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EDITOR

Michael Kazin
Georgetown University

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Rebecca Edwards
Vassar College

Adam Rothman
Georgetown University

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outlines of life as it ought to be, that values were implicit in experience."

One wonders what Lincoln would have thought about Boorstin's explanation of America's "genius." Lincoln insisted that experience itself was the problem, especially the experience of slavery, and, to deal with it, America must look to the Bible and return to the values of the Declaration of Independence, the "sheet anchor" of the republic. But the amazing aspect of Boorstin's conservative position of the 1950s is that it anticipated radical positions taken in the 1980s, especially the neopragmatism of the literary scholar Stanley Fish and the philosopher Richard Rorty. They, too, insisted that history and society have no foundation in philosophy or reason, that we are not what we think in any deep reflective sense but simply what we do, and what we do we do culturally not intellectually, simply following the contingencies of convention. That conservatives and radicals can partake of the same mental outlook could very well be called the cunning of consensus.

The consensus school of history was challenged during the 1960s as students took to the streets to protest the Vietnam War; a decade or so later, after the same radical students went to graduate school and received PhDs, they challenged the idea of consensus in the classroom and in their scholarship. Everywhere in American history they found enclaves of resistance and episodes of opposition, continuing moments of conflict that discredited the idea that America could have ever been held together by a set of core values, especially capitalist values. Everything from a labor strike to a hip-hop album was interpreted as subversive and transgressive, as though the worker had no desire for higher wages and the musician could hardly be motivated by money. While professors told their students how radical America was, the polls continually proved how conservative the country was. Professors proved conflict by teaching it; the masses of people proved consensus by heading for the shopping mall.

See also era of consensus, 1952–64; liberalism.

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JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS

liberalism

Liberalism has been a word of multiple meanings and valences ever since the late medieval introduction of the word *liberal* to English from Latin. On the one hand, liberal has indicated an inclination toward freedom, open-mindedness, generosity, and the cultivation of intellect; on the other, a shortage of discipline and practicality. As that cluster of disparate meanings suggests, liberalism has been an essentially contested concept, a problem made even more nettlesome for historians by its constantly changing significance over the last four centuries.

Puritan Origins

The Puritans bound for America on the *Arbella* in 1630 heard John Winthrop urge them to practice a "liberality" of spirit consistent with the Hebrew prophet Nehemiah's exhortations and St. Matthew's rendering of the Christian ideal of benevolence. Winthrop instructed his flock, as God's chosen people, to balance a prudent concern for their families with an unrestrained generosity toward those in need of help. Against the temptation of "selfishness," he counterposed Christ's injunction of unrestrained love and cheerful "liberality" to the poor as the surest sign of God's grace. The Puritans must be "knitted together in this work" and "must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities for the supply of others' necessities." If instead they were "seduced" and served "other Gods," such as "our pleasures and profits," Winthrop warned, they would "surely perish."

Thus began the American liberal project. The tensions between the narrow concern for kin and a broader interest in the community, between the sin of selfishness and the divine injunction to generosity, have persisted ever since. Puritans left England to escape religious constraints and to establish communities governed by rules devised according to their understanding of God's will. In laying those foundations, they demonstrated the inextricable ties between liberality and democracy in America. They also showed the artificiality of separating "negative" from "positive" freedom, an empty and misleading but influential distinction made familiar in recent decades after its introduction in 1958 by the Russian-émigré English philosopher Isaiah Berlin. The Puritans fled from the constraints of Anglicanism, but their escape was meaningful only because it enabled them to establish their own religious and civic institutions. As astute American advocates of liberality from Winthrop until today have understood, freedom from restraint exists only when individuals possess a real opportunity to exercise that freedom within self-governing communities. Fantasies of individual rights independent of the capacity of people to exercise them, or outside the boundaries of law that both constitute and constrain their use, have no foundation in American history.

The tensions between selfishness and generosity marked American colonial development up and down the Atlantic seaboard. Everywhere in Europe's American colonies—as everywhere in Europe—women, the poor, and members of racial and religious minorities were subjected to harsh discipline and excluded from decision-making processes. In this world, hierarchy was taken for granted as God's will. Despite his injunctions to generosity, even Winthrop assumed that there would continue to be rich and poor, powerful and powerless. Free men with property existed at one end of a spectrum; slaves at the other; women, children, artisans, servants, religious minorities, native peoples, and the few free people of color fell somewhere in between. Open-mindedness toward those unlike oneself marked a liberal sensibility, but in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, such toleration existed within rigid frameworks that dictated what types of treatment suited what sorts of people. Sharp distinctions, enforced between slave and free, nonwhite and white, women and men, members of religious minorities and majorities, and those without and with property, curtailed the exercise of the benevolence enjoined by Winthrop.

