João Jorge Coelho Pereira

Present Representations of 19th Century American Political Idealism

Outubro de 2010

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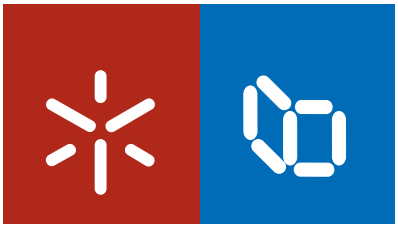

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Present Representations of 19th Century American Political Idealism

Dissertação de Mestrado
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Professor Jaime Costa

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Representações Actuais do Idealismo Político Americano do Século 19

O movimento de protesto "Tea-Party" tem marcado a agenda política nos Estados Unidos muito por causa da sua oposição ao crescimento do governo federal. O receio de que o país se tenha afastado dos seus princípios constitucionais tem sido o catalisador dos protestos. Esta dissertação tem como objectivo perceber como são entendidos os ideais que estão na base da formação dos Estados Unidos e qual a sua relevância actual. Para tal, serão apresentados os principais valores fundacionais mediante uma leitura dos principais autores e textos que definiram os valores centrais do país. A sua evolução ao longo de alguns dos mais marcantes episódios da história Americana é complementada com reacções de testemunhas e análises contemporâneas. O desvio em relação às aspirações iniciais, especialmente a partir das últimas décadas do séc. XIX, deve-se tanto a Republicanos como a Democratas, sendo que nenhum dos partidos conseguiu encontrar soluções que não assassem por um aumento do poder federal para responder às exigências democráticas e ao envolvimento externo. Os desafios que assim se apresentaram e as respostas encontradas alteraram o equilíbrio constitucional em favor do governo central deixando-o, no entanto, enfraquecido para fazer face a crescentes pressões oligárquicas que se têm vindo a impor. Esta ameaça, conjugada com a influência crescente do Estado federal na vida das pessoas, põe em risco a estrutura democrática do país, anulando assim as esperanças da Revolução.

Present Representations of 19th Century American Political Idealism

The recent Tea-Party protests in the United States have captured the political momentum thanks to their opposition to Big Government. They find a ready audience among those who fear that the country has moved away from its constitutional principles. This dissertation aims to question how the original ideals that inspired the formation of the United States are perceived today and what is their current relevance. In order to do this, the main foundational values are first presented through a reading of the principal authors and texts that established the core ideals. Their evolution throughout some of the most important moments in American history follows compounded with observer's reactions as well as current analysis. Although the country has moved from its initial commitments, especially since the last decades of the 19th century, both Republicans and Democrats are responsible, neither managing to find answers to the combined pressures for greater democracy and the exigencies of international engagements that did not increase the federal government's power. These challenges and the reactions that followed tipped the constitutional balance in favour of Washington, leaving it paradoxically weakened before oligarchic pressures that have been increasing of lately. This oligarchic threat, coupled with the enormous influence exerted by Big Government in people's daily lives, threatens to undermine the whole democratic structure, cancelling the Revolutionary hopes.

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Introduction

About the significance of the American Revolution and the principles that inspired the creation of the United States almost everything has been said and written. Less so about how those early ideals fare nowadays and what they mean for contemporary America. The American Independence marked a watershed period in History inaugurating a new relationship between Government and Individual in a time when absolute monarchies and autocratic government were the norm. The new bond signalled the birth of the modern Citizen and its right to hold Government accountable for its actions.

The political idealism of the Founding Fathers was centred on the revolutionary concept of personal freedom and a deep-seated distrust of Government. Hence the need to keep the latter within precise limits so as not to endanger Liberty. There was no consensus among the Founding Fathers as to the precise definition of the role of government or where to place the boundaries; likewise, the question remains a divisive and urgent issue nowadays. Unquestionably, the United States has changed dramatically, leaving far behind the remote and agrarian nation that seceded from Britain 234 years ago. As a result, it was inevitable that the initial ideals should suffer and a redefinition of what Government stands for ensued. America today is experiencing a polarising debate about individual liberty and government intervention much as it happened in the early years of the Republic.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the fundamental ideas about Government and Individual Liberty at the foundation of the United States and how far the country has moved from its initial perspectives. Given the vast number of people, documents and events available for a work of this nature a careful selection of what to examine is essential along with the inescapable sacrifice of much that others would regard as relevant. Rather than engage in an exhaustive re-telling of events and arguments, emphasis will be placed on a choice of topics that highlight how the challenges they represent have an effect on the nation's political idealism.

The American Revolution was a radical experience for the 18th century European mindset. The values it proclaimed, Equality and Liberty, were philosophical abstractions, hitherto unheard of in terms of political application. Hence the worth of starting with the impact they had on the colonists and how the Declaration of

Independence and the U.S. Constitution incorporate the philosophical thinking behind the Revolution given that these two documents illustrate the political idealism of the Republic. To better understand the divisiveness of the issue, the early debates and reservations about the structure of government and democratic participation are analysed in the second chapter. The chapter concludes with the Transcendentalists' answer to the questions about the meaning of Democracy and the ultimate responsibility of Government.

The pains of America's industrialisation widened the gap between the proclaimed ideals and the harsh reality experienced by millions of Americans. Criticism of the country's double standards and failure to live up to its promise marks the beginning of the end of the national consensus about free-initiative, keeping government out of the economy and away from social welfare. Similarly, the growing involvement in foreign affairs detached the country from its initial commitment to neutrality and non-interference. The participation in both World Wars opened the door to an unprecedented and ominous influence of the State in society during periods of crisis as well as aggravating the strain between reality and ideology. An outline of these two developments and the sentiments of the period are reviewed in chapters 3 and 4.

The last two sections assess the contemporary perception of the relationship between government and citizen during and after the struggle for the extension of Civil Rights. They will also analyse the potential threat to Democracy presented by the powerful central authority that matured with the previous developments. The current debate about a return to the constitutional principles of government is examined both regarding its antecedents as well as the causes that fuel the persistent suspicions about Washington and its allies.

The Civil War represented the settling of two fundamental questions left unanswered for too long by the Constitutional Convention: the continuation of slavery in a democratic nation and whether the compact between the States could be dissolved. Industrialisation and foreign involvement fundamentally restructured the United States ultimately settling the argument between Jeffersonians and Hamiltonians. The dispute between the two looms large in the political combats about the Constitution and resurfaces every so often, leaving the country contemplating the past in search for answers.

The Revolutionary Expectations

> In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments and common sense; and have no other preliminaries to settle with the reader, than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves
>
> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

The sentiment that the American Revolution portended something new and of great consequence in the history of mankind was perhaps best captured by Thomas Paine, the 18th century English-born revolutionary and pamphleteer. His fiery language denounced the evils and oppression of his lifelong enemies: hereditary power and the injustices of the European-style hierarchical societies. Upon settling in America Thomas Paine immediately became involved with the more vocal adversaries of British authority in America and undertook to express in no uncertain terms how he viewed the events that were taking place in the colonies. "We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand"[1], announced he in the opening pages of *Common Sense*, written in 1776. In it, Paine expounded the reasons why America was the torchbearer of a moral crusade intended to illuminate a world where monarchs claimed a divine right to rule over their subjects and where separation of people into social ranks was seen as a normal state of affairs. In his opinion, America's fight would brave a new trail and herald a new hope of liberty, breaking away from the corrupt traditions prevailing across the Atlantic. His adopted country was not just fighting to be free from British rule; it was advancing the cause of freedom for all the oppressed peoples around the globe, held imprisoned by a privileged minority that lived off their toil. "The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind."[2]

His pamphlet was intended to dramatize and he went so far as to predict in an ominous warning that the outcome of the struggle would determine the lives not only of those involved but would be felt by future generations all over. Being the standard-

[1] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, Rights of Man, and Other Essential Writings of Thomas Paine* (London: New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 59-60.
[2] *Ibid*., 3.

bearers of the noblest of causes all those involved were required to stand fast and persevere; should the colonists fail in their attempt, despair and misery would befell mankind.

> The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent – of at least one eight part of the habitable globe. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now.[3]

Paine's warning, echoing like that of a Sybille, forced a Manichean divide pitching the friends of Man's rights against its oppressors. It was a call to arms and there was to be no room for neutrality about the subject or moderation; all must take a stand and clarify their choice of sides. As William Goetzmann makes clear,

> Paine's pamphlet removed the frames of time and space from this discussion. Focusing on the basic nature of man everywhere, Paine unveiled a transcendent and global drama in which America and the American stood at the center stage, the symbol of mankind's hopes for a future of harmony and liberty.[4]

In a language filled with Biblical allusions, Paine allowed no middle ground in what he perceived was the last great fight that would usher the final Realm of Justice and Human Concord.

The passion and excitement in Paine's words rested on his unyielding belief in human equality and his memories of the misery he witnessed and suffered when living in England. A fervent champion of Man's natural rights, he was a product of the Enlightenment and the principles it upheld based on the use of Reason. Having observed the degradation and ruin of the common man in the streets of what was then the most powerful nation in the world Paine was convinced that America was the land where freedom and human dignity could flourish: "Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia, and Africa, have long expelled her – Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time

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[3] *Ibid*., 22
[4] William Goetzmann, *Beyond the Revolution: A History of American Thought from Paine to Pragmatism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 4.

an asylum for all mankind."[5] America is that safe haven and it must triumph in its struggle or the whole of humanity would be destined to live in darkness for all time in the same conditions he had seen in most of Europe.

The values and ideology that lay behind Paine's arguments were common and generally accepted at the time among thinkers, writers and liberal politicians of the age. The belief that something must change to alleviate the millions that lived in squalor and desperation was spreading even among many who benefitted from the feudal system. They disapproved of the notion that Government was the private property of one individual or that privilege and rank were natural separations between human beings. When Thomas Jefferson was chosen to write the Declaration of Independence he put to paper the philosophical values that had been gaining ground in the minds of people for some time. When charged that the Declaration was lacking in originality, he candidly observed that,

> I know only that I turned to neither book nor pamphlet while writing it. I did not consider it as any part of my charge to invent new ideas altogether and to offer no sentiment which had ever been expressed before....All its authority rests on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, &c.[6]

Together with the exasperation caused by the British treatment of the colonies and the trampling of their long-standing constitutional liberties and autonomous government, the mood of the population was ripe for a dramatic change. Secession was the word in everybody's lips as the only way to protect freedom and put in practice those new ideas that were spreading far and wide. Writing in 1818, John Adams was able to look back and acknowledge that "the Revolution was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people."[7]

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[5] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, Rights of Man, and Other Essential Writings of Thomas Paine* (London: New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 39-40.
[6] Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, August 30, 1823, *Foundations of American Political Thought*, ed. Raymond Polin and Constance Polin (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 170.
[7] James Madison to Hezekiah Niles, February 13, 1818, *Niles' Weekly Register,* March 7, 1818, Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency, http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116854 (accessed January 2, 2010).

Locke was one of the chief inspirations of the Revolution's ideals, although many others were also an influence through their writings. His works, most notably the *Two Treatises on Government,* outlined much of the main values and ideology that inspired the revolutionaries. It helped them justify their endeavour to build a new country based on principles of greater justice than the ones they observed across the Atlantic. Not only did the English philosopher maintain that all men were naturally free and in a state of equality, he also stated that the authority for government derived from the people, a concept which, in the late 17th century, was completely in contrast with the habitual practice. The natural consequence was to provide the colonist with a theoretical tool that legitimised the right to overthrow their government whenever it became oppressive and tyrannical or defaulted on its obligations. This concept, although developed by Locke in order to justify the 1688 Glorious Revolution in Britain, was promptly seized by the American revolutionaries to validate their separation from the United Kingdom. Perhaps the idea that caused everlasting impact on the Founding Fathers was the notion that power ought to be divided among different branches of government and not remain concentrated in one single institution. This equilibrium of powers gave birth to what become known as the "checks and balances" of the U.S. Constitution.

At the core of these proposals was the natural law philosophy, whose underlying principle predates John Locke. According to it, there is a natural order of things in the world, as well as moral precepts that bind everyone which were designed by God and can be grasped by mankind making use of its faculty of reason. The fact that the Enlightenment was a period wherein Reason supplanted theology as the main tool to understand the world does not mean that the 17th and 18th century philosophers renounced God. If anything, the Scientific Revolution, of which Newton was a prime figure, had the ambition to know the mind of God, to know his intentions. The new advances of science gave them a renewed self-assurance regarding Man's role as the main creation of God and its ability to share in His knowledge of Creation. As Carl Becker points out, "The eighteenth century did not abandon the old effort to share in the mind of God; it only went about it with greater confidence, and had the presumption to think that the infinite mind of God and the finite mind of man were one and the same thing."[8]

[8] Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: a Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 39.

What the likes of Newton and Descartes did was discredit the old Biblical God in favour of a more deistic Prime Mover or Great Architect that stepped back after creating the universe and the laws by which it is organized. Therefore, there was no way to know His will except by deducing the 'laws' of Nature through the use of the intellect as, for example, in the logical conclusion that if God had given life to Man he must have intended for its preservation. As a result, the existence of certain duties, or moral imperatives, implied the existence of certain rights: if the Creator intended for the preservation of Man's life it followed that everyone had the right to defend his own life and do everything in its power to protect it. Consequently, the use of logic reasoning could be extended to search for the establishment of just government. Being reason the only reliable guide that God created to assist men, the foundation of that just government could only rest upon reason itself. Only that would ensure that human politics conformed to the divine order of things.

> Since man, and the mind of man, were integral parts of the work of God, it was possible for man, by the use of his mind, to bring his thought and conduct, and hence the institutions by which he lived, into a perfect harmony with the Universal Natural Order.[9]

The notion that political authority originated from a compact among men was not a novel one. The medieval philosophers conceived the notion that kings derived their authority from a compact with their subjects by which they committed themselves to rule with justice. Later, with the rise of the absolute monarchs and divine rule, the power of the monarch was considered as coming directly from God and therefore unaccountable. Locke picked up the old idea and envisaged a 'natural state', previous to the institution of governments, in which men lived free and in equal possession of the rights that the natural law provided, i.e., life and liberty. In order to help protect these, men agreed to surrender part of their privileges and form a community, or government, with the aim of ensuring their safety and enjoyment of their natural rights. The government thus created answered to the authors of the compact and from them alone did it obtain its powers; whenever it failed in its duties it was the authors' right to dispose of it and form a new one. The people alone dictated the formation of such a

[9] *Ibid*., 57.

contract, the effects it produced and the people alone wielded the supreme power within the just boundaries of reason.

It comes as no surprise the enthusiasm with which the American colonists embraced these ideas for they seemed to contain in themselves all the elements they searched for in order to philosophically justify their revolution. It vindicated their desire to break free from the British Empire whilst at the same time upholding the justice of their actions. In doing so they ensured that their longing for a regime completely different to the ones in Europe was not only theoretically defensible, it was in accordance with God's intentions. The adherence of the American Revolutionaries to this was so widespread that they became the "sentiments of the day" that Jefferson alluded to in his letter to Madison. Supported by various writers and philosophers and discussed in the clubs and coffee-houses, they were present everywhere and seemed as obvious and natural as to dispense theoretical consultation in order to verify their validity.

Going back to the Declaration of Independence, some academics argue over which philosopher exerted more influence upon Jefferson. Some go so far as to contend that the language of the document is clearly marked by one or another of the main thinkers and even that some excerpts of the text are clearly discernible as having been copied from the writings of their champion.[10] Be it as it may, the Declaration is perhaps the best known document of American History, and although not legally binding, many see it as putting in writing the supreme values that guide the United States and which justify its existence. For the most part the Declaration is a summary of the grievances of the colonies towards King George III of Great Britain, but the second paragraph is where those values are laid bare in simple but inspiring prose.

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers

[10] Carl Becker, in *The Declaration of Independence: a Study in the History of Political Ideas,* p. 27, argues that "the Declaration, in its form, in its phraseology, follows closely certain sentences in Locke's second treatise on government". On the other hand, Morton White defends that the language used by Jefferson denotes the influence of Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui, the Swiss jurist, as well as his logical reasoning. Morton White, *The Philosophy of the American Revolution* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 163.

> form the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

In these few lines rests a whole philosophy of Government and political organization. Jefferson declares that first and foremost, above all else, all individuals possess "certain unalienable rights" which award them the primacy in relation to any Government; that the former is only instituted to "secure" the enjoyment of those rights and that its powers belong to the individuals for whose service the Government was created and the latter must therefore yield to them. Furthermore, whenever the Government walks astray from that set purpose, it is the people's right to overthrow it and redesign a new one more dedicated to "effect their Safety and Happiness". In short, it rendered Power accountable and responsible before its Sovereign, the People. Regarding what was taking place in Europe at the time, the whole premise that the government exists to serve its citizens was the equivalent of turning the relation of cause and effect upside down. Not only that, in the following lines the colonists detailed a catalogue of accusations against the King by which he became "destructive of these ends" listed as his subjects' rights, therefore allowing them to, first, abolish the Government (by declaring outright independence) and, second, create a new one in obedience to the values and principles defended in the Declaration.

The Declaration does not create anything, neither governmental structure nor organized institution. It merely states the basic civil liberties and what the fundamental relationship between the State and the individual according to its inspiring philosophy. The text says that it is the State's duty to protect the rights mentioned, to preserve each one's life and his liberty as well as his quest to maximise the two. Life and Liberty are granted at birth; however, to achieve the Happiness one has the right to pursue is a personal responsibility. It is the individual that must strive to reach it and to select the best path in order to do so. In the late 18th century it was not expected of any Government to intervene or in any way assist in that pursuit. Its job was merely to "secure", not to guarantee. This emphasis on individual responsibility walks hand in hand with a very American trait, that of self-reliance, of independence, and is one of the

main reasons why many Americans view with suspicion any form of governmental interference or encroachment.

As a result of this deep-rooted suspicion towards any form of authority and its abuses the Founding Fathers were all keen supporters of the principle of Constitutionalism. This charter of fundamental legal boundaries which cannot be overturned by legislative or executive command was the perfect tool to limit and define precisely what the government could and could not do. The organization of the new country started with a Confederation of the 13 colonies united in a Continental Congress. With each State exercising its sovereignty within its borders, the relations between them and of each with the Congressional government were defined by the Articles of Confederation. This first constitutional framing that regulated the relations between the States and the central power reflected the spirit that Government is merely needed to secure the citizens' fundamental rights and the framers' opinion that power corrupts. Under that legal structure, the national government did not have the power to levy taxes nor any other form of raising revenue leaving it at the mercy of the financial contributions of the States. Its power was limited and given the deep distrust with which any form of centralized control was met in the newly formed country, it soon became clear that the States would forego the consensus and opt for a unilateral and independent approach to any national issue. A mere seven years after the adoption of the Articles of Confederation, the situation had descended into chaos and the country seemed ready for a break-up.

The Continental Congress became a forum of discussion and debate without any powers although it did manage to settle some minor disputes between States. However, in other areas it proved far less successful, especially in fiscal and economic management. Internationally, the country faced irrelevance and most countries dismissed it as hopeless and bound to return to British control sooner or later. The spirit of egalitarianism and freedom that had inspired the population was still prevalent and any attempt to structure the country was met with resistance when it interfered with personal or organized interests. In 1783 historian David Ramsay summed up the gloom that spread through the former colonies with an insightful observation on one of the reasons behind the disarray into which the country was thrown. Sadly, he noted, "this revolution has introduced so much anarchy that it will take half a century to irradicate[sic] the licentiousness of the people… The pulling down of government tends

to produce a settled and habitual contempt of authority in the people."[11] The political idealism that was to be found in the Declaration seemed to be turning against itself and endangering the dreams and expectations of building a new society founded on liberty and the rights of individuals.

In 1786, an armed uprising in Massachusetts concentrated the attention of the nation. Led by a former Revolutionary War veteran, Daniel Shays, it was composed of small indebted farmers and merchants, most of whom were former war veterans themselves. The Shaysites, as they came to be known, were mostly the victims of the economic depression that gripped the country after the Independence due to the closure of the British Empire's markets to American goods. The insurrection threatened to spread to the neighbouring states due to a lack of institutional response. The Congressional government was paralyzed and powerless to take any action. The rallying cry of the Rebels proclaimed they were fighting for the same ideals and principles that inspired the Revolution, freedom form tyranny, and as the rebellion grew in momentum their demands increased. Soon there was talk of redistributing property based on the argument that "the property of the United States has been protected from confiscation of Britain by the joint exertion of all, and ought to be the common property of all."[12] Furthermore, they affirmed that "he that attempts opposition to this creed is an enemy to equity and justice and ought to be swept from off the face of the earth."[13] This caught the attention of the political class in the various States if only because most of them being landlords or moneyed merchants had much to lose.

