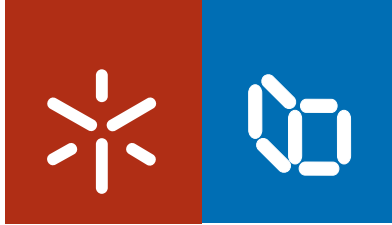


Universidade do Minho
Instituto de Letras e Ciências Humanas

João Jorge Coelho Pereira

**Perspectives on American Idealism
Since 1945**

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Perspectives on American Idealism Since 1945

Tese de Doutoramento em Ciências da Cultura
Especialidade em Cultura Norte-Americana

Trabalho efetuado sob a orientação do
Professor Jaime Costa

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Esta tese não seria possível sem a orientação do Professor Jaime Costa, do seu exemplo inspirador e das inúmeras conversas que tivemos ao longo dos anos. Não há palavras que possam descrever o seu apoio e a sua amizade é uma das que mais aprecio.

Ao longo destes anos várias pessoas contribuíram, de uma forma ou de outra, para que este trabalho visse a luz do dia. A minha família, que sempre esteve do meu lado, e amizades - velhas e novas. Gostaria de destacar algumas pessoas mas sei que com isso correria o risco de omitir outras.

Esta tese também é para elas.

“The former things, and evil, will soon be passed; but the good to come shall neither end nor change.” – John Winthrop, 1628.

D.I.

Perspectivas sobre o Idealismo Americano desde 1945

Os Estados Unidos foram criados como um projecto político assente sobre claros valores morais. A estrutura constitucional foi erguida para reflectir a filosofia revolucionária da independência, fortemente centrada na defesa da liberdade individual. O carácter inovador e ideológico deste projecto levou ao desenvolvimento de duas perspectivas divergentes relativamente ao papel do país na marcha da história universal. Uma de índole missionária, internacionalista e que advoga o envolvimento dos Estados Unidos com o mundo para disseminar os valores de 1776; uma segunda de natureza mais insular que pretende realizar a América dentro de portas. Esta tensão reproduz a natureza dinâmica do idealismo americano, baseada no choque entre múltiplas posições e o processo de negociação que transporta o país para novos entendimentos nacionais. Ciclicamente o país confronta-se com os seus opostos e do choque de tensões emerge regularmente uma nova síntese. O triunfo da tese internacionalista a partir de 1945 ocasionou uma evolução política, social e constitucional que desviou o país dos seus princípios fundacionais e que implicam graves prejuízos para o ideal de autonomia individual. A inexistência de um debate sobre a questão internacional e as suas consequências internas silenciou o processo negocial normal e deixa antever um período de conflito e tensão do qual se prevê que saía um novo equilíbrio político e constitucional.

Perspectives on American Idealism since 1945

The United States are a political project born from clear moral and ethical values. The constitutional structure was created to reflect the revolutionary philosophy of the Independence, centred on defence of individual freedom. The innovative and ideological nature of the project has produced two different outlooks regarding the country's role in the history of mankind. One is of a missionary temperament, internationalist and which argues for an involvement of America in world affairs to spread the values of 1776; the second is a more inward-looking understanding seeking to fulfil the meaning of America at home. This tension reproduces the dynamic nature of American idealism, founded on the clash of multiple positions and the ensuing negotiation which leads to national clarification. There is a cyclical clash of opposites from which emerges regularly a new synthesis that embraces the several impulses. There has been a noticeable departure from the original thesis stimulated by the political, social and constitutional evolution witnessed since the triumph of the internationalists in 1945. This has grave implications for the ideal of individual autonomy, and the absence of a national conversation regarding the international question and its domestic significance foretells a period of tension and reckoning from whence a new political and constitutional balance will emerge.

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INTRODUCTION

And thou America,
For the scheme's culmination, its thought and its reality,
For these (not for thyself) thou hast arrived.
Thou too surroundest all,
Embracing carrying welcoming all, thou too by pathways broad
and new
To the ideal tendest.

The measur'd faiths of other lands, the grandeurs of the past,
Are not for thee, but grandeurs of thine own,
Deific faiths and amplitudes, absorbing, comprehending all,
All eligible to all.

Walt Whitman, "Song of the Universal", *Leaves of Grass*

In the past 20 years we have gradually become aware that America is forever bound up in the affairs of the whole world. Our own future is linked to the future of all. In great capitals and in tiny villages, in the councils of great powers and in the rooms of unknown planners, events are being set in motion which will continually call upon our attention and make demands on our resources. Prophecy is always unsure. But if anything is certain, it is that this Nation can never again retreat from world responsibility. You must know, and we must realize, that we will be involved in the world for the rest of our history.

Lyndon B. Johnson, April 20, 1964

I – Opening statement: general purpose of this work

This work starts from a basic premise, which is that America inaugurates a new chapter in human political history. Born dedicated to the ideals of liberty and equality, its political foundation was shaped by a sense of destiny to unshackle Man from history, from hierarchical, social and political organisations, and initiate a dynamic experiment in free government. This work argues that the missionary urge present from the outset created a national self-consciousness regarding its exceptionality which in turn occasioned a dual outlook about the country's part in the world. On the one hand is the notion that America should stand as a role model, an inspiration for others through its completion within and by itself, territorially and spiritually. By creating the conditions for the preservation of individual liberty at home, by materialising such principles in its constitutional framework, America would show by example the new stage of human history. On the other hand, its uniqueness and protagonism carry with them an urgency to see its values disseminated, to fulfil a universal mission as the instrument of Providence to change the world and complete the ultimate goal of liberty and perpetual peace. Therefore, it must interfere in world affairs and cannot remain as mere observer.

It is our contention that this clash of perspectives, this contradiction regarding the application of America's values, has been a main driver of its relations with the world, and especially after World War II has conditioned domestic and foreign policies and developments. This work will try to show how this divide in the national identity manifested itself in events after 1945, how the country itself has changed because of the momentous decision to heed to the internationalist call, and the internal consequences resultant from accepting the responsibility of creating a new world order according to its cultural and political principles. This will allow us to address the fundamentals of American idealism and highlight what we believe is its essential nature, and understand the significance of this evolution for the country and for the wider world.

This thesis follows the trail left open by a study done for a Master's thesis which explored the subject of American idealism, its meaning and political manifestation. The interest in the topic is the result of long years of work and of a personal interest dating back to undergraduate studies in International Relations. This focus on America's idealism stems from its importance as structural element in the American political project, and how at this precise historical moment there is a marked departure in relation to its origins and about its current meaning. Furthermore, we will make the case for the

inevitability of a national conversation regarding the idea of America and argue that a process of anamnesis is needed to re-claim the principles that sustained the American experiment. We believe they are still the most valid moral structure for the establishment of a political community that aims to answer its members' aspirations and dignity.

II - Exposition of the basic premise and its significance for this work

The colonists arriving in the New World well understood the opportunity that opened up before them in the pristine forests of America. And the Puritans among them comprehended only too well the responsibility that such an opportunity entailed. They were God's chosen people, escaping Babylon to the Promised Land. Far from Europe, away from Crown and Church, to replicate the hierarchies and corruption of Man they had experienced in England would be to forfeit God's gift. A second chance was presented to mankind, for whom they acted as representatives, and they set forth to build a model society which in the words of one of their leaders "shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us."¹ As the elected few, theirs was the Truth and theirs a society that was pure. Their adherence to rigorous ethical values infused the colonies with the conviction that each individual could find the righteous path by himself, alone with his God by submitting to His law. Each one was a vessel, a conduit for God's work and capable of instituting the Kingdom of God for himself and in himself.

Thus the colonists believed that all one needed to survive and find his way in America was to follow a public ethical code. The several communities of different people coming from the different corners of Europe observed a common ideal of peaceful coexistence based on a shared absolute respect for natural rights. Each was free to follow his conscience as long as he observed the common moral code of conduct. Arriving in the Eden-like land of the American continent, Man was able to return to first principles; the philosophical natural state of mankind proposed by philosophers such as John Locke was materialised in the American frontier. Here, alone with Nature in its purest form, isolated from the European medieval societies and institutions, the

¹ John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity, 1630." Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, 1838), 3rd series 7:31-48. Hanover Historical Texts Project. <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html> (accessed September 12, 2013).

Europeans discovered that natural freedom denied them by centuries of aristocratic and theological rules and hierarchies. The living conditions in the colonies cancelled privilege and birth; hard work and talent the only distinguishing attributes that mattered. Nature was the great social leveller and liberator: mankind's natural liberty and equality was rediscovered in America, away from Europe, away from history.

The social organisation that emerged from this environment reflected those principles. Individuals were left to live their lives as they pleased and their associations were voluntary, to resolve common interests. Communities organised themselves and settled their rules for living in the different regions of the continent before the establishment of any form of political authority and this process was replicated manifold times during the colonial and frontier periods. The social contract was effected in the frontier: men came together and agreed to delegate upon a form of communal government the reconciliation of differences. The latter would organize matters best taken care of in common, while the individuals kept for themselves all that they could work out alone. Life was kept simple and men minded their own business, busy at work, trying to make a living, following their principles. Their rights pre-existed government and set a sphere of individual autonomy where the power of the government held no sway. Thus, after independence, Congressional government, as founded by the Articles of Confederation, was severely limited and maintained at a minimum. This constituted the fundamental principle of American idealism: the almost sacrosanct nature of individual autonomy and self-government.

When the Revolution came, the fight was as much for liberty as for advancing the reformation of mankind. Thomas Paine warned that the chance was at hand to start the world anew and the Great Seal of the new Republic proclaimed the independence to be the beginning of a new order of the ages, a new stage in the history of mankind (meaning and repercussions of which we will look at in greater detail in Chapter Eight). America was embarking on a singular political experiment of self-government and the idea that people mattered more than government. It was a radical, ideological revolution and the country thus born carried with it that moral ferment, an admixture of religion and anti-monarchism. Its product was a country built upon philosophical premises whose objectives and purposes antedate those of 1789.

The new Republic was infused with the Puritan belief that it was destined to play a great role in the history of the world. Its geographic isolation and virtual emptiness had permitted the establishment of new forms of self-government, breaking free from

feudal laws and social hierarchies. It was a land where mankind could witness how individuals could be free were it not for the institutional burdens of a past that did not exist in America. John Adams echoed the thinking pervading the colonies about their destiny. “I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.”² America had a destiny to fulfil, an ambitious mission to redeem the world and liberate Man. But to succeed in its duty, America must preserve its distinctiveness, its unique political character and thus avoid replicating European forms of social and political organisation.

In order to avoid the development of a European-like governmental apparatus - which would stifle individual freedom - America had to avoid complexity and retain a basic structure of local, state, and federal administration. The United States were in a unique geographical position to stay away from the vicissitudes of history. The country was able to dedicate itself to cultivating the vast lands to the West and manage its abundant resources, left to its own devices, caring only for its experience in free government. A whole historiography emerged around the idea that America was a new nation apart from all others, inaugurating a new era in human history, part of a covenant with Providence to preserve liberty which would hold so long as the nation kept away from organisational complexities.³ To preserve its distinct character America must avoid history, understood as a process of continuous and ever-increasing complexity. Historical progress is the accumulation of procedures, regulations and layers of social and political organisation. We argue that the nature of American idealism is a fight against the impositions of history, it is a conscious attempt to avoid history by stepping outside of it and thus create an independent framework, outside time and space that will endure permanently and never change because it is whole and complete.

Administrative simplicity meant that government was small and limited. Seymour Martin Lipset has argued that because America was born of a rebellion against aristocratic rule from Britain its political culture is one of deep distrust of government authority. In point of fact, alongside individualism and egalitarianism, Lipset claims that

² John Adams, *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* (1765). TeachingAmericanHistory.org <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/a-dissertation-on-the-canon-and-feudal-law/> (accessed July 17, 2015).

³ For a collection of the principal proponents of this historiography and their work regarding the idea that America should avoid bureaucracy and European-like developments, see David W. Nobel, *Historians Against History – The Frontier Thesis and the National Covenant on American Historical Writing Since 1830* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965).

anti-statism is a defining characteristic of American culture.⁴ Nothing illustrates this distrust of authority as the political system established by the Founders in 1787 wherein government is divided and each branch controls the other two and, originally at least, the States occupied a central role in the national balance of power. The aversion regarding the industrial, complex, and bureaucratic modern state is a reflection of the fear of historical progress and its consequences, and the desire to preserve a colonial Arcadia-like innocence and minimalism. This constitutes a primary source of conflict in American idealism since its universal mission is to reveal the ultimate goal of history, for which it must accept its natural progress and universal denouement. Furthermore, we hold that internal developments since 1945 have forced a substantial departure from the original consensual values and the country's uniqueness, and this work will put forward the argument that the consequences are as significant as to question the very idea of America, and that the contradictions and events will require a clarification regarding the nature of America and the political thought underpinning its political realisation.

III – Relevance

We claim that this tension regarding foreign relations has conditioned political decisions both at home and abroad. There have been many thinkers and ideas about American foreign policy, but we put forward the idea that the main driver, the main impulse for the country's interactions with the outside world is rooted in its sense of destiny and the two diverging considerations: to do something about it or to just stay home and let the world run its course. This is not to say that America's modern involvement with the outside world is not without its moments of realism, pursuit of self-interest and cold, detached assessments. But the core idea feeding the country's role in the greater stage of human tragedy is that of pivotal actor, the late character arriving for the completion of the drama. However one chooses to explain the country's actions in the past 70 years, their implementation began with the conviction of a choice regarding a moral persuasion deeply embedded in America's culture. This has shaped and influenced the different attitudes to foreign politics, especially since 1945 as this

⁴ Seymour Martin Lipst, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

work will try to demonstrate. In turn, foreign involvement has influenced domestic events and policies as a reaction to it.

The universal vocation remains as an undercurrent, running below the conscious surface, its pull strong and constant. One understanding of it wants the culmination of the grand design to be fulfilled at home, focusing on the individual American; the other has an eschatological aspiration to bring forth the final events of history. It is of the nature of the individualist perspective to be domestic, insular: be it ever so humble, there's no place like home. The purpose of America is to create and maintain the conditions that will allow each one to design and work his own path of personal liberation and improvement. The internationalist approach, on the other hand, requires a cosmopolitan outlook, an extending of the gaze beyond the horizon, a desire for active intervention and organisation of humanity's freedom and peace. This messianic outlook can only be attained by a life free from the menial tasks of ordinary existence. Therefore, the nation's elites are the more obvious advocates of going abroad and speeding the liberation of humanity. And while a disparaging analysis may conclude that the political and economic oligarchies have a vested interest in engaging in the pursuit of free trade and open markets, still they resort to the rhetoric of idealism to advance their cause. Disregarded or cynically instrumentalised, it is nonetheless there just as any teachings influence one's actions, sometimes without one realising it. It is rooted in the national consciousness, be it inward-looking or seeking substantiation abroad. The tension between the two, we believe, is the dynamo driving post-war America.

Other countries are conditioned by their past, getting their sense of communal identity from a shared history. America owes nothing to the past, only to the future, to what it aspires to become, to that which it is meant to be – the political and ideological best hope of mankind. As we shall see, perhaps therein lies the difficulty of its acceptance by the rest of the world, because it is not rooted in any recognisable past coterminous with that of other cultures. It is directly anti-historical, a rebellion against the impositions of the past and the march of progress. The religious belief in the spiritual equality of all before God, regardless of race or status, fit together with the natural rights doctrine affirmed in the Declaration of Independence and helped create a particular national doctrine which has been variously called Americanism or Exceptionalism. Restating Richard Hofstadter, America does not have ideologies but is

one. The question from the start, however, was whether the experiment was for domestic consumption only or for export.

While the young nation lacked the strength to follow its messianic purpose, it remained as a lighthouse, a beacon for the rest of the world and dedicated to domestic fulfilment. The city upon the hill worked its mission through example rather than proactive intervention. Perhaps reflecting that weakness, several of the early leaders urged the nation to avoid the temptation to interfere with the wider world. George Washington in his Farewell Address warned his countrymen that Europe was a different reality which America could not hope to cope with successfully. Thomas Jefferson likewise favoured that the country dedicate itself to elevating its citizens rather than pursue overseas follies. America's work lay at home, not abroad. But it was John Quincy Adams who proffered the sternest warning about the consequences at home of chasing visions outside, a warning we will look at more closely as we believe he was prescient in the consequences of yielding to foreign causes. He argues that America's march was the march of the mind, not of liberating armies. And so the country remained an international oddity, an experiment in democracy and liberty engaged with its own ideas and occupations. In Chapter One we will see how these calls of the past were ignored for a new approach after 1945, decisively altering contemporary America.

The wisdom of staying at home was given justification and direction by the Transcendentalists, who strived to give the experiment at home a clearer and more specific objective: to work for the benefit and personal advancement of the individual. The progress of its citizens towards enlightenment and self-fulfilment was to be the task of America. This was a more insightful America, more reflective of the circumstances at home and more individualistic, a Jeffersonian perspective. America was a domestic affair, dedicated to clear the path for each individual to engage in a journey toward personal progress. The State, as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, exists for the appearance of the wise man; when the latter emerges, the State must disappear. Transcendentalism is one of the main currents of American political thought that consistently resurfaces throughout the period covered in this work as its ideas are a staple of the individualist perspective, that part of the national character that urgently calls for an American completion of America.

Notwithstanding this reinvigoration of the individual character, the internationalist impulse lingered and although these two facets of the national personality kept an uneven balance in favour of the former for most of the country's

initial history, industrialism changed everything. The Civil War ended slavery but victory over the plantation aristocracy of the South also meant victory of the centralising forces over those of federalism and agrarian individualism, creating the conditions for the rise of rampant industrialism which changed a predominantly rural country into an urban and industrial society, introducing America to social turmoil. Still, the main American values of individualism, anti-statism and egalitarianism remained and continued to shape the years to come. Nonetheless, the first stirrings of disquiet made themselves heard as the country buckled under the weight of social and economic makeover.

Despite having fallen from grace in academia and elsewhere, we contend that Frederick Jackson Turner is one of the fundamental authors to be studied for this work. We will examine his ideas for we consider that his basic premise was seized as justification for going abroad to better defend liberty and democracy at home. Frederick Jackson Turner warned that with the end of the frontier by the end of the century, America was at a loss as to where to reinvigorate those values. Gone was the source and mould for individual liberty and democratic social organisation: the abundance of free land and absence of social and political institutions. Without that safety valve, and under pressure from industrialism, wherefrom would come the next reinforcement of the ideals of liberty and equality; how would the realignment of the country's political establishment be done in order to preserve democracy and the sphere of individual autonomy? Turner argued that new frontiers, empty spaces had to be discovered and explored, and so a conceptual justification for looking abroad emerged. In Chapter One, we will see how Turner's argument about the need to find new frontiers to preserve America's values was employed by internationalists to justify foreign expansion. Out of the need to perpetuate the unique character of the country emerged the idea of extending America's reach into new territories beyond its oceanic limits, and after 1945 the country has embarked on a new, and significant, chapter of its history. Given this, we find that an analysis of the United States since 1945 has to delve into the fundamentals of the country's vocation as culmination of human political thinking and the contrasting perspectives regarding its practice bearing in mind that the country's evolution, social and political, after 1945 is directly linked with the outside world.

IV – Outline of the aims of this work and its focus

Few would dispute that since the end of World War II the United States has taken a primary role in international affairs breaking with its past practices regarding foreign policy. Woodrow Wilson, a devoutly religious man with a strong sense of personal mission, grabbed the chance presented by the war in Europe to commit the United States to saving democracy and reform world politics. America was thrust back into European history, sacrificing men and treasure to settle questions that were alien to it. But his attempt at fastening the country with the rest of the world failed and the internationalists were left to wait for another opportunity. Nonetheless, they remained adamant that it was America's duty to intervene and share her benefits with the world. Ever since 1945 the future of America has indeed been linked to the future of all.

In his work *The Liberal Tradition in America*, Louis Hartz claims that America oscillates between bouts of messianism and isolationism. However, this is a generalisation that needs fine-tuning. We contend that contradiction and conflict are present at the core of American idealism and it would be more correct to claim that within this tension America has moments of introspection - especially after 1945 - when it looks to its own past in search of clues as to where its morality compels it to dedicate its efforts, an attempt at reconciling the contradictions, of overcoming actuality to accomplish the idea of America. As we shall see, whilst Eisenhower was reluctant to dedicate much of the federal government's powers domestically, he pursued a vigorous foreign policy strengthening America's commitments abroad. John F. Kennedy too was much more interested in foreign affairs although his success was questionable, to say the least. Events at home stemming from a growing dissatisfaction forced him to adopt a more conscious attitude to domestic problems. Lyndon Johnson tried to placate the storm by devoting a wide range of energies to domestic programmes, trying to balance the two poles, as it were, but his efforts proved futile. It was left to succeeding administrations to try and manage the wreckage, with formidable consequences as we will see. The pull exercised between the internal demands for personal improvement and the international obligations has decisively formatted America's recent history and we argue that the almost exclusive priority given to foreign affairs in the two decades after 1945 prompted the violent reaction demanding a domestic reorientation that came to be generally known as the Sixties.

The impetus for this work lies in the study of how the nation dealt with internal social, political and foreign demands after the war, how it tried to reconcile them with the revolutionary legacy and universalist expectations. The aim is to follow particular events and issues that have taken place since 1945 and understand how the dual character that emerged from the nature of American idealism has influenced their development. With this we expect to show how the product of those developments has fashioned present-day America and understand how it departs from, negates even, American idealism. Our focus is on the values that buttress that idealism and how they fare at present given the evolution undergone since the end of World War II. Few would deny that the United States have dramatically changed since that period and our intention is to highlight the differences between the foundational hopes and the present.

In a work of this nature and scope, selection is inevitable. Of the many paths that open up, choices have to be made. Other courses might equally have been followed, but we stand by the opinion that our judgment here presented allows one to grasp the fundamentals of the dichotomy which we believe is the emotional engine behind the nation's character and of its evolution since 1945. Therefore, a number of questions will draw our attention in order to consolidate our thoughts and ideas about the process in question. Namely, we will focus on the ideological background for the policies followed - domestic and foreign - and in what way are those policies related to American idealism. We will be particularly alert to the use of said idealism to justify actions and policies, as with Truman and the decision to engage resolutely in a worldwide defence of democracy, for example. In adopting a chronological progression we will follow events more clearly and see how they relate with American idealism. Not only will this permit us to discern the answers to who, where and when, but also as to the why.

What are the sources of inspiration for the language used in the speeches of the main political actors and how do they interpret America's idealism is another interesting point. It will allow us to perceive how the petitioning of the past materialises, or not, in executive and legislative action. This will allow us to understand where do political action and discourse converge and where do they move away from the founding ideals. The purpose is to highlight the clashes between the various perspectives and how they influenced events both at home and abroad, to follow the evolution of the country and how it coped with the pressure of both outlooks and ultimately show how the country was not designed for a global mission despite its missionary spirit.

The internationalists' desire to expand and reinvent the world to bring about the end of history is thwarted by the absence of a national expansionist character. Furthermore, the lack of a constitutional framework designed for expansion reveals that the country was planned for a domestic mission, hence the current problems with executive overreach and usurpation of powers by the national security apparatus. The modern immersion in history, so to speak, owes much to presidential initiative and the expansion of executive power has placed the White House at the centre of contemporary America's decision-making process in a way that was never dreamed of by 19th century Presidents, for example. Presidential studies have consequently evolved as a separate area of academic research, exemplifying the changing nature of the office's place in the constitutional framework. Although modern academia tends to dilute the ability of individuals to shape events, preferring more democratic social and economic structures and conditions as explanation for developments, we believe that along with impersonal forces it is also important to analyse the personalities and individuals' motivations in determining events. Historical, social, and material determinism cannot alone explain events, and in what regards our thesis, we look at individuals' reading of American exceptionalism as fundamental to understand their actions. We believe that the closer individuals are to the centres of power, the more their peculiarities influence events.

This work hinges on the view that America has a natural relationship with conflict and that contradiction and challenge are an integral element in its existence and rationalisation. Not only is there tension between competing principles, but a struggle to close the gap between the real and the ideal. At the root of American idealism is the notion of multiplicity. It is a democratic project, not just in the political sense of the word but in the sense of multitude, of variety and the inclusion of diversity under common ethical values. The underlying tension is what enables the dynamism, the fluidity and forward movement, and is at the centre of the project, a dialectic movement of sorts. For the country as a whole the only guide available is whatever convictions it brings with it. And those are ingrained in the past, in the founding idealism of the American project. It is our argument that at the heart of American idealism are moral and ethical absolutes, i.e., values which if taken to their logical conclusion necessarily implicate a fundamental conflict. Liberty and equality are mutually exclusive and although the balance between the two is what makes for the preservation of social harmony and personal satisfaction, the supremacy of one would demand the submission

of the other. Likewise, various perspectives arising from this primary conflict have coexisted in permanent tension throughout the country's history.

