

~~first by American progressives, including Wilson himself, darkened into oppression and eventually under Stalin into bloody tyranny.~~

~~The European democracies and America responded differently to the crisis of the Great Depression. Where in the United States, Franklin Roosevelt preserved the capitalist system and the constitutional tradition by the social democracy of the New Deal, reinforced by adroit political management, the leading European nations went their different ways. In Britain, Labour governments in 1923–24 and 1929–31 failed to tackle economic failure and were replaced by conservative administrations. In France, the socialist (social democratic) government of Léon Blum in the middle 1930s was brought down, mainly by the international crisis. In Italy, in Germany, and in Spain, and in eastern Europe, economic disaster opened the gate to fascism, which in Germany was called national socialism.~~

When the second war ended, the United States emerged for a time as the only economically successful society. Only the mysterious and—to democrats—sinister bulk of the Soviet Union, which had done more than American or British efforts to overthrow the Nazi “New Order” in Europe, stood between America and a sunlit future. Dr. Win-the-War, in Roosevelt’s phrase, had done what Dr. New Deal could not achieve: it had ended the Great Depression. The immense effort to arm the American economy for total war had doubled the gross national product in five short years and put the unemployed, who had reached one-quarter of the workforce, back to work. In those same years, the economies of all the European nations had been shattered, their plants bombed, their sources of energy and raw materials cut off, their retail systems fettered by rationing, and their labor forces decimated by mobilization and casualties.

With generosity, but also out of a wise calculation of enlightened self-interest, the Truman administration did what it could, through the Marshall Plan and other programs, to revive the economies and the societies of western Europe. There was a need for future trading partners, but there was also an urgent fear that destitution and despair would turn the Europeans towards communism and leave the United States without a beachhead or an outer defensive perimeter in Europe. Elsewhere, American policy rebuilt Japan and used the heavy weight of political and eco-

conomic pressure to hasten the end of the British, French, and Dutch empires. At Yalta, in particular, Roosevelt seemed to take the view that the Soviet Union would be a better partner than the British Empire in building the postwar world, though there was of course an element of calculation in this.¹⁷ The Roosevelt administration, with more than a dash of exceptionalist overconfidence, hoped to use nationalist China as its ally in building a new, democratic Asia.

Immediately after the end of the war, the United States had a monopoly of the most devastating and most terrifying military weapon ever devised, a weapon it had actually used, twice, on Japan. Both British and French scientists had, however, along with émigré Germans, Hungarians, Italians, Frenchmen, and Danes, played an important part in the work that made it possible to build an atomic bomb.

Far sooner than anyone in Washington anticipated, that monopoly came to an end. First the Soviet Union, then by the middle 1950s even the enfeebled economies of Britain and France, acquired nuclear weapons and some capacity to deliver them.

In a disastrous process of reciprocal fear, the Soviet Union and its client states in Eastern Europe, on one side of an ideological abyss, and the United States and its European and other allies on the other, moved blindly through rearmament to a posture of armed confrontation that could at any moment have burst into war. Probably the Soviet Union, in Stalin's lifetime, had no real intention of marching to conquest in Europe. But the Soviet Union was ruled absolutely by a paranoid dictator. No one in his realm dared defy or deflect him. He and his party colleagues were afraid that the capitalists meant to surround them. Their antagonists in Washington, especially after the communist revolution in China, were equally convinced that communism was a militant ideology on the march. No wonder that within five years from the high hopes of 1945, those voices—those of Dean Acheson, James Forrestal, and Paul Nitze, among others—prevailed in Washington. They concluded that the nation must prepare for permanent readiness, and if necessary for permanent war.

Stalin was ruthless and mad, but he was also cautious. In 1944, for example, he decided not to support the Greek Communists who were already fighting a British force in northern Greece. But in a manner that

was understandably interpreted in Washington as a systematic plan, he supported Communist governments, or governments dominated by Communists, in one country in Eastern Europe after another. The coup d'état in Prague in 1948, in particular, caused an abrupt war scare in Washington and seemed to confirm the entirely reasonable fears of those who believed that Stalin meant to make as much of Europe as he could into a Soviet sphere of influence. When that same summer the Soviet authorities tried to isolate the western sectors of Berlin, American and British air forces were able to supply the beleaguered city by an airlift. The West was strengthened, but the confrontation became more acute.

In the National Security Act of 1949, the Truman administration set to work to build the institutions—a National Security Council, a unified Defense Department, and a Central Intelligence Agency—that would be needed to fight a Cold War. This was, as conservatives of the Robert Taft persuasion protested, a historic break with American tradition. The politics of the Cold War have been persuasively explained not as a contest between liberal Left and conservative Right but as a Great Debate between upholders of traditional values and the partisans of a new, hard-boiled ideology of national security.¹⁸ The traditionalists upheld such established American instincts as suspicion of centralized government, of military influence, and of high taxation. The partisans of the new national security state and its ideology were convinced that the republic must change if it was to gird its loins for an enduring condition of near-war with communism, and it was they who prevailed.

By 1950—five years from a moment when the United States had created, in the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the international institutions that were to have guaranteed lasting peace—the Truman administration had accepted the strategy contained in National Security Council memorandum 68. This was a strategy of armed containment of communism. It implied massive rearmament. In a few short years it quadrupled defense expenditure. Over time, it did transform the United States into a “national security state.”

In the same year the Korean War broke out. That seemed to confirm the fears of those who saw the Soviet Union as committed to an aggressive drive for world domination. They were not wrong. Recent research, based on Soviet archives opened after the fall of the Soviet Union, has

confirmed that Stalin was indeed aware of, and approved, North Korea's invasion of South Korea. The United States, and some of its allies, found themselves at war with Communist North Korea and before long with the People's Republic of China. In Europe, after the Berlin airlift the Soviet Union stepped back. East and West continued to glare at each other over the Iron Curtain for another four decades. In East Asia, however, the Cold War was hot.

The coming of the national security state had profound implications for American society, not only abroad but at home. Fear of communism, in the form of what was called "McCarthyism," threatened traditional American rights, including the First Amendment guarantee of free speech. Abroad, the United States found itself in charge of a worldwide network of bases, eventually at least seven hundred of them in more than one hundred countries. Some were strategic air bases. Others were intelligence bases, including the secret bases for U-2 flights over the Soviet Union. Many were supply bases associated with American military aid. Some came into existence in the course of wars fought against communist or nationalist insurgencies, in the Philippines, in Southeast Asia, or in Central America.

