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GODFREY HODGSON

The American century

It was Henry Luce, the founder of *Time*, who in a signed editorial in his own magazine made popular the phrase "the American Century." The century was then already more than two-fifths over. It was 1941, and the Japanese had not yet attacked Pearl Harbor. The argument rumbled on whether the United States should enter the war on the side of Britain against Japanese militarism and German and Italian fascism, as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt privately thought inevitable, or should remain neutral, as a majority of both Congress and public opinion still preferred.

Luce wrote of the American Century not out of triumphalist nationalism but as a prophet calling on his countrymen to take up a burden in the spirit of Christian sacrifice. America should save Britain, Luce said, but, more than that, "we must undertake now to be the Good Samaritan of the entire world." He saw his country as destined to lift mankind "from the level of the beasts to what the Psalmist called a little lower than the angels."[1] The history of the rest of the American century can be seen as a commentary on the extent to which Luce's countrymen lived up to his vision, at home and abroad.

A few days after the century ended, President Clinton in a millennial State of the Union address, drew up his own balance sheet for the century. He spoke as if it was obvious that what Henry Luce dreamed of had come true. "We are fortunate to be alive at this moment in history," he began, to applause from the senators and congressmen, some of whom had only weeks earlier been trying to impeach him. "Never before has our nation enjoyed, at once, so much prosperity and social progress with so little internal crisis and so few external threats. Never before have we had such a blessed opportunity . . . to build the more perfect union of our founders' dreams."[2]

Within weeks, prosperity had been threatened by the sharpest break in the stock market since 1929. Within months external threats of a sinister new kind had shattered New York and Washington. Clinton called on the

country to pursue ideals of social progress that would have been familiar to Franklin Roosevelt. But influential voices were calling for a "new American century" that had less to do with social progress at home and more to say about hegemony abroad. "Does the United States have the resolve," a group of conservative and "neoconservative" intellectuals asked, "to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests?"[3]

The history of the twentieth century, in so far as the United States is concerned, can be seen in two ways. Objectively, it is a success story: the narrative of growing prosperity at home and steadily growing American power and influence abroad. Subjectively, it is a story of constant internal disagreement over such questions as the proper role of government in American society, over the meaning of equality between individuals, races, classes, and sexes, and over America's responsibilities towards the rest of the world. Twentieth-century America was at once stubbornly conservative and obsessed with change, instinctively libertarian and often punitive, secular and religious, egalitarian and yet increasingly unequal, confident and – as the century went on – frequently self-doubting. It was also constantly torn between an impulse to withdraw from a morally dubious world beyond the oceans, and a desire to extend the American way to as much of that world as possible.

It was on the whole a very open society, in the literal sense that it was largely defined by immigration. In 1900 there were 76 million Americans. By the end of the century that had almost quadrupled, to just under 300 million. The rate of economic growth slowed somewhat, from 2 percent a year in the first decade to less than 1 percent at its end. Where in the early nineteenth century American population growth had been maintained by exceptionally high rates of natural increase, in the twentieth century it was largely driven by immigration.

In the first twenty years of the century, immigration was high, mainly from southern and eastern Europe. In the first decade, 8.7 million immigrants arrived, representing a remarkable 10.4 percent of the population. Over the whole sixty years from before the Civil War to the end of World War I, the foreign-born hovered between 13 and 15 percent of the population. Many old-stock Americans felt it was too much. Immigration restrictions were imposed, aimed at allowing in few immigrants who were not of north European ancestry. Then came the Great Depression and World War II. Immigration sank to a trickle: half a million immigrants in the 1930s. Only after the relaxation of immigration controls by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations began to have their effect did a new great flood of

immigrants enter the United States, a total of more than 30 million in the last third of the twentieth century.[4]

This time they were very different people. Up to the 1960s the great majority of immigrants (not counting slaves, those involuntary immigrants) came from Europe; fewer than one in six of the Second Great Migration of the late twentieth century were Europeans. Just over half of them were born in Latin America (half of those in Mexico), and almost exactly a quarter in Asia. Where in 1970 only 5 percent of the population were Hispanic and a mere 1 percent Asian, a widely accepted estimate is that by the middle of the twenty-first century barely half of the population will be of European descent. More than a quarter will be "Hispanic," 8 percent Asian, and 14 percent African American.[5]

In 1900 the American economy and therefore American society were already changing rapidly. After the Civil War, undeterred by sharp recessions in 1873 and 1893, the economy grew rapidly. Manufacturing industry exploded. First textiles and food-processing boomed, then coal to fuel the railroads, iron and steel to build them, machine-building of all kinds, and at the turn of the century the electrical and chemical industries, and a myriad specialist businesses, from retailing, advertising, insurance, banking, printing, and entertainment. At the very beginning of the century, the Spindletop gusher in Texas inaugurated decades of abundant supplies of petroleum and natural gas. No wonder one of the most influential historians wrote a book called *People of Plenty.*[6]

Until the twentieth century, American exports were overwhelmingly agricultural: over 70 percent in each of the three decades from 1870 to 1900. World War I, with German and British industry absorbed with war production, and Britain, France, and (until the Revolution) Russia desperate to buy American food, munitions, and metals, was a decisive opportunity for American manufacturing. It was also the moment, with the City of London stretched to the limits of its credit to pay for American goods and to lend to the Allies, when Wall Street replaced London as the financial capital of the world.

