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Missing In Action: The New Deal Legacy In American Politics



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As Europe in the nineteen thirties struggled with economic depression, fascism and the coming second round of the First World War, the United States was a source of hope. Auden's "low dishonest decade" was less low, less dishonest, in the United States: that no doubt accounted for his decision to live with us. I grew up in New Deal New York. We were aware of the terrors, actual and impending in Europe, of the flagrant injustice of much of our national life, of the enemies of what two decades earlier was termed by a characteristic figure of the Progressive epoch "The Promise of American Life." Still, for my generation it was a time of actual and imaginative liberation, of a sense of battles joyfully joined and still to come, of solidarity in the construction of a new politics. Franklin Roosevelt, with his direct and robust imagery, his biting contempt for greed and reaction, his challenge to fear and passivity, was our charismatic leader. The patrician New Yorker led a coalition of the most disparate sort. It united Catholics, Jews and socially engaged Protestants in a common effort to reclaim a heritage of radical republicanism, used the secular intellectual legacy of a half century of social criticism, and recruited tens of thousands of activists for permanent duty in the government agencies and social movements struggling to achieve New Deal reforms.

The New Deal was sustained by its own culture—and by a public it brought into being. It embodied a large break with the continuity of American politics, but it was nonetheless a result of some fifty years of social thought, institutional experimentation, and political mobilization. Three major streams of politics flowed into it. One was the Progressivism of the middle class reformers repelled by the corruption and vulgarity of late nineteenth and early twentieth century capitalism. Often Protestant descendants of the abolitionists who abjured slavery and had fought for the Union in the Civil War, they thought of themselves as restoring the nation to its proper custodians, a responsible citizenry in general and a dedicated elite in particular. The Progressives, in control of some municipal and state governments, assumed command of the Federal state with Theodore Roosevelt. Attentive to the social achievements of Imperial Germany and Lloyd George's United Kingdom, they instituted regulation of the market and the beginnings of an American welfare state. They co-existed uneasily with, and often opposed, the Populists - whose high point was the Presidential candidacy of William Jennings Bryan in 1896. The Populists were strong in the west and south, amongst agrarian freeholders strenuously opposed to eastern capital and its control of credit, transport and markets. They had difficulty making common cause with the Progressives, who concentrated on reform of the expanding urban society they distrusted. They had more difficulty joining the urban working class, often composed of recent immigrants — many of them Catholic. That class included socialists come from Europe-allied with homegrown radicals who saw in socialism a continuation of an American revolutionary tradition. The new working class was,

however, ideologically and politically divided. Its Catholic components were strong advocates of solidarity and social legislation — but not of a self governing economy. The socialists had to contend with a trade union movement increasingly dominated by a rejection of a larger strategy for social transformation in favor of concentration on immediate gains in the workplace and wage packet.

These three major currents that led to the New Deal, then, were originally often at odds with one another and each was frequently rent by internal conflicts. One understands the fear and loathing Of Roosevelt by the right: after all, anyone who could join the US Catholic Bishops (distinctly pre Vatican II) and the American Communist party behind his program was formidable indeed.

The three currents did not flow directly into the New Deal. They were transmuted by Woodrow Wilson's wartime government and by the contradictory and jagged experience of the twenties. Wilson's "New Freedom" in governmental practise resembled Theodore Roosevelt's Progressivism in its opposition to the sovereignty of the market. The mobilization of the nation for the war in 1917 and 1918 expanded the functions of government and generated a politics in which civil society was directly organized by it. The trade unions were induced to collaborate with capital and government, members of the intelligentsia recruited as bureaucrats and propagandists. The technocratic tendencies conspicuous in Progressivism were greatly reinforced. The war was, no less importantly, an occasion for the near destruction of the socialist movement - which opposed it. Henceforth, the social imperialism of Theodore Roosevelt's explicit pursuit of world power would be inextricably connected to American social reform. Franklin Roosevelt served in the Wilson government as an Assistant Secretary of the Navy—the position Theodore Roosevelt occupied at the beginning of his career. Like his elder cousin, he also was Governor of New York — which, with states like California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, functioned as a laboratory of social reform. Franklin Roosevelt was less of a social imperialist, on the world scale, than a social democrat. Put in another way, he was a truer Wilsonian than Wilson himself: he took the democratization of US society to be a precondition of the spread of democracy abroad. He was, also, an anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist with at least a sense of US culpability in these regards in the western hemisphere. The New Dealers, however, were the descendants of the Progressives in their assumption that the US was in the vanguard of global progress. Unlike the founding imperial generation in 1898, they did not think of the cultural and racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxons (since some were Catholics and Jews, and others inveterate antagonists of the east coast gentry, they could not think in these terms.) They did, however, have a sense of American mission all the more acute because of their own social ascent in the nation. The New Deal legacy, then, involved a continuous alternation between two poles: the reconstruction of the domestic social order and the defense of that order by geopolitical and ideological engagement in the rest of the world. What the New Dealers did not imagine was that by declaring the US the achieved revolution, later generations could legitimate in the eyes of the American people the nation's present global role as champion of order and property.

The New Deal began in a series of efforts to overcome the worst effects of the Great Depression in 1933, continued with the legislative program of 1934 onward, which ended abruptly in 1938 - despite Roosevelt's extraordinary electoral triumph of 1936.

He was defeated in his attempt to reform the Supreme Court, and in his effort to purge the southern Democratic Party of reactionaries in favor of New Dealers. The legislation included the Social Security program for old age pensions, a new law. The Wagner Act, which regulated industrial relations in a way that facilitated unionization, and a number of major regulatory initiatives which brought banking, a great deal of inter-state commerce, and the stock market under rigorous Federal supervision. In addition, there were major public works projects (dams, waterways, urban infra-structure) and programs

of price support and technical aid for agriculture. The cessation of major new initiatives in 1938 was the beginning of a retrenchment: in that year reductions in government spending again depressed the economy. Roosevelt himself declared, once war had begun in 1941, that he was no longer "Mr. New Deal" but "Doctor Win The War."

In the long view, however, the New Deal profoundly altered politics - ideologically and materially—in the decades that followed. It declared large scale economic intervention by the Federal state legitimate and set as the goal of public policy an increase in the general standard of living. New Dealers depicted government as ideally functioning to reduce the discrepancies in influence and power between the wealthy and ordinary citizens: government was henceforth responsible for minima of economic equality. As the nation urbanized, the New Deal brought city dwellers (many of them offspring of the great waves of immigration from Europe of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) into the center of American politics. Catholics and Jews gained, in substantive terms, *droit de la cite*. New Deal jurisprudence, based on the work of the legal realists, insisted on the primacy of the Federal government. "State's Rights" was then as it is now mainly a transparent rationalization of the entrenched powers of property and race. New Deal jurists also undermined narrow interpretations of "Freedom Of Contract" which ignored power relations in the market and workplace. New Deal cultural work entailed a radical populism in content, often enough, but the notion that government had a responsibility to encourage the arts left space for the complexities of modernism. (Chaplin, a New Dealer, combined both - and the great anti-fascist film *Casablanca* was a product of New Deal internationalism.)

The New Deal directly empowered two groups which assumed central roles in public life. One was the industrial working class, organized in a greatly expanded union movement. The other was an educated intelligentsia (economists, historians, lawyers, political scientists, social policy experts, publicists, writers) which in and out of government, in specialized administrative and political tasks or in addressing the general public, provided ideological coherence and intellectual substance to New Deal policies. Less directly, the New Deal enlarged possibilities for blacks and women: the movements of the sixties were made possible by the widening of legal and social possibility of the thirties and forties.

The war of 1941-45 in many ways consolidated the New Deal. It brought full employment. Later forced out, women entered the labor force in large numbers and in jobs previously reserved for men. It enabled black leaders to gain access for blacks to extensive industrial employment. Price controls and rationing induced some distributive equality in the light of shortages and attempted manipulations of the market. Unions gained members and had a share of economic governance on national boards steering the war economy. The sense of national solidarity accompanying the war was ambiguous.