While great care was taken in most cases to preserve the proprieties and represent these bases as established at the request of allies, in practice, given the dependent status of the allies doing the requesting, it was often hard to distinguish them from traditional colonies. Extraterritorial rights were often claimed, so that American personnel were treated more favorably than local people. In some cases, such as the island base on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, leased from Britain, local inhabitants were evicted from their home country. American embassies, built in many supposedly allied capitals like great concrete forts, behaved toward sovereign governments rather like the political "residencies" with which the British Empire controlled territories in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere.

In many instances the U.S. government, often through the CIA, intervened more or less aggressively in local politics, overthrowing governments or preventing what Washington saw as undesirable changes of government. This is widely known to have happened in the Philippines from 1950 to 1953, in Iran in 1953, in Guatemala in 1954, in Cuba in 1961

and 1963, in South Vietnam in 1963, and in Chile in 1973. This roster by no means exhausts the instances of secret Washington intervention. That list includes the Congo from 1960 to 1965, Indonesia in 1965 (where the CIA was deeply implicated in a repression in which at least five hundred thousand and by some accounts two million communist and Chinese Indonesians were killed), Brazil in 1964, and India in the early 1970s. Even in Western European countries such as France, Italy, Greece, and Portugal, the CIA interfered clandestinely at one time or another to influence elections.¹⁹

If the United States “projected power,” as the phrase went, in these and other ways—for example, with the political use of economic and military aid—it is of course true that this world hegemony was different in many ways from the European empires of the past. The style and the rhetoric were anti-imperial, if only because American identity was so historically rooted in opposition to imperialism that conscious efforts were devoted to distinguishing the American way from the colonial past. It is true, too, that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the United States had pioneered methods of indirect and clandestine influence in the Caribbean and in Latin America that afforded precedents for what was happening elsewhere in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet the establishment of this network of alliances, bases, and systems of influence, and the sheer scale of American intervention—justified by American leaders and publicists by the perception of a worldwide contest against communism—marked a sharp departure from the American past.

It was not only on Diego Garcia or Okinawa, in Norfolk and the Rhineland, that bases were being built in the 1950s. From Thule to the Panama Canal Zone bases were being built nearer home. Senators and congressmen, once content with building post offices or the occasional dam, vied with one another to bring military “pork” to their states and districts. The surest sign of political clout in Cold War Washington was success in bringing massive military infrastructure to a politician’s home state. In an age when power in the Washington committee structure went by seniority, which it did until the early 1970s, the advantage held by long-serving legislators from the one-party South was decisive. Georgia, represented by Richard B. Russell, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Carl Vinson, his opposite number in the House, was the

home to huge bases. The U.S. Army Infantry Center at Fort Benning claims “to provide the nation with the world’s best trained Infantry, Soldiers and adaptive leaders imbued with the Warrior Ethos” and to “provide a Power Projection Platform capable of deploying and redeploying soldiers, civilians, and units anywhere in the world on short notice.”

Texas, fortunate enough to be represented by Speaker Samuel T. Rayburn, Senate majority leader Lyndon Johnson, and George Mahon, chairman of the crucial House Appropriations Committee, did even better. As well as air force bases like Lackland (the world’s biggest military flight training installation) and the vast expansion of the great army bases at Fort Hood, Fort Bliss, and Fort Sam Houston, not to mention Lyndon Johnson’s pet project for his friends at Brown and Root, to dig the deepest hole on earth, “MoHole,” Texas walked off with the Houston space center.

Military infrastructure transformed the country. But the big military procurement contracts did so even more. Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington, who started life as a liberal Democrat with reliable union backing, became “the senator from Boeing” and ended up as one of the fiercest hawks in the Washington aviary. Georgia legislators fought for Martin Marietta, New York congressmen for Grumman on Long Island, Californians for Lockheed, Douglas and the futuristic flight research at Edwards and Vandenberg air force bases. Aerospace corporations began to hire retired generals and admirals to smooth their path through the appropriations jungle in Washington, while senators like Barry Goldwater were given rank as generals to keep them loyal to the interests of the Military.

The sheer scale of Cold War investment in military hardware was enough to change the economic geography of the country. Southern California was the conspicuous example. At Burbank in the San Fernando Valley, Lockheed built not only military aircraft like the Hercules, Galaxy, and Starfighter, not to mention the mysterious U-2, but also the new generation of intercontinental ballistic missiles to deliver nuclear warheads. Douglas, at Santa Monica and Long Beach, did the same. But California was not the only state whose economy was boosted by defense contracts. Texas, Washington, Missouri, Florida, and Georgia were industrialized largely as a spin-off from the prosperity of defense contractors. The

Manhattan Project's installations in Washington vied with the investment at Boeing in transforming that state.

Even President Eisenhower, the former supreme commander of allied forces in Europe, famously warned, in his last speech as president, against the dangers of the "military-industrial complex." It was only out of reluctance to annoy members of Congress that he allowed the draft of his speech to be changed: what it originally targeted was the "military-industrial-congressional complex." Eisenhower's speech has often been misinterpreted. He was not denouncing the creation of an American arms industry. He was pointing out that there had been no such thing before World War II, and he was drawing attention to the potential impact of what had come into existence for politics and for society. In effect, he was echoing the concern of 1950s conservatives: that the headlong expansion of the military and the defense industry would create a "garrison state."

"How can we prepare for total war," Hanson W. Baldwin, the *New York Times's* respected military correspondent, asked in 1947, "without becoming a 'garrison state' and destroying the very qualities and virtues and principles we originally set out to save?"²⁰

The answer that the government gave in the 1950s and 1960s was essentially, "We don't believe that in transforming the nation into a national security state, we are in fact destroying our values and our virtues." By and large, the nation agreed—until the Vietnam War.

