

SCHOLARLY CONTROVERSY: RETHINKING THE PLACE OF THE NEW DEAL IN AMERICAN HISTORY

The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History

Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore
Cornell University

Abstract

"The Long Exception" examines the period from Franklin Roosevelt to the end of the twentieth century and argues that the New Deal was more of an historical aberration—a byproduct of the massive crisis of the Great Depression—than the linear triumph of the welfare state. The depth of the Depression undoubtedly forced the realignment of American politics and class relations for decades, but, it is argued, there is more continuity in American politics between the periods before the New Deal order and those after its decline than there is between the postwar era and the rest of American history. Indeed, by the early seventies the arc of American history had fallen back upon itself. While liberals of the seventies and eighties waited for a return to what they regarded as the normality of the New Deal order, they were actually living in the final days of what Paul Krugman later called the "interregnum between Gilded Ages." The article examines four central themes in building this argument: race, religion, class, and individualism.

I

In 1883, influential Yale Professor and social Darwinist William Graham Sumner took to the lectern to address the topic of "The Forgotten Man." In his address he criticized the misguided sentimentality of Gilded Age reformers who pitied the undeserving poor while overlooking the noble and uncomplaining worker who quietly toiled away and played by the rules. "Now who is the Forgotten Man?" he queried his audience. "He is the simple honest laborer, ready to earn his living by productive work," he answered. "We pass by him because he is independent, self supporting, and asks no favors." For Sumner, overlooking the industrious worker in favor of assisting the "nasty, shiftless, criminal, whining, crawling, and good-for-nothing people" was a tragedy. The honest working man deserved respect, asking only his liberty in exchange. Sumner's argument was more than a justification for ignoring the poor, however; it was also a clever attempt to make the working man and his sympathizers among the upper classes into allies in his project to discredit reform

International Labor and Working-Class History
No. 74, Fall 2008, pp. 3–32
© 2008 International Labor and Working-Class History, Inc.

as well as divide the working class from the poor. "It is clear now," he concluded his speech, "that the interest of the Forgotten Man and the interest of the 'the poor,' 'the weak,' and the other petted classes are in antagonism."¹

The long accepted outline of the twentieth century chronicles the defeat of such social Darwinist thinking. Sumner's politics—and, more importantly, his hoped-for alliances—ended, the textbook argument suggests, as the ideological battles and naked class conflict of the Gilded Age were finally tamed by the sympathy of middle-class Progressives and ultimately brought to heel with the triumph of the New Deal.

Not surprising, then, the second significant mention of the "Forgotten Man" in American political thought was when Franklin Roosevelt ran for the Democratic nomination in 1932. In his famous campaign speech, "The Forgotten Man," Roosevelt laid out a very different idea, seeking favor with a broad coalition of working people both employed and unemployed. "These unhappy times," he proclaimed as the Great Depression dragged through its third consecutive, dismal year, "call for the building of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the unorganized but indispensable units of economic power, for plans like those of 1917, that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid." He sought to unite "Main Street, Broadway, the mines, the mills" and farmers in a vision of shared sacrifice, accountability, and recovery that would, by the dawn of Roosevelt's second term in 1937, have enrolled millions of working-class and poor Americans together into what appeared to be a semi-permanent political coalition based on a new idea of collective economic citizenship.²

Less than two generations later, Richard Nixon invoked yet another "Forgotten Man" that helped to undo Roosevelt's version and harkened back to Sumner's. Accepting the 1968 nomination of the Republican Party, he returned to separating the nobility of the common man from the misguided pity of the do-gooders. He asked that the nation listen to the "quiet voice in the tumult of the shouting. It is the voice of the great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans, the non shouters, the non demonstrators They work in American factories, they run American businesses. They serve in government; they provide most of the soldiers who die to keep it free. They give drive to the spirit of America. They give lift to the American dream. They give steel to the backbone of America. They're good people. They're decent people; they work and they save and they pay their taxes and they care." Taking his political tutorials from George Wallace, Nixon went on to tap into and promote the cause of the disgruntled, confused, angry, and forgotten (white) working man, and, like Sumner, sought to separate the honest worker from threats just below him in the economic pyramid—as well as, more importantly, the meddlesome sympathies of the reformers.³

Much of postwar historical writing is informed by an unconscious Whiggish climb from Sumner's to Roosevelt's visions of the "Forgotten Man." But from the standpoint of the twenty-first century, Roosevelt's version now seems less

of a liberal triumph than it does a historical aberration—a byproduct of the massive crisis of the Great Depression rather than the linear triumph of the liberal state. The depth of the Depression undoubtedly forced the realignment of American politics and class relations for decades, but, we argue, there is more continuity in American political culture between Sumner and Nixon than between Roosevelt and the rest of American history. William Leuchtenburg famously saw every president since the Second World War as *In the Shadow of FDR*, but it might be more accurate to reframe the historical portraiture so as to picture FDR fading into the dark shadows of American history itself. Indeed, by the early seventies the arc of American history had fallen back upon itself. While liberals of the seventies and eighties waited for a return to what they regarded as the normality of the New Deal order, they were actually living in the final days of what Paul Krugman later called the “interregnum between Gilded Ages.”⁴

How best, then, to frame the New Deal in American history? The historian Robert Zieger once referred to the labor movement that burst upon the national stage during the 1930s and 1940s as a “fragile juggernaut.”⁵ Perhaps no better metaphor could describe the broader political culture that came of age under Franklin Roosevelt. The New Deal alliances seemed like an all-powerful force capable of implementing its progressive liberal policy regardless of conservative opposition. Yet simultaneously, when challenged, this same juggernaut shattered, its central contradictions revealed in its own compromises with the very real complexities of American history and politics. The power of the New Deal order gave the illusion of permanence, but the political edifice contained a web of internal fractures that, when stressed, broke open barely two generations later. Rather than trying to analyze the decline of a presumed political norm, as most scholars implicitly have, the more appropriate task might be to recast the New Deal and postwar era as “the long exception” to the nation’s political traditions. Liberalism would continue indefinitely in its many “protean” forms but the version generated by the trauma of Depression and war proved both distinct and brittle.⁶

Within that broader framework, we would like to emphasize three key dimensions in our analysis of American politics: the historic weakness of organized labor, the burdens of race, and the enduring power of religious faith. Each was changed in the breakthroughs of the New Deal era but each also maintained often overlooked continuities with the deeper impulses of American history—not the least of which was the primacy of business in American life. In trying to grapple with the decline of the New Deal order, many historians and political scientists have pointed to a host of variables, including racial backlash, the decline of unions, stagflation, identity politics, the Southern strategy, deindustrialization, and globalization, to name but a handful.⁷ While each has much explanatory power, depending up on the framing of the question, we suggest that all of the liberal breakthroughs of the thirties and forties with regard to labor, race, and religion remained so deeply conflicted in their original formation—grounded as they inevitably were in the contours of the American

past—that their public, post-1968 rupture appears, on reflection, to be quite understandable, perhaps even axiomatic.

The themes of labor, race, and religion are bound together by the ideology—though not necessarily the reality—of a deep and abiding individualism.⁸ Every sentence of Sumner's lecture extolled individualism as the keystone of a classical, nineteenth-century liberalism in dire conflict with the emerging administrative powers of the state enthusiastically supported by reformers and nascent, modern liberals. Even Roosevelt, despite being the architect of the regulatory state, could not offer a clear alternative to the individualist ethos so deeply embedded in America's public culture. So persuasive were FDR's evocations of that historic American belief that a trusted advisor, Rexford Guy Tugwell, thought that even when Roosevelt tried to construct a new vision of individualism suitable for modern, corporate society, those efforts "too had not been immune to our national myths. . . . [L]ike all of us," Tugwell continued, FDR "had a weakness for what was familiar and trusted which led him to overestimate their sufficiency and underestimate their irrelevant antiquity." Decades later, leaders from Nixon to George W. Bush would continue to call upon the same gods of a stark individualism—hardly relegated to antiquity as Tugwell presumed—as they avidly sought to govern and even enlarge a mammoth bureaucratic entity. While FDR envisioned the Leviathan as the "Forgotten Man's" friend and ally, latter-day presidents would continue to expand state power by asserting that they promoted his liberty through political policies and alliances that William Graham Sumner would have readily approved.⁹

II

As Sumner grasped, the most salient feature of the history of American working-class politics and union representation has been fragmentation. In the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, skilled, native stock, Protestant workers tended to be Republican and often carried cards in the craft unions of the old AFL. Old Irish and German Catholics might also be in the skilled trades but were most likely in the Democratic Party. The new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, often unskilled workers, were not only in different political parties from their skilled brethren, but their sporadic attempts to build broad-based industrial unions were sharply opposed by them as well. Black workers were not only Republicans, which placed them at political odds with those workers closest to them economically, but they also encountered systematic exclusion by working-class whites who typically favored their identity of whiteness over interracial solidarity. If there was one thing uniting the working people of both parties, it was their mutual distaste for yet another segment of the working class, Chinese immigrant labor. Add to this a host of other political, racial, regional, ideological, and ethnic differences and there is less a single working-class political identity than there is a splintered series of votes based on ethno-political antagonism. Occasionally brilliant flashes of solidarity

transcended this political crazy quilt, but this pervasive, layered, fragmentation of a collective class identity remained a central fact of American political history.¹⁰