In part, it was a linear continuation of New Deal nationalism - an ideology with recognizable social democratic content. In part it had large components of chauvinism (and in the war against Japan, a great deal of racism.) There was a good deal of social mixing, across ethnic and regional (if not racial) lines — confirming the New Deal's idea of one nation. An undertone of American millennialism, of imperial triumphalism, was quite discernible - to harden, later, into the dogma of the Cold War. The New Deal intelligentsia meanwhile became more aware of its national indispensability, less attached to the popular and public interests it had served, more open to collaboration with capital. The more intelligent segments of capital learned that there was an alternative to demonization of the state in its regulatory and redistributive functions - colonization of it in capital's interests.

The immediate post-war period – let us say, 1945 to 1948 - was characterized by three major developments. The New Deal's political vanguard, esconced in the trade unions and the Truman government and in city and state governments as well, made a basic decision expressed in Truman's 1948 electoral slogan, "Don't let them take it away." The conquests of the New Deal, Social Security, the regulatory functions of the state were to be conserved. For the rest, capital was to be induced to accept Keynesian investment responsibilities and a social contract based on a rising standard of living for a nation of consumers. Greatly enlarged governmental support for home ownership (subsidies, tax advantages, the construction of infra-structure) made possible the post-war expansion of the suburbs. A new middle class labor force was created by a scholarship program for returning members of the armed services. National health insurance, however, failed of enactment. This defeat, like the abolition of price controls and the attenuation or elimination of wartime regulation of the economy, was an aspect of the second major postwar development. Systematically, organized capital used the Republican Party and a large segment of the Democrats (particularly but not exclusively the southern ones), in a permanent counter-revolution, an effort to contain, bunt and stop New Deal initiatives—and to prepare for an eventual return to the total sovereignty of the market. The more sophisticated (which is to say, the highest) echelons of organized capital were quite capable of pursuing this design while compromising or temporizing with the extant New Deal forces, the more so as these could hardly be ignored or shrunk. They left to the more vulgar and provincial (and to the nouveaux riches of the south and west, so fully represented in the Reagan and Bush governments a generation and more later) total opposition. That expressed itself in connection with the third major post-war development: the beginning of the Cold War. The war against Germany and Japan was conducted as a bi-partisan venture, with senior posts going to representatives of Capital (some of them corporate lawyers who were predecessors in government of their colleagues Acheson and Dulles). The Cold War was conducted in similar fashion, with Truman obtaining a great deal of Republican support for the early confrontations with China and the Soviet Union, remobilization and rearmament, and the war in Korea. The persecution of the American left known as McCarthyism (by no means exclusively the work of the alcoholic Senator from Wisconsin), in which a hunt for "Communists" was extended to the systematic persecution and proscription of dissent, was made possible by the anxieties generated by the Cold War in the public. The Democrats, and a considerable number of New Dealers, with varying degrees of reluctance, and some reservations, accepted the ideological framework which made McCarthyism possible. The Cold War, in the new consumer's republic, had something for everybody: chauvinist frenzy for the primitives, doctrines of American exceptionalism for many, and millennial tasks, paid in earthly coin, for the intelligentsia.

Given these historical beginnings, is perhaps the interesting thing about the past fifty years is not how little but how much of the New Deal survived? I am unconvinced, and in teaching, I was struck time and time again not only by the ignorance of successive cohorts of students about the New Deal but by their lack of curiosity about their families' experiences in the thirties. I do not believe that our culture lives fixated on the future (if it did, more Americans would be environmentalists and in view of the ascent of China and India, fewer would be such self-confident imperialists). It seems, rather, to live in an unvarying present - in which everything is contemporaneous and nothing follows. The fifty years I am about to describe were sequential, torrential in events decisive for the following decades. There were so many points of excruciating intensity (the narrow escape from nuclear war in 1962, the terrible assassinations of John Kennedy and later of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the civil rights struggle, the war in Viet-Nam and its domestic consequences, the movements of the sixties, the self-destruction of Richard Nixon, the recrudescence of Republicanism, and now the burgeoning chaos of the war on Islam) that their mere enumeration is a test of our moral endurance. I shall consider the period as a whole — as refracted in a number of American institutions.

Our culture is at present so divided that to think of it as organized into one complex is to simplify - quite unheroically. Disraeli's "Two Nations" in a contemporary American version would have to be about twenty. Yes, everyone knows the familiar electoral maps of "Red" America - curiously, the Republican states - and its "Blue" counterweights. Republican America, dominant in the south, far west and parts of the Midwest but hardly invisible or inaudible elsewhere, is hard working and God fearing. It is mainly white and Protestant, even if its most enthusiastic celebrants are often Jewish ideologues — grateful for the Fundamentalists' support of Israel and even more grateful, one suspects, for being allowed to stay here and not emigrate there. Republican America believes in an American mission to the world, and does — unlike its metropolitan enthusiasts — send its sons into the military. It abjures the larger cities as sites of spiritual plague, and enthusiastic as it is about bombing Baghdad, would be even more enthusiastic about air strikes on Hollywood, New York and San Francisco. Blue America (on both coasts and in the industrial Midwest) is multi-ethnic and multi-racial, open and even casually tolerant about morality, secular, and cosmopolitan: indeed, some of these persons actually enjoy travel abroad and are proud of their ability to speak other languages. It is by no means atheistic, if skeptical that the US is the new Israel, chosen by God, and includes the Catholic adherents of Vatican II, liberal and modern Protestants, and Jews who definitely do not see in Sharon (or for that matter Senator Lieberman) an Old Testament Prophet reborn.

The matter, however, is not so simple. The black churches are Biblical and Evangelical, theologically close to the white Fundamentalists — but blacks vote for the Democrats.

Bush's coalition may be inspired by the apocalyptic literature which is a staple of lower middle class Protestant culture. His administration includes, nonetheless, the former Provost of Stanford University (Dr. Rice), the former Dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (Dr. Wolfowitz) and is supported by any number of intellectuals with degrees from Harvard and Yale. Richard Perle likes to muse about studying with Michael Oakeshott, although one wonders what Oakeshott would have thought of Perle's politics. The former Democratic Secretary of the Treasury, Dr. Summers, is now President of Harvard—and has hastened to share his wisdom with the larger public. (What has had the most attention is his dictum, "No one ever washed a rented car."). Rather than dwelling on the opposition between Fundamentalist province and cosmopolitan metropolis, we would do well to see that we have developed an imperial intelligentsia. Key posts in the academy, government, the media (and many of the foundations) are reserved for those who serve power. The current phenomenon is hardly new: it recapitulates the choice of a segment of the intellectuals during World War One, and the recruitment of the New Dealers (and many former Marxists) into the Cold War apparatus.

American art and literature are sometimes criticized for their apolitical individuation, for dwelling on autobiography rather than history. The antithesis is too simple, even false. Life histories reflect history. In his masterpiece, the trilogy USA, John Dos Passos connected the lives of his protagonists to the structure of the epoch, using the techniques of "Newsreels" to depict events and individual narrations to portray the struggles of persons with social fate. If in post-war novels, history receded into the background, it was still there. I regard the most significant of post-war novels, Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man" - about black existence in the United States — as more convincing about race relations than the social realism of his predecessor, Richard Wright. Even the ironic subjectivity of the Jewish novelists dealt with responses, in the last analysis, to American culture and society. The most ambitious of them, Phillip Roth, in his recent novels has dealt with themes of social decay as inseparable from problems of identity. What is problematic about all of post-war literature is what is problematic about the nation: there is no one nation but a kaleidoscope of ethnic, generational, regional, racial and religious perspectives. What has been lost is what Dos Passos (and his contemporary, the literary

critic and social historian Edmund Wilson) attempted to portray: the nation itself. There is a parallel between literary developments and the use of focus groups to generate electoral strategies: no one thinks a general narrative applies.