These economic changes altered *where* and *how* Americans lived. In 1900 two-thirds of all Americans, about 50 million, lived in rural settlements, either on the farm or in small towns. In 2000 urban and suburban settlements housed more than 200 million. First it was the great cities that swelled. Railroads concentrate, automobiles disperse. Millions of Americans moved from the farm to the city. Millions both of poor whites and African Americans moved north to Washington and New York, Chicago and Detroit. By the 1920s the urban population had passed the rural population in numbers.

Well-to-do people had long chosen to live in the suburbs. But after World War II, automobile ownership made possible a new kind of commuting. Developers and builders, helped by cheap loans and federal subsidies, built more modest suburbs, and the federal government funded up to 90 percent of highway costs. The freeway, the supermarket, and the suburban mall, reinforced by zoning and tax regimes, gave strong incentives to move out of town.[7] In the 1960s and 1970s, these long-established trends were reinforced by "white flight." Even after the black migration from the Deep South, only 16 percent of the city was black.[8] By the end of the century, African Americans made up over three-quarters of the population, which itself had shrunk from over two million. The black population of the most important metropolitan cities – New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles – grew from under 10 percent to 25 percent, and even higher percentages.

The effects were complex, but dramatic. Crime grew, at least until the 1990s. Racial tension flared sporadically. In spite of the efforts of the Johnson administration, and of countless reform mayors across the country, many of them black, middle-class whites largely abandoned the public school systems. New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, Cleveland, Atlanta, and Washington all elected black mayors from time to time.

The suburbs, too, changed as they became the typical American habitat. Much of the turmoil of the Progressive Era in the early twentieth century, said the great historian Richard Hofstadter, could be explained by the fact that America was born in the country but moved to town. Some of the tensions and frustrations of late twentieth-century America can be put down to the fact that by the end of the century more than half the population had moved on out to the suburbs, where great material comfort and convenience are sometimes purchased at the cost of loneliness, isolation, and even a sense of alienation.

In the twentieth century, the United States was reluctant to fight wars, but did very well out of them when it did. World War I was a bonanza for American industry even before the United States entered the war. The Wilson administration only decided reluctantly to fight when the intercepted Zimmermann telegram revealed that imperial Germany planned to reward Mexico for joining the war on Germany's side with American territory.[9] President Wilson arrived at the Paris peace conference as the arbiter of the world. All the other great powers had either collapsed, like the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman empires, or were much impoverished and diminished, like Britain and France. The United States stepped back from a leading role in the League of Nations because of

Wilson's failure to meet the objections of Henry Cabot Lodge and his supporters in the Senate.[10]

That led to a decade when the American economy prospered exceedingly, while American politics stagnated and American society entered a conservative phase. The twenties has been remembered as the Jazz Age, the decade of the Charleston and the Martini glass: it was also the decade of the second Ku Klux Klan, the Scopes trial, isolationism, business domination, and heavy dark furniture.

The American economy was badly damaged by the Great Depression. But when war came again, once again the territory and industry of the United States were untouched. The economy was revived again by war orders before Pearl Harbor and by the prodigious effort to build American military power between 1942 and 1945. When the conflict ended American industry, with for a time no competitors, enjoyed monopoly profits.

The immediate postwar years were a time not just of great prosperity but of wealth more equitably distributed than at any time since the United States first began to industrialize after the Civil War. With strong government controls and a major role for government in investment, development, and research, it was a social democratic boom. For the first time, millions of Americans bought their own homes. Developers like William J. Levitt put decent suburban homes within reach of the many. Millions, helped by the GI bill, now went to college. Unions collaborated with corporate management.[11] Unemployment was low, real wages grew rapidly, and there was massive investment in housing, industrial plant, and transport. This was the age of the "liberal consensus": conservatives, more or less reluctantly, accepted the domestic welfare state, while liberals – admittedly with significant exceptions on the Left – accepted the anti-communist foreign policy of the Right.

Once it became apparent that Stalin was not the benign "Uncle Joe" of wartime propaganda, the United States was committed to maintaining a state of military preparedness unprecedented in peace time. The Cold War that ensued transformed American society in many ways for the rest of the century.

It created a "military-industrial complex" and what came to be known as the "national security state." This was perhaps necessary, given the real danger from the Soviet Union in an age of nuclear weapons. But it was also something quite alien to the American tradition, hitherto – in spite of the Mexican war, the Civil War, Indian wars, and Caribbean interventions – profoundly civilian. In 1947 the National Security Act reorganized the federal government. It set up the National Security Council and provided the President with a National Security Adviser, soon to become one of the most powerful officials in the federal government. It merged the army air corps and the naval air service into a United States air force, put the air

force, the army, and the navy under a new Department of Defense, and created a Central Intelligence Agency. In 1950, a presidential document, NSC68, placed the government in effect on a war footing and led in a brief period to a fourfold increase in defense expenditure.