We maintain that there are cyclical moments in the country's history wherein the imbalances and tensions are resolved through political agonism - the struggle of opposing views - and a redefinition takes place, a dialectic resolution by means of a new proposition, growth through a synthesis of contrasting views, rather than an antagonistic victory and destruction of the opposing perspective. The desire to keep government limited and protect the sphere of personal autonomy reflected in the Articles of Confederation clashed with the need to have a more efficient national government to settle disputes and modernise the early Republic. From that conflict emerged the Constitution of 1787, an early moment of clarification. A second such instance of redefinition, and perhaps the most significant and with wider implications, was the Civil War which pitted several contrasting perspectives against one another in a violent antagonistic struggle after it became impossible to engage in an agonistic resolution of the differences. The right of local communities to decide their lifestyle and their mode of social organisation was a fundamental tenet of federalism, a shield against centralisation and oppression. But in the rural South it evolved into the defence of slavery and the denial of the values enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. The contradiction was further aggravated by that other elemental text, the Constitution, which protected slavery. Federalism versus centralisation in defence of slavery against liberty. The victory of the Union signalled the end of the Jeffersonian dream of a federal agrarian Republic of autonomous communities and the emergence of a centralised government and accelerated the industrialisation of the country.

America's relationship with the outside world, which is really the country's attitude regarding its universal vocation, was settled with World War II. The permanent involvement in the affairs of the world decided the question in favour of the universal mission but as we aim to demonstrate, the internal demands forced themselves upon the decision-makers. The developments thus triggered reinforced other latent contradictions which we will explore. This work will conclude by arguing that the tensions that have developed throughout the past 70 years are pushing the United States to another such moment of reckoning which will be triggered by external factors, namely financial and economic ones, and that the required clarification will have to deal with the core philosophy buttressing America's values. The current political and constitutional American landscape is a direct challenge to the values that stand at the foundation of the

country. Therefore, the country is faced with a choice: either it accepts that they are absolute and still valid, and that the Constitution is their embodiment and structures their political manifestation; or it concludes that the Constitution is unfit, unsuited, and outdated, raising the prospect that the very principles that sustain it are not complete, striking at the very essence of what is America. Either America is the revelation of mankind's progress, or everything it has achieved so far is a mistake, and the realisation that the ideal is unattainable and history inescapable.

CHAPTER ONE

A new course, or how a leading few have a disproportionate impact on the destinies of the many.

When a nation, at any given period of history, bears the responsibility for the military security and the economic stability of a geographic zone, that nation is in fact – whether it wants it or not – the head of an empire. From then on it does not serve any purpose, moral or otherwise, to deny the facts and pretend that business is as usual.

Jean-Jacques Servan Schreiber, New York Herald Tribune, October 1, 1950

I

America at the beginning was ruled by kings from across the sea. Freedom and the presidential system were established under the leadership of George Washington. The Articles of Confederation - the first constitutional arrangement – personified the original idealism with its protection of popular government. The power of the President was limited under the Constitution of 1787 and carefully watched by Congress and the Supreme Court, but it nonetheless represented a departure from the initial ideal by restricting the spheres of autonomy in favour of strengthening government. The Civil War affirmed the primacy of the federal government over States' rights but still the presidency did not last beyond two terms. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was in his fourth consecutive term when he died, leaving the care of the country to his right-hand man and chosen successor. At the time of his death, the Republic had changed thanks to economic depression and war. The final stages of the war heralded the birth of a new world and with it the affirmation of a new, different country. Although Harry S. Truman was the midwife called to deliver it, Roosevelt was the father. Victory in the war encouraged patriotic tribute to the Republic of Freedom and Democracy, but America emerged from the conflict a transformed land: a military power, leader of the Western world, burdened with the reconstruction and defence of its allies in Europe and Asia.

Entering the White House in 1932 on the back of an electoral landslide that won him both House and Senate, Roosevelt proceeded to take control of the nation. A country left prostrate by economic depression assented to his early interventionism and his New Deal. Since the independence, certain principles were accepted as being part of the nation's character, a set of moral, social and political values solidly built around the idea of individual freedom and liberty, a belief in a set of civilizational values which inform humanity. Despite the political differences, not since the Civil War had these values been questioned. Then, with the justification of the emergency of the Great Depression, the country was faced with the prospect of a new society and a new role for government. New federal agencies and departments were created to regulate and oversee the economy. Large public works projects were implemented to combat unemployment and Social Security legislation was passed to succour those affected by the economic downturn. A people long accustomed to liberty were hardly thankful of him who reminded them of their new dependence. In time, the early shock of the Depression had given way to a feeling that government had gone too far, that the New

Deal sought to reshape the country. “Reacting to a perceived shift in the public mood to the right, particularly from 1938 on, Roosevelt substantially reduced his reform efforts.”⁵ Ever the consummate politician, Roosevelt knew when to change course and sacrifice reform for political power. As one commentator observed, “The New Deal will never be understood by anyone who looks for a single thread of policy, a far-reaching, far-seeing plan. It was a series of improvisations, many adopted very suddenly, many contradictory. Such unity as it had was in political strategy, not economics.”⁶ He retained power for two more presidential elections following his adjustments.

The higher classes were induced to ingratiate themselves to him and get a share of the spoils of his corporatist policies intended to revive the economy. His National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) favoured a clientele of industrialists and businessmen with which it aimed to regulate every aspect of the economy. These government-sponsored cartels and monopolies would work with labour organisations in order to set prices, quotas, wages and production licenses in an attempt to bring life to a faltering economy. Unsurprisingly, the Supreme Court ruled the NIRA unconstitutional in 1935. The decision only emboldened the President to challenge the Supreme Court’s independence. His attempt at controlling the judicial system was unveiled in a bill that would, if approved, allow him to nominate additional justices - friendlier towards his reform plans - to the highest court in the country. This proposal, known as the ‘court-packing scheme,’ would in effect terminate the separation of powers in America. The Supreme Court yielded to the pressure from the executive and its manipulation of public opinion and began ruling more accordingly to Roosevelt’s wishes. In 1942, in the *Wickard v. Filburn* decision, the Supreme Court had become as deferential as to permit government to regulate citizens’ private economic decisions. Under a generous interpretation of Article I, Section 8, Clause 3, of the Constitution (also known as the Commerce Clause),⁷ the justices of the court deemed as within the authority of Congress to regulate a farmer’s production of wheat for private consumption. In judging so, they allowed an inordinate expansion of federal power beyond the regulation of interstate commercial activities and into the realm of free individual choice, which the Constitution was originally devised to protect.

⁵ Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here – Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 76.

⁶ Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition And the Men Who Made It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 327.

⁷ The clause in question states that Congress shall have power “To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes.”

The subservience of the financial and industrial clientele combined with a timorous Congress. The elected members were fearful of having to face the wrath of their constituents regarding the new state of affairs and of having to actually exercise their responsibilities. Hence, they abdicated their duty and gladly shifted the burden onto the presidency. Charles Beard,⁸ writing in 1940, summed the situation and the inevitable outcome.

Having failed to take their heavy liquidation in 1932 and 1933 and to manage successfully 'their own affairs' economic and political, the private interests and the state and local political interests, which had once exercised powerful checks on the power and momentum of the Federal Government, lost a large part of their independence; and, as Congress escaped its responsibilities by transferring to the Executive a huge discretionary authority in relation to banking, currency, and spending, centralization proceeded rapidly. In this way the old system of checks and balances, political and economic, was profoundly altered.⁹

Such a new arrangement regarding the supremacy of the federal government necessitates a strong central authority, with an array of vast new powers. It demands a centralised government and unity of action that is contrary to the spirit and the letter of the Constitution. Roosevelt was unperturbed. The constitutional balance requires a moderation of executive powers lest the former be undermined; Congress he controlled and the Supreme Court he coerced into obedience. Thus he consolidated his power over the nation.

In a country built on liberty and individual self-reliance, Roosevelt's reforms raised questions about the meaning of America's foundation. Franklin Roosevelt enabled the materialisation in America of a new understanding of Democracy that had

⁸ Charles Beard was a notable academic who inaugurated the economic interpretation of American history. In his view, class conflict was the main engine of American history and he regarded the Constitution of 1787 as the product of an oligarchy of financiers and merchants working to protect their economic interests. His views influenced many historians of the Progressive period which regarded the Constitution of 1787 as a coup to terminate popular democracy enshrined in the Articles of Confederation.

⁹ Quoted in David W. Noble, *Historians Against History – The Frontier Thesis and the National Covenant on American Historical Writing Since 1830* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 133-134.

been gaining ground since the end of the 19th century with Progressivism.¹⁰ Whereas the original significance concerned the administration of the commonwealth, allowing for the participation of the common people - political equality after an era of aristocratic rule - Democracy had metamorphosed into granting individuals power of decision regarding social and material well-being to all, especially the poorer classes – economic equality. For Progressives, the fulfilment of the new stage was to be achieved through centralised management, concentrating on government all administration and required instruments to bring forth the consummation of this material egalitarianism. The trend would have the 18th century-Liberalism of John Locke and the Founding Fathers slowly replaced by late 19th century-Progressivism.¹¹ Under this new paradigm, our view is that the re-shaping of the role of government gave the latter a new reason for its existence. No longer the guardian of liberty, it was entrusted with the reorganization of economy and finance, and of society as well, in the passage from a Republic to a new Democracy.

However, despite Roosevelt's actions, he was far from being a radical intent on subverting the Constitution. The Great Depression posed a severe threat to the American political system, with a heightened danger of class war and revolution. Regardless of his rhetoric, Roosevelt was keenly aware that laissez-faire capitalism and a business-as-usual attitude in politics would only strengthen the forces feeding on social unrest. As a member of the nation's aristocracy, FDR was drawn to power but he realised that if nothing was done, the elites would lose their power to revolution. Therefore, he set out to save the political system while using reforms as his Progressive credentials. As Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks show, Roosevelt's actions during the 1930's were destined to keep the country stable – avoiding revolution - and preserve the basic tenets of the American political and economic system. Confronted with the very real possibility of a third, more radical and Communist-inspired party emerging in America, Progressives were left with no choice: “though many leftists recognised that Roosevelt was trying to save capitalism, they could not afford to risk his

¹⁰ Progressivism in the United States emerged as a modernist reaction to industrialism and its social and economic effects. It called on government to take up a greater role in alleviating the impact of the changes and to begin a wide programme of social and economic reform. Their political demands were aimed against the representative Republicanism embodied by the 1787 Constitution in favour of greater popular participation in government.

¹¹ The term liberalism has acquired different meanings in Europe and the United States. Liberalism in Europe is understood in the classical meaning of the word, which stresses the principle of individual liberty from coercive interferences. American liberals emphasise the principle of equality and advocate greater government intervention in order to achieve it. Hence liberalism in the United States is associated with left policies and in Europe it is more closely regarded as conservative for opposing government interference.

defeat by supporting a national third party.”¹² Splitting the left-wing electorate would hand victory to the Republicans; FDR was their best chance of seeing some Progressive programmes enacted and that was better than nothing.

Albeit ambiguous regarding true reform, Roosevelt understood that the state of the economy demanded some social and economic concessions to avoid class warfare and a national breakdown. His political shifting reflects his attention to perceived changes in the electorate’s disposition and the dispensation of the legislative medicine according to the symptoms manifested by the patient. A careful but thorough physician, he sounded the discontented section of the country to gauge for the need of stringent action. “In discussions regarding radical and populist anticapitalist protest, the president stated that to save capitalism from itself and its opponents, he might have to ‘equalize the distribution of wealth,’ which could necessitate ‘throw[ing] to the wolves the forty-six men who are reported to have incomes in excess of one million dollars a year.’” When the people demanded more, he duly offered them more; he might not feel the part, but he would look and sound the part. “Roosevelt responded to the ‘share-the-wealth clamor’ by advancing tax reforms designed to stop ‘an unjust concentration of wealth and economic power.’”¹³ When the dissatisfaction subsided, he reduced his reformation zeal. In doing so, Roosevelt yielded to some extent to Progressive notions about democracy and its social responsibilities, no longer confined to political equality. In the process he maintained the economic system largely untouched and averted a collapse of the political system. But the precedent had been established and the lessons of executive activism would be remembered.

During the war, the actions of government violated liberty itself. The fear of internal dissent and sedition was behind the creation and empowerment of the Office of Censorship. Loyalty and increased support for the war were promoted by the Office of War Information and enforced patriotism supported by a now-compliant Supreme Court, even before America’s entry in the conflict: “On June 3, 1940, the Court decided *Gobitis*, upholding compulsory flag salutes. Local school boards not only could compel students to salute the flag, they also could expel dissenters.”¹⁴ The propaganda

¹² Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here – Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 72.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁴ Stephen M. Feldman, *Free Expression and Democracy in America: A History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 429.

campaigns emphasized American freedom against fascism and totalitarian regimes where liberty was non-existent. While American soldiers died abroad to rescue freedom, American citizens of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned by the US government and sent to internment camps and black Americans were regularly discriminated and abused throughout the country. Again, eager to please, the Supreme Court upheld the forced confinements: “in *Korematsu v. United States*, a six-to-three decision, the Supreme Court accepted the government’s claim that ‘military imperative’ had necessitated the relocations. Concluding that the government had not violated equal protection guarantees, the Court approved one of the most egregious infringements of civil liberties since the end of slavery.”¹⁵ From now on, government could prevail over any individual interest or liberty in order to defend the nation, a precedent for the modern security state.

But the war also allowed some of the idealism regarding the construction of a perfect society to spill unto the outside world. Early ideas about international concord eventually led to the creation of the United Nations, an expression of the American messianic impulse. The successor of the League of Nations benefitted from overt American support and determination to regulate international politics after the war, unlike the Wilsonian offspring. An idea promoted by Roosevelt during the war and successfully established by Truman after it, the United Nations became the symbol of America’s attempt to pacify international relations and achieve abroad what its early romanticism sought at home. Based in the country’s principles and their belief in the staying power of democracy as inspiring pattern, it aimed at a perfect and universal post-war society. Likewise, the Bretton Woods system of monetary and financial regulations was designed and implemented under American supervision, in the final years of World War II. The system established the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The structure of both the UN and Bretton Woods allowed the United States to shape the post-war political and financial world, effectively reflecting American principles and preferences. Ultimately, its preservation was wholly dependent on American power and the willingness to protect it. The stage was set for a new international order, fashioned by the United States during the war and under its control after it.

¹⁵ Ibid., 426.

II

Franklin Delano Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, after an unheard-of reign of 12 years. Holding his hand as he expired was Lucy Mercer, a lady friend, who had to pack and leave in a hurry.¹⁶ They had met early in his career when she worked as secretary to his wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, who was away the day he died. The wife had forced FDR to relinquish the affair or else face divorce and permanent damage to his political aspirations. So too was the country going to have to sacrifice romantic notions for hard realism. But just as Roosevelt kept periodic encounters with Mrs. Mercer, so too the country kept revisiting its past and the dreams of youth.

He was succeeded by his Vice-President, Harry S. Truman, who had risen through the Democratic Party's ranks thanks to the support of the notorious Kansas City Pendergast political machine of his native Missouri. Most Americans had no knowledge of their new President, "a sixty-year-old party regular who had secured the vice-presidency as a compromise choice following unusually convoluted, last-minute back-room politicking at the 1944 Democratic convention."¹⁷ Born in a family of Confederate sympathisers, his adhesion to the Democratic Party was a matter of loyalty to the family's hatred of the party of Lincoln rather than any sort of ideological considerations. During the Civil War, Kansas and Missouri had been the stage for vicious fighting and guerrilla warfare between the two opposing sides. His maternal grandparents had endured the depredations and violence of the raids. According to one of his biographers, "For the rest of their lives, they harboured an unquenchable hatred for Abraham Lincoln, blue uniforms and Kansans."¹⁸ On his father's side, there were no ambiguities either nor idealism whatsoever: "The party allegiance that John Truman [Harry Truman's father] inherited from his father was not based on class conflict; it was a product of the guerrilla warfare along the Missouri-Kansas border. He passed his faith along to his children, and they accepted it without question."¹⁹

The Democratic Party's organisation in Kansas City, Missouri, was directed by Tom Pendergast, a political boss who ruled a machine that "thrived on bribes, protection

¹⁶ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time - Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 602.

¹⁷ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 - 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 94.

¹⁸ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People - A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

money, and lucrative government contracts – all of which derived, directly or indirectly, from victory at the polls. Election fraud was rampant.”²⁰ Truman must have been aware of the illegal operations and the accusations that surrounded his patron, and his political career at national level was constantly under attack because of his early association with Tom Pendergast. But unlike his political associates, Truman was never involved in any shenanigans that could hurt his political ambitions seriously, being useful for the local party as a badge of honesty: “as Kansas City became progressively wide-open, corrupt and gangster dominated, Truman provided a veneer of respectability.”²¹ Such was the man who had just risen to power.

Although the war was fast approaching its end and an American victory looked all but assured, the succession came at a time of growing anxiety. Not only was Truman an unfamiliar figure - raising questions about his leadership abilities - but memories of the Great Depression were still vivid as it had only been tamed when the armaments industry and the military absorbed the masses of unemployed. Now, with the expected return home of the millions of soldiers fighting abroad and the likely cuts in the defence industry, there were fears of a return to the hardships prior to the war. Government war orders and centralised economic initiative had become so ubiquitous that the former’s economic presence was vital to the country’s well-being. “Some economists feared that the cutbacks, combined with the return to civilian life of 12.1 million military personnel, would lead to unemployment of 8 million people by early 1946. That would have been around 13 percent of the labor force.”²²

The demobilisation and reintegration of these vast numbers was a delicate matter, to be handled with care. Previous experience with the veterans of World War I had shown what could happen when their post-war demands and expectations were not met. In 1932, thousands of veterans had descended on Washington, D.C., to demand immediate payment of their promised Soldier’s Bonus, part of their compensation for duty to country in the Great War in Europe. Camped in the city, their numbers swelled adding to the nervousness of the political class until the government moved to expel them. The police failed to dislodge them and the Army was called to restore order but things got out of control. “Chief of Staff General Douglas MacArthur exceeded his

²⁰ Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 508.

²¹ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People – A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 157.

²² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4-5.

orders and deployed troops, tanks, and cavalry to drive the veterans out of all their encampments. At the largest of these, on the Anacostia River, the Army chased out stragglers with fixed bayonet and then torched the dwellings to the ground.”²³ The apprehension at again seeing American veterans fighting the Army in the nation’s capital had speeded the passage of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, in 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill. The aim was to ease the soldiers’ move back into civilian life by providing the means and the money for their peaceful assimilation, a domestic measure intended to balance the internationalist agenda.

However, the possibility of having millions of discontented former soldiers voicing their demands at Congress’ door with the chance of disturbances was unsettling for any President newly arrived and yet to secure his position. More so for Truman who had always had trouble asserting himself throughout his life. Issuing from a relatively well-off family whose fortunes had taken a turn for the worse, their troubles and debts had forced him to years of hard and unrewarding work in the family’s farm after dropping from his job at a local bank. During those years, “Harry’s relationship with his father made him an aging adolescent from the age twenty-two until he was well past his thirtieth birthday, living in his father’s house, following his father’s orders, enjoying minimal privacy, never quite able to establish an independent identity.”²⁴ After the period under the tutelage of his domineering father, Truman tried to establish himself as an entrepreneur, a land and oil speculator, and businessman, all with little success. This constant attempt at reinventing himself betrays a personality trait which we believe would later shape his political ego, his need to find his own space and affirmation. With every disappointment came a renewed hope that the next venture would carry with it the deliverance from a life of toil and social embarrassment. After the closure of his last venture, a men’s outfit store, he was rescued by the Pendergast machine and began directing his ambitions towards a political career. All of this carried greater weight upon his arrival at the White House given the soldiers ideological nationalism and sympathies towards charismatic leaders. “One poll in September 1945 found that 51 percent of

²³ Stephen R. Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill – How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), 56.

²⁴ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People – A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 28.

American soldiers still in Germany thought that Hitler, while wrong in starting the war, had nonetheless done Germany 'a lot of good'.²⁵

After his death, Roosevelt's significance grew in proportion to the doubts about Truman. A towering figure casts a long shadow, making it harder for those who have to find their own way underneath it. The war was in its final stages; in April, allied troops were advancing deep into Germany and closing in on Berlin while in the Pacific military operations had ensured American naval supremacy and the invasion of the Okinawa islands was underway. Hence, a new President addressed Congress four days after his accession determined to inaugurate his taking office with a tough approach. Sincere grief or obsequious eulogising for his political superior that had given him his presidency carried his words. "In His infinite wisdom, Almighty God has seen fit to take from us a great man who loved, and was beloved by, all humanity. No man could possibly fill the tremendous void left by the passing of that noble soul. No words can ease the aching hearts of untold millions of every race, creed and color."²⁶ Forgetful of the plight of American citizens of Japanese origin and black Americans, Truman proceeded to concentrate on the pressing issues that stood before the country: winning the war and the reconstruction of the post-war international order. Wishing to dispel any doubts that the Axis powers might have about the resolve of the new President, he assured them that "both Germany and Japan can be certain, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that America will continue the fight for freedom until no vestige of resistance remains!... Our demand has been, and it remains - Unconditional Surrender!"²⁷ The war, he continued, was a necessary sacrifice to usher in an age of justice and freedom, of universal peace that would be preserved and guaranteed by a new international organisation which the United States could not turn away from as they had done regarding the League of Nations. Careful consideration ought to have been given to his determination to terminate any vestige of resistance.

Truman was building on a theme that had been gaining favour among the American elite, namely that the start of World War II was due, in part, to the failure of the League of Nations. And that failure owed much to American refusal in joining the

²⁵ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13.

²⁶ Harry S. Truman, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress*, April 16, 1945. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12282> (accessed February 14, 2013)

²⁷ *Ibid.*

international structure devised by Woodrow Wilson after World War I. What was then attacked by the internationalists as isolationism was a foreign policy strategy whose principles were credited as tracing back to the early years of the Republic and upheld by Founding Fathers such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The first President had advised his fellow citizens about international commitments, especially with Europe, urging them to steer clear from the treacherous waters of European diplomacy.

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, 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.²⁸

It was a cautious approach to international affairs, based on the historical patterns of European politics and their constant pursuit of glory and empire, calling rather on the fulfilling of America at home. The need to protect the American experience from outside influence, particularly the disruptive European wars, was seen as vital in the early years of the Republic, foregoing the universal vocation of the Revolution. The development of the country and the successful implementation of its ideals during those formative years required stability and peace. Hence, Thomas Jefferson had proposed to conduct his administration's foreign policy following a simple rule: "peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none."²⁹ Entangling alliances that could drag the country to unnecessary wars where no direct or immediate American interest was at stake. Such examples were dutifully followed, just as other principles laid out by the nation's founders were held in revered estimation. And so, after 1918, having participated in a European war of empires, the United States had returned home and rejected any form of alliance or commitment with Europe. In order to circumvent the forebodings of the august founders of the country, and the feelings of the people, we argue that Truman's speech made a

²⁸ George Washington, "Farewell Address," September 19, 1796. U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=15&page=transcript> (accessed March 28, 2013).

²⁹ Thomas Jefferson, "First Inaugural Address," March 4, 1801. Encyclopaedia Britannica Profiles – The American Presidency. <http://www.britannica.com/presidents/article-9116902> (accessed March 28, 2013).

direct link between the preservation of American individual liberties and rights, and the need to preserve international peace. To secure the former required the protection of the latter, an idea which he would seize again in the future.

Our forefathers came to our rugged shores in search of religious tolerance, political freedom and economic opportunity. For those fundamental rights, they risked their lives. We well know today that such rights can be preserved only by constant vigilance, the eternal price of liberty!... It is not enough to yearn for peace. We must work, and if necessary, fight for it. The task of creating a sound international organization is complicated and difficult. Yet, without such organization, the rights of man on earth cannot be protected. Machinery for the just settlement of international differences must be found. Without such machinery, the entire world will have to remain an armed camp. The world will be doomed to deadly conflict, devoid of hope for real peace.³⁰

New technologies, weaponry and deployment capabilities meant that war abroad threatened freedom at home. Constant vigilance was essential, but in order for it to be effective it had to be carried out within a collective framework wherein all peace-loving nations met to settle disputes and help in keeping watch. The protection of the rights of man abroad was the safest guarantee of the rights of Americans at home, which we can regard as the perfect justification for overseas activism by linking domestic conditions with foreign circumstances.

When speaking about the protection of the rights of man, Harry Truman was offering to extend fundamental freedoms enjoyed by Americans to all of humanity, a pledge that he would re-affirm in more detail some years later. In this, he was not innovating but following the lead of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and giving voice to the missionary impulse in the country. As James Patterson argues, although Truman was trying to set his own course in the presidency he felt that “it was his duty to carry out the foreign (and domestic) policies of his predecessor.”³¹ And in our view, that policy was first articulated in January 1941, in Roosevelt’s annual message to Congress on the

³⁰ Harry S. Truman, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress,” April 16, 1945. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12282> (accessed February 14, 2013)

³¹ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 98.

state of the Union. In his address, he laid his vision of the world that would be built after the defeat of the Axis Powers.

In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression - everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way - everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want - which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants - everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear - which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor - anywhere in the world.³²

This was a not just an ambition to disseminate American values and see them acted upon in the wider world. Of his Four Freedoms, the last two are not usually considered to be part of the American canon of liberties for which the Revolution of 1776 had been fought. These were a new set of human expectations that went beyond Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. Rather, they converged with the Progressive ideology sustaining his domestic reforms, but extended on a global scale. He ended his speech drawing a parallel between America's historical evolution, the meaning of its revolution, and the world it was aiming to create.

Since the beginning of our American history, we have been engaged in change - in a perpetual peaceful revolution - a revolution which goes on steadily, quietly adjusting itself to changing conditions - without the concentration camp or the quicklime in the ditch. The world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society.³³

Roosevelt was devising a reformation of the ways of the world in keeping with the belief that a new era had been born in 1776 and was now ready to be established

³² Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," January 6, 1941. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16092> (accessed March 28, 2013).