The coming of the Cold War, rearmament, and the creation of a national security state had a paradoxical effect on politics. The challenge to the Truman administration came not from a pacifist or anti-interventionist Left but from the Right. The political mood and style named for Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin extended far wider than his vicious but buffoonish attacks. (The mood could just as well have been called "Nixonism," because the thirty-seventh president of the United States first came to prominence by flinging around equally wild and disingenuous accusations, even if in the most celebrated case, that of Alger Hiss, he struck lucky and was right.)²¹ It was absurd that McCarthy should insinuate that Dean Acheson, as tough an anticommunist as could be found, was somehow in cahoots with the communists; absurd, in that instance, but the fear of domestic communism was not just the

product of the wild raving of an isolated Midwestern alcoholic. If the nation found itself engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the survival of all that America stood for, millions of sensible Americans asked, how can we be sure that we are not being corrupted from inside, like the governments of those countries in Eastern Europe that had been subverted by communist tactics? After all, communists had been influential in the American labor movement. How can we rise to the challenge our leaders say we must confront? “McCarthyism” was a dark chapter in the history of American civil liberties. It was also consciously used by selfish interests of several kinds to justify attacks on labor power and on the intelligentsia of the Left. But wholly irrational it was not.

The impact of the Cold War on American society was all but ubiquitous. At one end of the spectrum was the expansion of educational opportunity. Universities could, for the first time in history, attract federal funding, even for such fields of study as classics and literature. The GI Bill, though not strictly a Cold War measure, allowed millions of Americans whose families had never been able to dream of higher education to go to college. At the other end of the spectrum, the Interstate Highway System, the first national road system and perhaps the most ambitious infrastructure project ever undertaken by any national government in peacetime, was begun by the Eisenhower administration, though it was not completed until the twenty-first century. Whole industries received a boost from the willingness of Congress to appropriate money for a wide range of desirable projects if they could be represented as required for national security. Civil aviation, for example, was subsidized by the manufacture of warplanes.

At the same time American businessmen, traditionally hostile to government intervention in the economy, grew accustomed to depending on lush cost-plus contracts from the Department of Defense and other fountains of federal munificence. High-technology industry—in particular, in nuclear physics, materials science, electronics, computers, and many departments of engineering—was pushed ahead by government research and development contracts. The Pentagon’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency played a crucial role in developing the Internet, and government poured money into private research labs such as Bell Laboratories and XeroxParc, as well as into universities.

Memory has distorted the actual sequence of economic history. The Cold War was by and large a good time for the American economy and for average income, though not comparatively as good as the years when World War II was ending mass unemployment and pushing up wages. The true Golden Age for the American economy was during World War II. Average disposable personal income (in 1996 dollars) grew from \$5,912 in 1940 to \$7,920 in 1944. Then, in the late 1940s, before the Korean War boom and before the increase in defense expenditure after NSC-68, disposable income in real terms stood still for a while. It picked up strongly again in the 1950s, rising from \$7,863 in 1950 to \$9,167 in 1959.

So both war and Cold War were good for the economy, but hot war was better than cold. Still, the economy did continue to grow steadily in the Cold War years. For a time there was virtually no foreign competition. There was massive investment in manufacturing, distribution, and agriculture. (It was not until 1954 that the number of tractors on American farms passed the number of horses and mules!) Prosperity was increasingly widely distributed.

The big industrial unions joined together in the CIO were able to negotiate exceptionally favorable contracts that gave the workers “fringe benefits,” including health care and pensions. The 1950 contract signed by the United Auto Workers with General Motors was the benchmark. It heralded the coming of a new era in industrial bargaining, an era of unprecedented prosperity for unionized workers, though the growth in wages was not as spectacular as under the pressures of war, with millions of workers away in uniform. Now tens of millions of American workers were able for the first time to look forward to a standard of living previously available only to executives and professionals. Home owning spread rapidly. By the end of the 1950s it was possible to claim—with some exaggeration and with the help of such devices as official counting of all women as “white collar workers”—that more than half of the American work force had joined the middle class.²² That claim, too, dubious as it was factually, became the basis of another exceptionalist rhetoric: “Only in America . . .” It was not long before the same was true in much of Europe and elsewhere.

By the early years of the Cold War, American society was certainly exceptionally successful—if only in the sense that, thanks to the catastro-

phe of war, all potential rivals were not successful at all. By the 1970s, however, that had substantially changed. Whether you measured average income, or gross national product, or productivity, many other nations, in Western Europe and East Asia, were closing the gap. In those early Cold War years, the United States certainly was exceptional in terms of plenty and profusion. That was not, however, what had made the United States exceptional in the first half of the nineteenth century. Then, American society had been exceptional in terms of equality, of opportunity, and of political participation.

A new ideology of exceptionalism was becoming widespread in the 1950s. It defined American exceptionalism, partly in terms of material prosperity and military power, and partly in the name of a contrast between democracy, often assumed to be essentially American, with dictatorship and totalitarian societies, especially, of course, in contrast with the Soviet Union and communism. This was the new and specialized meaning of *freedom*, a value that had been cherished by Americans since the Revolution, but whose precise meaning had changed.

This new American ideology has been called the “liberal consensus,” because it represented a grand bargain between liberal values in domestic politics and conservative anticommunism as the guiding principle in foreign policy. Many conservatives, that is, more or less grudgingly accepted the “liberal,” or social democratic, goals of the “welfare state”; most liberals signed up for anticommunist foreign policies. This ideology overlapped with that of the “national security state” in rejecting traditional fears of a “garrison state.” It assumed a congruence between a constitutional system based on the sovereignty of the people and the rule of law, and the prevalence of free-market capitalism. Later, beyond the limits of the period we consider in this chapter, it became fashionable to restrict the role of government and to emphasize the need to minimize the regulation of the free market. But as John F. Kennedy succeeded General Eisenhower in the White House and redefined the national purpose in terms of a “long twilit struggle” against communism, the American ideology was cast, as never before, in terms of opposition to the Other.

That had always been an element in the national ideology, and therefore in the understanding of American exceptionalism. Only the identity of the Other, and the character of the struggle against it, altered.

In the colonial period, the Other was the Native American, sensed more as a shadowy menace in the woods than as an organized enemy, and the slave, feared as a potential threat on the farm and even within the home. In the Revolution, and for a long time afterward, the Other was the British monarchy, the Established Church, and more generally a hierarchical society that set limits on the freedom of the individual citizen. Soon, in response to Catholic immigration from Ireland and central Europe in the 1840s and 1850s, the Roman Catholic Church itself became for a time the Other. The 1850s, the decade of massive immigration from Ireland, was the time of the Know Nothing movement and of wild nativist paranoia about papal plots in America.

It was not hard to see “Prussian militarism” as the Other in 1917, when the big new German U-boats sank liners and freighters bound for Britain and France with Americans on board. It was even easier in the 1930s and 1940s to see Nazi Germany and its Italian and Japanese allies in the same light. Easiest of all was to cast international communism as an implacable enemy, and one that could be seen as an enemy within as well as without, burrowing into American society through spies, agents, labor radicals, and pink professors.