Much legislation, including the vast interstate highway program, was justified on grounds of national security. The atomic weapons program, the Cold War, and the expansion of the military permanently altered the balance between the separated powers – in favor of the executive branch. Paranoia about the threat from domestic communism began to shift the centre of gravity of political debate to the Right.

Abroad, the United States built up a network of alliances, treaties, and more than 700 military bases in almost every country outside the sphere of Soviet control. With the larger states of Western Europe, more or less correct diplomatic relations veiled the asymmetry between American power and allied dependence. In developing countries, many of them former colonies emancipated from European domination in large part as a result of American pressure, American ambassadors, in fortress-like embassies, browbeat weak sovereign governments like nineteenth-century European proconsuls.

After the Chinese revolution of 1949, the United States faced not one but two communist potential superpowers, as well as a whole string of East European and Asian "satellites." American policy, proposed by the Russian expert George F. Kennan and interpreted by the "Wise Men" of the foreign policy "Establishment" (Henry Stimson, Dean Acheson, John J. McCloy, and their heirs such as the Bundy brothers) sought to "contain" Soviet and Chinese power, by diplomacy, by nuclear deterrence, and by force only as a last resort.[12] After 1949 Moscow abandoned any intention of a frontal attempt at adding Western Europe to the Soviet empire. Instead, the Soviet leadership sought to isolate the West from markets and sources of raw materials by supporting nationalist and revolutionary movements.

The United States became involved in counterinsurgency operations which often meant supporting authoritarian regimes that were profoundly alien to American traditions of respect for human rights and the rule of law. The culmination of these trends towards unacknowledged imperialism was the war in Vietnam. In the spring of 1965 President Johnson ordered a decisive escalation of American commitment to supporting the government of South Vietnam. North Vietnam, which was supporting a national communist guerrilla war in the South, was bombed, and American troops in the theatre were increased from the 16,000 "advisers" discreetly deployed by President Kennedy to over 500,000, backed by massive air and naval power,

in 1968. Yet it gradually became apparent that a great power that does not win a war, loses it.

The Vietnam War had a complex effect on American society. Many came to feel that the war was morally unjustified. Another, probably larger, segment of public opinion, asked what purpose it served. By the hinge election year of 1968, these very different bodies of opinion, combined, had become a majority. Popular support for the war dwindled. In that year, President Johnson withdrew from running for a second term.

President Nixon, elected as a result of Johnson's abdication, adopted a complicated strategy that amounted to a partially concealed retreat from the war. He and his adviser, Henry Kissinger, devised a strategy for limiting the great damage the war was doing to American society at home and to the reputation of America abroad. They initiated diplomatic contacts with both Russia and China, hoping to persuade them to rein in the Vietnamese communists. They reduced American military presence, claiming that they would rely on air war. To no avail: in 1975 Americans watched with distress as their last forces withdrew, unable to protect those Vietnamese who had supported them from the vengeance of the victors. Publicly and painfully, the greatest power on earth had lost its first war.

African Americans in the South, and to a lesser extent elsewhere in America, enjoyed less than full freedom. Segregated residentially and socially, they were denied civil rights and in the Deep South the vote. Their separate system of education was far from equal. The problem went far beyond the specific injustices suffered by black Americans. In states with almost one-third of the US population, the defense of segregation maintained a flagrantly undemocratic pyramid of power. At the base, police officers, often brutally, kept African Americans in a subordinate role. Too often the courts denied justice to black people. And at the apex of the system a dozen states were virtually one party polities. Political power was a monopoly enjoyed by conservative Democrats devoted to protecting the South's "way of life." A quarter of the United States Senate and 100 members of the House constituted a bloc of conservative Democrats. Far beyond the racial question, this southern domination of national politics affected everything from foreign affairs to budgetary and social policy. Southern senators and congressmen benefited from a "seniority system" that did not begin to crack until the middle 1970s.[13]

In the late 1930s a small group of African American lawyers dared to drive the first wedge into this formidable structure of repressive power. Tactically they chose to campaign for desegregation in education, first in

law schools, then in universities generally, and finally in secondary schools. After a long campaign they won a great victory in 1954. In the famous case of *Brown v. the School Board of Topeka, Kansas* the Supreme Court held that separate education was intrinsically unequal.[14]

Even after the *Brown* decision the Deep South was determined to resist. Change came from activist groups. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., educated son of a respected Atlanta preacher. King had absorbed the ideals and techniques of M. K. Gandhi and the Indian nonviolent resistance movement against British rule. He began to lead demonstrations in one Deep South town after another, culminating in his campaign to desegregate Birmingham, Alabama, and in his great speech at the March on Washington in 1963. At the same time younger activists, less thoughtful than King, in the Congress for Racial Equality and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, began to work at registering black voters in the rural South.[15]

This put national Democratic politicians, torn between their northern labor union, liberal, and black voters and the serried ranks of the southern Democracy, under pressure. It was not until Lyndon Johnson became President (a Texan with conservative instincts but also with a deep commitment to justice for black people) that Congress passed a Civil Rights Act (1964) and a Voting Rights Act (1965).