How much of New Deal culture was an American version of socialist realism, entrusted often to artists, film directors, playwrights and writers close to if not actually integrated in the American Communist Party? Firstly, a flat and linear rendition of reality, devoid of historical and psychological complexity, is not a unique characteristic of Stalinism. Indeed, in the notoriously philistine hearings on "UnAmericanism" held by the Congress in the early Cold War years, complexity and obscurity in art were denounced as evidence of a pathological, and possibly treasonous, mentality. (The successors of an earlier generation of persecutors are found amongst the neoconservative intellectuals and their less elegantly educated allies.) American modernism is largely connected to American traditions of dissent and revolt: recall Warren Beatty's marvellous film, "Reds." The connection is, however, often large and loose and the names of Thomas Stearns Eliot, Henry James and Ezra Pound remind us that there are other and opposite political paths modernists can tread. The history in the thirties, forties and fifties of the journal *Partisan Review*, is instructive. Founded under the auspices of the John Reed Society and close to the American Communist party in 1934, it transformed itself two years later into a voice for modernism and an anti-Stalinist Marxism. Modernism remained, a reconciliation with capitalist democracy followed at the beginning of the Cold War. Some of its iconic contributors, like Dwight Macdonald (and some in a subsequent generation, my own) still held that there was a relationship between capitalism and the lying tedium of an industrially produced mass culture.

The post-war triumphs of American modernism in art and literature had their origins in sensibilities critical of routine and tradition, in demands for new experiences, in a New Deal (or maybe New Frontier, John Kennedy's term) in aesthetics. The analogies remain that, analogies. New Deal culture itself was explicitly pedagogic, an effort not to go beyond the boundaries of everyday experience but to make that experience more tolerable for ordinary persons. The general atmosphere of social experiment of the New Deal (as with socialist politics in Europe) may have directly encouraged modernism - but hardly dictated its content and forms. Still, these are hardly individualized and private statements but (often) exceptionally difficult forms of social commentary.

The post-war prosperity made possible, in large measure, by New Deal policies brought with it a reorganization of the stratification of American culture, a certain broadening of the social basis of high culture - but hardly by any criterion equality of access to high culture. The single most important American contribution to world culture, jazz, was born in the tormented depths of the nation. It is impossible to say the same of the post-war productions of film, television, music and ordinary literature. They are for the most part designed for specific segments of the market, or vacuously generalized for a broad market. Many of these works reproduce the appearances of everyday life but purposefully avoid going beneath the surface. Much is explicitly escapist: daytime television serials rarely concern the world of work and often depict settings far beyond the means of average viewers. That much said, there has been an entire set of critical films and television dramas - which touch nerves precisely because they refer to conflicts in the public's ken. So much denial is cultivated by the products of the cultural industry, that even an approximation of reality has the allures of radicalism. The notion, however, that there is so much subliminal criticism of society in mass culture that it is in some measure subversive is nonsense. The uncomplicated narratives of the old New Deal, in films and novels and theater, did show recognizable human beings in familiar settings - sometimes in open struggles against wealth and power. (The filmed version of "The Grapes Of Wrath" comes to mind.) The cultural products of the past half century have sometimes achieved that level, but have hardly gone beyond it. It is unlikely, in any event, that the next American revolution (if it comes) will take place indoors.

The United States, practically alone amongst the industrial democracies, is pervaded by religious belief and organization. The problem is that it is very difficult to establish a precise causal relationship between religious affiliation (or profession of belief) and political behaviour. The general finding, that those who identify themselves as religious are more likely to vote Republican, leaves open the question as to whether there may be some underlying factor which accounts for both religiosity and political choice—residence, for instance, in a setting with little cultural and social diversity. Moreover, the claims to religious affiliation by respondents in polls may not be entirely true. We have much qualitative evidence on the function of religious belief systems in ordinary lives, but it is difficult to extrapolate from that to the entire American social world. The pronouncements of theologians, bishops, church officials, pastors and priests and the depth and intensity of conviction of ordinary believers are distinct. Some serious scholars have discerned a religious marketplace, ruled by consumers searching for personalized brands. That is consonant with both the idea of the US as a consumer's republic - and of its citizens as intractably Protestant whatever their primary religious cultures..

The major American churches have changed since the New Deal epoch. The Protestants have become more Protestant, in the sense of increasing inner differentiation. The Catholics have become more autonomous of Rome and their own hierarchy. The Jewish community is decidedly more integrated and at home in the United States — and, partly because of its success in the US and partly because of its attachment to the state of Israel, appreciably less passionate about social justice. The New Deal drew a great deal of moral energy from the churches, much of it concentrated on primordial ideas of economic justice and human dignity. The present division between the Fundamentalist and Evangelical Protestants and the more liberal and modern ones was very pronounced, then - but the southern white Fundamentalists voted Democratic as a matter of course, and were often poor and beneficiaries of the New Deal. Questions of race, of women's rights, were apparently fixed - off the immediate political agenda. A national secular culture was there, in Hollywood and in the broadcasting industry, but it was controlled and subdued enough, and remote enough, not to threaten the psychic equilibrium of the Fundamentalist communities. The rest of Protestantism was politically divided between Calvinists of the market and Calvinists of conscience, who supported the New Deal as their immediate and remote ancestors had supported Progressivism and before that Abolitionism. The Roman Catholic Church in the US was still, during the New Deal, a church of the working class - and many of its leaders were infused with the Catholic social doctrines of *In Rerum Novarum*, and thought the New Deal reforms theologically acceptable as well as in the obvious interest of the Catholic working class. In the New Deal period, a majority of American Jews were descendants of the great wave of immigration from central and eastern Europe around the turn of the century. They had brought with them not only centuries of experience of living in the interstices of capitalism, but socialist doctrines - and, failing that, prophetic traditions of social justice and communal self-help. With its separation of church and state, public educational systems, and rights of citizenship, the United States was for the immigrants and their offspring the true promised land. A Jewish intelligentsia ascended the ranks of the educated. Initially facing discrimination in employment, they streamed into the service of government and the unions, and into the cultural industry - long a bastion of an earlier and more established German Jewish immigration.

Much changed in the post-war period. The general rise in the standard of living made elemental questions of social justice seem less urgent, and the civil rights struggles were deferred until the late fifties and sixties. Catholics and Jews, with long memories of prejudice against them, had used the New Deal as a vehicle of group social promotion. The Cold War provided not only opportunities for service in a vastly expanded permanent government, but an occasion to demonstrate a ferocious American patriotism. The theologians across the faiths united in finding in America's version of religious pluralism

the will of God. Reinhold Niebuhr, once the champion of the social values of the New Deal, in his last years mused on the limits of power and the permanence of evil (much of which he located in Stalin's Russia.) The focus of a good deal of theological reflection in all of the churches changed from the quest for the material basis of dignity to existential and metahistorical reflection - with the struggle against Communism an open question. American Jewry, meanwhile, somewhat burdened with the guilt of having escaped the horrors of the Holocaust, compensated for this by idealizing the new state of Israel. There were prophetic minorities in all of the churches, but they were in the late forties and in the fifties minorities - reduced in influence and in fact natural siblings of the secular intellectuals whose visions of social transformation had been overwhelmed by the new prosperity and the accession of the US to world power.

It was not only the intellectuals whose visions had changed. The American labor force remained combative, especially industrial workers organized into trade unions.

The great wave of unionization under the New Deal, the struggles for union recognition and decent wages and conditions of work, were of course conducted by men and women with very concrete goals. Their strikes were eminently political: they sought to alter the conditions not only of economic existence but to make tolerable their dependency as waged workers. Some union leaders and activists thought of the movement of the thirties as part of a larger project, an American social democracy; some would have welcomed an American social revolution, if it had been possible. The very gains of the unions (high wages and job security in the unionized industries, with social benefits amounting to a private welfare state) certainly reconciled their beneficiaries with the nation. The unionized workers largely voted for the Democrats. They delegated negotiating powers to the American unions' very large permanent bureaucracies, and allowed union officials to seek to move government toward a welfare state. These conventionalized and routinized relationships, however, proved fragile. The seemingly benign figure of Dwight Eisenhower in his 1952 and 1956 campaigns made inroads into trade union voting blocs, and the rather less benign Nixon in 1968 and 1972 and later Reagan in 1980 and 1988 widened the opening. Racial conflict was one cause of the shift, and a rejection of the movement against the war in Viet-Nam was another. Paradoxically, the change coincided with an appreciable worsening of the condition of unionized labor, in terms of wages and job security, both.

