mothers, homosexuals, and nontraditional families (which, in fact, far outnumbered

traditional ones). In the absence of significant societal or governmental support for women's traditional responsibilities, women assume a double burden. They participate in the labor force almost to the same degree as men, and yet work outside the home is still organized as though workers had wives to take care of household work, child care, and the myriad details of private life. Work outside the home makes few accommodations to the demands and priorities of family life.

The pioneering work of the twentieth century—as women made their way into hostile, male-dominated public spaces—remains unfinished. Most of the barriers have been broken at least once. But equity remains a distant goal. Achieving that goal is complicated by the fact that for the moment women are not a highly unified group. The contemporary struggles within feminism to deal with the differences among women are the essential precursor to any future social movement that claims to speak for women as a group. The very meanings of masculinity and femininity and their multiple cultural and symbolic references are now overtly contested throughout the popular culture.

Another legacy of the feminist movement that proclaimed that “the personal is political” is an unresolved ambiguity about just where the boundary between the personal and the political properly lies, and the dilemmas resulting from politicizing private life. At the end of the century, Americans faced a constitutional crisis rooted in the strange career of personal politics. For an entire year virtually everyone in the United States was riveted by the scandal concerning President Clinton, Monica Lewinsky, Kenneth Starr, and the American Congress. Behaviors that once would have been considered purely private (and gone unremarked by political reporters, for example) became the basis for impeachment. Who defended the distinction between public and private and who assaulted it? The tables seem to have turned with a vengeance as the right wing pried into intimate details about the president's sexual activities in a consensual relationship while the liberals (including feminist leaders) protested. The politicization of private life is indeed a double-edged sword. This should be no surprise, as conservative backlash since the 1970s has evidenced a clear willingness to use the power of the state to enforce its vision of proper private relationships on issues such as abortion, homosexuality, divorce, prayer in the schools, and the content of textbooks.

The recent history of feminism calls to our attention a number of dimensions in this crisis that should not go unnoticed. First, there have always been many members of society (racial and sexual minorities, welfare recipients, and women, to name only the most obvious) whose private behaviors have been scrutinized and regulated by those in power. By forcing these issues into public debate and evolving laws that might protect such groups (for example laws against sexual harassment) feminists have also removed the cover of silence that protected powerful men from public scrutiny for their private behaviors. That such laws were subsequently used in a campaign to unseat a president whose election was directly due to the votes of politically mobilized women resonates with irony.

Women's solidarity has waxed and waned across the twentieth century. It will certainly continue to do so in the twenty-first. The next wave of feminist activism will no doubt take a shape we cannot envision, just as no one at the dawn of the twentieth century could have imagined the battles that awaited them. That there will be another wave, however, is a safe prediction, given the unfinished agendas of the last century and the still unforeseen contradictions that future changes will create. The next wave will shape the new century.

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POSTSCRIPT



Has the Women's Movement of the 1970s Failed to Liberate American Women?

F. Carolyn Graglia's critique of contemporary feminism is a throwback to women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who opposed the women social workers and suffragettes who entered the man's world. Her book is a modern restatement of Barbara Welter's classic and widely reprinted article, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* (Summer 1996).

Graglia argues that contemporary feminism ignores women's primary role in raising the children and preserving the moral character of the family. She blames contemporary feminism along with the Great Society's social programs for promoting a sexual revolution that has destroyed the American family by fostering sexually transmitted diseases and a high divorce rate.

Historian Sara M. Evans takes a long-range view of the women's liberation movement. By comparing the political, legal, and domestic situation of women in 1900 with today, Evans charts the successes and failures that were achieved by the two waves of feminist protest movements in the twentieth century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of middle-class women from elite colleges in the northeast were in the vanguard of a number of progressive reform movements—temperance, anti-prostitution, child labor, and settlement houses. Working in tandem with the daughters of first-generation immigrants employed in the garment industry, the early feminists realized that laws affecting women could be passed only if women had the right to vote. The suffragettes overcame the arguments of male and female antisuffragists who associated women voters with divorce, promiscuity, and neglect of children and husbands with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

The women's movement stalled between the two wars for a variety of reasons: Women pursued their own individual freedom in a consumer-oriented society in the 1920s, and the Great Depression of the 1930s placed the economic survival of the nation at the forefront. But the Second World War had long-range effects on women. Minorities—African Americans and Hispanics—worked for over 3 years in factory jobs traditionally reserved for white males at high wages; so did married white females, often in their thirties. Although the majority of these women returned to the home or took more traditional low-paying "women's" jobs after the war, the consciousness of the changing role of women during the Second World War would reappear during the 1960s.

Evans points out the two streams that formed the women's liberation movement from the mid-1960s. First were the professional women like Betty Freidan, who created the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, who worked with women leaders in labor unions, government, and consciousness-raising groups to demand enforcement of Title VII of the 1965 Civil Rights Act, which banned discrimination in employment and wages. A second wing of feminist activists came from the civil rights and anti-war new left protest groups from the elite universities. Many of these women felt like second-class citizens in these movements and decided they had their own issues that they had to deal with.

Evans dubbed the years 1968 to 1975 "the golden years" because of the following successes: "Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in Congress in 1972; the 1973 Supreme Court decision (*Roe v. Wade*) legalizing abortion; Title IX of the Higher Education Act which opened intercollegiate athletics to women; the Women's Equity Education Act; and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act."

Evans points out that the women's movement suffered a "backlash" in the 1980s as America became much more conservative. The new right blamed the increases in divorce, single parenthood, out-of-wedlock births, abortions, and open homosexuality on the cultural values of the 1960s. But by the beginning of the twenty-first century, middle-class women made substantial gains in the professions compared with 1960: Law school today 43 percent, 1960 2 percent; medicine today 38 percent, 1960 6 percent; MBA programs today 35 percent, 1960 4 percent; dentistry today 38 percent, 1960 1 percent; and Ph.D. programs today 39 percent, 1960 11 percent. Working-class women, however, have been much less successful in breaking into traditional blue collar jobs such as truck driving and construction.

Both the antifeminist Graglia and to a much less extent the pro-feminist Evans have been critiqued by moderate feminists like Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Cathy Young, who contend that contemporary feminists have not spoken to the concerns of married women, especially women from poor to lower-middle-class families who must work in order to help support the family. Fox-Genovese's *Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life: How Today's Feminist Elite Have Lost Touch with the Real Concerns of Women* (Doubleday, 1996) is peppered with interviews of white, African American, and Hispanic Americans of different classes and gives a more complex picture of the problems women face today. Young, author of *Cease Fire! Why Women and Men Must Join Forces to Achieve True Equality* (Free Press, 1999), asserts that Graglia denies the real discrimination women faced in the job market in the 1950s. Furthermore, Graglia's critique of the sexual revolution is an attempt to restore a view of female sexuality as essentially submissive.

In 1998 Harvard University Press reprinted Betty Friedan's two later books—*The Second Stage* and *It Changed My Life*, both with new introductions with suggestions for the twenty-first century—which are critical of some of the directions that the women's movement took.

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ISSUE 18



Is the United States a Declining Power?

YES: Andrew J. Bacevich, from *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (Metropolitan Books: Henry Holt and Company, 2008)

NO: Fareed Zakaria, from *The Post-American World* (W.W. Norton, 2009)

ISSUE SUMMARY

YES: Professor Andrew J. Bacevich, a West Point graduate and Vietnam veteran, believes that the United States has major problems because it has enlarged the power of the presidency and abuses its military power to create an informal empire in the energy-rich Persian Gulf in its pursuit of a consumer-dominated good life.

NO: Dr. Fareed Zakaria, a political commentator for CNN, believes the United States is still a great power in the post-industrial world because of its tremendous advantages in education, immigration, and scientific innovation.

Americans generally don't like change. But it's the most constant factor in American history. The changes are measured against two ideal standards established by the founding fathers in 1787: (1) a representative and honest form of government run by men of character and virtue and (2) an economic system of laissez-faire capitalism where farmers and merchants compete fairly and honestly in an open market system with no interference from government. The reality is that each generation that has succeeded the founding fathers has never been able to live up to these ideals because they are impossible standards. Even the founding fathers floundered in the real world. During the earliest years of the Republic, the main issue was not decline but survival. Could a Republican form of government survive economically without the protection of the British mercantilist system? Could a federal system of government protect the liberty of its citizens and maintain order without disintegrating into anarchy? Did the North's victory in the Civil War end the constant threats of secession and prevent the decline of the American experiment with representative government? The answer to all these questions is yes.

This reader has focused on the issues affecting our history from the 1870s to the 1970s. In its broadest terms, the "Industrial Revolution" transformed the lives of all Americans who lived during these times. In 1910, a middle-class American baby would be born in a hospital, not at home. The delivery was made by a male medical doctor and not a female midwife. The family lived in a single-family house in a small city, not on a farm. The house contained two bedrooms, a parlor, one bathroom with a sink with pump water, and a toilet that may or may not flush. The ideal family (not always the reality) had clearly defined roles. Mom stayed home, the children attended grammar school, and the bright ones went to high school, while dad worked as a bookkeeper. Sunday was family day, a time for church picnics and an occasional trip to the closest city. This is a pretty idealistic portrait of middle-class America at the turn of the twentieth century, but it's not that far removed from reality. Urban life in 1910 was very different from farm life in 1850 and very different from a typical middle-class family in 2010.