Rights and Duties in the Age of Democratic Revolutions

Beginning with the Revolution of 1688 in England and continuing through the ratification of the U.S. Constitution a century later, a whirlwind of cultural change uprooted many of these hierarchical patterns and transformed others. These ideas, which provided the ammunition for Americans to construct a new national political culture on the foundations of earlier colonial thought and practice, derived from multiple sources.

In American writers' contributions to transatlantic debates during the age of democratic revolutions, diverse traditions of dissenting Protestantism blended with arguments by Samuel Pufendorf and John Locke concerning the relation between individual rights and God's will, with eighteenth-century Scottish common sense moral philosophy, and with varieties of republican political theory drawn from the ancient world and updated by Renaissance humanists. Attempts to disentangle the religious, liberal, and republican strands of the arguments woven during the eighteenth century are futile and counterproductive. Americans involved in these furious debates cited authorities promiscuously, hijacked arguments for their own particular purposes, and did not always see the differences between traditions that now seem evident to many scholars.

The American discourses of independence and constitution making displayed the full range of meanings contained in the idea of a liberal disposition. A passionate commitment to freedom from British rule inspired the local and state declarations of independence on which Thomas Jefferson drew. Versions of that commitment also surfaced in the early rumblings of antislavery sentiment among African Americans, Quakers, and New Englanders and in the scattered calls for women's rights from writers such as Abigail Adams and Judith Sargent Murray. A commitment to open-mindedness manifested itself in the distinctive American idea of amendable constitutions, a federal structure, independent branches of limited government that quickly contested each other's authority, and provisions to protect personal property and the freedom of speech and religious belief. Reminders of the importance of benevolence and generosity coursed through countless speeches, learned treatises aimed at persuading an international reading audience, and informal pamphlets directed toward ordinary people. In their efforts to balance the unquestionable desire to prosper and the equally genuine concern with advancing what they called

the "general interest," Americans drew on the Hebrew Bible and the Christian scriptures, philosophical and legal tracts on history and ethics, and new-fangled British and French economic ideas about a self-regulating market.

Among the state constitutions that appeared during the war for independence, the Massachusetts constitution drafted by John Adams in 1779 proved the most influential; it manifests impulses persisting in the American colonies from their early seventeenth-century origins. Adams proclaimed the rights to life, liberty, property, free expression, and trial by jury; he balanced those rights against citizens' duty to worship God, obey the law, and contribute to an educational system that extended from elementary schools to the university in Cambridge. In a republic, Adams insisted, duties matter as much as rights, because "good morals are necessary to the preservation of civil society." A government founded on popular sovereignty could flourish only through the general diffusion of "wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue." Without "the principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality," some individuals would be tempted to look to their own "private interest" instead of the proper end of government, "the common good." Unself-consciously echoing John Winthrop, Adams concluded that republican government must "inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence" and inspire "generous sentiments among the people."

Easy agreement on a few principles, however, including the rights to self-government and to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, masked deeper divisions. No sooner had Americans won their independence than citizens of the new nation began to squabble. Those who invoked "justice and the general good," or "the common good of society" against the dangers of selfish factions, as James Madison did in *The Federalist*, were charged with elitist leanings poorly masked by their genuflections to popular government. Many of those who resisted the U.S. Constitution claimed it would empower a rising metropolitan elite. But the backwoodsmen and farmers in western regions, who joined with some urban artisans to oppose the new Constitution, were themselves accused of advancing their own narrow self-interest against the broadly shared goals of political stability and commercial expansion. Thus, the multiple meanings of a "liberal" sensibility became apparent as early as the debates that raged over proposed state and national constitutions in the 1780s.