Soon the exceptionalism of the Cold War period took on a religious flavor. In a famous passage in his memoirs, Dean Acheson describes how he intervened in a meeting with President Truman to persuade him that the United States must take over the defense of Greece and Turkey from Britain, which could no longer afford to keep troops there. Acheson recalled how when his chief, the secretary of state, General Marshall, “flubbed his opening statement,” he pleaded in a whisper to be allowed to speak. “I knew we were met at Armageddon,” he wrote. As the son of an Episcopal bishop, Acheson knew very well that Armageddon was the place where, in the book of Revelation, the last battle would be fought between the legions of good and evil.²³

Five years after Dean Acheson stood at Armageddon, as we have seen, the great New England scholar Perry Miller spoke at the opening of an exhibition of Puritan texts at the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University in Providence. He took his theme from a sermon preached in 1670 by the Reverend Samuel Danforth, which gave him a title: New England’s *Errand into the Wilderness*. In his speech, Miller made the ulti-

mate exceptionalist boast: "The Bay Company was . . . an organized task force of Christians, executing a flank attack on the corruptions of Christendom."

There had always been a thread of religious destiny in the pattern of American patriotism. Lincoln and Woodrow Wilson infused their great speeches with the language of redemption, election, salvation. But the circumstances of the 1950s wove a new fabric. There was the consciousness of material plenty. There was the sense of victory, with the lurking hope that, whatever the dark powers of the Soviet Union, nuclear weapons might restore invulnerability. Mingling with that hope was a new fear, that America might yet be called to do final battle with the forces of evil. All this came together to forge a new militant sense of exceptionalism. It breathes through the high school and college textbooks of the time as well as through the political oratory, a belief that the United States had been entrusted by God with a mission of bringing light to a darkling world.

The most perfunctory trawl through the high school and college textbooks of the Cold War period illustrates how pervasive was the exceptionalist theme. Americans who were at high school in the 1950s and at college in the 1960s were brought up with assumptions about the exceptional historical destiny of the United States as uncontested as the air they breathed. These texts were not especially arrogant or aggressive in their assumptions. Most were written with a due respect for those past European traditions they saw as contributing to the improved version of humanity that was America. They occasionally made a bow to what were seen as the promising efforts of Latin America to aspire to the same ideals. They were not even wholly uncritical. Slavery is condemned, and some texts even speak sympathetically of the experience of the Native Americans, though others are less sensitive in that regard. What is characteristic of them all is a certain calm assumption of the ethical superiority not only of the American condition but also of American ideals.

A 1948 high school text illustrates this tone.²⁴ It begins by asking the teacher to invite the students to say which they consider to be the three greatest countries in the world. From the start, then, children are to be taught to put their homeland in a competitive setting. It then lists, in a

frankly self-congratulatory tone, ten characteristics of “Americanism” that can be traced from colonial times to the present:

- (1) Economic opportunity
- (2) Wide participation in politics
- (3) Belief in reform rather than revolution (!)
- (4) A mobile population
- (5) A high position and freedom for women
- (6) Belief in education and widespread educational opportunity
- (7) Concern for the welfare of others
- (8) Toleration of differences
- (9) Respect for the rights and abilities of the individual
- (10) World-wide responsibility

It is not that any of these propositions, except perhaps the volte-face on revolution, is plain untrue. It is not even that many of them apply to most other developed societies. Are Americans unique in their concern for the welfare of others, for example? Or in respect for education? In their respect for women? What is suspect is that the purpose of beginning a secondary school textbook with a set of self-praising propositions of this kind is not to encourage a thoughtful or analytical understanding of the history of the student’s country. It is to inculcate an American exceptionalist ideology, almost, indeed, a theology.

Unit Seven is a good example of this tone. “People from many countries came to America as a land of opportunity. These people developed ideals which one historian has called the American Dream. It is a dream of a richer, fuller, and better life for each person according to his ability and his talents regardless of his race or nationality. . . . The American Dream is slowly coming true.” So that’s all right, then.

When those high school students (or, in those days, a severely limited proportion of them) reached college, they would be taught history in a similarly ideological vein. A 1960 college text is equally self-congratulatory:

The American Revolution was in part a revolt against the upper classes of European derivation, and as time went on the

cult of the common man grew until it became the typical American philosophy. The goal of America has been the economic improvement of the masses, and this remains a goal which requires social and economic change. . . . The goal of achieving a decent standard of living for all men, of abolishing poverty and inequality, has come closer to realization in the United States than was dreamed possible. It has largely eliminated those class conflicts which have plagued almost all societies. The 'classless society' which Marxian socialists held up as the goal of proletarian revolution has been largely achieved by American "capitalism," mixed with a good deal of government welfare activity. The American standard of living is many times the world average.²⁵

Calm as is the tone, and free from vulgar bombast, this text does read oddly today. The suggestion, for example, that the Revolution targeted "upper classes of European derivation" suggests that it was largely carried out by persons not of European derivation. But Washington's family came from England, and Jefferson's were Irish Protestants. With few exceptions, all the Founding Fathers traced their descent from the British Isles, and so did most of their followers. The only significant populations in the American colonies not of European descent were slaves, who tended to favor the English Crown, and Native Americans, who displayed an infuriating tendency to side with sometimes the English, sometimes the French monarchy. The language imports into the account of the American Revolution anachronistic New Deal-era notions of immigrant populations rising against Boston Brahmin snobs and their unreconstructed habit of insisting that "no Irish need apply." The text has a liberal flavor that is now out of fashion. It would, I suppose, be a bold person who would now maintain that the goal of America is still the economic improvement of the masses, and indeed an unusual teacher who would speak to students of "the masses." As for the abolition of inequality, the United States now comes either near the top or at the top of the list of the most unequal societies among the world's developed industrial democracies, whether measured by income or wealth.²⁶ Nor, at the time of writing, is the American standard of living "many times" the average of its equals and competitors in the world.