Yet in the midst of the Great Depression, workers emerged from their separate enclaves into a coalition that drove the single great breakthrough in collective working-class politics and organization. It was an extraordinary moment, a singular period in US history, in which all the key factors fell into place to create the New Deal order. White working people, attracted by an increasingly homogeneous culture (their ethnic loyalties no longer reinforced yearly after the Immigration Act of 1924 and the exhaustion of ethnic welfare resources in the economic crisis) slowly edged beyond the ethnic enclave. The reorganization of production over the previous four decades, engineered by Frederick Winslow Taylor, Henry Ford, and their associates, also restructured group identity, particularly in leveling the distinction between skilled and unskilled workers. Simultaneously, the experience of welfare capitalism in the twenties, in which employers provided social programs in lieu of union representation, broadened workers' conception of the rights due them in the wake of that system's collapse early in the Depression. Moreover, the depth of the Great Depression helped foster a general sense of shared national destiny—that the nation's citizens would rise or fall together.¹¹

Two additional transformations occurred in the early years of the New Deal that propelled the great breakthrough. New union leadership, committed to industrial unionism and aggressive tactics against management, looked to organize all, including at times women and African Americans, whose prior exclusion had often doomed earlier efforts. Of great significance was the role of government. For the first time in American political history, the federal government actively supported the right of working people to organize collectively to achieve their goals. The National Labor Relations Act affirmed the right to organize and provided rules of conduct for, and oversight of, union elections—an unprecedented set of legal protections. The Supreme Court even temporarily abandoned a deep history of opposition to the collective interests of working people and upheld the Wagner Act in 1937. The commingling of a renewed sense of the possible among workers, government support, and a revived union leadership produced a rare moment in the long struggle of organized labor when the unions won—and won big—delivering over one-third of the nonagricultural labor force into the union movement by the end of the Second World War.¹²

Despite this, as historian Nelson Lichtenstein argues, “industrial unionism’s moment of unrivaled triumph proved exceedingly brief.” It was only a matter of weeks after the CIO’s famous victories at General Motors and US Steel in 1937, he notes, that “the radical challenge posed by mass unions generated furious opposition: from corporate adversaries, Southern Bourbons, craft unionists, and many elements of the New Deal coalition itself.” The passage of the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act marked the high point in labor legislation. Even then, just when the project to organize mass industry began to falter in the

recession and political attacks after 1937, the national mobilization for war alone saved the upsurge in union membership. What followed in both politics and organizing was largely a consolidation and expansion of those early victories, and a series of tactical retreats, if not outright defeats, in attempts to push beyond them. As Lichtenstein continues, "the unions would never again enjoy a political environment as favorable as that which transformed American work life during the years between 1934 and 1937."¹³

Even as the profound trauma of the Great Depression fostered new approaches, it also revealed sharp continuities with the American past. As with the Populist movement before it, in which the individualism of small farmers propelled a search for a common good critical of corporate influence, the New Deal was limited by the continued appeal of that individualist ethos. This entrenched cultural value set the limits on the rise of organized labor, as David Brody has argued: "In America, where individual liberty weighed so heavily, labor law more than in any other country discounted the claims of solidarity in favor of the nonunion workers and, more to the point, the antiunion employer."¹⁴

The Depression years marked a fundamental shift in the Democratic Party's vision away from the chaotic stream of populist rhetoric, progressive pragmatism, antimonopoly politics, and radical flirtations that had defined it since the nineteenth century. Although those earlier ideas continued to have their adherents, the bedrock legislation of the early New Deal signaled a turn away from antimonopoly positions to the acceptance and regulation of the modern corporation. By 1937, liberal political commentators and Democratic Party leaders alike confined their policy aims to a single set of principles intended to regulate capitalism toward increased consumption. As Alan Brinkley expressed it, this new "set of liberal ideas essentially reconciled to the existing structure of the economy and committed to using the state to compensate for capitalism's inevitable flaws—a philosophy that signaled, implicitly at least, a resolution of some of the most divisive political controversies of the industrial era." After 1937, the liberals' job was to manage the system toward the Keynesian dream of full employment and broad-based consumption. As Brinkley concludes, it was "a world in which large-scale bureaucracies were becoming ever more dominant and in which it was becoming increasingly difficult to imagine an alternative to them;" it was a system "more coherent, less diverse, and on the whole less challenging to the existing structure of corporate capitalism than some of the ideas it supplanted." For all of the press coverage of FDR's 1936 campaign condemnation of the nation's "economic royalists" who sought, he claimed, to impose an "industrial dictatorship"—a truly exceptional rhetorical stance in American presidential oratory—a far more accurate guide to the legacy of both FDR and New Deal liberalism remained his 1932 campaign call for an "enlightened administration" of the corporate economy orchestrated by the state in concert with the business community. The gutted Employment Act of 1946 and the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 were early evidence of the trimmed prospects of the New Deal for the postwar era.¹⁵

As important as these economic and trade union issues were in defining the limits of the New Deal philosophy, two additional issues reveal the fragility of the core of its political coalition. In particular, the unresolved issue of race proved detrimental to advancing liberalism beyond its miracle decade between 1935 and 1945. With the major migration of southern blacks into the North between 1915 and 1945, black voters did move into the New Deal electoral coalition by 1944, and there was a powerful effort by some in the labor movement to welcome black workers into their industries and their unions, particularly those affiliated with the CIO. However, in the union movement as in the Roosevelt administration, an inconsistent commitment to equality limited the reach of the liberal coalition.¹⁶

The foundation of the New Deal congressional coalition revealed how deep the racial fissure was. The administration's legislative strength rested on its Faustian pact with the southern Democrats, senators and representatives baptized into, and who rose to success through, a regional Democratic party that proudly proclaimed itself as the party of the white man. Southern black voters were overwhelmingly disenfranchised, and the resulting one-party system guaranteed that the seniority of southern congressmen molded New Deal legislation to a significant extent toward their worldview. That perspective, which emphasized the maintenance of a low wage, nonunion, and racially stratified work force "free" of Washington's regulation, contributed to a political imbroglio that FDR recognized even before taking office but proved powerless to overcome. As Lawrence and Cornelia Levine have suggested, upon FDR's death in 1945, "the greatest irony" was that the New Deal Democratic coalition remained "as inherently unstable and prone to ideological and political stalemate as the day Roosevelt became its leader."¹⁷

On the other side of the coalition were the northern Democrats, many liberal and formally committed to racial equality and trade unionism. They too understood the power southern Democrats wielded and in the fine print of such important legislation such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the National Labor Relations Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act—each of which specifically exempted from coverage categories with heavy concentrations of black working people—one can find the price demanded for the bill's very passage. But racial realities closer to home also constrained many of these northern politicians. When FDR issued an executive order implementing fair employment practices in defense industries, in response to A. Philip Randolph's proposed protest march on the White House, the reaction of northern white working people—the constituency of many elected Democratic politicians—was revealing. As these policies were implemented in Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, and other industrial centers, white workers, many in the United Auto Workers (UAW) and other liberal unions, walked off the job rather than work with union "brothers" who were black. So pervasive were these actions, dubbed "hate strikes," and so committed were the strikers, that the national UAW joined forces with the federal government to strip their own locals of labor law protections if they persisted. Not even the wartime

patriotism of northern white workers could overcome embedded racial attitudes, and most unions did little to alter rank and file thinking.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, given its deep currents in the American past, the issue of religion also confronted New Deal liberalism, although not openly until after the war. This was perhaps ironic for, in prewar liberal opinion, religion was thought at best a private affair without serious public meaning.¹⁹ Common wisdom among liberals and progressives of all stripes held that the Scopes trial in 1925, which starred Clarence S. Darrow as the defender of science, evolution, and individual rights against fundamentalism's champion of traditional morality and majoritarian rule, William Jennings Bryan, had settled once and for all two critical, interrelated questions: evolution would be taught in the nation's schools and religious faith, mocked into irrelevance by H.L. Mencken's sardonic commentary on the trial, was no longer a factor in modern America. Joel Carpenter's study of the fundamentalist movement in the decades after the Scopes trial reveals how erroneous this latter perception was: fundamentalists were less vanquished than busy building a potent and widespread alternative culture that nurtured their faith and would, in time, return in force to the public square.²⁰

In a different way Catholic working people as well veered sharply from New Deal-era liberal thought. For generations, American Catholics had grown to consciousness within a church tradition that identified liberal individualism and secular modernity as mortal enemies. This was not simply the consequence of an archconservative, authoritarian hierarchy—although church leaders at every level tended to be just that; rather, this opposition to liberalism's secular individualism had complex roots in Catholic social teaching. In part, a long held corporatist sensibility, which emphasized the centrality of the family over the autonomous individual, remained influential and found daily expression in the national system of parochial schools for generations of Catholic children. For American Catholics, that ethos both encouraged a "Catholic ghetto" mentality into the 1950s in response to secular culture *and* a serious social analysis of the political economy which proclaimed social responsibility for poverty and other related problems. The very emphasis on family opened wide the door to demands for societal solutions to such structural inequalities. American Catholicism's leading progressive cleric, Father John Ryan, lamented the New Deal's shift to a Keynesian-inspired policy of consumer individualism that offered "new inventions that produced new luxuries" in lieu of economic planning that promoted communal well being.²¹

This central theme in Catholic social thought would prove critical to popular Catholic reaction to the New Deal and to its legacy of liberalism. Catholic working people were active within the union movement, comprising as much as a third or more of the new industrial unionists, and a significant segment of the AFL membership as well. But their embrace of communal solutions to poverty, economic injustice, and inhumane conditions at work or home were not commitments held apart from their faith. Justice was embedded within that faith-based vision and contained other issues understood as the

essential foundation for those social and economic concerns. Opposition to both birth control (widely if not universally observed by Catholics into the 1960s) and abortion reflected a concern for individual life and the integrity of the family inseparable from the call for social justice. Most importantly for political activity, the staunch anticommunism of the Catholic community had a pronounced impact on New Deal, working-class Catholics. Their faith precluded a ready acceptance of the rational-materialist vision of much of the CIO; their focus on family raised suspicions of a singular reliance on the state; their European ethnic heritage encouraged fear of Soviet intentions over the often mythic, and therefore all the more powerful, memories of original homelands; and their American patriotism alerted them of the need to defend the nation against subversion from within. In a way that particularly confounded many liberal and left commentators, these men and women could be deeply Catholic, active, even militant, trade unionists, and reject much of secular, liberal thought, while they simultaneously supported core economic aspects of New Deal policy.²²