The Puzzle of Parties

With the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, centuries-old charges that self-government might prove undisciplined and ultimately impractical persuaded increasing numbers of anxious Americans. The first U.S. party system resulted from the contrasting reactions of Americans to their erstwhile ally's dramatically different experience with democracy. Federalists reacted in horror to the assault on individual rights they saw in the Reign of Terror, whereas Jeffersonian Republicans embraced the cause of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* as their own and saw their enemies' embrace of England as treasonous. Both groups embraced ideals of liberality such as freedom, equality, and national self-determination. But only a few years after George Washington warned that political parties would erode Americans' shared commitments to the general good, Jefferson ascended to the presidency in a bitterly contested election that was dubbed a Second American Revolution by his partisans—and by their enemies.

Were either the Federalists or the Jeffersonian Republicans, or were the Whigs or the Jacksonian Democrats that followed them several decades later, more "liberal" than the other? For nearly two centuries, ever since the word *liberal* itself entered Anglo-American discourse with a specifically political meaning during the early nineteenth century, American historians have debated that question. If liberalism is thought to involve generous support for the disfranchised, including African Americans, Indians, and women, and to involve extending educational opportunities and enforcing public authority in the economic sphere for the sake of the common good, then first the Federalists and later the Whigs might deserve to be designated liberals. But if liberalism instead means advancing farmers' and workers' interests against the plutocracy and asserting decentralized local authority against national elites threatening to monopolize political and economic power, then the followers of Jefferson and Jackson ought to be considered the liberals of the antebellum years. To complicate matters even further, many Federalists and Whigs worried about the danger of lawlessness and defended the principle of privilege, hardly a liberal quality, whereas many Jeffersonians and Jacksonians exhibited antiliberal tendencies of their own, ignoring the rights of blacks, Indians, and women as they trumpeted their commitment to white-male democracy.

As those contrasts make clear, both sets of early-nineteenth-century American parties invoked principles and

liberalism

championed programs that drew on some of the original meanings—both favorable and pejorative—of liberality. Only by shoehorning these parties anachronistically into categories that emerged later in American history can either group be made to embody liberal sensibilities, as these were later understood, more fully than the other. The solution to this problem is not to invoke a “liberal” litmus test but to concede that different Americans understood the constellation of liberal commitments toward freedom, toleration, benevolence, cultivation, and popular government in strikingly different ways. Perhaps the French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville’s idea of “self-interest properly understood,” capturing both Americans’ concern with individual rights and the robust sense of social responsibility that inspired them to create countless voluntary organizations, best conveyed the unstable amalgam of American values.

At no time did a unitary “liberal tradition” ever exist in America. The dynamics of antebellum American public life reflected instead racial, gendered, economic, religious, and ethnocultural tensions that increasingly divided the nation along sectional lines. That process culminated in the emergence of Abraham Lincoln, the towering figure of nineteenth-century American politics, the individual who cemented the nation’s enduring commitment to the ideals of liberty, equality, and democracy.

Lincoln’s Legacies

Only after the Civil War did some American writers and politicians enthusiastically and self-consciously embrace the designation *liberal*. Those who called themselves liberals first clustered around Lincoln’s party, the Republican Party that formed in the 1850s from the ashes of the Whigs, an awkward fact for those committed to the idea that Jackson’s Democratic Party was the authentic carrier of a continuous American liberal tradition that began with Jefferson and culminated in Franklin Roosevelt. Post-Civil War Republicans called themselves liberals to signal several commitments. First, they embraced and even extended Lincoln’s plans for reconstructing the South. They fought to secure the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Amendments because they judged the extension of social, economic, and political rights to the freedmen crucial to consolidate the triumph of the Union and transform race relations forever. The unyielding force of racism, a tragic legacy of centuries of slavery, doomed their plans to failure.

Second, they embraced the cause of education and aesthetic cultivation. Together with English liberals such

as John Stuart Mill, American liberals reasoned that the promise of democracy could be redeemed only if all citizens, black and white, women and men, ordinary workers and college-educated professionals, could read and write and participate in public deliberation. Charges of elitism limited the effectiveness of their program of cultural uplift.

Third, many of those who embraced liberalism sought to exchange the strident sectarianism of American religious denominations with a less doctrinaire and more open-minded emphasis on spirituality. Fierce loyalties to particular religious traditions persisted, however, and manifested themselves in fervent critiques of liberalism as a new species of godlessness masquerading as broadmindedness.