The peroration of this textbook praises American society for its superiority in terms of charity, tolerance, and faith. “No other portion of the globe,” the authors write on the very eve of the civil rights revolution and the racial rioting in several hundred cities across the United States in the middle 1960s, “has a comparable record in the peaceful coexistence of so many different kinds of people.” Finally, the authors praise their countrymen for their exceptionally pacific character:

The vision of universal peace continues to exist here. The “true grandeur of nations,” Americans have always felt, lies in peace, not in war; in social improvement, not in military glory. . . . This secular version of the Christian ideal of the millennium comes as close as any one thing to summing up the meaning of American history. A land where miracles have happened, and unhappy men have become happy, America is a country with a national faith that this can go on happening, until democracy, in the words of Walt Whitman, has fashioned “a new earth and a new man.”

The ideal is endearing. No one can dislike the teachers who offered such an irenic vision to adolescents. Yet this picture was offered in the year when the most successful military man of his generation was warning his countrymen against the dangers of the military industrial complex, and former lieutenant (junior grade) John Fitzgerald Kennedy was riding to power with his warnings of a nonexistent missile gap with the Soviet Union. In his eloquent inaugural he told his countrymen that the trumpet summoned them again—“not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are”—to a “long twilight struggle.” It was true that he defined that struggle as one against “the common enemies of mankind: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.” But his call was clearly understood, in America and around the world, as a call to renewed militancy against the nation’s military enemies in the Cold War. And over the following half-century the United States, for all this vision of “universal peace,” accumulated the most formidable military arsenal the world had ever seen by spending more on the military than the rest of the world put together, and used that arsenal on many occasions.

There is no “official history” in the United States as it was known in the Soviet Union or other totalitarian states, though the need for textbooks to be vetted by state authorities can sometimes, in some southern states, approach the reality of censorship. If one American historian can claim a pseudo-official status, however, it is perhaps Daniel J. Boorstin, who served with distinction as Librarian of Congress, and who is widely admired for the learning and originality of his three-volume history, *The Americans*. But the college text that Boorstin wrote with the help of his wife and a colleague has an unmistakably exceptionalist tone, from a “prologue” on the very first page:

American history, in this version, is the story of a magic transformation. How did people from everywhere join the American people? How did men and women from a tired Old World where people thought they knew what to expect become wide-eyed explorers of a New World? . . . What has been especially American about our ways of living and earning a living? Our ways of making war and making peace? Our ways of thinking and hoping and fearing, of worshipping God and fighting the Devil? Our ways of traveling and politicking, of importing people, of building houses and cities? These are some of the questions we try to answer in this book.²⁷

Nothing could be more explicit. The emphasis of a history to be put into the hands of undergraduates is to focus consciously on what is different, what is “especially American,” in other words on what is exceptional, about American history. No wonder if at least some of the Americans taught in this spirit out of books like this came to believe that not only their country, but they too—unlike “tired” Europeans—were morally exceptional. In these texts, we can actually watch young Americans being taught a quasi-official exceptionalism that takes little account of inconvenient facts. They could not be expected to see it for the tangle of dangerous half-truths that it was.

F • O • U • R

From Liberal Consensus to Conservative Ascendancy

We shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest to our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right . . .

Woodrow Wilson, declaring war in 1917

The case for American exceptionalism has long been expressed by a familiar litany. America, generations have reassured themselves, is as a city set upon a hill, its citizens new men and women, its destiny the last, best hope of earth. But as we have seen, on examination the details of the case turn out to have changed a good deal over time.

Many exceptionalists today, starting with the forty-third president of the United States, base their case on religion. It was the deity, according to them, who singled out the United States for his purposes. Yet the Founders, to take an obvious example, were hardly conspicuous for their religious belief; deism, among them, was as common as orthodoxy.

In recent decades, capitalism has taken its place on the podium as an aspect of American exceptionalism almost equal with democracy. For many, however, throughout the Progressive and New Deal years, capital-

ism rated very low in their reasons for thinking the United States exceptional. Where once Americans, like Alexis de Tocqueville, saw their country as exceptional in its practice of equality, the conservative consensus of the late twentieth century gave equality a far lower place than other values, such as freedom. Empirically the United States has become one of the least equal, indeed probably the very most unequal, of the world's developed democratic nations in terms of the distribution of both income and wealth.

Where once America was exceptional in its contempt for militarism and its suspicion of standing armies—"there is such a thing," boasted Woodrow Wilson, "as a man being too proud to fight"—now the supposedly invincible prowess of American arms is a vital part of the exceptionalist litany. Recent American presidents have not been too proud to fight even quite small nations. Woodrow Wilson's reasons for believing in the exceptional destiny of the United States were different from those of Abraham Lincoln, and John Kennedy's again different in some respects from those of Franklin Roosevelt. Lyndon Johnson won a record mandate from the American people and vowed to build a Great Society. Fifteen years later, the United States was governed by people who admired Margaret Thatcher for saying there was no such thing as society.

So while the sacred texts and the public rhetoric of exceptionalism have drawn on a common bank of ideas and phrases, when the public philosophy of Americans changed, so did the character of their exceptionalism. And between 1960 and 2000 the public philosophy did change decisively, from the liberal consensus to the conservative ascendancy.

If the moral exceptionalism of America's historical destiny remained as much as ever the grand theme of American nationalism, Americans in the last third of the twentieth century praised themselves for being exceptional in very different ways from the way their parents had praised themselves. In a nutshell, Americans used to be proud of being exceptionally liberal. Now many of them are equally proud of being exceptionally conservative.

In 1950, in a book called *The Liberal Imagination*, the critic Lionel Trilling, then perhaps as close as America has known to being an intellectual pope in the French manner, wrote that "in the United States at this

time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition. For it is the plain fact that nowadays there are no conservative or reactionary ideas in general circulation.” Indeed, he went further and put the boot into any lurking conservatives, who did not, “With some isolated and some ecclesiastical exceptions, express themselves in ideas but only in action or in irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas.”¹ Irritable mental gestures? That would not go down well at the American Enterprise Institute.