³³ *Ibid.*

worldwide. It was also a re-interpretation of the meaning of the Founding Fathers' intentions and of the Constitution itself, since the latter was understood to be in permanent flux. No longer the result of careful and considered reflection about the association between power and human nature, it was now a tool to follow the vicissitudes of the world, human inconsistency and ever-changing aspirations. Not only that, there was also a tacit promise of a firm and permanent commitment of America with the new world that was to be shaped come the defeat of the tyrannical attempt at world domination by Germany and Japan. In August of that same year, the President, together with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, issued the Atlantic Charter, the basic blueprint for a future global organisation. Besides elaborating on the principles of what would become the United Nations, Roosevelt linked its creation with his Four Freedoms speech.³⁴ America was seeking a new world order, just as Wilson had, but this time Roosevelt would not be thwarted by Congress.

The internationalist emancipation from the careful approach towards entangling alliances was motivated by a growing sense of the country's strengths, both financial and industrial. Despite the Depression, the United States of America were the pre-eminent industrial powerhouse of the world. Trade, finance and innovation paired with abundant resources and a growing population, vital elements for the future and which made the country the most advanced in the world. In his state of the Union address of 1941, prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Roosevelt had set out his administration's new policy of increased armament production given the developments abroad that would surely drag America into the conflict. The preparation for the inevitable involvement of America in the war absorbed the millions of unemployed in the armaments industry, effectively putting an end to the recession, and a growing minority of the American elite felt that time had come for the country to cast aside wary isolationism and assume the mantle of global leadership.

A short month after Roosevelt's state of the Union address, Henry Luce, editor of Time and Life magazines had issued an appeal for his fellow Americans to embrace their country's mission and strive for a new era which he termed the American Century. Despite having become the "most powerful and the most vital nation in the world, nevertheless Americans were unable to accommodate themselves spiritually and

³⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Statement on the Atlantic Charter Meeting with Prime Minister Churchill," August 14, 1941. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16154> (accessed February 14, 2013)

practically to that fact. Hence they have failed to play their part as a world power.”³⁵ Henry Luce thus recognised that an essential characteristic of a dominant nation, the will to power, was absent from the nation. Such a failure to accept that the country had the means and the opportunity to lead after 1918 had brought war and devastation.

The consequences of that retreat back home had nonetheless impacted upon Americans as well as disrupting global trade and stability, these having wreaked havoc on a debilitated economy. According to Luce, the solution was “to accept wholeheartedly our duty and our opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world and in consequence to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit.”³⁶ The call to engage with the outside world was made using the messianic appeal to share not only America’s idealism and constitutional framework but also its productive energy and democratic genius: “a sharing with all peoples of our Bill of Rights, our Declaration of Independence, our Constitution, our magnificent industrial products, our technical skills. It must be an internationalism of the people, by the people and for the people.”³⁷ But the purpose was not merely an altruistic impulse to share, to be a beacon of ideals and paternalist guidance. Just as Roosevelt had declared that America was seeking a new world order, Henry Luce argued a similar pro-active role for America: to export American ideals, ultimately to shape the world accordingly and ensure the triumph of American democracy throughout the world.

America as the powerhouse of the ideals of Freedom and Justice - out of these elements surely can be fashioned a vision of the 20th Century to which we can and will devote ourselves in joy and gladness and vigor and enthusiasm... It is in this spirit that all of us are called, each to his own measure of capacity, and each in the widest horizon of his vision, to create the first great American Century.³⁸

Here was a member of the country’s elite calling on the country to follow in the footsteps of the Revolution in its universal spirit. For Henry Luce, America needed to

³⁵ Henry Luce, “The American Century.” *LIFE*, February 17, 1941. Information Clearing House, News, Commentary & Insight. <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article6139.htm> (accessed March 28, 2013)

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

provide not only the philosophical thrust but to engage dynamically in its promotion abroad, to be the driving force that ushered the new world. The Revolution of 1776 was a global mission that remained unfulfilled. America was a revolutionary country with a significant role to play in history, to spread and uphold democracy and perpetual peace. To linger in the sidelines was to betray humanity's aspirations for freedom. It was the means to the end that needed to be worked out as the geopolitics of the post-war became more complex.

This was Harry Truman's ideological template with which to carry out his administration, and the expectations he tried to meet. And on him depended the decisions that would determine the future. Shortly after his swearing-in, on April 25, he addressed the United Nations Conference in San Francisco that met to draft the organisation's charter and re-affirmed his intention to abide by his predecessor's vision. Earlier that day Truman was briefed about the Manhattan Project by Secretary of War Henry Stimson, responsible for the atomic bomb project. As Truman recalled it later, Stimson explained to him the "revolutionary changes in warfare that might result from the atomic bomb and the possible effects of such a weapon on our civilization... He went into great detail in describing the nature and the power of the projected weapon."³⁹ Until then, Truman had only a vague knowledge about a new kind of lethal device being developed in secret but was unaware of the nature and magnitude of the vast project being undertaken by the country: the development of a weapon of mass destruction. Perhaps he let that recent knowledge slip in his address to the delegates in San Francisco when he stated that "With ever-increasing brutality and destruction, modern warfare, if unchecked, would ultimately crush all civilization."⁴⁰ Still, the President urged the envoys of the various nations present to set aside their differences and strive to find a way to secure peace for the benefit of all humankind.

While victory in Europe would come in a matter of days (Germany surrendered on May 8), in the Pacific the struggle against Japan continued. The land invasion of Okinawa was proving to be a brutal mission with tens of thousands of casualties on both sides as the Imperial Army was fighting for the defence of Japanese home-territory. The

³⁹ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman – Volume One: 1945, Year of Decisions* (New York: The New American Library, 1965), 104.

⁴⁰ Harry S. Truman, "Address to the United Nations Conference in San Francisco," April 25, 1945. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12391> (accessed February 14, 2013).

tenacious and even suicidal resistance of the Japanese soldiers was a bitter foretaste of what an assault on the main islands of Japan would entail in human lives. Truman himself would argue until the end that his decision to use the atomic bomb had been based on the need to avoid further bloodshed and save the lives of American troops. In his memoirs he states that prior to the testing of the bomb there was great anxiety for it to be successful. If the test failed, “then it would be even more important for us to bring about a surrender before we had to make a physical conquest of Japan. General Marshall told me that it might cost half a million American lives to force the enemy’s surrender on his home grounds.”⁴¹ As a controversial point in the atomic debate, regarding the estimates on casualties one of his biographers states that “In later years, he exaggerated them.”⁴²

The attack on the southernmost Japanese island of Kyushu was not scheduled to start until November 1945, with the war prolonging into 1946 for the main island of Honshu. There were signs that Japanese resolve was beginning to wear thin. Overtures for peace were being made before the onset of the apocalyptic scenario projected by official estimates that claimed a successful invasion would cost hundreds of thousands of American lives. Gar Alperovitz claims that “Among historians of World War II it is now a commonplace that Japanese power disintegrated rapidly in the spring and summer of 1945 – that from the early months of that year, their defeat was certain.”⁴³ Among the Japanese High Command the inevitable became clearer by the day. Therefore, they initiated diplomatic contacts to assess the possibility of a negotiated peace. As the conditions in Japan worsened and its military vulnerability increased, “the frequency and intensity of secret diplomatic moves and so-called ‘peace feelers’ mounted. At the same time American cryptographers intercepted increasingly revealing cable traffic as Japanese officials began maneuvering to end the war.”⁴⁴ These diplomatic moves were being carried out through Moscow, which Japan hoped would act as an intermediary. The Emperor of Japan was himself getting involved in the ‘peace feelers’ in an attempt to speed the process and lend it credence.⁴⁵ Unbeknownst to them, however, Stalin had already agreed at the Yalta Conference in February 1945 to enter

⁴¹ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman – Volume One: 1945, Year of Decisions* (New York: The New American Library, 1965), 460.

⁴² Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People – A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 324.

⁴³ Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 17.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

the war in Asia against Japan, effective three months after the German surrender in order to make the necessary preparations. As such, it can be argued that Truman had the option to wait and see how events unfolded. As one historian sees it, it seems clear that the President

would have risked little by postponing the bombing in order to ascertain whether Japanese moderates in Tokyo might succeed in their efforts to reach a peace. Postponement would also have given Truman time to assess the impact on the Japanese of Russian engagement in Asia. The land invasions, after all, were not scheduled to take place for another three months, during which time America was unlikely to suffer much in the way of casualties.⁴⁶

The relationship with Communist Russia and its leader, Joseph Stalin, was another factor adding to the drama. Franklin D. Roosevelt had been willing to appease the Soviet dictator in order to get him to participate in the international organisation to be set up after the war. Russian cooperation was decisive if the United Nations was to be successful. Nonetheless, Stalin had an agenda of his own and he was not willing to sacrifice it for the sake of any idealistic project the Americans might nurture. Having discarded worldwide revolution and the global spread of the Communist gospel, his goal was to widen Russia's influence in Eastern Europe and Asia as much as possible, in a patent exercise of imperialist expansion and border security not unlike that of the tsarist period. In Yalta, besides the involvement of Russia in the war in the Pacific, the Allies had agreed on free and democratic elections in the liberated countries of Europe but the Soviets were crushing any attempt at free self-determination in the nations liberated by the Red Army. The case of Poland was particularly blatant and threatened to shatter the Yalta agreements and the United Nations' likelihood of success. With most of Eastern Europe under control of the Red Army, Stalin was proving that possession is nine-tenths of the law.

Relations began to sour and upon his accession, Truman decided it was time to do something about it.

The President was determined to be decisive and called Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, to tell him how he felt. The meeting took place

⁴⁶ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 110-111.

within two weeks of Roosevelt's death and was one the most fabled of Cold War contacts. Truman wasted no time on small talk and told Molotov that the USSR was breaking the Yalta agreements. Molotov was shaken by Truman's tone and replied, 'I have never been talked to like that in my life.' Truman retorted, 'Carry out your agreements and you won't get talked to like that.' Molotov, a Truman aide recalled, turned 'a little ashy'... Truman, who liked to let people know he was tough, was pleased at this encounter.⁴⁷

Frustratingly enough for him, his robustness did not impress Stalin. He continued to trample the terms of the agreement and to impose Russian domination wherever his armies were present. For Truman and America in general, it was a rude awakening to the ruthless realities of international politics. "By imposing Soviet control on Poland – and similarly pro-Communist regimes on Romania and Bulgaria – Stalin underscored two Cold War realities: first, that he was determined to ensure his domination over bordering nations in Europe; and second, that he had the military power to do so, no matter what the Allies said in protest."⁴⁸ The strained relationship increased both sides' distrust of one another. Consequently, when the United States successfully tested for the first time an atomic weapon near Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16, 1945, Truman did not release the full extent of the news to Stalin (whom he met in Potsdam, Germany, from July 17 to August 2), downplaying the new weapon's importance to future events: "At Potsdam, as elsewhere, the secret of the atomic bomb was kept closely guarded... On July 24, I casually mentioned to Stalin that we had a new weapon of unusual destructive force. The Russian Premier showed no special interest."⁴⁹ Stalin, however, already knew about the bomb and was fully aware of its implications. His network of spies had long ago breached the security wall surrounding the Manhattan Project.

On a personal level, though, the news had a big impact on the President. As Hamby states, "Truman was elated. The bomb had given him a sense of enormous power and at a stroke had changed his position from that of a supplicant in quest of an ally against Japan to a more-than-equal partner now able to be indifferent."⁵⁰ The

⁴⁷ Ibid., 105-106.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁹ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman – Volume One: 1945, Year of Decisions* (New York: The New American Library, 1965), 458.

⁵⁰ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People – A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 332.

shifting of Stalin's positions and his failing to live up to agreements has been suggested as being behind a supposed desire by the Truman administration to send a strong message to Russia with the bombing of Japan, in what various historians call 'atomic diplomacy.' More importantly, ending the war with Japan before Russia declared war would deprive the Soviets of any large territorial gains in the region. If so, the decision would, along with Stalin's incursions and occupation of Eastern Europe, be one of the first opening moves in the Cold War. As one researcher emphasizes, "throughout the spring and summer of 1945 American officials developed their thinking on the use of the atomic bomb in close relationship to the planning of U.S. diplomacy towards the Soviet Union."⁵¹

Be it because he wanted to save American lives in a future invasion of Japan's main islands or the need to send a clear warning to a fickle Stalin, or his perceived need to assert his leadership at home with the military establishment, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were authorised by the President (August 6 and 9, respectively). Despite the indiscriminate killing of women and children, the bombings were very popular in America, with 75 percent of Americans glad that it had been used,⁵² a fact that reinforced Truman's decision. His motivation for authorising the use of the atomic weapon may never be fully determined, possibly being a sum of all of the above. What is clear is that, confronted with the news of the existence of such a weapon when before he was totally uninformed about it, and given the pressure exerted by the exigencies of war and of supreme power, the decision came to rest on him alone. The moral dilemma is made more acute by the fact that the bombings were devastatingly effective: Japan surrendered days after the second attack. In the end, as James Patterson concludes, "The decision to use the Bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was politically popular in the United States – no doubt of that. And it quickly ended the war. Amid the awful passions of the time, it is hardly surprising that Truman acted as he did."⁵³

III

By the end of 1945, America was the uncontested victor and ruler of the Western world. The country had come together to fight its enemies, consensus ruled, Truman

⁵¹ Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 129.

⁵² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 110.

consolidated his power. Still, the following years would be marred by economic upheaval and domestic strikes as part of the conversion from a wartime economy and the absorption of the demobilised troops. One year, 1946, proved particularly difficult as strikes threatened to paralyse railroad transportation and coal production, both vital to the country's economy. Truman had to employ forceful measures to restore order and the normal flow and output of the sectors involved. Continued government economic intervention was necessary to assist in the transition as well. As time went by, as greater numbers of consumers accessed the market, the increased need for consumption goods stimulated the economy. The war spurred technological developments and improvements that were quickly made available to the general public. Household appliances, such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners and television sets benefitted from a surge in industrial innovations that greatly helped fashion modern domestic life as we know it. Automobiles became ubiquitous and facilitated social mobility, making it easier to move according to where work could be found. The great expectations that permeated the country regarding the future in general, specifically the future role of the country both economically and in world affairs, propped up a general atmosphere of optimism that encouraged the younger generations and the returning soldiers to take chances and engage with life.

One piece of legislation proved decisive to help in the change. The GI Bill of 1944 (The Servicemen's Readjustment Act) was signed by Roosevelt in June, just in time for the 1944 presidential campaign which all polls indicated would be a close contest. "In May 1944, George Gallup, the director of the American Institute of Public Opinion, penned an article calling the potential presidential matchup between FDR and Thomas E. Dewey, the Republican governor of New York, 'evenly matched.'" But, contrary to the 1940 election, when the country was not yet at war, this time "Gallup paid particular attention to the potential importance of the soldier vote in deciding the outcome. Even on the eve of the 1944 election, Arthur Krock of the *New York Times* considered the soldier vote critical to determining the winner."⁵⁴ Having previously vetoed veterans' legislation, Roosevelt had a poor record among the soldiery. With memories of the battle in Washington, D.C., in 1932, between World War I veterans and the Army looming large, Roosevelt was under pressure from militant veteran groups threatening to destroy democracy in America if their demands were not met.

⁵⁴ Stephen R. Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill – How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), 201.

”Representative Maury Maverick, a friend to veterans and one himself, cautioned that if World War II veterans returned to conditions as Great War veterans had, the United States would this time certainly face ‘a dictatorship.’”⁵⁵

The GI Bill was a vast and generous government programme. It offered monetary compensation to returning soldiers and financial aid for home purchasing, higher education and loans to start businesses. Between 1945 and 1949 alone, the cost reached \$3.7 billion.⁵⁶ It was money that was used to buy the newly available goods, household appliances and commodities which helped to stimulate industrial production and assisted in bringing about the economic boom of the post-war years. It was in the housing sector that these effects were most visible. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Veterans Administration (VA) were given authorisation to increase spending with loans for home buying. Thus, millions of veterans purchased homes with VA-backed mortgages: “29 percent received government-backed loan guarantees, which enabled some 4 million vets to buy homes at low interest rates and 200,000 to purchase farms or businesses.”⁵⁷ Given the numbers involved, we see this as nothing short of transformative.

Before the war, only 44 percent of the nation’s 35 million dwellings were owner occupied. By 1956... the proportion of owner-occupied dwellings had risen to 60 percent. For the first time since the United States had been a nation of farms and small towns – perhaps for the first time ever – a significant majority of American families had realized the dream of homeownership.⁵⁸

The American dream of homeownership was closely related with the country’s original ideal of the independent small farmer. Thomas Jefferson saw the independent yeomanry as the backbone of the Republic. Most early colonists had moved to America in search of a new life, financial independence and freedom that seemed all but assured given the vastness of land available to settlers. The American democracy’s ideal rested on the assertion that the masses could be relied upon to judge wisely because they owned property in the form of their farmstead, the land they tilled. Having to defend

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵⁶ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14.

⁵⁷ Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The GI Bill – A New Deal for Veterans* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 83.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 187-188.

their property against the un-propertied and dependent voters - mostly urban poor - made them more concerned with the long-term well-being of the State, instead of the immediate satisfaction of personal impulses. Hence, they could be trusted with the vote. For Thomas Jefferson the family farm was essential for the success of the American experiment; so much so that he made the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 to ensure that there would be enough land available to keep America a farmers' Republic for generations to come.

The Homestead Act of 1862 gave land away for free to those willing to work it for a number of years after which they could buy it at a low price. With the decline of agriculture and farming and the rise of the urban industrial economy, the dream of a property-holders democracy continued under the guise of ownership of one's home in the city or village. Or in the suburbs, a new social reality that augmented as construction builders tried to meet the increasing demands for new housing. The now-common landscape of America's suburbia emerged as the urban population moved out of the city centres after World War II. "During the 1940's and in particular the half-decade following the war, the rapid movement of big-city dwellers to new homes outside the central city increased that proportion to 41 percent, and in the 1950's it grew again to 49 percent." The transformation was complete the following decade as "the areas outside the nation's largest cities surpassed these cities in population and the balance has continued to shift from the center to the periphery ever since."⁵⁹ This makeover was assured with federal loans and guarantees that involved ever-increasing sums of money.

Government aid with education for veterans triggered a revolution in higher education as well. This was in keeping with the Transcendentalists goal of personal betterment and the Jeffersonian focus on education. The assistance with college tuitions contributed to the advancement of individuals returning from military service as well as fostering a knowledge revolution that benefitted the country as a whole. By 1947, 1.15 million veterans had enrolled in colleges and universities, a number that would increase in the following years and that, according to some, "added 450,000 engineers, 180,000 doctors, dentists and nurses, 360,000 teachers, 150,000 scientists, 243,000 accountants, 107,000 lawyers, and 36,000 clergymen."⁶⁰ Despite all these signs of optimism there were those who, upon reflecting on the consequences, were critical of the new state of affairs in education. There was concern that the swelling numbers were leading to a

⁵⁹ Ibid., 190.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 86.

gradual drop in academic standards. Thus, universities ceased being the last bastions of careful deliberation, “the last resorts of aristocratic sentiment within democracy.”⁶¹ Egalitarianism had taken academia by storm. There was no longer any discerning momentum, a barrier against the levelling impulses of the unpredictable masses. The flood doors had been wide open, universities were “no longer ‘villages with priests’ but impersonal and bureaucratic ‘multi-verses’,”⁶² enormous learning factories intent on making money out of student enrolments and producing knowledge routinely, like an assembly line, without thought or care. The growing pressure to deliver in terms of skills for the marketplace was suffocating and brushing aside an education that was previously intent on virtue and sought the tutoring of citizens. This utilitarian perspective triggered the end of higher education as an end in itself to become a means to an end, no longer educating individuals but merely training workers for the job market.

Although the goal of a socially egalitarian society was closer at hand, there were concerns as to the effects such a change would bring. True, social hierarchies based on education were being torn down but critics questioned what would the triumph of middlebrow culture mean in terms of social conformity; egalitarian impulses would increase the pressure over all those who aspired to something different, elevated, above the uniform masses. In the decades that followed, the shortcomings of higher education would only become more evident. The opening up of elite universities to minorities and women was based on merit, extending to all classes the access to an informed understanding of the past that rooted the individual to his culture. More and more, however, the wardens of civilisation abandoned their guardianship of inherited knowledge and culture for an education dedicated to training skills for jobs. Later, in the 1960’s and 1970’s, it would be the time for uprooting theories. Higher education became fragmented, focused on group cultures, blurred and scattered, promoting a cultural void and aimlessness that eroded all ideals and values as tainted by some form or other of prejudice and inequality, ultimately hurting Democracy itself. The free and autonomous citizens on which the latter depends are not born but need to be educated. The relativism regarding the traditions and institutions of Democracy corroded belief in

⁶¹ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind – How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1987), 89.

⁶² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 69.

its qualities and values, encouraging support for anti-democratic systems based on distorted views and utopian doctrines. All in all, though, it was a time of general optimism. However, the younger generations' hopes would be thwarted by the consensus and conformity issuing from the Cold War.

IV

Having been neglected by Roosevelt when Vice-President, badly informed in world affairs and inexperienced, Truman surrounded himself with advisers when President. These represented the elite members of the country's *intelligentsia*, believing in their special prerogatives as well as in their capacity to recognize what was best for America and to formulate the proper means to achieve it. "The influence of these advisers, often called the Establishment in later years, became powerful by 1946 and had extraordinary staying power that lasted well beyond the Truman administration."⁶³ They eventually became a permanent non-elected caste within the government that outlasted the President. The National Security Council was created in 1947 to assist the executive in assessing foreign and defence policies. The Central Information Agency (CIA) was formed the same year to collect and analyse information relevant to national security. These developments originated in America's increasing involvement abroad as supporting units to help the presidency. The network of contacts and influences they spawned allowed them to shape and perpetuate cabinet and departmental thinking; sometimes in accordance with the President, sometimes as resistance to him. Above all, they shared a common certainty in the opportunity, indeed the very need, for America to assume global leadership. The righteousness of America's values was beyond any doubt hence their belief that the country had a duty to spread democracy and its democratic values. Spreading the true American faith went hand in hand with the protection and fostering of American interests, the 'purposes we see fit' that Henry Luce had endorsed.

The expectations and hopes ran high, the country's psyche still very much revolutionary, the Revolution of 1776 still exerting a powerful influence, as well as its meaning - a democratic defining moment in history - upon the bureaucratic leaders. It was their duty to help bring about its promised change to the world, a global fulfilment making use of its transformative power. There was hardly a better moment in time as the European nations and their outdated models and ambitions lay in ruins. Their failure

⁶³ Ibid., 98.

meant that America could now fill the void, take up the mantle and provide the world with a new project, based on its ideals. The country had the means to meet the purposes. Ever surrounding the President, controlling the corridors of power and influence, the new courtiers were persuaded that

the United States had the means - economic, industrial, and military – to control the behavior of other nations. This belief, which became widely shared by the American people during the post-war years, helped the Establishmentarians to shape what the historian John Gaddis calls the ‘inner-directed’ nature of postwar American foreign policy: it often depended less on what other nations did or did not do than on what the experts thought the United States had the capacity to do.⁶⁴

The materialisation of this confidence began to take shape in early 1947. Members of the country’s political elite became ever more persuaded that the security of the United States depended on international peace, which was in keeping with the country’s moral approach to foreign affairs. The latter was necessary for the security of the American experience, and to undermine it was to challenge the United States itself.

The end of the war saw the Soviet Union’s leadership continuing the tsarist policy of expansion towards the South in search of open warm-water ports in the Mediterranean. Constant pressure was being exerted upon Turkey to allow the presence of Russian troops in the country. This was coupled with the infiltration of weapons and advisers to help the communists in Greece fighting the local government in order to take control of the country. Stalin’s violations of agreements alarmed Truman and his advisers. The blatant disregard for the rules of the game puzzled the American leadership that nurtured high hopes about the reconstruction of the post-war world. How to cope with such a destabilising element took the country some time to work out. In the meantime, Truman decided that he could not let Stalin get his own way in Greece and Turkey as he had done in Eastern Europe. There, the fate of millions of people had been decided behind what Winston Churchill had called an Iron Curtain that had descended over Europe. That curtain was now being pulled over the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 104.

Truman was determined to put a stop to this – ‘the buck stops here,’ read the famous sign in his desk. But before that, Truman needed to circumvent Republican opposition in Congress (where they held a majority in both Houses since the 1946 midterm elections). As Arthur Vandenberg, a Republican senator that supported involvement abroad, explained to Truman, “there was ‘only one way to get’ what he wanted: ‘That is to make a personal appearance before Congress and scare the hell out of the American people’”⁶⁵ about the Communist threat. The clamour of the frightened masses would force the GOP⁶⁶ to acquiesce to the President’s wish.

Truman dutifully addressed Congress and laid out what become known as the Truman Doctrine. In it, the President detailed Communist aggression in Greece and Turkey and the likely consequences of its success. He then declared that “I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.”⁶⁷ There had been previous pledges to uphold international security, namely through the active participation with the United Nations. This time, however, the President was announcing a direct involvement to defend democracy abroad. This was a departure from the long-standing policy of non-engagement that had guided the country since its birth. Entering the Great War on the side of the Allies had been an exception which had caused a backlash that put an end to Woodrow Wilson’s internationalist agenda.