Fourth, liberals championed civil service reform. Liberals worked to end the spoils system and the reign of party bosses and urban machines, not because they hated immigrants but because they judged political corruption among the gravest sins of the republic, a flaw that some of them hyperbolically equated with slavery as an abomination of democracy. But the Democratic Party loyalty of immigrants in northern cities—and of Southerners who hated Lincoln as deeply as these liberals revered him—combined to thwart their efforts.

Finally, liberals imported the British and French idea of *laissez-faire*. Opposing the legacies of feudal practices and the stifling mercantilist policies of the nation-state on behalf of a free-market economy made sense in Europe in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But in the United States, economic regulation had been practiced primarily by local and state authorities for the benefit of ordinary people, whether by protecting their neighborhoods against “noxious trades” or by regulating the flow of goods according to the principle *salus populi* (the people’s welfare). So the late-nineteenth-century American campaign to restrict government authority did not liberate the energies of shackled entrepreneurs from the stranglehold of monarchies and landed aristocracies, as British and French liberals had sought to do decades earlier. Only in the economic sphere did late-nineteenth-century American liberals succeed, thereby unleashing a wave of unregulated economic activity that soon swamped agricultural and industrial workers alike.

The New Liberalism

Given the failure of liberals to achieve color-blind democracy in the South or defeat bosses in the North, and given the success of their campaign for *laissez-faire*, the

aging liberal Republicans of the Gilded Age came under fire from a new generation of political and social reformers at the end of the nineteenth century. Emerging first in the radicalism of the Knights of Labor, then in diverse forms of rural discontent that assumed the name of populism, these forms of insurgency gave way to a new coalition of reformers who gradually coalesced around the label *progressives*. Allied as their liberal Republican predecessors had been with like-minded English reformers, these progressives likewise adopted a program similar to that advanced by their early-twentieth-century English counterparts, which they dubbed the "new liberalism."

The new liberalism shared with the older version a commitment to cultural reforms such as education, temperance, and campaigns against prostitution. American new liberals also called for democratic reforms like a nonpartisan civil service, the initiative, referendum, recall, and the direct election of U.S. senators. Some new liberals—though not all—favored woman suffrage. As new liberals continued their predecessors' calls for democratic reform, some understood that commitment to mean the elevation of the electorate's judgment rather than the expansion of its size. In the American South, self-styled progressives sold the exclusionary practices of Jim Crow legislation as a form of democratic "purification," just as some English "liberal imperialists" justified the expansion of empire and the denial of home rule to Ireland as versions of the "White Man's Burden." On the question of extending American power in the Spanish-American War, American liberals old and new divided bitterly. Some, including aging veterans of the Civil War and radical Reconstruction such as New England reformer Thomas Wentworth Higginson and cultural critic Charles Eliot Norton, and others, including the writer Samuel Clemens and the philosopher William James, condemned American expansionism as a repudiation of the nation's most precious democratic ideals. Certain liberals, such as Theodore Roosevelt, interpreted American empire as the natural extension of Americans' reformist energies. The Spanish-American War would not be the last time liberals would divide over the issues of war and peace.

The sharpest departure of the new liberalism from the old, however, came in the domain of economic regulation. Empowered by a conception of economics brought back from Germany by a new generation of scholars such as Richard T. Ely and his student John Commons, reformers denied the timelessness of classical economics and asserted that economic ideas, like all others, develop

historically and must be scrutinized critically. The rise of the social gospel shifted the emphasis of prominent Protestant clergymen such as Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch from the afterlife to the injustices endured by the poor in this life. A new generation of women, often college-educated, sought to exert pressure in various domains. Some justified their reformist activities as a form of "social housekeeping" for which women were uniquely well suited. Others, such as Jane Addams in the settlement house movement, Florence Kelley in the realms of industrial regulation and consumer protection, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the broader campaign for women's equality, worked to reconceive and expand women's roles by reassessing their capacities.

In place of *laissez-faire*, most new liberals called for the federal government to intervene in order to restrain corporate power and restore the rights and freedoms ostensibly secured by law but effectively limited by economic inequality. Progressives created a new apparatus, the regulatory agency, with procedures patterned on the model of scientific inquiry. The officials who staffed regulatory agencies were expected to use their expertise to find and enforce a nonpartisan public interest. Inspired (or shamed) by muckrakers such as Lincoln Steffens, Upton Sinclair, and Ida Tarbell, prominent legislators experimented with new forms of government authority designed to address particular economic and social problems.