The undercurrents of both Catholic and Protestant dissent framed the broad cultural context for John Dewey's forward looking 1930 reflections on American political values, modernity, and liberalism. In *Individualism New and Old*, Dewey, a major philosopher of modern American liberal thought, argued for a reconfigured liberalism, one that proclaimed the centrality of democratic debate and decision-making and one that derived its vitality from both the collective and individualistic values of a democratic nationalism. Obsolete and detrimental in an era of corporate capitalism, Dewey argued, was the atomistic individualism of nineteenth-century classical liberalism; but detrimental too was the embrace of bureaucratic organization and centralized planning implemented by "experts" who largely ruled apart from the people whose lives their decisions altered. Beyond problem-solving by educated elites versed in the technology of management, Dewey asked, what did liberalism offer? His answer was not comforting: The "lack of secure objects of allegiance, without which individuals are lost, is especially striking in the case of the liberal." Liberalism had in the past "a definite intellectual creed," he remarked, but "Liberalism to-day is hardly more than a temper of mind, vaguely called forward-looking, but quite uncertain as to where to look and what to look forward to." For a political movement, Dewey considered this a tragedy: "For human nature is self-possessed only as it has objects to which it can attach itself."²³

Four years later, Dewey returned to this theme distinguishing between religion, which oppressed humanity, and the religious dimension in human experience emancipated by scientific inquiry and molded through concerted human activity. The "ideals" that are thus generated from, and supported by, "forces in nature and society" create an "active relation . . . to which I would give the name 'God.'" This elevation of man's mastery over nature as the "secure object" of Dewey's search indeed became liberalism's postwar anthem. Deeply reflective of the culture's romance with science and technology, it

nonetheless proved brittle as a unifying national object of allegiance in the coming decades.²⁴

For all of the political and cultural contradictions of the “old” individualism, it had once connected many Americans to the possibility of a broader collective identity, a path that wove through Jeffersonian self-reliance to a concept of citizenship rooted in the social value produced for all by one’s individual work.²⁵ At its most vibrant—in the abolitionist movement, in Populism, Progressivism, the pre-1920 socialist movement, and the women’s movements—these dissidents expanded traditions of individualism into connections, albeit typically brief, to a common good. Dewey was nonetheless right when he argued that the “old” individualism had outlived its usefulness in a corporate, consumer-orientated society and economy whose domineering presence denied a political role for this ethos of individualism. But that same modern social structure also precluded the democratization of that scientific mastery over nature Dewey advocated. Even more, Dewey and the liberalism he in part influenced never quite grasped that their very espousal of human mastery was itself considered blasphemous by a majority of Americans whose object of individual and national “allegiance” was in fact “secured” by their religious faith.

The New Dealers’ turn away from antimonopoly, the most potent political expression of that earlier producer-based individualism, toward a socioeconomic national policy designed to support corporate development and the consumer culture it encouraged, largely eliminated the possibility of the “old” individualism transforming itself into a new fighting liberal faith. As liberals dismissed most redistributive policies that significantly curtailed corporate prerogatives, the potent connection that had once tied the individual to a communal vision sharply ebbed. Without that bridge to common ground, liberals’ continued evocation of individualism encouraged instead a more familiar, private understanding, one focused on the assertion of individual rights and liberties in conflict with the majoritarian ethos formerly evoked by William Jennings Bryan and others. The consequences, we suggest, were profound. Shorn as it was of a redistributive vision and lacking those “secure objects of allegiance,” the New Deal proved to be a weak philosophical alternative to the dominant strain of individualism in the public arena. It would be only a matter of time before liberalism’s more conservative opponents, like Sumner himself, artfully, and to a surprising degree, successfully, presented the political arena as a renewed American battle between the people and the liberal elite.

III

To identify these many stress fractures in the very foundation of the New Deal order is not to dismiss its immense accomplishments. Many historians and frustrated activists, especially those who formed their opinions in the 1970s and 1980s, have been critical of labor’s more bureaucratic form during and after the Second World War. Given the very real obstacles to grander schemes, the

war and postwar eras are best seen as periods of working-class achievement rather than compromise and sellout, a period in which the wartime emergency allowed the unions to gain much of what they were unable to obtain during the thirties. Labor may have rapidly waned as a social insurgency, but the presence and power of unions in the postwar era stood as institutional proof of the far reaching, if simple, idea that common people were entitled to a decent life. Unions checked the unlimited prerogatives of business and, with the passing of each bargaining session and each strike, delivered unprecedented affluence for working people. In the process economic inequality declined, wages and benefits rose, and nonunion working people received important spillover effects. As conservative as the choices may have been from the options available, to have social security, a minimum wage, relief programs, and extensive job creation were significant events in individual and familial experience.

Steelworker's son Jack Metzgar, for instance, could point to a complete transformation in his family's fortunes after the Second World War—from their material well-being to his father's bearing toward supervisors on the shop floor. "No regular guy in the history of the world had seen the material conditions of his life improve more dramatically," he noted about the coming of the CIO to the steel mills. Yet that new material wealth was also more than just that; it was a source of expansive possibility. The "moral injunctions to daily fortitude made so much more sense than when there were so many visible payoffs for doing so," explained Metzgar. "We were learning to tolerate less and less repression from anybody or anything. . . . If what we lived through in the 1950s was not liberation, then liberation never happens in real human lives." That Metzgar quite realistically framed his family's "liberation" as a product of home ownership, a new world of consumer durables, and the lilting sense of hope built upon rising expectations—buoyed by the cycle of social Keynesianism fostered by collective bargaining—is both honest and profoundly suggestive of the outer reaches of American working-class politics.²⁶

Just as the Second World War saved the CIO from its late-thirties' doldrums, so too the war, more than the New Deal itself, created the more equitable economy enjoyed by the Metzgar family. The major reallocation of the American division of wealth was, in fact, not the New Deal but the Second World War. Economists Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez have shown that "the twentieth century decline in inequality took place in a very specific and brief time interval" fostered by the large tax increases necessary to fund the war.²⁷ Prior to 1940 economic power had been consistently concentrated in the top percentiles until what other economists have called the "Great Compression" in the American wage structure that occurred during the war.²⁸ The "surprising fact," Claudia Golden and Robert Margo argue, is that "top wage shares did not recover after the war." Why the wealthiest were not able to recoup their historic percentage of the pie in the immediate postwar era can be attributed to the New Deal policies that, in *maintaining* the pattern of redistribution that had been created during the wartime emergency, shared more widely the benefits of a booming economy. These maintenance policies

(which are often mistakenly considered “redistributive”) were the real foundation of the postwar promise of a “golden age.” This period of rough equity allowed the bottom sixty percent of households to more than double their pretax income between 1949 and 1979. The pattern began to reverse course in the 1970s and, within a decade, the nation’s wealthiest citizens returned to their accustomed, commanding positions of power, unencumbered by significant countervailing forces in either political or economic realms.²⁹

Important as the more expansive terrain of economic opportunity of the postwar era was, however, it did not liberate Americans from the historic constraints of their political culture. Indeed, the inherent limits that framed the New Deal were shared both by liberal elites and, to a significant degree, by a majority of working people as well. Union leaders, for example, with impressive rank and file support, staked their legacy not on racial justice, equal pay, quality of work life, or even on expansion of the movement beyond the white, male, industrial sectors. Rather, what proved most attractive was the welcome security the New Deal offered: the rising wages that encouraged consumption and the legal and economic policies that promised secure, continuous employment. Workers and the union leadership, with significant governmental support, were the bulwark against the unlimited prerogatives of business. Simultaneously, they largely embraced rather than contested the emerging new order.³⁰

In the fifteen years following the Second World War, the return to “normality” and a booming domestic economy appeared to be confirmation that the new system worked. The Cold War certainly raised tensions within liberalism, and between liberalism and a conservative politics less dormant than before, but it actually enhanced the New Deal order’s political strength.³¹ In fact, what was most impressive was the cohesive nationalism that formed public attitudes on this issue. Labor, too, seemed ensconced, an institutional given of the new political order, and a staunch ally in a national anticommunist crusade. The 1955 merger of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations healed internal wounds; and that same year union membership approached thirty-five percent of all wage earners, the highest ever to that date or since. Despite the growing prominence of evangelical revivalists like Billy Graham and the reappearance of morally engaged, grassroots conservative activists, the religious presence in American political life remained comfortably in the cultured hands of the mainline liberal Protestants. Even on racial issues, America’s ever-present reality, improvements appeared evident to many liberal Americans. White workers accommodated to the presence of blacks on the assembly line, if not yet in skilled positions, even as fierce territorial battles over black residential expansion continued in northern cities.³²