Soon, many of the most illustrious and influential members of society started pushing for a new covenant that would displace the first one striking a balance between the need for stronger government and preservation of the hard-won liberties and ideas that motivated the Revolution, let alone their wealth. The task looked daunting because not only were the States determined to keep their powers but the various factions that arose all had different conceptions as to the path to be followed. Despite the general agreement that more power had to be given to a central authority, the new U.S. Constitution faced stiff opposition from those who feared that too much power was

[11] William Goetzmann, *Beyond the Revolution: A History of American Thought from Paine to Pragmatism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 42.
[12] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 95.
[13] *Ibid*., 95.

being handed to the new federal government and that individual liberties might be at risk.

The main division took place between the Federalists, supporters of strong central power, and the Anti-Federalists, fiercely protective of liberties and suspicious of handing more power to any national authority. The latter were dedicated to preserving the decentralized nature of the country, convinced that only via popular participation in small organized communities nation-wide would the citizenry uphold the public good in detriment of private interests and better keep in check any potential oppressive government. Civic virtue was a fundamental element for the Anti-Federalists and the decisions of the electorate should be made taking into consideration the common good instead of heeding to personal passions or political factions, a concern that would be echoed decades later by the Transcendentalists. The best way to ensure that the moral decision was taken by the citizens was to keep the government spheres close to them and not dilute their votes in the wide extension of a large Republic with a centralized government. The Federalists countered that the existence of different opinions was essential for liberty and that trying to suppress party politics and diverging factions was a destruction of liberty and not a defence of it. Besides, they argued, in a vast country a representative chamber would help to restrain extremists who would be faced with a body of representatives of different opinions. The best solution to counter the danger of partisan politics was to have it diluted with other parties and their enthusiasts.

After much debate between the advocates of each side, the ratification was agreed pending the inclusion of a Bill of Rights. In it would be inscribed as legally binding the liberties and privileges that protected the individual from government interference. The agreement was the product of a series of compromises that attempted to reconcile different perspectives and thus garner a wide support among the various social groups of a very diverse country. As for the Bill of Rights, although they agreed that more power had to be given to government in order that it may secure the rights mentioned in the Declaration of Independence, nonetheless the Anti-Federalists understood that even if the people had the right to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” it might be best to remind the government of it and keep it in writing lest he forget. Thus, fundamental principles of the Enlightenment became traditional American values and forged a national vision of life and the role of Government. A feat achieved through much compromise and negotiation, which became a chief strength of American political life but also ensured that certain essential questions, the most obvious one

being that of slavery, were left unattended, postponing their resolution until it was too late. The settling of these would take place after 4 years of bloodshed and destruction before the United States were a century old.

For many that had participated in the Revolution, the U.S. Constitution was the finish line of a journey that had been fraught with danger but that ultimately vindicated a new paradigm about societies and political regimes. The new text was seen as reflecting a new national character where every man was deemed independent, able to look to his counterpart in Europe and feel proud of his freedom. Together with the Declaration it represented the putting in practice of all the ideas and theories of government that inspired the Revolution. As John Quincy Adams, the son of John Adams and President himself, later remarked, "The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are parts of one consistent whole, founded upon one and the same theory of government".[14] In fact, the Constitution emulates the Declaration's theoretical exposition and confirms its stance on the origin and vocation of the political system it creates, as its Preamble clearly proclaims.

> We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

In accordance with that theory, the new text divided power between the 3 branches of government: the executive, the legislative and the judicial powers. In doing so, it attributed to each specific competency in relation to the other two thus creating mechanisms of control. These checks and balances, wherein each kept a watchful eye on the others, aimed to ensure the balance of the whole system. It certainly ensured its durability, for it is one of the oldest written constitutions still in use, although amended throughout the years.

The first ten amendments were a by-product of the ratification process originating from the demands that the Constitution should be circumscribed by a Bill of

[14] Richard B. Morris, *The Framing of the Federal Constitution* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1986), 20.

Rights, which in fact is what they amount to. The main preoccupation was to protect the liberties of the population and place precise limits to any government attempt to grow out of its constitutional boundaries. Those that at first opposed the inclusion of the 'Bill of Rights' Amendments claimed that the enumeration of the powers of government in the Constitution was sufficient guaranty of the liberties since all powers not specifically delegated to the government belonged to the people, as established by the Preamble of the Constitution. Therefore, to specify rights was to limit them. Thomas Jefferson addressed this argument letting it be known of his worry that it was too frail to hold off serious contention.

> To say… that a bill of rights was not necessary because all is reserved in the case of the general government, which is not given, while in the particular ones, all is given which is not reserved, might do for the audience to which it was addressed, but it is surely a *gratis dictum*, the reverse of which might just as well be said; and it is opposed by strong inferences from the body of the instrument as well as from the omission of the clause of our present Confederation, which had made the reservation in express terms.[15]

In the end, the fear of federal usurpation of powers and trampling of liberties prevailed and the Bill of Rights was included in the Constitution. Two amendments (Amendments IX and X) are specifically meant to restrain the national government's appetite for power or temptation to abuse its citizens' freedom. Amendment IX guarantees that other rights exist besides the ones listed and that they belong to the people.

> The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

It reinforces the precept that the People is the source of all Government power and that, as such, it retains a multitude of other rights which are wholly independent and distinct from the effects produced by the 'compact' that created the federal authority. The addition of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution does not incorporate

[15] Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, December 20, 1787, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Being His Autobiography, Correspondence, Reports, Messages, Addresses, and Other Writings, Official and Private,* ed. H.A. Washington (1854). Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency, http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116913 (accessed January 12, 2010).

every right that is in possession of the People nor can it be used to limit them; just because a right is not specified does not mean that the People does not possess it. Also, it is not to be implied that those rights not enumerated are to be less important than those inscribed in the Constitution. Amendment IX is a reminder that the individuals' privileges to further the enjoyment of liberty are extended to others besides the ones mentioned and that they are untouchable.

Amendment X reinforces the notion that the foundation of authority rests with the People and extends its protection to the States against the accumulation of powers by the government.

> The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

Whilst the focus of Amendment IX is the Bill of Rights and an affirmation of privileges, Amendment X is directed to the body of the Constitution. It determines that the powers handed over by the Constitution to the federal political power are the only ones the various branches of government have; all else stays with the States and/or the People. To put it another way, it rejects every source of power not present in the Constitution itself. However, perhaps because of the omission of the word 'expressly' in the first part of the amendment, the powers of government have been enhanced by the use of the 'necessary and proper clause' in the Constitution as well as the 'implied powers' argument. Amendment X was meant to be used to curtail the supremacy of government and avoid an excessive accumulation of power within it. Such accumulation would be disruptive of liberty as too much power ultimately conflicts with the people's autonomy and independence.

The mistrust towards strong government was always present in the minds of 18th century Americans and always equated with the British rule from which they had released themselves not long ago. Their struggle to secede from the British Empire still loomed large in their minds and greatly influenced their political thinking. Their main concern was individual liberty and how best to preserve it. For many, if it were possible, to live without the institution of government would be their obvious choice.

The need for government was, as Paine had said, "a necessary evil".[16] Believing that Men engage in society in order to satisfy their needs, government was "rendered necessary by the inability of moral virtue to govern the world".[17] Because of Man's natural weakness, security had to be looked for in a compact with others by which they all agreed to give up power to a designated authority, an idea that forms the basis of the 'Social Contract' theory which Locke defended and that greatly influenced Paine and the American revolutionaries. Therefore, the government's end was to defend freedom and provide security; in order to avoid risking see it turn on its creators they felt that the smaller it was, the better. Thomas Paine, again, summed up the general feeling on the subject: "I draw my idea of the form of government from a principle in nature, which no art can overturn, viz. that the more simple any thing is, the less liable it is to be disordered, and the easier repaired when disordered."[18]

In 1789 the Revolutionary process was complete and the new nation seemed ready to fulfil Paine's prophecy to begin the world anew and become a beacon of hope to the whole of mankind. All eyes were set on the great experiment taking place in the New World and the country could feel proud of itself; "Americans had made good on their revolutionary promise to create a new society with new institutions and a new government that would serve as a model for the world."[19] For many, it was now time to set the model to work and face the more mundane challenges of politics rather than dwell in high philosophical ideals. Others, however, still felt that a lot of work awaited the country before it could really claim to have lived up to its promise.

[16] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, Rights of Man, and Other Essential Writings of Thomas Paine*. (London: New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 5.
[17] *Ibid*., 7.
[18] *Ibid*., 7.
[19] William Goetzmann, *Beyond the Revolution: A History of American Thought from Paine to Pragmatism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 45.

The Citizen and the Government

> The American Revolution was not a common event. Its effects and consequences have already been awful over a great part of the globe. And when and where are they to cease?
>
> John Adams, letter to Hezekiah Niles

Today's political language seems to imply that Republic and Democracy are equivalents, when in fact they are not. Nor were they associated at the foundation of the United States either. James Madison, writing in defence of the Constitution's ratification, presented a clear separation between Republic and Democracy:

> The two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter may be extended.[20]

To the Founding Fathers democracy evoked the images of Athenian mob rule and the collapse of the Roman Republic brought down by demagogues and military populism. Although they defended popular sovereignty, by which they understood the people to be the sole owners of power which was merely delegated to the governmental agencies, they did not conceive that the people should actually govern the country. In fact, the debate about whether or not to allow the general population greater participation in defining the policies of the nation started even before Independence was achieved.

During the Revolutionary War proposals were put forward about introducing popular government. The measures were supported by those who claimed that the small farmers and labourers who had fought the English could not be excluded from the political procedures or the decisions regarding their country's institutions. Opposed to this opinion was the common belief that the masses were unfit to rule. A defence of

[20] James Madison, "Federalist Nº 10", in *Selected Federalist Papers*, ed. Bob Blaisdell. (Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 2001), 28.

hierarchical authority based on the conviction that the unstable and impulsive masses were dominated by base instincts and violent passions and therefore incapable of sound political judgment. The lessons of Antiquity convinced many in the upper classes that popular government was a sure recipe for disaster and civil strife. The obvious solution was to have 'the best' members of society, the cultural and financial elite, guiding the country's destiny and advising its citizens. Only they had the economic stability that allowed them to have a long-term perspective of what was best for the country as a whole. Spared from the drudgery and everyday preoccupations that entrap and exhaust the *hoi polloi*, they had the right education and the time to reflect about the future of the nation, the wisdom to find the best course in the treacherous waters of domestic partisan politics and international diplomacy.

This 'aristocratic' outlook of politics nonetheless favoured a certain degree of participation of the common man in matters of government. After all, the Revolution had also been made to topple a form of rule wherein only a small minority participated in the decision-making process. However, the leaders of the new country preferred to see that contribution through a form of delegate participation, i.e., by the election of representatives of the people. These would then rule in the name of the whole body of citizens and take charge of government representing the latter in their executive capacity. This was the safest approach to popular participation in the functioning of the Republic and one that made sense to the more enlightened communities of the late 18th century and long into the 19th. In his work regarding the subject, Sean Wilentz reminds us of the prevailing mood towards democracy among the literate: "Philosophically, the assumption prevailed that democracy, although an essential feature of any well-ordered government, was also dangerous and ought to be kept strictly within bounds."[21]

In support of a limitation of popular involvement in the country's management both practical reasons as well as ideological ones were presented. The size of the country and the vast distances between towns made it difficult to convene the general population every time a law was to be voted. "In a large society inhabiting an extensive country," wrote John Adams "it is impossible that the whole should assemble to make laws. The first necessary step, then, is to depute power from the many to a few of the

[21] Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 7.

most wise and good."[22] John Adams was an admirer of the British parliamentarian system of government wherein he approved of the House of Lords, the hereditary assembly of the "wise and good", acting as a counterweight to the representative chamber of the House of Commons, more prone to corruption and influence by demagogues. His belief that the well-born and most able should represent the country led many of his contemporaries to accuse him of being an 'aristocrat' and of monarchist intentions because of his support of a strong executive branch. He certainly believed that social classes were a natural phenomenon in every society and that the formation of government should accept that as a fact. Moreover, he said, certain members of society should not be eligible to vote. Besides women, considered unfit for the business of state because of their delicate nature, another group altogether was to be disenfranchised. Men without property should be excluded from suffrage because, said Adams, just as children they too have no will of their own and are more apt to be corrupted by those on whom they depend.

> Children have not judgment or will of their own. True. But will not these reasons apply to others? Is it not equally true that men in general, in every society, who are wholly destitute of property are also too little acquainted with public affairs to form a right judgment, and too dependent upon other men to have a will of their own? If this is a fact, if you give to every man who has no property a vote, will you not make a fine encouraging provision for corruption by your fundamental law? Such is the frailty of the human heart that very few men who have no property have any judgment of their own. They talk and vote as they are directed by some man of property who has attached their minds to his interest.[23]

For all the accusations of befriending aristocracy, John Adams was not alone in defending these views. In fact, many of the most influential of his contemporaries shared the same concerns and were of the opinion that the involvement of the lower

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[22] John Adams, letter to George Wythe, January 1776, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, with a Life of the Author,* ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1856). Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency, http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116853 (accessed January 10, 2010).

[23] John Adams, letter to James Sullivan, May 26, 1776, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, with a Life of the Author*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1856). Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency, http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116850 (accessed January 12, 2010).

classes should be limited to a minimum. When the delegates assembled in Philadelphia to discuss the new Constitution, the Shays Rebellion added to the fears of those who warned against permitting the establishment of too much democracy. The convention reflected the difficulty of trying to conciliate the democratic appeals of the people and the feared consequences of such an enhanced contribution. As Sean Wilentz observes,

> The delegates wished to create a new, more perfect union that would promote an enlightened class of rulers who would think continentally instead of in straitened, self-interested terms. Delegates spoke openly of the need to restrain what one Virginian called 'the turbulence and follies of democracy' and what a New York delegate had called 'popular phrenzy'. Yet the majority of the convention, as of the country, also believed that sovereignty belonged, ultimately, to the citizenry.[24]

The solution adopted to solve this dilemma was the creation of a series of filters by which the power of the people could be controlled. Hence, the House of Representatives was to be the only body directly elected by popular vote. The Senate was to be elected by the States legislatures (changed more than a hundred years afterwards to election by direct suffrage via Amendment XVII, in 1911); the executive branch, perhaps the national office whose powers have caused greater controversy throughout American history, is still today elected indirectly through an Electoral College. And the top rank of the judicial branch, the Supreme Court, is appointed by the executive, himself the product of a filtering of the popular decision. Besides these controls on the choice of officials, the delegates created a series of legal instruments, the 'checks and balances', by which each branch would control the other two. As Gore Vidal put it, "home was to have its very own government in the form of a three-part republic, so carefully checked and balanced that no Caesar, much less mob, could easily hijack it."[25]

The propertied class, merchants and financiers had managed to claim popular sovereignty for their creation whilst preventing the sovereign from determining the model and the institutions of the country. The same barriers erected by the

[24] Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 32.
[25] Gore Vidal, *Inventing a Nation – Washington, Adams, Jefferson* (New Haven, CT: London: Yale University Press, 2003), 22.

constitutional framers to protect their republic from a 'Caesar' also kept the populace from the accessing the machinery at the top echelons of the power structure. Thus, they excluded the general population from direct participation in the decisions that shape the economic and public institutions which ultimately affect their lives. These were to remain firmly in the hands of the 'wise and good'. During the debates that ensued about the ratification of the Constitution, James Madison criticized the supporters of free elective government. He warned that democracies were more vulnerable to faction and insurrection as the majority of citizens might be swayed by those who knew how to manipulate the passions of the multitude to vote in a manner that threatened the rights of others.

> Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths. Theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of government, have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would, at the same time, be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions.[26]

Having different opinions and passions in contention required a system that could guarantee the prevailing of the right sentiments. After much wrangling and deliberation, the States ratified the Constitution and its mechanisms of control and political filters, ensuring perennial accusations from the proponents of popular democracy that the political and financial elites had stolen the democratic process away from their rightful owners.

This popular suspicion towards the political elite has firm roots in the pioneer spirit of independence and self-reliance. The American belief that every citizen is perfectly capable of making the right decisions for himself disregards the need for help or 'guidance' of any particular social or political group. The inherent distrust that ordinary Americans feel about anyone that assumes their education and knowledge should endow him with a special right to decide for the community or to oversee the country arises from the very ideological nature of the American Revolution. The seeds

[26] James Madison, "Federalist Nº 10", in *Selected Federalist Papers*, ed. Bob Blaisdell. (Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 2001), 28.

of a Revolution fought to put an end to a hierarchical society ruled by an aristocracy have matured into a determination to level all social and political rankings and ensure equal rights for all. This includes the right to make one's voice heard and participate in the decisions about the nation's future. The rise of populist movements against the elites and the government, a recurring feature in American political life, is inspired by the country's attitude towards politicians and the early promise of building a society in which equality was to be its distinctive characteristic and each individual a guardian of his own freedom by keeping a close watch on government.

Nevertheless, even Thomas Jefferson, of all the Founding Fathers the one most favourable to democracy, recognized the convenience of the system agreed upon during the Constitutional Convention. Replying to a friend engaged in the writing of the Constitutions for several of the newly independent South-American republics, Jefferson admitted that there were certain affairs beyond the capacity of the common man that could only be properly dealt with via intermediaries in government.

> With us, the people (by which is meant the mass of individuals composing the society) …being unqualified for the management of affairs requiring intelligence above the common level, yet competent judges of human character, they chose for their management representatives, some by themselves immediately, others by electors chosen by themselves.[27]

However, Jefferson believed that the elected representatives should come from a 'natural' aristocracy based on virtue and talent. Unlike Adams' view of society, which acknowledged natural hierarchies and the influence they exercised, Jefferson did not share his friend's ideal of promoting equilibrium between the different social orders through the creation of separate legislative chambers for each, following the British model. Instead, he firmly defended popular sovereignty and its right to hold government accountable. Adams had a selective outlook on society and politics, his love of all things English giving his opponents enough ammunition to accuse him of royalist intentions. A leading member of the Federalist Party mainly settled in New

[27] Thomas Jefferson to Pierre S. du Pont de Nemours, April 24, 1816, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* ed. Paul L. Ford. (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1899). Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency, http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116915 (accessed January 10, 2010).

England defending normalization of the commercial ties with Britain and with a strong conservative penchant, he became more and more opposed to the popular element of the Republic. Sean Wilentz tells us that his views grew increasingly more aristocratic as time progressed.

> After American independence, Adams' social views took a sharper elitist turn, away from the idea that merit was randomly distributed among all classes and toward his claim, in 1787, that 'gentlemen will ordinarily, notwithstanding some exceptions to the rule, be the richer, and born of the more noted families'.[28]

Jefferson did not limit the accession to elected office to the members of the upper classes only, as Adams tirade suggests. Money and wealth should not be the basis upon which to validate anyone's ability to be trusted with governmental responsibilities, Jefferson argued. Instead, men from all ranks and backgrounds with the proper education, enlightened understanding of the world and political affairs could, and should, be elected to office. A meritocratic society would promote any person that demonstrated having the necessary skills and experience forming the 'natural aristocracy' that should rule the country under popular control.

Replying to a letter from John Adams where the latter argued that "Birth and Wealth together have prevailed over Virtue and Talents in all ages"[29], Thomas Jefferson made his case for the difference between what he understood were the natural and the artificial aristocracies and the reservations at the base of each man's judgment on the matter: to Jefferson the danger came from the few; to Adams it came from the many.

> For I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents.... There is also an artificial aristocracy founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents; for with these it would belong to the first class. The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society.... You think it

[28] Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 76.
[29] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, July 9, 1813, *The Adams – Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill, NC: London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 352.

> best to put the Pseudo-aristoi into a separate chamber of legislation where they may be hindered from doing mischief by their coordinate branches, and where also they may be a protection to wealth against the Agrarian and plundering enterprises of the Majority of the people. I think that to give them power in order to prevent them from doing mischief, is arming them for it, and increasing instead of remedying the evil.[30]

The differences of opinion between the two friends reached a breaking point with the French Revolution, in 1789. John Adams condemned the Revolution and was horrified by the excesses committed in the name of freedom; Jefferson was a supporter of the cause and although he did not condone the violence, he did understand the repressed feelings that had been unleashed. Jefferson was a disaffected member of the moneyed 'aristocracy' that ruled his country. His opposition to hereditary rule was one of the reasons why he favoured the French Revolution and his firm belief in popular sovereignty was behind his sympathetic look towards rebellions and uprisings.