The modern American labor movement, based largely on industrial unions rather than craft organization, is a result of New Deal legislation. The Wagner Act of 1934 made it impossible for conservative judges and state governments to combine to block or nullify union organizing drives, by specifying minimal labor union rights and governmentally supervised procedures within firms to guarantee these. It was, however, a new generation of unionists who converted these formal advantages into working class power by organizing in the automobile, mining, petro-chemical, steel, and transport industries. The craft unions of the American Federation of Labor were often ethnically and racially restrictive, increasingly were isolated islands in the sea of mass production. The owners and managers of the industries challenged by the new Committee on Industrial Organization were hardly the capitalist partners of labor depicted by consensual ideology. They fought bitterly against the new unions, resorting to tactics that had served them well since the nineteenth century: private police forces working with local authority, intimidation and dismissal of the organizers, legal aid from the local bar and from the judiciary, state and Federal. The Wagner Act effectively restricted them, but so did the refusal of the Federal government to assist them - and often (as in Michigan, where workers occupied the General Motors factories in 1936) that of state government, as well. The new industrial unions were staffed by activists who understood themselves as a political vanguard. They took to industrial terrain the politics of the New Deal in their most radical form - and, exploiting an unexpected situation of full employment, continued the battle throughout the war, when New Deal political initiatives were stopped.

The immediate post-war period, however, was one of three great defeats. The Republican Congress of 1947 substituted for the Wagner Act a set of regulations (Taft Hartley Act) which made organizing difficult, and prohibited the "closed shop" (fully unionized enterprises.) Another clause, a Cold War product with domestic benefits for its manufacturers, required that unions certify that their officials were not Communists. Since many of the most experienced and devoted unionists were or had been in the American Communist Party (and were charged with this even if they had never been members), unions lost many of their most committed leaders. The internal union fights on this issue were additionally debilitating. The second defeat was the failure of a systematic attempt to unionize the south - in part because white southerners feared that unions would grant wage and job equality to blacks. The south became the destination of choice for American firms seeking to lower labor costs (and some European ones, too) - until, of course, they moved to Mexico and then China. Moreover, the absence of unions in the south made it much easier for conservative Democrats and then Republicans to maintain permanent majorities in the southern states. Finally, the most forceful and reflective of American unionists, Walter Reuther of the United Automobile Workers, tried and failed to obtain agreements from the employers for an American version of co-determination - even for profit sharing.

The long term implications of these developments were immense. The unions continued, if with more difficulty, to organize in the industries in which they were already implanted. They concentrated, there, on maximizing wages, on struggles for some control of the work process, on maximizing, too, benefits like health insurance. In return, they collaborated with management in maintaining very demanding work loads. The head of IG Metall once told me that many of his members were ready, on health grounds, to retire well before they were sixty ("Sie sind schon Kaputt.") The United Auto Workers met the situation with the slogan, "Thirty And Out." That is, workers would enter the factories at eighteen, and wished to be able to leave thirty years later with decent pensions - to live other lives. The unions did raise the standard of living of an appreciable segment of the American labor force (at the time of the Johnson Presidency, a third of American workers were unionized.) Between 1947 and 1973 US living standards in general doubled. The unions were the most consistent and strongest advocates, within the Democratic Party and the nation, of a social wage - universal health insurance, decent levels of unemployment and disability insurance - and of social investment, above all in education. They educated their members, politically and socially: states with large unions were the strongpoints of American social democracy. That much said, the unions reluctantly accepted an idea of the US as a republic of consumption, in which the concept of the sovereignty of citizenship had given way to an economic definition of social personality. In a Darwinian society, the unions did what they could to strengthen the capacity of their members to conduct the struggle. Their political efforts, as honorable as they were, did not compensate for their inability to challenge the supremacy of capital in the workplace.

The United States from 1973 onward entered a period of halting economic growth, de-industrialization, relatively stagnant living standards and increasing inequality. The economy was struck by the increase in the cost of oil, by the delayed effects of the cost of the Viet-Nam war, by competition from goods produced abroad and in foreign markets. A prolonged period of inflation accompanied recession. In this setting, the large industrial unions were forced onto the defensive. As the industries they had organized contracted, their focus shifted toward the defense of the most immediate interests of their members. Membership in fact declined at an increasing rate. An increase in unionization amongst public service workers and in education altered the internal composition of the unionized labor force but did not stem its absolute decline. Unions have since 1953 lost two thirds of their effectives. No union represents even half the workers in any one industry (even in the auto industry.) Only nine percent of private sector workers are unionized; some sixteen percent of public sector workers are organized. The unions loose more members in

any given year by retirement than they gain by recruitment. Meanwhile, American workers generally work longer hours than their European counterparts, enjoy far less vacation time, and have far less income in social wages (public benefits and goods.)

In this desperate situation, the leadership of the AFL-CIO passed in 1995 to John Sweeney. The son of an Irish immigrant who drove trains in the New York underground, Sweeney has a large attachment to Catholic social doctrine - combined with an acute appreciation of the ravages of American economic Calvinism. The powers of the president of the central trade union organization are delegated and limited: he may propose, the separate unions dispose. Sweeney has a long term strategy with three central points. One is to secure the Presidency and if possible the Congress, as well as state and municipal governments, for the Democrats. They can be counted upon, if not to pass new legislation congenial to the unions, at least to interpret the existing laws with some fairness, to use the considerable discretionary powers of government to assist the unions and the working class (that is to say, most employed Americans), and to appoint judges who will not - in a constitutional system in which the judiciary is sovereign, legislature and executive at once - instinctively side with capital. The second point is to seek by all possible means to increase union membership - by penetrating occupations and industries previously unapproachable (the technological sector, for instance), by working with the immigrants crowded into the low paying service sector, by attending to the special requirements of a feminized labor force. The third is in some ways the most ambitious and at present the least developed: to develop a new conception of representative or surrogate trade unionism, in which the unions would speak for the concerns of the unrepresented. In this connection, it is significant that Sweeney was a leader of the Seattle protests (where there was participation by thousands of American unionists), went to Genoa, surprised there by Cofferati's caution, and is engaged in the Social Forum.

The United States is a nation in which movements of social protest often erupt, alter the political agenda and indeed the course of history, only to subside until subsequent generations - frequently with nothing but textbook memories, if that, of their predecessors - go into the streets, again. It is a very open question as to whether the very loose alliance of groups protesting capitalist models of globalization will constitute the next vanguard of American radicalism. They, and the unions, have made "free trade" a political issue - with immense help from the unashamedly rapacious behaviour of American capital. Under Clinton, this alliance achieved a notable political victory, blocking Congressional ratification of the Multilateral Trading Agreement. (There are as yet, however, no American Governors prepared to follow the newly elected Presidents of the Regional Councils in France, who have declared that they will not apply in their jurisdictions the European Union decrees ordering the privatization of public services. Perhaps, to be sure, that is because we have less public service - and much of it is already privatized.)

Some of the leaders of the American organizations which emerged in public view at Seattle were, younger, activists of the sixties. There is an entire literature on that generation, some of it ascribing its activism to the influence of New Deal parents - or grandparents. The protesters of the sixties, who held that the New Deal had been deformed into "corporate liberalism" were particularly enraged with Franklin Roosevelt's protege, Lyndon Johnson, and his Vice President, Hubert Humphrey. They regarded the unions as especially corrupted (the AFL-CIO leadership supported the war in Viet-Nam) and especially after the murders of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were convinced that they were domestic exiles, living in a hostile country. Still, George McGovern had been a professorial specialist on the agricultural policies of the New Deal, and Jimmy Carter recalled electricity being brought to his family's farm by a New Deal agency. Meanwhile, Edward Kennedy served as a permanent witness to the New Deal tradition in his (continuing) forty year Senate struggle for an American welfare state, and a relatively rational foreign and military policy. A new generation of black legislators - led by

veterans of the civil rights movement — entered the Congress, and more recently, a group of Congresswomen and Senators have been strenuous advocates of redistribution and social regulation. It would be an over simplification to conclude that the social movements represented the radical depths of the New Deal tradition, whilst the erstwhile protesters who achieved electoral office or governmental posts embodied technocratic compromise. It took Kennedy decades (well into the eight years of the Clinton Presidency) to obtain a shamefully modest increase in the statutory minimum wage - and excellent legislative initiatives by senior black figures like John Conyers and Charles Rangel have never even been voted upon. There is a division of labor: the social movements act in the public sphere, the New Deal's legislative heirs struggle in government itself.