While liberal intellectuals began to talk of the “end of ideology,” of how the postwar system had ended class conflict by creating industrial pluralism, and how the unions were now simply junior partners to the corporations in the modern state’s regulatory bureaucracy, other forces were already in motion.³³ On the left, the rising social movements of the sixties tended to see liberalism and labor at first as an ambivalent ally, “its social idealism waning under the

tendencies of bureaucracy, materialism, business ethics," in the words of the New Left's 1962 "Port Huron Statement."³⁴ By the latter half of the sixties, both liberals and the unions grew to become the left's opponents—too bureaucratized, too slow on civil rights, too retrograde on women's issues, and, above all, among the staunchest supporters of the war in Vietnam. From the right, a deep distrust of liberalism, including its "modern Republican" variant, was also evident, as what began as an intellectual critique of the New Deal's "enlightened administration" broadened into a popular movement. William F. Buckley's *National Review* helped move conservatism away from a "stuffy orthodoxy, Republican stand-pat-ism and economic self-interest" by offering what Pat Buchanan called a "snapping pennant" of political faith that played a critical role in encouraging a variety of contentious conservative thinkers to reach ever more receptive audiences with a new vision. Increasingly, in southern California, across the South, and in many Midwestern communities, conservatism turned more populist, demanding the inclusion of the phrase, "under God," in the Pledge of Allegiance and the passage of antiunion "right-to-work" legislation in state after state, while fiercely opposing government-sponsored sex education and the abolition of prayer in the nation's public schools.³⁵

By the early 1960s, a conservative movement had emerged, complete with its own youth wing, Young Americans for Freedom, and with two major achievements to its credit. It offered a potent critique of liberalism with appeals to Dewey's "old" individualism and to anticommunism, two core objects of an American allegiance, and did so in concert with the slowly awakening religious communities long thought by liberal activists to have disintegrated. Second, while the New Left's critique of liberalism dismissed its ideas and its institutions (particularly the Democratic Party and its major ally, organized labor) as equally corrupt, the conservatives scathingly critiqued the liberal Republicans who then dominated the GOP even as they worked consistently and effectively to commandeer that national party. The different approaches proved critical. Barry Goldwater lost the 1964 election to Lyndon Baines Johnson and, as liberals crowed over the demise of a candidate and his movement that the historian Richard Hofstadter scorned as "so bizarre, so archaic, so self-confounding, so remote from the basic American consensus," conservatives planned for the future. Goldwater's more than 26 million voters were a quite respectable base for future political organizing. In Ronald Reagan, an experienced conservative—and once a New Deal enthusiast—the movement found its spokesman and, in 1966, a successful California gubernatorial candidate. Liberal exaltation at Goldwater's defeat proved in but a few years to be as astute as an earlier liberal generation's complacent reaction to the Scopes trial.³⁶

As much as there was an exception that proves the rule of the "long exception," it was another brief but intense period of reform between 1964 and 1965. Politically, the Great Society was an unexpected byproduct of the political capital gained after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the subsequent breaking

of the legislative log jam formed by Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans, and Lyndon B. Johnson's landslide victory over Barry Goldwater. Like the inchoate philosophy of the New Deal, Johnson's most direct attack on inequality, the "war on poverty," was a hodgepodge of programs glued together by a single phrase. Unlike the New Deal's focus on creating jobs directly, however, the "war on poverty" programs emphasized helping individuals to reform themselves so as to gain better access to the job market—mostly through job training and educational assistance.

The tacit assumption of Great Society policymakers was that in the midst of the greatest economic boom in American history, unemployment was not a structural problem but a personal one. Johnson made this pointedly clear during his administration's first months. He declared an "unconditional war on poverty in America" in his January 1964 State of the Union speech and, on February 1, appointed Sargent Shriver, then the director of the Peace Corps, to head the effort. But in a cabinet meeting a few weeks later, when Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz suggested a massive jobs program similar to the New Deal's Works Progress Administration, Johnson's menacing glare foreclosed any movement in that direction: "I have never seen a colder reception from the president," a staff member at that meeting recalled. Johnson "just—absolute blank stare—implied without even opening his mouth that Shriver should move onto the next proposal." Neither a jobs program nor direct relief, both echoes of a New Deal past, were on LBJ's agenda. Rather, his goal remained to make of the poor "tax payers rather than tax eaters."³⁷ The declarations of "unconditional war," moreover, had always been grander than the actual funding. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan explained at the time, the "war" had been "oversold and under financed to the point that its failure was almost a matter of design." No sooner had the political dam broke in 1964-1965, then it began to re-form, blocking future liberal advances, while at the same time Johnson diverted the dollars he originally intended for his domestic war to the war in Vietnam.³⁸

Johnson envisioned his Great Society programs as "fulfilling FDR's mission," but the core focus of those varied legislative acts differed sharply from Roosevelt's. In his May 1964 speech, Johnson proclaimed that the century-long effort "to create an order of plenty for all of our people" had been successful. The current task, down into the coming century, would be "to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life, and to advance the quality of our American civilization." This was the moment for the nation to dedicate itself to reach beyond the "rich ... and the powerful society ... upward toward the Great Society," that place "where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods." This post-materialist appeal was quite different from Roosevelt's, but it did result in an avalanche of social and cultural improvements aimed at a general uplifting of the nation. The creation of the Transportation Department; education bills, with their Pell grants and student loans; consumer protection acts; the creation of the Public Broadcasting System; the national endowments for both the Humanities and

the Arts; the core national environmental acts; and the beautification of the nation's highways did in fact greatly enhance American life. No Great Society innovation proved more popular than Head Start, which focused on the education of the nation's poor children. All of these programs would be attacked directly over the years, but as Robert Dallek has observed, their continued survival, and the broader spirit that motivated them, owes much to their "hold on the public imagination that endures."³⁹

Of the flood of liberal legislation that crossed Johnson's desk prior to the conservative turn of the 1966 midterm elections, none were more important than the creation of Medicare (for the aged) and Medicaid (for the poor) in 1965. National health insurance had been on the progressive docket since the New Deal era, but even at the apex of liberals' postwar power, Johnson felt he did not have the votes to initiate a comprehensive national program of health insurance. By tactically choosing to provide protection to the poor and aged, the Great Society did help close some of the largest gaps in the semiprivate welfare system created after the Second World War. Many Great Society policy makers presumed, in this era of liberal consensus, that the main sectors of the economy would remain unionized indefinitely and medical benefits would only need to be provided for those outside of the well-organized and well-remunerated primary sectors of the economy. In reality, the semiprivate, contractual welfare arrangements were, as Jennifer Klein put it, only "islands of security, with high waters all around."⁴⁰ Within two decades, vast swaths of wage earners would qualify neither for employer-provided health insurance nor the federal programs, and medical benefits provided by a union contract would become an increasingly rare thing for working Americans.⁴¹ The Great Society was built on the premise that the New Deal generation had solved the major structural issues. Those premises, however, were losing both their economic and political validity, leaving the founding arguments of the Great Society greatly weakened.

Central to these developments was the impact of the Civil Rights movement. An eloquent and morally compelling grassroots demand for the extension of citizenship to all individual Americans clashed with the structural limitations of New Deal liberalism. The ensuing public religious framing of demands for citizenship and political rights was often dismissed as extraneous, even a camouflage, to a decidedly secular, progressive liberal social movement. That too it was, but the force of that African American faith in debates over numerous social issues in the coming decades would create tensions both within black communities and with their liberal allies.⁴² The career of Martin Luther King, Jr. also revealed these boundaries. As long as he and the movement remained within the individualist emphasis on citizenship and the American tradition, King remained an icon for liberals, North and South. But as he expanded his focus, integrating issues of poverty, military expenditures, and the morality of the Vietnam War, proudly claiming the antiwar socialist Eugene V. Debs as an influence, many mainstream white liberals began to question and criticize. That others in the movement, reacting as did King to the welcome but still limited

achievement of individual political rights, raised the slogan of black power made the dismissal of King's new approach that much easier.⁴³

In a way that some still found counterintuitive, however, many of the most violent confrontations between blacks and whites occurred not in the South but in northern cities. Early in the 1960s, before the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act the following year, white trade unionists (particularly in the skilled building trades) often found themselves the object of picket lines and sit-ins for maintaining all-white applicant lists for the required apprentice training programs. Their angry responses, sympathetically shared by many other union workers, were in part racially driven, but it was also a defensive reaction to a perceived economic threat. Organized workers, usually white and male, had achieved some extraordinary victories in negotiations with employers over the past decades and enjoyed the benefits of a semiprivate welfare system. Nonunion workers, either excluded from existing unions or in the burgeoning unorganized sectors of the economy—often women and people of color in service occupations—were left out of the club. Even more explosive were the efforts by the Civil Rights movement to expand housing options for blacks in Chicago, Detroit, and other northern cities. So violent was the opposition in Chicago in the summer of 1966 that King declared: "I have never in my life seen such hatred. Not in Mississippi or Alabama. This is a terrible thing."⁴⁴

Many white workers, conscious of protecting the unique gains achieved through contractual agreements, furiously resisted what they perceived as unwarranted attacks on their economic standing and neighborhood boundaries. They felt they were becoming the new forgotten men, a sentiment reinforced by the political drumbeat of Governor George Wallace on the Right and demands for affirmative action on the Left. As school busing moved to the forefront in northern cities after 1966, managed and enforced by federal courts, that anger exploded. In the fallout, a significant number of northern working people, organized or not, gravitated toward more conservative political candidates, and sharply toward Republicans in presidential contests. Many union workers and their leaders believed that their one-time success during the thirties and forties had turned the house of labor into a palace. And perhaps it had, but the entrance was heavily guarded and the foundation lay on shifting sands.⁴⁵

During this decade as well, another major pillar of that 1930s coalition also sharply altered direction. Southern Democrats, generally conservative, were fast changing their registration and voting Republican, driven by resistance to civil rights gains, federal enforcement of the Constitution, and a growing concern with the moral culture of American life. In one of the important—and ironic—realignments in American political life, new Southern suburban Republicans joined to support a Richard Nixon and ultimately a Ronald Reagan in alliance with white working people in the North whose economic interests Southern politicians had so consistently and effectively blocked for a generation. Figures such as Wallace and South Carolina Senator Strom