Although the events in France far surpassed anything that he might understand, he nonetheless had, a couple of years earlier, argued that "a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical. Unsuccessful rebellions, indeed, generally establish the encroachments on the rights of the people which have produced them."[31] In fact, he recognized that they could have a powerful effect upon rulers and governments and provide a healthy purge, eliminating any temptation of government abuse. Hence, he said, the proper authorities should take a lenient approach and be "so mild in their punishment of rebellions as not to discourage them too much. It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government."[32] This approach could not be farther apart from that of John Adams who was an unambiguous advocate of order and civilised conduct in all aspects of life, especially political and social.

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[30] Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, October 28, 1813, *The Adams – Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill, NC: London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 388.
[31] Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, January 30, 1787, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Being His Autobiography, Correspondence, Reports, Messages, Addresses, and Other Writings, Official and Private,* ed. H.A. Washington (1854). Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency, http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116911 (accessed January 30, 2010).
[32] *Ibid*.

Jefferson's words echo his rooted wariness of the potential for coercive abuses by the government. To him, a greater popular participation in politics was the best assurance against the evils of government intrusion.

> We may say with truth and meaning that governments are more or less republican, as they have more or less of the element of popular election and control in their composition; and believing, as I do, that the mass of the citizens is the safest depository of their own rights,… I am a friend to that composition of government which has in it the most of this ingredient.[33]

Whilst John Adams had a cynical opinion of mankind, viewing it as corruptible and easily manipulated, thus trusting only those of the right pedigree, Jefferson argued that the people's control of government was the best weapon against tyranny. Although they could lack the needed qualifications to manage directly certain administrative tasks, they were "competent judges of natural character"[34] enabling them to elect the best elements as their representatives. Given an increased awareness of the mechanism and implications of government provided by education and virtue they would accurately perform their duty as Sovereign and Guardian of the Republic. As he himself makes clear to one of his friends, he entertains no fantasies regarding human nature but is nonetheless certain that both the development of the country's standards of living as well as the defence of liberty will be greatly improved by an educated mass of citizens.

> Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day. Although I do not, with some enthusiasts, believe that the human condition will ever advance to such a state of perfection as that there shall no longer be pain or vice in the world, yet I believe it susceptible of much improvement, and most of all in matters of government and religion; and that the diffusion of knowledge among the people is to be the instrument by which it is to be effected.[35]

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[33] Thomas Jefferson to John Taylor of Caroline, May 28, 1816, *Memoirs, Correspondence, and Private Papers of Thomas Jefferson,* vol. 4, ed. Thomas Jefferson Randolph (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1829), 285-288. Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency, http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116907 (accessed January 10, 2010).
[34] Thomas Jefferson to Pierre S. du Pont de Nemours, April 24, 1816, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* ed. Paul L. Ford (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1899). Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency, http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116915 (accessed January 10, 2010).
[35] *Ibid*.

The association between broad access to education and vigorous defence of liberty had been recognized by many of the most influential men of the recently independent country. Benjamin Rush, a friend of Benjamin Franklin, had written in 1786 that "without learning, men are incapable of knowing their rights, and where learning is confined to a few, liberty can be neither equal nor universal."[36] Education was a fundamental tool for any citizen that aimed to protect his liberties and the most eminent men of the country were consistent with their stated aim to make the United States a land of freedom and self-determination. They dedicated most of their time developing state and national education programmes and founding universities and colleges.

The importance attributed by Jefferson to educating the masses and the promotion of public virtue culminated in various educational initiatives, the most prominent one being his patronage of the University of Virginia. In his mind, the country needed centres of higher learning that could match the ones in Europe still attracting much of the American youth. His ambition to see the younger generations of his country being educated at home, rather than abroad, is anchored in a desire to preserve the nation's love of freedom which Jefferson believed was firmly rooted to its simplicity of manners and existence. Europe's sophistication and the fashionable living among the elites could ensnare an easily impressionable mind and turn it away from its country's old-fashioned quaintness and unadorned living. In a letter to John Banister, Jefferson leaves no doubts as to how he regards a European education and especially its potential effects on the upbringing of future citizens.

> Let us view the disadvantages of sending a youth to Europe. To enumerate them all would require a volume. I will select a few. If he goes to England, he learns drinking, horse racing, and boxing. These are the peculiarities of English education. The following circumstances are common to education in that and the other countries of Europe. He acquires a fondness for European luxury and dissipation, and a contempt for the simplicity of his own country; he is fascinated with the privileges of the European aristocrats, and sees with abhorrence the lovely equality which the poor enjoy with the rich in his own country; he contracts a partiality for aristocracy or monarchy;… It appears to

[36] William Goetzmann, *Beyond the Revolution: A History of American Thought from Paine to Pragmatism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 113.

> me, then, that an American coming to Europe for education loses in his knowledge, in his morals, in his health, in his habits, and in his happiness… Cast your eye over America. Who are the men of most learning, of most eloquence, most beloved by their countrymen and most trusted and promoted by them? They are those who have been educated among them, and whose manners, morals, and habits are perfectly homogeneous with those of the country.[37]

Not only was a foreign education, i.e., European, undesirable because counter-productive in its effects since it would not prepare the youth for life in the United States, it could also become a danger to liberty and equality at home. The pernicious influence exercised on the youth by living in monarchies amongst dissolute aristocrats could prove nefarious to the formation of citizens that, due to their education and influence, could become elected officials or trusted with government positions. The continuous pressure of despotic traditions felt overseas and the routine contempt for the common man that he would witness abroad, Jefferson warned, would inebriate the naïve minds of the young men. Upon returning home, the loss of so comfortable a living as the one they had experienced and the sharing of a squalid equality with the simple folk would be nothing short of abhorrent to them.

The importance Jefferson attributes to educating citizens who can act as watchful guardians against the encroachments of government and the threats to their liberties is only equalled by his zeal and attachment to protecting America's rural qualities. These he considered being the best elements of American society and the perfect counter to what he perceived was urban corruption that could derail all the efforts of promoting equality and popular sovereignty. To be educated in the homeland was the safest way for young minds to grow accustomed to American virtues of modesty and love of freedom; it would also make them more predisposed to fight for and protect them. The development of the individual would pave the way for the development of the country and strengthen the values upon which the country was created. Jefferson had no doubts that any American ethics ought to be simple ones: love of liberty and the strength of will required to be free were incompatible with dissipation

[37] Thomas Jefferson to John Banister, October 15, 1785, *Memoirs, Correspondence, and Private Papers of Thomas Jefferson,* vol. 1, ed. Thomas Jefferson Randolph (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1829), 345-347. Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency, http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116900 (accessed January 24, 2010).

and luxury that poisoned the mind. Therefore, he concluded, "the consequences of foreign education are alarming to me as an American."[38] Jefferson strived to find solutions that would reinforce social cohesion as his greatest fear was that dissent and disunion in American society would divide the nation and, thus, imperil its survival. Jefferson knew, like many of the Founding Fathers, that unity among the classes was essential for the survival of the young United States in a hostile world, especially given the strong sense of independence and rebellious nature of its citizens.

A more decisive clash between Founding Fathers in the formative years of the Republic saw Thomas Jefferson battle Alexander Hamilton, personal secretary and close friend to George Washington. Hamilton shared much of Adam's admiration for the British Constitution and was a supporter of strong central government, having been a staunch defender of the 1787 Constitution (he was the author of a majority of the Federalist Papers). During Washington's administration he served as Secretary of the Treasury and worked to organise the country's finances and create a central authority responsible for control of the economy and management of currency and credit. Despite not being mentioned in the Constitution, Hamilton successfully created a national Bank of the United States against the vehement opposition of Jefferson, among others, who believed that it was an unlawful expansion of government as well as being a harbinger of trouble. Whilst Jefferson was adamant that government should be kept to a minimum and easily under control of the general population, Hamilton saw government as a positive institution that, if managed efficiently and with expertise by the best men, could provide for the well-being of the nation.

The arguments used by both forever defined the opposing views on the interpretation of the Constitution and government powers, up to this day. In defence of his economic and financial policies Hamilton argued that the exigencies of government and the 'necessary and proper' clause in the Constitution[39] permitted government to use means not specifically mentioned to carry out its duties, giving birth to the 'loose constructionist' interpretation of the Constitution. Jefferson remained faithful to his 'strict' interpretation of the text in accordance with the Tenth Amendment of the

[38] *Ibid*.
[39] Article 1, section 8, enumerates the powers of Congress including the power "To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof."

Constitution. The differences between the two men were not only about the interpretation of the text, but extended into their view of the world and about the future of the country, more particularly about the role of government. While Hamilton defended a cosmopolitan view of America, a country destined for progress and engaged with the world, Jefferson had a simpler and more parochial country in mind, one more attuned with its roots as a land of farmers and unsophisticated but righteous people.

Jefferson's agrarian ideal resembles that of the early Roman Republic, a nation of small farmer-citizens, simple but virtuous men ploughing the land during peacetime ready to take up the sword in defence of freedom and country whenever needed. They would act as the guardians and the bulwark of the Republic he envisaged, a land of humble, hard-working people yet proud of their independence. Nevertheless, Jefferson did not dismiss the benefits of urban commerce, especially the maritime commerce that was truly the only means of export for American goods. The young Republic could not afford to turn its back on the rest of the world and the thriving cities and seaports of the East Coast were a vital lifeline that could not be ignored. But these were also home to urban speculators, always looking to make a profit out of the work of others, and the many unoccupied city poor, idle men with no morals, dependent on the goodwill of benefactors and patrons that used them at their leisure for whatever purpose no matter how corrupt.

> To protect the republic from being corrupted by these dependent men, Jefferson looked to expanding the influence of America's free majority of self-reliant planters and yeomen (he never really distinguished between the two) – honest, moderately prosperous, and productive toilers whose reason, supposedly, was not clouded by servility to others.[40]

Sean Wilentz draws attention to Jefferson's intentions in his praise or rural life as another means to build a solid safeguard for the defence of liberty. The opportunity offered by the Louisiana Purchase, in 1803, to double the size of the country was quickly grasped by President Jefferson, despite the political quarrelling and the constitutional uncertainties about the power of the executive to conclude the deal. Despite the doubts about its legality and the political opposition, Jefferson approved the

[40] Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 47-48.

treaty, not only because it opened the Mississippi valley to American traders and provided the country with a new major seaport, New Orleans, but also because Jefferson was "secure in his view that the Purchase would provide sufficient land to keep the United States an agrarian yeoman's republic for all time."[41] Now with more land than the young Republic could manage, Jefferson's dream of populating it with small and loyal hardworking citizens seemed destined to be fulfilled.

As the contest between the different views regarding popular participation in the political process and the duties of government raged on, another proposal emerged in the first half of the 19th century offering a fresh look about the individual, his association with the political institutions and what the 'pursuit of happiness' should mean. The Transcendentalists, a loose group of intellectuals which included philosophers, poets, scholars and ministers that originated in New England, revolted against what they perceived was America's excessive mercantilism and rationalization. It was a Romantic revolt against the common sense approach and arid materialism of the Enlightenment, which they regarded as being deprived of any idealism. To them America was an inspiring land, a country that transcended the mundane and offered the chance to explore infinite possibilities of development both for the individual as well as for American society as a whole. Therefore, a new spirit and character was needed for a new set of ideals and moral codes. These would aim higher than the mere accumulation of wealth and endeavour to smooth the progress of Man through the different opportunities of advancement available to all.

The Transcendentalist movement emerged in the context of early 19th century American religious debate as a reaction against the new rationalism of Unitarianism, which itself had been a response to the old Calvinist piety. Unitarianism "was rational, intelligent, worldly, and perfectly in tune with the mercantile values of Boston's sophisticates… Unitarianism was the ultimate in Lockean common sense, a reasonable religion for the intelligent and unsuperstitious."[42] To the Transcendentalists, Unitarianism had "no heart hence no soul."[43] As such, they wanted to add spirit and essence not only to Religion but also to reinvigorate American society. They sought to bring forward a new vision of Man and of his place in the World, to release him from

[41] *Ibid*., 111.
[42] William Goetzmann, *Beyond the Revolution: A History of American Thought from Paine to Pragmatism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 188.
[43] *Ibid*., 189.

materialist preoccupations and on a new course that would lead to personal development and a newfound connection with Nature: "on a social level, to be Transcendental was to be critical of materialism, crassness, and the overly rationalized society that America threatened to become."[44] Directed at the individual, it was a personal emancipation project aiming to bring forward some idealism and a new morality and ethics into people's life.

The bond with Nature was a fundamental aspect of Transcendentalism, especially for Emerson, one of the more prominent members of the movement. Following German metaphysics, Emerson differentiated between the external world, the world of fact and matter, and the world of imagination, pure mind and understanding. The link between the two was Nature, which through symbolic perception acted as a guide to the spirit; the natural world acted as an illustration, a microcosm of the whole. Starting from the world of phenomena one could reach the higher echelons of knowledge by studying and understanding the natural facts because they are representations of spiritual facts. This association with Nature extends to the composition and development of human institutions. Being a symbol of the divine, Nature's development is to be replicated by human societies and countries: everything is destined to grow and bloom and must be allowed to do so. Therefore, to Emerson Democracy is the perfect social system as it enables the community to freely express itself and develop.

The freedom and equal opportunity granted by the democratic process emulates that observed in the wild where every plant and animal is free to live and to mature in equal circumstances. The freedom of choice granted by Democracy enables the betterment of its citizens, the ultimate Transcendentalist ambition. They expected that given the opportunity to choose in free elections the population would opt for the right thing, make the most ethical decision. Democracy could only survive if the petty personal interests were laid aside in favour of the decision that would benefit the public good. It was vital that the decisions taken by the citizen reflect this and the best way to ensure that, the Transcendentalists argued, was to promote the betterment of each citizen, to encourage the flourishing of the higher mind, the self-awareness that is unselfish and understands that its interests are common to those of the community. Therefore, the emergence of moral decisions worthy of open-minded citizens depends

[44] *Ibid*., 213.

on the freedom provided by a plural society, which seeks to create the conditions for the New Man to blossom unfettered, emulating Nature. This autonomy is fundamentally opposed to predetermined judgments and actions dictated from above in an authoritarian system, just as a plant will not grow to its fullest when constrained by a vase. The sensitive observation of Nature and the deciphering of its symbolism have as a corollary an understanding of Man's infinite possibilities and of the best arrangement to achieve it. There was an innate union between American democracy and the free flowing progress of Nature; all that remained now was to find the best way to motivate Americans to do the same.

The Transcendentalists believed that the focus on property and rights that dominated American politics and society should be diverted towards people. The country and its institutions had been designed with too much emphasis on what they argued was a narrow idea of freedom. They wanted to include the spiritual and the insightful into the concept, expanding the possibilities and the meaning of freedom itself. Emerson sentenced that "the form of government which prevails, is the expression of what cultivation exists in the population which permits it"[45], implying a direct link between the formation of a government whose main vocation is the defence of property rights and liberty and the culture of its citizens, obsessed with their material possessions and the freedom to act upon them. He clearly despairs of his countrymen's lack of higher aspirations when he says that "there never was in any man sufficient faith in the power of rectitude, to inspire him with the broad design of renovating the State on the principle of right and love."[46]

Emerson wanted more; the Founding Fathers had located the source of power and rights with the people and the Constitution had been designed to protect that. Jefferson, and those who shared his opinion, wanted America to be an agrarian society in order to ensure economic and political liberty for its farmer-citizens, relying on the social independence from patrons or benefactors that owning a plot of land would grant to the poorer citizens. However, none of this addressed the fundamental questions of moral and ethical freedom that troubled the minds of those aware that something was amiss regarding America's potential. To put it simply, the Transcendentalists wanted to

[45] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Politics", in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Second Series* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2008), 258.
[46] *Ibid*., 267.

know one thing: what are the personal freedoms protected in the Constitution for? To Emerson, the answer was simple: to allow people the chance to delineate their path toward intellectual and moral advancement, to reach greater consciousness and understanding of themselves and of all that surrounds them. "To educate the wise man, the State exists", Emerson declared, and he boldly concluded that "with the appearance of the wise man, the State expires."[47] All of the ideals of the Revolution, the Constitution and the political body so created, all these exist for the people. Not merely to protect their liberty and property, but fundamentally to enable them to elevate themselves from the material onto the ideal.

To Emerson the education and empowerment of the country's citizens is the only end of Government; not only a political and economic empowerment but also a spiritual one. The political institutions created to enforce the Constitution and the individual liberties would be put to work for the personal growth and development of every citizen. Their existence, which is justified by the need to protect the constitutional arrangement, would cease once that goal was achieved. Freedom is not to be achieved under the protecting arm of a political establishment designed to shield property but through personal improvement and a new moral character. The Revolutionary ideal of liberating people from oppression and begin a new era of liberty would be best achieved through people's empowerment and not through the influence of artificial organizations created for that end. As Emerson saw it, the relationship between the individual and the structures of power was upside down: the latter should exist for the people and not the other way around. As Joseph E. Mullin explains, "Emerson does not believe that if the structures of society are changed then the people will follow; on the contrary, reform begins with self-trust, self-respect, and the subsequent emergence of personal power."[48] This reform through the individual would influence and extend itself to all the country for, as Emerson makes clear, "the highest end of government is the culture of men: and if man can be educated, the institutions will share their improvement, and the moral sentiment will write the law of the land"[49] Change the man, and the whole country will follow.

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[47] *Ibid*. 265.
[48] Joseph Eugene Mullin, "Ralph Waldo Emerson – From Illusion to Power," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 53, nº 4 (1997): 577.
[49] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Politics", in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson – Series I & II* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2008), 260.

The dawn of the wise man, the man of high character and virtue, would announce the end of the organized State as the latter would become obsolete. However, despite all the political proclamations about democracy and the triumph of the rule of law, Emerson is aware that there is still a long way to go to accomplish that ideal scenario. As he himself acknowledges, "we think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cockcrowing and the morning star. In our barbarous society the influence of character is in its infancy."[50] To consider anyone a person of character is the utmost quality that can be bestowed by Emerson; "men of character are the conscience of the society to which they belong,"[51] however "as a political power, as the rightful lord who is to tumble all rulers from their chairs, its presence is hardly yet suspected."[52] By bringing about that new maturity in Man, the State heralds the arrival of its true master. The State exists to prepare and foster that which will, when ready, take its place as ruler and dismiss the former as having completed its only mission, yielding its position of authority to the rightful sovereign: the people, unbounded and truly in control of its destiny.

The real state of affairs, though, is dispiriting and Emerson laments the fact that "we live in a very low state of the world, and pay unwilling tribute to governments founded on force."[53] As a consequence, the solution to counter this exercise of force, this misuse of power, while we wait for the coming of the man of character is straightforward: "The less government we have, the better, - the fewer laws, and the less confided power. The antidote to this abuse of formal Government, is, the influence of private character, the growth of the individual."[54] This idea is shared with Thoreau, Emerson's disciple, who summed up is thoughts about the matter.

> I heartily accept the motto, 'That government is best which governs the least'; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe, 'That government is best

[50] *Ibid*., 266.
[51] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Character", in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson – Series I & II* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2008), 213.
[52] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Politics", in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson – Series I & II* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2008), 266.
[53] *Ibid*., 267.
[54] *Ibid*., 265.

> which governs not at all'; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have[55]

Thoreau expects to see the time come when Men are ready to govern themselves without the assistance or coercion of government. The dawn of the 'wise man' is, to him, the sign of the end of government.

Government is a necessary evil, as Thomas Paine declared, and a burden that must be tolerated grudgingly. Therefore, to hand too much power to the State should be avoided as it will hamper the progress of the citizen. The levying of taxes, the intrusions into the private life of citizens and the dictates of laws intended to change society or otherwise influence the individual in his decisions are all obstacles that prevent him from following his natural course of expansion, which should be free from any interference. In Emerson there is not so much the worry to have the citizens keeping a permanent watch over the government as the concern that the latter should not grow out of its constitutional boundaries. The purpose is to keep the road clear for personal development and the final replacement of the State. As such, too much State would be in contradiction with the ultimate goal: it would strengthen the resistance it would offer to its own demise thus risking the derailment of all efforts.