The President was aware of this. “I could never quite forget the strong hold which isolationism had gained over our country after the First world War.” Isolationists frequently read aloud Washington’s Farewell Address in Congress as a reminder to the country and its chief executive. However, Truman had his own understanding about the first President’s advice. “It served little purpose to point out to the isolationists that Washington had advised a method suitable under the conditions of his day to achieve the great end of preserving the nation, and that although conditions and our international position had changed, the objectives of our policy – peace and security – were still the

⁶⁵ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 128.

⁶⁶ Grand Old Party, the Republican Party’s honorary nickname for its fight against slavery and defence of the Union during the Civil War.

⁶⁷ Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine,” March 12, 1947. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12846> (accessed February 14, 2013).

same.”⁶⁸ His defence of the country’s engagement and stand against Communist expansion in the world was made through a particular interpretation of the Founding Fathers’ aspiration, and highlighting the desire to save the country from harm while ignoring the deeper considerations involved. The new rationale was that the cost of inaction and withdrawal would mean greater danger for the country in the long run. Thus, for Truman, despite the changing times, the will was the same: to preserve and protect the United States.

This was the time to align the United States of America clearly on the side, and at the head, of the free world. I knew that George Washington’s spirit would be invoked against me... But I was convinced that the policy I was about to proclaim was, indeed, as much required by the conditions of my days as was Washington’s by the situation of his era and Monroe’s doctrine by the circumstances which he then faced.⁶⁹

In launching the country in a crusade to uphold Democracy wherever it was endangered, the President claimed that the foreign policy of the United States should change according to times and conditions - and opportunity. For what Truman argued in his understanding of the words of advice by Washington was that America’s foreign strategy served a national objective which was that of self-preservation. And Truman maintained that, presently, defending America was best done by upholding Democracy abroad. But although he invoked the Founding Fathers and the global spread of liberty, Truman acknowledged that his policy was in response to outside events, rather than part of a careful, measured political thinking. This was *Realpolitik*, not idealism in action: enter the classical approach regarding political societies. The latter are societies whose most urgent and key task is their self-preservation and the security of their citizens. The global mission of the Revolution lay forgotten, replaced by practical considerations though he still used it to win public opinion, pretending that nothing had changed when everything was different.

The tension between the Revolution’s universal vocation and the individualist pull to complete America at home was solved by recourse to a new mission which comprised both views. And unlike Wilson, the great internationalist, it was achieved by

⁶⁸ Harry S. Truman, *The Truman Memoirs, Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope – 1946 – 1953* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1956), 107

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

a most plain man. Truman was devoid of idealism, a practical Midwesterner loyal to his country and the values he inherited from his family. But in his pragmatism we can see how he set the country on course to permanent involvement with the outside world. Although lacking the sophistication of the eastern establishment, he knew his countrymen well enough to understand that in order to convince them to accept his proposals he had to tap into their personal interests as well as their idealism.

The vision of the world of the Founding Fathers might be seen as unsophisticated and misconstrued as isolationist. But it was founded on an acute understanding of human nature and the awareness that the interests of America abroad were not the same as those of Europe; both sides of the Atlantic having different perceptions about the world. They consequently put the brakes on the revolutionary idealism appealing instead to realism and self-interest. Woodrow Wilson's internationalism and that of his successors rests on the hope that human affairs can be conditioned to permanent progress. Hence the latter's belief that humanity's march towards a perfect and global society can be carried out by international organisations such as the United Nations. However, as the Founding Fathers well knew, no society can change human nature. Their early policy was an attempt to extricate America from contact with the feudal and aristocratic legacies of Europe - from history - which ultimately lead to war; a conscious effort to protect the experiment in free government from the artificial creations of human nature's ambitions.

This new involvement would expose the country to the vicissitudes of history in the belief that the country could influence and shape the world. But in a speech before the US House of Representatives in 1821, then Secretary of State John Quincy Adams elaborated on the dangers underlying this belief. What had America done for the benefit of mankind, he asked rhetorically. His answer was candid.

America, with the same voice which spoke herself into existence as a nation, proclaimed to mankind the inextinguishable rights of human nature, and the only lawful foundations of government... Wherever the standard of freedom and Independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters

to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.⁷⁰

The American experience was a beacon for the rest of humanity. While Americans had escaped history, the rest of the world was still locked in its instability and turmoil, seeking to release itself from hierarchical institutions and traditional regimes. America had castoff medieval European heritage in favour of a return to a society governed by the immutable laws of Nature that applied to all peoples for all times. However, she was not to be the propagator of her system of government. She would act as inspiration. Therefore, to help the rest of the world, it was better for America to isolate itself from that world. The Revolution's global mission is set aside; there is a world vision, but through the purity of the ideals. Adams sees that protection better achieved by keeping on the sidelines. Technological progress and heightened self-assurance had convinced Truman otherwise.

Abandoning this unilateralist position would entail grave consequences, not only for America but also for the world at large. Adams predicted that should the country pursue those monsters, it would lose its freedom and would never release itself from the chase, from the responsibility to deliver the world from them. "She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom."⁷¹ For the outside world, the consequences would be dire. He prophesied the likely outcome of policies such as Truman's Doctrine to defend democracy and help the countries under threat from communism: "The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force.... She might become the dictatress of the world. She would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit... [America's] glory is not dominion, but liberty. Her march is the march of the mind."⁷² The role of America was played in the realm of ideas, not in the material world.

⁷⁰ John Quincy Adams, "Speech to the U.S. House of Representatives on Foreign Policy," July 4, 1821. The Miller Center, University of Virginia. <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3484> (accessed May 13, 2013).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Truman was re-writing the past anew and its interpretation with reference to the conditions of his own time. His utilitarian perspective opened a new era in American history and that of the world. Nonetheless, John Quincy Adams' prediction would come back to haunt the country.

V

In 1946 George Kennan wrote what would become the basis for the development of an American strategy regarding the Soviet Union. A long time expert on Russia and stationed in Moscow as a diplomat where he had witnessed first-hand the practical results of the communist experience, he had written a telegram back home outlining the thinking and ideology behind Soviet behaviour. His Long Telegram described how Marxism and traditional Russian thinking combined to distort the Soviet worldview and how this influenced their handling of world affairs. In July 1947, he expanded his ideas in an article entitled "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. However, his ideas had already by then been widely circulated in the corridors of Washington among officials, diplomats and presidential advisers. George Kennan contended that Russia's communist leadership had a siege mentality, always fearful of encirclement by capitalist countries and of a possible attack. Because of their ideology, they perceived themselves to be in an everlasting war against Capitalism; their basic axiom, then, was that there could be no peaceful coexistence until the overthrow of Capitalism and Russian domination over a communist world. His analysis stated that in order to secure Soviet power Russia reasoned that America's society, its traditional way of life, and its international authority had to be broken. In his conclusion, Kennan argued that the Soviets were not influenced by the logic of reason, but were highly sensitive to the logic of force. Therefore, if met with strong opposition they would retreat. His advice was for the development of a strategy intended to bring aboard as many allied nations as possible and build a common framework of resistance in order to contain Soviet expansion. Additionally, America needed to make perfectly clear that it had sufficient force and was willing to use it in the defence of its allies.⁷³

Kennan's work highly influenced the political thinking among experts in the United States, but it took a clarification of the international scenario to see his ideas

⁷³ George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947, 25:566 - 582. <http://chenry.webhost.utexas.edu/usme/2007/Kennan/14885486.pdf> (accessed April 25, 2013).

implemented. Truman's policy of containment was, initially, an economic one. "I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes... The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died."⁷⁴ It was originally an *ad hoc* solution, specifically aimed at Greece and Turkey. Nonetheless, as Kennan's ideas began to take hold in Washington, the need for a coherent strategy became more evident. The United States' response could not be subject to constant change in conditions and improvised accordingly. Rather, pragmatism was best served by idealist policies.

The State Department had been working on a plan to counter Soviet expansion in Europe that was first put forward by Secretary of State George Marshall in a speech at Harvard University. The underlying principle followed Truman's acknowledgment of the relationship between poor economic conditions and the rise of totalitarian regimes. The plan, which was named after Marshall, had a clear-cut goal: "Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist."⁷⁵ The Marshall plan would provide financial and economic help to the nations of Europe and thus contain the communists' advance by negating them the economic and social problems on which they thrived to reach power. Rebuilding the economies of post-war Europe was also fundamental to drive the American economy since the former would resort to America to buy goods. Between 1948 and 1952, the United States directed over \$13 billion in aid to Western Europe.⁷⁶

Although the Marshall Plan was presented to the whole of Europe, including the countries under Soviet control, Moscow instructed its Eastern European subjects to rebuff the offer. Questions remained about the Truman Doctrine, now made more palpable with the Marshall Plan. The President's promise was to assist free peoples, but

⁷⁴ Harry S. Truman, "Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine," March 12, 1947. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12846> (accessed February 14, 2013).

⁷⁵ George C. Marshall, Jr. "The Marshall Plan Speech," June 5, 1947. The George C. Marshall Foundation. http://www.marshallfoundation.org/library/MarshallPlanSpeechfromRecordedAddress_000.html (accessed April 26, 2013)

⁷⁶ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 133.

he had not clarified if that applied to all, everywhere. Although money was also being sent to the Philippines and America was busy in Japan reconstructing that country, Stalin's rejection meant that the bulk of America's efforts were directed towards Western Europe. That was a necessity given that the continent was the main stage where the drama was being played. However, there was anxiety as to whether Portugal and Spain should be accepted in the ranks of the free peoples making a stand against Soviet advance. Their anti-communist stance mitigated any qualms and helped ease America's post-war combination of idealism and expediency.

The establishment of a common framework of resistance was plagued by European rivalry. Centuries of war and enmity do not die easily. America's allies in Europe were still engaged in securing national objectives and, for some, the preservation of their colonial empires. These differences were soon proving an obstacle hard to surmount as Truman recognised: "The overriding task that seemed to confront American policy in Europe was to provide an incentive for the Europeans to look at the situation in the broadest possible terms rather than in narrowly nationalistic, or even partisan, focus."⁷⁷ The Marshall Plan was one such incentive, a powerful one indeed. Europe was starved for money, besides food. But the benefit of the plan was that it demanded little apart subscribing to some basic conditions of an economic nature. The incentive to build a more solid engagement came with the drawing of the battle lines between East and West, and the final positioning of all the pieces on the board.

Tensions in Europe peaked in 1948 when Communists in Czechoslovakia staged a coup to take over power and with the Russian blockade of West Berlin. The lifting of the Berlin blockade after a massive airlift operation had proven the benefits of closer cooperation between the European allies and Stalin's aggressive policy in Czechoslovakia convinced them of the necessity of forming a more permanent alliance. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (April 4, 1949) was a watershed moment for both sides of the Atlantic. The remaining differences regarding the German division were settled among its Western occupying countries with the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany in May 1949, and the *de facto* division of Germany as well as that of the continent. For the United States, however, it was a turning point, a significant departure from previous experience. Article V of the NATO charter enshrined a collective defence commitment wherein an attack on any member would be considered

⁷⁷ Harry S. Truman, *The Truman Memoirs, Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope – 1946 – 1953* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1956), 115.

an attack on all. This, of course, implied going to war. We can rightly claim that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams' fears were thus materialised: it was an entangling alliance and the implications of this historical development would prove hard for the country to extricate itself from. It was also the beginning of a muscled containment policy, as advised by Kennan.

Truman advertised the treaty as a reaffirmation of America's dedication to peace and to the ideal of peaceful settlement of disputes. But it was more than that, it was a military fortification facing the Russians. The vote in the Senate was instructive as to the Senators' judgment about committing the country in such a way, with 82 votes in favour and 13 against; there was one Senator that did not vote. But the treaty was far more than a commitment to go to war should there be an attack in Europe. It was also a burden and a loss of the capability to make choices without restrictions. On the other hand, together with the IMF and the World Bank - financial structures created by the United States - it amounted to the redesigning of a world order mirroring the country's principles and interests, an outcome that could not fail to please the Wilsonian ambition.

The United States now assumed the tutelage and direction of Western Europe. Besides the permanent stationing of American soldiers in Europe, there was the need to reorganise European armed forces in order to form a common functioning force. "The first major task was to reach an agreement on how to work out the defense of the NATO area. Up to this time each country had its own defense plans, but now it became necessary to think of the area as one. This did not involve specific national positions, but instead, the overall strategic approach."⁷⁸ The need to manage resources into a coherent structure was met with resistance by several countries accustomed to maintaining their own military structure. "The Dutch, for instance, with their long tradition of sea-faring and exploration, did not want to restrict their navy, yet the plan called for them to concentrate on certain types of ground forces." Previous experience had taught them to view with suspicion historic enemies' pledges of support in case of need. "Almost all member nations indicated their understanding of the basic principles involved, namely that by avoiding duplication of effort more could be accomplished. However, there was also the thought present, and sometimes expressed, that they wanted to have a balanced defense of their own in case NATO did not succeed."

⁷⁸ Ibid., 266-267.

Finally, a persistent lack of confidence among the allies only made each country adhere firmly to national imperatives.

France was unwilling to give up any part of its preoccupations with the defense against Germany. The Benelux countries wanted to make sure that Britain as well as France shared in the actual defense arrangements in their part of Europe. The Scandinavians felt they were out on a flank and dangerously exposed on their end of the strategic arc. England tried to preserve her strength for the preservation of the remnants of her empire. And this is just the beginning of the list.⁷⁹

The United States had to play a paternalist role towards Europe, patching up differences and scolding when necessary in order to bring the wayward allies together round the common goal. We can agree with John Quincy Adams: America was the dictatress of Europe, responsible for keeping the peace among the nations under its care and taking charge of their security and prosperity, binding them under the alliance and ruling them.

The United States' new foreign policy was finally encapsulated in a secret National Security Council (NSC) document, in April 1950. Known as NSC-68, it set America's guiding strategic principles for the Cold War. The document endorsed George Kennan's containment as well as Truman's approach to foreign policy. It stated that the fundamental purpose of the United States was set in the Preamble to the 1787 Constitution which meant that, "In essence, the fundamental purpose is to assure the integrity and vitality of our free society, which is founded upon the dignity and worth of the individual." Therefore, in order to fulfil this objective, "Our overall policy at the present time may be described as one designed to foster a world environment in which the American system can survive and flourish. It therefore rejects the concept of isolation and affirms the necessity of our positive participation in the world community."⁸⁰ Intervention and multilateralism were of the utmost importance but so was the development of a strong defence establishment. Presently, the United States and its allies did not have the proper and necessary means to counter Soviet pressure. If the

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁸⁰ US National Security Council, "NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," April 14, 1950. *Naval War College Review*, Vol. XXVII (May-June, 1975), pp. 51-108. <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/nsc-68/nsc68-1.htm> (accessed April 24, 2013).

trend were not reversed, the country would face “a gradual withdrawal under the direct or indirect pressure of the Soviet Union, until we discover one day that we have sacrificed positions of vital interest. In other words, the United States would have chosen, by lack of the necessary decisions and actions, to fall back to isolation in the Western Hemisphere”⁸¹

The paper from the NSC converged with Truman’s utilitarian perspective about international relations. They served to protect America and were a means to ensure self-preservation. Devoid of any idealism, the cold calculated assessment reflected the need to maintain a position of force abroad lest the country be faced with a hostile encirclement by nations under the yoke of Communism. Isolationism was not an option as it entailed severe risks. “This course would at best result in only a relatively brief truce and would be ended either by our capitulation or by a defensive war - on unfavorable terms from unfavorable positions - against a Soviet Empire compromising all or most of Eurasia.”⁸² The document highlighted the need to rely more on military force than on negotiation, therefore validating the NATO alliance. “Without superior aggregate military strength, in being and readily mobilizable, a policy of ‘containment’ - which is in effect a policy of calculated and gradual coercion - is no more than a policy of bluff.”⁸³ Whereas before America was constantly playing catch-up to the Soviets, reacting to their moves, now the country decided to take the initiative and set the tone of the engagement.

The document’s ideas and proposals became the backbone of America’s Cold War military strategy. However, the paper and its adoption as policy directive highlighted a gradual transformation in the constitutional balance of power that would become apparent a few decades hence. Truman’s increasing reliance on his advisors led to the creation of the NSC, an executive counselling body to assist the President on national security issues, naturally extending into foreign affairs. The apparently innocuous innovation represented, however, the most recent step in the enlargement of the Executive, in this case with reference to the conduction of the country’s foreign policy. Previous Presidents had gradually dismissed the “advice and consent of the Senate to make treaties”⁸⁴ clause, thus terminating the understanding that Congress and the Presidency would cooperate in judging and shaping foreign policy. They claimed an

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ United States Constitution, Article II, Section 2, Clause 2.

almost exclusive prerogative regarding foreign policy, helped by the several executive departments. Truman was now planning strategies with far-reaching implications and making decisions regarding treaties based on the opinions of an unelected and unaccountable staff of people loyal only to a shared line of action.

Such a state of affairs did not take place without resistance at home. There were questions as to whether the United States were unnecessarily escalating the conflict with the Soviet Union. There were also deep divisions within the White House and the various government departments regarding America's participation in a military alliance in time of peace. There was a sense of unease about an initiative that had come from the British and that had been endorsed and promoted in Washington by some members of government among them Secretary of State George Marshall. Truman, hoping to cut spending within the enormous military budget, went along with the idea of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Although Truman was neither the initiator nor a particularly ardent proponent of the North Atlantic Treaty, he looked upon it with favour in part because it would allow the United States to reduce its military presence in Europe and thus save money. He knew that by signing the treaty the United States would have to provide substantial monetary assistance to the Europeans, but he believed that this would be cheaper than maintaining a huge number of ground troops in Europe for the foreseeable future.⁸⁵

The disagreements originated with the treaty's ramifications, namely in case of an attack on any of the members, anywhere. Louis Johnson, appointed Secretary of Defence by Truman in 1949, one week prior to the signing of the treaty, had voiced his fears, and those of many others, about the repercussions for America. In a speech the year before, at the national convention of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR),⁸⁶ Johnson had warned against giving "to any foreign nation or groups of nations the power to say when the United States should go to war."⁸⁷ The country was faced with the possibility of losing its independence regarding a vital aspect for the existence

⁸⁵ Keith D. McFarland and David L. Roll. *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America – The Roosevelt and Truman Years* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 235.

⁸⁶ The Daughters of the American Revolution is an organisation dedicated to historical remembrance for women who are directly descended from people who participated in the Revolution.

⁸⁷ Keith D. McFarland and David L. Roll. *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America – The Roosevelt and Truman Years* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 237.

of any nation. As John Quincy Adams had predicted, America was no longer the ruler of her own spirit. When summoned before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to testify about NATO in his capacity as Secretary of Defence, Louis Johnson was forced to come up with an explanation for his DAR speech. As he was now forced to champion NATO by virtue of his position in government, Johnson worked hard to convince the Senators that what he had said was not quite what he had said.

The year 1949 proved to be momentous, both abroad and at home. News came that the Soviets had successfully tested an atom bomb of their own, levelling the field and stripping the United States of their military advantage. That same year, the country was faced with an ominous incident as some sectors of the country's military establishment staged a challenge against civilian command. As part of Truman's desire to slash spending and the need to reorganise the country's military strategic priorities in face of Cold War developments, it was decided to unify the armed forces under a single cabinet secretary. Until then, there existed a Secretary of War and a Secretary of the Navy whilst the emergent air corps was part of the Army. It was decided that the air corps would become a separate entity, the Air Force. All would be united under a single government Department of Defence. The Navy, proud of its legacy and fiercely independent, opposed the merger. The historic rivalry between Army and Navy about missions and responsibilities erupted frequently in the higher echelons, not just in brawls between servicemen of the two branches of the military, which, albeit colourful, only heightened mutual distrust and antagonism. The need to cut spending and the new deployment capabilities of the latest long-range B-36 bombers placed air power at the forefront of the new military strategy to the detriment of naval power. When Louis Johnson decided to cancel construction of the Navy's new, highly expensive class of aircraft carriers, the Secretary of the Navy resigned, and senior naval officers rebelled.

The 'Revolt of the Admirals', as it came to be known, emerged from a conviction that the politicians, goaded by the Air Force, were intent on restricting the Navy and even threaten it with extinction as obsolete given the new potential of aerial warfare. "The method of attack was propaganda, both positive, which would build-up the navy, and negative, which would launch a full-scale assault on the defense secretary and the air force."⁸⁸ A dossier was prepared with allegations of wrongdoing against Secretary Johnson accusing him of illicitly making the necessary procurements for the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 176.

new air force bombers with corporations led by personal friends of his. The scandal made its way to Congress where a special investigation by the House Armed Services Committee was called to look into the allegations. The Navy was determined to undermine its civilian superior and have him expelled.

The breach of discipline within the chain of command was aggravated when the “revolt entered a new phase, one in which press leaks, innuendos and challenges to the administration’s defense policies became ever more rampant.”⁸⁹ In a time when unity and cohesion in the face of external threat was of the essence, here was a demonstration of the dangers arising from the presence of an overgrown military institution that aspired to make the decisions when it came to the defence of the country. One of the admirals decided to raise the stakes. “When Admiral Radford was called to the witness table, he attacked the B-36 and atomic blitz theory of warfare on moral grounds. Radford said that if the American people knew that the B-36 lacked precision-bombing capability and would be used to annihilate civilian populations, they would consider it ‘morally reprehensible’”.⁹⁰ This was an indirect censure of President Truman, who had approved the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the indiscriminate killing of thousands of civilians. The situation threatened to get out of hand as questions of moral accountability were being raised, the consequences of which were anyone’s guess. The military were criticising the Commander-in-Chief and his authority in decisions of a military nature. The insubordination undermined civilian control of the military, further emboldening the mutinous officers, and inspired further developments.

The Army, the Air Force and the Executive branch of government closed ranks against the Navy. Without support and branded as rebellious and irresponsible for placing its interests above that of the country in a time of national danger, the revolt of the admirals capsized. Senior naval officers were dismissed - including several admirals - to restore discipline in the ranks and the Navy lost much of its public prestige and influence in government. The purge would prove timely as the country would be thrust within a year into another conflict across the Pacific. The consequences of the abandonment of American tradition in foreign policy for an active involvement of unpredictable consequences were forcing the country to put out fires wherever they erupted, in this case in the faraway and shadowy peninsula of Korea. It also required a strong and permanent military establishment, one growing in strength and prominence

⁸⁹ Ibid., 181.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 183.

in the nation's affairs, thus bolstering its leaders, their inevitable indispensability in the Cold War, and their sense of superiority in determining the best course of action. Once the military establishment became self-aware of its power, it began to regard government as a threat to its existence. The revolt of the admirals was a symptom of the desire for emancipation from civilian control and of its growing strength and importance. The difficult relationship between the organisations responsible for the security of the country and the government would resurface in the coming decades as more and more of the nation's resources were channelled to national security.

VI

We can easily see how Harry Truman's leadership difficulties were acutely revealed in his domestic policies. The shadow of Roosevelt still loomed large over his successor. As leader of the Democratic Party and President, Truman felt he had to emulate and continue his predecessor's politics and leadership. "Truman's uncertainty was entirely understandable, for to millions of Americans, especially the poor, Roosevelt had been an almost saintly father figure. Liberals had regarded him as the very model of strong presidential leadership in battles for social change."⁹¹ Right at the outset of his presidency, in September 1945, Truman tried to assert his liberal credentials with a manifesto outlining the social and economic programme for his administration. "A constant undercurrent ran through it: a sense of confidence that after fifteen years of depression and New Deal and wartime big government, the American people wanted an expanding welfare state and a quasi-controlled economy."⁹² However, his first attempt foundered before a coalition of Republicans and conservative Democrats in Congress, thus highlighting Truman's lack of control over his own party despite the fact that the Democrats held a majority in both chambers from 1945 to 1947.

During the campaign for the 1948 presidential elections, Truman tried to energise his supporters by promising a new effort at social change. Using language that evoked the pioneer days, he spoke of the need to innovate and lead the way in a new

⁹¹ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 137.

⁹² Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People – A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 361.

“frontier of human rights and social justice.”⁹³ Truman returned to power in the 1948 elections in one of the greatest electoral surprises in decades. The defeat of Republican candidate Thomas Dewey defied every opinion poll and political commentator’s prediction. Encouraged by this victory and confident that he now possessed a mandate for change with a majority in Congress, Truman was set on fulfilling Roosevelt’s legacy by announcing his Fair Deal programme, a continuation and extension of the New Deal. The inspiration came from a speech given by FDR in January 1944. In it, Roosevelt put forward the need for America to agree upon a new compact, one that would advance the country from political rights into new economic rights, the change from classical liberalism to Progressivism. The inalienable rights of the Declaration of Independence as enshrined by the 1787 Constitution were insufficient.

As our Nation has grown in size and stature, however - as our industrial economy expanded - these political rights proved inadequate to assure us equality in the pursuit of happiness. We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. ‘Necessitous men are not free men.’ People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made. In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all regardless of station, race, or creed.⁹⁴

Roosevelt projected a new constitutional proviso, an economic bill of rights. Among the values that stemmed from the 1776 Revolution were individual liberty and egalitarianism. Roosevelt proposed a concept of material egalitarianism in order to better secure individual freedom. Given that economic resources and wealth are limited, it was unclear how much this new notion of equality would infringe on individual autonomy to follow one’s goals as pleased. Furthermore, given the vast bureaucratic federal machinery required to advance and execute this economic egalitarian drive, it

⁹³ Harry S. Truman, “Address in St. Paul at the Municipal Auditorium,” October 13, 1948. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13046> (accessed April 9, 2013)

⁹⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “State of the Union Message to Congress,” January 11, 1944. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16518> (accessed January 19, 2012).

remained to be seen how this expected growth in governmental power would relate with liberty itself.