Many members of the judiciary abandoned the doctrine of *laissez-faire* and embraced a conception of law as a flexible instrument, an orientation that jurists like Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. and Louis Brandeis developed from the premises of the philosophy of pragmatism developed by William James and John Dewey. The principle animating these reforms descended from the eighteenth-century conception of balancing rights and duties. As Theodore Roosevelt put it in 1910, "Every man holds his property subject to the general right of the community to regulate its use to whatever degree the public welfare may require it." These programs were to be financed by the graduated income tax, which many considered the quintessential progressive reform because it tied the obligation owed to the capacity to contribute. The implementation of these programs, however, left much to be desired. Both legislators and regulatory commissions proved susceptible to capture by those they were empowered to restrain. Business interests proved as creative in eluding government oversight as they were in exploiting new resources and new markets.

liberalism

Despite its failures, the new liberalism permanently transformed American politics. Affirming the principle that government may intervene in the economy to protect the interest of consumers, workers, and other disadvantaged groups remained a pillar of liberal doctrine throughout the twentieth century, as did a more or less self-consciously pragmatist commitment to flexible experimentation in public policy. Whereas the old liberalism had calcified by 1900 around an unyielding commitment to *laissez-faire*, the new liberalism substituted what Walter Lippmann called "mastery" for now-discredited "drift." Many new liberals saw in the open-endedness of pragmatism not a threat to stability but the key to fulfilling what another central theorist, Herbert Croly, called "the promise of American life," the use of democratic means to attain a great national end of active government devoted to serving the common good.

Toward a Second Bill of Rights

World War I constituted a cultural watershed in American life, but politically the changes were more subtle. The war and its aftermath, especially the failure of the United States to join the League of Nations, soured many progressives such as Lippmann on the possibilities of democracy. So did the fracturing of the progressive coalition between its urban and rural factions. Many evangelical Christians supported the prohibition of alcohol and opposed new ideas such as evolution; those passionate commitments divided them sharply from many of their erstwhile progressive allies and opened a new rift between increasingly secular and enduringly religious Americans previously linked by a shared commitment to principles both groups considered liberal. An equally fateful rift opened between those who embraced government power and sought to silence critics of Woodrow Wilson's war effort and those who, like the founding members of the American Civil Liberties Union, considered freedom of speech inviolable. Both the division between progressive and conservative religious groups and the division between civil libertarians and those wary of unregulated speech and behavior have become increasingly deep—and more debilitating both politically and culturally for liberalism—over the last century.

In the 1920s, liberals' pre-World War I interest in bringing scientific expertise to government continued unabated. The most celebrated hero of the war, the "great engineer" Herbert Hoover, abandoned Woodrow Wil-

son's internationalism but continued to think of himself as a progressive keen on efficient management. First as secretary of commerce and then as president, Hoover oversaw a modified regulatory regime that purported to extend the progressives' approach to government-business relations while surrendering decision making to the private sector. When that experiment in corporatism failed dramatically and the nation sank into depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt stumbled into half-hearted versions of progressive economic regulation while forging a coalition of voters that sustained his unstable brand of liberalism for several decades. Some members of Roosevelt's administration embraced much more aggressive schemes of economic planning that would have expanded public control over the private sector to an unprecedented degree. But their efforts, like those of the most ambitious new liberals before them, crumpled in Congress under the assault of critics who characterized such plans as utopian, medieval, Communist, or Fascist.

When the United States was forced into World War II by Pearl Harbor, doctrinal disagreements no longer mattered as much. Spurred by the urgent need to produce military supplies as fast as possible, informal arrangements between government and business facilitated unprecedented economic growth. In the face of never before seen military dangers, government authorities curtailed the civil liberties of many Americans, particularly those of Japanese descent. At the end of the war, the United States faced a new world. Now the richest economy as well as the most powerful military in the world, the nation had to decide how to use its wealth and power. For several years Roosevelt had been developing a plan to meet that challenge, which he outlined in his 1944 State of the Union address and on which he campaigned for reelection that fall.