Nor was this merely an illusion of liberals living within an academic ivory tower. Richard Nixon famously said, “We are all Keynesians now.” He could almost as plausibly have said, “We are all liberals now.” In far more ways than the conservative faithful of the Bush years might admit, the Nixon administration’s domestic agenda was a continuation of the Kennedy-Johnson policy. That is not altogether surprising, if you think that the man in charge of domestic policy was none other than Daniel Patrick Moynihan, profoundly a liberal at heart, even when in a middle period of his life he railed at certain liberals, because of his resentment at what they had said about him and his famous report on *The Negro Family*. The last time I saw Moynihan, I was criticizing Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld over Iraq. “Ah,” said Pat in his most puckish manner, “you mean my liberal friends from the Nixon White House!” It is true—if now hard to believe—that in those days rising Republican politicians did not altogether disdain liberal credentials. Certainly the Nixon administration pointed with pride to its achievement in desegregating schools across the South. A generation later the proportion of Americans who call themselves liberals, as measured by one survey, fell from 34 percent in 1970 to 20 percent in 2000.²

Those numbers probably exaggerate the change that has actually taken place. What has unmistakably happened, however, is that the center of gravity of American politics has moved decisively to the right. The word *liberal* itself has fallen into disrepute. Nothing is too bad for conservative bloggers and columnists—let alone radio hosts—to say about liberals. Democrats themselves run a mile from the “L word” for fear of being seen as dangerously outside the mainstream. Conservative politicians and publicists, by dint of associating liberals with all manner of ab-

surdity so that many sensible people hesitated to risk being tagged with the label of liberalism, succeeded in persuading the country that it was more conservative than it actually was.

The word *liberal* has had a strange history. It was coined in Spain in the early nineteenth century. Originally, a liberal was not just one who believed in freedom. He was also one who upheld the interests and the values of the bourgeoisie against monarchical and clerical reaction. At the philosophical level, liberals like John Stuart Mill upheld the supreme value of freedom, including economic freedom. Later in the century, as we have seen, critics on the Left argued that what came to be called Manchester liberalism defended the interests of the rich against those of the poor. Many therefore turned to socialism in one version or another. Nineteenth-century liberals were the defenders of laissez-faire, of capitalism, and of business interests. This was at a time when, everywhere in Europe as well as in Britain, businessmen were relatively progressive compared with aristocratic landowners, not to mention the church and the monarchy. In Britain the Liberal Party of Gladstone, Asquith, and Lloyd George was sharply distinguished from Labour and the socialists, though there was a certain overlap on what was called the “Lib-Lab” Left.

To the extent that neither monarchs and their courtiers, nor landed noblemen, nor an established church threatened the freedom of the American bourgeoisie, the United States had no obvious role for Manchester liberals. The closest equivalent in nineteenth-century America was perhaps those New England abolitionist capitalists, Radical Republicans of the piratical stamp of Benjamin F. Butler, who combined a passion for liberty with a commitment to a robust industrial capitalism. It was not until the 1940s that *liberal* came into general use as a euphemism for “Left.” The New York Liberal Party was the home of those on the Left who realized that to call yourself socialist in the United States was to risk losing the votes of many natural progressive supporters. So it came about that conservatives could use the word *liberal* to denounce the mildly social democratic ideals behind the ambitious proposals of the New Deal, the Fair Deal, and President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society. They have succeeded in frightening many into avoiding the liberal label.

To generalize about the political mood of a contentious, volatile

nation of three hundred million souls is at best unscientific and at worst absurd. If one tries to gauge long-term shifts in that mood, one conventional measure is the proportion of the American electorate that identifies as being Democrat, Republican, or independent. The Louis Harris poll has been tracking these self-identifications since 1969. Changes have been slow, but significant. In 1969 just under half (49 percent) of those asked gave their party affiliation as Democrat, just under one-third (32 percent) called themselves Republicans, one-fifth (20 percent) were independents.³

The Democratic percentage has fallen steadily (though with occasional small revivals) to 41 percent in 1980, the year of Reagan's first victory, and 34 percent in 2004. The Republican share fell to 21 and 22 percent in four of the five years after Watergate. It had risen to one-third, 33 percent, by Reagan's last year and held at 31 percent in 2004. Independents reached 32 percent in 1974, the year of Nixon's Watergate disgrace, and touched 29 percent in 1992, the year of Ross Perot's impressive third-party campaign and Clinton's first victory. But by 2004 independents had settled back to 24 percent, just 5 percentage points above where they had been thirty-five years earlier. Most significant has been the erosion of the Democratic margin over Republicans, from an average of 21 points in the 1970s to a bare three points by 2004.⁴

If instead of looking at party identification you consider ideology, as measured by the scale from conservative to liberal, and ask people about their own assessment of their ideological position, the changes in their answers are equally gradual, perhaps surprisingly so. In the 1970s, 32 percent of all adults called themselves conservatives, and 18 percent liberal. By 2004 the number who called themselves conservatives had risen to 36 percent, and the liberal number had held solid at 18 percent. Moderates were 40 percent in the 1970s, and are still 40 percent in the first decade of the new century.⁵

These self-identifications are unsatisfactory, for at least two reasons. For one thing, people like to think they are "moderate," and many who so describe themselves would seem to others extreme to the verge of fanaticism in one direction or another. For another, and this is particularly troubling for our present inquiry, the definitions of political ideologies themselves change over time. What was seen as dangerous con-

servative extremism in the 1970s may have become almost liberal by the twenty-first century, and vice versa.

There has undoubtedly been a substantial shift in public opinion away from identification with liberalism and toward identification with conservatism. The conservative assault on government has captured much ground. To be at all precise about the size and the timing of this shift, however, is treacherous. It is often forgotten that even in 1936, the high-water mark of the New Deal, more Americans identified themselves as conservative than as liberal. Pollsters and political scientists have long abandoned a binary division between liberals and conservatives. First they favored a tripartite analysis that counts liberals, conservatives, and “moderates.” More recently they have looked for more precise, because multiple, categories.

In 1987 the Pew Center, cooperating with the *Times Mirror* survey, produced an elaborate new “typology” that sought to get behind simple categories.⁶ The study derived from academic studies dating back to the 1960s of political outlooks and personal characteristics that influenced voter behavior. Some of these were psychological, such as “alienation.” Some concerned attitudes toward government and politics directly. Some, such as isolationism or anticommunism, affected foreign affairs, while others dealt with social or moral attitudes, for example, to race, class, or religion, and others again arose from economic or financial circumstances. The researchers then used the statistical tool factor analysis to break the answers of more than four thousand respondents into nine basic value orientations or themes that, they claimed, “provide the motivation for virtually all political behavior in America.”

On the basis of this more subtle inquiry, the researchers found that only 27 percent of Americans identified strongly as conservatives and 19 percent as liberal. In terms of traditional party allegiance, 31 percent identified strongly as Democrats, and only 23 percent as Republicans. One possible explanation is the history of southern conservatism. (Many older people who considered themselves loyal Democrats were staunchly conservative, especially on race but also social issues, and no doubt some continue to resist the equation of conservatism with the Republican Party.) The study concluded that although party did not correlate strongly with people’s opinions on many issues, it was an important element in

the way people arrived at political opinions. If party is combined with the nine basic values, it does improve understanding of Americans' political attitudes. Ideological self-identification as liberal or conservative was not important for most Americans. Self-identification, finally, as liberal or conservative provided a less reliable analytical tool in the opinion of the authors of the survey than did basic values.