Harry Truman announced his Fair Deal in a speech in January 1949, before being inaugurated following his victory in the presidential elections. It was a continuation of his 1945 manifesto and a follow-up to the second bill of rights proposed by his predecessor. Where Roosevelt argued that economic equality was essential to ensure individual liberty, Truman envisaged an extension of the country's benefits through an economic system guided by democratic principles. "In this society, we are conservative about the values and principles which we cherish; but we are forward-looking in protecting those values and principles and in extending their benefits... we believe that our economic system should rest on a democratic foundation and that wealth should be created for the benefit of all."⁹⁵ An advocate of strong central government, Truman understood it to be the latter's mission to further democracy and protect the individual, as stated in the Declaration of Independence. "The fulfilment of this promise is among the highest purposes of government." Therefore, his set of proposals "should be enacted in order that the Federal Government may assume the leadership and discharge the obligations dearly placed upon it by the Constitution."⁹⁶ This despite the Constitution being largely silent about government control of the economy. He thus placed government at the top of the collective structure and as tutelary entity. Government intervention was the device by which individual and social problems could be solved and freedom achieved. The President was adamant that government was the source of well-being and that "Every segment of our population and every individual has a right to expect from our Government a fair deal."⁹⁷

This interpretation of the role of government heralded new powers of intervention and regulation. Truman was intent on enlarging liberty through an increased use of government despite the fact that the Revolution and the ideals that inspired the Declaration of Independence and the 1787 Constitution were precisely aimed at limiting government so as not to tread on liberty. This second attempt was also thwarted by the same coalition in Congress between Republicans and conservative Democrats, dampening his electoral victory mood and giving an example of the

⁹⁵ Harry S. Truman, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," January 5, 1949. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13293> (accesses March 22, 2013).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

constitutional balance of power designed by the Founding Fathers to restrain executive overreach. His hopes of extending Roosevelt's New Deal into his Fair Deal were frustrated by the conservative coalition in Congress which also passed legislation of its own and over Truman's opposition. Arthur Schlesinger saw this as a sign that Congress was still intent of fighting back a rising presidency engaged in undue appropriation of powers.⁹⁸

Truman's Fair Deal aimed especially at housing legislation, extension of social security in unemployment and health systems and fair and full employment practices and wages. The idea grew that it was the government's moral obligation to assist those who had less, to enable them a fair chance at America's promises. This meant that instead of leaving individuals to regulate moral issues among themselves, the federal government now assumed the task of determining how that duty towards others should materialise and what that duty was, by making use of the common pool of resources. The central administration would grow to become the arbiter and judge of questions of moral duty, assuming itself to be the embodiment of the collective will. Stepping away from its original limited role as guardian and protector of individual liberties and rights, the Government was now to interfere in the relationship between them so as to improve the chances of some. The aim was no longer freedom but equality; no longer individual self-improvement but well-being. The question was how much of liberty would and could be interfered with in order to promote economic egalitarianism.

The argument between liberty and equality was to continue, with the ascendancy of the latter pulling America towards a paternalistic perspective of Power as the provider of rights. When the promotion of the common good became inseparable from the promotion of certain groups or individuals' interests, then the boundary between public and private spheres became blurred. The restricting of government's actions to the public sphere while maximising individual liberty within the private sphere became more difficult. Government was encroaching upon the latter in order to promote the common good. And although Truman's domestic promises failed, there was no revolt against the allocation of greater resources toward foreign expansion because questioning that mission was to become synonymous with un-Americanism.

⁹⁸ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 127.

VII

The Second World War ended full of promises for America. Expectations ran high and the hope was that the post-war years would launch the American Century. The mantle of leadership would now fall upon the United States which would, combined with the Revolution's ideals, see the values of Freedom and Democracy expand on the back of worldwide peace. Instead, the onset of a Cold War with the Soviet Union was a rude awakening for the nation's elite as it realised that the country was engaged in a new global confrontation, whose potential for destruction far surpassed anything imagined. The Cold War would prove to be a severe test of reconciling foreign policy responsibilities and revolutionary values but also of the viability and desirability of spreading those very ideals abroad all the while maintaining the status quo in parts of the world where the fight against Communism was carried out by crushing individual freedom and democracy.

Likewise, the adaptation to the country's new international commitments and its new role of leadership proved difficult and awkward for a nation used to watch from the sidelines history taking shape. Americans believed that they could avoid the confusions of history by keeping away from international affairs, by protecting their revolutionary experiment from outside interference. As David Noble points out, the Puritans who moved to America in the 17th century "believed that the community they established in the New World was sustained by a covenant with God which delivered them and their children from the vicissitudes of history as long as they did not fail in their responsibility to keep their society pure and simple." This theological view was compounded in the 18th century by the Enlightenment's natural principles and the belief that "the new republic that emerged from the American Revolution had a covenant with nature which freed it from the burdens of European history as long as its citizens avoided the creation of complexity."⁹⁹ Avoiding complexity meant keeping government small and bureaucracy simple. Only thus could the link with nature be maintained. It was an idea that Jefferson understood well and which he supported as a complement to his agrarianism.

The country without past, without the legacy of religious and aristocratic institutions could hope to maintain its pristine condition and purity only if it steered

⁹⁹ David W. Noble, *Historians Against History – The Frontier Thesis and the National Covenant on American Historical Writing Since 1830* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 3.

away from European-like political intricacies that would bring back the country under the influence of the shifting fortunes of history. As the developments unfolded it became clear that “By 1945, however, it no longer seemed possible that the vast institutional edifice of corporations and governmental bureaucracy could vanish.”¹⁰⁰ The country had been moved into an elaborate mixture of international responsibilities and domestic expectations that had forced upon it a growing structure of government. American innocence would ensure the opportunity to live a perfect life so long as Americans kept pure and virtuous, in communion with God and Nature. By involving themselves with European politics, they became stained, enmeshed in the latter’s old ways, its corruption and venality. The early simplicity was now forfeited. America would actively participate in history and suffer from its side effects, trying to come to grips with domestic needs and the exigencies of its foreign entanglements.

Although the country’s tradition was one of avoiding foreign involvements, the temperament with which the people accepted this new attitude owed something to the belief in America’s mission to spread its values. As James Patterson remarks,

A specially religious people, many Americans approached foreign policies in a highly moralistic way. This was not only because Communism embraced atheism, though that mattered, especially to Catholics and other religiously devout citizens. It was also because many Americans believed so fervently in the rightness of their political institutions and the meaning of their history. America, as the Puritans had said, was a City on a Hill, a special place that God had set aside for the redemption of people. It followed that the United States had a God-given duty – a Manifest Destiny, it had been called in the nineteenth century – to spread the blessings of democracy to the oppressed throughout the world.¹⁰¹

America believes that the principles upon which its constitutional order is based are universal principles, applicable to all people at all times. American exceptionalism originated from the notion that the development of the best form of government had been achieved at home, one addressed to all humanity regardless of race or creed. Therefore, it had to be made available to all; history as the continuous evolution of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰¹ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 88.

mankind and human reason's ability to better the human condition, had been fulfilled. Truman added to this desire to spread the blessings of the Revolution, a sharing of America's industrial and scientific knowledge, "a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas,"¹⁰² which came to be known as the Point Four programme. This was Henry Luce's American Century pledge to share technical skills, the country's responsibility to advance the betterment of all nations. If America indeed was the chosen land of God, then it followed that its rewards and fruits could not be other than collective and had to be made available to all. Truman was so taken by this notion of America as custodian of material knowledge and skills that he considered it to be a most valuable instrument of America's strategy in the world. "I considered this so basic to our position in the world that I included the North Atlantic Treaty, along with adherence to the U.N., the Marshall Plan and the Point Four program, among the foundations of our foreign policy in my Inaugural Address on January 20, 1949."¹⁰³ He might not achieve the Fair Deal at home, but he would extend it abroad.

The United States' foreign policy after the war was developed bearing in mind that confidence regarding American capability. But it was also very much determined by a heightened perception that the preservation of America's uniqueness depended on an expansion of the frontier for democracy throughout the world, as we have seen. In this, we believe that the ideas of Frederick Jackson Turner still carried significant weight. Albeit largely discredited nowadays, his ideas were highly influential during the first half of the 20th century and, we argue, in the decision-making process in the early years of the Cold War. Jackson Turner argued that the democratic character of America's political institutions was shaped by the advance of the frontier along the continent throughout the 19th century. "American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American

¹⁰² Harry S. Truman, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1949. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13282> (accessed May 16, 2013).

¹⁰³ Harry S. Truman, *The Truman Memoirs, Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope – 1946 – 1953* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1956), 264.

character.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, for Turner, America’s paramount influence in determining its constitutional outlook was the western frontier.

Neglecting the contributions and the inspiration of European thinkers and their ideas, Turner proposed an exclusively continental theory for the development of American values. With the end of the inland expansion, achieved in the 1890’s, he warned that the closing of the frontier with its limitless availability of free lands would force the issue of socialism and class warfare upon America. For him, democracy was a product of an expanding frontier and its egalitarian conditions. Expansion in remote frontier conditions promoted individualism and this, in turn, was the source from which democracy sprung: “As has been pointed out, the frontier is productive of individualism... The frontier individualism has from the beginning promoted democracy.”¹⁰⁵ Turner revealed anew the anti-historical nature of American idealism: it was a perpetual movement forward to avoid historical progress. This constant search for the unknown in order to avoid the stasis that will result in modernity effectively meant that America is a migratory reality, incapable of settlement lest it changes its essence. The Frontier was the real America, outside time and space, and to stop the frontier meant letting history catch-up and work the transformation of America.

The closing of the American frontier had, thus, obsessed politicians that had read Turner, worrying that history would finally succeed in reaching America. The availability of vast tracts of land was the safety valve that precluded social unrest in America. With that ending, and with industrialism creating growing class divisions, they feared that social turmoil and political convulsion as was taking place in Europe and elsewhere would reach the country’s shores and put an end to the American experiment. But Turner was confident that the danger could be evaded. “He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American intellect will continually demand a wider field for its exercise. But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves.”¹⁰⁶ The solution implied was an outward expansion, a foreign policy inspired by a new frontier of Democracy abroad. And we contend that Truman was following Turner’s reasoning

¹⁰⁴ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996), 2-3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 37

when he urged America to defend Democracy abroad the better to protect it at home. We can point to Appleman Williams explanation as correct regarding this.

Expansion, Individualism, and Democracy was the catechism offered by this young messiah of America's uniqueness and omnipotence. The frontier, he cried, was 'a magic fountain of youth in which America continuously bathed and rejuvenated.' Without it, 'fissures begin to open between classes, fissures that may widen into chasms.'... Ultimately, he lauded the pioneer as the 'foreloper' of empire. And to drive home the lesson he quoted Rudyard Kipling, the laureate of British imperialism. Turner had explained the past and implied a program for the present. Materialistic individualism and democratic idealism could be married and maintained by a foreign policy of expansion.¹⁰⁷

The answer, then, was to look outwards and to expand the frontier of American democracy. Much of the ensuing century, especially after 1945, witnessed American involvement to defend and expand that global frontier. Turner's frontier thesis influenced many politicians from the start, most notably among them Theodore Roosevelt, a staunch supporter of American intervention abroad. It was Theodore Roosevelt who wrote in an essay that "Every expansion of civilization makes for peace. In other words, every expansion of a great civilized power means a victory for law, order, and righteousness. This has been the case in every instance of expansion during the present century, whether the expanding power were France or England, Russia or America... Fundamentally the cause of expansion is the cause of peace."¹⁰⁸ Not only was expansion the surest way to preserve America's purity, but it would also prove beneficial for the rest of the world as it would achieve perpetual peace. In pursuing that Frontier America would achieve its mission and keep its true character.

The Truman Doctrine, with its emphasis on the defence of democracy abroad is proof that self-preservation could be used to justify a desire to see democracy triumphant on a global scale. "The Truman Doctrine seemed an almost classic statement of the thesis that the security and well-being of the United States depended upon the

¹⁰⁷ William Appleman Williams, "The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy." *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 24, No. 4. (Nov., 1955): 379-395. <http://vi.uh.edu/pages/buzzmat/articles/frontier%20thesis%20and%20foreign%20policy%20WAW.pdf> (accessed April 26, 2013).

¹⁰⁸ Theodore Roosevelt, "Expansion and Peace", in *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses*. New York: Bartleby.com, 1999. <http://www.bartleby.com/58/>, (accessed May 13, 2013).

successful execution of America's unique mission to defend and extend the frontier of democracy throughout the world."¹⁰⁹ As we have seen, both Franklin D. Roosevelt and Truman emphasised the fact that domestic welfare and safety at home was dependent on the defence of free regimes and democratic conditions abroad and made use of the past to justify the present. Truman's synthesis accomplished the goal of internationalism while resolving the tension within America's ethos for the next two decades.

Likewise, Truman's programmes to deal with the transition from a wartime economy into peacetime reflect the awareness regarding the dangers of social unrest. Whilst before returning soldiers could be expected to return to their homestead and plough the land, the industrial state had trouble to accommodate the excess proletariat. Roosevelt's GI Bill and the several government aid programmes enacted by his successor were meant to face possible unrest. Despite his loss of popularity, one can argue that Turner's warnings about the end of the frontier and its consequences were still present on American leaders' minds. However, as America embarked on a resolute engagement with the world, forsaking its traditional cautious unilateral approach, Americans were slowly coming to realise that history was finally catching up with the United States, pushing the country into a path that threatened its uniqueness. From now on, the country was responsible for the protection and well-being of a significant portion of the globe, and efforts were being made to refute the words of Servan Shreiber about empire. Nonetheless, America was continuing down that new path, one that escorted it towards a European perspective about Power, about the relationship between government and the individual. One that no longer placed the former as the subordinate instrument of the latter, but as an ever increasingly independent entity, capable and increasingly willing to challenge the individual for prominence.

¹⁰⁹ William Appleman Williams, "The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy." *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 24, No. 4. (Nov., 1955): 379-395.
<http://vi.uh.edu/pages/buzzmat/articles/frontier%20thesis%20and%20foreign%20policy%20WAW.pdf>
(accessed April 26, 2013).

CHAPTER TWO

The elusive revolution and the last American

In time of actual war, great discretionary powers are constantly given to the Executive Magistrate. Constant apprehension of war, has the same tendency to render the head too large for the body. A standing military force, with an overgrown Executive will not long be safe companions to liberty.

James Madison, Debates in the Constitutional Convention, June 29, 1787

I

The 1950's decade started unpromisingly with a war in Korea and an escalation of the post-war red scare. The intensification of the witch-hunt by Senator Joseph McCarthy so gripped the nation that people were afraid to commit to landmark documents like the Declaration of Independence. One such incident took place in 1951, in Madison, Wisconsin, when a reporter asked people to sign a petition where portions of the Declaration and of the Bill of Rights were included. An outraged President brought up the matter a few days later in a speech in Detroit. Harry Truman attributed the blame to a smear campaign by "doubters and defeatists" whose purpose was to "stir up trouble and suspicion between the people and their Government." As Truman recounted, the events took place as part of the local Fourth of July commemorations.

A hundred and twelve people were asked to sign a petition that contained nothing except quotations from the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. One hundred and eleven of these people refused to sign that paper - many of them because they were afraid it was some kind of subversive document and that they would lose their jobs or be called Communists.¹¹⁰

Apart the ignorance about the wording of two documents that define the country and its ideals, the fear of being associated with left-wing social and political demands was real and pervasive. Throughout the country accusations of 'communist' and 'subversive' were hurled at people who might disagree with the prevailing social and political atmosphere. The latter favoured attempts to curb freedom of thought and freedom of expression in the fight against Communism which, it is worth remembering, was being carried out to protect freedom. But in the process, the very language and values of the Revolution could be construed as 'subversive.' If that was the case, then we can argue that it was proof enough that they were unfulfilled, further justifying the Jacksonian democratic goal of making them effective for all.

When proclaiming the Truman Doctrine and America's commitment to aid democracy wherever it was threatened, Truman had distinguished between the oppressive character of Communism and the freedom of the American way of life. The

¹¹⁰ Harry S. Truman, "Address in Detroit at the Celebration of the City's 250th Anniversary," July 28, 1951. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13859>, (accessed January 1, 2013).

latter consisted of free elections, free institutions, freedom of speech and of conscience, freedom from political oppression. Nonetheless, shortly after, the President issued an executive order establishing a loyalty programme for federal employees. Any individual, employed or prospective, could be branded as disloyal and banished from his job with the government or denied employment with it. When the order was issued, in 1947, more than two million people worked for the government. Each one of them was subjected to federal investigation. As always, this promoted different confirmations regarding human nature. Anonymous tips began reaching the government about people regarded as potentially distrustful, people displaying suspicious behaviour or defending unorthodox opinions. Besides the several denunciations there was also information about individuals who possessed books or art considered subversive, expressed strong sympathy for the underprivileged and conviction concerning equal rights for all races and classes (the latter expressly declared in the Declaration of Independence and upheld by various Amendments to the 1787 Constitution). Political consensus and social peace were being achieved through enforced conformism.¹¹¹ The government was now allowed to spy, question and intrude into people's homes and personal lives in order to better scrutinise their conscience. The probing and violation of the once untouchable personal sphere was done for the sake of the defence of liberty, an all too recurring argument.

The situation worsened when the anti-communist zeal led to the publication of a list of suspected organisations. "Truman's executive order creating the loyalty program required the attorney general to generate a list of subversive organizations. The executive order did not require the attorney general to publish the list, but he did so anyway, to ruinous effect."¹¹² From then on, anyone associated with any of the hundreds of organisations listed as suspect was regarded as a possible communist, a potential enemy of the country. Furthermore, by associating those organisations' ideas and conducts they could look for patterns of behaviour and belief in others to evaluate attitudes. The House of Representatives reinforced a special investigative committee created before the war to examine possible Nazi activities in America and refashioned it to rid the government of communists and save the country - the House Committee on un-American Activities. Infused with new life, it was spurred by Republican Senator

¹¹¹ Stephen M. Feldman, *Free Expression and Democracy in America: A History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 434.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 435.

from Wisconsin Joseph McCarthy's campaign of intimidation and persecution. Yet, what could be more American than defence of political equality and democracy for everyone, issues now considered subversive and threatening to American values? The red scare was the result of an increasingly overbearing governmental machinery whipping up the masses into an anti-communist fervour, emerging in a country unaccustomed to such large administrative structures. Not acquainted with the routines and mechanisms of a complex governmental machinery, under pressure from the outside, government became paranoid about its survival and suspicious of its own citizens, the ones whose freedom it was designed to protect. The latter's liberty was quickly regarded as a potential menace that had to be controlled. Whereas previously government existed for the good of its citizens, now the citizens had to be controlled for the good of government. Government was therefore venturing from economic supervision and into social and individual thought-control. To define certain activities as un-American implied that there were standards of behaviour and beliefs that had to be obeyed in order to qualify as truly 'American'. Failure to comply meant that one was un-American; to be American one needed to conform. The Founding Fathers would have been alarmed at the proposition for what could be more American than the pursuit of personal preferences free from interference or scrutiny. Had not the Revolution been fought to defend the right to live as one pleased, to pursue one's own path toward self-improvement, to think differently?

Events escalated in February 1950 when Joseph McCarthy turned the creature against itself. He announced he was in possession of a list of hundreds of names of members of the Communist Party that were working in the State Department. And that Secretary of State George Marshall was aware of both the list of names and their party membership. He warned that government had been infiltrated and was now in danger of being toppled. Consequently, government officials in the various departments were subject to thorough investigation. The array of powers given to government to persecute communists was now being turned against staff and members of government. The purge would be total, triggered by an abstract and cold rationale that demanded that the highest motivation should be the preservation of the purity of a self-absorbed establishment.

The hysteria reached a new level when in the summer communist North Korea attacked South Korea. The United States were drawn into the conflict, which would last until 1953. The war effort was encumbered by accusations that a fifth column was at

work inside government to hand out victory in Korea to the communists. That same summer, the Supreme Court upheld a lower court's verdict to imprison members of the Communist Party in America for advocating the overthrow of government. The charges were brought because of the defendants' ideas, nor for any specific, concrete action.

The government did not seek to prove that the defendants had conspired to overthrow the government or had already acted to initiate the government's downfall. Instead, the prosecutors proved that the defendants taught Marxist-Leninist doctrine, as developed in books like Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*, and that such doctrine predicted the demise of capitalism and encouraged the overthrow of government... did the Constitution protect the advocacy of such ideas?¹¹³

The Supreme Court's answer was that the Constitution, despite the First Amendment, did not. The lower court had invoked the presence of a clear and present danger to justify the cancellation of the First Amendment, a measure that the Supreme Court upheld since government did not have to "wait until the putsch is about to be executed, the plans have been laid out and the signal is waited."¹¹⁴ Government was cleared to engage in pre-emptive measures whenever threatened, in a confirmation of its power of regulating consciences. But more importantly, the regulation of political thinking was sanctioned by the highest court in the land.

The success of his accusations and the compliance of both the country and the political system emboldened McCarthy. His self-righteousness and sense of mission led him to believe that he could challenge anyone. Following the armistice in Korea, he was determined to prove that failure to win the war was because the Army had been infiltrated by communists. Generals and high-ranking officers were summoned before McCarthy, their World War II and Korean War decorations and injuries insufficient to stop the Senator from relentlessly questioning their service and their loyalty. The Army and the new President would have none of it. Dwight Eisenhower "would not acquiesce when McCarthy turned on the Army. Eisenhower had not merely been an Army General, he had been supreme commander of the Allied Forces during World War II and then Army chief of staff. Ultimately, the McCarthy-Army confrontation broke

¹¹³ Ibid., 441.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 442.

McCarthy and deflated the Red Scare hysteria.”¹¹⁵ When McCarthy procured preferential treatment for one of his aides drafted by the Army, a report surfaced with details of the incident and of McCarthy’s threats when his request was denied. With tacit support from Eisenhower, a Senate committee was designated to investigate the matter. Under the Army’s counter-attack, McCarthy realised that his terror tactics had left him with no friends and no assistance, and that Eisenhower was giving covert support to his downfall; the Army was looking after its own. His reign of terror ended when the Senate voted to censure him in late 1954 following hearings related to the controversy with the Army. Nonetheless, among its main effects we include a growing conformism and social reluctance in accepting opinions questioning the consensus and the fact that it enforced a silent, cowed approval of the new domestic and international state of affairs. Dissent and defiance, early American of virtues, lay prostrate and branded as defeatist and un-American and McCarthyism was instrumental in suffocating any dissent regarding Cold War policies and the changes that followed. Perhaps unconsciously, Truman was right when he talked of an argument between the people and government.

II

The 1952 presidential campaign pitted Dwight Eisenhower for the Republicans against Adlai Stevenson for the Democrats. The campaign issues revolved around the war in Korea and the communist threat in America. Seen as soft on Communism, the Democrats were on the back foot and Eisenhower held the initiative throughout. The electorate, properly frightened by McCarthyism and constant reports of communist infiltration, viewed with suspicion any softening against the Soviet aggressor. With the war in Korea seemingly deadlocked, Eisenhower, the former Supreme Commander of Allied Forces during World War II, promised to end the war if elected, even if it meant going there himself. Ike, as the General was popularly known, won the contest easily. However, a more significant and interesting debate of ideas, albeit less appealing to the mass media, had taken place during the primaries for the Republican nomination.

Robert Alphonso Taft, son of former President William Howard Taft, was Republican Senator for Ohio and one of the leading politicians of the country. A conservative known for his structured arguments and solid political philosophy, he had

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 443.

been the leading opponent of the New Deal and of America's participation in World War II. His non-interventionism was grounded in the belief that the United States should avoid new obligations to foreign nations or expand those already existing. Because of his prominence among the Republicans, he was known as Mr. Republican but also as Mr. Integrity for never compromising his principles and beliefs for his political ambitions. In the Senate he was known as "a man who never broke an agreement, who never compromised his deeply felt Republican principles, who never practiced political deception."¹¹⁶ So testified the Democrat John F. Kennedy.

In 1946, Taft seriously damaged his political prospects by speaking against the Nuremberg Trials where Nazi leaders were sentenced to death. This at a time when the trial and sentencing of Nazis was highly popular, and the legality of it all hardly questioned. Taft, however, manifested his disagreement with what was, in essence, the application of retroactive laws, prohibited by the Constitution. The crimes for which the German leaders were tried were not defined as such at the time of their taking place, only after the war ended. John F. Kennedy, in his tribute to the courage of Senator Taft, said of him that

The Constitution of the United States was the gospel which guided the policy decisions of the Senator from Ohio. It was his source, his weapon and his salvation. And when the Constitution commanded no "*ex post facto* laws", Bob Taft accepted this precept as permanently wise and universally applicable. The Constitution was not a collection of loosely given political promises subject to broad interpretation. It was not a list of pleasing platitudes to be set lightly aside when expediency required it. It was the foundation of the American system of law and justice and he was repelled by the picture of his country discarding those Constitutional precepts in order to punish a vanquished enemy.¹¹⁷

To neglect the Constitution was to validate the belief that might makes right, it was the negation of the principles for which the country had been founded. Taft would not embark in such a slight against the work of the Founding Fathers.