The change in mentalities must come from within each one and cannot be imposed from above by society or by laws designed to create social models.

> Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity… Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.[56]

The purpose is not to entice rebellion against society or any form of authority (although Thoreau did endorse pacifist resistance.) but to encourage an inner, personal, struggle against uniformity and social pressure to comply and fall in line with the

[55] Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience", in *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 385.
[56] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance", in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson – Series I & II* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2008), 23.

accepted practices and opinions. When Thoreau was jailed for failing to pay his taxes as a protest against the Mexican War, Emerson visited him and asked "What are you doing in there?" to which Thoreau retorted "What are you doing out there?"[57] The key word is self-reliance, and the rejection of popular standards in favour of one's own set of tried and painfully learnt principles. "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string,"[58] however high the price might be for such self-reliance. This romantic aspiration, therefore, is a personal endeavour which has to be achieved without any assistance from the outside and regardless of wealth and social condition.

Despite this idealism, the economic realities of the country were giving rise to a growing dissatisfaction among the population. They questioned the much lauded liberty and democratic achievements of the country as well as the status quo regarding the political and economic responsibilities of American society. Criticism abounded and demands for change increased as well as the insistence for government to have a more direct intervention in everyday life and drop its laissez-faire attitude.

[57] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 156.
[58] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson – Series I & II* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2008), 22.

The Challenges to the *Status Quo*

> The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.
>
> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

The Transcendentalists, particularly Emerson, revealed to America a new reality, a new vision beyond that of the visible manifestations of Nature; one that required an aesthetic sensibility to decipher the symbolic representations of the World in order to understand their ulterior meaning. Their goal was to capture the spiritual meaning of Nature so as to deliver its revelations as a guiding light for humanity. In 1855 Walt Whitman took it upon himself to be the interpreter of Nature and disclose its hidden significance. But, above all, he was to be the seer and the prophet of the American experiment, a self-appointed quest to reveal to all the true nature of the country and its destiny as the Universal Nation, a transnational land where all cultures would meet for a single purpose: to work for the transcendence of Man beyond race, culture, education and wealth. In his preface to *Leaves of Grass* he justifies the Poet's intimate and mystical connection with America's soul, itself a unique country, and his unique position as oracle:

> The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races. Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people. To him the other continents arrive as contributions…he gives them reception for their sake and his own sake. His spirit responds to his country's spirit.[59]

The supernatural bond between Whitman and the nation's spirit would give birth to what was to become a Gospel for Democracy. This amounted to a reinforcement of the American idealism born with the Revolution, for Democracy was the only system that allowed Man to grow and develop itself to its fullest. However, Democracy required strength of will, the fortitude to forego one's personal interests in favour of the

[59] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass – The Original 1855 Edition* (Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 2007), 4.

collective well-being; an almost physical determination to surpass the basic instincts of self-preservation and the impulse to ensure the most beneficial situation. The strength of mind to step out of the individual perspective and search for what was best for the community was a form of advanced citizenship that Democracy demanded if it were to be viable. Every citizen needed to understand that liberty is not about doing what one wants, but doing the right thing for everybody. Such virtue, Whitman knew, was scarce and the people needed to be reminded of it. He had not come to preach, but merely to shed light on the country's revered qualities and hopes which had been forgotten and abandoned. He unveiled them for he was the keeper of the sacred fire: "the greatest poet does not moralize or make applications of morals… he knows the soul"[60]. His purpose was to guide America back towards the ideals that had inspired the Revolution and announce the coming of the age when America would fulfil its destiny. He would show the way and give meaning to events in accordance to the plan put forth for the United States by Nature. Only he could understand the higher meaning of what occurred in the country and its importance within the wider history of mankind's constant improvement: "past and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is."[61]

Whitman understood America as a work in progress, waiting for completion. There still remained a lot to be done to accomplish what it could, and indeed must, become, the great democratic nation. By the time he had published the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* slavery was the greatest wrong that America had to correct. The country was embroiled in a dispute that grew fiercer by the day and that divided the nation into pro and anti-slavery camps. Whitman believed that his book would heal the nation, fill the breach that had opened and prevent the slide into civil war. He would save the great American experiment and bring together the opposites, uniting them under that great American ideal, democracy, achieving the union of races, cultures and classes in harmony and liberty. The disunity wrought by slavery threatened Whitman's vision, which required that the country move beyond partisan politics and party factionalism. Unity was of the essence; the dream needed to be shared collectively or it would otherwise succumb to the various conflicting forces pulling it apart. Only an idea of common nation could cement together the gathering of all races and cultures in

[60] *Ibid*., 10.
[61] *Ibid*., 9.

liberty and democratic harmony, the American Universalism that the Poet had come to announce.

Although slavery and slave-trade were the main issues, the clash had a wider reach and spilled over into questions about States' Rights and the range of federal intervention. The articles of the Constitution regarding the powers of Government and the 10th Amendment itself gave room to different interpretations as to the States' capacity to determine their economic model (heavily reliant on slave work in the Southern States) and the Federal authority's ability to intervene and terminate the exploitation of human beings. These questions, most infamously that of slavery which had been left unaddressed in order to guarantee the South's support for the Constitution, had been adjourned when the 1787 Constitution was ratified and had finally come to a head in 1861 when the slave States of the South seceded from the Union. The Civil War that followed lasted 4 years and is still up to this day the deadliest conflict in American History.

The end of the war meant not only the victory of the North and the end of the short-lived Confederate States of America but had wider and far-reaching political, social and racial repercussions. The end of slavery and the enfranchisement of the black population of the South was a major step towards completing the "greatest poem" that Whitman announced. The advancement of Democracy had to be achieved in countless bloody battlefields. However, it also meant reinforcing Washington's power of intervention and the role played by the federal government in the social compact. From the end of the war onwards, the national government would be free to step up its involvement in States' affairs and expand its regulatory powers over an increasing array of matters. All of the pending questions between the States and the federal government were decided in favour of the victor, as always happens in quarrels that are left to be decided by the fate of arms.

The victory of the central power over the separate units in the United States draws a parallel with the long struggle that opposed the European monarchs fighting to consolidate their power against the feudal lords that dominated medieval politics. The outcome of that slow process was the emergence of a new structure centred on the monarch that dominated the kingdom and evolved into a strong centralised power that closely controlled any local or regional attempt at autonomous self-rule. The seeds of the government's accumulation of prerogatives and powers were sown in the United

States as a result of the Civil War and at the expense of the States, a development which, in time, would raise questions about the nature of American federalism. However, given the nature of the Southern States' ultimate assertion of autonomy, which inevitably meant a right to secession, few questions remained regarding the federal reorganization, its intervention in the South and the string of new controls that were enforced ensuring the upcoming supremacy of Washington.

There were other great transformations taking place in the United States, whose momentum accelerated after the war. The growing industrialisation of the country, especially in the North, triggered the change from an agricultural to an industrial society. The political stability after the war laid the ground for massive economic and financial investments that changed the urban landscape as well as the living conditions of the urban residents in American cities, especially in the Eastern seaboard. The quick growth in the numbers of immigrants contributed to enlarge the ranks of the urban poor who lived in deprived conditions. Their swelling numbers meant a plentiful source of cheap labour that fed the factories and ensured the wages paid were kept well below what was reasonable. The working conditions were degrading and the basic safety and hygiene standards ignored with impunity. Accidents and disease ravaged the working force, many of them children, who spent an average of 10-12 hours to earn wages that failed to ensure their basic sustenance. Adding to this, the periodic economic depressions which threw workers into unemployment by the thousands made life, especially in the cities, a frightful experience.

The dreadful working and living conditions experienced by the masses of urban workers were captured and denounced by several writers of the time. The effects of the laissez-faire capitalism and the appalling manoeuvrings of the big companies were exposed in almost graphic detail by the likes of Upton Sinclair, Jack London, Frank Neiser, Theodor Dreiser and Frank Norris; even Mark Twain and Henry James criticized the system in newspaper articles. These authors were attacked as "muckrakers", accused of making a name for themselves out of the mud and filth they raked and scraped contributing to the social tensions of the time.[62] This veritable

[62] See Howard Zinn, Chapter 13 "The Socialist Challenge", in *A People's History of the United States*, for the contribution made by writers to expose the labour conditions and corruption during the late 19th-early 20th century America as well as details about the general working atmosphere.

"literature of exposure" was read by millions and contributed to create the right social frame of mind to bring forward reform.

The beginning of the 20th century saw a push for legislation aimed at regulating working hours, child labour and safety standards in working places. It was also the period when the first organizations of workers designed to protect and enhance their rights were formed and started making themselves heard in American society. The federal government enjoyed a surge in effective powers of intervention in the economy via the social discontentment and demands for greater regulation in the market. New laws were passed that increased the regulatory powers of Washington, especially during Theodore Roosevelt's administration (1901 – 1909) whose efforts to contain and fight the big business monopolies earned him the nickname "trust-buster". In 1913, the 16th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified enabling Congress to levy taxes on incomes. Although hailed by many as a progressive act which opened the door for a redistribution of wealth sponsored by the federal government it also granted the latter a massive source of income. This created a permanent financial basis from which to shore its growth and pre-eminence at national level since it provided no apportionment of the new revenue among the States. The States suffered another setback when the 17th Amendment, also ratified in 1913, stripped them of the power to elect their Senators through their respective State legislatures. Designed to prevent corruption and bribery during senatorial elections in the States legislatures and to increase the process' transparency, it established that henceforth all Senators were to be elected directly by popular vote. While it did increase the democratic nature of the system, it nonetheless represented another clear sign that power was shifting from the States to the central government in Washington.

The period of reform when all these new laws were passed benefitted many, especially amongst the common people. Nonetheless, fundamental social and political degrading conditions remained intact, especially for the black population, women and socialist activists who attacked what they saw as evidence of the grip that the rich and powerful classes still held over the country's political system. As one left-leaning historian understood it, the whole effort had but one aim, to keep the masses quiet without having to change any of the fundamentals of the system and ensure continuation of the *status quo*.

> What was clear in this period to blacks, to feminists, to labor organizers and socialists, was that they could not count on the national government. True, this was the "Progressive Period," the start of the Age of Reform; but it was a reluctant reform, aimed at quieting the popular risings, not making fundamental changes... The system was rich, productive, complex; it could give enough of a share of its riches to enough of the working class to create a protective shield between the bottom and the top of the society.[63]

There was much to be sceptical about. Racial segregation remained an established fact of everyday life in the South long after the end of the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation. Much of what had been achieved in the immediate aftermath of the war was quickly lost in the years following the departure of the federal troops. During the "Progressive Era" lynch mob violence against blacks was common in the Southern states and Woodrow Wilson's administration (1913 – 1921) tried to re-segregate the Armed Forces and the Federal Civil Offices. Historian Rayford Logan was so disillusioned with the scaling back witnessed in the first decades of the new century that he called it the nadir of American race relations.[64] Other groups had equal cause to feel bitter and disappointed; the fact that women were allowed the vote in 1920 did not ensure them equal social standing with men and even the new labour regulations did not stop the factory owners from abusing their workers. To the more revolutionary of the forces opposing the prevailing order the Constitution of 1787 was seen as an instrument of control devised by the American oligarchy to perpetuate its power. Urban industrial societies could not be expected to be governed by constitutions crafted in a preindustrial era based on completely different economic and social realities, they argued. Therefore, the radicals demanded profound transformations needed to deal with the new world; a new Constitution was required along with a reorganization of the whole government structure. Preferably, a restructuring that would hand the federal power increased leverage to exert its influence upon society and bring about the desired social changes and redistribution of property.

Others, however, did not share the determination to abolish the existing form of government, believing that what was needed, instead, was a new approach to the way politics was run and to extend the decision-making process to the lower classes. These

[63] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 349.
[64] *Ibid*., 347.

moderate progressives were convinced that it was far more important to recapture the government from those who had hijacked it rather than demolish the whole edifice and start anew. There was no need to sever the link with the traditional system which they believed was essentially democratic and gave the reins of power to the people. Barry Karl sums up their point of view regarding revolution and the corrupt elites that had overtaken the country:

> The government created by the Constitution of 1787 was thus perceived as a democratic government already in place. Any connections between that government and upper-class wealth were understood as insidious corruptions of popular control, not as inherent defects in governmental form. Revolutions, therefore, were not necessary. One had only to "turn the rascals out" and retake the power... the threat to democracy was not the existing government but the failure to use it properly. That failure could be remedied by attacking the hidden centers of antidemocratic power through legislation.[65]

The aversion that many felt about violent seizure of power and social upheaval, even among those who espoused Marxist ideals, persuaded them that change could be achieved by placing the right people in the right places. Therefore, "if Americans could elect a socialist Congress and a socialist president, who would in turn appoint socialists to the Supreme Court, American government would begin to behave differently without having undergone a revolutionary change."[66] For these progressives, the system was not entirely broken; it was still valid and could yet provide the answers that society sorely needed provided it was interpreted in the right way.

This prompted accusations that such arguments reflected the intrinsic conservative nature of the proponents as well as of American society in general, unable to detach itself from an obsolete and oligarchic frame of mind. The violent methods that the radicals proposed to enforce social justice were anathema in a society that prided itself on the democratic nature of its government. The economic aspects of socialism, by which the government would take a greater role in regulating and even managing important aspects of the productive infrastructure, were seen as contrary to the American spirit of doing business which was all about rugged independence and

[65] Barry D. Karl, *The Uneasy State: The United States from 1915 to 1945* (Chicago: London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 24.
[66] *Ibid*., 12.

energetic entrepreneurship, free of constraints and bureaucratic shackles. There were better ways to correct imbalances than blindly following fundamental ideological recipes at face value without analysing their compatibility with the country's society and economy. The violent capture of power and radical reorganization of government advocated by the revolutionaries never really appealed to the majority of the population in the United States, in part because, as Barry Karl notes, "'Violence', the term that described the antithesis of the American conception of political action, was unacceptable as a method of reform. Americans had had their democratic revolution. All that was necessary was to make it work."[67]

The American Independence had been a just revolution, properly justified and in a sense an act of self-preservation against the usurpation of ancient rights. Unlike the French Revolution, it had not descended into tyranny and methodical murder to force the population into submission and defend the new tyrants' hold on power. The American Revolution never turned against its citizens and the latter felt that they participated freely in the system of government. To accept that a new insurgency was needed was to acknowledge that it had all been an illusion and that the philosophical foundations of the Revolution were nothing more than a mythological construct built to blind and deceive the population at large. To the common white man, although life could be harsh and unfair, the most compelling evidence in support of the system was the delivery of what it promised at the start of the Revolution: freedom to lead one's life as one saw fit, freedom from repressive government or aristocratic whims. Millions of immigrants trying to escape from poverty and oppression were attracted to the United States by the promise that equal opportunity was given to anyone who was willing to work hard and take the chances coming their way. Although women, African Americans and other minorities felt the brunt of the system's injustices, the majority still believed that the solution lay in reform rather that revolution. And the majority decided the outcome of elections.

Randolph Bourne was, primarily, a man of letters, a writer of progressive ideals and a critic of culture and society. Writing in the early years of the 20th century his essays point to the inconsistencies and injustices of American democracy and he attacks the system which, in his opinion, failed to live up to its promises. Bourne was very

[67] *Ibid*., 24.

critical of the entire American political establishment and the U.S. Constitution which he considered fortunate to have been ratified prior to the French Revolution. The 1787 compromise was nothing short of a plot by the wealthy and powerful to take the place of the departing British overlords at the top of the new Republic. Given the popular enthusiasm in America in support of the events in France, Bourne invited his fellow countrymen to reflect about the direction of the country had the Articles of Confederacy lasted a while longer.

> It may be a salutary thing for an American to pause now and then and wonder what would have been the character of our Federal Constitution if the Philadelphia Convention had met five years later than it did. It is safe to say that after 1791 our oligarchic Constitution could never have been ratified in a single State of the Union. The people would have insisted that the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the measures of the National Assembly be taken as our model, rather than Montesquieu's misconception of the British Constitution, and the aristocratic philosophy of Hamilton and Madison.[68]

Bourne was an angry opponent of all those constantly evoking the English liberal tradition as America's legacy who claimed that its institutions had been modelled to uphold the same values and defend liberty. His censure was two-fold: first of all, the British settlers in the American colonies did not structure their communities based on general philosophical ideas about freedom or political affairs. The pilgrims, escaping from religious persecution in England, arrived in the New World with a simple purpose: "they came to get freedom to live as they wanted to. They came to escape from the stifling air and chaos of the old world; they came to make their fortune in a new land".[69] Small religious communities as they were they merely organized themselves in accordance to what rules existed in the motherland. Consequently, the outcome was a reproduction of the 17th and 18th English social and political realities, with all its injustices and distortions.

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[68] Randolph Bourne, "The Doctrine of the Rights of Man as Formulated by Thomas Paine", in *The Radical Will – Selected Essays 1911-1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (Berkeley, CA: Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 238.
[69] Randolph Bourne, "Trans-national America", in *The Radical Will – Selected Essays 1911-1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (Berkeley, CA: Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 250.

> They invented no new social framework. Rather they brought over bodily the old ways to which they had been accustomed. Tightly concentrated on a hostile frontier, they were conservative beyond belief. Their pioneer daring was reserved for the objective conquest of material resources. In their folkways, in their social and political institutions, they were, like every colonial people, slavishly imitative of the mother-country. So that, in spite of the "Revolution", our whole legal and political system remained more English than the English, petrified and unchanging, while in England law developed to meet the needs of the changing times.[70]

Secondly, he attacks all of those who make reference to the writings of the promoters of English liberty as a source of confirmation of the validity and worthiness of the American arrangement. He was especially severe towards Edmund Burke and all those who argued for representative democracy. His vision of democracy is directly taken from Thomas Paine and he lambasts all those

> whose reverence for Anglo-Saxon institutions and the palladia of English freedom always stops short of any attempt to make that freedom vital and significant instead of a superstition. Our strongest modern exponents of the rights of "freedom" and "property", oppose all attempts to extend the sphere of freedom and make it potent in our social life and to change our social system, where the majority of men are economically unfree in everything but a Pickwickian sense , and in which only a minority own any property at all. Conservatives, however, will always prefer to hear the doctrines of English freedom expounded by Edmund Burke rather than Thomas Paine. For to Burke freedom meant freedom to be governed by a representative class. To Paine, however, it meant the equal exercise of civil rights in society.[71]

Bourne did not see in existence an equal exercise of rights in the United States, neither in his time nor in any previous period, for that matter. The accusation persisted that the *de facto* aristocracy of landowners ruling the recently liberated colonies had hijacked the reins of power and succeeded in ratifying a Constitution which legitimised

[70] *Ibid*. 250.
[71] Randolph Bourne, "The Doctrine of the Rights of Man as Formulated by Thomas Paine", in *The Radical Will – Selected Essays 1911-1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (Berkeley, CA: Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 239.

and perpetuated its command of the country, notwithstanding all the pledges of upholding liberty. Randolph Bourne makes the distinction between freedom to do as one pleases, which he says the 'ruling element' has been quite liberal in providing, and freedom as the "democratic cooperation in determining the ideals and purposes and industrial and social institutions"[72] of the country, which are kept tightly in the hands of the country's elite. Thus, the decisions that shape the institutions and principles that affect everyday life of ordinary people are taken by a minority; a minority which determines the burdens and living conditions of the majority without sharing or even experiencing them. To Randolph Bourne there was still a long way to go before the masses of common people were equal participants in the decisions that shaped the country's future, before democracy had finally been established in America, the land that promised freedom to everyone. The accusations of oligarchic rule would persist and gain strength in the years to come.

[72] Randolph Bourne, "Trans-national America", in *The Radical Will – Selected Essays 1911-1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (Berkeley, CA: Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 252.