Seven years later, the Pew Center revisited these questions and refined its typology.⁷ The 1994 typology divided the public into ten groups defined by their attitude toward government and a range of other beliefs. Two of these "value orientations" were party "leanings." The other eight involved attitudes toward environmentalism; religion and morality; social tolerance and social justice; business and the respondent's own financial situation; government; and patriotism. The survey found three groups who identified strongly with the Republican Party ("staunch conservatives," "populist Republicans," and "moderate Republicans"). Four groups identified strongly with the Democratic Party: the survey called them "liberal Democrats," "new Democrats," "socially conservative Democrats," and the "partisan poor." Other groups were independent or politically uninvolved bystanders. This typology certainly made it possible to relate the political ideology of individuals closely to topical issues, such as gay rights, criticism of President Clinton personally or of the Clinton administration, or welfare policies.

The study of ideological and party identification in general has evolved in the direction of more complex analysis. Whether you agree with the approach or its conclusions in detail or not, it has become harder to say that the country is moving decisively or as a monolith from a more liberal to a more conservative orientation, if only because the analysis shows such different strands of opinion within both political parties, and within liberal and conservative thinking. So the flight from liberalism may not have been quite as headlong or as universal as it has suited conservative publicists to maintain.

Yet it remains undeniable, in my opinion, that if the word *liberal* has fallen out of favor, so too have essential elements in the liberal philosophy itself.⁸ At the heart of the liberal style in government since the New Deal was a methodology. A problem was identified and analyzed by experts, often academics. A program would be devised for dealing with the

problem. Funds would be appropriated, staff hired, the program implemented. Hey, presto! The problem would be solved. Justly or unjustly, the majority of Americans, having watched the efforts of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to use this method to bring about the earthly paradise, or at least the Great Society, decided that it didn't work. Among intellectuals, that was the basis of the neoconservatives' faith in what they liked to call the law of unintended consequences. Beginning as an undeniable generalization, that most schemes of social reform have consequences not intended by their sponsors, it became an argument against social reform in general, and an attack on the claims of any government to achieve any improvement in society.

Many working-class white Americans, meanwhile, came to a further conclusion. The liberal reliance on government and its bureaucracy was seen as a more or less deliberate bid on the part of a privileged class of persons to give to African-Americans help and comfort that had not been forthcoming to white workers or to their immigrant grandparents. In parallel with this new, or newly reinforced, suspicion of government, was a new acceptance of the idea that business, or—as conservative publicists liked to put it—“the market,” could solve social and economic difficulties more efficiently than government. This evolved into what Thomas Frank has called “market populism,” the highly dubious belief that businessmen have the public's interests closer at heart than do politicians.⁹

At the same time corporate management itself was moving, so to speak, to the right. In the 1960s the most admired corporate leaders had been those who were willing, in order to avoid labor conflict, to build a corporate welfare state, working closely with union leadership in the process. In the 1970s the combined impact of the energy crisis and renewed foreign competition from first European, then Asian manufacturers evoked a tougher, harder management style.

It did not take the new corporate culture long to break the power of organized labor. The proportion of American workers enrolled in unions fell drastically. In 1965 more than 30 percent of the American workforce were union members. Their number continued to rise, reaching a peak of more than 22 million as late as 1979. By 2007 the number had fallen to 15.7 million, and the proportion had gone down to 12.5 percent: only one American worker in every eight is now a union member.¹⁰ Moreover,

union membership in the private sector was only 7.5 percent. Union members were far less likely than in previous generations to be white male family heads. More of them were women and members of ethnic minorities, which ought not to have reduced their political and social power, but probably did.¹¹

In other ways, too, corporate management changed. Power shifted from manufacturing to the financial sector and financial markets, from General Motors to Goldman Sachs. A new style of finance capitalism, marked by a fierce new culture of “mergers and acquisitions,” hostile takeovers, and corporate raiding, put management under pressure as never before to deliver higher profits, quarter by quarter, to the shareholders. The share of the owners of capital in the revenues of business grew, and the share of the workers’ wages declined.

In the quest for higher profit, managements outsourced to plants overseas. More important, they pressed down relentlessly on wages and conditions for their employees stateside, and cut back employment ruthlessly. Increasingly unprotected by politicians or by unions, workers for corporations like McDonald’s and Wal-Mart found their personal dignity, as well as their incomes, under constant siege.

Another aspect of the new tone, from the 1970s on, was a subtle but steady “southernization” of American political life. Some observers claimed to trace this in various cultural fields, such as the national enthusiasm for country music or the spread of a supposedly southern passion for sports, including NASCAR racing and hunting, even a southern style in attitudes to the military and to patriotism.¹²

What was not a mere matter of opinion was the growing political influence of southerners and in particular of southern evangelical Christianity. Although this has been denied, it appears that powerful church groups such as the Southern Baptist Union were alarmed and affronted by a threat from the Carter administration to remove immunity from federal taxes from Christian schools.

Politics in general was transformed by southern influence and in particular by the process, itself a consequence of the enfranchisement of southern blacks, whereby the Republican Party came to be dominated by conservative southerners. At the same time, as southern conservative influence largely disappeared from the Democratic Party, and the influence

of African-American, female, and Hispanic voters increased, the Democratic Party moved some way to the left.

While in many respects racial attitudes were growing more tolerant and some barriers to economic and social progress by minorities were lowered, in racial matters, too, the rest of the country became in some ways more like the South. The great northern cities became as segregated, in residential and educational terms, as the major cities of the South, and by certain measures even more so. (By both of the two methods of measurement, “absolute clustering” and the Gini coefficient, Chicago and Detroit were by the 1990 census more segregated than Atlanta or Houston.)¹³ By the 1990s the general sympathy for African-Americans generated by the civil rights movement had been largely replaced by a resentment fed by the suspicion that liberal elites had favored blacks at the expense of working-class whites. The *Bakke* case was a flag, marking how far public opinion had shifted away from all kinds of affirmative action. Derision of “political correctness,” a staple of conservative journalists and polemicists, increasingly made it acceptable to mock the sensitivities of women and minorities.