The Second Bill of Rights, as Roosevelt called his plan, was to include the right of every American to a job at a living wage, adequate food, clothing, housing, medical care, education, and "protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment." Similar programs of social provision took shape throughout the industrialized world. In almost all western European nations, through the efforts of liberal and social democratic coalitions, they came to fruition. Roosevelt griped to Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins that the most visible of these schemes, England's Beveridge Plan, which served as the blueprint for Clement Atlee's postwar Labour government, should have been called the Roosevelt

Plan. But the same forces that had stymied earlier liberal programs did the same to the Second Bill of Rights, which Congress dismantled in the wake of Roosevelt's death. Only a remnant of the plan survived in the form of the G.I. Bill. The benefits provided by even that limited measure fueled a sustained wave of prosperity that lasted three decades, and scholars of the Second Bill of Rights have been left wondering about its effect had Roosevelt lived to shepherd it into law.

Cold War Transformations

The postwar period never saw the resurrection of Roosevelt's ambitious plan, the unrealized ideal of one strand of twentieth-century liberalism. The onset of the cold war transformed American politics even more dramatically than had the Red Scare after World War I. Harry Truman presented his Fair Deal as the culmination of Roosevelt's liberal plan for generous social provision, a benevolent discharging of comfortable Americans' duties to their less fortunate fellow citizens. But, given the perceived threat from an expansionist Soviet Union, such programs were vulnerable to the charge that they had become un-American. After three centuries in which Americans had worked to balance their rights against their responsibilities and the sin of selfishness against the divine command of benevolence, property rights metamorphosed under the shadow of communism into the essence of America and concern with the poor into almost a sign of disloyalty. Consumption replaced generosity in the national pantheon. New Dealers shifted from redistributionist schemes to the stabilizing ideas of English economist John Maynard Keynes; conservatives embraced the free-market principles of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek. Confusingly, both Keynesians who emphasized government intervention through monetary and especially fiscal policy and conservatives who prized laissez-faire called themselves liberals, as European champions of free-market capitalism do to this day. But whereas the heirs of FDR continued to invoke the principle of equality alongside their commitment to liberty, American conservatives increasingly branded egalitarian ideals as socialist and exchanged the term *liberal*, which they rejected as tainted by its association with progressives' and New Dealers' economic programs, for the new label *libertarian*.

Not all American liberals retreated before the widespread enthusiasm for salvation by consumption. Many followed the neo-orthodox Protestant minister Reinhold Niebuhr. Counterposing a newly chastened realism to

the ostensibly naïve reformism of earlier liberals such as Dewey and his followers in the New Deal (many of whom remained committed to the possibilities of radical democracy), Niebuhr urged Americans to acknowledge the pervasiveness of sin and the ubiquity of evil. Tough opponents called for tough-mindedness, and although Niebuhr did not entirely renounce Rauschenbusch's social gospel, many liberals' shift in emphasis from possibilities to dangers, and from pragmatic problem solving to ironies and tragedies, was unmistakable. Whereas Roosevelt had called Americans to an expansive egalitarian mission, liberals such as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. instead urged them to cluster around "the vital center." For many liberals, as well as most libertarians, ambitious egalitarian plans took a backseat to hard-headed geopolitical maneuvering.

Beneath the tone of cold war realism, though, a more subtle shift in liberal focus was taking place. Despite a rhetoric of free-market triumphalism, many ostensibly conservative mid-century Republicans shared liberals' belief that some version of a government-business alliance was in the interest of all Americans. Just as informal gentlemen's agreements had enabled war production to go forward, so new treaties were struck with labor unions, interest groups, and government regulatory agencies in the hope that some new American hybrid would emerge to dissolve the tensions between labor and management. Many liberals shared the confidence that a new, university-trained, non- or post-ideological managerial elite could staff the ramparts of the private and public sectors. Where earlier progressives had seen inevitable conflict, new corporate liberals trumpeted a professionally engineered consensus forged by voluntary accommodation.

So placid (or constricted) did such visions seem that some American observers projected them backward across American history. Many scholars argued that Americans had always agreed on basic principles, but they disagreed in evaluating that consensus. Historian Daniel Boorstin deemed it "the genius of American politics." Political scientist Louis Hartz considered it a tragedy. Unfortunately, one of the most influential books ever written about American politics, Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America*, was also among the most misleading. Not only did Hartz's account minimize the significance of the nonwhites and women who were still ignored by many white male writers in the 1950s, it also papered over the fierce battles that had characterized public life in America ever since the founding of the English colonies. Hartz's portrait of a one-dimensional

liberalism

and stifling consensus flattened a much more conflictual and dynamic record of constant struggles. Liberals grappled with their opponents over the meanings and purposes of American democracy, a conflict that flared into violence and culminated in a bloody Civil War, and even those who assumed the mantle of liberalism frequently disagreed about its meaning.