¹¹⁶ John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York and London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 195.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

Robert Taft's outspoken defence of the values of the country earned him a torrent of criticism and abuse from his fellow citizens. In a fine illustration of the confusion of the times, he had to justify his speech and belief in a country where the closing of ranks to defend liberty had produced a conformist thinking that excluded all difference of opinion. He reminded his country that the values of the Constitution and American ideals of fairness and justice were fundamental for the defence of liberty and that "Liberalism implies particularly freedom of thought, freedom from orthodox dogma, the right of others to think differently from one's self. It implies a free mind, open to new ideas and willing to give attentive consideration... When I say liberty, I mean liberty of the individual to think his own thoughts and live his own life as he desires to think and live."¹¹⁸ Taft suffered what any individual must suffer when he puts his conscience ahead of the will of the masses.

In 1952 that was precisely what the country lacked, the capacity and even the willingness to "give attentive consideration" to the great questions before it. As the leading Republican of his day, Taft was running to secure the party's nomination for the coming presidential election. However, his foreign policy was viewed as isolationist, a position that ran counter to all that the Truman administration had achieved since the end of the war. This exposed him to charges of reckless endangerment of the country and of the whole world in the face of communist aggression. As Michael Hayes sums up, "The real problem with the term isolationism is not that it misrepresented Taft's general orientation, but rather that it permitted defenders of various Roosevelt and Truman policies to discredit Taft without having to engage his arguments seriously."¹¹⁹

Robert Taft opposed new commitments or the extension of those that were already in existence, and advocated a scaling down of NATO. His foreign policy was based on a hierarchy of values, stemming from the early days of the Republic. "Fundamentally, I believe the ultimate purpose of our foreign policy must be to protect the liberty of the people of the United States... Only second to liberty is the maintenance of peace."¹²⁰ According to Taft, the country's traditional foreign policy had avoided unnecessary war abroad and preserved liberty at home: it sought protection of the revolution's integrity at home rather than its expansion abroad. Knowing that his

¹¹⁸ Quoted in John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York and London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 205.

¹¹⁹ Michael T. Hayes, "The Republican Road Not Taken: The Foreign-Policy Vision of Robert A. Taft," *The Independent Review*, v. VIII, n. 4, (Spring 2004): 510.

¹²⁰ Robert A. Taft, *A Foreign Policy for Americans* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1951), 11.

embracing of that principle could warrant accusations of isolationism against him, Taft went on to explain his interpretation of that policy.

From the days of George Washington that has been the policy of the United States. It has never been isolationism; but it has always avoided alliances and interference in foreign quarrels as a preventive against possible war, and it has always opposed any commitment by the United States, in advance, to take any military action outside of our territory. It would leave us free to interfere or not interfere according to whether we consider the case of sufficiently vital interest to the liberty of this country.¹²¹

The goal of America, then, was the preservation of liberty at home rather than looking to enforce it abroad. Taft was an exponent, probably the last, of the domestic vocation of America, a realist in the mould of Washington and Jefferson. The Republican Senator was, nonetheless, a supporter of an international organisation to protect and uphold peace among nations. But that organisation would have to prove efficient and the principle of collective security promoted by the rule of law, applicable to all nations, and not by treaties of a military nature such as NATO. However, as it had been devised, the United Nations could not fulfil that role. His criticism of the UN rested on the veto power of the biggest nations in the Security Council. For Taft, the veto power “completely dispels the idea that any system of universal law is being established, for surely nothing can be law if five of the largest nations can automatically exempt themselves from its application.”¹²² As it stood, the organisation was just the instrument of the great powers’ foreign policy disguised as law, the confirmation of their supremacy in the post-war world.

Taft believed that the greatest domestic threat the foreign policy being pursued posed to the country was the financial burden it placed upon the nation as a whole. The financial constraints of feeding the growing military expenditures threatened individual liberty by way of its fiscal and economic demands. Taft opposed this and advocated a foreign policy that would allow the United States to choose when and how to intervene abroad. That freedom of action was now denied by the military alliance it had with Western Europe that bound the country to its defence. Recalling Roosevelt and

¹²¹ Ibid., 12.

¹²² Ibid., 40

Truman's international objectives, Taft pointed to the obvious economic and manpower limitations of the United States in enforcing FDR's Four Freedoms or the Truman Doctrine. Instead of leading by example, the proponents of these grand ideals were "inspired with the same kind of New Deal planned-control ideas abroad as recent Administrations have desired to enforce at home. In their hearts they want to force on these foreign peoples through the use of American money and even, perhaps, American arms the policies which moral leadership is able to advance only through the sound strength of its principles and the force of its persuasion."¹²³ To complete this international ambition, the country would have to maintain an enormous standing military apparatus that would not only consume the hard-won earnings of Americans but also threaten the very goals it was trying to accomplish, domestic and foreign. For in the case of Roosevelt's wish to bring freedom to others worldwide, Taft warned that "the forcing of any special brand of freedom and democracy on a people, whether they want it or not, by the brute force of war will be a denial of those very democratic principles which we are striving to advance."¹²⁴ John Quincy Adams could be heard about the rise of a new dictatress of the world. But also of its own people, Taft added.

In order to be prepared to honour its commitments with NATO and defend Democracy worldwide would require military readiness to engage at any moment. "The truth is that no nation can be constantly prepared to undertake a full-scale war at any moment and still hope to maintain any of the other purposes in which people are interested... it requires a complete surrender of liberty and the turning over to the central government of power to control in detail the lives of the people and all of their activities."¹²⁵ The consequences were dramatic for the values the country held more dearly, especially for freedom, at home and abroad. In many ways, Taft was anticipating many of the problems that would beset the country in the coming decades, foreign and domestic. "He anticipated correctly that a steady rise in defense outlays could lead to a 'garrison state' and the erosion of civil liberties. Finally, Taft was prescient in warning that even well-meaning internationalism would necessarily degenerate over time into a form of imperialism that would breed resentment against the United States around the globe, eventually endangering U.S. national security."¹²⁶

¹²³ Ibid., 17-18.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 68.

¹²⁶ Michael T. Hayes, "The Republican Road Not Taken: The Foreign-Policy Vision of Robert A. Taft," *The Independent Review*, v. VIII, n. 4, (Spring 2004): 510-511.

With the Korean War raging in the background, Taft's ideas were attacked as unpatriotic and dangerous. The GOP leaders feared that the party would fare poorly in the coming elections as the fight against communism intensified both at home and abroad. Plans were laid to bring to the fore a candidate more attuned with the nation's new international role, one that understood the realities of foreign policy; but above all, one that understood the Republican's hunger to return to power.¹²⁷ The party was divided between its liberal Eastern establishment and the Midwestern conservative wing of the party. The latter wanted to preserve the party's ideological principles; the former wanted to return to power at any cost. And the best man to achieve that was the most popular man in the country: General Dwight David Eisenhower, who had commanded the allied forces in World War II and had been appointed by Truman as Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in NATO. Truman's victory in the 1948 elections "meant that the Republicans were now desperate for a presidential candidate who could return them to power. Ike was obviously that man. As Walter H. Judd told Senator Taft, 'You're the king, Bob, but Ike's the ace, as far as getting the votes is concerned.'"¹²⁸ Power trumped principle.

Eisenhower's experience in the war had made of him a firm believer in America's need to be involved abroad to better protect the country. However, he was devoid of any revolutionary idealism and he regarded foreign policy through the prism of America's material interests, as he had made clear in 1951.

From my viewpoint, foreign policy is, or should be, based primarily upon one consideration. That consideration is the need for the U.S. to obtain certain raw materials to sustain its economy and, when possible, to preserve profitable foreign markets for our surpluses. Out of this need grows the necessity for making certain that those areas of the world in which essential raw materials are produced are not only accessible to us, but their populations and governments are willing to trade with us on a friendly basis.¹²⁹

Eisenhower chose to run for the GOP to stop Taft from winning and changing American foreign policy. He had been courted by both Democrats and Republicans and

¹²⁷ Piers Brendon, *Ike – The Life and Times of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 212

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Michael T. Hayes, "The Republican Road Not Taken: The Foreign-Policy Vision of Robert A. Taft," *The Independent Review*, v. VIII, n. 4, (Spring 2004): 518.

had already rejected Truman's offering of the Democratic Party's nomination for the 1952 election once in a meeting between the two. Truman insisted: "Truman pressed the offer; Eisenhower rejoined that his differences with the Democrats over domestic issues, especially labor legislation, were too vast for him to even consider accepting."¹³⁰ Despite the presidential pressures he made his way toward the Republicans.

Eisenhower shared many of Taft's views about domestic policy; but they diverged decisively regarding foreign policy. "His concern was with Taft's policies, not on domestic matters, where the two men thought alike, but in foreign affairs, and most of all with Taft's commitment to NATO (Taft had voted against the treaty)."¹³¹ The Republican liberals were already busy at work promoting the General's name as contender for the party's nomination, marketing him as the man to face up to communist Russia and bring America back from defeatism at home and in Korea. Before his decision to stand for nomination as the Republican candidate, Eisenhower tried to get from Taft a sure commitment towards NATO should the latter win the election. He arranged a meeting with him with a clear purpose in mind: "He wanted Taft's support for NATO; if he got it, he was ready to 'kill off any further speculation about me as a candidate for the Presidency.'"¹³² Despite his hopes that Taft would see the rationality of America's current foreign policy and the need for it to be continued, the talk came to nothing. They disagreed on everything, especially in the matter of the President's constitutional powers to deploy troops abroad. "The senator objected Truman's program of sending additional American divisions to Europe, said that the President did not have the right to do so. Eisenhower insisted that the President certainly did have such a right."¹³³ The meeting ended, along with Eisenhower's reservations and Taft's hopes of being the chosen candidate.

The question about the legality of the presidential power to send troops and involve the country in a war had been raised before. The matter had first been prompted by Truman's decision to intervene in Korea and his total disregard to inform Congress for several weeks. This despite the constitutional proviso that only Congress can declare war and thus pave the way for the deployment of American soldiers abroad for combat duty. Justifying his decision to send troops after North Korea had invaded the South,

¹³⁰ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower – Soldier and President* (London and Sidney: Pocket Books, 2003), 264.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 255.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 256.

Truman said that he had done so under the terms of the American participation in the UN, a treaty agreed to by Congress. As such, no congressional authorisation was needed because it was implied in the country's adhesion to the international charter, and as supreme commander of the armed forces he had the power and the duty to see that the laws and treaties be duly executed. Taft was adamant that not only did the Constitution forbid the President from declaring war but also from acting unilaterally in the deployment of the armed forces abroad, regardless of any treaties signed or approved. The constitutional issue was further highlighted by American participation in NATO and the proposal to send more US soldiers to Europe and have them join what amounted to an international army under the control of a foreign council of the various participating nations. For Taft, not only was it unconstitutional, it was an exercise in executive overreach.

No one can question the fact that the initiative in American foreign policy lies with the President... [but] the American people certainly do not believe or intend that his power shall be arbitrary and unrestrained. They want a voice in the more important features of that policy, particularly those relating to peace and war. They expect their Senators and Congressmen to be their voice... The fundamental issue in the 'great debate' was, and is, whether the President shall decide when the United States shall go to war or whether the people of the United States themselves shall make that decision¹³⁴

We can pointedly say that President Truman was following down a road that amounted to a dangerous appropriation of powers. When confronted with a Congressional resolution to stop him sending more troops without consent from Congress, Truman said he did not need permission. Not long after, the State Department submitted to Congress a document entitled "Powers of the President to Send the Armed Forces Outside the United States" to justify the President's actions. In it was argued that the President alone had the power and the authority to decide whether or not foreign policy required the deployment of troops anywhere in the world, "no matter what the war in which the action may involve us. The document also claims that in sending armed forces to carry out a treaty the President does not require any statutory authority whatever, and it does not recognize the difference between a self-executing treaty and

¹³⁴ Robert A. Taft, *A Foreign Policy for Americans* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1951), 21-22.

one which requires, even by its own terms, congressional authority.”¹³⁵ The President claimed supreme power to evaluate the country’s international necessities and of being the sole authority capable of committing the armed forces to react in accordance.

The justification for this appropriation of power by the executive rested on the argument that on this matter “constitutional doctrine has been largely molded by practical necessities.”¹³⁶ The argument was further proof that the President was breaking free from the Constitution and claiming for the executive branch a level of power it did not have, a dangerous precedent that could easily find similarities in history. Upon hearing of the argument thus presented, a journalist and author at the time wrote: “Caesar might have said it to the Roman Senate. If constitutional doctrine is moulded by necessity, what is a written Constitution for?”¹³⁷ Not content with claiming this new supremacy for the Presidency, the document demanded that Congress not only acquiesce but show support for the President in his carrying out of his newly extended powers. The dangerous internal situation and “the magnitude of present-day military operations and international policies requires a degree of Congressional support that was unnecessary in the days of the nineteenth century.”¹³⁸ As Taft saw it, “Congress no longer has any power to act. It is simply given the right to support the President after the President has acted.”¹³⁹

The argument about the danger posed by the executive branch of government’s disregard for proper limits was as old as the Republic itself. The question of the powers of the President had already been addressed by the critics of the 1787 Constitution during the ratification debates. The office of President was absent from the Articles of Confederation that had governed the country prior to the Constitution. The Anti-Federalists, opposed to the new constitutional covenant, attacked the new office as a form of kingship. They viewed the new federal arrangement as a prelude to centralised tyranny and the President as equivalent to a king given his powers in war and diplomacy.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 24-25.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Robert A. Taft, *A Foreign Policy for Americans* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1951), 25.

¹³⁷ Gareth Garrett, *The People’s Pottage* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1953), 124.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Robert A. Taft, *A Foreign Policy for Americans* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1951), 25.

¹³⁹ Robert A. Taft, *A Foreign Policy for Americans* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1951), 25.

In the first place the office of president of the United States appears to me to be clothed with such powers as are dangerous. To be the fountain of all honors in the United States - commander in chief of the army, navy, and militia; with the power of making treaties and of granting pardons; and to be vested with an authority to put a negative upon all laws, unless two thirds of both houses shall persist in enacting it, and put their names down upon calling the yeas and nays for that purpose - is in reality to be a king, as much a king as the king of Great Britain, and a king too of the worst kind: an elective king.¹⁴⁰

The Anti-Federalists were particularly concerned with the President's power as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. They were well acquainted with historical examples that showed just how difficult, and dangerous, it was to take away an army placed at the disposal of an individual with power. Fresh in the minds of the critics of the new compact was the recent episode involving General George Washington, who, at the end of the war of independence had renounced power and the throne handed to him by his officers and soldiers. What if some future president, popular among his troops, failed to display such detachment? "Let us suppose a future president and commander in chief adored by his army and the militia to as great a degree as our late illustrious commander in chief; and we have only to suppose one thing more, that this man is without the virtue, the moderation and love of liberty which possessed the mind of our late general - and this country will be involved at once in war and tyranny."¹⁴¹ With a standing army and given his constitutional powers, such a popular President would be unstoppable.

An excuse could easily be found, in the name of defending the general welfare, to subvert the Constitution and place himself as absolute ruler. The Federalists, advocating the ratification of the new federal Constitution, were in agreement regarding the threat posed by standing armies to any political community. Alexander Hamilton, for one, recognised that "Frequent war and constant apprehension, which require a state of as constant preparation, will infallibly produce them."¹⁴² However, he countered that standing armies would be a temporary expedient to be used in times of war only. Given

¹⁴⁰ Anti-Federalist n° 70, in Bill Bailey, ed. *The Anti-Federalist Papers* (Folsom, CA: The Federalist Papers Project), 275. <http://www.thefederalistpapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/The-Anti-Federalist-Papers-Special-Edition.pdf>, (accessed June 6, 2013).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 275.

¹⁴² Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist n° 8", in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 33.

the peaceful nature of the Republic, and its role as example for the rest of humanity, war would be an exceptional situation to happen only in cases of national danger. Furthermore, America was in a position of insularity which protected her from invasion from abroad. If the Americans could survive the turmoil of the formative years, “we may for ages enjoy an advantage similar to that of an insulated situation. Europe is at a great distance from us. Her colonies in our vicinity will be likely to continue too much disproportioned in strength to be able to give us any dangerous annoyance. Extensive military establishments cannot, in this position, be necessary to our security.”¹⁴³

Incapable of matching Eisenhower’s popularity, Taft retired from the race. The Eastern establishment of the Republican Party had found its ticket to Washington and would not relinquish it. Moreover, their candidate also shared in the internationalist agenda. Eisenhower was chosen as the man to continue the foreign policy started by Truman; pursuing that foreign policy would mean that the executive siege of the Constitution would not be lifted.

III

Eisenhower was a very popular General. He had supervised the D-Day landings in Normandy, commanded the allied assault on Germany, was adored by his veterans. His reputation abroad, especially in Europe, was immense. Everyone expected him to be a strong President, a true leader. But by the end of his two-term period in the White House, he was a figure of ridicule and highly criticised for his inactivity, especially at advancing civil rights and social reform, the real priorities of the country rather than his imperial consolidation. He was the butt of jokes because of his favourite hobby, playing golf, to which he dedicated a good amount of time. In his biography of Eisenhower, Piers Brendon, a one-time admirer of the General, summed up his disillusionment and criticism of the President’s constant golfing. “There was Ike’s incessant golfing with millionaires and the growing suspicion that he was doing a part-time job. ‘Ben Hogan for President,’ said one bumper sticker, ‘(If We’ve Got to Have a Golfer in the White House, Let’s Have a Good One).’”¹⁴⁴ The model to follow was still Franklin D. Roosevelt. “Critics of Eisenhower’s presidency complain above all that he did not work hard at the job and that he failed to take charge. A good President, they thought, had to

¹⁴³ Ibid., 35.

¹⁴⁴ Piers Brendon, *Ike – The Life and Times of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 4.

be strong and activist – like FDR.”¹⁴⁵ When Eisenhower left office, journalists referred to the White House as the tomb of the well-known soldier.¹⁴⁶

These we take as somewhat unfair accusations given that he continued all New Deal programmes still in force and advanced others. Furthermore, Eisenhower pursued a policy of silent affirmation of the executive and the federal government in general, consolidating the new balance of constitutional powers. He created the Department of Health, Education and Welfare that combined the existing Social Security programmes and enlarged total benefits to include an extra ten million people.¹⁴⁷ He launched the Interstate Highway System, which was devised as a solution to allow for the evacuation of people from big cities in case of a nuclear war (major cities would be a primary target for nuclear attacks). It was, essentially, a vast federal public works plan that employed thousands of people paid and kept with federal subsidies that made a significant contribution to the economy, besides being decisive in encouraging America’s love affair with the automobile. Rivalling Roosevelt’s agenda to combat unemployment during the Depression, the road building lasted for decades, in effect prolonging FDR’s precedent and surpassing his most ambitious programmes in scope and length. Other projects included the St. Lawrence Seaway, a system of canals and locks allowing ships to travel from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes using the St. Lawrence River. Government was no longer intent on centralised planning of the economy but it still intervened decisively and was the main social player. Throughout, the new President kept a tranquil demeanour, which was disconcerting to some who missed Roosevelt’s boldness or even Truman’s Midwestern unbroken plain-speaking.

Eisenhower was committed to a balanced budget and deficit reduction, like any good conservative. But he did not oppose social welfare and never threatened it, quite the contrary: “social welfare expenditures during his presidency rose slowly but steadily as a percentage of GNP (from 7.6 percent in 1952 to 11.5 in 1961) and (especially after 1958) as a percentage of federal spending.”¹⁴⁸ Eisenhower had a very precise idea of the role federal government should play in society. Generally opposed to interventionism, he did believe in the federal government as a regulator of interests. He was a firm

¹⁴⁵ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 245.

¹⁴⁶ Piers Brendon, *Ike – The Life and Times of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 399

¹⁴⁷ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower – Soldier and President* (London and Sidney: Pocket Books, 2003), 357.

¹⁴⁸ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 272.

believer in a strong central authority, above and beyond its constituent parts, charged with overseeing the country. Small government was not in his mind; in his way of thinking, individual liberty was best served by a vigilant government. According to James Patterson, Eisenhower's policies while President reflected his idea of "what the United States should be: a cooperative society in which major groups such as corporations, labor unions, and farmers would set aside their special interests to promote domestic harmony and economic stability. The State, Eisenhower believed, could serve as an arbiter of this cooperative commonwealth, acting to bring excessive special interests together and restraining their demands."¹⁴⁹ Faced with resistance from the old guard of the Republican Party that strived to preserve the ideological principles of the GOP, and thus opposed to any involvement or enlargement of the role of government, Eisenhower believed that it would lead the party to extinction. Aghast with the results of the 1954 congressional elections - in which the Republicans were soundly defeated - and at the conservative wing's threats of walking away, Eisenhower angrily let it be known that "I have just one purpose, outside the job of keeping this world at peace, and that is to build up a strong progressive Republican Party in this country... If they want to leave the Republican Party and form a third party, that's their business, but before I end up, either this Republican Party will reflect progressivism or I won't be with them anymore."¹⁵⁰ Eisenhower did not question Progressivism, rather seemed to believe that in order to keep it from getting out of control in the hands of Democrats, it should be pursued by the Republicans, who would hopefully deploy it sparingly.

However, despite his unwillingness to intervene and see federal law imposed over the States, events further opened the door to federal intervention. State legislatures' immobility or unwillingness to act to correct wrongs and deal with local problems left Eisenhower little choice but to involve the federal government. The most notable case during his presidency was the crisis that followed the United States Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, of 1954. The Court's decision was a blow right at the heart of racial segregation in the South, namely by ruling that the existence of different public schools for white and black students was unconstitutional. The 'separate but equal' policy in the South was thus mortally wounded, although the effects were not

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 272.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building – Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 51.

made visible until later. In the midst of growing social unrest for the extension of civil rights to black Americans, the Supreme Court delivered a major victory for justice.

Nevertheless, in 1956 a group of Senators and Representatives - all from the South and Democrats bar two - signed and presented to Congress a manifesto against the Supreme Court ruling. In their Southern Manifesto, as it became known, the signing Congressmen attacked what they saw as abusive judicial activism in action. "The unwarranted decision of the Supreme Court in the public school cases is now bearing the fruit always produced when men substitute naked power for established law."¹⁵¹ They argued that where the Constitution kept silent, it was the States' right to regulate their internal affairs; the action of the Court was an unwarranted and illegal intervention. "We regard the decisions of the Supreme Court in the school cases as a clear abuse of judicial power. It climaxes a trend in the Federal Judiciary undertaking to legislate, in derogation of the authority of Congress, and to encroach upon the reserved rights of the States and the people."¹⁵² Their claims were supported by the Constitution, namely by the Tenth Amendment, and by past rulings of the Supreme Court.

In accordance with the Tenth Amendment, the separate but equal principle had been affirmed by the Supreme Court in previous occasions to be within the discretion of the States in regulating its public schools. "Though there has been no constitutional amendment or act of Congress changing this established legal principle almost a century old, the Supreme Court of the United States, with no legal basis for such action, undertook to exercise their naked judicial power and substituted their personal political and social ideas for the established law of the land." Both the legal precedents and the Constitution were now being overturned not because of any constitutional change but because of what they termed "temporary popular passion or the personal predilections of public officeholders."¹⁵³ In their attempt to perpetuate the old ways of the South, they contended that the desire to effect social and cultural change should not be the rationale by which to interpret the law. And yet, their arguments raised an interesting question, viz., the question of *vox populi* and *vox iustitiae* in a democracy, the will of the people and the abstract principles of law.

¹⁵¹ *The Southern Manifesto*. Congressional Record, 84th Congress, Second Session. Vol. 102, part 4 (March 12, 1956). Washington, D.C.: Governmental Printing Office, 1956: 4459-4460. <http://course.cas.sc.edu/germanyk/post1945/materials/The%20Southern%20Manifesto.htm>, (accessed June 14, 2013).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

To introduce on the reading of the law the spirit of the times is to endorse a rule of men, not a rule of law. There are few things as dangerous as the fluctuating desires and longings of men. Hence the need to uphold steadfast and general principles, as a guarantee against impulsiveness. *Vox iustitiae* stands as protection against the popular passions of the majority. In this case, however, the Southern Manifesto failed to realise that the outstanding question was the principle of justice itself as it was being usurped by the prejudices of the white majority in the South. If they truly feared the long term effects of federal interference in States' affairs, they should have defused the situation beforehand by giving black citizens social and political equality in accordance with the Constitution and the Declaration, and working to build a fairer society in the South. Instead, they chose to try and use the Constitution to protect their prominence and their way of life. If unwavering principles are the bastion of civil stability over time, it is nonetheless true that societies are ruled by men and in the South they placed popular majoritarian prejudices above the principles of law.

The dispute highlighted anew the tensions within the foundational values of the republic in America. The narrative of the Revolution and its ideals were likewise used by both the opponents of racial segregation and its supporters. For despite being surely wrong in their racism, the subscribers of the Southern Manifesto were nonetheless backed by the Constitution and the Tenth Amendment regarding State regulation of public schools. The clash between the differing interpretations of the principles of the country, moral and constitutional, was fragmenting their hitherto universalism. The question facing the nation is how to convey its values, intended as valid for all humankind regardless of race, culture and religion, when the grand narrative of the Revolution is used to defend conflicting viewpoints.