These are some of the background changes that transformed the political climate and shifted its center of gravity to the Right. To understand the evolution of exceptionalism, it is worth taking the time to recall, albeit briefly, the political narrative of the past forty years. The modern conservative ascendancy in America can itself be seen as an “unintended consequence” of the political and intellectual upheavals of the 1960s. By the later years of that turbulent decade, many Americans had reacted negatively to the libertarian and self-indulgent aspects of what was known as the counterculture. They became what were called “social conservatives.” A largely imaginary bacchanal of the 1960s became a historical datum. Lashed on by godless upper-class libertines, younger Americans were given to believe, the decade of the 1960s was consumed with unbridled chemical and sexual experimentation. As early as 1972 Richard Nixon was able to take advantage of this reaction to caricature the Democratic presidential candidate, Senator George McGovern, a sober-living Midwestern former bomber pilot from that bastion of metrosexual debauchery, South Dakota, as if he were a monster of unpatriotic licentiousness.

Well before that time, a new conservative movement had sprung up. It arrived largely unnoticed at the time of Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory in the 1964 presidential election, hidden from much journalistic notice by the civil rights revolution, the unenthusiastic reception of the Great Society, and the rising doubts about the morality and the wisdom of the Vietnam War. The new conservatism had many origins, and many preoccupations, some of them mutually contradictory. In particular, it contained libertarian elements—especially those concerned with economic liberty and business interests, including resentment of high taxation—and on the other hand social, ethical, patriotic and religious elements. These two potentially incompatible elements were welded together, not least by the strong anticommunism of the group around William F. Buckley, Jr., at *National Review*.

The new mood was partly instrumental in the 1968 presidential election. It extended far more widely than party politics, however. It embraced skepticism, as we have seen, about the efficacy, and the justification, for government action to achieve social goals. It reflected widespread resentment among blue-collar Americans who would previously have been safe Democratic voters. The segregationist governor of Alabama, George Wallace, had astonished the political world in 1964 by his success with working-class voters in Maryland, Indiana, and Wisconsin. In 1968 he put the fear of God into both Democratic and Republican leaders. Wallace voters felt that the Johnson administration had favored African-Americans at their expense. There was a rebellion against high taxation, and in particular the "bracket creep" that was for the first time obliging working-class voters to pay property taxes. Many Americans were grossly offended by what they saw, and were coached to see, as the abandoning of traditional standards of decency in sexual behavior and patriotism. Wallace was the first to profit from such sentiments. But all these strands contributed to Richard Nixon's narrow defeat of the Democratic candidate, Hubert Humphrey, in November 1968.

When Nixon, buoyed by his and Henry Kissinger's apparently successful diplomacy with the Soviet Union and China, was overwhelmingly reelected four years later, it looked as though 1972 might be one of the occasional moments of realignment, when at intervals of a generation or so whole blocks of American voters permanently shift their allegiance.¹⁴ In

this instance, it looked as though the Republicans, under Nixon's leadership, had indeed ripped away two great chunks of the "Roosevelt coalition" that had kept the Democrats in power since 1933: southern conservatives and northern working-class Catholic voters. There were even, as 1972 turned into 1973, reports of as many as forty Democratic congressmen, most in the South but some from the North, planning to cross the aisle and become Republicans.¹⁵

Then came the Watergate hearings. By the early weeks of 1973, it was clear to Democratic congressmen who had already started to negotiate the terms of their entry into the Republican system that this was not a moment to become a Republican. The credibility of Richard Nixon and his administration drained slowly away until in August 1974 he chose to resign ahead of almost certain impeachment. The short-term effect was a Democratic tide in the midterm elections of that year and the election of a Democrat, Jimmy Carter, in 1976.

The conservative revolution, therefore, was postponed by some seven years, and when it came it was not a Nixon but a Reagan revolution. The interim brought two failed presidencies, those of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. It brought the humiliating end of the Vietnam war and the onset of an energy crisis that shook many of the assumptions Americans had made about their country's position in the world, including assumptions about its exceptional situation. For the first time since the Great Depression, many Americans began to question whether their children would live as well as they had.

That was why people were so relieved and so grateful when Ronald Reagan assured them that it was "morning in America" again. The slogan might be vapid, but it struck a chord. A new conservative mood took hold. One theme was the intensified suspicion of government. Where in the Kennedy and Johnson era, government was seen as the fallible but necessary instrument of social progress, now an increasing proportion of Americans adopted Reagan's conviction that, as he put in his first inaugural, "in this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." In the end, even a moderately liberal Democratic president in Bill Clinton agreed that "the era of big government is over."¹⁶

Although Reagan was not personally either a born-again Christian

or a notable exemplar of austerity in his private life, and indeed evangelical Christians came to resent how little his administration had done for them, the new Christian Right was a distinctive and powerful wing of the new conservative coalition that had brought him to power.

This in itself was new. The American constitutional tradition not only mandated a separation between church and state; it also sought to keep confessional politics at arm's length. Now, as not before, at least for many decades, American exceptionalism acquired a specifically religious tone.

The Reagan administration marked the beginning of a sharper division in public opinion than had been seen for many years. For many Democrats, Reagan's personality and politics were alike bizarre and unfamiliar. For conservatives, he was quite simply a hero, the leader who had cleansed the national stables, blown away miasmas of doubt and restored the ancient verities. In reality, Reagan's achievement was as mixed as his reputation. While in the central field of international politics, in the superpower relationship with the Soviet Union, he was highly successful, in other foreign relations, especially where he had to deal with weak countries of the so-called Third World, he blundered. His administration's conduct of the Iran-Contra affair almost led to political disaster. At home, conservatives and the corporate world welcomed his attempt to reduce the influence of government. In his brutal demolition of the air traffic controllers' strike, he administered a symbolic blow to the political power of organized labor. Yet he cannot be said to have been notably successful in reducing the importance, let alone the cost, of the federal government. His management of the economy was unsteady and of the budget incompetent.

~~It was his successor, George H. W. Bush, who inherited the achievements of the Reagan foreign policy. Bush managed the consequences of the collapse of communism, and especially the reunification of Germany, with great skill. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, threatening the stability of the Middle East and of the "new world order" the president was trying to promote, Bush wisely responded through the United Nations. He successfully put together a broad international coalition, including traditional allies like Britain and France, and Arab nations like Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt. In this way he restored the world order~~