Thurmond symbolized the nation's evolving political affiliations. Thurmond, who began his career as a states' rights Democrat bolted the party in 1948 to run as a Dixiecrat against Harry Truman and the Roosevelt legacy. Then, in 1964, Thurmond completed his rightward journey, when he announced as a Republican and campaigned intensely for Barry Goldwater throughout the South. As Kevin Phillips suggested, the legions of forgotten men among the Wallace voters—both north and south—were likewise en route from a Democratic past to a Republican future.⁴⁶

IV

Many of the transitions in the late postwar era were embodied on the presidential level in the figure of Richard Nixon. Cambodia and Watergate rightfully overshadow his presidency, but if we take Nixon on his own terms, then his overarching political goal was to build the successor to the Roosevelt coalition—what he liked to call the New Majority. He believed that his 1972 landslide electoral victory was for the Republicans much like the 1936 election was for Roosevelt and the Democrats: the delivery of the common man to the party of Nixon. Although not ready to abandon workers to the free market—in fact still very much governing in a liberal mode—his strategy was to shift the electorate's allegiances from the shared material world of the New Deal to the divisions of culture, social life, and race. As he lectured his advisors about the new world of the 1970s, "The real issues of the election are the ones like patriotism, morality, religion—not the material issues. If the issues were prices and taxes, they'd vote for McGovern."⁴⁷

Writing in the brief halcyon days between Nixon's victory and the Watergate disaster, presidential advisor Patrick Buchanan claimed that "the ideological fault that runs beneath the surface and down the center of the Democratic Party is as deep as any political division in America." The blue collar, lower middle class ethnics and white Southerners "who gave FDR those great landslides" are now in rebellion against the "intellectual aristocracy and liberal elite who now set the course of their party." Although Nixon's electoral victory and the triumphant rhetoric came as the administration was about to crumble under the Watergate scandal, Buchanan was only off the mark by the degree and timing, though not the substance, of his point when he claimed that 1972 "makes the long-predicted 'realignment of parties' a possibility, and could make Mr. Nixon the Republican FDR" and the New Right "the successor to the Roosevelt coalition."⁴⁸ Yet Nixon and his advisors took too much credit for their accomplishment. As Thomas Sugrue argues, the deeper impulses of American history had long been at work. "The 'silent majority' did not emerge *de novo* from the alleged failures of liberalism in the 1960s; it was not the unique product of white rejection of the Great Society. Instead it was the culmination of more than two decades of simmering white discontent and extensive antiliberal political organization."⁴⁹

In the aftermath of Richard Nixon's defeat of George McGovern in 1972, Democratic Senator Eugene McCarthy pinpointed the converse of Nixon's

perceived victory: that the Democrats had long been coasting on their old accomplishments. His party, lamented McCarthy, had not offered any real differences on major issues of collective welfare between themselves and the opposition since 1948. Rather, Democrats had pursued office in the postwar era "trying to get elected on the basis of our old achievements, running on the New Deal, what we did in the 1930s." We "were also running on the old failure of the Republicans," he concluded, reduced to digging up the corpse of Herbert Hoover to rattle voters' fears.⁵⁰

Before liberals were able to recover from the 1972 electoral disaster and enjoy their post-Watergate victories in the 1974 midterms, a crumbling economy destroyed their last claim to leadership. The year 1972 had been the most egalitarian year in US history, the point on the graph where society's largess was shared most equitably; unemployment was at historic lows, and earnings were at their all time high for male wage earners, having climbed an astonishing forty percent since 1960. Beginning in 1973-1974, however, the impact of the New Deal eroded. Real earnings first stagnated, advances driven down by oil shocks and inflation, and then by deindustrialization, plant closings, and a global restructuring of work itself that would continue over the ensuing three decades. Neither the policies nor the political coalitions that had maintained the Second World War era "great compression" proved tenable in the waning days of the long exception. To the present day, earnings for working people have continued to languish, rarely rising above the high achieved in the early 1970s. In 2005, measures of inequality had returned to 1920s levels. Even the relative rise of women's wages in the 1980s is greatly attributable to the decline in male earnings.⁵¹

In the face of the stern economic challenges of the seventies, the absence of a viable collective vision that had briefly animated New Deal liberal policy left few alternatives, while the rising politics of individual rights proved a weak set of protections against the perfect economic storm of the seventies. Despite the collective-sounding left rhetoric that often accompanied demands in the post-1965 civil rights and feminist movements, at the core of these and many other actions was a concern with expanding the rights and freedoms of individuals and social—but not economic—groups. The result would eventually be called "rights consciousness" or "identity politics," a political outlook that contrasted with the economic liberalism of the New Deal. Although the distinction between the two eras is often overdrawn, the new outlook emphasized the rights of previously excluded individuals and groups to equal opportunity. The contrast was most pronounced in labor and employment law, where the old system of labor rights was "fading away," legal scholar Katherine Stone explained, overtaken by "a plethora of new employment rights for individual workers" that promised protection from issues such as discrimination and sexual harassment. A parallel process, with even wider reverberations across American life, marked the feminist movement and the profound changes in gender relations in post-sixties' America. Economic demands—equal

pay for equal work—achieved enormous attention and considerable success in the decades after 1970 but, at its foundation, was built upon the individual right of each woman. The movements for gender equality fundamentally transformed occupational life, but the underlying rationale was consistent with that “old” individualism Dewey had lamented and could be perfectly aligned with enlightened corporate policy (not to mention an economy that increasingly relied upon families with two breadwinners). There was no fundamental contradiction in the fact that a political demand that originated in a rhetorically left-leaning movement but embedded its politics in an individualist vision would find its most effective applications within major corporations.⁵²

The new politics offered a more progressive version of individualism—often based on the rights of previously excluded groups—as well as a telling critique of the whiteness and maleness of the New Deal paradigm. Although blame for the decline of New Deal liberalism is often laid on the table of post-sixties “rights consciousness,” the draw of individual and group rights over collective material well being actually speaks to more profound issues: the historical fragility of class identity in American politics, the exceptional nature of the New Deal order, and the powerful allure of individual rights in American culture. By the time that stagflation, the second greatest set of economic problems of the twentieth century, befuddled policymakers, the New Deal was largely exhausted and the new politics offered few answers to the structural crisis of the seventies. Old-school liberals tried to overcome the divisiveness of post-sixties America by rebuilding a New Deal vision on a shared material platform that included labor law reform, full employment legislation, discussions over industrial policy, and debates over national health insurance. All of these efforts were still born. They scratched their heads as the “presumed Weberian distinction between the rational economic realm and the irrational social realm” broke down into far more complicated axes of political and social identity. Those dimensions of political identity with the most traction for those on both the right and the left proved to be far from the workplace.⁵³

The pre-New Deal system of employee relations once dismissed as “welfare capitalism” returned to fill the breach. In lieu of the fading power of trade unions and the declining efficacy of the regulatory state, working people drifted back toward a corporate paternalism that reinforced employees’ dependence upon the “largesse” of the private sector. Generations of analysts have typically believed that this limited system of worker benefits offered by employers in exchange for loyalty to the corporation of the 1920s broke down of its own accord with inevitable rise of the welfare state and the modern union movement. But, as David Brody argues, “It is comforting to think that welfare capitalism never was a success, never persuaded workingmen that they were best off as wards of the employer, and never took deep roots in the American industrial order. The facts, however suggest otherwise.” Had it not been for the economic, and thus political, trauma of the thirties, the course of corporate paternalism might well have continued uninterrupted as the main current of American

industrial relations even in the postwar era. Sanford Jacoby builds on this, showing the enduring but overlooked legacy of welfare capitalism even at the height of the New Deal's powers and certainly long after their decline.⁵⁴

The ensuing culture wars furthered the erosion of a collective economic vision. Advocates of a pro-choice position on abortion rights, shunning an electoral strategy, joined supporters of busing, affirmative action, and equal employment opportunity by leaning on the courts, which, for the new "forgotten Americans," smacked of a certain distrust of the majority's religiously-informed attitudes. In one respect, liberalism was now back in the dawn of its modern twentieth-century roots, battling against William Jennings Bryan's evocation of community rule. This time, however, the forces of evangelical conservatism, widely, if differently, shared across the society, were the harbingers of the future. As the New Right's media guru Richard Viguerie noted about the seventies, "We never really won until we began stressing issues like busing, abortion, school prayer and gun control. We talked about the sanctity of free enterprise, about the Communist onslaught until we were blue in face. But we didn't start winning majorities in elections until we got down to gut level issues."⁵⁵

The 1960s countercultural challenge to American norms met a parallel fate. The cultural left often melted into some of the nation's most vaunted mainstream traits: consumption, religious revivalism, and antistatism. The Dionysian outlook readily melded with materialism and libertarianism, while America's consumer culture easily absorbed the sixties' more commercially viable trends. The movement's famous search for authenticity and individual meaning had its most lasting *institutional* impact on American life less in the legacy of the counterculture's multiple experiments with communal living than in the potent individualism of Protestant revival evident in the enormous growth of the "New Paradigm," non-denominational evangelical churches started in the late 1960s by converts from the hippie movement, the so-called Jesus people. As Michael Harrington lamented as early as 1973, "The cultural revolution has been subverted by the conservative society in which it is taking place."⁵⁶

In this atmosphere, a struggle to define the meanings of individual rights commanded the dominant position in the public political discourse of both right and left. Conservatives, riding the wave of a grassroots movement that would bring Ronald Reagan to the White House, effectively pitted the rights of the forgotten man and woman against the controlling powers of the state bureaucracy and the courts. Liberals, too, built upon the success of the 1960s in expanding individual rights, just as they were simultaneously reduced to defending rather than advancing the political and economic gains of the 1930s and 1940s. The slogans of the day suggest the new political battlefields: "right to choose," "right to life," "gay rights," "Equal Rights Amendment," "prayer in schools," "right to work," "welfare rights," "consumer rights," and even white ethnics' claims to individual rights through group identity. The rights discourse became "the near-invincible trump card in most debates regarding public policy." The specific applications of this renewed rights ideology served contradictory purposes. For liberals, it marked their growing distance

from New Deal visions while simultaneously drawing them into the deepest currents in American history.⁵⁷

There were some exceptions. The environmental movement grew significantly following the first Earth Day in 1970. In environmentalists' efforts to preserve the broadest common ground, the planet itself, a diverse and energetic network of activists grew and became a factor in American political culture. Environmentalists had significant success in building upon the Great Society's Clean Water and Clean Air Acts to preserve that common good, but continued to battle against the revival of conservative arguments, rooted in free market thought, that decried the regulatory curtailment of corporate prerogatives. Other social movements with collective goals ranging from saving manufacturing from the scourge of deindustrialization, to stopping American intervention in Central America, to blocking nuclear proliferation, offered up visions that reached beyond individual rights and self interest. The outcomes often overwhelmed the intentions.