As the case of the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* illustrates, the moral and the legal offspring of the Revolution clashed decisively and utterly. How could the same event fail to produce a comprehensive vindication of its values when its democratic and liberal current was stopped by its anti-statist individualism and suspicion of enlarged government in the form of local governments which excluded individuals on account of the colour of their skin? The validity of America's ideals thus under examination, the country would face further soul-searching in the coming years as some people became convinced that the solution entailed a growing intervention of federal government to uphold justice. Self-righteousness would

grow as the values became strained by contradictions typical of the breaking down of consensus and the inability to make use of common sense.

Eisenhower was not a supporter of social reform by command, especially if done through law-making, by intervention of the Supreme Court in the social and political spheres.¹⁵⁴ The Justices were taking a leading role in shaping policy, taking sides in the social and political battles transforming the country. This growing intervention of the judicial branch of federal government was the logical consequence of the inflexibility of the Southern States in correcting what was a clear injustice towards black Americans. Not only was it unjust, it was self-defeating for the cause of autonomy of the States' legislatures. Failure to act was tantamount to abdication of rights, hence justifying federal intervention and encouraging further involvement from Washington. If the States had taken into their hands to rectify the wrongs being done to black Americans rather than opt for a criminal idleness, federal intervention could have been unnecessary. A more pro-active stance might have nipped in the bud a new stage of centralisation and government encroachment on State's rights and that after the *Brown* decision would gather pace. The *Brown* decision bolstered the Court into stretching its authority in the decades that followed, during the cultural and social revolution of the Sixties and Seventies. Thus, the Supreme Court moved beyond the interpretation of the laws into the making of laws, substituting itself to elected officials and representatives in Congress, a trend that has been gathering pace. In the social and cultural vertigo about to grip the country, the nine Justices of the Court would take it upon themselves to shape society, advance social reform, and dispense solutions to a myriad of social problems, not unlike a proper government ruling by decree over and beyond local legislatures.

Notwithstanding, the practical effects of *Brown vs. Board of Education* were not visible until 1957, when nine black children tried to attend a white school in Little Rock, Arkansas. Crowds of white people flocked to the school to prevent the children from entering and protests turned into violence. The situation escalated and captured national attention when the State governor called the National Guard to stop the children from going to school. Armed men stood at the door of the school to ward off whatever threat nine small children represented. Despite his personal objections, Eisenhower respected the Court's ruling as being the law of the land and when the

¹⁵⁴ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 393.

Arkansas governor tried to impede it by using the Arkansas National Guard, he understood that it was his duty to uphold the law. The former General invoked his constitutional role as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and ordered the National Guard to stand down and return to barracks. As the white segregationists kept their protests and threatened the children, Eisenhower sent federal troops to protect them. It was the first time that the federal government sent troops to the former Confederacy since the Reconstruction, earning Eisenhower a fair amount of abuse from the South and reawakening talk of secession.¹⁵⁵

Despite this apparent victory, segregation and racial injustice continued in the South and the actions of government only intensified the violence. Congress tried to correct one such violation of civil rights by passing the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first civil rights legislation since the Reconstruction and aimed at forcing the States into ending racial segregation and inequality. The 1957 Act mostly addresses voting rights and voter registration for blacks which were systematically segregated and prevented from voting in the South. This piece of legislation was passed in Congress over the objection of the Democratic Party, which controlled the region since 1876. Hatred of the Party of Lincoln, the man who had defeated the Confederacy, resentment because of the Reconstruction and the Republican Party's support for black Americans' rights after the war ensured for the Democrats what was known as the 'Solid South'. The Democratic Party reaped the electoral benefits of their support for racial segregation and the electoral exclusion of blacks until the 1960's. It was not until a decade after that the scenario was altered. However, Eisenhower's record regarding civil rights has been labelled as a failure. One of his most prominent biographers spares no words: "In civil rights, as in civil liberties, Eisenhower was not a reluctant leader – he was no leader at all. He just wished the problems would go away... With regard to civil rights...Eisenhower's refusal to lead was almost criminal."¹⁵⁶

IV

Eisenhower's time in the White House was within the most consistent period of economic growth the country has ever witnessed. The period from the end of World

¹⁵⁵ Piers Brendon, *Ike – The Life and Times of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 346.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower – Soldier and President* (London and Sidney: Pocket Books, 2003), 566.

War II and the first oil shock in 1973 was “a boom that astonished observers. One economist, writing about the twenty-five years following World War II, put it simply by saying that this was a ‘quarter century of sustained growth at the highest rates in recorded history.’”¹⁵⁷ Notwithstanding, in domestic policy, Eisenhower tried to pursue a middle course, continuing most of the New Deal programmes whilst emphasizing a balanced budget. Perhaps that combination of economic growth and perceived presidential inactivity helps explain the disappointment of some of his biographers about his part-time presidency and his preference for golfing rather than actively pursuing a more ambitious domestic agenda. Some urged the president to seize the economic opportunity to advance more public and social programmes, such as John Kenneth Galbraith. In his 1958 book, *The Affluent Society*, Galbraith accused American society of being excessively money-orientated, neglecting the plight of those less fortunate and ignoring policies that were fundamental to improve quality of life in America. He pushed for greater spending in public education, and more money for social services. “Galbraith was concerned above all with the contrast, as he saw it, between private opulence and public austerity.”¹⁵⁸

Unwilling to follow in presidential activism similar to that of his predecessors, Eisenhower has suffered the judgment of those who regard the Presidency as the true engine of evolution in the country. Roosevelt had set the example of what a President ought to be like and even Truman had tried to follow in his path, albeit with mixed success. They were the examples of what liberals expected from the Executive – strong presidential interventionism. Roosevelt had greatly expanded the power of the presidency thanks to his determination and forceful personality but also because of his increasing use of administrative law that governed the organization and regulation of government agencies. Congress delegates power to these agencies to act as instruments for the executive, and therefore they answer directly to the White House. Through these and the laws that administered them, Roosevelt managed to govern without Congress and shape federal law. Also, circumventing Congress as the source of legislation was done by using executive orders, directives issued by the President of the United States that have the power of federal law. In general, and ever since FDR, Presidents have been making use of executive orders to direct and manage the workings of the federal

¹⁵⁷ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 60.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 340.

government. Executive orders do not necessitate Congressional approval and have the same legal weight as laws passed by Congress.

In 1952, Truman had attempted to expand FDR's presidential actions by making use of his supposed emergency powers and thus rule by decree. With the war in Korea drawing more and more American forces, Truman responded to a strike in the steel industry by directing the Secretary of Commerce to seize and operate the steel mills, effectively nationalising the whole industry. Akin to FDR's executive orders seizing property in the name of national security, Truman's order was not supported by any constitutional proviso, but was based on the powers vested in the President by the Constitution as the Executive of the United States and as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The President, Truman said, had a duty to protect the country from harm. Since steel was vital to the war effort, Truman reasoned that national security required him to take control of the steel mills and break the strikes. Truman was innovating, true to the opinion of his advisers that constitutional doctrine was moulded by necessity. The steel industry went to the courts and the case reached the Supreme Court which ruled against the President. The Justices argued that he could not, by himself, make laws. "Justices were particularly caustic about the notion that the Commander in Chief clause conferred domestic powers on the Presidency."¹⁵⁹ No President could escape having his executive powers controlled by law or Congress, even by invoking his military role. Nonetheless, in its ruling, the Supreme Court implied that under more extreme circumstances, such an action could be acceptable.¹⁶⁰

Despite disappointing many that expected him to follow the examples of his predecessors, Eisenhower was much more astute and energetic than his critics credit him. Claims that he did not work hard enough nor exhibit leadership qualities were later subjected to revision. As archives and new material were made available, a new picture of Eisenhower emerged wherein he stands out as much more shrewd and sly than previously thought. As Arthur Schlesinger described it, "We may stipulate at once that Eisenhower showed much more energy, interest, self-confidence, purpose, cunning, and command than many of us supposed in the 1950's; that he was the dominant figure in his administration whenever he wanted to be."¹⁶¹ Although he presided during the perfect time for presidential activism, in economic terms, he preferred to work behind

¹⁵⁹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 144.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁶¹ Quoted in James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 249.

the scenes to deal with contentious issues. Leading from behind, he guided policy while allowing credit to be attributed to others - or blame, when things went wrong, therefore protecting himself. His furtive operating method had been decisive in bringing down Senator McCarthy, for example. He was scheming and ambitious, especially in the way he dealt with, and acted, to strengthen presidential power, a legacy which subsequent Presidents did not neglect.

Eisenhower inherited Truman's body of advisors and enlarged it, especially the National Security Council. The NSC became his preferred support unit for foreign and defence policy review. Given his military background, he was used to and relied heavily on a carefully selected and highly prepared staff, an inclination he carried with him into the White House and of which he made full use of during his presidency. New entities and advisory groups were created to follow and coordinate all NSC actions and the implementation of national security policy. Likewise, the Executive Office of the President, created in 1939 by Roosevelt, was strengthened and upgraded into a structured system with the inclusion of new assistants and advisors. Among these was the creation of the National Security Advisor, a position that was placed at the head of the NSC. The multiplication of executive offices and staff culminated in the appointment, by Eisenhower, of a White House Chief of Staff to organise and administer the growing apparatus. This development helped protect the White House staff from exterior interference by keeping it off limits from prying eyes and ensured the necessary tranquillity and privacy to carry on daily work. However, the Chief of Staff amounted also to a 'gatekeeper' managing the schedule and controlling access to the President. Long gone were the days when American Presidents strolled down Washington's avenues and were within reach of the common citizen and the White House was a public building open to all. The isolation and confidentiality of the Executive was confirmed by the fact that the appointments did not require Congressional approval. Free from inquiry, the Executive became ever freer to pursue its own inclinations and also increasingly removed from public and congressional scrutiny.

The growth of this unelected and unaccountable presidential household helped transform the Presidency into a distant and remote organ, separated and increasingly less accessible to congressional oversight. The internal business of the White House became off-limits to Congress after Eisenhower invoked executive privilege regarding access to White House information, effectively shutting the door on Congress and its

prerogative to be kept updated on the workings of the executive branch. During the decisive phase of the Red Scare, at the hearings that opposed McCarthy and the Army, Eisenhower gave strict orders to deny public disclosure of all information regarding any and all conversations and communications inside the White House or between staff of the Executive Office. “The president stated that government employees must be able to give candid advice on official matters and that all details of their communications with the executive branch should therefore be kept confidential.”¹⁶² The departure from accepted tradition and historical procedure between branches of government was so novel that one biographer states that “This was the most absolute assertion of presidential right to withhold information from Congress ever uttered to that day in American history. Earlier Presidents had held that that their conversations in Cabinet meetings were privileged and confidential, but none had ever dared extend this privilege to *everybody*[italics in original] in the Executive Branch.”¹⁶³ Arthur Schlesinger summed the new White House attitude regarding access to information thus: “The historic rule had been disclosure, with exceptions; the new rule was denial, with exceptions.”¹⁶⁴

Eisenhower’s initial claim of presidential immunity was met with general approval, mostly because it helped finish off McCarthy. The relief with the end of the man responsible for the Red Scare obfuscated a full comprehension of the meaning of this new development. Within the following years, the Eisenhower administration would resort to that expedient enough times to establish a hitherto unusual precedent as an unchallenged constitutional principle. Federal government, already overgrowing its boundaries, was now witnessing the detachment of one of its branches regarding the other two. “The casual adoption by Eisenhower of the doctrine of absolute executive privilege showed how the combination of congressional delinquency with the executive perspective could lead even a Whig administration to aggrandize the Presidency.”¹⁶⁵ To Surround the Presidency with walls of silence and a special secrecy prerogative enabled Eisenhower to follow the path of his predecessors, if not in political activism at least in constitutional innovation, paving the way for the enlargement and supremacy of the executive branch over the judicial and legislative.

¹⁶² Piers Brendon, *Ike – The Life and Times of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 274.

¹⁶³ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower – Soldier and President* (London and Sidney: Pocket Books, 2003), 378.

¹⁶⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 157.

¹⁶⁵ *Idem.*, 159.

V

His subtlety in domestic policy, however, contrasted with his intense foreign policy activities. And here he played a decisive role in consolidating America's presence in the world. His penchant for elusiveness reflected in his preference for the use of covert operations abroad to advance American interests and his strategic reliance on nuclear retaliation rather than committing to actual troops on the ground to face the Soviets. Eisenhower started his Presidency with an affirmation of the superiority of America and its values, pitting freedom against slavery, a common refrain. In his first inaugural address, in January 1953, the newly sworn President claimed that "At such a time in history, we who are free must proclaim anew our faith. This faith is the abiding creed of our fathers. It is our faith in the deathless dignity of man, governed by eternal moral and natural laws. This faith defines our full view of life. It establishes, beyond debate, those gifts of the Creator that are man's inalienable rights, and that make all men equal in His sight." Unlike the Soviet Union, then, "This faith rules our whole way of life. It decrees that we, the people, elect leaders not to rule but to serve." Therefore, in the great scheme of things, "Freedom is pitted against slavery; lightness against the dark."¹⁶⁶

But Eisenhower's moralising rhetoric unveiled some more material considerations regarding the country's fight against Communism. "We know, beyond this, that we are linked to all free peoples not merely by a noble idea but by a simple need. No free people can for long cling to any privilege or enjoy any safety in economic solitude. For all our own material might, even we need markets in the world for the surpluses of our farms and our factories. Equally, we need for these same farms and factories vital materials and products of distant lands." This candid acknowledgment reflected Eisenhower's previous view about foreign policy, expressed in 1951. The need to maintain free access to raw materials and markets was of paramount importance to the United States if it were to properly discharge "the responsibility of the free world's leadership."¹⁶⁷ However, Eisenhower was quick to dispel any doubts about American commitment.

¹⁶⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1953. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9600> (accessed June 25, 2013).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

The United States would not limit itself to the protection of its economic interests but strive to protect freedom worldwide. In addition, its leadership would be conscientious and not an imposition, deflecting John Quincy Adams' fears. "So it is proper that we assure our friends once again that, in the discharge of this responsibility, we Americans know and we observe the difference between world leadership and imperialism; between firmness and truculence; between a thoughtfully calculated goal and spasmodic reaction to the stimulus of emergencies." In this balancing act, then, the United States would observe a strict respect for the internal affairs of other nations, and the free choices of their peoples. "Honoring the identity and the special heritage of each nation in the world, we shall never use our strength to try to impress upon another people our own cherished political and economic institutions."¹⁶⁸ Unlike the Soviet Union, the leader of the free world promised to steer clear from what a few decades later would be popularly known as regime change.

Soon, however, Eisenhower would have to go back on his word. That very summer the CIA was involved in a coup to oust the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. After nationalising the British oil industry in Iran, Mossadegh faced an oil embargo organised by the British to force him to recant his position. The economic effects were quickly felt. Faced with the prospect of having Iran falling into the Soviet Union's orbit, the CIA moved to topple Mossadegh putting an end to the constitutional monarchy and inaugurating an increasingly autocratic rule under the Shah Reza Pahlavi. Decidedly pro-Western, the Shah became an indispensable ally in the fight against Communism but his reign ultimately grew so unpopular as to open the door to the Islamic revolution of 1979. Eisenhower could claim that the United States had not imposed its political and economic institutions on Iran, as the Soviet Union did with its satellite countries. However, neither could he claim to have respected the free will of the Iranian people, for Mossadegh was the elected leader of government.

The whole affair was a stain on America and its moral superiority. Eisenhower was unperturbed; during his administration, the CIA grew to become one of the main government agencies and a fundamental weapon in the Cold War. As he put it himself, the use of covert operations was "just about the only way to win World War III without having to fight it."¹⁶⁹ Departing from its role of gathering and evaluating foreign

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Piers Brendon, *Ike – The Life and Times of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 257.

intelligence in order to support national security decisions, Eisenhower was determined to use it as an operational element in the field. But he was also determined to avoid any embarrassment to himself or the executive branch. True to his cautious and furtive management of controversial issues that could shed an unfavourable light on him, the President avoided any direct link to the operations planned or to any knowledge of their preparation. “Establishing a pattern he would hold throughout his Presidency, he kept his distance and left no documents behind that could implicate the President in any projected coup. But in the privacy of the Oval Office, over cocktails, he was kept informed by Foster Dulles, and he maintained a tight control over the activities of the CIA.”¹⁷⁰

Unsurprisingly, then, the CIA became increasingly involved in secret manoeuvres to topple governments, democratically elected or otherwise. Guatemala in 1954, Indonesia in 1958 and especially Cuba, after the 1959 revolution and the victory of Fidel Castro, are some of the more significant examples. Some aspects of it all gave cause for reflection. Some of the coups involved the argument of the defence of American economic interests abroad, as in the case of Guatemala. The leader of the Central American republic had promoted land reform at the expense of foreign interests, mainly American companies that had business ventures in fruit production and commerce. The ease with which the first coups were carried out convinced many in the administration that covert operations were a simple and straightforward affair, thus encouraging its use around the world, from Japan to the Congo, in Africa. A final consideration is that its promotion belittles America and its values. As one biographer reflects, it “suggests that the United States, whose greatest glory is a system of open government, should ape the Soviet Union by taking its foreign affairs out of the realm of diplomacy and into that of conspiracy.”¹⁷¹

The death of Josef Stalin in March 5, 1953, seemed to open the possibility of improving relations between the two superpowers. In a speech delivered barely a month later, Eisenhower seized the occasion to send a message to the new Soviet leadership challenging it not to waste the opportunity for a peaceful coexistence between the two sides and the scaling down of international tensions. The President urged the Russians

¹⁷⁰ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower – Soldier and President* (London and Sidney: Pocket Books, 2003), 343.

¹⁷¹ Piers Brendon, *Ike – The Life and Times of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 257.

to “help turn the tide of history.” The best outcome of the present situation would be “a life of perpetual fear and tension; a burden of arms draining the wealth and the labor of all peoples; a wasting of strength that defies the American system or the Soviet system or any system to achieve true abundance and happiness for the peoples of this earth.”¹⁷² The worst would be atomic war and the destruction of humanity. Worried about the growing military budget, Eisenhower talked not of the cause of liberty, but the cause of humanity. “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense.” In 1896, William Jennings Bryan, opposing the gold standard in favour of silver, claimed that humanity was being sacrificed in a ‘cross of gold’, a metaphor that Eisenhower recaptured to good effect. “Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”¹⁷³

Eisenhower’s fine rhetoric seemed to have delivered when in late July an armistice in Korea was agreed. However, shortly after, the Soviet Union successfully tested a hydrogen bomb. The new Soviet leadership seemed willing to continue the confrontation and raise the stakes in the nuclear arms race. Together with superior number of ground forces, the military balance was now leaning towards the Russian side. Faced with the enormous manpower of the Red Army which the United States and its European allies could not match, the United States could only rely on its superior air power. The air superiority included hundreds of new jet propelled bombers, capable of dropping great numbers of nuclear weapons on Russian territory, thus delivering a crushing blow to the enemy. In October 1953, the National Security Council prepared a new paper (NSC 162/2) which advised a shift from reliance on conventional forces to nuclear weapons as the main focus of American defence. Eisenhower appreciated the strategy, which would allow a reduction of costs. Consequently, the New Look policy was unveiled the following January by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles who announced that the country would henceforth rely on massive retaliatory power. Eisenhower’s economic perspective fully embraced the New Look foreign policy. “Reliance on massive retaliation would enable reductions in the size of the army, which would have been very expensive to maintain at Korean War levels, and therefore to cut

¹⁷² Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Address* “‘The Chance for Peace’ Delivered Before the American Society of Newspaper Editors,” April 16, 1953. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9819> (accessed June 12, 2013).

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

costs. 'More bang for the buck,' contemporaries said. The President was especially anxious to balance the budget because he feared inflation, which he was sure would badly damage the economy and widen divisions in American society."¹⁷⁴

Soon, however, questions were raised about the implications of massive retaliation. The assumption was that the country would react with a nuclear strike in the event of a confrontation, even when faced with an attack with conventional forces. Opponents were quick to make themselves heard, especially at the higher levels of the military hierarchy. "Critics, led by the Army Chief of Staff Matthew Ridgway, charged that it was unbalanced and thereby forced America into an 'all or nothing' posture."¹⁷⁵ Others contended that it amounted to nuclear blackmail and that it would only accelerate the arms race as the Russians tried to match the strategy by building more nuclear weapons. Others still argued that the whole policy lacked credibility. "Potential aggressors, far from being deterred, would act with impunity, confident that the United States would not dare to use nuclear weapons in the vast majority of regional conflicts."¹⁷⁶ America would not break a butterfly upon a wheel. Through her allies and satellites, the Soviet Union could engage in wars by proxy forcing a policy of attrition knowing that the United States would have trouble justifying the use of nuclear weapons against smaller nations. A far more troubling question, though, revolved around the constitutional implications of the strategy. "If American policy was to retaliate instantly and massively against Soviet aggression, what happened to the congressional power to declare war? In March, Dulles explained: 'If the Russians attacked one of America's allies, there was no need for the President to go to Congress for a declaration of war'."¹⁷⁷ Predictably, Congress was not pleased and a constitutional quarrel was brewing, but fortunately constitutional scruples were never tested. Nonetheless, this was another assertion of presidential authority and of its growing pre-eminence.

The New Look foreign policy emphasized reliance on strategic nuclear weapons to deter potential threats, both conventional and nuclear. However, it carried considerable implications for Congress and its power to declare war. Although the

¹⁷⁴ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 288.

¹⁷⁵ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower – Soldier and President* (London and Sidney: Pocket Books, 2003), 368.

¹⁷⁶ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 290.

¹⁷⁷ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower – Soldier and President* (London and Sidney: Pocket Books, 2003), 368.

Constitution gives the war-making power to Congress, the President's control of foreign policy could produce such a situation as to force upon the country a state of war without congressional approval. Truman had already sent troops and committed the country to a war in Korea without seeking a declaration of war. In justifying his actions, he argued that the urgency of the matter did not allow time to wait for Congress to deliberate and issue a declaration of war. Should the North succeed in its offensive against the South the global peace system would collapse and the Communists would feel emboldened to strike again somewhere else. The threat had to be countered immediately; furthermore, pre-existent agreement to American participation in international alliances and treaties meant that the President did not need congressional approval to carry out America's duties under the treaty. As Commander in Chief and responsible for the security of the country, the President could deploy the armed forces when, in his judgement, the defence of the country so required. Thus, by creating a previous obligation, the country could be forced into a war by Presidential judgment and without Congress having the opportunity to consider the matter. This placed the most powerful power of a democracy in the hands of the President alone.

Just as the Anti-Federalists had feared, the presidency was wielding a power not unlike that of a king in pulling the country into a conflict. Back in 1848, faced with a presidential war without congressional approval caused by the actions of President James Polk, Representative Abraham Lincoln had raised the same concerns about the royal prerogative in foreign affairs. In a letter to a friend, Lincoln expressed his misgivings about trusting the assessment of the country's security needs solely into the hands of the President. "The reason why the Constitution had given the war-making power to Congress, Lincoln added, was because Kings had always been involving and impoverishing their people in wars. 'This our [constitutional] convention understood to be the most oppressive of all Kingly oppressions; and they resolved to so frame the Constitution that *no one man*[italics in original] should hold the power of bringing this oppression upon us'." ¹⁷⁸

Eisenhower left no doubts regarding his exclusive control of foreign policy and treaty-making power, which the Constitution requires be made with the "advice and consent" of the Senate.¹⁷⁹ As part of his strategy to isolate the Soviet Union,

¹⁷⁸ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 43.

¹⁷⁹ Article II, Section 2, Clause 2: "He [the President] shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur."

Eisenhower signed, and had Congress approve, a series of treaties and defence arrangements with other countries. Spain's Franco was admitted as an ally of the United States in its fight against Communism in 1953, by virtue of the Pact of Madrid. Despite its repressive rule at home and previous siding with Fascism and Nazism, its ideological opposition to Communism was enough to grant it a reprieve and admittance to the club of nations fighting to protect democracy and liberty. Expediency and scruples had already been forced into a mismatch when Portugal was accepted as a member of NATO, the military structure created to protect liberty in Europe.

Strategic convenience and political pragmatism were Eisenhower's foremost rules as he committed the United States to another collective security organisation in 1955, in Asia. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) was intended to be a replica of NATO to hold the spread of Communism in the region. In 1958, the country joined the Baghdad Pact, which included Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan, completing a ring surrounding the Soviet Union. The Soviet fear of enclosure was thus fulfilled; Cold War tensions increased as the two superpowers scrambled to complete military alliances, the Soviet Union and its European satellites pledging mutual support by the establishment of the Warsaw Pact. The spree of international accords and agreements had serious constitutional consequences. "The 'pactomania' of the 1950's made it more difficult than ever for Congress to prevent Presidents from deploying troops as treaty commitments and the national security were deemed to require (and the President was the judge of both). Presidents therefore acquired the habit of moving the armed forces as if they were institutional, if not personal, property."¹⁸⁰ The emancipation of the executive vis-à-vis the other branches of government was now coupled with the free use of a vast military establishment - a situation prone to trigger military hastiness in the most vulnerable branch of government given its individual nature.