Nothing indeed has so defined or haunted what there is of our public sphere for the past generation as the memory of the social movements of the sixties. I begin with the black struggle for civil rights, almost entirely black until repression in the segregationist states of the south (and the frequent brutality of the police and indifference of government in the states that had actually remained true to the Union under Lincoln) mobilized a party of conscience amongst the white citizenry. The celebrated decision of the Supreme Court abolishing segregation in 1954 was the culmination of a half century of struggle by the black community itself (the case was argued before the court by a black lawyer who as Mr. Justice Marshall later was the first black justice on the Supreme Court.) Later campaigns for the right to vote, for access to public facilities, for places in desegregated schools — in the face of mob violence often tolerated if not organized by city and state governments — were equally rooted in the community. The black churches were (and are) often the bearers of black historical consciousness, shaped by redemptive Biblical imagery. Black colleges and universities, the black intelligentsia, were very important. Here we encounter a question. Amongst the most influential and profound of American social scientists in the last century was William E. DuBois, whose studies of racism in its world historical context anticipated both the entire discussion of post-colonialism and the revisions of American self-understanding which have preoccupied historians for a generation. Yet Du Bois left the US in despair in his nineties to live in Ghana (1961) - at the same time as he joined the Communist Party as a gesture of defiance. Some years earlier he had had an argument with someone of considerable revolutionary competence, Mao, who had criticized American blacks for their "diseased psychology." Du Bois' rejoinder was simple: American blacks needed not a new psychology but jobs.

These were, precisely, what the New Deal — for all of its economic emphasis — did not provide. Dependent upon the Democratic white vote in the segregationist states, where blacks did not vote, Franklin Roosevelt considered that he would destroy the entire New Deal program were he to move against segregation. So great was the New Deal paralysis on race relations that he accepted the initial exclusion of agricultural and domestic labor from the Social Security system - insisted upon by southern white legislators fearful of black economic independence. Blacks, especially in the north, were indirect beneficiaries of such economic recovery as the New Deal generated. In the north, again, they were more equitably treated with respect to the distribution of New Deal benefits (employment by the Works Progress Administration): they could hardly have been worse treated than in the south, where segregation was an exploitative apartheid. Industrial unionization provided for black workers some equality of economic position. The demand for labor in the factories after the outbreak of war in 1941 initially was of no help to black workers, many of them who had migrated from the south in search of employment. The black union leader A. Phillips Randolph threatened Roosevelt with a march on Washington if he did not bar Federal contracts for firms refusing to employ blacks. The blacks in the armed services, and the ideology of war against fascism, as well as anxiety about overt racial conflict, very much in mind, Roosevelt capitulated. Later, under Truman, Kennedy and Johnson, legislative and administrative measures to ensure

equal rights were frequently justified as indispensable to the standing of the US in the struggle against Communism. Truman (opposed by the then Chief of Staff, Dwight Eisenhower) desegregated the armed forces — which have since functioned as an institution of integration and mobility for black citizens.

Truman left the Presidency in 1953, and Eisenhower held it for eight years thereafter. Truman had been a Senator from Missouri, and a New Deal Senator at that: he was a considerable antagonist of the power of the large corporations. He was also Roosevelt's Vice President when fate brought him to office in 1945, and definitely of the generation which came of age politically under the New Deal. John Kennedy left his Massachusetts Senate seat to become President in 1961, a child of the New Deal. His father had been Roosevelt's first Wall Street regulator, as Chairman of the newly created Securities and Exchange Commission. He was especially suited for the post, having been a solitary financial pirate himself - and, as a Catholic, especially aware of the overwhelming hypocrisy of the Protestants who then dominated Wall Street. He was also a political Catholic and Roosevelt's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, and a pronounced opponent of entering the war on the UK's side. The Senator was the heir of a complicated political legacy, and used it with extreme skill to win a very narrow victory over Richard Nixon. He was a New Dealer by inheritance rather than by conviction, understood that the white working class was his electoral base - and was very reluctant (on the same grounds as Franklin Roosevelt, fear of losing votes in the south) to take up the cause of black rights. The rhetoric of the New Frontier ("Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country") was intended to apply to our world role. Much to the surprise of the entire Kennedy government, many younger Americans supposed it meant that they had tasks of domestic social reform. By the end of his Presidency, having saved the world from nuclear destruction by ignoring the advice of the military and the civilian Cold War managers, in the Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy turned to domestic matters. What might have become of his Presidency is a matter of speculation. What is not speculative is that the Vice President who succeeded him in 1963, Lyndon Johnson, was despite the catastrophe of Vietnam, a great domestic reformer.

Lyndon Johnson in his Great Society program was the one heir of the New Deal who sought seriously to make good the deficiencies of the New Deal itself. His remark as he signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that the white south would be lost to the Democrats indefinitely is invariably cited. Less discussed is what impelled him to do it - the enormous pressure of protest apart. Johnson himself grew up in abysmal poverty, clearly did not think that the impoverished had only themselves to blame. Whatever the balance of conscience and calculation in his decision (if the white south was lost, the black south and blacks elsewhere were won), he was a New Deal traditionalist in making benefits universal. The Civil Rights Act benefited by extension children, Latinos, welfare recipients, women. Johnson obtained the passage of medical insurance for elderly citizens and medical subventions for the impoverished - again, universal measures. He initiated a very large program of Federal aid to schools, which in effect took education out of the control of states and municipalities. Johnson's War On Poverty had been begun, in fact, by Kennedy - influenced by an American socialist marked by his Catholic theological origins, Michael Harrington. It was Johnson, however, who funded it generously. He was, in his belief in the powers of government, perhaps the last New Dealer. It is interesting that this supremely gifted politician - running for President, he could recite his prospects in every county in the 50 states - thought in terms of the long run. In the short one, he recognized the power of protest and the idea of one nation.

Blacks, then, profited from being treated as citizens with equal rights to the wages of citizenship. There was another category of Americans whose special situation had not been the focus of systematic attention in the New Deal, women. Roosevelt appointed the first woman cabinet official, Secretary Perkins at the Labor Department. Mrs. Roosevelt was an omnipresent figure in the society, and a particular champion of the excluded,

impoverished, neglected and oppressed. The New Deal and the crisis of the Depression generated currents, indeed torrents, of activism and organization in the society. Just as the new Labor movement had origins in the memories and actual practise of the unions earlier in the century, the women leaders of the New Deal epoch looked back to the struggle for suffrage and economic and social protection. The dominant figure of the New Deal epoch remained, however, the white male worker and head of family. The administrative and legislative initiatives addressed to women's problems, specifically, were like those dealing with blacks - rather sparse. Indirectly, women profited from all kinds of initiatives. The wartime labor shortage opened, qualitatively and quantitatively, great opportunities. With millions of men away in the armed forces, many women developed competences and senses of self sufficiency denied by traditionalized gender concepts. They were sent home after the war. Women's employment gradually increased again in this period — but in lower paying service jobs. The unions insisted that the standard wage should be sufficient to support an entire family and were opposed to measures which would grant women formal equality in the labor market. Meanwhile, cohorts of well educated middle class women left the labor force shortly after completing their educations to become suburban household managers. The revival of feminism in the sixties was largely the work of this group, although Betty Friedan, who wrote the best selling book, *The Feminine Mystique*, had been a trade union employee. The complaints of educated women who would have wished for managerial or professional careers and faced exclusion from these posts were real enough. They were not identical with the sufferings of those tens of millions of their working class sisters who were employed under conditions of open exploitation: discrimination in wages, harassment and insults to their dignity at work. The unions did do something to remedy the situation, but where women workers were in a minority position amongst unionized males, they were not spared culturally legitimated abasement. For a while, the two sorts of protest flowed together. John Kennedy appointed Eleanor Roosevelt to chair a Federal commission on the position of women, but it was Lyndon John's Civil Rights Act of 1964 that provided the legal basis for active intervention by the Federal government to enforce rights for women. Since then, more women than men voters have supported Democrats in national elections.