This marked the end of the first phase of a revolution in the politics of race in America. Black people in the South achieved legal equality. Most southern whites, after the initial shock of desegregation, accepted legal equality more or less reluctantly, sometimes indeed with relief and even pride. But the political geography of the South was profoundly changed.

Many of the more conservative southerners, who had supported conservative Democrats, became Republicans. This process had incalculably important consequences for national politics. Stripped of most of the southern conservatives, and reinforced by millions of southern black voters, the national Democratic party moved sharply to the Left. The Republican party, on the other hand, once proud of its part in preserving the Union and emancipating the slaves, became more clearly identified as conservative.

One unanticipated consequence of the end of the one-party Democratic South was to change the ideological color of the national two-party system. Until the 1960s, if you had to explain to an intelligent foreigner what divided the two American parties, you would have had to refer to the great events of the 1860s: civil war, emancipation, and "Reconstruction." Now, after the great political victories of the Johnson administration, the parties were defined by the events of the 1960s.

The majority of white Americans, even in the South, found it hard to argue with the end of segregation by law. To achieve equality as a fact in the North was far harder. The North, too, was racially segregated, not by law, but by custom. Northern cities and their suburbs were in practice almost as sharply segregated in residential terms as the South, and residential segregation was reflected in schools. Efforts to change this by such court-approved devices as busing were bitterly resented. So were most forms of "affirmative action." White working-class families felt they were being asked to shoulder an unfair share of the burden of social and racial transformation. Efforts to use the power of the federal government for social purposes were more likely to make the government unpopular than to achieve its aims.

Starting as early as 1964, when the Republicans nominated Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona as their candidate, only to hear him proclaim that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no crime," a new radical Right made itself felt in politics. This had many sources: in religious and moral feelings, in economic fears, and in an offended patriotism, brilliantly expressed by Ronald Reagan among many others, that sprang from the feeling that the security and the prestige of the United States had been put at risk.

By the middle 1970s, the United States was experiencing serious economic competition, first from western Europe, then from East Asia. For the first time, the United States was importing energy. After the Arab oil embargo of 1973 and the consequent price rise, Americans, sitting in gas lines, found themselves wondering whether the cheap energy that had fueled American prosperity would last for their children. The country experienced weak economic growth and high inflation.

Now corporate business determined to be master in its own house again. A new generation of managers aggressively challenged the unions, which lost members. The inflation of house prices took whole bands of modestly paid workers, for the first time, into higher tax brackets. Beginning in California in 1977 a tax rebellion spread across the country. Conservative intellectuals began to develop a whole series of new doctrines with appeal to groups of people for whom the old Republican conservatism meant nothing. One was the immensely popular, if fallacious, idea that "liberalism",[16] so far from being the ideology of the working man, was the philosophy of snobbish elites.

Monetarism, supply side economics, and other critiques of New Deal liberalism flourished. The axe was first laid to the roots of "Keynesian" orthodoxy by Milton Friedman in his presidential lecture to the American Economic Association as early as 1967. By the middle 1970s, as he prepared to make a serious run for the presidency, Ronald Reagan had recruited a powerful team of conservative economists to advise him.

A new breed of conservative intellectual impresarios sought to deprive the liberals of the virtual monopoly of influence they had enjoyed. An event of great resonance in this process was the founding in 1973 by a small group led by Irving Kristol of the journal *The Public Interest.* This, together with the group who provided the ideas for Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson's unsuccessful campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1976, which included Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Norman Podhoretz, and Richard Perle, was the first generation of what came to be called the "neoconservatives." At first, the group (admittedly a loose and indeed disparate one) was concerned with refuting what it saw as the un-American New Left thrown up by the antiwar civil rights movements. Only later did a second generation (including some of the sons of the first generation, notably Irving Kristol's son William Kristol) focus more on foreign policy issues.

Foreign policy was, however, one of the fields where the new conservatism first found a response. The Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, enunciated the doctrine that bears his name, that the Soviet Union would always support those struggling for revolution. Soviet policymakers decided to take advantage of the Watergate crisis and of the Carter administration, often by supporting their ally, Cuba. The culmination of this newly aggressive Soviet policy in the developing world came with the invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979.

American conservatives were more concerned by the Nixon–Kissinger policy of détente with the Soviet Union in strategic matters. In the early 1970s the neoconservative group around Senator Jackson linked trade concessions to the Soviet Union with Soviet policy on emigration, especially of Jews. In 1976 a number of influential men formed a Committee on the Present Danger to alert the Washington community to the Soviet threat, and President Ford allowed his Director of Central Intelligence, George H. W. Bush, to set up a group of conservative figures, known as Team B, to criticize the CIA's official estimate of Soviet capabilities and intentions. The stage was being set for a new, more confrontational policy under Ronald Reagan.