America and the World

> Observe good faith and justice towards all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all. Religion and morality enjoin this conduct; and can it be, that good policy does not equally enjoin it? It will be worthy of a free, enlightened, and at no distant period, a great nation, to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence.
>
> George Washington, *Farewell Address*

The turn of the century witnessed another momentous test to America's foundational political idealism, this time concerning its foreign policy and intervention in the outside world. In 1823 President James Monroe, on the occasion of his annual address to Congress, put forward the United States' official position regarding the newly independent South-American countries in what came to be known as the Monroe Doctrine. Henceforth, the President declared, the Western hemisphere was no longer open for colonization. All the former colonies that had reached independence were to be respected as sovereign nations and America would be especially vigilant to see that it was so. The reason behind this need to defend the new Southern neighbours was a simple one: the political system of the United States was fundamentally different from those of the European powers. Therefore, the preservation of that unique system, "under which we have enjoyed unexampled felicity"[73], required that there could be no undue influence coming from the autocratic governments in Europe. For that reason, although keen to preserve friendly terms with all nations and particularly the European Empires, the United States would consider

> any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety… It is impossible that the allied powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness.[74]

[73] James Monroe, *Monroe Doctrine as Expressed During President Monroe's Seventh Annual Message to Congress*, December 2, 1823. Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=23&page=transcript (accessed May 5, 2010).
[74] *Ibid*.

In exchange for this European non-involvement there would be no American interference whatsoever in any existing colonies that Europe still had in the Americas. Also, the utmost neutrality would be observed regarding the internal affairs of Europe and the United States would not take sides in any dispute or participate in any alliances with any European powers. Neutrality was the policy advised by George Washington in his Farewell Address upon completion of his second term as President and which the country had duly observed ever since. Nonetheless, James Monroe declared that there was a limit to America's foreign attitude. The safety of the United States was the limit to the non-interference policy. Any action or attempted intervention in the continent would be viewed as a threat to American security.

> But with the Governments who have declared their independence and maintain it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States.[75]

Although never expressed it was to be understood that the Republic would take every step necessary to deflect such "unfriendly disposition", including military preparations and engagement if needed.

Besides the veiled threat of military action, America also asserted its moral high ground and the nobility of its ideals. Not only did it declare that its political constitution was superior to that of any of the European great nations, it also took under its special protection the liberated colonies of South America. It was an unabashed declaration of belief in American exceptionalism and of its role as an example to all the oppressed peoples of the world. In addition, the United States donned the mantle of protector of the new republics in South America, further enhancing its moral grandeur and the generosity of its revolution.

Soon, however, those high principles suffered the first blows when the country realized it was growing in strength and the political class interpreted Clausewitz literally: war is merely the continuation of politics by other means. The "Manifest

[75] *Ibid*.

Destiny", the territorial expansion of the country westwards towards the Pacific Ocean, was a political credo for many in the Washington circles of power. Tensions started to mount when the fertile lands of California, in possession of Mexico, captured America's attention. Attempts were made to buy them or reach a form of compromise; when all that failed, politics yielded to war. The objective of reaching the Pacific was fulfilled after the war with Mexico, in 1846-48, and the annexation of the latter's Northern provinces. The war raised a chorus of protests, Thoreau among them, leading to his refusal to pay taxes in a decision that culminated in his arrest, but the elation of victory and the gold of California soon put all that to rest. However, the nation's innocence had been lost and the gloss over the exemplary beliefs of the country was blemished. The acquisition of Alaska from Russia in 1867 and the annexation of Hawaii in 1898 expanded the United States beyond the contiguous mainland and the country again doubled in size. The expansion of the country signalled the birth of a giant and the growing awareness of its strength inebriated the political and financial elites. The annexation of Hawaii occurred under murky circumstances, prompting criticisms and accusations of aggression towards a weaker nation but the real shock came later when America made its sonorous entrance into the club of imperial powers.

In 1898 war was declared against Spain. Both the causes as the incidents that originated the conflict were disputable, to say the least. Of unquestionable influence was the role played by the press, especially the newspaper empire property of William Randolph Hearst, and the 'yellow journalism' precursor of today's sensationalist media. Hearst's populist headlines and jingoist editorials did much to stoke the flames of war in the minds of ordinary Americans. In the aftermath of the "splendid little war"[76] the United States took possession of Cuba and the Philippines, among other spoils of war. America had engaged in wars of expansion before, namely against Mexico, but this represented a watershed moment in the history of the country. Not only was The United Sates now actively participating in the colonial race alongside the European Empires, it had acted against one of the oldest among them, albeit a decaying one, thus securing a place among the most powerful nations in the world by direct confrontation with a rival.

[76] The comment was made by John Milton Hay, former personal secretary to President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, in a letter to Theodore Roosevelt. John Hay would later serve as Secretary of State during Theodore Roosevelt's administration until his death in 1905.

It was a commanding statement of emancipation and willingness to challenge the other powers but it raised uncomfortable questions. It shook the nation's psyche triggering a profound soul-searching about the country's nature and its spirit in face of the undeniable fact that the United States was now an Empire. The resistance to American occupation erupted with bloody violence in the Philippines the year after the war, 1899. Ambushes and attacks on U.S. forces were a daily feature; the human toll grew and public opinion against the first imperial experience followed suit. Besides opposing the war and claiming it was blatantly motivated by the ambition of creating an overseas empire, the critics asked how a former colonial people that had fought for its freedom could justify keeping colonies of its own. America's founders believed that its revolution was meant to be a beacon of hope and an example of liberty for all mankind; that America would lead by example in breaking the shackles of oppression. To keep colonies and entertain imperial designs was a betrayal of the American character and its Revolutionary ideals; it was un-American. The American Anti-Imperialist League, founded in 1899, lamented the whole enterprise but they especially resented the "betrayal of American institutions at home. The real firing line is not in the suburbs of Manila. The foe is of our own household. The attempt of 1861 was to divide the country. That of 1899 is to destroy its fundamental principles and noblest ideals."[77]

Although Cuba and the Philippines were not independent at the start of the war against Spain, America had pledged not to interfere in any colony and it had denounced the countries that acquired or kept colonies. Having declared that the Western hemisphere was now free from colonization the logical policy was to release the territories once they had been rescued from their former masters; otherwise it would fall foul of committing the same actions it deplored on others. The American Anti-Imperialist League was quick to highlight the contradiction:

> The United States have always protested against the doctrine of international law which permits the subjugation of the weak by the strong. A self-governing state cannot accept sovereignty over an unwilling people. The United States cannot act upon the ancient heresy that might makes right.[78]

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[77] "Platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League", in *Speeches, Correspondence, and Political Papers of Carl Schurz,* vol. 6, ed. Frederick Bancroft (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 77, note 1. Fordham University – Internet History Sourcebooks Project, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1899antiimp.html (accessed May 7, 2010).
[78] *Ibid*.

America was now an imperial power like the European ones it criticised and accused of being despotic. Critics pointed that not only was the United States risking their standing abroad with the blatant display of double-standards but the path of imperialism chosen by the political elite in Washington was a treasonous conduct towards the very notion of what the country stood for and what the spirit of 1776 and the Constitution represented:

> Whether the ruthless slaughter of the Filipinos shall end next month or next year is but an incident in a contest that must go on until the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are rescued from the hands of their betrayers.[79]

Among the arguments mustered in support of America's interventionism abroad was the idea that the territorial expansion of the country was also an expansion of freedom and democracy. Far from moving away from the spirit of the Revolution, the recent actions against Spain were an extension of the values of the Founding Fathers. America's mission was to liberate former oppressed peoples wherever it could and introduce them to U.S.-style democracy. As John Judis says, the mission had religious overtones to it.

> Proponents of imperialism, including Protestant missionaries, also viewed overseas expansion through the prism of the country's evangelical tradition. Through annexation, they insisted, the United States would transform other nations into communities that shard America's political and social values and also its religious beliefs.[80]

Others merely stated that the country had come of age and taken its rightful place among the great nations of the world; *Realpolitik* determined that it was impossible to escape the realities of foreign policy and the economic necessities of the country. The United States could not remain in the sidelines and risk having precious markets closed to its goods. The survival of the nation demanded expansion even if it meant creating an overseas empire, the difference being that its empire would be built in

[79] *Ibid*.
[80] John B. Judis, "Imperial Amnesia", *Foreign Policy*, July-August 2004, 50-59.

accordance to its unique standards and principles. The fight for the soul of the country and the defence of it would plague the politics of the country for ever after.

The United States' entry in World War I put an end to the last assurance pledged in the Monroe Doctrine, namely that America would not takes sides regarding European affairs. Simultaneously, it marked the end of a policy stretching some 120 years and defined by George Washington's plea not to participate in Europe's system of alliances. In his Farewell Address, the First President had warned of the dangers of involvement in Europe's wars. Of special concern to him and many others regarding Europe, in what amounted to a general preoccupation regarding the unity of the country, were the divisions it might open in American society as had happened during his presidency with the French Revolution. The sympathies of the Americans towards either the French or the English had pushed the country to the verge of a dangerous split and strained the diplomatic relations with both Empires. Therefore, upon his departure from office, Washington had urged his countrymen to steer clear from the treacherous waters of European power politics.

> The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop. Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none; or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.[81]

Full integration in the international political structure occurred in 1917 when war was declared against Germany and troops were sent to fight alongside British and French soldiers in the trenches of Flanders. The decision to enter the war again divided the nation. It was not easy to convince Americans to commit to fighting across the Atlantic where no apparent American interest was at risk. Besides, the country had a

[81] George Washington, *Farewell Address*, September 19. 1796. Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=15&page=transcript (accessed May 5, 2010).

large minority of Germans or people of German descent that contributed greatly to the development of American society and were therefore greatly welcomed. Nonetheless, as the war dragged on, international trade suffered greatly and businessmen and policymakers began to worry about its effects on the economy which depended greatly on the continuation of trade and open markets. Eventually, the German submarine warfare brought the Atlantic trade to a halt and the sinking of the passenger ship *Lusitania* in 1915, along with emotional appeals to rescue neutral Belgium perfidiously invaded by the Huns, as the call went, provided the necessary arousing element that swayed a majority of public opinion in favour of entering the war. The detachment with which the country watched the war unfold during the first years gave way to a government-encouraged zealous fervour against Germany and all things German; the blind, all-out, submarine campaign enraged many who thought it to be an immoral and treacherous method, a clear violation of the rules of honourable combat. The official mantra was that America had no choice but to fight to restore world trade and save Europe from the clutches of German imperialism. America had found itself a new mission, as Barry Karl summarizes.

> The transformation of popular attitudes in so brief a period of time was as remarkable as the experience of the war itself. American interest in international affairs entered a new phase as public opinion shifted from its familiar focus on protection of "our" hemisphere to the salvation of the world.[82]

Unlike previous conflicts, World War I was an industrial war, requiring the reorganisation of the whole economic and social structures in order to feed the war effort. The war opposed highly industrialised Empires with plentiful resources and at the peak of their power, a world away from the decadent and disintegrating Spanish Empire in 1898. Although America was an industrialised nation, it lacked the economic central organisation that existed in Germany, for example. It also had no matching war industry capable of delivering the vast amounts of weapons, equipment and ammunitions needed for battle. The country was, when compared to Europe, still very decentralised, relying primarily upon individual enterprise and autonomous management of the economy. Soon the task proved far too complex to be left to

[82] Barry D. Karl, *The Uneasy State: The United States from 1915 to 1945* (Chicago: London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 34.

voluntary organisation and the government had to take charge of the creation of the industrial war machine.

The war effort benefitted enormously from the work of Frederick Taylor who developed concepts and techniques intended for a more effective management of industrial production that were branded with his name, Taylorism. His scientific approach of measuring the workers' efficiency and speed during their tasks helped improve working methods and increase production while reducing the time needed to do so. Although Taylorism was accused of reducing the human element to just another replaceable part in a bigger mechanism, Frederick Taylor insisted that he was merely aiming at enhancing the collaboration between administration and workforce in order to achieve the ultimate, common, goal that was greater industrial capacity for the good of the country. His success encouraged some to consider adopting his ideas in a social context, an attempt to put an end to class conflict and promote union and social harmony towards higher objectives that would benefit the United States as a whole. In the interwar years this attempt was accused of being too similar to the fascist movements that were taking ground in Europe, keen on achieving national unity and social stability through the elimination of the individual idiosyncrasies and private interests.

This search for unanimity materialised thanks to the wartime nationalism that sprung when war was declared in 1917. Aided by a Committee on Public Information and an intense propaganda campaign that not only looked to suffocate dissension and prevent sedition but also promote loyalty and the values of America, President Woodrow Wilson managed to steer the country through the war without any serious social disruptions despite the various opposing nationalities living in America.[83] Randolph Bourne understood clearly the significance of this and its effects upon the wider community and individual freedom. The war had given birth to the "State" which, according to him, was

> essentially a concept of power, of competition; it signifies a group in its aggressive aspects... The State is the country acting as a political unit, it is the group acting as a repository of force, determiner of law, arbiter of justice. International politics is a "power politics" because it is a relation of States and

[83] For an outline of the difficulties faced by the Wilson administration during the war and the measures taken, as well as their effect on the country, see Barry D. Karl, Chapter 3, "Managing the War", in *The Uneasy State: The United States From 1915 to 1945*.

> that is what States infallibly and calamitously are, huge aggregations of human and industrial force that may be hurled against each other in war.[84]

Whilst in times of peace the State languishes helplessly torn between the multitude of opinions and differing attitudes of its citizens, it is in times of war that the State reaches its apex as every element of society surrenders his individuality in favour of the larger whole. Therefore, Bourne does not hesitate to declare that

> War is the health of the State. It automatically sets in motion throughout society those irresistible forces for uniformity, for passionate cooperation with the Government in coercing into obedience the minority groups and individuals which lack the larger herd sense[85]

The word "herd" is used to criticise the unquestioning obedience to the State and its leaders in time of war. Although several writers and political thinkers had pondered about the ideal society and worried about the disintegrating effects of social conflict, Bourne considered that the fear of war produced such a pressure upon the individual as to reduce him to act with a herd-like instinct.

> War... seems to achieve for a nation almost all that the most inflamed political idealist could desire... We are at last on the way to full realization of that collective community in which each individual somehow contains the virtue of the whole. In a nation at war, every citizen identifies himself with the whole, and feels immensely strengthened in that identification. The purpose and desire of the collective community live in each person who throws himself wholeheartedly into the cause of war... At war, the individual becomes almost identical with his society.[86]

This pernicious effect obfuscated the capacity to analyse properly the situation and the justice of the State's actions, allowing for the grossest violations of liberties and fundamental constitutional principles. The crowding of the herd in search of common protection was the most dangerous enemy of individual freedom. It forced each one to

[84] Randolph Bourne, "The State", in *The Radical Will – Selected Essays 1911-1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (Berkeley, CA: Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 358.
[85] *Ibid*., 360.
[86] *Ibid*., 361.

act against his best interests and endangered the country's most cherished ideals. Despite the voices of alarm and condemnation, the war-induced nationalism enforced the herd mentality and the silencing of dissent in American public opinion achieved its purpose throughout the duration of the war and sowed the seeds for future attacks on democracy and its liberties

World War I was to be the war that would end all wars. It would make the world safer for democracy, a formula that struck a chord deep within American public opinion. For if the Revolution of 1776 was to be effectively the precursor of a new age of liberty and democracy for the whole of mankind the United States was faced with the dilemma over whether to engage with the outer world in order to facilitate that advancement or remain in the sidelines confident that it sufficed to shine as inspiration. Woodrow Wilson was convinced of the former. Thus, when the war ended, the Wilson administration tried to radically alter international diplomacy making it more straightforward, putting an end to the customary secret treaties and alliances that had precipitated the war. Wilson's "Fourteen Points" presented before Congress served not only to reassure the country that it was fighting for a just cause. It was also a way to set the goals ahead of the peace talks in Paris, by which he aimed to create a new international arrangement based on transparency and concord. It was a decisive step towards American engagement with the world in order to influence its direction, particularly through the creation of the League of Nations, a world forum destined to solve peacefully all quarrels between nations. As Barry Karl notes,

> By asserting its rights not only to protect its own interests but to change the basic international structures that had presumably placed those interests under threat in the first place, the United States was seeking a new role for itself in international affairs, a role much closer to that of the sympathetic revolutionary state it had so often tried to be in nineteenth-century international politics.[87]

However, the line between sponsorship of freedom abroad and the defence of one's interests can be easily blurred. As with the Spanish-American War of 1898 the justification for entering the war in Europe was presented by some as a way to bring

[87] Barry D. Karl, *The Uneasy State – The United States from 1915 to 1945* (Chicago: London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 38.

democracy to foreign peoples living under despotic rule while those opposed denounced the real purpose as being more material in nature. The same justifications and accusations would be used throughout much of America's interventions abroad in the twentieth-century and as late as with the second war in Iraq.

Woodrow Wilson set out for the Peace Conference in Paris determined to make of America's inauguration in the world of high politics a moment to remember. Perhaps somewhat naively he expected to change the ways of international diplomacy, looking forward to being the leader of the Conference among seasoned veterans of European intrigue. Having been given a rapturous welcome by the masses when he arrived at the Old World, Wilson was sure he would begin a new era in which American idealism would play a central role as a global inspirational force. However, much to his chagrin, he soon realised that what really motivated his European counterparts was revenge and the possibility of territorial gains. In order to obtain the necessary backing for his League of Nations project, Wilson turned a blind eye to most of the bargaining and carving of lands that took place in Paris, along with the blatant violations of the armistice agreements. But the greatest disappointment of all was yet to come. Hoping to firmly engage the country in a permanent role within the international community, Wilson hoped that the League of Nations would ensure for the United States a pre-eminent role in the world stage. As its main driving force and inspiration, America could not only shape the diplomatic environment according to its principles, it could also guarantee its safety and that of its interests abroad.

Unfortunately, for Wilson, Congress rejected the American participation in the League of Nations. A hard blow for a President committed in changing the world, it was also a death blow for the League itself which never recovered from the absence of its main patron. The victory of an isolationist policy in the United States is far from being a reason behind the outbreak of World War II, whose reasons are easier to be found in the outcome of the Peace Conference in Versailles. However, being a country whose power was already felt in both the Pacific and the Atlantic and had been a vital element in bringing an end to the military operations in Europe, it did not bode well for the world at large that America should turn its back on the management of global disputes. This return to George Washington's careful approach to international politics and its entanglements came to an abrupt end in 1941. Although the United States had chosen to avoid the complexities of the outside world it was impossible to remain indifferent to the menace coming from an alliance between Germany and Japan. Continued apathy

before the combined pressure coming from both hemispheres would mean suicide. When World War II started America became the "arsenal of democracy" supplying Great Britain and the Allies with military equipment and provisions. Although not directly at war it represented an active participation in the war; most importantly it was a clear choice of sides in the war, despite its neutrality. Already an economic powerhouse, its sheer size and presence in the Pacific region meant that it was a key factor in the strategy of Japan who, by the 1930's onwards, was actively engaged in expanding its influence in South-East Asia and the Pacific. It was a matter of time before America was drawn into the war, wilfully or not.

Once back in the fray of international politics the United States would no longer leave centre stage and would heed the call of duty as one of the two remaining global powers following the second, and more effective, European suicide. After the defeats of both Germany and Japan and the division of the globe in two opposing ideological blocs, America would become the leader and shield of the free world, a drastic materialisation of its Revolutionary ideals and one that represented another significant shift in the nation's psyche. The Cold War and all the exigencies it imposed on America's military meant that continental isolation was no longer an option. The political choices forced upon the country by the confrontation with the Soviet bloc severed America from its poetic ideal of peaceful living and freedom from foreign entanglements. In his Farewell Address, in 1961, President Dwight Eisenhower recognized this fundamental change but acknowledged America's duty to live up to its values both at home as well as abroad.

> Throughout America's adventure in free government, our basic purposes have been to keep the peace; to foster progress in human achievement, and to enhance liberty, dignity and integrity among people and among nations. To strive for less would be unworthy of a free and religious people. Any failure traceable to arrogance or our lack of comprehension or readiness to sacrifice would inflict upon us grievous hurt both at home and abroad.[88]

Nonetheless, he worried that the demands of the new world order and its harsh realities could fundamentally change the country and with a pernicious effect on its

[88] Dwight Eisenhower, *Farewell Address*, January 17, 1961. Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=90&page=transcript (accessed May 5, 2010).

freedom and long held principles. Drawing a parallel with the early military establishment that existed prior to the two World Wars, when the country had no armaments industry and could get away with improvisation when needed, Eisenhower warned of the growing military-industrial complex which had grown so fast that threatened to alter the political and social landscape within the United States. Not only were the armed forces growing in size and strength, vast sums of money were allocated to the weapons industry which translated into thousands of jobs and a newfound financial and economic importance in the country.

> But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment… 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. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.[89]

The 'American experience' was under potential threat not only from the outside, but also from within. The different challenges facing the country would put the dream under duress and test the nation's resolve to face up to them and keep true to its values.