Americans are constantly in search of the honest politician and the truly competitive economic system. When it is not found it's because of some conspiracy. Did John D. Rockefeller use force to eliminate his competitors in the oil distribution business? Did Jay Gould pay off the New York State legislature to gain access to land to build his railroad? Were urban Protestant laborers forced to work for minimal wages because business allowed Catholic and Jewish immigrants to compete for their jobs in the factories? Did the Jewish bankers from England control Wall Street and the gold standards? Did these banks control the cotton and grain exchanges and "screw" the farmers? Were old-line patrician families like the Adams and Roosevelts correct in their distrust of nouveau riche tycoons like Diamond Jim Brady, Andrew Carnegie, and J. P. Morgan? Did nativist anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic complaints have any basis in reality or were they simplistic responses to a changed political and economic environment?

Since 1950, when the postindustrial society more or less originated, the American population has doubled from 150 to 300 plus million. Americans created the most affluent society that ever existed in history. While there have always been pockets of poverty, the upper and middle classes have never been better off. But is the good life about to end? Look at the negative side. Liberal critics point out that structural unemployment may remain at an all-time high at 8 percent; that the gap between rich and upper middle-class gets wider each decade; that the working class blue-collar workers have lost their factory jobs to automation and overseas competitors; that global warming is a real issue.

Conservatives also have their complaints. The deficit is out of control. Too many Americans want something for nothing. The work ethic is dead. Moral standards that permit abortion on demand and open prostitution are accepted as a matter of course. Terrorism is a real threat to Americans both in the Middle East and at home. Is it too late for Americans? Can we stop the government from taking away our second amendment rights to bear arms?

The final issue in the reader addresses the question of a declining America from two opposite views. Professor Andrew Bacevich thinks we've over-reached militarily in pursuit of a consumer-dominated good life. Political commentator Fareed Zakaria sees us still as a great power because of our advantages in education, immigration, and scientific innovation.

The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism

Introduction: War Without Exits

For the United States, the passing of the Cold War yielded neither a “peace dividend” nor anything remotely resembling peace. Instead, what was hailed as a historic victory gave way almost immediately to renewed unrest and conflict. By the time the East-West standoff that some historians had termed the “Long Peace” ended in 1991, the United States had already embarked upon a decade of unprecedented interventionism. In the years that followed, Americans became inured to reports of U.S. forces going into action—fighting in Panama and the Persian Gulf, occupying Bosnia and Haiti, lambasting Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Sudan from the air. Yet all of these turned out to be mere preliminaries. In 2001 came the main event, an open-ended global war on terror, soon known in some quarters as the “Long War.”

Viewed in retrospect, indications that the Long Peace began almost immediately to give way to conditions antithetical to peace seem blindingly obvious. Prior to 9/11, however, the implications of developments like the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center or the failure of the U.S. military mission to Somalia that same year were difficult to discern. After all, these small events left unaltered what many took to be the defining reality of the contemporary era: the preeminence of the United States, which seemed beyond challenge.

During the 1990s, at the urging of politicians and pundits, Americans became accustomed to thinking of their country as “the indispensable nation.” Indispensability carried with it both responsibilities and prerogatives.

The chief responsibility was to preside over a grand project of political-economic convergence and integration commonly referred to as globalization. In point of fact, however, globalization served as a euphemism for soft, or informal, empire. The collapse of the Soviet Union appeared to offer an opportunity to expand and perpetuate that empire, creating something akin to a global Pax Americana.

The indispensable nation’s chief prerogative, self-assigned, was to establish and enforce the norms governing the post-Cold War international order. Even in the best of circumstances, imperial policing is a demanding task, requiring not only considerable acumen but also an abundance of determination. The

preferred American approach was to rely, whenever possible, on suasion. Yet if pressed, Washington did not hesitate to use force, as its numerous military adventures during the 1990s demonstrated.

Whatever means were employed, the management of empire assumed the existence of bountiful reserves of power—economic, political, cultural, but above all military. In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, few questioned that assumption. The status of the United States as “sole superpower” appeared unassailable. Its dominance was unquestioned and unambiguous. This was not hypernationalistic chest-thumping; it was the conventional wisdom.

Recalling how Washington saw the post–Cold War world and America’s place in (or atop) it helps us understand why policy makers failed to anticipate, deter, or deflect the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. A political elite preoccupied with the governance of empire paid little attention to protecting the United States itself. In practical terms, prior to 9/11 the mission of homeland defense was unassigned.

The institution nominally referred to as the Department of Defense didn’t actually do defense; it specialized in power projection. In 2001, the Pentagon was prepared for any number of contingencies in the Balkans or Northeast Asia or the Persian Gulf. It was just not prepared to address threats to the nation’s eastern seaboard. Well-trained and equipped U.S. forces stood ready to defend Seoul or Riyadh; Manhattan was left to fend for itself.

Odd as they may seem, these priorities reflected a core principle of national security policy: When it came to defending vital American interests, asserting control over the imperial periphery took precedence over guarding the nation’s own perimeter.

After 9/11, the Bush administration affirmed this core principle. Although it cobbled together a new agency to attend to “homeland security,” the administration also redoubled its efforts to shore up the Pax Americana and charged the Department of Defense with focusing on this task. This meant using any means necessary—suasion where possible, force as required—to bring the Islamic world into conformity with prescribed American norms. Rather than soft and consensual, the approach to imperial governance became harder and more coercive.

So, for the United States after 9/11, was became a seemingly permanent condition. President George W. Bush and members of his administration outlined a campaign against terror that they suggested might last decades, if not longer. On the national political scene, few questioned that prospect. In the Pentagon, senior military officers spoke in terms of “generational war,” lasting up to a century. Just two weeks after 9/11, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was already instructing Americans to “forget about ‘exit strategies’; we’re looking at a sustained engagement that carries no deadlines.”

By and large, Americans were slow to grasp the implications of a global war with no exits and no deadlines. To earlier generations, place names like Iraq and Afghanistan had been synonymous with European rashness—the sort of obscure and unwelcoming jurisdictions to which overly ambitious kings and slightly mad adventures might repair to squabble. For the present generation, it has already become part of the natural order of things that GIs

should be exerting themselves at great cost to pacify such far-off domains. For the average American tuning in to the nightly news, reports of U.S. casualties incurred in distant lands now seem hardly more out of the ordinary than reports of partisan shenanigans on Capitol Hill or brush fires raging out of control in Southern California.

How exactly did the end of the Long Peace so quickly yield the Long War? Seeing themselves as a peaceful people, Americans remain wedded to the conviction that the conflicts in which they find themselves embroiled are not of their own making. The global war on terror is no exception. Certain of our own benign intentions, we reflexively assign responsibility for war to others, typically malignant Hitler-like figures inexplicably bent on denying us the peace that is our fondest wish.

This book challenges that supposition. It argues that the actions of Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, however malevolent, cannot explain why the United States today finds itself enmeshed in seemingly never-ending conflict. Although critics of U.S. foreign policy, and especially of the Iraq War, have already advanced a variety of alternative explanations—variously fingering President Bush, members of his inner circle, jingoistic neoconservatives, greedy oil executives, or even the Israel lobby—it also finds those explanations inadequate. Certainly, the president and his advisers, along with neocons always looking for opportunities to flex American military muscle, bear considerable culpability for our current predicament. Yet to charge them with primary responsibility is to credit them with undeserved historical significance. It's the equivalent of blaming Herbert Hoover for the Great Depression or of attributing McCarthyism entirely to the antics of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

The impulses that have landed us in a war of no exits and no deadlines come from within. Foreign policy has, for decades, provided an outward manifestation of American domestic ambitions, urges, and fears. In our own time, it has increasingly become an expression of domestic dysfunction—an attempt to manage or defer coming to terms with contradictions besetting the American way of life. Those contradictions have found their ultimate expression in the perpetual state of war afflicting the United States today.

Gauging their implications requires that we acknowledge their source: They reflect the accumulated detritus of freedom, the by-products of our frantic pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

Freedom is the altar at which Americans worship, whatever their nominal religious persuasion. "No one signs odes to liberty as the final end of life with greater fervor than Americans," the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once observed. Yet even as they celebrate freedom, Americans exempt the object of their veneration from critical examination. In our public discourse, freedom is not so much a word or even a value as an incantation, its very mention is enough to stifle doubt and terminate all debate.

The Limits of Power will suggest that this heedless worship of freedom has been a mixed blessing. In our pursuit of freedom, we have accrued obligations and piled up debts that we are increasingly hard-pressed to meet. Especially since the 1960s, freedom itself has undercut the nation's ability to fulfill its commitments. We teeter on the edge of insolvency, desperately trying to

balance accounts by relying on our presumably invincible armed forces. Yet there, too, having exaggerated our military might, we court bankruptcy.