Reagan's foreign policy was less simple than many expected when, in a speech to Evangelical ministers in 1983, he characterized the Soviet Union as an "evil empire."[17] By his second term, he could claim decisive success in dismantling the Soviet threat, though much of that happy outcome was due to the unexpectedly rapid disintegration of the Soviet economy. Reagan was intent from the start on successful negotiations with the Soviet Union, but did not believe that a conciliatory stance was the right approach. In the summer of 1983, however, he asked a disarmingly simple question about the conventional belief in "mutually assured deterrence." "Wouldn't

it be better," he asked a national television audience, "to save lives than to avenge them?"[18]

Almost a quarter of a century later, SDI still does not work as a weapons system. But as a diplomatic offensive it was instantly successful. Mikhail Gorbachev, the new Soviet leader, who was attempting to save communism by a strategy of transparency and transformation (*glasnost* and *perestroika*), calculated that an attempt to match American technology would shake the Soviet economy to pieces. He was prepared to end the nuclear competition of the Cold War. Reagan had foreseen this. The supposed simpleton had read the realities of diplomatic conflict better than the experts.

The Gorbachev policy in the Soviet Union led to the collapse of communist regimes in eastern Europe, an event of immense resonance. Reagan's record in the peripheral battlefields was less impressive. He launched a number of military attacks, in Lebanon, Grenada, and Libya. He overestimated the threat from a Leftist government in Nicaragua, and allowed undisciplined staff to mount a clumsy operation to circumvent congressional prohibitions against supporting Right-wing guerrillas there. Yet by his inimitable combination of joviality and toughness, he evoked almost fanatical affection and persuaded a majority of Americans that it was "morning in America."

Lionel Trilling famously declared, in 1950, that liberalism is the only intellectual tradition in the United States. By the 1960s conservative journals and magazines were no longer confined to a ghetto. William F. Buckley and his *National Review* united libertarian and traditional conservatives under the banner of anti-communist nationalism. Editorial writers like Robert Bartley of the *Wall Street Journal* and columnists such as George F. Will in the *Washington Post*, demanded to be taken seriously even by their opponents.

Conservative activists took Democratic political professionals on at their own game. Direct mail fund-raisers like Richard Viguerie and conservative angels such as Joseph Coors of the Heritage Foundation and William Baroody Jr. of the American Enterprise Institute provided the money. From the 1970s, they established first beach-heads, then dominant political machines in many states, prosperous suburban counties, and cities.

The trend was reinforced by developments in the all-important news media.[19] National television arrived in the United States only in 1953, when the first "coast-to-coast hookup" was achieved. For the first few years, American television went through a springtime of innovation, then settled down to what was to be its continuing forte, earning immense profits by not overestimating the taste of the American audience. From the late 1950s until about 1980 both news and entertainment were dominated by the three

national networks, CBS, NBC, and ABC. The country was divided into several hundred markets, almost all of which boasted a local station "affiliated" to each of the networks. Public broadcasting, introduced in 1967, with the Public Broadcasting System for television and National Public Radio, was limited to providing such material as was thought desirable, but from which the commercial networks could not make money.

By the 1960s, more than 80 percent of the population cited television, not radio or newspapers, as the primary source of their national and international news. All three networks were located in New York. They unconsciously imported into their presentation of the news a relatively liberal New York "take." In the 1960s and 1970s the technology, both of production and of distribution, changed fast. Eventually digital technology was to have even greater impact. There was a ready market for a new, higher quality cable television, introduced by pioneers like Ted Turner of Atlanta around 1980. By the early 1990s, cable was giving American viewers quality programming as well as choice. It cut sharply into the near-monopoly of the three networks. Their share of the national audience, once over 90 percent, fell to 60 percent and below. The influence of New York dwindled accordingly. CNN is based in Atlanta. Much cable production comes from Los Angeles. And when Rupert Murdoch's News International launched the Fox network from California, it was unapologetically patriotic, populist, and conservative.

The economy entered the twentieth century still heavily dependent on primary sectors: agriculture, mining, and forestry, though industry was already growing rapidly. In the second and third quarters of the century, manufacturing, using new technologies derived from chemistry and physics and the techniques of mass production and "scientific" management, became the dominant force in the American economy. At the beginning of the century farmers were still numerous, but the dominant unit was the "small town," admittedly an elastic concept that covered many kinds of settlements. When the century began great cities had already acquired the accoutrements of metropolitan life: great universities, public buildings to be compared with those of the great European cities, office buildings that far outstripped in efficiency, not to mention height, anything to be seen on the other side of the Atlantic, museums, symphony orchestras, sports arenas, mass transit systems. More typical than either the very rich or the very poor was a growing American middle class of clerks, industrial workers, and artisans of every kind, most of them living in realistic hope of achieving a decent standard of comfort and dignity.

Several European manufacturers were building cars before Ransom E. Olds built the first gasoline car in America in 1900. Thereafter the American automobile industry grew with astonishing speed. It also offered a kind of model for the development of other industries (radio, aviation, domestic appliances, television, computers) based on technical innovation and production engineering. Competing car manufacturers increasingly relied on marketing that exploited psychological insights as well as on design and commercial hyperbole.