[89] *Ibid*.

> If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it. I know, indeed, that some honest men fear that a republican government can not be strong, that this Government is not strong enough; but would the honest patriot, in the full tide of successful experiment, abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm on the theoretic and visionary fear that this Government, the world's best hope, may by possibility want energy to preserve itself? I trust not. I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest Government on earth.
>
> Thomas Jefferson, *First Inaugural Address*

The battles of World War I not only decimated a generation as they also put an end to the optimism and certainties of the preceding era. The ensuing bitterness and cynicism of the survivors affected every level of society and cultural manifestation of the following years. The questioning of the old order's convictions shook the latter's social and political convictions allowing radical ideologies to spring to life ready to replace the old system. In Europe, the most advanced region of the globe both economically as well as culturally, extremist alternatives to democracy reached power in Italy and Germany and similar ideologies made serious advances in other countries; Russia was experimenting with Communism since 1917. In the United States critics were also questioning the viability of the country's political system and of democracy itself. Conservative writers such as Henry Mencken, Paul Elmer More, Irving Babbitt, Ralph Adams Crane and especially George Santayana derided the common man's ability to play such a vital role in the political process and were distrustful of democracy's majority rule, suspicious as they were of the masses' instincts. Knowing, as Whitman knew, that democracy required strength of will and character to forsake one's instincts and self-interest, they doubted the mob and its capricious nature. Fascism had in Lawrence Dennis a powerful orator in the United States and the fear of bolshevism did much to earn him a sympathetic audience that looked at fascism as the ideology most willing to counter the communist threat. Besides, the fascist view of State

as an organic entity demanding unity and a shared purpose as essential for survival appealed to the many who feared dissent and the subversion of the national spirit. The contingencies of war temporarily subdued the social strains and the necessary reflection about the future of the country. Once the war was over the country found that it became harder to reconcile the different perspectives. As Barry Karl remarks,

> For the next four decades – even up to the present, one might argue – the relationships between war and reform, nationalism and internationalism, traditional individualist democracy and the centralized industrial state would continue to provide Americans with a puzzle to contemplate, at least for those brave enough to try.[90]

The economic collapse of the early 1930's weakened the American faith in the virtues of capitalism and political liberalism. The Great Depression plunged the country in social turmoil and as the situation failed to improve it became evident that the political class was incapable of dealing with the situation. Raised in the belief that the economy worked in cycles and that in order to regulate itself it was best left free of interference, the old elite was not prepared to tackle a crises of such magnitude intervening to stimulate the economy or enact the necessary policies to help the millions of unemployed. In fact, as Barry Karl notes, Americans did not share the same way of thinking about government intervention in the economy to alleviate social inequalities, leaving the country paralysed during the meltdown.

> Despite the efforts of progressives to make the federal government responsive to social change and capable of influencing it, the absence of an American consensus on what constituted social justice, let alone social equality, had always restricted the power of Washington to do anything more than call attention to problems.[91]

The arrival of Franklin Roosevelt to the White House in 1933 heralded a new point of view and a new disposition regarding the role of government. His New Deal aimed at tackling the crises and re-launch the economy with massive public works

[90] Barry D. Karl, *The Uneasy State – The United States from 1915 to 1945* (Chicago: London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 33.
[91] *Ibid*., 90-91.

projects and a vast programme of economic planning that earned him accusations of destroying America's entrepreneurial spirit. Roosevelt's unprecedented four terms as President coupled with his rhetoric as well as his attempt to reshape the Supreme Court in order to force it into submission raised eyebrows and accusations of disregard for the Constitution. On top of this, his popularity and strong personality combined with his willingness to make use of presidential power had many fearing an overthrow of the Constitution and the establishment of an autocratic regime, not unlike what was happening in several countries across the Atlantic.

Liberal democracy was under attack in much of Europe, unable to provide an efficient response to the economic collapse. Mussolini and his Fascist ideology offered a corporate-state solution wherein Government would control the economy via a clientele of loyal industrialists and entrepreneurs. Together, government and the commercial and industrial sectors would regulate every aspect of economic life. Roosevelt was accused of drawing inspiration from Mussolini for his National Industrial Recovery Act, which would regulate, together with the industrial and labour organisations, production quotas, wages, prices and licensing rights and requirements. Although the Supreme Court ruled as unconstitutional the National Industrial Recovery Act, prompting Roosevelt to accuse the Justices of obstructing his efforts to save the country thus setting the stage for his attempted subversion of the High Court, he nonetheless accomplished much of his programme. He vastly expanded the regulatory powers of government, particularly over Wall Street and the banking sector, and introduced progressive taxation as well as Social Security legislation. He made use of his oratory attacking the bankers and the rich, although he came from one of the most aristocratic families in the country, advertising his pursuance of regulation for the entire financial sector as a means to rein the growing oligarchy from taking control of the state. This populist posture evoked memories of Andrew Jackson's battle against the bankers and merchant elite of his time.

Despite the sweeping taxes and regulations that vastly expanded the size of government the Republicans did not attack the New Deal as a whole, signalling a major shift regarding the role of government and its intervention in society and the economy. As John Patrick Diggins remarks, at the time of the 1940 presidential election many of the New Deal's initiatives had become an established feature in the American political landscape.

> The Republican candidate Wendell Willkie appealed to businessmen and middle-class white Americans who saw themselves as victims of the New Deal's progressive taxes and government regulations… Even so, Roosevelt easily won the election over Willkie, and it is worth noting that the Republicans did not repudiate all of the New Deal. Willkie attacked public-power projects like the Tennessee Valley Authority but not social security, aid to farmers, or trade-union bargaining power… Years earlier Roosevelt had failed to persuade Congress to pass further progressive legislation. Yet many of the New Deal programs became part of a common heritage shared by both parties. Where the Republicans and Democrats would differ most acutely in future years was over fiscal policy.[92]

Thus, the Republican Party was equally comfortable with state-aid, industrial subsidies and an altogether greater federal leverage via its new agencies and assorted expansions. Nevertheless, the New Deal had mixed results on the economic front and only with the start of World War II and the United States entry in 1941 did the situation improve. The industrial orders for weaponry, material and agricultural foodstuffs kick-started the economic recovery and the masses of unemployed either joined the military ranks or were absorbed by the industrial war effort.

Once again, America's involvement in World War II was not a unanimous decision welcomed by the country. There was stiff opposition, especially regarding the fight against Germany. As in 1917 there was a vast propaganda effort to convince Americans about the justice of the fight and repressive actions to quell any form of dissent. The fear of a possible fifth column operating in the country influenced decisions that rank among the gravest violations of the American ideal. The suspicions about the loyalty of American citizens of Japanese origin had a racial overtone to it. Unlike German-Americans, for example, who were allowed to live a rather normal life, they were rounded up and placed under surveillance in concentration camps. Racial prejudices influenced opinions about the war and about America's contribution, some more subtly than others. Charles Lindbergh, the aviator hero and a vocal opponent of America's participation in the war, denounced what he believed was a Jewish conspiracy to manipulate the country into declaring war on Germany. There was the perception that the country should not be fighting countries of a shared European origin

[92] John Patrick Diggins, *The Proud Decades – America in War and Peace, 1941 – 1960* (New York: London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988). 12-13.

engaged in combating communism. The racial intolerance did not affect Americans of German or Italian descent, nor was there any persecution of communists or fascists although the war was being fought against totalitarian regimes. The Japanese Empire, however, represented the 'yellow danger' that haunted Europeans and Americans since the turn of the century and whose expansion had to be fought.

The discrimination against the "Japs" rivalled the one towards blacks. After the Civil War the South had all but remained immune to any of the effects of the several Amendments passed to put an end to slavery. Racial segregation perpetuated itself as a way of life in the Deep South. In the remainder of the country, racial discrimination was commonplace and ever-present. Despite the country's war effort, not all of American society was allowed to contribute in equal conditions. John Patrick Diggins presents some hard numbers: "In Los Angeles Douglas Aircraft employed 33,000 workers. All but ten of them were white. North American Aviation had hired eight blacks – all janitors. Seattle's Boeing Aircraft had 41,000 workers and no blacks."[93] Not only the defence industry; the armed forces themselves were opposed to the full inclusion of blacks refusing to train them as officer candidates or to assign them to combat duty. Roosevelt was forced to issue several orders to put a stop to the situation and enforce the law, aware that it was hard to justify war against a racist ideology when similar events were rampant at home. The contradiction was even more appalling to returning GI's that had witnessed the atrocities committed by the Nazis and had to face the discrimination and racial hatred of the American Democracy.

World War II had been labelled as the war to protect the 'Four Freedoms' and the slogan became immensely popular thanks to the work of the Office of War Information, a powerful propaganda machine set up by the Roosevelt administration. The four freedoms (freedom of speech, of worship, freedom from want and from fear) had been essential to win the support of the American people for the war: the war had been won to protect and spread them. Again, America was living up to its self-appointed role as the beacon lighting the universal fight for a freedom. As the Iron Curtain descended over Europe and the mutual suspicions between the United States and the USSR intensified, America's allies immediately became crusaders in the global fight against the dark forces of communism. Despite the embarrassment of having Spain and Portugal lauded as friends of liberty while they were ruled by dictators, the

[93] *Ibid*., 28.

American side assumed the title of free world and built its moral authority accordingly, distinct from the Soviet Union and its allies. In the free world the Four Freedoms had triumphed and were upheld as natural to the liberal democracies where they prevailed, authoritarian allies notwithstanding.

Freedom from fear was cancelled in the early years of the Cold War when Senator Joseph McCarthy launched an internal crusade of his own to rid the country of communism and its sympathizers. His campaign was a blow to the moral authority America and its allies claimed over the Soviets. The 'red scare' was so compelling that once again fundamental liberties and values were brushed aside, although in the name of the sacred duty to protect Liberty itself. All contrary opinions and ideologies were dangerous and classified as subversive or seditious, a threat that needed to be crushed mercilessly. The hysteria that took control of the country during that period is a remarkable moment in which liberalism, which is synonymous with tolerance, showed its darker face in the United States. Louis Hartz had noted how liberalism's philosophical foundations hid a potential for the self-negation of liberty.

> Here is a doctrine which everywhere in the West has been a glorious symbol of individual liberty, yet in America its compulsive power has been so great that it has posed a threat to liberty itself. Actually Locke has a hidden conformitarian germ to begin with, since natural law tells equal people equal things, but when this germ is fed by the explosive power of modern nationalism, it mushrooms into something pretty remarkable.[94]

The propensity for conformity and intimidation of those who think differently, a natural result of the "mass Lockianism" that Hartz says shapes the American mind, is the threat that liberalism poses to itself. Alexis de Tocqueville had remarked as much during his visit to the early 19th century United States, noting how in democratic societies there existed a tendency for uniformity of thought and action, silently imposed by the mores of egalitarian societies.

> When the equality of conditions is long established and complete, as all men entertain nearly the same notions and do nearly the same things they do not require to agree, or to copy form one another, in order to speak or act in the

[94] Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America – An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution*, 2nd ed., (San Diego: New York: London: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1991), 11.

> same manner; their manners are constantly characterized by a number of lesser diversities, but not by any great differences.[95]

This standardization of principles enforced by the community helps explain why, in certain periods of American history, different opinions are repressed and persecuted such as happened during McCarthyism. In light of this, Hartz concludes that there is a major fault within liberalism itself that is fuelled by nationalism and foreign threats, namely,

> that when a liberal community faces military and ideological pressure from without it transforms eccentricity into sin, and the irritating figure of the bourgeois gossip flowers into the frightening figure of an A. Mitchell Palmer or a Senator McCarthy.[96]

Hartz uses the term "Americanism" to qualify the uncompromising liberal perspective prevalent in the United States; an "absolute moral ethos" which accepts no not other viewpoint than its own and reacts violently in self-preservation when threatened. According to the same author, this liberal absolutism makes itself felt not only at home but abroad as well. The effect, he continues, is "hampered insight abroad and heightened anxiety at home."[97] The arrest and persecution of dissidents and the recurrent fear of internal enemies plotting to destroy the country, be it Germans, Japanese, communists or, more recently, Muslims, is the visible aspect of that heightened anxiety at home. The difficulty in dealing with different viewpoints and principles abroad, the hampered insight, also influences America's actions overseas and is in part responsible for the country's wavering in foreign affairs, torn between non-interventionist impulses and a messianic enthusiasm whenever it commits itself to intervene.

The desire to remain on the sidelines is a consequence of the Revolutionaries' eagerness to cut all ties with Europe and its corruption and endemic wars. Their desire to protect the young Republic influenced their view of Europe as a threat and a source of harm for the noble principles by which they aimed to regulate their lives. The

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[95] Alexis de Tocqueville and Alan Ryan, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II (London: Everyman's Library, 1994), 218.
[96] Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America – An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution*, 2nd ed. (San Diego: New York: London: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1991), 12.
[97] *Ibid*., 288.

sentiment was captured and recommended by George Washington in his Farewell Address, explicitly affirmed in the Monroe Doctrine and resurfaces from time to time. Woodrow Wilson's failure to convince Congress to accept America's participation in the League of Nations is the classical example of a period when isolationism determined the political course of the nation.

The messianic approach, according to Hartz, is determined by an irresistible impulse by the 'Americanists' to shape the world according to their *Weltanschauung*. As he points out, "an absolute national morality is inspired either to withdraw from "alien" things or to transform them: it cannot live in comfort constantly by their side."[98] The same root whence flourishes the need to protect the exceptionality of the American liberalism gives birth to the aspiration of seeing it universally applied as if to better ensure its survival.

> Embodying an absolute moral ethos, "Americanism," once it is driven on to the world stage by events, is inspired willy-nilly to reconstruct the very alien things it tries to avoid. Its messianism is the polar counterpart of its isolationism.[99]

The propaganda machinery during both world wars made frequent use of America's mission as defender of the cause of freedom, democracy and deliverer from the evils of imperialism. Woodrow Wilson claimed that America had to make the world safe for democracy and Roosevelt wanted the 'Four Freedoms' enjoyed by every living person in the world. The occupation of the Philippines and Cuba after the war with Spain was justified as liberation from colonialism and necessary to introduce democracy. More recently, 'regime change' has been used to validate military interventions to topple dictatorships, fundamentalist regimes and establish democracy, namely in Iraq and Afghanistan. There is a moral dimension to all these declarations. The objective is not only to win the war but to add some meaning to the victory; not only a military victory but a triumph of American values.

Woodrow Wilson was perhaps the greatest of the "Americanists". A man imbued with a profound religious sentiment, he included a moral dimension into his foreign political perspectives originating the term 'Wilsonian idealism'. He was

[98] *Ibid*., 286.
[99] *Ibid*., 286.

determined to put an end to the way international politics were conducted by presenting in a joint session of Congress a plan that he hoped would be the foundation of a new world of peace and democracy. His ambition was nothing short of a complete reconstruction of the international political environment and the ushering of a new mentality, more akin to his own beliefs and American values. The root of the war was attributed to the imperialist ambitions of the great European nations and, therefore, Wilson set his sights in putting an end to the age of "conquest and aggrandizement". Following the liberal credo that the will of the people was supreme, the President was eager to promote self-determination, at least in Europe since the United States were still present in the Philippines and Cuba. Thus, he said, all peoples were to "be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development"[100]. As a result, the nationalist movements seized the confusion and disorder that followed the end of the war whilst others benefited from the Allies explicit support to proclaim their independence. The German Empire was amputated of its Eastern territories to allow for an independent Poland but the worst fate befell the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman Empires, both collapsing and breaking apart. The bits and pieces of those former multinational empires gave birth to a multitude of countries in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, the new frontier lines owed more to territorial ambition than actual ethnic boundaries. The shockwaves of those seismic events that redrew Europe's map are still felt today, particularly in the Balkan region.

The reconstruction extended into the creation of an international forum of discussion wherein all international disputes would be discussed openly. This, along with the abolition of secret covenants and alliances, would render the diplomatic proceedings more candid and accountable to public opinion, hopefully exerting pressure on politicians to heed the peaceful interests of their population rather than their own political ambitions. Although Congress rejected the United States participation in the League of Nations, Wilson's ambition to create a general assembly of international representatives, mirroring the liberal ideal of representative government, was recovered after World War II. The United States successfully sponsored the creation of the United Nations, a better replica of its precursor armed with proper powers of intervention. Congress did not oppose this second attempt and duly approved the country's

[100] Woodrow Wilson, *Fourteen Points*, January 8, 1918. Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=62&page=transcript (accessed July 8, 2010).

involvement. America's foreign policy since 1945 has been marked by greater military interventionism abroad, both to assert its interests and to live up to its role as "protector" of the free world. However, there has been, especially after the Cold War, an increased concern with the moral dimension of America's use of military might. Interventions in Somalia and the Balkans have taken place based on humanitarian fears, to protect civilian populations under attack or restore peace. These had the effect of restoring the country's moral authority among the nations and keep it in tune with its ideals of peace and democracy. The accomplishment of these ideals has been used to justify the use of America's power abroad and, more recently, the promotion of democracy worldwide has influenced President George W. Bush's tenure in office with the neoconservative current of intellectuals providing the ideological framework.

America's desire to live up to its democratic pledge has been met with mixed feelings, both abroad as well as at home. The optimism regarding foreign acceptance of democracy can lead to embarrassing situations such as declarations by some American officials during the last Gulf War that the US soldiers would be welcomed as liberators by the Iraqi people. America's unconditional admiration of its constitutional arrangement and of liberalism itself gives credence to Hartz's words about its absolutist view of US-style democracy, lauded as unique and virtually perfect. This can render the United States deaf to others' particular circumstances and needs, imposing a one-size-fits-all system on very diverse realities, prompting accusations of imperialism and colonialism. The ensuing surprise and resentment at the attacks against America and its soldiers feed the arguments of those who argue that the country should retire to its borders and leave the rest of the ungrateful world to its own devices. American critics of the country's foreign involvement are a vocal group fostering a movement in favour of the United States' withdrawal from the United Nations that has been gaining momentum. They regard American membership in the UN and the latter's charter as unconstitutional demanding America's withdrawal. Supporters of the Constitution and of the American ideal, they follow, however, the foreign policy of non-commitment advised by George Washington and outlined by Thomas Jefferson in his first Inaugural Address, in 1801. In it, he proposed to develop "peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none".[101] Ron Paul, House

[101] Thomas Jefferson, "First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1801", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency*. http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116902 (accessed July 16, 2010).

Representative from Texas, introduced a bill in 2009 intended to cut all ties between America and the United Nations, the American Sovereignty Restoration Act. Besides directing the President to terminate the country's participation in the international organization, the bill also prohibits the authorization of funds for the United Nations, the participation of U.S. Armed Forces as part of any U.N. military or peacekeeping operations and bars U.S. Armed Forces from serving under U.N. command.[102] This would effectively deprive the organisation of its major financial and military contributor, condemning it to the share in the same fate as the League of Nations. The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs where it remains under consideration, waiting to be voted.

One hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation signed by Abraham Lincoln, the country was still not fulfilling its promise of granting to each citizen its share of the "unalienable rights" that Jefferson included in the Declaration of Independence. The Civil Rights movement in the fifties and sixties was essentially a non-violent struggle to end racial discrimination and injustice in America. Looking to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution for inspiration, the activists were determined to recapture the true spirit of the documents that founded the nation and demanded that their constitutional rights be respected. Martin Luther King, Jr., the leading figure of the period, decried the inconsistency that lay between the words that were revered as a symbol of the nation and the racial segregation and violence that were well established in the United States. It was unbecoming for the country to act in so blatant disregard of the values it professed. Besides being morally wrong, he reminded Americans that

> segregation was *inefficient* as well as unjust, that it held back *progress* in the South, that it offended *cosmopolitan* views around the nation and the world, that it was *unpatriotic* to smirch the name of America with this offense.[103]

[102] U.S. Congress. House, *American Sovereignty Restoration Act – A Bill to End Membership of the United States in the United Nations*, HR 1146. 111th Congress, 1st Session, February 24, 2009. http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_bills&docid=f:h1146ih.txt.pdf, (accessed July 15, 2010).
[103] Garry Wills, *A Necessary Evil – A History of American Distrust of Government* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 295.