As the 1970s turned into the 1980s and beyond, many New Deal liberals sensed that something terrible had gone wrong. In retrospect, one can see how liberals reached an impasse, proffering up program after program to deal with social ills. This "thinking like a state," in the words of James Scott, was the only thing close to Dewey's "secure object of allegiance" available to postwar liberals. The labor movement, long the institutional pillar of liberalism, had begun its precipitous decline, nearly wiping out the organizing advances of the CIO four decades earlier. In post-Nixon America, the corporations succeeded in their own counter-reformation of capitalism. This time, however, corporations were less dependent upon state-led redistribution to boost demand than on a global market for cheap labor and an avidly consuming professional middle class. Little wonder then, given this reorganization of the political economy, that a socially progressive, and intensely pragmatic young Southern governor rose to support another Southerner, incumbent president Jimmy Carter, at the 1980 Democratic convention with words rarely if ever heard in such a setting before that moment. The electorate "cannot be moved by the symbols and accomplishments of the Democratic Party of the past," the thirty-four-year-old Bill Clinton declared, and continued:

We were brought up to believe, uncritically, without thinking about it, that our system broke down in the Great Depression, was reconstructed by Franklin Roosevelt through the New Deal and World War II, and would never break again. . . . [But] we must remember that we have no right to expect that this or any system will be permanently prosperous, free of all crises. . . . We did not get into these difficulties overnight, and we will not emerge from them immediately. It is not in the cards.⁵⁸

A decade later this stream of logic would culminate with the rhetorical flourish, "the era of big government is over," albeit, one might add, over only for the forgotten Americans, not for the corporations.⁵⁹

V

Given the intense brevity of the “fragile juggernaut,” it might be more accurate to think of the “Reagan revolution” as the “Reagan restoration,” a return to a more sharply conservative, individualistic reading of constitutional rights and liberties prevalent before the New Deal. That this restoration included a society more sharply stratified by economic distinctions and racial divides, a significantly less liberal interpretation of a host of social and cultural issues, an enhanced fragmentation of working people’s political voice, and a reuniting of religious and conservative activists in civic life is due to many factors. But prominent among them in driving this return to a new Gilded Age was the profound fragility of New Deal liberalism itself. Even so, this was not a restoration in the sense of a return to small government as Reagan so forcefully advertised. As David Stockman’s lament about the Reagan administration’s inability to truly roll back government suggests, a Hamiltonian structure—contra Louis Hartz—was the true vital center of twentieth century American politics. Akin to post-Civil War America, the political discourse of the Reagan Era celebrated the self-made man while denigrating the encroaching powers of government—all the while enlarging those federal powers to new heights. The issue was never really whether that government was large or small as political rhetoric might have us believe, but toward what ends and whose interest those massive institutions would be driven.⁶⁰

The revival of individualism since the decline of the New Deal order developed in a radically expanded and much healthier form. The promise of constitutional rights and liberties has been made much wider and more substantial by the social movements of the twentieth century: there are no segregationist state constitutions, a commitment to gender equality is far broader, and the official forms of Jim Crow are in their grave. The Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act are the most important political achievements of the postwar era, and the transformation in gender relations is the most significant social transformation of the contemporary age. The current—and perhaps exhausted—debate between “class politics” and “identity politics” overlooks the fragility of the one-time leap forward in class identity and how readily a reformed individualism adapted to the deeper impulses in American life. Above all else, any understanding of post-New-Deal-order individualism must place at the center of the discussion the problems involved with the restoration of the nearly-uncontestable power of the fictitious, if legally protected, individual in American life: the corporation.⁶¹

It is all too common to see in this the vacillating “cycles” of partisan history rather than a “long exception.” Undoubtedly, Republican hegemony, like that of the Democrats after the Second World War, will inevitably collapse of its own weight, in-fighting, decadence, contradictions, corruption, and imperial overreach. What replaces it, however, will not be some simple cycle back to a New Deal revival but will most likely be a much more chastened form of liberalism that takes its cues from well outside of the New Deal paradigm. Union

activists succeed, when they do, by using tactics that stay far away from the once-promising mechanisms of the National Labor Relations Act. Similarly, Democrats wring their hands over their rational-secular reputations by seeking to infuse their campaigns with both Southern-ness and spiritual vision. Hopes of decent pay for the working poor turn away from Congress and toward local living-wage coalitions, and some of the best hopes for health-care reform remain on the state level. The representation of workers has returned to the immigrant ethnic enclave, the church, the workers' center, and the occasional union, whose collective strength in the private sector is significantly lower now than in the pre-New Deal era.⁶²

It well may be that the exceptional nature of this era, with all its inherent and largely unresolved contradictions, lasted as long as it did as a result of several interrelated, structural conditions that were not generated directly by the political dynamics of the New Deal. The absence of massive immigration between the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 and the reopening of America's borders in 1965 suspended some of the working-class fragmentation and quickened the process of assimilation of ethnic communities, most importantly in the political arena. The evangelical community remained largely outside of politics, thereby muting a major chord in American political culture. Even one of the centerpieces of American politics, populism, also appears to have entered a hiatus between Father Charles Coughlin and George Wallace, its impulses instead absorbed by the technocratic outlets of collective bargaining, New Deal politics, and Keynesian economics. The global framework was also unique, structured around a pronounced Cold War unity shaped by an economic context of clear American superiority in a stable industrial world. In contrast to the eras before the First World War and after the 1970s, a "de-globalization" of the world economy structured the New Deal and the ensuing decades, channeling profits and productivity gains into domestic reinvestment to the benefits of working Americans.⁶³

To reframe the New Deal order as a long exception, we would argue, is not a jaundiced view of American history but a more thorough understanding of our recent past that can provide a more stable intellectual foundation on which to build discussions of present and future politics. We recognize the contested nature of American politics and social life that have informed a wide variety of dissenting movements, but we also understand that the most powerful aspects of American political culture have proved resistant to these protests. Our aim is not to diminish the vision of those dissenters, but rather to resituate the New Deal era in the broader terrain of US history. In arguing that there is more continuity in American political culture between William Graham Sumner and Richard Nixon, we are clearly positing that, absent major national shocks, the capacity for fundamental political change is limited in the American context. Our founding mythos of individualism has structured our collective life, created much of value, and become so intimately intertwined with the very essence of the nation itself that its limitations become most difficult to

perceive and discuss. If our argument is correct, then conservative victories are more understandable and progressive victories all the more astonishing.

Recognizing the "long exception" allows us to look beyond the static political solutions that emerged in the uniquely traumatic circumstances of the Roosevelt years and begin to consider what Barrington Moore has called "suppressed historical alternatives" that might (re)imagine contemporary bridges between the individualist strains in our public culture and a vision of the common good.⁶⁴ Modern day reformers, for instance, might find more potent historical analogies for contemporary dilemmas in the fluid alliances of the Progressive Era rather than in the administration of Franklin Roosevelt. Indeed, the virtues of that historical movement may actually be in what some note as its flaws: an often pragmatic approach to reform, a diffuse leadership, mixed class alliances, and the lack of a clear left and right dichotomy. As we have suggested, class identification in America has been largely fragmented, influenced by deeper currents in the culture than just the economic. In Michael Kazin's words, Americans tend to see themselves as "a people not a class," suggesting that a real and fruitful politics must be based on those long-standing realities rather than a desire for it to be otherwise.⁶⁵ At their best, the progressive reformers made the best of the power of individualism in American political culture, affirmed a vision of democratic life across class (if decidedly not always racial) lines, and sought a bridge between that individualism and a common good. That approach, with all of its potential for mixed results, is worth revisiting to consider if, and how, it might provide insight on the new problems of our own time.

There have been and will be moments that do occur, where change is possible, when the burden of experience offers new insight even as human contradictions remain a constraint. Humanity is always alive with possibility. As the sociologist Ulrich Beck, argues, "Skepticism . . . makes everything possible again: ethics, morality, knowledge, faith, society, and criticism, but differently—a few sizes smaller, more tentative, more revisable and more capable of learning and thus more curious, more open to the unexpected."⁶⁶

NOTES

An early draft of this essay was given as the Krieger Lecture in American Political Culture, March 13, 2007, Cornell University. We would like to thank Sandy and Carol Krieger for their generous support of the American Studies Program. For comments and criticism, we thank Glenn Altschuler, Kevin Boyle, Robert Bussel, Derek Chang, Dorothy Sue Cobble, Samuel Flaks, William P. Jones, Michael Jones-Correa, Rebecca Givan, Robert Hutchens, Michael Kazin, Isaac Kramnick, Kevin Kruse, Nancy MacLean, Joseph McCartin, Jack Metzgar, Aaron Sachs, Michael Smith, Jason Sokol, Ann Sullivan, Michael Trotti, Clarence Walker, Robert Vanderlan, and Robert Zieger.