Henry Ford made the first Model T in 1908.[20] By 1913 he was using moving assembly lines, progressively improved. In 1914 he introduced the five-dollar, eight-hour day for workers, and in 1916 US automobile production passed one million units for the first time. In 1917, the year when the United States entered World War I, 14.8 million cars and trucks were registered in the United States, and only 720,000 in the rest of the world. Manufacturing cars, mainly in and immediately around Detroit, became the centerpiece of a vast industrial complex involving steel, glass, and rubber manufacturers, body makers, and subcontractors making thousands of parts.

In the late nineteenth century, an industrial geography had been created between the coal of Pennsylvania and West Virginia and the iron ore of northern Minnesota, shipped by barge through the Sault canal, to the steel mills of Pittsburgh, to be used in the manufacture of steel rails, locomotives, and railroad cars. Now a new industrial empire grew up. It created a lobby in politics even more powerful than the railroads had been in the Gilded Age, involving the automobile, tyre, plastics industries, the truckers and the highway builders and the most powerful industrial lobby of all, the oil industry. The drive to put America on wheels, to build highways and develop ever more and more far-flung suburbs, was backed by growing real estate interests, and by the banking, insurance, and advertising industries.

Even more important was the impact of the automobile industry on American labor. Millions of workers left the farms of the Great Plains and the South to find work in the industrial Midwest. They included millions of African American workers from the Cotton Belt who poured north into Detroit, the South Side of Chicago, the Hough neighborhood in Cleveland, and such Great Lakes industrial cities as Akron, Gary, and Milwaukee. The migration created the preconditions for the racial and political conflicts of the 1960s.

The new consumer-based manufacturing of the 1920s to the 1950s saw the growth of a new "industrial" (as opposed to "craft") unionism. The United Auto Workers pioneered a cooperative unionism based on collective bargaining, elaborate contracts, and broad welfare packages. That won the loyalty of the industrial army that until the 1960s powered the politics of the New Deal and of the Roosevelt coalition in the Democratic

party. For a time, the new labor movement encouraged a new, relatively liberal management and so the politics of consensus.

By the end of the century many different kinds of suburbs had developed. Some were major centers of employment as well as residential settlements. No longer were they all enviably opulent. There were black suburbs and white suburbs, and one notable change was that, where once immigrants had begun their life in America by crowding into city neighborhoods with their "landsmen," in the last quarter of the century immigrants headed straight for the suburbs. Diverse as the suburbs are, they share a characteristic that explains much about the political shift to the Right in the last third of the century. For William Schneider, the chief political commentator for CNN, the move to the suburbs suggested a preference for the private over the public. In 2000 and 2004, President George W. Bush reaped a substantial margin in suburban neighborhoods.

For a time after World War II, as after World War I, other industrial nations were too disrupted to compete with American productivity and efficiency. By 1960, though, the automobile and other engineering industries had revived in Europe. Then came the rise of Japan, and later the appearance of new industrial competitors, especially in Southeast Asia, taking advantage of their wage cost advantage to compete, first in third markets, and increasingly in the American market itself. By the end of the twentieth century, the once all-conquering American manufacturing industry was struggling to survive at home, let alone abroad, and American managements were forced to "outsource" manufacturing to countries many Americans had never heard of. To visit a suburban mall became a geography lesson, with American retailers displaying a profusion of high quality textiles, clothing, and appliances produced in such places as China, India, Central America, and even the Andaman Islands.

The decline of American manufacturing industry was concealed by the technological brilliance and wealth-creating capacity of government military, or as it was called "defense," expenditure. In his farewell address in January 1961, President Eisenhower, warned against what he called "the military-industrial complex":

> This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence – economic, political, even spiritual – is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications.[21]

In the last third of the twentieth century, the economic geography and the social tone of America changed into a post-industrial pattern that was

created in large part by the development of this military industrial complex. (The Internet, for example, developed largely out of the efforts of the Pentagon's Advanced Projects Research Agency.) This profoundly transformed what had once been a deeply civilian country. Tens of millions of American workers can enter the workplace only with name tags and electronic security clearance. By the end of the twentieth century, industry had become intimately tied into the military services. Military officers habitually left to take well-paid jobs in defense industries. Whole new industrial regions, in California and Texas, sprang up to serve the military.

Although around the millennium rash claims were made on behalf of the "new economy," in reality even the relatively brief period of prosperity in the late 1990s did not achieve the all-round success of the years immediately after World War II. Though there was respectable growth, unemployment was relatively low, and there was plenty of technological innovation, the most striking character of the late twentieth-century economy was not its prosperity but its changing nature. Where in mid-century the American economy was driven by manufacturing, now the financial sector was in the driving seat, and its demands were paramount. The values of bankers, brokers, accountants, consultants, and above all lawyers lorded it over those of researchers, scientists, engineers, or inventors. Management took back the control that had been partially lost to unions. Business, too, was remarkably successful in overcoming the unpopularity it had experienced in the Progressive and New Deal eras. Consumers uncritically accepted the authority of brands; many of them became walking billboards, every garment advertising some product or corporation.