Indeed, no sooner had sociologist Daniel Bell and other liberals proclaimed "the end of ideology" than dramatic conflicts began breaking out over competing principles. The first battleground was the South. African Americans radicalized by the rhetoric of democracy, by the experience of military life, or by knowledge of a world outside the segregated South mobilized to challenge the stifling regime of Jim Crow. This racial crusade began decades earlier, as signaled by the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. Booker T. Washington had already emerged by then as a prominent educator and writer, and his critic W.E.B. DuBois, the only African American among the founders of the NAACP, had offered profound analyses of "the problem of the color line" as the central challenge of the twentieth century. After simmering for decades without attracting the attention of the mainstream press, the African American campaign for civil rights at last awakened the consciences of white liberals. When the combustible combination of post-World War II agitation, the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (which declared segregation of public facilities unconstitutional), and the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott inspired by Rosa Parks and led by Martin Luther King Jr. came together, the scattered efforts of many activists ignited into a national movement.

Earlier accounts, which centered on the heroic struggles of King and a few visible leaders, have been replaced by broader histories of a "long civil rights movement" that stretched unbroken from the early twentieth century and extended through the efforts of countless foot soldiers who challenged norms of racial subjugation across the nation. Coming as it did at the same time that social scientists and literary scholars were constructing a new paradigm of "human"—as opposed to "national" or "racial" or "ethnic" or "gendered"—characteristics, the civil rights movement rode a wave of universalism that most American liberals took as the harbinger of a transformed set of social relations across earlier chasms of race, class, and gender. From linguistics to sociology,

from anthropology to the study of sexuality, from biology to philosophy, liberal scholarly investigators joined the quest for a common denominator that would link all humans.

These heady ambitions fueled forms of liberal social and political activity that left a permanent imprint on American culture and American law. Under pressure from liberal and radical reformers, race, gender, and labor relations gradually shifted. These changes—piecemeal, partial, and incremental—rarely satisfied impatient liberal activists, yet they nevertheless transformed the American cultural landscape. Campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s on behalf of American women, workers, prisoners, and those who were poor, mentally or physically disabled, gay, lesbian, or aged changed the ways in which employers, police, judges, school officials, architects, engineers, social workers, and physicians worked. In another domain, a chorus of environmentalists assailed smug assumptions about the consequences of Americans' profligate use of natural resources and worked to nurture alternative environmentalist sensibilities. Visionaries saw the dawn of a new age.

Challenges from Right and Left

Within little more than a decade, however, such hopes had evaporated. Struggles within the movements for black liberation, women's liberation, the labor movement, and against the war in Vietnam began to seem almost as bitter as the struggles fought by the partisans in those conflicts against their conservative foes. By the time the prolonged economic expansion of the postwar decades ended with the oil crisis of 1973–74, liberals' cultural confidence had been shattered. They found themselves assailed not only from the right but from a new, and more radical, left. A newly energized conservative movement found a modern leader in the governor of California, Ronald Reagan, and additional support from disgruntled white ethnics, suburbanites anxious about their cultural and religious values and their future, and an increasingly vocal segment of Americans antagonized by blacks, women, and gay and lesbian Americans demanding equal rights. Critics on the left began to assail liberals for their alleged complicity in the forms of racism, sexism, and exclusion practiced internally and in the nation's imperialist atrocities abroad, all of which were said to derive from the Enlightenment's shallow confidence in a narrow form of "reason" that promised liberating fulfillment but delivered only confinement. By the time Reagan was elected president in 1980, liberalism

had become a term of opprobrium for critics on the left as well as the right.

In recent decades liberals have struggled to escape the dismissive caricatures of both radicals and conservatives. Liberals' egalitarian dreams were judged unrealistic and their cultural leanings elitist, their generosity counterproductive and their confidence in reasoned debate faintly comic. Liberals' commitment to freedom of expression also came under attack. By excluding religion and tolerating obscenity, critics charged, liberals made possible a degrading competition between pornography and banality in the value-free zone of popular culture. According to critics left and right, liberals were responsible for all that was wrong with America—even though those groups offered diametrically opposite diagnoses of the nation's maladies.