1. William Graham Sumner, *The Forgotten Man and Other Essays*, Alert Galloway Keller, ed., (New Haven, 1919), 476, 493, 494.

2. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The 'Forgotten Man' Speech," Radio Address, Albany, N.Y. April 7, 1932. *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Vol. I. (New York, 1938), 625.

3. Richard Nixon, "Acceptance Speech," Republican National Convention, 1968; on his adoption of Wallace, see Jefferson Cowie, "Nixon's Class Struggle: Romancing the New-Right Worker, 1969–1973," *Labor History* 43 (Summer 2002): 257–283.

4. William E. Leuchtenburg, *In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, 2001). Paul Krugman, "For Richer," *New York Times Magazine*, October 20, 2002. The "interregnum" largely rested on the foundation of the massive narrowing of wage inequality during the 1940s, which drifted apart slowly in the fifties and sixties. Income inequality then grew rapidly after the 1970s. See Claudia Goldin and Robert A. Margo, "The Great Compression: The U.S. Wage Structure at Mid-Century," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 107 (February 1992): 1–34.

5. Robert Zieger, *The CIO: 1935–1955* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 1.

6. Gary Gerstle, "The Protean Character of American Liberalism," *American Historical Review* 99 (October 1994): 1043–1073.

7. The literature on the decline of the New Deal order is beyond the scope of a single footnote. As in all of the footnotes in this essay, the citations provide direct sources of quotes, basic introductions to the issues or works that were particularly influential in developing this analysis. No attempt has been made to be exhaustive. For the decline of New Deal liberalism see Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order* (Princeton, 1989); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post War Detroit* (Princeton, 1996); Mathew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, 2006); Michael Goldfield, *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States* (Chicago 1987); Todd Gitlin, *Twilight of Common Dreams* (New York, 1995); Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American* (New York, 1991); Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (New York, 2000); Richard Oestreicher, "The Rules of the Game: Class Politics in Twentieth-Century America," in Kevin Boyle, ed., *Organized Labor and American Politics, 1894–1994: The Labor-Liberal Alliance* (Albany, 1998), 29.

8. By "individualism," we mean to suggest what Wilfred M. McClay has called "the tendency to regard individual men and women as self-contained, contract-making, utility-maximizing, and values-creating actors, who accept only those duties and obligations they elect to accept." See Wilfred M. McClay, "Individualism and Its Discontents," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 77:3 (Summer 2001): 391–406. See also Robert Wuthnow, *American Mythos: Why Our Best Efforts To Be A Better Nation Fall Short* (Princeton, 2006); Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontents: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1996).

9. On Tugwell, see Lawrence W. Levine and Cornelia R. Levine, *The People and the President: America's Conversation with FDR* (Boston, 2002), 219–220. FDR also rhetorically evoked a more collective vision, but without consistent effort. For a recent effort to revive it, see Cass R. Sunstein, *The Second Bill of Rights: FDR's Unfinished Revolution and Why We Need It More Than Ever* (New York, 2004).

10. Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the U.S. Working Class* (New York, 1986); Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton, 2001); Richard Jules Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875–1900* (Urbana, 1986); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1971); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, 1991); Gwendolyn Mink, *Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development: Union, Party, and State, 1875–1920* (Ithaca, 1986); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, 2004); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (New York, 1998); David Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (New York, 1982).

11. Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago* (New York, 1991); Vernon M. Briggs, Jr., *Immigration and American Unionism* (Ithaca, 2001); Daniel Nelson, *Frederick W. Taylor and the Rise of Scientific Management* (Madison, 1980).

12. On new union leadership, Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York, 1977); Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (New York, 1991); Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York, 1995). On the changing role of the

state, see Melvyn Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, 1994); Christopher L. Tomlins, *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law, and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880–1960* (New York, 1985); Zieger, *The CIO*; David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the 20th Century Struggle* (New York, 2nd ed., 1993).

13. Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, 2002), 52–53.

14. Brody, *Labor Embattled: History, Power, Rights* (Urbana, 2005), 140; as Brody noted, “The New Deal was only expressing its own essential conservatism.” *Workers in Industrial America*, 126; Andrew Workman, “Creating the Center: Liberal Intellectuals, the National War Labor Board, and the Stabilization of American Industrial Relations,” Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1993.

15. Alan Brinkley, *End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York, 1995), 4–7; Jack Metzgar, *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered* (Philadelphia, 2000), 62, 146–147. For Roosevelt’s Commonwealth Club address see *American Rhetoric On-Line Speech Bank* (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ldrcommonwealth.htm>); James MacGregor Burns discusses the ambiguities of that 1932 speech in *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York, 1956), 142, 180. For FDR’s 1936 speech see *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, with a Special Introduction and Explanatory Note By President Roosevelt*, Samuel I. Rosenman, compiler, (New York, 13 vols., 1938), V: 230–236. As evident in the Commonwealth speech, FDR delivered two messages, one stressing efficient administration and the other an “economic constitutional order.” But the bottom line, as David M. Kennedy notes, was ultimately to provide security for the vulnerable, but also for working people, investors, and the corporations. See David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York, 1999), 364–365.

16. James Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill, 2005); St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York, 1945); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth Century America* (New York, 2005).

17. Levine and Levine, *The People and the President*, 250–256.

18. August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York, 1979). On Randolph, FDR, and fair employment, see Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge, 1990); Merle E. Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941–1946* (Baton Rouge, 1991). For a sampling of the racial politics in northern cities during the 1940s, see Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (New York, 1983); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, 2003); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, 2003).

19. For an interesting discussion of the religious backgrounds and perspectives of New Dealers in Washington, see Colleen McDannell, *Picturing Faith: Photography and the Great Depression* (New Haven, 2004).

20. Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York, 1997); Edward J. Larson, *Summer For the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York, 1997).

21. John McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York, 2003), 105–114, 130–131, 164. See also the discussion of Baltimore’s working-class Catholics during the 1940s in Kenneth D. Durr, *Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940–1980* (Chapel Hill, 2003), especially chaps. 1–3.

22. Neil Betten, *Catholic Activism and the Industrial Worker* (Gainesville, FL, 1976), 108–123, and especially 110–112; Frank Walsh, *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven, 1996); see also Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (University Park, PA, 1999), 133–143, 165–169. On the issue of Catholic sexual practices, see Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca, 2004). On the broad outlines of Catholic popular social thought, see McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 127–165; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth*

Century Urban North (Chicago, 1996); Durr, *Behind the Backlash*; Jay Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York, 2002), 127–190; David O'Brien, *The Renewal of American Catholicism* (New York, 1972), passim.

23. John Dewey, *Individualism New and Old* (New York, 1930), 59–61, 93; for a fuller exploration, see Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, 1991).

24. John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New York, 1934), 50–51. For a critique of this thinking by a leading American liberal see Reinhold Niebuhr, "Do the State and the Nation Belong to God or the Devil?" (1937) and "Faith and the Sense of Meaning in Human Existence" (1966) in Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics: A Commentary on Religion, Social and Political Thought in a Technological Age*, ed. Ronald H. Stone, (New York, 1968), 3–13, 83–101; Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York, 1985).

25. See Alexis de Tocqueville's discussion of "self interest properly understood" in *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer (Garden City, NY, 1969), 526.

26. Metzgar, *Striking Steel*, 6, 39. Others such as Christopher Tomlins see this "liberation" as little more than a trap, a "counterfeit liberty," that boxed unions into a set of rules and power relations under which it could not possibly win. To the extent this is true, it presumes that the possibility for a more radical transformation was possible in the immediate postwar moment—a position we argue against here. See Christopher L. Tomlins, *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law, and the Organized labor movement in America, 1880–1960* (New York, 1985), 326–328; Nelson Lichtenstein, once very critical of the compromises of the Second World War era, recently explained, "in the early years of the twenty-first century, the potential payoff from the corporatist bargain of the World War II era looks much better than it once did" in the heady years of the early seventies. "Introduction to the New Edition," *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (Philadelphia, 2003 [1982]), xii.

27. Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, "Income Inequality in the United States, 1913–1998," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118 (2003): 1–39.

28. Claudia Goldin and Robert Margo, "The Great Compression: The Wage Structure in the United States at Mid-century," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 107 (1992): 1–34.

29. Robert H. Frank, *Falling Behind: How Rising Inequality Harms the Middle Class* (Berkeley, 2007), 6–14.

30. There are very important but episodic struggles to broaden postwar labor politics. See Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988), 786–811; Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, 2003); Timothy Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960–1980* (Chapel Hill, 1999); George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana, 1994); Howell John Harris, *The Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s* (Madison, 1982); Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (New York, 1982); Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia, 1988); Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana, 1993).

31. See H.W. Brands, *The Strange Death of American Liberalism* (New Haven, 2001).

32. On the merger, see Zieger, *The CIO*, 305–371; Philip A. Taft, *Organized Labor in American History* (New York, 1964). On the emerging challenge to mainline protestant establishment, see William Martin, *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York, 1991); Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*; on racial issues, see Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, 2005); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York, 1977); Taylor Branch, *Paving the Way: America in the King Years, 1954–1963* (New York, 1988).

33. Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York, 1960); Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time: From World War II to Nixon What Happened and Why* (New York, 1976), 74–79; Clark Kerr, *Industrialism and Industrial Man: The Problems of Labor and Management in Economic Growth* (Cambridge, 1960); Derek Bok and John T. Dunlop, *Labor and the American Community* (New York, 1970); Katherine Stone, "The Post-War Paradigm in American Labor Law," *Yale Law Journal* 90 (June 1981), 1509–1580.

34. Students for a Democratic Society, "The Port Huron Statement" (1962) in James Miller, *"Democracy is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York, 1987), 344.