The United States today finds itself threatened by three interlocking crises. The first of these crises is economic and cultural, the second political, and the third military. All three share this characteristic: They are of our own making. In assessing the predicament that results from these crises, *The Limits of Power* employs what might be called a Niebuhrean perspective. Writing decades ago, Reinhold Niebuhr anticipated that predicament with uncanny accuracy and astonishing prescience. As such, perhaps more than any other figure in our recent history, he may help us discern a way out.

As pastor, teacher, activist, theologian, and prolific author, Niebuhr was a towering presence in American intellectual life from the 1930s through the 1960s. Even today, he deserves recognition as the most clear-eyed of American prophets. Niebuhr speaks to us from the past, offering truths of enormous relevance to the present. As prophet, he warned that what he called “our dreams of managing history”—born of a peculiar combination of arrogance and narcissism—posed a potentially mortal threat to the United States. Today, we ignore that warning at our peril.

Niebuhr entertained few illusions about the nature of man, the possibilities of politics, or the pliability of history. Global economic crisis, total war, genocide, totalitarianism, and nuclear arsenals capable of destroying civilization itself—he viewed all of these with an unblinking eye that allowed no room for hypocrisy, hokum, or self-deception. Realism and humility formed the core of his worldview, each infused with a deeply felt Christian sensibility.

Realism in this sense implies an obligation to see the world as it actually is, not as we might like it to be. The enemy of realism is hubris, which in Niebuhr’s day, and in our own, finds expression in an outsized confidence in the efficacy of American power as an instrument to reshape the global order.

Humility imposes an obligation of a different sort. It summons Americans to see themselves without binders. The enemy of humility is sanctimony, which gives rise to the conviction that American values and beliefs are universal and that the nation itself serves providentially assigned purposes. This conviction finds expression in a determination to remake the world in what we imagine to be America’s image.

In our own day, realism and humility have proven in short supply. What Niebuhr wrote after World War II proved truer still in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War: Good fortune and a position of apparent preeminence placed the United States “under the most grievous temptations to self-adulation.” Americans have given themselves over to those temptations. Hubris and sanctimony have become the paramount expressions of American statecraft. After 9/11, they combined to produce the Bush administration’s war of no exits and no deadlines.

President Bush has likened today’s war against what he calls “Islamofascism” to America’s war with Nazi Germany—a great struggle waged on behalf of liberty. That President Bush is waging his global war on terror to preserve American freedom is no doubt the case. Yet that commitment, however well intentioned, begs several larger questions: As actually expressed and

experienced, what is freedom today? What is its content? What costs does the exercise of freedom impose? Who pays?

These are fundamental questions, which cannot be dismissed with a rhetorical wave of the hand. Great wartime presidents of the past—one thinks especially of Abraham Lincoln speaking at Gettysburg—have not hesitated to confront such questions directly. That President Bush seems oblivious to their very existence offers one measure of his shortcomings as a statesman.

Freedom is not static, nor is it necessarily benign. In practice, freedom constantly evolves and in doing so generates new requirements and abolishes old constraints. The common understanding of freedom that prevailed in December 1941 when the United States entered the war against Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany has long since become obsolete. In some respects, this must be cause for celebration. In others, it might be cause for regret.

The changes have been both qualitative and quantitative. In many respects, Americans are freer today than ever before, with more citizens than ever before enjoying unencumbered access to the promise of American life. Yet, especially since the 1960s, the reinterpretation of freedom has had a transformative impact on our society and culture. That transformation has produced a paradoxical legacy. As individuals, our appetites and expectations have grown exponentially. Niebuhr once wrote disapprovingly of Americans, their "culture soft and vulgar, equating joy with happiness and happiness with comfort." Were he alive today, Niebuhr might amend that judgment, with Americans increasingly equating comfort with self-indulgence.

The collective capacity of our domestic political economy to satisfy those appetites has not kept pace with demand. As a result, sustaining our pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness at home requires increasingly that Americans look beyond our borders. Whether the issue at hand is oil, credit, or the availability of cheap consumer goods, we expect the world to accommodate the American way of life.

The resulting sense of entitlement has great implications for foreign policy. Simply put, as the American appetite for freedom has grown, so too has our penchant for empire. The connection between these two tendencies is a causal one. In an earlier age, Americans saw empire as the antithesis of freedom. Today, as illustrated above all by the Bush administration's efforts to dominate the energy-rich Persian Gulf, empire has seemingly become a prerequisite of freedom.

There is a further paradox: The actual exercise of American freedom is no longer conducive to generating the power required to establish and maintain an imperial order. If anything, the reverse is true: Centered on consumption and individual autonomy, the exercise of freedom is contributing to the gradual erosion of our national power. At precisely the moment when the ability to wield power—especially military power—has become the *sine qua non* for preserving American freedom, our reserves of power are being depleted.

One sees this, for example, in the way that heightened claims of individual autonomy have eviscerated the concept of citizenship. Yesterday's civic obligations have become today's civic options. What once rated as duties—rallying to the country's defense at times of great emergency, for example—are now matters

of choice. As individuals, Americans never cease to expect more. As members of a community, especially as members of a national community, they choose to contribute less.

Meanwhile, American political leaders—especially at the national level—have proven unable (or unwilling) to address the disparity between how much we want and what we can afford to pay. Successive administrations, abetted by Congress, have deepened a looming crisis of debt and dependency through unbridled spending. As Vice President Dick Cheney, a self-described conservative, announced when told that cutting taxes might be at odds with invading Iraq, “Deficits don’t matter.” Politicians of both parties certainly act as if they don’t.

Expectations that the world beyond our borders should accommodate the American way of life are hardly new. Since 9/11, however, our demands have become more insistent. In that regard, the neoconservative writer Robert Kagan is surely correct in observing that “America did not change on September 11. It only became more itself.” In the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Washington’s resolve that nothing interfere with the individual American’s pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness only hardened. That resolve found expression in the Bush administration’s with-us-or-against-us rhetoric, in its disdain for the United Nations and traditional American allies, in its contempt for international law, and above all in its embrace of preventive war.

When President Bush declared in his second inaugural that the “survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands,” he was in effect claiming for the United States as freedom’s chief agent the prerogative of waging war when and where it sees fit, those wars by definition being fought on freedom’s behalf. In this sense, the Long War genuinely qualifies as a war to preserve the American way of life (centered on a specific conception of liberty) and simultaneously as a war to extend the American imperium (centered on dreams of a world remade in America’s image), the former widely assumed to require the latter.

Yet, as events have made plain, the United States is ill-prepared to wage a global war of no exits and no deadlines. The sole superpower lacks the resources—economic, political, and military—to support a large-scale, protracted conflict without, at the very least, inflicting severe economic and political damage on itself. American power has limits and is inadequate to the ambitions to which hubris and sanctimony have given rise.

Here is the central paradox of our time: While the defense of American freedom seems to demand that U.S. troops fight in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, the exercise of that freedom at home undermines the nation’s capacity to fight. A grand bazaar provides an inadequate basis upon which to erect a vast empire.

Meanwhile, a stubborn insistence on staying the course militarily ends up jeopardizing freedom at home. With Americans, even in wartime, refusing to curb their appetites, the Long War aggravates the economic contradictions that continue to produce debt and dependency. Moreover, a state of perpetual national security emergency aggravates the disorders afflicting our political

system, allowing the executive branch to accrue ever more authority at the expense of the Congress and disfiguring the Constitution. In this sense, the Long War is both self-defeating and irrational.

Niebuhr once wrote, "One of the most pathetic aspects of human history is that every civilization expresses itself most pretentiously, compounds its partial and universal values most convincingly, and claims immortality for its finite existence at the very moment when the decay which leads to death has already begun." Future generations of historians may well cite Niebuhr's dictum as a concise explanation of the folly that propelled the United States into its Long War.

In an immediate sense, it is the soldier who bears the burden of such folly. U.S. troops in battle dress and body armor, whom Americans profess to admire and support, pay the price for the nation's collective refusal to confront our domestic dysfunction. In many ways, the condition of the military today offers the most urgent expression of that dysfunction. Seven years into its confrontation with radical Islam, the United States finds itself with too much war for too few warriors—and with no prospect of producing the additional soldiers needed to close the gap. In effect, Americans now confront a looming military crisis to go along with the economic and political crises that they have labored so earnestly to ignore.

The Iraq War deserves our attention as the clearest manifestation of these three crises, demonstrating the extent to which they are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. That war was always unnecessary. Except in the eyes of the deluded and the disingenuous, it has long since become a fool's errand. Of perhaps even greater significance, it is both counterproductive and unsustainable.