A firm believer in the American ideals, Martin Luther King, Jr. appealed to the nation's sense of right and wrong. He preached non-violent forms of protest and civil disobedience to see the rights of full citizenship applied to all Americans regardless of their race, making use of biblical references to reinforce his rhetorical prowess. Always bearing in mind the promises made by the Founders, he successfully invoked the American ideals presenting them as unfulfilled and the situation as unworthy of such high aspirations. He linked the plight of black Americans with the Revolutionary struggle for freedom. Martin Luther King, Jr. knew that violence would only harden the prejudices of the white majority and harm the Civil Rights movement. Therefore, the wisest course was to draw them to the cause through a complete identification with the nation's values and glorification of its ideals. As Eric Foner remarks,

> A master at appealing to the conscience of white America without appearing to be dangerous or threatening, King presented the case for black rights in a vocabulary that bridged the gap between the races and fused the black experience with that of the nation.[104]

As a patriot he worried about the fatal contradiction that weakened American society, neither advocating the overthrow of government nor lending support to revolutionary impulses. As Garry Wills points out with reference to the movement's attitude towards government,

> The laws targeted were presented as dissonant with the spirit of the government itself. The whole governing structure did not need to be shaken down. In fact, the purpose of the disobeyers was to provoke action *by* the government to right a wrong it was equipped to deal with.[105]

In fact, due to the hostility with which their demands and demonstrations were met by local and state authorities in the South, the activists placed their hopes of redress on the national government. In the late-fifties, early-sixties, to talk of government interference in, or regulation of, social issues raised the spectre of state-controlled

[104] Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London: Oxford: Picador Macmillan Publishers, 1999), 278.
[105] Garry Wills, *A Necessary Evil – A History of American Distrust of Government* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 288.

societies in a country involved in a dispute for global supremacy with the USSR, its ideological nemesis.

> At a time when Cold War ideology had highlighted the danger to liberty from excessive government and made respect for the distinction between "civil society" and the realm of politics a cornerstone of liberal thinking, civil rights activists resurrected the vision of federal authority as custodian of freedom.[106]

The calls for action by the governmental machinery not only to guarantee the constitutional rights of citizens but also act as arbiter of social conflicts was proof of the activists trust in the former's work and its ability to intervene. The New Left, a political movement that sprang to life in the sixties, was not so trustful about government activity or its motivations. Inspired by the Civil Rights' activism it abandoned the Marxist revolutionary ideas of the Old Left and sought, instead, to promote reform through social protest. The latter had been tainted by its radical ideas about class war and violent seizure of power, permanently damaged by its unflinching communist allegiance and Stalinism. The New Left aspired to social change rather than class warfare; it advocated non-violence and focused on students, young intellectuals, as the force that would drive the change, moving away from the working class and its strength to bring about the social revolution. It was above all a counter-cultural movement, a revolution against the conformity and Cold War consensus of the fifties and its consumerist indifference to the social problems in the United States. Suspicious of the "establishment", as they called it, they opposed the government which they accused of being in control of a military and financial clique as well as the institutions of higher learning. Distrustful as they were of structures of authority in general, the revolt began in the college campuses at the universities accused of being hostage to the country's imperialist ideology. Terry Eagleton's take on the beginnings of student protests focuses on the association between the two and the counter-cultural and generational aspect of the youth revolt in the United States.

> At the height of capitalist consumerism, American imperialism and the Civil Rights movement, it was becoming more and more difficult to conceal the fact

[106] Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, (London: Oxford: Picador Macmillan Publishers, 1999), 279.

> that those areas of disinterested humane enquiry known as academic institutions were in fact locked directly into the structures of technological dominance, military violence and ideological legitimation. A new, more socially heterogeneous student body, who could not be expected any longer spontaneously to share the cultural class-assumptions of their teachers, thus effected a kind of practical 'estrangement' of those assumptions.[107]

With the Vietnam War student activism became a nationwide rebellion, degenerating into outbreaks of violence at times. The demand for reform and general anger at the way the older generations were governing the country fused with opposition to the war and the fear, resentment and alienation of the younger generations; they refused to be used by the 'establishment' without being listened to. As a result the power structure lost its legitimacy and the definition of freedom became synonymous with rejection of all authority. This had a profound cultural impact as the values and mores of the older generations were rejected opening the door to new fashions, cultural expressions and lifestyles. Liberation and individual choice became the rule and the motto for millions of young Americans, including women. The feminist cause gained visibility and strength as the suburban myth of the fifties' perfect woman crumbled and showed the isolation and desperation that was common to most women, barred from pursuing a career and reduced to motherhood and petty housewife duties. Inequality and exclusion from positions of power meant that there was a parallel between the way society treated black Americans and women, thus invalidating the words of the Declaration of Independence for well over half of the population. Other groups also found encouragement to manifest and demand that their rights be respected, marking the period as one of the most crucial in recent American history regarding the acknowledgment of minorities and their civil liberties.

All the high hopes and idealism of the Summer of Love soon gave way to violence and disillusionment for many of those involved, however. Race riots and violent manifestations in which several people were killed left a bitter feeling in the general population. The assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., both of whom were shot in 1968, shocked the nation and were seen by the more radical elements as proof that the 'establishment' would stop at nothing to protect its dominance, determined as it was to stop any kind of change. As the opposition to the

[107] Terry Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 30.

Vietnam War intensified, radical movements began to engage in violent demonstrations, burning of the American flag and bombings. Perhaps the greatest disappointment arrived when many of those leading the movement, driving the enthusiasm and hope of many, became part of the very system they criticised and tried to reform. Likewise, many of the theories and works of art of the period, that were a symbol of the intellectual effort to spearhead reform in the country, were incorporated by the 'establishment', leaving many distraught with the way their effort was abandoned.

> American liberals and radicals tend understandably to be something of a gloomy, fatalistic bunch, painfully conscious as they are of the rapidity with which even the most revolutionary work of art can be placed in the lobby of the Chemical Bank, or of the alacrity with which the Pentagon can hire its clutch of semioticians and deconstructionists.[108]

The dismay at the betrayal perpetrated by those who 'sold out' to the system angered those who remained faithful and earned the former some scathing remarks, such as Eagleton's cynical observation about the allure of privilege and status upon those who succumbed to temptation: "how idealist to imagine that art, or theory, could in itself resist political power!"[109]

Ironically, social reform would be pushed through by one of the principal representatives of the 'establishment', one of the branches of government, long regarded as the protector of *status quo*. A flood of legal cases reaching the Supreme Court in the 60's and 70' allowed the judges to express their interpretation of the Constitution in matters that would shape American society for the coming decades. The judiciary, via some landmark rulings by the Supreme Court, became, as Eric Foner states,

> a powerful ally of the revolution in race relations, infusing political and social substance into the constitutional guarantee of equal protection of the laws. It also redefined how political democracy must operate and revitalized the Bill of Rights as a broad protection of citizens' liberties.[110]

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[108] *Ibid*., 31.
[109] *Ibid*., 32.
[110] Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London: Oxford: Picador Macmillan Publishers, 1999), 300-301.

As the author points out the Supreme Court's action extended far beyond questions of race. It upheld and reinforced freedom of speech and its rulings on cases dealing with the First Amendment had far reaching implications in diverse issues, ranging from Cold War loyalty demands to religious freedom. This amounted to a "rights revolution", as Eric Foner calls it, that forever changed the country and whose effects are still felt nowadays. It also brought the United States nearer to achieving its vocation of democratic inclusion and of completing "the greatest poem". Foner summarises the magnitude of the Supreme's rush of activity during one of the most troubled periods in American history.

> The "rights revolution" completed the transformation of American freedom from a finite body of entitlements enjoyed mainly by white men into an open-ended claim to equality, recognition, and self-determination. By the end of the sixties, and well thereafter, the government and legal system were inundated by rights claims from all sorts of aggrieved groups – blacks, women, gays, welfare recipients, ethnic groups, the elderly, the handicapped. Claims were also advanced for the rights of the voiceless – the "unborn" (as the foes of abortion termed the fetus[sic]), the environment, endangered plant and animal species. Congress and the Supreme Court would spend much of the rest of the century defining the rights of various groups of Americans and the role of government in advancing or restricting their enjoyment.[111]

Nevertheless, the progress towards a much more inclusive American society still fails to convince those whom Richard Rorty calls the "spectatorial Left". Rorty draws a distinction between what he sees has two different American Lefts, and accuses the more vocal and prominent members of the New Left of having retreated into Academia and succumbing to a "semiconscious anti-Americanism, which it carried over from the rage of the late Sixties."[112] He contrasts this cultural Left with the reformist Left of the early 20th century that hoped to change America and was a beehive of ideas and projects aimed at creating the first classless, truly democratic, society. In his opinion, those for whom "the study of philosophy – mostly apocalyptic French and German philosophy – replaced that of political economy as an essential preparation for participation in leftist

[111] *Ibid*., 304.
[112] Richard Rorty, *Achieving our Country – Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 98-99.

initiatives"[113] must be chastened for having abandoned the political arena choosing instead to engage in High Theory, rewriting the nation's history as a tale of shame and degradation. These intellectuals, he continues, have all but forgotten about the inspiring ideals that motivated Abraham Lincoln and Walt Whitman. Their detached attitude prompted Rorty's rebuke that "the difference between early twentieth-century leftist intellectuals and the majority of their contemporary counterparts is the difference between agents and spectators."[114] Because they have stopped contributing to real politics, opting instead to remain in the sidelines of the political process, he concludes that "the academic Left has no projects to propose to America, no vision of a country to be achieved by building a consensus on the need for specific reforms."[115] What is worse, he says, because there is no real alternative, no project with actual ideas, this barren scholarly atmosphere has been contaminating the public opinion. Roger Scruton coined the term *Oikophobia* to define the repudiation of one's inherited values, of the national idea.[116] This constant denial of the country's ideals advocating instead a permanent penance for its errors is becoming the conventional opinion about America. It is nothing more than a plentiful source of cynicism that undermines the vitality necessary to build on top of what has been achieved thus far.

Rorty's answer to the mounting scepticism is pride, pride in America and what it stands for, which he hails as essential to complete the nation's potential.

> National pride is to countries what self-respect is to individuals: a necessary condition for self-improvement… Emotional involvement with one's country…is necessary if political deliberation is to be imaginative and productive. Such deliberation will probably not occur unless pride outweighs shame.[117]

Although he does not deny the country's many shortcomings and its shameful episodes of the past, he nonetheless believes that the country can be proud of its inherent promise of Democracy. The nation's early commitment to the principles of freedom and democratic universalism cannot be outdone by actions directed by men.

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[113] *Ibid*., 77.
[114] *Ibid*., 9.
[115] *Ibid*., 15.
[116] Roger Scruton, *England and the Need for Nations* (London: Civitas, 2004), 36.
[117] Richard Rorty, *Achieving our Country – Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.

The ideals belong to the nation's soul, and the soul is pure, unblemished by the conduct of Man. Walt Whitman preached as much and his announcement of America's coming fulfilment had an almost religious fervour to it. Rorty argues for a return to that sentiment of spiritual belief in Democracy and describes it as a civic religion, albeit a secularist one whose prophets, Walt Whitman and John Dewey,

> wanted to put hope for a casteless America in the place traditionally occupied by knowledge of the will of God. They wanted that utopian America to replace God as the unconditional object of desire. They wanted the struggle for social justice to be the country's animating principle, the nation's soul.[118]

America and Democracy are synonymous and the true expression of the country should be its unshakable optimism in pursuing its destined future. To persist in policies of guilt without offering solutions can only weaken the morale and belittle America's values, postponing the country and delaying it from becoming what it must become.

[118] *Ibid*., 18.

Visions of Contemporary America

> As an oligarchy is not a figment of political theory, a specious fraud, or a mere term of abuse, but very precisely a collection of individuals, its shape and character, so far from fading away on close scrutiny, at once stands out, solid and manifest.
>
> Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution*

The role of government in social issues became one of the most sensitive in the years following the Civil Rights movement and debate rages to this day. The Bill of Rights allowed a strengthening of the centralizing power of the judiciary branch, as Americans have come to realize since the Civil War. Presently, the legal system stands as the main focus of power in American political life. The Bill of Rights has enabled the Supreme Court to intervene in political and social life and regulate on various matters, including the role of government in society. This has reignited the dispute about judicial review and judicial supremacy, a question that already divided opinions in the early days of the Republic. John Taylor of Caroline (1753 – 1824), one of the most committed opponents of the judiciary's power to act as arbiter of government's actions, argued instead that such a role could only be performed by the founders of the compact – the people – and wrote some of the most consistent prose on the subject.[119] To deny the people that right would be to deny the nature of the compact established in the country's foundation. As Joseph E. Mullin reminds us, "It has been an old argument against judicial review that a creature of the Constitution – the Supreme Court – could not interpret the meaning of the Constitution."[120] The question about the precise role of government and interpretation of the U.S. Constitution are issues that strongly polarize American political life and resurface every so often.

The debate about the interpretation of the Constitution is as old as the Constitution itself, stretching back to the days of the Washington administration when Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton clashed regarding the matter. The

[119] For an account of John Taylor of Caroline's reflections on the U.S. Constitution see Joseph Eugene Mullin, "John Taylor's *Construction Construed, and Constitutions Vindicated* and *New Views of the Constitution of the United States* – with Some Reflections on the European Union", in *Europe's American Revolution,* ed. Simon P. Newman (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2006).
[120] *Ibid*., 158.

controversy surrounding the establishment of a National Bank provided the opportunity for both men to exchange their arguments concerning the reading of the document. Known to be a supporter of limited government Jefferson argued on behalf of a rigid interpretation of the text, laying the bases for the "strict construction" doctrine. Backed by the wording of the 10th Amendment, the author of the Declaration of Independence sustained that the powers that assisted the structures of government were those enumerated in the Constitution and no other. Otherwise, he warned, "To take a single step beyond the boundaries thus specially drawn around the power of Congress, is to take possession of a boundless field of power, no longer susceptible of any definition."[121] The protection of personal liberty, a very dear issue to Jefferson, rested on the precise limitation of government action and this could only be secured through an exact analysis of the text.

Hamilton, on the other hand, was an admirer of the British political constitution and a defender of strong federal government. He relied on the "necessary and proper" clause to argue in favour of the Bank and an enlargement of the government's legal powers in order to secure its efficiency and the country's survival. His "loose construction" theory was fundamental, he said, for the proper functioning of government and the carrying out of its duties.

> The means by which national exigencies are to be provided for, national inconveniences obviated, national prosperity promoted, are of such infinite variety, extent and complexity, that there must, of necessity, be great latitude of discretion in the selection & application of those means.[122]

Hamilton believed, like many, that government would better attend to its citizens' needs if allowed to act and equipped with the proper legal instruments to do so. Distrustful of people's instincts, he placed his hopes of achieving a more balanced society on the actions of a detached and impartial abstraction, a creation that would nonetheless be organized and commanded by people, although he expected them to be wiser and more objective than the common man.

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[121] Thomas Jefferson, "Opinion on the Constitutionality of Establishing a National Bank - February 15, 1791", in *Jefferson vs. Hamilton – Confrontations that Shaped a Nation*, Noble E. Cunningham, Jr. (Boston: New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 51.

[122] Alexander Hamilton, "Opinion on the Constitutionality of Establishing a National Bank - February 23, 1791", in *Jefferson vs. Hamilton – Confrontations that Shaped a Nation*, Noble E. Cunningham, Jr. (Boston: New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 55.

The crux of the matter resided in the construal of the phrase "to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers."[123] Always worried about abuses of power and the dangers of an expanded government, Jefferson was apprehensive about the effects such a generous interpretation as Hamilton's would produce.

> If such a latitude of construction be allowed to this phrase as to give any non-enumerated power, it will go to every one, for there is no one which ingenuity may not torture into a convenience, in some way or other, to some one of so long a list of enumerated powers.[124]

Jefferson understood that if the door were opened for greater governmental involvement, it could never be closed again. The growth and expansion of federal government would undermine state and local power and ultimately its regulatory appetite would impose on the individual. The central power would never relinquish on any controlling influence it could get hold of.

The two men's differences of opinion established the principles that are at the heart of the two diverging fields of constitutional interpretation and forever divided the supporters of each vision into Jeffersonians and Hamiltonians. Public sentiment sways periodically from one to the other according to events of national significance and as backlash against the damages inflicted by big government policies (Hamiltonians) or the shortcomings for lack of intervention by administrations with a more limited government mindset (Jeffersonians).

Nonetheless, the rise of big government was made easier due to the inability or unwillingness of States legislatures to take matters into their own hands and solve various pressing problems before them. As Pietro Nivola remarks about the 20th century alone,

> Had southern states not enforced white supremacy well into the mid-20th century, there would have been less need for a Federal Civil Rights Act in

[123] Constitution of the United States of America, Article One, Section 8, Clause 18.
[124] Thomas Jefferson, "Opinion on the Constitutionality of Establishing a National Bank - February 15, 1791", in *Jefferson vs. Hamilton – Confrontations that Shaped a Nation*, Noble E. Cunningham, Jr. (Boston: New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 53.

> 1964. Had most states been able to rescue their impoverished citizens from the Great Depression, the New Deal would have seemed less urgent. If more states had had the wherewithal to address widespread environmental pollution, perhaps a national Clean Air Act or Clean Water Act would not have been essential.[125]

In many situations, the apathy of local structures allowed the central government to intervene and fill the gap left by the States. This federal enlargement is better illustrated by the continuous increase in federal spending. According to the data collected by the Office of Management and Budget the budget of the United States Government settled at $525 million in 1901 but was well over $1 billion in 1917, although the justification for such a figure can be attributed to the country's participation in World War I. Nonetheless, it reached $6.5 billion in 1934 (Roosevelt's New Deal package) and at the end of World War II was $92.7 billion, a sum required by the two wars in the Pacific and in Europe. The end of the Second World War slowed the budgetary expansion and it wasn't until 1962 that federal spending exceeded $100 billion. It surpassed $500 billion in 1979 and just 9 years later reached $1 trillion. In 2009 the budget was a staggering $3.5 trillion and the Office's estimate for 2014 is for a $4.16 trillion budget.[126] This Leviathan has been the dedicated creation of both Democrats and Republicans, regardless of the latter's proclaimed commitment to smaller government. As Robert Bishop, Republican House Representative for Utah, concedes, "The federal government has grown under both Democrats and Republicans; the best that can be said is that federal spending has sometimes grown more slowly under Republican control."[127] Emphasis should be put on the word 'sometimes'.

Such runaway overindulgence has not been without opposition. The incentives towards government officials, obstructive bureaucracy and the power structures' accommodating relations with great corporations have, time and again, sparked populist reactions. The American populist tradition follows a general script, championing the

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[125] Pietro S. Nivola, "Rebalancing American Federalism," *The American Interest*, March-April 2010, http://www.the-american-interest.com/article-bd.cfm?piece=787 (accessed April 23, 2010).
[126] Executive Office of the President of the United States, Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables - Budget of the United States Government -Fiscal Year 2011* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), http://www.gpoaccess.gov/usbudget/fy11/pdf/hist.pdf (accessed August 17, 2010).
[127] Bishop, Rob, "The Case for Federalism – The Founders' Forgotten Formula for Freedom", *National Review Online*, May 6, 2010, http://article.nationalreview.com/433539/the-case-for-federalism/rep-rob-bishop (accessed May 10, 2010).

cause of simple, honest working people and defending the values of the Founding Fathers, especially Jefferson's ideal of self-reliance in a Republic of virtuous citizens. Populist outbursts have a long tradition in the United States, from the Know-Nothings to the Popular Party, William Jennings Bryan and the Prohibition Party. Andrew Jackson was elected President on a pledge to reclaim Washington from the corrupt politicians that had taken hold of government and return it to its rightful owners, the people. A man of the people himself, his inauguration was attended by thousands of common Americans eager to cheer their new protector; the following ceremonies were celebrated for his order to throw open the doors of the White House to all who wished to participate, in a display of true democratic commemoration. His administration dedicated its energies to fighting the urban elite of bankers and industrialists that threatened the livelihood of small farmers and workingmen. The similarities with Jefferson did not end here as he, too, opposed a Second Bank of the United States, successor to the one Jefferson had tried to stop. Just as his predecessor, he believed it would concentrate more power and wealth in the hands of the rich at the expenses of the poor.