In the thirty five years since Lyndon Johnson's Presidency, the Republicans have held the White House for twenty-three years (Nixon and Ford, 1969-1977, Ronald Reagan, 1981-1989, George Bush Sr, 1989-2003, George Bush, Jr. 2002 to date) and the Democrats for twelve (Carter, 1977-1989, Clinton, 1993-2001.) The Senate has had Republican majorities from 1981 to 1987 and from 1995 to 2001 and again from 2003 to date. The House has had a Republican majority since 1995. In this period, the Democratic majorities when they had them were reduced from year to year. Equally, the Republicans in the period gradually won a majority of Governorships, majorities in a majority of state legislatures, and occasional mayoralities in erstwhile Democratic strongholds, the larger cities. Entire areas of the nation (much of the white south, and the far west, and many of the metropolitan suburbs on the east and west coasts) became permanently Republican. Democrats in more closely contested districts or states frequently took their distances from the traditions of the New Deal. Those who remained loyal to it acted to defend the immediate interests of their constituents. When small Democratic majorities in the House and Senate faced Republican Presidents, they could not always rely on their internal cohesion and Republican Presidents could bargain with many Democrats to achieve their legislative programs. Democratic Congressional majorities had obvious veto powers. They could block repugnant Federal Agency, Cabinet or Judicial appointments. They had to trade their budgetary powers, usually, for limited goals of great importance to their voters: the distribution of educational, health and welfare benefits. That made it possible for the adversaries of the welfare state to claim, with some plausibility, that its "entitlements" were inflexible and that the entire system of social allocation and redistribution had become rigid, even dysfunctional. The proponents of the welfare state were unable to advance new projects, since they had to expend all of their political capital warding off

efforts to reduce or dismantle what had already been achieved No Republican President, before the present incumbent, was more disliked by the Democrats than Richard Nixon. Reviled for his savage electoral and legislative tactics as a Congressman and Senator, and his assumption of the role of aggressive partisan as Vice President to the ostensibly more benign Eisenhower, he struck the New Dealers and their heirs as the incarnation of the resentment of the homines novi who did not wish to make common cause with the New Deal. When C.Wright Mills at the end of his very substantial book, *White Collar*, declared that the American middle class was up for sale, the only question was, who would buy it - he was surely thinking of politicians like Nixon. The New Dealers, too, could not forgive Nixon his role in the initial attack on Alger Hiss, the New Deal official whose conviction for perjury was thought by a national majority to confirm the fact of Communist penetration of the inmost reaches of Democratic government. (Hiss went to the Yalta Conference as a senior staff member to Roosevelt and later was President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, which argued for what the Republicans thought of as a dubious internationalism in the early years of the Cold War. He was also a Harvard Law School graduate and protégé of New Deal sages like Justice Frankfurter.) That much said, Nixon actually extended the Great Society and the role of government as an agent of redistribution. His Presidential innovations included revenue sharing, by which the Federal government turned funds over to the states for specified programs - a move which integrated the functions of the Federal state with the workings of the state governments in ways thought unattainable by the early New Dealers.

Reagan voted for Franklin Roosevelt four times, and as a leader of the „Screen Actors“ union, joined John Kenneth Galbraith, Hubert Humphrey, Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Reuther, Eleanor Roosevelt, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and other iconic figures of the New Deal tradition in 1947 to found what was for a long period the most prominent lay movement in the New Deal church, Americans for Democratic Action. He abandoned his beliefs in the benign functions of government along with ideas of the nation as a solidary community, to replace them with faith in the efficiency and indeed justice of the functions of the market in a society of responsible individuals. The anti-Communism of the Cold War and shock, more real than feigned, at the rejection of American society by its favoured children in the students' revolt completed his ideological conversion. When he came to Washington as President, he had already been Governor of the nation's largest state, California, and had wrested it from the Democrats by mobilizing a great deal of the fears of marginalization by newly prosperous citizens flattered at being idealized as the authentically moral and reliable bearers of the republic. As with his present successor, George Bush Jr., he was often mocked by his adversaries as lacking in intelligence. A President needs political intelligence and Reagan had a good deal of that. His project has been likened to Thatcher's in its insistence on deregulation - but in fact Reagan installed in our Federal state a generation of colonizers whose aim was not the simple restoration of the sovereignty of the market but a symbiosis between economy, state and society. Reagan's critics supposed that his dogmatism was limited, initially, to the sphere of culture. the promulgation by Federal and state government of new orthodoxies in aesthetics, morals, thought. The critics were denying their own claim that modern societies could not dispense with a great deal of coordination by the state.

The critics, New Deal liberals and radicals (either slowly maturing veterans of the sixties or older ones whose slow burning inner fires had been restoked by that decade) did complain of one development - which they then proceeded to misconstrue. That was the planned intellectual counter-offensive of the right, designated neo-conservatism. It had several distinct elements. One was an unapologetic eulogy for American power, closely connected to the assertion of the evident superiority of the American model of society. This was said to consist of autonomous and responsible citizens - autonomous in that they cared for themselves, without benefit of social insurance, and responsible in that they did not challenge the centrality and legitimacy of the market. However, they were

not portrayed as social atoms, but as integrated in the institutions of civil society: family, neighbourhood, church. American religion assumed the ostensible importance attributed to it by President Eisenhower, when he declared that every citizen ought to have a religion - and that he did not care what it was. The promulgation of these ideas was entrusted, in an epoch of deindustrialization, to an ideological cottage industry with quite exceptional capacities for growth. The production of books and journals, the staffing of centers of research and university departments, the disbursement of fellowships and grants, editorial posts and writing assignments in major magazines and newspapers, constituted careers open to many talents. The American intelligentsia, at the beginning of the Cold War, had shown its acute sense of opportunity in accepting funding from the CIA for its contributions to the struggle of a free and plural society against the many corruptions of state socialism. As the Cold War wound down, the next generation (some figures provided a connection, often a familial one, between the generations) showed that its sense of what would sell on the cultural market was at least as developed. Not the least of the strengths of neo-conservatism (a term now so hopelessly stretched that its current utility is nil) was that it drew very able recruits from those who had been New Dealers - or technocrats with a larger vision (some, in their youths, had even been socialists and in some cases if only briefly members of rhetorically revolutionary sects.)

There was an undertone of triumphalism in all of this, of especial attraction to Catholics and Jews who had grown up expecting to be perpetual outsiders, but who now found themselves at the very center of society. Perhaps this was what accounted for an acerbic, even angry, tone when the new thinkers confronted the nation's older social critics. They were dismissed as hopeless pessimists or fanatic utopians—or both - because of their explicit belief that the US was exceptional only in its wildly exaggerated self-congratulation. Their supposed addiction to arcane and senseless doctrines and methods (deconstruction, multi-culturalism, neo-Marxism, structuralism) - especially suspect because imported and imported in some cases from France - was evidence, if more evidence were required, of their utter failure of rootedness. In time, the attitude generated grotesque episodes like the criticism of an exhibition at the Museum of American History in Washington, because it intimated that the conquest of the American west was accompanied by a certain amount of environmental destruction, ethnic cleansing, and economic exploitation. Criticism of the United States was interpreted by this group as usually a product of either subversive intent or incurable blindness. Interest in the particular histories of immigrant groups was especially suspect, evidence for failure to appreciate the integrative possibilities of American life. Blacks, and Latinos, in these respects were strenuously criticized by Jewish neo-conservatives who, it appears, thought of Israel as the fifty first state. These ideologies were not imposed on the Democrats from without, and were frequently voiced inside the party - for a time, with the concurrence of the systematic anti-Communism of the trade union leadership (George Meany and his successor, Lane Kirkland.)