Yet ironically Iraq may yet prove to be the source of our salvation. For the United States, the ongoing war makes plain the imperative of putting America's house in order. Iraq has revealed the futility of counting on military power to sustain our habits of profligacy. The day of reckoning approaches. Expendng the lives of more American soldiers in hopes of deferring that day is profoundly wrong. History will not judge kindly a people who find nothing amiss in the prospect of endless armed conflict so long as they themselves are spared the effects. Nor will it view with favor an electorate that delivers political power into the hands of leaders unable to envision any alternative to perpetual war.

Rather than insisting that the world accommodate the United States, Americans need to reassert control over their own destiny, ending their condition of dependency and abandoning their imperial delusions. Of perhaps even greater difficulty, the combination of economic, political, and military crisis summons Americans to reexamine exactly what freedom entails. Soldiers cannot accomplish these tasks, nor should we expect politicians to do so. The onus of responsibility falls squarely on citizens. . . .

Containment during the Cold War did not preclude selective engagement. Nor should it today. A strategy of containment should permit and even underwrite educational, cultural, and intellectual exchanges. It should provide opportunities for selected students from the Islamic world to study in the West. And it ought to include a public diplomacy component. Yet

however worthy, such initiatives will have a marginal effect at best. Our ability to influence perceptions and attitudes across the Islamic world will remain limited.

By extension, Americans ought to give up the presumptuous notion that they are called upon to tutor Muslims in matters related to freedom and the proper relationship between politics and religion. The principle informing policy should be this: Let Islam be Islam. In the end, Muslims will have to discover for themselves the shortcomings of political Islam, much as Russians discovered the defects of Marxism-Leninism and Chinese came to appreciate the flaws of Maoism—perhaps even as we ourselves will one day begin to recognize the snares embedded in American exceptionalism.

President Bush's freedom agenda has attracted negligible international support. As a result, when it comes to liberating the Greater Middle East, the United States finds itself stuck doing most of the heavy lifting. A strategy that aims to contain violent extremists would likely be far more agreeable to American allies and could be persuaded to shoulder a greater portion of the load.

The president's insistence that war provides the best antidote to terror has made it difficult to locate a point of concurrence between ourselves and others who share the view that Islamic extremism poses a problem, while defining the solution to that problem differently. The president's reluctance even to acknowledge the existence of other equally important problems where "the parochial and the general interest" just might intersect has further complicated the effort to forge a basis for collaboration. Repairing the legacy of the Bush years will surely require renewed attention to such problems, two of which loom especially large: nuclear weapons and climate change.

For the United States, abolishing nuclear weapons ought to be an urgent national security priority. So, too, should preserving our planet. These are the meta-challenges of our time. Addressing them promises to be the work of decades. Yet ridding the world of nuclear weapons is likely to prove far more plausible and achievable than ridding the world of evil. Transforming humankind's relationship to the environment, which will affect the way people live their daily lives, can hardly prove more difficult than transforming the Greater Middle East, which requires changing the way a billion or more Muslims think.

In lieu of President Bush's misguided global war on terror, these two issues offer points of concurrence that can provide the basis for sound strategy. In each case, realism rather than idealism—not "do-goodism" but self-interest—provides the impetus for action. The idea is not to save the world but to provide for the well-being of the American people. That others might credit the United States with promoting the common good, thereby refurbishing U.S. claims to global leadership, ranks at best as a secondary, although by no means trivial, potential benefit.

Nuclear weapons are unusable. Their employment in any conceivable scenario would be a political and moral catastrophe. For the United States, they are becoming unnecessary, even as a deterrent. Certainly, they are unlikely to dissuade the adversaries most likely to employ such weapons against us—Islamic extremists intent on acquiring their own nuclear capability.

If anything, the opposite is true. By retaining a strategic arsenal in readiness (and by insisting without qualification that the dropping of atomic bombs on two Japanese cities in 1945 was justified), the United States continues tacitly to sustain the view that nuclear weapons play a legitimate role in international politics—this at a time when our own interests are best served by doing everything possible to reinforce the existing taboo against their further use.

Furthermore, the day is approaching when the United States will be able to deter other nuclear-armed states, like Russia and China, without itself relying on nuclear weapons. Modern conventional weapons possess the potential to provide a more effective foundation for deterrence. They offer highly lethal, accurate, responsive second-strike (or even first-strike) capabilities. Precision conventional weapons also carry fewer of the moral complications that make nuclear weapons so inherently problematic. Hence, they have the added advantage of being usable, which enhances credibility.

By the end of the Cold War, the United States had accumulated a stockpile of some 23,000 nuclear weapons. By 2007, that number stood at an estimated 5,736 warheads of various types. Although the reduction appears impressive, this represents less an achievement than a gesture—like the chronic cigarette smoker who goes from three packs a day to two and fancies that he has his habit under control. Even if one assumes that nuclear weapons possess any real utility, what conceivable target set would require more than 100 warheads to destroy? Far more severe cuts in the U.S. arsenal, shrinking the total to a couple hundred at most, are in order.

When it comes to nuclear weapons, the point of concurrence between the parochial and the general interest seems clear: Such weapons should be entirely eliminated. Presidents from Harry Truman's day to the present have bemoaned their very existence and have repeatedly promised to work for their abolition. Now might actually be the moment to act on that promise.

Climate change likewise poses a looming threat to America's well-being—and the world's. Here, the point of concurrence between the national and international common good seems self-evident: It lies in moving aggressively to reduce the level of emissions that contribute to global warming.

The United States ranks among the world's worst polluters—here we confront one unfortunate by-product of American freedom as currently practiced. Acting alone, Americans cannot curb climate change. Yet unless the United States acts, the chances of effectively addressing this global threat are nil.

Preserving the environment means reducing the global consumption of fossil fuels while developing alternative energy sources. In addition to saving the planet, leadership in this arena will enhance national security. Among other things, reducing oil imports could reduce the flow of dollars to the Islamists who wish us ill, something that ought to be the very cornerstone of a strategy of containment. Perfect security is an illusion. Yet, when it comes to keeping security problems within tolerable limits, self-sufficiency has a value greater than even the largest army.

No doubt undertaking a serious, long-term, national effort to begin the transition to a post-fossil fuel economy promises to be a costly proposition. Yet, whereas spending trillions to forcibly democratize the Islamic world will

achieve little, investing trillions in energy research might actually produce something useful. From the Manhattan Project to the space race to the development of the Internet, large-scale technological innovation has tended to be an American strong suit. By comparison, when it comes to large-scale efforts to engineer political, social, and cultural change abroad, the American track record has never been better than mixed. Since September 2001, it has been downright abysmal.

A concerted effort to abolish nuclear weapons will entail some risk. A concerted effort to reduce the effects of climate change implies considerable inconvenience and even sacrifice, at least in the near term. Yet, a people for whom freedom has become synonymous with consumption and self-actualization evince little appetite for either risk or sacrifice—even if inaction today increases the prospect of greater risks and more painful sacrifices tomorrow.

As long as Americans remain in denial—insisting that the power of the United States is without limits—they will remain unlikely to do any of these things. Instead, abetted by their political leaders, they will continue to fancy that some version of global war offers an antidote to Islamic radicalism. The United States will modernize and enhance its nuclear strike capabilities while professing outrage that others should seek similar capabilities. Americans will treat climate change as a problem to be nickel-and-dimed. They will guzzle imported oil, binge on imported goods, and indulge in imperial dreams. All the while, Washington will issue high-minded proclamations testifying to the approaching triumph of democracy everywhere and forever.

Meanwhile, the American people will ignore the imperative of settling accounts—balancing budgets, curbing consumption, and paying down debt. They will remain passive as politicians fritter away U.S. military might on unnecessary wars. They will permit officials responsible for failed policies to dodge accountability. They will tolerate stupefying incompetence and dysfunction in the nation's capital, counting on the next president to fix everything that the last one screwed up. In Niebuhr's words, they will cling to "a culture which makes 'living standards' the final norm of the good life and which regards the perfection of techniques as the guarantor of every cultural as well as every social-moral value." Above all, they will venerate freedom while carefully refraining from assessing its content or measuring its costs.

"The trustful acceptance of false solutions for our perplexing problems," Niebuhr wrote a half century ago, "adds a touch of pathos to the tragedy of our age." That judgment remains valid today. Adamantly insisting that it is unique among history's great powers, the United States seems likely to follow the well-worn path taken by others, blind to the perils that it courts through its own feckless behavior.

For all nations, Niebuhr once observed, "The desire to gain an immediate selfish advantage always imperils their ultimate interests. If they recognize this fact, they usually recognize it too late." Both parts of this dictum apply to the United States today—and in spades. To extend however slightly the here and now, Americans are increasingly inclined to write off the future. So they carry on, heedless of the consequences even for themselves, no less for their children or grandchildren.

Thus does the tragedy of our age move inexorably toward its conclusion. "To the end of history," our prophet once wrote, "social orders will probably destroy themselves in the effort to prove that they are indestructible." Clinging doggedly to the conviction that the rules to which other nations must submit don't apply, Americans appear determined to affirm Niebuhr's axiom of willful self-destruction.