Franklin Roosevelt also made use of populist rhetoric to attack the financial elite that caused the economic collapse of the Great Depression in order to get elected. But unlike Jefferson and Jackson, he vastly increased the government's reach and, at his behest, Congress legislated to regulate enormous swathes of the economy and industrial sector. Although it represented an enormous enlargement of federal responsibility, his Social Security program was developed for the benefit of the poor, more in tune with Hamilton's ideas of a dutiful strong central government working to provide for its citizens in need. Roosevelt's penchant for stirring populist sentiments was further enhanced by his captivating personality and charisma, which he put to good use in his 4 victorious election campaigns for President. Although member of one of the great 'aristocratic' American families, he successfully built an image as a friend of the common man and his speeches were carefully aimed to strike the right chord when it came to the latter's fears and anxieties.

American politicians like to explore populist reactions against corrupt elites, political or financial, and their perceived scheming to deprive the masses of their freedom because it helps their campaigning. However, there is a grassroots populism that is usually more conservative in nature. The latter usually complains about the disappearance of a pastoral, small town, America and the neighbourly qualities of small

communities. As Henry Olsen illustrates regarding the years of the youth riots and civil strife, it is the memory of an idyllic past that inspires the apprehensions of middle-class America.

> In the '60s, many Americans grew uneasy with the course the country seemed to be taking, both politically and socially. The America of farms and small towns was giving way to a nation of suburbs; the growth of large corporations, the rise of television, and the sharp increase in internal mobility were eroding the cohesiveness of local communities. Accompanying these changes was the growth of the national government, which had continued apace even under Republican president Dwight Eisenhower. Despite increasing affluence and relative peace abroad, an ever-larger number of Americans felt their country was becoming unrecognizable — and they wanted to take it back.[128]

In either case, the state machinery is at the centre of the protests: be it for having grown too much and too powerful as to become a threat to liberty, for being in the hands of a corrupt minority and favouring that corrupt minority, or the sum of both wherein a corrupt elite has unbridled command over an outsized power structure. Fear of a financial oligarchy wreaking havoc with the country's economy is nothing new and, as we have seen, has been well taken advantage of throughout American history.

More recently fears have started to spread about the seizure of government by new and more powerful corporate elites. In May 2009, Simon Johnson, former Chief Economist of the International Monetary Fund, wrote an article in which he attributes the blame for the current economic crises to a powerful business and finance oligarchy acting with the consent of the U.S. government. He also denounces the former's political weight in Washington and how its influence has effectively blocked the passage of any successful regulatory legislation that could curtail their power.

> Elite business interests—financiers, in the case of the U.S.—played a central role in creating the crisis, making ever-larger gambles, with the implicit backing of the government, until the inevitable collapse. More alarming, they are now using their influence to prevent precisely the sorts of reforms that are needed,

[128] Henry Olsen, "Populism, American Style", *National Affairs*, Issue Number 4, Summer 2010, http://nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/populism-american-style (accessed June 28, 2010).

> and fast, to pull the economy out of its nosedive. The government seems helpless, or unwilling, to act against them.[129]

The financial services' successful capacity to create wealth in the latter decades coupled with its growing economic value for the country as a whole earned the sector an aura of authority and triumph that brought with it great political leverage. The ease with which bankers and financiers were chosen for top jobs in Washington only deepened the power of Wall Street over an enthralled country. Simon Johnson recalls a few such cases of people who moved between the two main centres of power.

> One channel of influence was, of course, the flow of individuals between Wall Street and Washington. Robert Rubin, once the co-chairman of Goldman Sachs, served in Washington as Treasury secretary under Clinton, and later became chairman of Citigroup's executive committee. Henry Paulson, CEO of Goldman Sachs during the long boom, became Treasury secretary under George W.Bush. John Snow, Paulson's predecessor, left to become chairman of Cerberus Capital Management, a large private-equity firm that also counts Dan Quayle among its executives. Alan Greenspan, after leaving the Federal Reserve, became a consultant to Pimco, perhaps the biggest player in international bond markets. These personal connections were multiplied many times over at the lower levels of the past three presidential administrations, strengthening the ties between Washington and Wall Street.[130]

The Jeffersonian and Jacksonian reservations about the unholy alliance between big business and government and their anxieties regarding the control of the nation's destiny seem to have materialized. Worse of all, they feared that the country's wealth could be used to rescue the oligarchs when in trouble. As the present crises unfolded the government's response was to create massive bail-outs for big banks and companies and financial stimulus packages, thus propping up those responsible for the economic collapse. Simon Johnson recalls the procession of deals and bail-outs that took place in the months following the collapse of the financial sector.

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[129] Simon Johnson, "The Quiet Coup", *The Atlantic*, May 2009, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/05/the-quiet-coup/7364/ (accessed April 19, 2010).
[130] *Ibid*.

> In March 2008, Bear Stearns was sold to JP Morgan Chase in what looked to many like a gift to JP Morgan. (Jamie Dimon, JP Morgan's CEO, sits on the board of directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, which, along with the Treasury Department, brokered the deal.) In September, we saw the sale of Merrill Lynch to Bank of America, the first bailout of AIG, and the takeover and immediate sale of Washington Mutual to JP Morgan — all of which were brokered by the government. In October, nine large banks were recapitalized on the same day behind closed doors in Washington. This, in turn, was followed by additional bailouts for Citigroup, AIG, Bank of America, Citigroup (again), and AIG (again).[131]

The political and financial clienteles, via the traditional 'pork barrel' projects, were also lavishly gifted with money whose primary purpose was to kick-start the economy. The recent financial reform bill, signed in the summer 2010, has done little to assuage the fears of a government takeover by Wall Street. The first assessments of the new law are sceptical as to its real effectiveness. Writing for Newsweek magazine, Michael Hirsh frets about the outcome and how, despite all the pleas and warnings, the law has only reinforced the existing financial oligarchy.

> The fundamental structure of Wall Street had hardly changed. On the contrary, the new law effectively anointed the existing banking elite, possibly making them even more powerful. The major firms got to keep the biggest part of their derivatives business in interest-rate and foreign-exchange swaps. (JPMorgan, Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, Bank of America, and Morgan Stanley control more than 95 percent, or about $200 trillion worth, of that market.)[132]

The dismay at seeing no trustworthy change is compounded with consternation at the realisation that there has not been a radical rethinking of the U.S. economy and the role of the banking and financial sectors. The leading thinkers and proponents of a sweeping reform of Wall Street were left out of the process.

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[131] *Ibid*.
[132] Michael Hirsh, "Obama's Old Deal", *Newsweek*, August 29, 2010, http://www.newsweek.com/2010/08/29/how-obama-got-rolled-by-wall-street.print.html (accessed August 30, 2010).

> Summers and Geithner, by contrast, [Director of the National Economic council and Secretary of the Treasury, respectively] had been acolytes of Bob Rubin, the former Clinton Treasury secretary who, along with then–Fed chairman Alan Greenspan, had presided over many of the key deregulatory changes in the '90s. And they convinced Obama that the financial system they themselves had done so much to nurture was, on the whole, fine. As long as there were greater capital reserves, leverage limits, and more regulatory oversight, Wall Street could remain intact.[133]

The financial ties that connect these men with Wall Street and their former employment with great banking corporations feed the growing suspicion that Washington is heeding to the directions coming from New York's banking elite rather than the country's needs. Thus the accusations that the multi-billion dollar bailouts saved the banks from the mess they created, leaving the taxpayers to foot the bill. The result of all the bail-outs and stimulus packages has been a soaring deficit and a ballooning debt which have left the United States on the verge of bankruptcy.[134] According to the IMF, "closing the fiscal gap requires a permanent annual fiscal adjustment equal to about 14 percent of U.S. GDP." The fiscal gap is the difference between federal spending and federal revenue, meaning that the country is spending much more than it earns, with dire consequences for the future.[135]

The bleak prospects leave some wringing their hands in despair as they lament the decline of America. Newspaper articles and editorials have been written drawing parallels between the present state of the country and the last days of the Roman Empire. The association with Rome says more about the writers' image of America than about the state of the country. The politicians are to blame, they say, because they have strayed from the principles enshrined in the Constitution; they have sold American society the illusion that you could spend more than you earn, that the American dream was free of charge. Lust and sloth have undone America. If only the country would

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[133] *Ibid*.
[134] According to the Office of Management and Budget's estimates, the Federal Debt will reach 100% of GDP in 2012, at a record $16 trillion. Executive Office of the President of the United States, Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables - Budget of the United States Government -Fiscal Year 2011* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), 134. http://www.gpoaccess.gov/usbudget/fy11/pdf/hist.pdf (accessed August 17, 2010).
[135] Laurence Kotlikoff, "U.S. is Bankrupt and We Don't Even Know It," Opinion, *Bloomberg*, August 10, 2010, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-08-11/u-s-is-bankrupt-and-we-don-t-even-know-commentary-by-laurence-kotlikoff.html (accessed August 13, 2010).

return to the good old habits of prudence and thriftiness, stop buying imported goods and opt instead for Made in America, the country would be alright. It is in itself a form of populism that appeals to a simpler and idyllic past of lost virtues and which feeds on anxiety about the future in times of trouble, looking back into the past in search for answers.

Nonetheless, it is an expression of the mounting concern about the country that has captured middle-class America. Unsurprisingly, Americans have begun to worry about the direction the country is headed and who is at the helm. The recent Tea-Party protests don't just oppose the current administration. They are also an embarrassment for the Republicans as several of the GOP's candidates are being defeated in the primaries by independents supported by the Tea-Party movement, thus threatening the Republican Party's establishment. Their claims to be protesting against politicians in general and their Washington-based corrupt bargains can be traced back to the Jeffersonian idealism about the citizen as sentinel and defender of liberty. Despite their tumultuous nature, the grassroots populist movements are well within what the Founding Fathers would have expected of the American population when it came to politics: an active public opinion, a participative society always questioning its political leaders and their choices of policy. One has only to remember Jefferson's appeal for a little rebellion now and then in order to remind politicians that the citizens are permanently vigilant and ready to keep government within the bounds of the Constitution.

The bashing of politicians and intellectuals is a trademark of populist enterprises and the tea-partiers make no exception. Their opposition against the American elites is spurred by the disdain the latter express towards what they dismiss as resentment of white middle-class America against the Obama administration and its progressive policies. The inability to accept the Tea-Party's protests as valid manifestations of anxiety and apprehension about the state of the nation, preferring to ignore them as mere bigotry, have justified accusations that the ruling class and their ideological backers are increasingly out of touch with the general population. Charles Krauthammer mockingly enumerates a few current examples of the widening perception gap between the "little people" and their rulers and the labels appended to the former by the politically correct elite.

> Resistance to the vast expansion of government power, intrusiveness and debt, as represented by the Tea Party movement? Why, racist resentment toward a black president. Disgust and alarm with the federal government's unwillingness to curb illegal immigration, as crystallized in the Arizona law? Nativism. Opposition to the most radical redefinition of marriage in human history, as expressed in Proposition 8 in California? Homophobia. Opposition to a 15-story Islamic center and mosque near Ground Zero? Islamophobia.[136]

Rather than acknowledge any credit or meaning to their opponent's arguments, the liberal left's reaction is to block debate by labelling the political adversaries as intolerant and small-minded. The rejection of common people's values and traditions as populist and unsophisticated, retrograde even, is but another form of Oikophobia. The repudiation of local values and loyalties in favour of abstract ideals that have to be imposed from the top by enlightened elites is consistent with an aristocratic belief that the mob is unfit to accept and understand the high values of those who know better. This type of reasoning compromises the principles for which the American Revolution was fought since it assumes that a minority holds a monopoly on truth being therefore the only one apt to rule. The American Revolution wanted to take away power from the British aristocracy and make it accessible for all to participate and have its opinions heard. To dismiss politically incorrect ideas and projects merely because they do not suit a predetermined social project is a violation of the fundamental American principle that "all men are created equal" enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. For better or worse, if all men are equal then their ideas ought to be considered as legitimate as anyone else's.

Despite the high pledges in the Declaration and the Constitution, the Founding Fathers themselves had a guarded opinion about the masses. Their support for a republican form of government instead of a full democratic system was the result of aristocratic reservations about the 'rabble' and the fear that the latter could be swayed by populists and demagogues exploiting their basic instincts and selfishness. Thucydides was a familiar author in many of the Founding Fathers' personal libraries. It wasn't until the Romantic Movement in the early 19th century that America would

[136] Charles Krauthammer, "The Last Refuge of a Liberal", Opinion, *The Washington Post*, August 27, 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/26/AR2010082605233_pf.html (accessed August 28, 2010).

look at Ancient Athens as more than just a source of anarchic rule by the multitude. As Garry Wills points out,

> This nation's founders first looked to Rome, not to Greece, for their model. Like most men of the eighteenth century, they thought of Athens as ruled by mobs. If any Greek city was admired, it was Sparta, whose discipline inspired the severe moralists of the early Roman Republic. The "mixed government" of Rome – not Athens' direct democracy – was the model invoked in debates over the proper constitution for the United States.[137]

Thus the remark by some that the U.S. Constitution was designed to act as a safety valve to hold the masses' volatile disposition[138]. If the purpose was to emulate the Roman Constitution, the Founding Fathers seemed to have forgotten that to subvert the Roman Republic all it took was a popular general willing to use his influence over the army. Andrew Jackson, the hero of the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812, didn't need his army to reach the Presidency; his popularity among the electorate was more than enough.

When Whitman began his quasi-religious praise of Democracy his prospective audience in Washington was more than ready to hear him; the early nineteenth century witnessed a Greek revival brought about by archaeological discoveries and a re-interpretation of the evidence of the period. The works of Byron, Shelley and Keats did much to promote Greece's struggle from Ottoman despotism in Europe and America. The cradle of Western Civilisation was fighting a new Thermopylae to preserve the ideal of freedom and keep tyranny away from European shores. The romantic ideal of popular democracy had taken hold of the minds of men of wit and genius who believed that their fellow citizens would rise to their responsibilities. Whitman's passionate defence of Democracy has a moral dimension; it is not merely the freedom to do as one pleases but to act correctly. It requires a strong commitment to uphold the community's interests above personal ones, an advanced citizenship. Precisely what the early supporters of a Republican system of representation doubted the population capable of achieving. Their pessimistic conception of Man clashed with the high ideals about a virtuous citizenry dreamt of contemplating the ruins of the Parthenon.

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[137] Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg – The Words That Remade America* (New York: London: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 42.
[138] See note 25 above.

The failure to enlighten the population properly in order that it may rise up to its new station as ruler can have serious consequences for democracy in any society. The exercise of free choice must be carried out as Whitman understood it, as a moral duty, or it will fail and democracy will breed tyranny and despotism. Alexis de Tocqueville had warned about that failure in his study of democracy in America. Not only did social coercion induce individuals to abide to uniform opinions and social mores threatening their freedom, but a greater danger lurked in the shadows of democratic societies. The triumph of egalitarianism and individual freedom can produce a new form of isolation that, together with an increased dependence upon the central power and its institutions, will make of every individual an easy prey to the despotic impulses of government. As the Frenchman observed about democratic societies,

> The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavouring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest; his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind.[139]

Writing in the nineteenth century, Tocqueville warned that such isolation would make the individual dependent on government for his everyday needs. The cultural dominance of modern television coupled with education systems that are embroiled in theoretical experimentations bound to fail its pupils are placing the masses in an educational and intellectual dependence that although appealing to their bases instincts and far from fulfilling their needs shapes their narrow vision of the world. The increased centralisation of government has given the latter greater influence over society be it by way of entitlements and grants, social security programmes and subsidies for the general population or production and labour standardized regulations. This has slowly amplified the individual's dependence on a paternalistic government, "an immense and tutelary power which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications and to watch over their fate."[140] After securing its control over the separate individuals and its capacity to shape their character through its monopoly on finance and culture, the State proceeds to organize society at will.

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[139] Alexis de Tocqueville and Alan Ryan, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II (London: Everyman's Library, 1994), 318.
[140] *Ibid*., Vol. II, 318.

> It covers the surface of society with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate, to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.[141]

Unlike other totalitarian regimes which constrain their citizens and opposition through violence and intimidation, Tocqueville sees democracy degenerating into a despotism that feeds on apathy, broken vigour and weakened determination; a despotic supplier of all the physical and rational needs of citizens sapping their free-will and creative confidence. Contrasting with previous tyrannical systems, this new absolutism will not miss legitimacy since its pre-eminence and power will be ratified by the general population because of the mildness and subtleness of its commands. The legal ratification of the *status quo* will be unquestionable as the voters shield their hesitations and fears under the excuse that their rulers have been chosen democratically. However, "no one will ever believe that a liberal, wise, and energetic government can spring from the suffrages of a subservient people."[142]

Hence the importance of a protest group such as the Tea-Party movement. It is a sign of energy and vigilance in American society, meaning that Tocqueville's bleak prognosis is still a distant prospect for America. Far from deriding or accusing the tea-partiers of every possible anti-democratic label, it should be viewed as a symptom of vitality and refusal to accept consensus, no matter how appealing or protective they may look. The Founding Fathers, Jefferson especially, would understand the tea-partiers and award them an encouraging smile.

[141] *Ibid*., Vol. II, 319.
[142] *Ibid*., Vol. II, 321.

Conclusion

> In these sentiments, Sir, I agree to this Constitution with all its faults, if they are such; because I think a general Government necessary for us, and there is no form of Government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered, and believe farther that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years, and can only end in Despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic Government, being incapable of any other.
>
> Benjamin Franklin, *Speech to the Federal Convention*

The dispute about the role of Government that opposed Jefferson and Hamilton has been decided in favour of the latter and of his defence of strong central government. Jeffersonians can take comfort in the advancement of democracy and widespread enjoyment of constitutional rights. The effort to balance an extension of democracy while trying to contain government within well defined limits was doomed from the start. As Alan Ryan summing up the Tocqueville's perspective about the concentration of political power: "Egalitarians tend almost automatically to prefer uniform solutions to problems; governments always do. When these two tendencies run in harness, the way is paved for a steady increase in the centralization of administration."[143]

The rise of Big Government in America has accelerated since the start of the 20th century and no party can claim monopoly on responsibility; both have been unfaltering in their endeavour to steer the United States away from the ideal of small, contained central government. There have been plenty of good reasons for this to happen, be it the need to increase the country's efficiency in times of conflict or to meet its international responsibilities as leading nation, be it to remedy social ills or intervene in order to restore social justice. No matter how sound the justifications, the fact remains that federal government's weight and influence in America has grown stronger and become ubiquitous in detriment of state and local answers and solutions. There could hardly be talk of blame since events have a way of imposing themselves over human expectations and human nature is hardly to be trusted when the opportunity

[143] Alexis de Tocqueville and Alan Ryan, *Democracy in America* (London: Everyman's Library, 1994), xli.

arises. Nor is it necessary to share Gore Vidal's taste for conspiratorial oligarchies to realize that those who wield power will always try to extract as much advantage as possible from a constitutional arrangement aimed at preventing a takeover from below rather than from the top. And yet it was the pressure from below, pushing for an extension of democracy from the last decades of the 19th century onwards that forced the system into allowing government greater intervention on behalf of social justice. To invite the supremacy of any state structure is to surrender control over it. To permit the State to organize and promote uniformity of thought and action during a period of war is to allow it to take control over the citizen, reversing the balance of power.

While most of the country is sleepwalking through the destruction or restructuring of important and fundamental foundational principles, the appearance of yet another anti-tax, and-establishment movement has stirred the sleepy waters of American politics. Despite all the derision and accusations of extremism and ignorant populism they are a sign that the country still has enough in it to reflect about the direction the country has taken and protest at the abandonment of its original values and political *ethos*. For all its imperfections, narrowness and hopelessness in today's world, the ideal of small government coupled with individual responsibility is the cornerstone upon which the United States has been built and the soul and spirit of the American Revolution.

Worried commentators wishing to draw a parallel with the fall of the Roman Empire should look elsewhere for inspiration; if a comparison is to be made, it is not with the collapse of Empire but demise of the Roman Republic. The inauguration of the Principate represented the end of Roman *libertas* and the republican constitution at the hands of populist oligarchs. A degenerate and corrupt population watched indifferently so long as it was fed and entertained by their rulers. The growing vulnerability of government to an oligarchic takeover, together with its pervasive influence in people's lives means that Tocqueville's grim warning about Democracy is not a far-fetched possibility. To counter this, democracy should reinforce the responsibilities demanded of the individual rather than those of the federal authority and strive for the former's betterment so that it may act suitably as ruler and guardian of his sovereignty. A return to Emerson and Whitman, to the advanced citizenship, is of the essence for the question is whether the American Republic can survive without the virtues that inspired its formation.

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