A somewhat schematic image of a typical (white male) Democratic voter was constructed and critics were instructed that to fail to acknowledge his sensibilities was an extreme form of elitism. That the stereotype recalled no one as much as Archie Bunker, the prejudiced and stupid anti-hero of the television series "All In The Family" was not, it seemed, a form of snobbery but an expression of moral solidarity with the American working class. From the turbulence of the sixties onward, three inter-connected streams of debate agitated and divided the Democrats. The first was broadly cultural: could a party espousing a pluralist and secular conception of American life make contact with voters who were deeply religious and who had little or no tolerance for feminism, homosexual rights, and the freedom of instinctual expression. The second was economic: the Democrats as a party of redistribution incurred the real danger of being seen as the representative not merely of special interests but of parasitic ones whose values were not shared by those Americans who might not earn much, but were hard working. "Tax and

spend" was a charge leveled at the Democrats by the Republicans, and there was no point to objecting that educational and social investment were important - if ordinary citizens, like the Californians who enthusiastically joined the tax revolt that eventually ruined that state's ability to pay for public services, thought first of all of their own incomes and not in larger terms. The third argument concerned the necessity for the nation to be "strong" in terms of military resources and the readiness to use these, as opposed to the sentimentality of dwelling insistently on human rights. Distinctions were made, but they were not always luminously consistent Democrats willing to accept US sponsorship of the Pinochet regime in Chile were eloquent advocates of putting maximum pressure on the USSR to obtain freedom of emigration for Soviet Jewry.

These contradictions racked the party in the period of the Nixon-Ford governments, and when Watergate proved too much for the American electorate, an unprepared Governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter, became President. Carter's record of accomplishment in public works after his period in office is admirable, but should not be confounded with his less than masterful conduct of his mandate. He was a southern Christian, given to using a moral language (which had been quite effective when as Governor he sought to overcome, with some success, Georgia's legacy of racial segregation). That did not protect the party, or Carter himself for that matter, from the systematic attacks of the Republicans determined to portray it as anti-Christian (a phrase often offered spontaneously in contemporary interviews with supporters of the present President, himself viewed as "a good Christian.") There was another difficulty, the problem of deriving from Christian morality a concrete politics, since the same moral fundamentals may well inspire contrasting or even contradictory courses of action. As the deferred bill for the Vietnam War became due, as deindustrialization proceeded at a rapid rate, as the foreign trade deficit increased, his government was charged with responsibility for both inflation and unemployment. Lacking a coherent economic strategy, he did what Democrats have in any event been doing since Johnson: when in doubt, turn to the financial elite for guidance or, at least, relief.: They are usually disinclined to attack their own representatives in government, and the presence of a Wall Streeter at the Treasury or at the head of the Federal Reserve offers reassurance that Democrats will not take redistribution, much less economic planning in an expanded public sector, as seriously as they might were a trade unionist or independent academic to occupy these posts. (John Kenneth Galbraith as John Kennedy's former Harvard tutor and campaign advisor was sent ten thousand miles from Washington to serve as Ambassador in New Delhi - and a Republican who had served Eisenhower as Secretary of Commerce was promoted to heads Kennedy's Department of the Treasury.) The third problem for Carter was his inability to decide what to do about the empire whose command he had inherited. A former naval officer (on submarines equipped with nuclear weapons), he was inclined to moderate the brutalities of empire and seek a different American relationship to the world. That was the view of his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, but not of his National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. He had, therefore, two foreign policies. Vance resigned after his advice not to undertake the disastrous Iraq hostage rescue mission was ignored.. Brzezinski succeeded in a far fetched but all too real design to ignite a war between the USSR and the Islamists in Afghanistan and so gave us the Taliban. The miseries of the domestic economy and the embarrassment of the hostage situation in Teheran so undermined Carter that he lost to Reagan. Senator Edward Kennedy had attempted to replace him as the candidate, but the Democrats decided that they feared his person and policies even more than they disliked Carter.

By the end of the Carter Presidency, most of the elements of our current situation were visible. One is the systematic ignorance, inauthentic chauvinism, and total servility to corporate capitalism of the media - which offer gratifying careers to zealous strivers but few opportunities to honest journalists. The university intelligentsia are divided, and the division is not quite one of right against left, professions of American faith and assaults on

the system. The academic optimists (who think the US can be changed for the better) include some of the more critical minds in the society, many working in the natural sciences, some in law, fewer in the routinized and captured fields of economics and politics. The historians occupy a special position, a majority eschewing the fabrication of national myths - but finding that their work does not then make its way into the sanitized secondary school textbooks censored by local vigilantes of all kinds. The university intelligentsia, in other words, engage in different sorts of technocratic politics, some aligning themselves with particular groups (women, minorities, immigrants, labor) and others seeking a putative public interest in working on issues like the environment. Others simply enough integrate themselves with the institutions of power and wealth (the recently named President of Harvard, Clinton's former Secretary of the Treasury, has said that his university needs to develop closer relations with business and government. It was one of his professors of theology who asked how these relationships could possibly become closer.) Another set of academics, in the humanities, despairs of immediate political connection and concentrates on the vagaries of soul and spirit - -of which in the national experience, there are plenty.

Meanwhile, in the larger society, the absurdly idyllic picture of middle class life so bitterly defended by the ideologues of American contentment is falsified by the inner and outer travails of the society: depression and familial conflict, alcoholism and drug addiction, difficult to deal with in the best of families but made even more so by the economic discontinuities and uncertainties of the new economy. The more the conservatives praised the virtues of church and family, the less these institutions were able to bear the strains of a privatized society. In the upper middle reaches of society, psychotherapy, self help groups, and the cults of personal growth were responses to the commodification of existence. Below that, beneath the surface of the teachings of the churches which drew perhaps one of two or six of ten Americans to weekly services, a wild and often apocalyptic imagery provided narratives which purported to make sense of history. How much of American life is lived in private hells (in the consumption of alcohol, drugs, pornography, in domestic and neighbourhood violence) is unclear—but to judge by the resonance of the films which occasionally deal with the matter, it is no small segment of our life. The familiar picture of the division of the US into two cultural blocs against this background is overly simplified - it seems in part denial, in part crude condensation.

That, however, was the prevalent ideology when Governor Dukakis of Massachusetts opposed Reagan's Vice President, George Bush Sr., in 1988 for the Presidency. Dukakis ran two campaigns, one under the theme, "This election is not about ideology, it is about competence." As long as he stuck to this message, exceedingly welcome to the Democrats who wished to make a final break with the New Deal legacy, he trailed in the polls. When very late in the campaign he evoked issues of redistribution, of social investment and social benefits, and named the avarice of corporate capitalism by its name, he made large gains - too late to win. It was possible, then, for opposing factions amongst the Democrats to draw opposite conclusions from the same event, Some argued that Dukakis was hopelessly compromised by the party's record of "weakness" in foreign policy - -an entirely fictive concept brandished by the Democratic proponents of confrontation with the Soviet Union to beat down their inner party opponents, and thankfully seized upon by the Republicans as a means of delegitimizing the entire party. Others argued that Dukakis, since he came from Massachusetts, represented the wrong values—exemplified by the fact that his wife admitted that she had been treated for depression. National statistics suggest that one of five Americans at some point seeks medical assistance for depression, but the Republicans managed to depict this bit of personal history as culturally symbolic. Dukakis was also taxed with having presided over a prison e system which released a man who subsequently murdered someone, and a black man at that. Other Democratic critics of Dukakis argued that he was thought likely to raise taxes, and favor excesses of regulation. The reformist Democrats argued that they

had almost won and that many segments of the electorate if not immune to issues like abortion and the death penalty were more interested in obtaining economic benefits and social protection and thought government the only institution that could help them. The party's problem was to agree on this least common denominator.