Though unemployment never threatened to reach the levels it had reached in the Depression, employment was insecure. The late twentieth century was an age of corporate power. Yet even the corporate elite trod in fear of the stock market and its harsh, unpredictable judgments. The corporate scandals of the time perhaps owed as much to executive fear as to executive greed.

If American society, at the close of the twentieth century, was surprisingly militarized, another transformation struck many observers.[22] Society had also become "southernized." The new conservatism was unmistakably southern. It had many causes, as we have seen. But one of the fundamental causes of the conservative ascendancy was the shifting of the political ballast in the South as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and the enfranchisement of southern blacks. In the late twentieth century southerners dominated the political leadership in both parties, as the names of Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and Al Gore, as well as George Herbert Walker Bush, George W. Bush, Newt Gingrich, Tom DeLay, Trent Lott, and many others remind us.

In the 1960s, it seemed that the South must inevitably become more like the North. Instead, in significant ways the whole country became more like the South. This was not only a matter of enthusiasm for country music and NASCAR racing. Where once the South had been seen as backward, by the 1970s it had become the Sun Belt, representing all that was dynamic in the economy and society, and contrasted with a declining Rust Belt in the Northeast and Midwest. The most prosperous industries congregated in southern California, Texas, Florida, now three of the four most populous states. The new American way of life was to be found in its purest form no longer in New York or Chicago, but in the sprawling metropolises of the Sun Belt and their suburbs, from Miami and Atlanta to Houston, Phoenix, and Los Angeles. "The southernization of American society," writes Michael Lind, "was visible in many realms, from civil rights, where political polarization along racial lines came to define national politics, to economics, where the age-old southern formula of tax cuts, deregulation, free trade and commodity exports came to define the national mainstream."[23]

Nowhere was this more clearly marked than in the role of a new, politicized religion that was quintessentially southern. The new conservatism was inseparable from evangelical Protestantism. Conservative Protestants, especially evangelicals and most of all the Southern Baptists, allied to conservative Catholics and conservative Jews, had acquired power and influence that their own congregations could scarcely have dreamed of at mid-century.

Suburbanized, militarized, "southernized" it might be, but their society at the end of the twentieth century continued to offer Americans practical as well as juridical freedom on a scale unmatched by any society in history. True, even by the end of the 1970s, many of the hopes of the 1960s for the emancipation of racial minorities and the equality of women had proved disappointing. The failure of the Equal Rights Amendment and the rise of the "pro-life" movement are evidence of the latter, and the revulsion against busing, affirmative action, and other measures by which liberal government ought to achieve racial equality, illustrate the former reaction. Yet both minorities and women were in a far stronger and freer state, in terms of both esteem and opportunities, at the end of the century than they had been at its midpoint. Even as the last barriers to advancement for African Americans and for women fell, symbolized by the appointment of Madeleine Albright, Colin Powell, and Condoleezza Rice successively as Secretary of State, so the statistical evidence ground slowly closer and closer to parity. Equality, however, was no longer elusive only for blacks and for women. Whether in terms of income, wealth, education, health care, or opportunity, Americans were getting less equal than they had been, and less equal than the citizens of other advanced democracies.[24]

The freedom of American life, however, as distinct from equality, was not primarily the product of political action. To some degree, it had always been inherent in the space and the resources of America. It was implied in the near-complete absence of feudal relations in American society from the beginning.[25] Freedom and opportunity have always been central to the American ideology. They have also been delivered by institutions of many kinds, and the number of those who could enjoy practical freedom and opportunity grew steadily over the course of the twentieth century. If internationally the twentieth century was the American century, internally it was the century of steadily expanding opportunity to enjoy freedoms that had once been the prerogative of the few.

Educational opportunity extended steadily. For the first half of the century the quality of public schools and of public universities improved. Immigrants from abroad, and internal migrants from poor regions, could receive an education that put them close to equality with those privileged by private education. In the last quarter of the century, to be sure, that process was slowed and in some places reversed. Public secondary schools, at least in the bigger cities, fell behind private schools and the best suburban public schools. Public universities, except for a dozen or so with substantial endowments, could not compete with the great private universities. But that was a worry for the future. The striking fact in the twentieth century was the contribution educational institutions made to opportunity of many kinds.

Less obvious, but even more pervasive, was the contribution of commercial energy and innovation, and especially that of the institutions of credit. Banks, mortgage lenders, credit card companies, and retailers made it possible for the ordinary citizen to travel, to buy homes, cars, appliances, many manufactured cheaply abroad, in a variety and profusion of ways unimagined in earlier generations.

The expansion of credit may have dangers for the future. Not only has the federal government, even in the hands of the Republican party, traditional guardian of monetary probity, lurched into unprecedented levels of deficit and debt. Individual Americans, too, have grown accustomed to owe their soul, not to the "company store," but to the credit card providers. By the end of the century many questioned how long foreign holders of the dollar will be content to hold dollar assets. That was a dramatic shift since the days when the dollar was the world's only "hard currency."