The Post-American World

The Rise of the Rest

This is a book not about the decline of America but rather about the rise of everyone else. It is about the great transformation taking place around the world, a transformation that, though often discussed, remains poorly understood. This is natural. Changes, even sea changes, take place gradually. Though we talk about a new era, the world seems to be one with which we are familiar. But in fact, it is very different.

There have been three tectonic power shifts over the last five hundred years, fundamental changes in the distribution of power that have reshaped international life—its politics, economics, and culture. The first was the rise of the Western world, a process that began in the fifteenth century and accelerated dramatically in the late eighteenth century. It produced modernity as we know it: science and technology, commerce and capitalism, the agricultural and industrial revolutions. It also produced the prolonged political dominance of the nations of the West.

The second shift, which took place in the closing years of the nineteenth century, was the rise of the United States. Soon after it industrialized, the United States became the most powerful nation since imperial Rome, and the only one that was stronger than any likely combination of other nations. For most of the last century, the United States has dominated global economics, politics, science, and culture. For the last twenty years, that dominance has been unrivaled, a phenomenon unprecedented in modern history.

We are now living through the third great power shift of the modern era. It could be called “the rise of the rest.” Over the past few decades, countries all over the world have been experiencing rates of economic growth that were once unthinkable. While they have had booms and busts, the overall trend has been unambiguously upward. This growth has been most visible in Asia but is no longer confined to it. That is why to call this shift “the rise of Asia” does not describe it accurately. In 2006 and 2007, 124 countries grew at a rate of 4 percent or more. That includes more than 30 countries in Africa, two-thirds of the continent. Antoine van Agtmael, the fund manager who coined the term “emerging markets,” has identified the 25 companies most likely to be the world’s next great multinationals. His list includes four companies each

from Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, and Taiwan; three from India; two from China; and one each from Argentina, Chile, Malaysia, and South Africa.

Look around. The tallest building in the world is now in Taipei, and it will soon be overtaken by one being built in Dubai. The world's richest man is Mexican, and its largest publicly traded corporation is Chinese. The world's biggest plane is built in Russia and Ukraine, its leading refinery is under construction in India, and its largest factories are all in China. By many measures, London is becoming the leading financial center, and the United Arab Emirates is home to the most richly endowed investment fund. Once quintessentially American icons have been appropriated by foreigners. The world's largest Ferris wheel is in Singapore. Its number one casino is not in Las Vegas but in Macao, which has also overtaken Vegas in annual gambling revenues. The biggest movie industry, in terms of both movies made and tickets sold, is Bollywood, not Hollywood. Even shopping, America's greatest sporting activity, has gone global. Of the top ten malls in the world, only one is in the United States; the world's biggest is in Beijing. Such lists are arbitrary, but it is striking that only ten years ago, America was at the top in many, if not most, of these categories.

It might seem strange to focus on growing prosperity when there are still hundreds of millions of people living in desperate poverty. But in fact, the share of people living on a dollar a day or less plummeted from 40 percent in 1981 to 18 percent in 2004, and is estimated to fall to 12 percent by 2015. China's growth alone has lifted more than 400 million people out of poverty. Poverty is falling in countries housing 80 percent of the world's population. The 50 countries where the earth's poorest people live are basket cases that need urgent attention. In the other 142—which include China, India, Brazil, Russia, Indonesia, Turkey, Kenya, and South Africa—the poor are slowly being absorbed into productive and growing economies. For the first time ever, we are witnessing genuinely global growth. This is creating an international system in which countries in all parts of the world are no longer objects or observers, but players in their own right. It is the birth of a truly global order.

A related aspect of this new era is the diffusion of power from states to other actors. The "rest" that is rising includes many nonstate actors. Groups and individuals have been empowered, and hierarchy, centralization, and control are being undermined. Functions that were once controlled by governments are now shared with international bodies like the World Trade Organization and the European Union. Nongovernmental groups are mushrooming every day on every issue in every country. Corporations and capital are moving from place to place, finding the best location in which to do business, rewarding some governments while punishing others. Terrorists like Al Qaeda, drug cartels, insurgents, and militias of all kinds are finding space to operate within the nooks and crannies of the international system. Power is shifting away from nation-states, up, down, and sideways. In such an atmosphere, the traditional applications of national power, both economic and military, have become less effective.

The emerging international system is likely to be quite different from those that have preceded it. One hundred years ago, there was a multipolar

order run by a collection of European governments, with constantly shifting alliances, rivalries, miscalculations, and wars. Then came the bipolar duopoly of the Cold War, more stable in many ways, but with the superpowers reacting and overreacting to each other's every move. Since 1991, we have lived under an American imperium, a unique, unipolar world in which the open global economy has expanded and accelerated dramatically. This expansion is now driving the next change in the nature of the international order.

At the politico-military level, we remain in a single-superpower world. But in every other dimension—industrial, financial, educational, social, cultural—the distribution of power is shifting, moving away from American dominance. That does not mean we are entering an anti-American world. But we are moving into a *post-American world*, one defined and directed from many places and by many people.

What kinds of opportunities and challenges do these changes present? What do they portend for the United States and its dominant position? What will this new era look like in terms of war and peace, economics and business, ideas and culture?

In short, what will it mean to live in a post-American world? . . .

America's Long Run

First, however, it is essential to note that the central feature of Britain's decline—irreversible economic deterioration—does not really apply to the United States today. Britain's unrivaled economic status lasted for a few decades; America's has lasted more than 130 years. The U.S. economy has been the world's largest since the middle of the 1880s, and it remains so today. In fact, America has held a surprisingly constant share of global GDP ever since. With the brief exception of the late 1940s and 1950s—when the rest of the industrialized world had been destroyed and America's share rose to 50 percent!—the United States has accounted for roughly a quarter of world output for over a century (32 percent in 1913, 26 percent in 1960, 22 percent in 1980, 27 percent in 2000, and 26 percent in 2007).¹ It is likely to slip, but not significantly, in the next two decades. In 2025, most estimates suggest that the U.S. economy will still be twice the size of China's in terms of nominal GDP (though in terms of purchasing power, the gap will be smaller).

This difference between America and Britain can be seen in the burden of their military budgets. Britannia ruled the seas but never the land. The British army was sufficiently small that the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck once quipped that, were the British ever to invade Germany, he would simply have the local police force arrest them. Meanwhile, London's advantage over the seas—it had more tonnage than the next two navies put together—came at ruinous cost to its treasury. The American military, in contrast, dominates at every level—land, sea, air, space—and spends more than the next fourteen countries put together, accounting for almost 50 percent of global defense spending. Some argue that even this understates America's military lead against the rest of the world because it does not take into account the U.S. scientific and technological edge. The United States spends more on defense

research and development than the rest of the world put together. And, crucially, it does all this without breaking the bank. Defense expenditure as a percent of GDP is now 4.1 percent, lower than it was for most of the Cold War. (Under Eisenhower, it rose to 10 percent of GDP.) The secret here is the denominator. As U.S. GDP grows larger and larger, expenditures that would have been backbreaking become affordable. The Iraq War may be a tragedy or a noble endeavor, depending on your point of view. Either way, however, it will not bankrupt the United States. The war has been expensive, but the price tag for Iraq and Afghanistan together—\$125 billion a year—represents less than 1 percent of GDP. Vietnam, by comparison, cost 1.6 percent of American GDP in 1970 and tens of thousands more soldiers' lives.

American military power is not the cause of its strength but the consequence. The fuel is America's economic and technological base, which remains extremely strong. The United States does face larger, deeper, and broader challenges than it has ever faced in its history, and the rise of the rest does mean that it will lose some share of global GDP. But the process will look nothing like Britain's slide in the twentieth century, when the country lost the lead in innovation, energy, and entrepreneurship. America will remain a vital, vibrant economy, at the forefront of the next revolutions in science, technology, and industry—as long as it can embrace and adjust to the challenges confronting it.

The Future Is Here

When trying to explain how America will fare in the new world, I sometimes say, "Look around." The future is already here. Over the last twenty years, globalization has been gaining breadth and depth. More countries are making goods, communications technology has been leveling the playing field, capital has been free to move across the world. And America has benefited massively from these trends. Its economy has received hundreds of billions of dollars in investment—a rarity for a country with much capital of its own. Its companies have entered new countries and industries with great success and used new technologies and processes, all to keep boosting their bottom lines. Despite two decades of a very expensive dollar, American exports have held ground.

GDP growth, the bottom line, has averaged just over 3 percent for twenty-five years, significantly higher than in Europe. (Japan's averaged 2.3 percent over the same period.) Productivity growth, the elixir of modern economics, has been over 2.5 percent for a decade now, again a full percentage point higher than the European average. The United States is currently ranked as the most competitive economy in the world by the World Economic Forum. These rankings have been produced every year since 1979, and the U.S. position has been fairly constant, slipping sometimes in recent years to small northern European countries like Sweden, Denmark, and Finland (whose collective population is twenty million, less than that of the state of Texas). America's superior growth trajectory might be petering out, and perhaps its growth will be more "normal" for an advanced industrial country for the next few years. But the general point—that America is a highly dynamic economy at the cutting edge, despite its enormous size—still holds.