When the Soviet Union and its satellite states collapsed in 1989–91, and when the domestic U.S. economy began to lose ground relative to both the industrialized and the developing world, liberal confidence was shaken. Without a Communist menace or a socialist alternative, which had provided the fixed points against which many liberals could measure their economic policies, navigating the new terrain of domestic and international politics became more treacherous. Free-market champions and their allies in academic disciplines who were attracted to models proclaiming self-interested behavior as the consequence of "rational choice" increasingly set the terms of social scientific debate. The particularistic agendas of identity politics challenged the integrationist programs of the civil rights movement and the post-World War II wave of feminism. The earlier liberal emphasis on freedom and toleration remained, but in the absence of a compelling agenda of economic reforms premised on the ideal of equality or the older virtue of benevolence, the new liberal critique of a naturalized and thus unassailable free-market model seemed vulnerable to libertarians' charges of impracticality.

By the twenty-first century, few candidates for public office embraced the label of liberalism—not surprising given that fewer than 25 percent of voters identified themselves as liberals. Clearly the momentum had shifted: 50 years earlier Boorstin and Hartz had declared all of American history a species of the genus liberalism, and liberals confidently proclaimed that the future belonged to them as well. Partisan squabbles seemed to be subsiding. New nations were emerging from colonial childhood into full membership in the United Nations. As partialities and particularities ap-

peared to be giving way to a new universalism, a reign of liberal toleration, benevolence, generosity, and cultural cultivation seemed visible on the horizon. One decade into the twenty-first century, that world seemed very far away.

Opposition to the war in Vietnam had prompted liberals to associate flag-waving patriotism with their hawkish opponents, a strategic disaster that enabled conservatives to identify their own aggressive foreign policy with the national interest and to portray liberals as traitors. Particularly after September 11, 2001—and with disastrous consequences—the charge stuck, which was odd given the commitments of earlier American liberals. From the birth of the nation through the Civil War to World War II, most liberals had rallied to legitimate assertions of American power. Relinquishing that tradition proved catastrophic, both culturally and politically. Likewise from the dawn of the United States through the height of the civil rights movement and the opposition to the Vietnam War, liberals mobilized alongside—not against—people of faith. Surrendering religion to the right proved as damaging to the political prospects of liberalism as the widespread concern that liberals were insufficiently patriotic because they disagreed with conservatives over issues of foreign policy.

Yet if liberals were able to recover from those strategic blunders or correct those misperceptions, they might find their fortunes changing in the twenty-first century. Opinion polls demonstrate that the ideals associated with liberalism for the last four centuries retain a grip on the American imagination. If liberals could regain the confidence to embrace and reassert those ideals, and if they could abandon commitments to failed policies and programs and construct a new cultural and political agenda to advance the principles they embrace, they might yet see a brighter horizon. From the early seventeenth century until the present, many of those attuned to liberality have distrusted selfishness and parochialism and embraced the idea that popular sovereignty could enable Americans to replace inherited practices of oppression and hierarchy with open-mindedness and generosity. Achieving those goals remains the challenge facing liberals today.

See also conservatism; democracy, radicalism.

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Libertarian Party

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JAMES T. KLOPPENBERG

Libertarian Party

The Libertarian Party was organized on December 11, 1971, in Denver, Colorado, at the home of David Nolan by a circle of conservative activists furious with the Nixon administration's Keynesian economic policies. In addition to Nolan, a former Republican activist, its leaders included the prominent economist Murray Rothbard, philosophy professor John Hospers, and businessman Edward Crane (later founder of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank). The party quickly became one of the most successful alternative entities in twentieth-century American politics. It gained a place on the presidential ballot of every state by 1980, and as of 2005 had elected a total of more than 600 members to public office on various levels across the country. By July 2006, 235,500 Americans were registered Libertarian Party members. Despite these achievements, however, like many independent political organizations the Libertarian Party has had a greater impact on American political language and ideology than on practical policy—a phenomenon particularly evident in its troubled relationship with the Republican Party.

Members of the Libertarian Party understand individual liberty to be the fundamental and necessary basis