The "default" in American domestic politics has been business hegemony. Business and its spokesmen reigned in the 1920s and the 1950s and again in the closing years of the twentieth century. Every generation or so, however, business is perceived as having failed or overreached itself. Thus in the Progressive era it was seen as having usurped political power. In the Great

Depression it failed to provide prosperity. In the 1950s, as a succession of worried bestsellers warned, a Power Elite led by the Man in the Gray Flannel suit, the Organization Man and his Hidden Persuaders was felt to be trying to impose conformism. In the 1960s, business dominance was challenged by housewives, students, environmentalists, and sexual and racial minorities. By the 1980s, however, business ascendancy was back, reinforced by a new morality, a new nationalism, and a newly politicized religion. At the end of the century, American society was polarized between those who found the dominance of business chafing, and those – a narrow but decisive majority – who resented criticism of the status quo more than they wanted to criticize its limitations.

The American twentieth century divides rather neatly into three periods, separated by two ties of social and political crisis. The first third of the century, astride the triumph of World War I, was a time of buoyant optimism. Before the war, this took the form of Progressivism, itself a complex blend of nostalgia for the imagined simplicities of the agrarian past and ambition to build a juster and more efficient society. In the 1920s the emphasis was on social conservatism and economic expansion. Then, in 1929, came the Great Crash. Unemployment reached close to one-quarter of the workforce. Banks closed. Panic was only calmed by Franklin Roosevelt's bold action to preserve American capitalism and constitutional government.

The middle third of the century was a time of recovery, leading to triumphant success. The United States emerged from World War II not only the most powerful nation on earth, but also a fairer and more open social democracy than even the Progressives had contemplated. A "liberal consensus" brought conservatives and liberals together, as both agreed to restrain their ambition to impose their vision. Yet the Cold War subjected American society to strains that were not always fully understood. As a result, a second, more subtle time of troubles arrived at about the two-thirds mark of the century. The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War combined to challenge all traditional forms of authority. During the five years from the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963 to the election of President Nixon in November 1968, these strains ended the era of liberal consensus and social democracy and opened the way for a conservative ascendancy that was sealed by the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

The mood of 2000 hardly qualified as national contentment. But it did constitute a broad acceptance that American life, if not perfect, was better than any alternative. It was this, rather than any Lucean ambition to be the world's Good Samaritan, that inspired a growing belief that it would be the destiny of the United States, in spite of the incomprehension of an ungrateful world, to build a new American century.

NOTES

1. Henry R. Luce, editorial, *Time* magazine, February 1941.
2. William Jefferson Clinton, State of the Union message, January 27, 2000.
3. William Kristol and others, *Project for a New American Century*, www.newamericancentury.org.
4. Desmond King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race and the Making of a Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
5. James P. Smith and Barry Edmonston (eds.), *The New American Economics, Demographic and Fiscal Effects of Immigration* (Washington DC: National Academy Press, 1997).
6. David M. Potter, *People of Plenty, Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).
7. On the problems of cities and the rise of the suburbs, see Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).
8. On the black migration, Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: the Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Knopf, 1991).
9. Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Zimmermann Telegram* (New York: Ballantine (Random House), 1958).
10. John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Breaking the Heart of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
11. Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).
12. Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).
13. On the lasting effect of the racial conflicts of the 1960s on the rise of conservatism, see Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).
14. See C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).
15. On the civil rights revolution, there is a vast literature. Try Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954 to 1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).
16. The word "liberalism," which had once described the free trade, *laissez-faire* ideas of businessmen, had become a euphemism for socialist or social democratic ideas.
17. Speech to National Association of Evangelicals, March 1983. See Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 241.
18. Address to the Nation on National Security by President Ronald Reagan, March 23, 1983.
19. A good introduction is Michael and Edwin Emery, *The Press and America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992).

20. The following automobile statistics are taken from Richard A. Wright, *West of Laramie*, a history of the automobile written for the Antique Automobile Club of America and published on its website, aaca.org.
21. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Farewell Address to the Nation, January 17, 1961.
22. For example, John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie; the Southernization of America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1973); Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South Is Shaping American Values, Politics and Culture* (New York: Random House, 1996); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Godfrey Hodgson, *More Equal Than Others* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2004); Michael Lind, in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (eds.) *Ruling America* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2005).
23. Lind in Fraser and Gerstle, *Ruling America*, p. 253.
24. See Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and John Schmitt, *The State of Working America, 2000/2001*, Washington DC, Economic Policy Council (Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press, 2001); Hodgson, *More Equal Than Others*.
25. Only near complete. Slavery notoriously imitated and indeed exceeded the power relations of feudal society, since rights were implicit in feudal societies, while slavery, at least in North America, denied all rights. And here and there a kind of feudalism lasted well into the nineteenth century. See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), p. 212, for the 80,000 tenants of the van Rensselaer manor in the Hudson valley in the 1830s. Similar conditions have appeared in south Texas, northern New Mexico and elsewhere. But American institutions have never been feudal, and the feudal spirit has never reigned unchallenged in America.

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