Look at the industries of the future. Nanotechnology—applied science dealing with the control of matter at the atomic or molecular scale—is considered likely to lead to fundamental breakthroughs over the next fifty years. At some point in the future, or so I'm told, households will construct products out of raw materials, and businesses will simply create the formulas that turn atoms into goods. Whether this is hype or prescience, what is worth noticing is that by every conceivable measure, the United States dominates the field. It has more dedicated nanocenters than the next three nations (Germany, the United Kingdom, and China) combined, and many of its new centers focus on narrow subjects with a high potential for practical, marketable applications—such as the Emory-Georgia Tech Nanotechnology Center for Personalized and Predictive Oncology. At market exchange rates, government nanotech funding in the United States is almost double that of its closest competitor, Japan. And while China, Japan, and Germany contribute a fair share of journal articles on nanoscale science and engineering topics, the United States has issued more patents for nanotechnology than the rest of the world combined, highlighting America's unusual strength in turning abstract theory into practical products.

The firm Lux, led by Dr. Michael Holman, constructed a matrix to assess countries' overall nanotech competitiveness. Their analysis looked not just at nanotechnology activity but also at the ability to “generate growth from scientific innovation.” It found that certain countries that spend much on research can't turn their science into business. These “Ivory Tower” nations have impressive research funding, journal articles, and even patents, but somehow don't manage to translate this into commercial goods and ideas. China, France, and even Britain fall into this category. A full 85 percent of venture capital investments in nanotechnology went to U.S. companies.

Biotechnology—a broad category that describes the use of biological systems to create medical, agricultural, and industrial products—is already a multibillion-dollar industry. It, too, is dominated by the United States. More than \$3.3 billion in venture financing went to U.S. biotech companies in 2005, while European companies received just half that amount. Follow-on equity offerings (that is, post-IPO) in the United States were more than seven times those in Europe. And while European IPOs attracted more cash in 2005, IPO activity is highly volatile—in 2004, U.S. IPO values were more than four times Europe's. As with nanotechnology, American companies excel at turning ideas into marketable and lucrative products. U.S. biotech revenues approached \$50 billion in 2005, five times greater than those in Europe and representing 76 percent of global revenues.²

Manufacturing has, of course, been leaving the United States, shifting to the developing world and turning America into a service economy. This scares many Americans and Europeans, who wonder what their countries will make if everything is “made in China.” But Asian manufacturing must be viewed in the context of a global economy in which countries like China have become an important part of the supply chain—but still just a part.

The *Atlantic Monthly* writer James Fallows spent a year in China watching that manufacturing juggernaut up close, and he provides a persuasive explanation—one well understood by Chinese businessmen—of how outsourcing has

strengthened American competitiveness. Most Americans, even management experts, have not heard of the “smiley curve.” But Chinese manufacturers know it well. Named for the U-shaped smile on the simple 1970s cartoon of a happy face, ☺, the curve illustrates the development of a product, from conception to sale. At the top left of the curve one starts with the idea and high-level industrial design—how the product will look and work. Lower down on the curve comes the detailed engineering plan. At the bottom of the U is the actual manufacturing, assembly, and shipping. Then rising up on the right of the curve are distribution, marketing, retail sales, service contracts, and sales of parts and accessories. Fallows observes that, in almost all manufacturing, China takes care of the bottom of the curve and America the top—the two ends of the U—which is where the money is: “The simple way to put this—that the real money is in the brand name, plus retail—may sound obvious,” he writes, “but its implications are illuminating.” A vivid example of this is the iPod: it is manufactured mostly outside the United States, but the majority of value added is captured by Apple, Inc. in California. The company made \$80 in gross profit on a 30-gigabyte video iPod that retailed (in late 2007) for \$299. Its profit was 36 percent of the estimated wholesale price of \$224. (Add to that the retail profit if it was sold in an Apple store.) The total cost of parts was \$144. Chinese manufacturers, by contrast, have margins of a few percent on their products.

America's Best Industry

“Ah yes,” say those who are more worried, “but you’re looking at a snapshot of today. America’s advantages are rapidly eroding as the country loses its scientific and technological base.” For some, the decline of science is symptomatic of a larger cultural decay. A country that once adhered to a Puritan ethic of delayed gratification has become one that revels in instant pleasures. We’re losing interest in the basics—math, manufacturing, hard work, savings—and becoming a postindustrial society that specializes in consumption and leisure. “More people will graduate in the United States in 2006 with sports-exercise degrees than electrical-engineering degrees,” says General Electric’s CEO, Jeffrey Immelt. “So, if we want to be the massage capital of the world, we’re well on our way.”

No statistic seems to capture this anxiety better than those showing the decline of engineering. In 2005, the National Academy of Sciences released a report warning that the United States could soon lose its privileged position as the world’s science leader. In 2004, the report said, China graduated 600,000 engineers, India 350,000, and the United States 70,000. These numbers were repeated in hundreds of articles, books, and blogs, including a *Fortune* cover story, the *Congressional Record*, and speeches by technology titans like Bill Gates. And indeed, the figure does seem like cause for despair. What hope does the United States have if for every qualified American engineer there are 11 Chinese and Indian ones? For the cost of one chemist or engineer in the United States, the report pointed out, a company could hire 5 well-trained and eager chemists in China or 11 engineers in India.

The only problem is that the numbers are wildly off the mark. A journalist, Carl Bialik of the *Wall Street Journal*, and several academics investigated the matter. They quickly realized that the Asian totals included graduates of two- and three-year programs—people getting diplomas in simple technical tasks. A group of professors at the Pratt School of Engineering at Duke University traveled to China and India to collect data from governmental and nongovernmental sources and interview businessmen and academics. They concluded that eliminating graduates of two- or three-year programs halves the Chinese figure, to around 350,000 graduates, and even this number is probably significantly inflated by differing definitions of “engineer” that often include auto mechanics and industrial repairmen. Bialik notes that the National Science Foundation, which tracks these statistics in the United States and other nations, puts the Chinese number at about 200,000 degrees per year. Ron Hira, a professor of public policy at the Rochester Institute of Technology, puts the number of Indian graduates at 120,000–130,000 a year. That means the United States actually trains more engineers per capita than either India or China does.

And the numbers don’t address the issue of quality. As someone who grew up in India, I have a healthy appreciation for the virtues of its famous engineering academies, the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT). Their greatest strength is that they administer one of the world’s most ruthlessly competitive entrance exams. Three hundred thousand people take it, five thousand are admitted—an acceptance rate of 1.7 percent (compared with 9 to 10 percent for Harvard, Yale, and Princeton). The people who make the mark are the best and brightest out of one billion. Place them in any educational system, and they will do well. In fact, many of the IITs are decidedly second-rate, with mediocre equipment, indifferent teachers, and unimaginative classwork. Rajiv Sahney, who attended IIT and then went to Caltech, says, “The IITs’ core advantage is the entrance exam, which is superbly designed to select extremely intelligent students. In terms of teaching and facilities, they really don’t compare with any decent American technical institute.” And once you get beyond the IITs and other such elite academies—which graduate under ten thousand students a year—the quality of higher education in China and India remains extremely poor, which is why so many students leave those countries to get trained abroad.

The data affirm these anecdotal impressions. In 2005, the McKinsey Global Institute did a study of “the emerging global labor market” and found that a sample of twenty-eight low-wage countries had approximately 33 million young professionals³ at their disposal, compared with just 15 million in a sample of eight higher-wage nations (the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Australia, Canada, Ireland, and South Korea). But how many of these young professionals in low-wage countries had the skills necessary to compete in a global marketplace? “Only a fraction of potential job candidates could successfully work at a foreign company,” the study reported, pointing to several explanations, chiefly poor educational quality. In both India and China, it noted, beyond the small number of top-tier academies, the quality and quantity of education is low. Only 10 percent of Indians get any kind

of postsecondary education. Thus, despite enormous demand for engineers, there are relatively few well-trained ones. Wages of trained engineers in both countries are rising by 15 percent a year, a sure sign that demand is outstripping supply. (If you were an employer and had access to tens of thousands of well-trained engineers coming out of colleges every year, you would not have to give your employees 15 percent raises year after year.)