That is, to some extent, what Bill Clinton did in his first (and even his second) electoral campaigns - greatly aided by a split in the potential Republican vote caused by the candidacies in 1991 and 1996 of the very eccentric millionaire, Ross Perot. Clinton was a southerner and a Christian, who in the end found that these characteristics endeared him more to blacks, with whom he had a special rapport, than to southern whites. It is difficult to say what his basic convictions were, since these proved to be remarkably flexible. He was extremely adept at telling different parts of the Democratic electorate what it wished to hear, and a unique capacity to communicate made him a very effective political manager. He was as President as intellectual and well read as any of his predecessors, and more than most, but his greatest strength was perhaps his instinctive grasp of the limits of the office in a period in which change was difficult to articulate, let alone master. He was greatly helped by the abysmal and sordid tactics of the Republicans, particularly but not exclusively in the matter of his sexual conduct - inelegant but hardly the major offense his enemies claimed it to be, especially since the Republican leaders themselves were not obvious candidates for sainthood. It would be reassuring to note that their failure to impeach him marked a permanent defeat for the late model Puritans - but the references to God used by Bush to justify his geopolitical adventure in Iraq suggest that the peculiar spiritual force of American Fundamentalism is far from exhausted.

The curious mixture of economic interests, class alignment, and cultural choice which marks modern American politics was especially pronounced in the Clinton years and is of course with us still. The Republicans are dominant in the south and parts of the west, in many of the suburban areas elsewhere too, and apart from the proprietors and senior employees of capital, include small businessmen, a large number of persons for whom their Church identity is important, gun owners, anti-tax fanatics, exponents of traditional gender roles and (especially important in the US) persons rendered uncomfortable by both heterosexuality and homosexuality. The Republicans can usually count upon those who would regard questioning the statement "ours is the greatest nation on earth" as worse than an eccentricity, as prima facie evidence for pathological rootlessness. Latinos, environmentalists, feminists, unionists, and the smaller and less organized advocates of a demilitarized and anti-imperialist foreign policy join the black churches and community organizations in backing the Democrats, who also win the support of the public interest organizations of the best educated part of the electorate. The Republicans, with more and denser ties to capital, can generally outspend Democrats in elections by a ratio of two or three to one. The Democrats are not inclined to practise voluntary poverty, however, and their own excellent connections to the cultural industry, financial capital and retailing enable them to raise very large sums of money.

Two additional points are important. With electoral participation at only fifty percent (forty percent in Congressional election years when the Presidency is not at stake) the influence of particular interest groups and lobbies is all the greater. Since what counts in the Presidential election are electoral votes won state by state and not national vote totals (Gore had more votes than Bush but still lost), national campaigns on national themes are very difficult. The other point is that in the resultant Congressional politics, many important issues of the role of the state are left to the courts to decide. We have experienced a judicialization of politics, making struggles over the nomination and approval of Federal judges in the Senate that much more important.

The Democrats' alliances with Wall Street, rather than any serious ventures in historical and political analysis, accounted for the eagerness with which Clinton and the somewhat more ambivalent Al Gore (the son, after all, of a New Deal contemporary of

Lyndon Johnson and John Kennedy in the Senate) embraced the doctrines of the Third Way. In the Democrats' case, this entailed the adoption of the view that budget deficits were intrinsically bad and that as a consequence, social spending had to be curtailed. It also meant a vague ideology of "personal responsibility," particularly applied to impoverished recipients of social assistance - obliged to work to qualify for welfare. The ensuing bargain with Wall Street and the Chair of the Federal Reserve Bank, Greenspan (whose fiscal rigor disappeared with a Republican President in office and his own re-appointment in the balance) led to low rates of interest. This in turn enabled tens of millions of householders to re-finance their homes at lower rates and to use the gains for consumer expenditures. Combined with a convincingly fraudulent boom in technology, the increase in household debt led to a rise in the price of equities, which added to what was a speculative bubble. It is true that millions of jobs were created under Clinton, but large social needs (in education, health, infra-structure) continued unmet. Clinton did attempt a reform of health insurance — but not by instituting a single payer system which would have eliminated the swollen administrative costs and profits of the private sector in present hybrid system. The project was defeated (Hillary Clinton, who was in charge of it, told me that she was deeply disappointed at the way in which the large insurance corporations broke the terms of a political bargain the White House thought it had negotiated with them). The Democrats, with no coherent ideological and political defense against the onslaught of the Republicans, lost majorities in the House, and then the Senate, lost majority positions in a majority of state legislatures, lost their majority of governorships, and lost the mayoralities of cities like Los Angeles and New York. The attempt to impeach Clinton followed shortly after his re-election - and was defeated, due to the votes of more liberal Republicans and to a considerable amount of disgust in the public with the Republicans substitution of defamation for politics. Clinton himself, for all of his intelligence was a supremely manipulative figure, whose animal cunning was far greater than his moral courage. The rest of his Presidency passed with a good deal of argument between Clinton and the New Democrats and the trade unions and the New Deal remnant on "free trade."

A Democratic Presidency, even when Republicans control both chambers of the Congress, makes a difference. At the very least, certain things do not happen. Environmental and labor laws, social legislation of all kinds, are not eviscerated by administrative action or inaction. Extremely important in the US system, where the Federal Appeals Courts and the Supreme Court act as political instances, entirely reactionary judges are not appointed; sometimes judges with a reasonable social conscience make it to the bench. A US President appoints, initially, some four thousand officials to policy making posts: under the Democrats, some of these (younger as well as older) think of themselves as in the New Deal tradition. The two major American political parties are each forced to unite, or pretend to unity, when contending for the Presidency. Still, even under a Democratic President, the House and Senate Democrats are sharply divided and responsive less to a central party ideology than to their own financial backers and constituencies. When Gore ran for President, he did so in utterly schizophrenic fashion— one day he was the son of a New Dealer, the next he was a New Democrat abjuring "big government." Despite that, a very considerable degree of mobilization by blacks, environmentalists, trade unionists won him a majority of the votes. Why not: polling studies conclude that despite the even division in the active electorate, a majority of all eligible voters consider that government has responsibility for minima of economic and social decency. Whether, and how, Senator Kerry will act on this fact is an entirely open question. As I write (May) he seems to be attempting a bargain with Nader, whereby that dissident Democrat will attract anti-imperial and anti-war and anti-capitalist votes Kerry is afraid to solicit, and in the end release them to Kerry. The bargain may not come off, and in any event speaks volumes about Kerry's lack of clarity and courage with respect to positions he had taken as a Senator. The New Deal legacy isn't dead, it does appear to be missing in action.

The United States is a continental nation; it is also an imperial power, the armed defender not only of its own geopolitical interests (which are, in the view of our imperial managers, limitless) but the ally, protector, and sponsor of a quite striking variety of nations. The consolidation of democratic institutions and the observance of human rights are not the primary ends of US foreign policy. The US has sought stability, understood as an unerring constancy in alignment in questions large and small with the US - not least, access to cheap raw materials (as with oil) for the US and the opening of foreign markets (including financial markets and now, services) to US firms. There have been strenuous debates in the US on foreign policy in the last fifty years, but only recently have some advocates of American power dared to state what many of its critics have thought obvious: our world role entails a constant striving for hegemony. The Democrats have been at least as responsible for our imperial position and the development of imperial structures as the Republicans. The dysfunctions of empire - deformations in resource allocation, the inequality of the risks of military service and in bearing the costs of domination, the encouragement of a chauvinistic idea of national superiority which is the direct successor of now embarrassing ideas of Anglo-Saxon moral and racial virtue, the development of a corps of imperial bureaucrats and ideologues who live not for but from our empire and are correspondingly unable to criticize its existence and working - are as visible under Democratic Presidents as under Republican ones. Theologically speaking, empire tempts Americans to indulge in the sin of pride. It is true that toward the end of his life, John Kennedy in his speech at American University in June of 1963 called for a reconsideration of, even an end, to the Cold War: that may be connected to his assassination. America's development of a dualistic morality, in which the government and its agencies (and our client parties and governments) were and are allowed criminality of every kind outside our borders has been as much a part of the ethos of the Democratic party as of the Republicans. Worst of all, America's global involvements have been conducted in imperial structures which have merged with domestic ones to consolidate and deepen the democratic deficit of our institutions, as in the supreme disregard for Constitutional liberties and the recognized norms of international law by the Bush government. The mobilization of the society for tasks which reflection suggests it might be better off without, under the leadership of persons of a striking degree of authoritarianism and arrogance, are major sources of the attenuation of the New Deal legacy. Franklin Roosevelt was an internationalist: he would not have wished for the world we have now made.