35. As Patrick Buchanan recalled of his and others' experiences in the late 1950s, "...what *National Review* did was to take the word conservatism, then a synonym for, and convert it into the snapping pennant of a fighting faith." Buchanan is quoted in John A. Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, 1997), 63. On the origins of the conservative movement, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, 2001); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York, 2001); John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America* (New York, 2004); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York, 1976); Kruse, *White Flight*. On the ongoing debate over sex education see Kristin Luker, *When Sex Goes to School: Warring Views on Sex—and Sex Education—Since the Sixties* (New York, 2006); on school prayer, see Bruce J. Dierenfield, *The Battle over School Prayer: How Engel v. Vitale Changed America* (Lawrence, KS, 2007).

36. Richard Hofstadter, "A Long View: Goldwater in History," *New York Review of Books*, October 8, 1964, as quoted in Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 452. See also Gary Donaldson, *Liberalism's Last Hurrah: The Presidential Campaign of 1964* (Armonk, NY, 2003).

37. Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York, 2006), 449, 451. See also Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York, 1998), 79; James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900–1985* (Cambridge, 1986), 141. In his footnote (p. 259), Patterson identifies the staffer as Adam Yarmolinsky and quotes his recollections from the unpublished transcript of a 1973 panel discussion at the John F. Kennedy Library, "Poverty and Urban Policy," 287.

38. Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York, 3rd ed., 2007), 110, 192; Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty*, 151. Had the money spent on the war on poverty in the sixties gone directly to those living below the poverty line, it has been calculated that everyone would have received a mere \$70 per year. The welfare debate tipped further away from the New Deal heritage by riding the resurgence of individual rights in the divisive "welfare rights" debates.

39. Robert Dallek, *Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President* (New York, 2004), 155–157, 234–239, 373–374; Bruce J. Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents* (New York, 1995), 99–102 (Johnson's Great Society speech is reprinted at 174–177); Barbara C. Jordan and Elspeth D. Rostow (eds.), *The Great Society: A Twenty Year Critique* (Austin, 1986), particularly the comments of Bill Moyers (35–37, 171–179) and Ray Marshall (53–56). For a detailed narrative of the Great Society's legislative efforts, see Irving Bernstein, *Guns or Butter: The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson* (New York, 1996).

40. Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton, 2003), 257.

41. On the unique aspects of the US welfare state, see Jacob S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States* (New York, 2002); Peter A. Swenson, *Capitalists Against Markets: The Making of Labor Markets and Welfare States in the United States and Sweden* (New York, 2002).

42. See David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, 2004); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, 1994); Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton, 1997); Alton Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, 1984).

43. See Martin Luther King, "A Time to Break Silence" and "Black Power Defined," both delivered in 1967, in James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco, 1986), 231–244, 303–312, respectively; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965–68* (New York, 2006), 581–604, 625. On King and Debs, see Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle from Economic Justice* (Philadelphia, 2007), 320; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*.

44. Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 511; Thomas J. Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from Below: Civil Rights, the Building Trades, and the Politics of Racial Equality in the Urban North, 1945–1969," *Journal of American History* 91 (June 2004): 145–173; Dennis A. Deslippe, "'Do Whites Have Rights?': White Detroit Policemen and 'Reverse Discrimination' Protests in the 1970s," *Journal of American History* 91 (December 2004): 932–960; Durr, *Behind the*

Backlash; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*; Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1985); Self, *American Babylon*.

45. Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945–1968* (Ithaca, 1995); Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, *An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968* (New York, 1969); Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, 1991).

46. Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge, 1997/1969); Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (Garden City, NY, 1970); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge, 1995); Earle Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, 2002); Kruse, *White Flight*; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*.

47. Raymond Price, *With Nixon* (New York, 1977), 121–122; Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for New Majority* (Chapel Hill, 2004); Cowie, “Nixon’s Class Struggle.”

48. Patrick J. Buchanan, *The New Majority: President Nixon at Mid-passage* (Girard Bank, 1973), 63–64.

49. Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 268.

50. McCarthy speech in *Proceedings of the 46th National Convention of the United Mine Workers of America* (Indianapolis, 1973), 276; a similar argument about coasting on one-time success is Rick Perlstein, *The Stock Ticker and the Superjumbo: How the Democrats Can Once Again Become America’s Dominant Political Party* (Chicago, 2005).

51. Daniel H. Weinberg, “A Brief Look at Postwar U.S. Income Inequality,” *Current Population Reports* June 1996, Bureau of the Census (pp. 60–191); Daniel H. Weinberg, Charles T. Nelson, Edward J. Welniak Jr., “Economic Well-Being in the United States: How Much Improvement—Fifty Years of U.S. Income Data from the Current Population Survey: Alternatives, Trends, and Quality,” *American Economic Review* (May 1999): 18–22; *Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 2007; Francine D. Blau and Lawrence M. Kahn, “Gender Differences in Pay,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14 (Fall 2000): 84–85; Goldin and Margo, “The Great Compression.”

52. Brinkley, *End of Reform*, 3–10, 268–271, and passim; Katherine Van Wezel Stone, “The Legacy of Industrial Pluralism: the Tension between Individual Employment Rights and the New Deal Collective Bargaining System,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 59 (Spring 1992): 576; Michael J. Piore and Sean Safford, “Changing Regimes of Workplace Governance, Shifting Axes of Social Mobilization, and the Challenge to Industrial Relations Theory,” *Industrial Relations* 45 (July 2006): 299–325; for the post-civil rights opening of the workplace, see Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge, 2006); Edsall and Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, 95. William Saletan discusses the role of individualism in the pro-choice movement in *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War* (Berkeley, 2003). For an incisive critique of liberalism in this era, see Michael Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1996); alternatively, see Michael Walzer, *Politics and Passion: Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism* (New Haven, 2004) and Walzer, “The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism,” *Political Theory* 18, 1 (February 1990), 6–23.

53. There was precious little history of planning in the postwar era to build upon when the crisis of the seventies hit. Margaret Weir, *Politics and Jobs: The Boundaries of Employment Policy in the United States Material* (Princeton, 1002); Otis L. Graham, *Toward a Planned Society: From Roosevelt to Nixon* (New York, 1976); quote on Weberian rationality from Piore and Safford, “Changing Regimes of Workplace Governance,” 319.

54. Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, 78; Sanford M. Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* (Princeton, 1998).

55. Richard Viguerie quoted in *The Guardian*, April 1, 1981, 5.

56. Chuck Smith began his ministry to former hippies, surfers, and other countercultural types in Southern California in 1966, and membership doubled almost monthly at first. Thirty years later, the Calvary Chapel movement Smith started had sponsored more than 600 loosely affiliated domestic churches, another 200 abroad, and a splinter movement, the Vineyard Church, with another 600 congregations. See Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York, 2000/1993), 12–30; Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, 1997), 17–20, 29–34, and passim. On the continued dramatic growth

of these and other similar congregations in the decade following 1996, see Lauren Sandler, *Righteous: Dispatches from the Evangelical Youth Movement* (New York, 2006) and Jeffrey L. Sheler, *Believers: A Journey into Evangelical America* (New York, 2006); Michael Harrington, *Fragments of the Century* (New York, 1973), 231.

57. Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York, 2005); Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago, 1986); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, 2006); Rieder, *Canarsie*.

58. Governor William Jefferson Clinton, "We Must Speak to America," Democratic National Convention, August 14, 1980, reprinted in Stephen A. Smith, ed., *Preface to the Presidency: Selected Speeches of Bill Clinton, 1974-1992* (Fayetteville, 1996), 24-25.

59. William Jefferson Clinton, "State of the Union Address," January 23, 1996, Washington, D.C. downloaded November 27, 2007, <http://clinton4.nara.gov/WH/New/other/sou.html>

60. David A. Stockman, *Triumph of Politics: How The Reagan Revolution Failed* (New York, 1986); Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of the Republican Era* (Norman, 1995), 25. On Louis Hartz and "American exceptionalism," see Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, 1955); Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York, 1996), and the enormous literature that has grown around Hartz' analysis. On the contradictions of disparaging the state while expanding it in the Reconstruction and Gilded Ages, see Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America After the Civil War* (New Haven, 2007).

61. "Rights consciousness" is critiqued in Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 209-11; for the tension between competing versions of the women's movement see Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, 2004); see also Todd Gitlin, "Beyond Identity Politics: A Modest Precedent" and the response of Michael Eric Dyson, "The Labor of Whiteness, the Whiteness of Labor, and the Perils of Whitewashing," in Steven Fraser and Joshua B. Freeman, eds., *Audacious Democracy: Labor, Intellectuals, and the Social Reconstruction of America* (New York, 1997), 153-172.

62. On the relevance of pre-New Deal tactics, see Clayton Sinyai, "Change to Win: A Gompersism for the Twenty-First Century?" *New Labor Forum* 16 (Spring 2007): 73-; Dorothy Sue Cobble, "Lost Ways of Organizing: Reviving the AFL's Direct Affiliate Strategy," *Industrial Relations* 36 (July 1997): 278-301; on unions' future as coalition partners see Rebecca Kolins Givan, "Side by Side We Battle Onward? Representing Workers in Contemporary America," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 45 (December 2007): 829-854.

63. On union power in an exceptional time of closed borders see Vernon M. Briggs, *Immigration and American Unionism* (Ithaca, NY, 2001); on de-globalization see Jeffry A. Frieden, *Global Capitalism: Its Fall and Rise in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2006).

64. Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (New York, 1979), 376.

65. Michael Kazin, "A People Not a Class: Rethinking the Political Language of the Modern US Labor Movement," in Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker, eds., *Reshaping the U.S. Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s* (London, 1988), 257-286.

66. Ulrich Beck, *Democracy Without Enemies* (Cambridge, 1998).