Higher education is America's best industry. There are two rankings of universities worldwide. In one of them, a purely quantitative study done by Chinese researchers, eight of the top ten universities in the world are in the United States. In the other, more qualitative one by London's *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, it's seven. The numbers flatten out somewhat after that. Of the top twenty, seventeen or eleven are in America; of the top fifty, thirty-eight or twenty-one. Still, the basic story does not change. With 5 percent of the world's population, the United States absolutely dominates higher education, having either 42 or 68 percent of the world's top fifty universities (depending which study you look at). In no other field is America's advantage so overwhelming.⁴

A 2006 report from the London-based Centre for European Reform, "The Future of European Universities," points out that the United States invests 2.6 percent of its GDP in higher education, compared with 1.2 percent in Europe and 1.1 percent in Japan. The situation in the sciences is particularly striking. A list of where the world's 1,000 best computer scientists were educated shows that the top ten schools are all American. U.S. spending on R&D remains higher than Europe's, and its collaborations between business and educational institutions are unmatched anywhere in the world. America remains by far the most attractive destination for students, taking 30 percent of the total number of foreign students globally. All these advantages will not be erased easily, because the structure of European and Japanese universities—mostly state-run bureaucracies—is unlikely to change. And while China and India are opening new institutions, it is not that easy to create a world-class university out of whole cloth in a few decades. Here's a statistic about engineers that you might not have heard. In India, universities graduate between 35 and 50 Ph.D.'s in computer science each year; in America, the figure is 1,000.

Learning to Think

If American universities are first-rank, few believe that the same can be said about its schools. Everyone knows that the American school system is in crisis and that its students do particularly badly in science and math, year after year, in international rankings. But the statistics here, while not wrong, reveal something slightly different. America's real problem is one not of excellence but of access. Since its inception in 1995, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) has become the standard for comparing educational programs across nations. The most recent results, from 2003, put the United States squarely in the middle of the pack. The United States beat the average score of the twenty-four countries included in the study, but many of the countries ranked below it were developing nations like Morocco,

Tunisia, and Armenia. Eighth-graders did better than fourth-graders (the two grades measured) but still lagged behind their counterparts in countries like Holland, Japan, and Singapore. The media reported the news with a predictable penchant for direness: "Economic time bomb: U.S. teens are among worst at math," declared the *Wall Street Journal*.

But even if the U.S. scores in math and science fall well below leaders like Singapore and Hong Kong, the aggregate scores hide deep regional, racial, and socioeconomic variation. Poor and minority students score well below the American average, while, as one study noted, "students in affluent suburban U.S. school districts score nearly as well as students in Singapore, the runaway leader on TIMSS math scores." These are the students who then go on to compete for and fill the scarce slots in America's top universities. The difference between average science scores in poor and wealthy school districts *within* the United States, for instance, is *four to five times greater* than the difference between the U.S. and Singaporean national averages. In other words, America is a large and diverse country with a real inequality problem. This will, over time, translate into a competitiveness problem, because if we cannot educate and train a third of the working population to compete in a knowledge economy, it will drag down the country. But we do know what works. The large cohort of students in the top fifth of American schools rank along with the world's best. They work hard and have a highly scheduled academic and extracurricular life, as anyone who has recently been to an Ivy League campus can attest.

I went to elementary middle, and high school in Mumbai, at an excellent institution, the Cathedral and John Connon School. Its approach (thirty years ago) reflected the teaching methods often described as "Asian," in which the premium is placed on memorization and constant testing. This is actually the old British, and European, pedagogical method, one that now gets described as Asian. I recall memorizing vast quantities of material, regurgitating it for exams, and then promptly forgetting it. When I went to college in the United States, I encountered a different world. While the American system is too lax on rigor and memorization—whether in math or poetry—it is much better at developing the critical faculties of the mind, which is what you need to succeed in life. Other educational systems teach you to take tests; the American system teaches you to think.

It is surely this quality that goes some way in explaining why America produces so many entrepreneurs, inventors, and risk takers. In America, people are allowed to be bold, challenge authority, fail, and pick themselves up. It's America, not Japan, that produces dozens of Nobel Prize winners. Tharman Shanmugaratnam, until recently Singapore's minister of education, explains the difference between his country's system and America's. "We both have meritocracies," Shanmugaratnam says. "Yours is a talent meritocracy, ours is an exam meritocracy. We know how to train people to take exams. You know how to use people's talents to the fullest. Both are important, but there are some parts of the intellect that we are not able to test well—like creativity, curiosity, a sense of adventure, ambition. Most of all, America has a culture of learning that challenges conventional wisdom, even if it means challenging authority. These are the areas where Singapore must learn from America."

This is one reason that Singaporean officials recently visited U.S. schools to learn how to create a system that nurtures and rewards ingenuity, quick thinking, and problem solving. As the *Washington Post* reported in March 2007, researchers from Singapore's best schools came to the Academy of Science, a public magnet school in Virginia, to examine U.S. teaching methods. As the students "studied tiny, genetically altered plants one recent afternoon, drawing leaves and jotting data in logbooks," the Singaporean visitors "recorded how long the teacher waited for students to answer questions, how often the teenagers spoke up, and how strongly they held to their views." Har Hui Peng, a visitor from Singapore's Hwa Chong Institution, was impressed, as the *Post* noted. "Just by watching, you can see students are more engaged, instead of being spoon-fed all day," said Har. The *Post* article continued, "[In Singapore], she said, the laboratories are fully stocked but stark, and the students are bright but reluctant to volunteer answers. To encourage spontaneity, Hwa Chong now bases 10 percent of each student's grade on oral participation."

While America marvels at Asia's test-taking skills, Asian countries come to America to figure out how to get their kids to think. Top high schools in Beijing and Shanghai are emphasizing independent research, science competitions, and entrepreneur clubs. "I like the way your children are able to communicate," said Rosalind Chia, another Singaporean teacher on tour in the States. "Maybe we need to cultivate that more—a conversation between students and teachers." Such change does not come easily. Indeed, Japan recently attempted to improve the flexibility of its national education system by eliminating mandatory Saturday classes and increasing the time dedicated to general studies, where students and teachers can pursue their own interests. "But the Japanese shift to *yutori kyoiku*, or relaxed education," the *Post* says, "has fueled a back-to-basics backlash from parents who worry that their children are not learning enough and that test scores are slipping." In other words, simply changing curricula—a top-down effort—may lead only to resistance. American culture celebrates and reinforces problem solving, questioning authority, and thinking heretically. It allows people to fail and then gives them a second and third chance. It rewards self-starters and oddballs. These are all bottom-up forces that cannot be produced by government fiat. . . .

The native-born, white American population has the same low fertility rates as Europe's. Without immigration, U.S. GDP growth over the last quarter century would have been the same as Europe's. America's edge in innovation is overwhelmingly a product of immigration. Foreign students and immigrants account for 50 percent of the science researchers in the country and, in 2006, received 40 percent of the doctorates in science and engineering and 65 percent of the doctorates in computer science. By 2010, foreign students will get more than 50 percent of all Ph.D.'s awarded in every subject in the United States. In the sciences, that figure will be closer to 75 percent. Half of all Silicon Valley start-ups have one founder who is an immigrant or first-generation American. America's potential new burst of productivity, its edge in nanotechnology, biotechnology, its ability to invent the future—all rest on its immigration policies. If America can keep the people it educates in the country, the innovation will happen here. If they go back home, the innovation will travel with them.

Immigration also gives America a quality rare for a rich country—hunger and energy. As countries become wealthy, the drive to move up and succeed weakens. But America has found a way to keep itself constantly revitalized by streams of people who are looking to make a new life in a new world. These are the people who work long hours picking fruit in searing heat, washing dishes, building houses, working night shifts, and cleaning waste dumps. They come to the United States under terrible conditions, leave family and community, only because they want to work and get ahead in life. Americans have almost always worried about such immigrants—whether from Ireland or Italy, China or Mexico. But these immigrants have gone on to become the backbone of the American working class, and their children or grandchildren have entered the American mainstream. America has been able to tap this energy, manage diversity, assimilate newcomers, and move ahead economically. Ultimately, this is what sets the country apart from the experience of Britain and all other historical examples of great economic powers that grow fat and lazy and slip behind as they face the rise of leaner, hungrier nations.

The Macro Picture

Many experts, scholars, and even a few politicians worry about a set of statistics that bode ill for the United States. The savings rate is zero, the current-account deficit, trade deficit, and budget deficit are high, median income is flat, and commitments for entitlements are unsustainable. These are all valid concerns and will have to be addressed by Washington. If America's economic system is its core strength, its political system is its core weakness. But the numbers might not tell us everything we need to know. The economic statistics that we rely on give us only an approximate, antiquated measure of an economy. Many of them were developed in the late nineteenth century to describe an industrial economy with limited cross-border activity. We now live in an interconnected global market, with revolutions in financial instruments, technology, and trade. It is possible that we're not measuring things correctly.

It used to be a law of macroeconomics, for example, that in an advanced industrial economy there is such a thing as NAIRU—the nonaccelerating inflation rate of unemployment. Basically, this meant that unemployment could not fall below a certain level, usually pinned at 6 percent, without driving inflation up. But for the last two decades, many Western countries, especially the United States, have had unemployment rates well below levels economists thought possible. Or consider that America's current-account deficit—which in 2007 reached \$800 billion, or 7 percent of GDP—was supposed to be unsustainable at 4 percent of GDP. The current-account deficit is at dangerous levels, but we should also keep in mind that its magnitude can be explained in part by the fact that there is a worldwide surplus of savings and that the United States remains an unusually stable and attractive place in which to invest.

Harvard University's Richard Cooper even argues that the American savings rate is miscalculated, painting an inaccurate picture of massive credit card debt and unaffordable mortgages. While many households do live beyond their means, the picture looks healthier at the aggregate level, Cooper argues. Private

U.S. savings, which includes both household saving (the “often-cited” low figure of about 2 percent of personal income) and corporate saving, reached 15 percent in 2005. The decrease in personal saving, in other words, has been largely offset by an increase in corporate saving. More important, the whole concept of “national saving” might be outdated, not reflecting the reality of new modes of production. In the new economy, growth comes from “teams of people creating new goods and services, not from the accumulation of capital,” which was more important in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet we still focus on measuring capital. The national accounts, which include GDP and traditional measures of national saving, were, Cooper writes, “formulated in Britain and the United States in the 1930s, at the height of the industrial age.”

Economists define saving as the income that, instead of going toward consumption, is invested to make possible consumption in the future. Current measures of investment focus on physical capital and housing. Cooper argues that this measure is misleading. Education expenditures are considered “consumption,” but in a knowledge-based economy, education functions more like savings—it is spending forgone today in order to increase human capital and raise future income and spending power. Private R&D, meanwhile, isn’t included in national accounts at all, but rather considered an intermediate business expense—even though most studies suggest that R&D on average has a high payoff, much higher than investing in bricks and mortar, which counts under the current measures as savings. So Cooper would also count as savings expenditure on consumer durables, education, and R&D—which would give the United States a significantly higher savings rate. The new metric worldwide would raise the figure for other nations as well, but the contribution of education, R&D, and consumer durables to total savings “is higher in the United States than in most other countries, except perhaps for a few Nordic countries.”⁵

With all these caveats, the United States still has serious problems. Many trends relating to the macroeconomic picture are worrisome. Whatever the savings rate, it has fallen fast over the past two decades. By all calculations, Medicare threatens to blow up the federal budget. The swing from surpluses to deficits between 2000 and 2008 has serious implications. For most families, moreover, incomes are flat or rising very slowly. Growing inequality is the signature feature of the new era fueled by a triple force—the knowledge economy, information technology, and globalization. Perhaps most worryingly, Americans are borrowing 80 percent of the world’s surplus savings and using it for consumption. In other words, we are selling off our assets to foreigners to buy a couple more lattes a day. These problems have accumulated at a bad time because, for all its strengths, the American economy now faces its strongest challenge in history. . . .

Notes

1. These numbers are based on market exchange rates, not adjusted for living standards. The numbers in PPP dollars would be 19 percent in 1913, 27 percent in 1950, 22 percent in 1973, 22 percent in 1998, and 19 percent in 2007. The PPP numbers also show the same pattern, of American power being relatively stable at around 20 percent of global GDP.

2. Of course, information from public companies represents only part of the picture, because more than three-quarters of the world's 4,203 biotech companies are held privately. Europe has a larger share of the world's private biotech companies, representing 42 percent of the total (compared with 31 percent in America). The United States, by contrast, is home to a greater share of public biotech companies (50 percent versus Europe's 18 percent), perhaps indicating the greater maturity of the U.S. market.
3. MGI's figure includes graduates trained in engineering, finance and accounting, life science research, and "professional generalists," such as call center operatives. Young professionals are defined as graduates with up to seven years of experience.
4. The right-wing attack on American universities as being out-of-touch ivory towers has always puzzled me. In a highly competitive global environment, these institutions dominate the field.
5. Consumer durables, education, and R&D amount to 8.6 percent, 7.3 percent, and 2.8 percent of GDP, respectively. Adding this to the 15 percent saved by more traditional means yields just over 33 percent of GDP in national savings.



POSTSCRIPT



Is the United States a Declining Power?

Fareed Zakaria is one of our more perceptive political television and magazine commentators. Born in India and educated in elite Indian schools, he immigrated to the United States and attended Yale and Harvard before editing and writing for *Newsweek Internationale*.

Zakaria believes we are now in the third great tectonic shift since 1500. The Renaissance, Reformation, and scientific revolutions were the first, the industrial revolution dominated by the United States from the 1880s through the 1980s was the second, while the third revolution since the 1990s is “the rise of the rest—China, India, Brazil, Russia—sharing wealth and power with the United States.”

Zakaria does not believe that the United States is a declining power. He rejects comparisons with the decline of England in the twentieth century because the United States has a much stronger economic and population base to remain a major power in the postindustrial world. Three areas where the United States dominates the rest of the world include education, science, and a diverse population.

No social scientist can dispute that the United States contains the world’s best undergraduate and research universities because so many immigrants, including Zakaria, clamor for student visas to attend our colleges. While our grammar and high schools have been disparaged for poor teaching and lower standards, the author points out that our suburban schools as opposed to our inner city high schools are among the best in the world. As the Singaporean minister of education points out, “We have a meritocracy of test takers, you have a meritocracy of thinkers and doers.”

Both the universities and the government along with many businesses support our talented entrepreneurs with research and development (R&D) in “nanotechnology-applied science dealing with the control of matter at the atomic or molecular scale” as well as biotechnology which is a multibillion-dollar industry that creates medical, agricultural, and industrial products.

Immigration, according to Zakaria, has provided America’s edge in innovation. Foreign students have taken advantage of our superior higher education system. By 2010, foreign students will earn more than 50 percent of all Ph.D.s, including 75 percent in the sciences. Many of these students remain in the United States, start up new companies in nanotechnology and biotechnology, become citizens and create a “brain drain” from the country of origins.

Critics of Zakaria might complain that he is too optimistic and plays down some of America’s current problems. While he is good on the long-term prognosis, there are a number of immediate issues that need to be dealt with.

Like most economists and political observers, Zakaria was caught off guard by the collapse of Wall Street and the large investment banking houses in the fall of 2008 as revealed in his new preface to the paperback edition of *The Post-American World*. The debt issue is not dealt with adequately even if we need new economic indicators to measure capital in today's economy. We don't know whether high unemployment is temporary or a structural casualty in the new economy. If structural, how many workers will be available to pay the retirement and health benefits of an aging population? Finally, Zakaria doesn't seem to be much concerned with a bloated military budget which he deems a minor concern.

Both Zakaria and Bacevich are concerned with a broken political system. Zakaria's chief worry is that the two political parties have become so ideologically polarized into liberal and conservative factions, compromise, which is the heart of our political system, has become broken. Bacevich, on the other hand, believes that Democracy is broken because the large power of the executive branch has created an imperial presidency that presides over an informal global empire run by the American military.

Unlike Zakaria, Professor Bacevich believes that the "exceptional American political and economic" system which we created in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has come to an end. America's present-day obsession with consumer goods has allowed our government to use the military to create an informal empire in the Middle East in search of oil and other energy-related resources. Consequently, Americans refuse to deal with two major problems that could destroy our world—the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the issue of global warming. Bacevich is not very optimistic about America's future. He quotes the famous Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr: "One of the most pathetic aspects of human history is that every civilization expresses itself most pretentiously, computes its partial and universal values most convincingly, and claims immortality for its finite existence at the very moment when the decay which leads to death has already begun." (*Beyond Tragedy* [New York, 1937]).

In addition to Niebuhr's *Irony of History* (New York, 1952), which informed many post-World War II scholars, Bacevich has incorporated the concept of an informal American empire from the diplomatic historian William Appleman Williams' *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 2nd ed. (Dell Publishing, 1972), whose seminars and books created "the Wisconsin school of diplomacy"—a generation of new left scholars still dominant in the field. Bacevich wrote a new introduction to the 50th anniversary of *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*.

Ironically, Bacevich is a Catholic Conservative, a West Point graduate, a Vietnam veteran, and a parent who lost his son in combat in 2007 in the Iraq War. A professor of history and international relations at Boston University, he writes for a number of magazines, including Pat Buchanan's *The American Conservative* which supports a conservative domestic policy but also a neo-isolationist foreign policy. His critique of the neoconservative foreign policy of the Bush administration can be found in *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (Oxford, 2005). In a footnote on p. 235, the author cites Bruce Berkowitz on *The New Face of War* (New York, 2003) which

cites CIA data calculating annual worldwide military spending at approximately \$750 billion with the then-current Pentagon budget at \$380 billion or more than 50 percent of the world's military outlays.

The bibliography of the postindustrial economy is enormous and constantly changing. Somewhat optimistic are the books by *New York Times'* columnist Thomas Friedman. Two of significance are: *The World is Flat* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005) and *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution and How It Can Renew America* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008). A student guide to Friedman is the portrait of him, "The Bright Side: The Relentless Optimism of Thomas Friedman," in *The New Yorker* (November 10, 2008) by Ian Parker. On a daily basis, a reader can gain a liberal optimistic view from the editorial pages of *The New York Times* and a more pessimistic conservative outlook from the editorial pages of *The Wall Street Journal*. Finally, reporter James Fallows supports Zakaria in "How America Can Rise Again," *The Atlantic Monthly* (January/February, 2010).





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