America's authority regarding its allies was highlighted in dramatic fashion during the Suez crisis. The military intervention of France, Israel and the United Kingdom as a response to the Egyptian nationalisation of the canal was dealt a fatal blow with Eisenhower's repudiation of the action. Unwilling to condone the operation and escalate the situation in a strategically sensitive region, the President exerted pressure to force its allies to retreat, in a clear affirmation of America's imperial supremacy. Having advanced to Egypt on the conviction that Eisenhower would see the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 165.

rationality of the move and eventually support their intervention, France and the United Kingdom realised that no American ally was cleared to engage on its own initiative and without permission from Washington, D.C. Despite it being done in order to secure their national interests, there was no denying the colonisation of their foreign policy and dependency upon the needs and strategies of the United States. Eisenhower wielded his powers at will and further committed American troops to countries requesting help in combating Communist insurgency or attack, an assurance formalised in the Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957.¹⁸¹

These developments did not fail to create an atmosphere where the armed forces became pre-eminent in American society. In his Farewell Address, Eisenhower acknowledged this new state of affairs, a realisation that the country was fully immersed in a new reality, that of a global superpower responsible for the protection and well-being of a significant portion of the world. Faced with a “hostile ideology - global in scope, atheistic in character, ruthless in purpose, and insidious in method,” the country needed to keep its self-control in order to maintain the delicate balance between principle and expediency. That equilibrium had enabled it to become the “strongest, the most influential and most productive nation in the world” without threatening its key tenets of government: freedom and democracy. However, new threats emerged that had the potential to unbalance the country. Eisenhower admitted that America had forever been severed from the simple life, an idyllic past when it had no armaments industry and relied on “emergency improvisation of national defense.” The acceptance of international responsibilities after World War II compelled the country 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. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations.”¹⁸²

The country had forever changed. Gone were the days of the frontier and of rugged individualism that flourished thanks to an absent government, limited in size and

¹⁸¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Special Message to the Congress on the Situation in the Middle East,” January 5, 1957. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=11007> (accessed June 12, 2013).

¹⁸² Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Farewell Radio and Television Address to the American People,” January 17, 1961. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12086> (accessed June 18, 2013).

scope. The new reality forced itself on society and the individual; the consequences were alarming hence his famous warning.

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.¹⁸³

The unprecedented enlargement of government and its vast new accretion of responsibilities and powers were new in American history. The goal of freedom and democracy was faced with a vast standing army, just as feared by Federalists and Anti-Federalists at the Constitution's ratification debates. Furthermore, it was now strengthened with an arms industry whose economic and social influence – in economic investment and jobs – meant that it could dictate terms and shape vast portions of American society. Therefore, Eisenhower urged his fellow citizens: “We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

Eisenhower pointed to a second threat, less well-known but more relevant as time progressed, that of the technological revolution that accompanied the arms race. “The free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. Partly because of the huge costs involved, a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity.” The subjection of intellectuals and academia to the new order of things represented a significant loss of independence in the academic world. Hence, “The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project

¹⁸³ Ibid.

allocations, and the power of money is ever present - and is gravely to be regarded. Yet, in holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should, we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific-technological elite.”¹⁸⁴ A respected elite that could pervert the course of scientific enquiry and investigation in order to protect their jobs and assure the subsidies for research. As the revered guardians of knowledge, of the secrets of nature unseen to the rest of society, they had the power to divert the country’s attention to their own interests. An elite section of society, they could nonetheless fall prey to petty materialist urges and a very human survival instinct. In future years, this forgotten warning would prove as prophetic as the one regarding the armed forces and the extension of government powers.

Once back in the fray of international politics the United States would no longer leave centre stage and would remain as one of the two remaining global powers of the post-war order. The political choices forced upon the country by the confrontation with the Soviet bloc separated America from its romantic ideal of peaceful living and freedom from foreign entanglements. In his Farewell Address, in 1961, President Dwight Eisenhower recognized this fundamental change; he worried that the demands of the new world order and its harsh realities could fundamentally change the country and have a pernicious effect on its freedom and long held principles. 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.

VI

Critics blame Eisenhower for his inactivity and for failing to follow in the path of social reform, especially regarding civil rights. This despite the fact that his administration coincided with one of the country’s most prosperous economic periods in history. It should also be pointed out that he was President in a period of serious international tension and danger, managing nonetheless to avoid involving the country in war, and in fact rescuing the country from one, a feat achieved by few presidents since 1945. But this was not enough to win his detractors. His demeanour in domestic affairs failed to inspire people and the idea emerged that he preferred to focus on

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

international events. But we should probably recognise in this a manifestation of discontent toward a perceived neglect of social progress at home.

One such critic labelled his years in the White House as an “historical intermission when America stopped to snooze while the world churned inconsiderately on... [that] era of insufferable moral posturing abroad and irresponsible political abdication at home.” His eagerness to avoid controversy and escape censure is described as belonging to “a mind which sought consensus at the expense of conviction.”¹⁸⁵ Unsurprisingly, Eisenhower did not share in the same opinion. In 1956, after suffering a heart attack the President pondered stepping down and not running for re-election that year. As he looked around for a possible successor, he could find nobody that could match him, casting doubting glances on all possible candidates: none was *capax imperii*. “In finding shortcomings in every possible successor, Eisenhower was coming to see himself as indispensable.” His staff and closest advisers reinforced the belief that he alone could keep the peace, that he was the captain to steady the nation’s ship during the storm. His Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, supported the same conviction. “Dulles believed that America’s standing in the world had never been higher, that Eisenhower was the most trusted leader around the world and the greatest force for peace. Eisenhower wrote in his diary, ‘I suspect that Foster’s estimate concerning my own position is substantially correct.’”¹⁸⁶

Still reeling under the influence of Roosevelt’s New Deal at home and the emergence of the Cold War abroad, America was slowly realising the extent to which it had changed. If Eisenhower’s years as President were a sort of an interregnum, the ‘historical intermission’ must be understood as the period during which the nation fully absorbed the fact that it was immersed in a new reality: that of a superpower in a new world order. Detached from its traditional attitudes of unilateralism and small government, Eisenhower was the catching of breath, the pause to allow the country to process the new state of affairs after the eventful Truman presidency and the end of World War II.

For some, the new order of things, less than appealing, was truly appalling. Gareth Garrett, author and journalist, deprecated the effects upon the Republic arising from America’s growing foreign involvements since the end of World War II. The full

¹⁸⁵ Piers Brendon, *Ike – The Life and Times of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 405.

¹⁸⁶ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower – Soldier and President* (London and Sidney: Pocket Books, 2003), 418.

awareness of what had happened to the agrarian ideal of the Thomas Jefferson and the desire to keep America away from the convulsions of history was summed by Garrett in a single word: empire.

We have crossed the boundary that lies between Republic and Empire. If you ask when, the answer is that you cannot make a single stroke between day and night; the precise moment does not matter. There was no painted sign to say: 'You now are entering Imperium.' Yet it was a very old road and the voice of history was saying: 'Whether you know it or not, the act of crossing may be irreversible.' And now, not far ahead, is a sign that reads: 'No U-turns.'¹⁸⁷

Garrett was aware that for the casual observer, the outer appearance of the Republic looked intact. The ancient forms and institutions were still in place and the Constitution still ruled the land. Nonetheless, he drew a parallel with the Roman revolution and the way in which Augustus had brought about the Principate and the age of Empire while maintaining the trappings and institutions of the Republic to soothe consciences and those more scrupulous about the change. For all purposes and intents, Rome was still a Republic, commanded by the Senate and the People of Rome, but in practice power now lay in the palace and was held firmly in the hands of the leader, supported by a vast military. Revolution within the form, Garrett called it after quoting Aristotle: "People do not easily change, but love their own ancient customs; and it is by small degrees only that one thing takes the place of another; so that the ancient laws will remain, while the power will be in the hands of those who have brought about a revolution in the state."¹⁸⁸ As we see it, Eisenhower's administration was the culmination of an arguably comparable transformation in America.

An uncompromising opponent of FDR's New Deal and the progressive agenda behind it, Garrett argued that the first positive sign of the change and the will of the population to hold on to their liberties lay in the relationship between the government and its citizens. "The first article of our inherited tradition, implicit in American thought from the beginning until a few years ago was this: '*Government is the responsibility of a self-governing people*'. That doctrine has been swept away; only the elders remember it. Now, in the name of democracy, it is accepted as a political fact that *people are the*

¹⁸⁷ Gareth Garrett, *The People's Pottage* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1953), 117.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

responsibility of government. The forms of republican government survive; the character of the state has changed [italics in original].”¹⁸⁹ A critique that is reminiscent of Alexis de Tocqueville’s own warning against the decay of democracy into consented tyranny because of the apathy and indifference of the population as long as their needs are met by government.¹⁹⁰ Garrett’s argument follows the Frenchman’s reasoning about the preponderance of government in the daily lives of its citizens.

Formerly the people supported government and set limits to it and minded their own lives. Now they pay for unlimited government, whether they want it or not, and the government minds their lives - looking to how they are fed and clothed and housed; how they provide for their old age; how the national income, which is the product of their own labor, shall be divided among them; how they shall buy and sell; how long and how hard and under what conditions they shall work, and how equity shall be maintained between the buyers of food who dwell in the cities and the producers of food who live on the soil. For the last named purpose it resorts to a system of subsidies, penalties and compulsions, and assumes with medieval wisdom to fix the just price. This is the Welfare State. It rose suddenly within the form.¹⁹¹

According to him, the Constitution had not been created to foster any form of social or economic theory. Its purpose was merely to disperse power among the various branches of government and, thus, better protect individual liberty. However, to overcome the Constitution and to evade its restraints became an accepted exercise of the art of government, followed by Presidents with a reformist agenda. His favourite target was FDR, and he pointed an accusing finger to his handling of the Supreme Court as well as criticising the latter for initially objecting to his proposals only to succumb to pressure and yield to the President’s wishes, thus changing the Republic. The original precepts and intentions of the Constitution, representative and limited government in the republican form, have been eroded away by argument and rhetoric, according to him, paving the way for the subversion of the Constitution and the development of Empire.

Garet Garrett puts forward four requisites which, for him, represent the true hallmarks of Empire. To him, the overcoming of the constitutional republic has bred the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 119.

¹⁹⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II (London: Everyman’s Library, 1994), 318 – 319.

¹⁹¹ Garet Garrett, *The People’s Pottage* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1953), 120.

development and establishment of all four in their entirety: the dominance of the executive over the other two branches of government, the subordination of domestic policy to the requirements of foreign policy, the ascendancy of the military way of thinking and the existence of a system of satellite nations orbiting the centre of empire. All these could be observed by Garrett and his contemporaries as being in existence since the organization of the world order in two opposing blocs, America being at the head of one of them. By committing the country to the various military alliances that shaped the Cold War, Truman and Eisenhower had placed the executive at the top of the governmental structure and forced internal developments to conform to the exigencies of international responsibilities. The Cold War expanded the militarisation of the country and the steady growth of Eisenhower's military-industrial complex, a garrison-state prepared to wage war at any moment with the ensuing military state of mind that subdued and intimidated the civilian mind. War dominated the thinking of the country, all of its resources focused for such eventuality with an engaged guard of satellite nations ready to follow in case of need.

Of all these developments, the supremacy of the executive was the one that most worried Robert A. Taft. Although he warned against the enlargement of government in general, he was particularly concerned about the threat posed by the hold foreign policy had over the country and its effects in the country's constitutional balance. Especially worrying was the predominance the Presidency had over the definition of foreign policy. Undoubtedly, the Constitution granted the executive a major role in directing the country's foreign policy, but much of the current power it currently possessed had been unduly appropriated. As Taft saw it, the recent protagonism of the Presidency in matters of foreign policy had the potential for causing great disruption internally.

There can be no question that the executive departments have claimed more and more power over the field of foreign policy at the same time that the importance of foreign policy and its effect on every feature of American life has steadily increased. If the present trend continues it seems to me obvious that the President will become a complete dictator in the entire field of foreign policy and thereby acquire power to force upon Congress all kinds of domestic policies which must necessarily follow.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Robert A. Taft, *A Foreign Policy for Americans* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1951), 21.

Taft feared that international involvements would impose over the country, forcing it to shape its internal decisions in order to feed and sustain its commitments abroad. With such power concentrated in a single pair of hands - resorting to executive privilege and national security claims to escape congressional oversight - the President had the potential to determine alone the country's course of action with little impediment. Recent developments in the field of constitutional construal of executive powers seemed to confirm Taft's reservations. "Also, for many years the State Department has been developing a theory that almost any action can be taken by executive agreement, which does not absolutely require any congressional approval at all, instead of by the treaty method prescribed in the Constitution. Undoubtedly, the necessity of obtaining a two-thirds vote in the Senate is very difficult and has encouraged many people to think that this development was necessary."¹⁹³ External pressures enforced the acceptance of the cult of presidential authority and the hegemony of the political state's needs over those of the individual. This suffocating of the powerful American individualistic undercurrents would erupt within the next decade.

Robert Taft's premonitory remarks are rooted in a deep American tradition that highlights distrust of authority and the preservation of liberty. By the end of his presidency, Eisenhower came to share many of the fears of his former rival for the GOP nomination in his Farewell Address. Taft's alarm about executive dominance converged with Eisenhower's warning regarding the ascendancy of the military state of mind in the form of the growing military-industrial complex. However, whilst the former President looked to the forces surrounding government and their strength in diverting the course of the national ship, the Senator was more concerned with the impact of an unbridled Presidency. "If in the great field of foreign policy the President has the arbitrary and unlimited powers he now claims, then there is an end to freedom in the United States not only in the foreign field but in the great realm of domestic activity which necessarily follows any foreign commitments. The area of freedom at home becomes very circumscribed indeed."¹⁹⁴

To Taft the question lay in the matter of the corrupting effect of power upon human nature. "If the President has unlimited power to involve us in war, then I believe that the consensus of opinion is that war is more likely. History shows that when the

¹⁹³ Ibid., 22.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 23.

people have the opportunity to speak they as a rule decide for peace if possible. It shows that arbitrary rulers are more inclined to favor war than are the people at any time.”¹⁹⁵ It was precisely fear about an arbitrary ruler endowed with the power to drag the country into war that had been in the minds of the delegates to the constitutional convention when they placed the war-making power in the hands of Congress, a collective body.

Confronted with the recent example of the British King’s arbitrary deployment of troops in the colonies, the delegates were loath to institute the same example in the brand new Republic by giving the President the final say regarding war and peace. Therefore, Congress alone would have the power to declare war, and the President charged with the direction of troops in the field as commander in chief. The Constitution plainly sets the legislative branch above the executive branch, with Congress addressed in Article I and the Presidency following in Article II. Clearly, the framers understood that execution was to follow deliberation and authorisation. In case of an emergency, however, the President had the power to use the armed forces to repel an invasion, given the urgency of the situation and the time it would take to assemble Congress in order to authorise the use of the military to face the attack. A surprise attack required an immediate defence which the vagaries of politics and congressional delegates were too slow to provide for. The President had a defensive power, only Congress could initiate a war; once declared, it was for the President to see it through.

The president retained the inherent power of any sovereign to employ armed forces to meet a sudden attack, whether to protect the ‘homeland’ of the United States or American citizens abroad. But this executive power was limited to the immediate situation. Should hostile forces launch ‘invasions’ of the United States, Congress alone had the right of ‘declaring war’ in response, and of granting the president the authority to ‘command’ the troops through subordinate officials, both civilian and military.¹⁹⁶

Lincoln himself agreed that ‘no one man’ should have the power to commit the country to a war. Being commander in chief was a function, not an office, a distinction which, if inscribed in the Constitution, might have stopped many Presidents’ claims to send troops abroad and to engage them in combat. As Alexander Hamilton made clear,

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹⁶ Peter Irons, *War Powers – How the Imperial Presidency Hijacked the Constitution* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 23.

the President could exercise his powers as commander in chief “only in the direction of war when authorized or begun.”¹⁹⁷ As things stood, the President was capable of deploying the armed forces under the requirements of the multitude of military and defence treaties signed, therefore effectively bypassing the need to ask Congress for a formal declaration of war. The Presidency thus hijacked the congressional war-making powers and claimed them to itself.

Since 1945, as the Cold War realities forced themselves over the country, Truman and Eisenhower moved to appropriate for the Presidency ever-increasing powers in the realm of foreign policy. Those harsh realities, whether sought or coerced, placed new and unknown demands upon government to attend to with diligence and precision. The American government was called to perform and deliver on things it had never been asked to do. As Hamilton had reminded his readers during the debates to ratify the 1787 Constitution, “It is of the nature of war to increase the executive at the expense of the legislative authority.”¹⁹⁸ Or, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. put it, evoking Randolph Bourne, war is the health of the Presidency.¹⁹⁹ If the powers of the executive are only established during times of crisis, what happens when that danger is permanent? “The new American approach to world affairs, nurtured in the sense of omnipresent crisis, set new political objectives, developed new military capabilities, devised new diplomatic techniques, invented new instruments of foreign operations and instituted a new hierarchy of values. Every one of these innovations encouraged the displacement of power, both practical and constitutional, from an increasingly acquiescent Congress into an increasingly imperial Presidency.”²⁰⁰

The fears of the Founding Fathers, about placing fundamental power at the disposal of one single individual, rather than diffuse it over several branches, were now materialising. The purpose of dividing power within the new Republic was that it was harder to corrupt all three branches at the same time. With Eisenhower’s strengthening of the Presidency, human nature and its deep inner workings would henceforth play an increasingly decisive role in shaping policy. Now, the President, the most vulnerable element of the constitutional arrangement, would seize protagonism in the Republic and determine the course of the national ship. With the modern mythologizing of the

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in Peter Irons, *War Powers – How the Imperial Presidency Hijacked the Constitution* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 26.

¹⁹⁸ Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist n° 8”, in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 33.

¹⁹⁹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 82.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

Presidency and the media's penchant for idolisation and elevating presidents to Olympian heights, it was all the more inevitable that successive Presidents would see themselves as the main centre of gravity in the American system of government.

Despite the idealist desire underpinning America's foreign engagement, the lack of a constitutional framework designed for such purpose showed in this period. The Executive's appropriation of powers and rebalancing of the constitutional structure that took place after 1945 were effected to obviate the shortcomings of the Framers' architecture, evidence of a realist outlook on the part of the former revolutionaries. The country was not intended to disseminate the Revolution and neither were they willing to provide it with the tools for it.

Eisenhower we credit as a constitutional revolutionary in that he understood the need to strengthen the Executive and acted accordingly, surrounding the Presidency with a panoply of offices and staff that isolated it from interference and increased its efficiency. He placed it atop the pyramid and laid the foundations for the security establishment's affirmation. This he acknowledged in his final warning which must be regarded as his realisation of the magnitude of the transformation from the rural, parochial country of the foundation.

Despite the harsh criticisms facing his administration, we view Eisenhower as a key President, albeit one that worked on deception and obscurity. His elusive character showed in other decisions during his time at the White House, along with his administrative capabilities. Already displayed in the planning and execution of the Normandy landings during the war, Eisenhower's penchant for subtlety showed in some of his legislation, namely the Interstate Highway System. It was a public works project of enormous proportions, employing thousands of people and extending for decades. But although it was a programme that would make FDR proud, it managed to be approved and executed mostly without protest for it was cloaked as a strict common sense defensive measure aimed to facilitate the evacuation of people from cities in case of a nuclear attack. But its effects stretched deeper as it also was vital in integrating the nation's economy with a close-knit network of transportation arteries and thus substantiate federal involvement.

More importantly, we hold him as fundamental for the consolidation of the country's internationalist section. Not only did he strengthen the military alliances that materialised America's world power, he also reinforced the Presidency and equipped it

with the administrative tools with which to properly discharge its duties as the head of the new imperial Republic. The agencies and departments surrounding the office effectively insulated it from outside interference besides ensuring its autonomy. And this Eisenhower coupled with executive privilege, paving the way for the gradual emancipation of the Executive regarding the other branches of government. Knowing that the Constitution was not prepared to deal with the new international commitments and the governmental restructuring necessary to deliver the speed and efficiency required, he determined to raise the Presidency as the primary organ of decision-making. Congress, given its multiple nature, was wholly inadequate to play the role; an individual body would be much better at concentrating and streamlining decisions. It amounted to a quiet revolution, with significant implications for the future. And it was carried out by a subtle and improbable revolutionary, one who delved and operated in the shadows, unnoticed. Just as Truman was decisive in that he pushed the country toward international commitment, we hold Eisenhower equally decisive with his constitutional revolution, in which the supremacy of the Executive was to become a matter of doctrine rather than mere expediency.

CHAPTER THREE

The most vulnerable element of the constitutional arrangement

The management of foreign relations appears to be the most susceptible of abuse, of all the trusts committed to a Government, because they can be concealed or disclosed, or disclosed in such parts & at such times as will best suit particular views; and because the body of the people are less capable of judging & are more under the influence of prejudices, on that branch of their affairs, than of any other. Perhaps it is a universal truth that the loss of liberty at home is to be charged to provisions against danger real or pretended from abroad.

James Madison, letter to Thomas Jefferson, May 13, 1798

I

As the curtains closed on Eisenhower's administration, the country focused on a new presidential election. On the Republican side was Richard Nixon, Eisenhower's Vice-President; on the Democratic ticket was a young Senator from Massachusetts known for his eloquent oratory and inspiring speeches. As the country faced the new decade, he warned that "The times are too grave, the challenge too urgent, and the stakes too high... We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier - the frontier of the 1960's - a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils - a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats."²⁰¹ Thus spoke the Democratic candidate for the coming presidential elections, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. His acceptance speech was full of historical references from Abraham Lincoln to Franklin D. Roosevelt, and claiming their legacy for his candidacy. As he made his audience dream at the mention of those names, he put forth a forceful image of leadership and vigour, warning that far from easy promises he would be a demanding President.

Woodrow Wilson's New Freedom promised our nation a new political and economic framework. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal promised security and succor to those in need. But the New Frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises - it is a set of challenges. It sums up not what I intend to offer the American people, but what I intend to ask of them. It appeals to their pride, not to their pocketbook - it holds out the promise of more sacrifice instead of more security.²⁰²

Kennedy was thus recovering one of the most fundamental American values, the rugged individualism emanating from the Frontier days, and reminding his listeners that the promises of American life rested solely in their hands and their hard work. After Eisenhower's stasis, "after eight years of drugged and fitful sleep,"²⁰³ Kennedy was promising a new America and a new future.

Under Ike, there had been no rapture, no grand idealism, no project for America, his critics contended. With JFK, the dream was back. Young, good-looking, the aura of

²⁰¹ John F. Kennedy, "Address of Senator John F. Kennedy Accepting the Democratic Party Nomination for the Presidency of the United States - Memorial Coliseum, Los Angeles," July 15, 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25966> (accessed August 13, 2013).

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

money and the trappings of wealth making him even more attractive to the media, John F. Kennedy had also won a Pulitzer Prize with a book about courage in politics.²⁰⁴ Dealing with the virtue of staying true to principles under pressure Kennedy was no stranger to political necessities, however: “at a Harvard dinner in February 1952 John F. Kennedy went out of his way to defend McCarthy as ‘a great American patriot.’”²⁰⁵ Despite his youth, the aspirant leader was careful not appear as inexperienced. In a campaign dominated by foreign policy issues, he kept a stance of determination and toughness towards the Communist threat. In a speech before the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah, in September 1960, the Democratic candidate whipped up religious sentiment in his message about the confrontation against the USSR. Not wanting to appear soft or naïve about the ideological principles of Communism he stated that “the enemy is the Communist system itself - implacable, insatiable, unceasing in its drive for world domination... this is not a struggle for supremacy of arms alone - it is also a struggle for supremacy between two conflicting ideologies: Freedom under God versus ruthless, godless tyranny.”²⁰⁶

The campaign came to a head during the televised election debates that pitted both candidates against each other. It was the first time in American electoral history that such an event took place and Nixon was to find out that with the advent of television in politics, appearances were everything. “Americans who listened on the radio thought that Nixon, a trained debater since high school, had ‘won’. The majority of millions who watched on television, however, seemed attracted to Kennedy. Nixon had hurt his knee campaigning and had a chest cold. Refusing to apply heavy makeup, he looked haggard and unshaven, and he sounded hoarse. Kennedy, by contrast, arrived tanned from California and seemed cool and controlled.”²⁰⁷ The era of political ideas and arguments, however vapid, was being replaced by looks and emotive oratory, however empty. Nineteenth-century politicians invariably referred back to the

²⁰⁴ The authorship of the book (*Profiles in Courage*) is disputed, with most of the work attributed to Kennedy’s speechwriter, Ted Sorensen. Nevertheless, the book’s success and the Pulitzer award established Kennedy’s credentials as an intellectual and helped make him a credible presidential candidate.

²⁰⁵ Piers Brendon, *Ike – The Life and Times of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 213.

²⁰⁶ John F. Kennedy, “Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Salt Lake City, Utah, Mormon Tabernacle,” September 23, 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=74176>, (accessed August 19, 2013).

²⁰⁷ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 437.

Constitution. By contrast, modern politics was becoming a contest of improving on promises.

Kennedy understood early on the immense power of television and its value for politics. The period is marked by the work of Marshall McLuhan on mass communication and Kennedy's apt control of visual communication. His televised inauguration contrasted sharply with that of Eisenhower, a mere 4 years prior, and signals the change from a grey, perfunctory ceremony to a lively public ritual. But it also showed how Kennedy realised that the message is better transmitted by the image it conveys than in its actual content. As each candidate announces a new vision, his successor must outshine him with a New Deal, the Fair Deal, the New Frontier, the promise of a new day, of a new world. A cynic could argue that the American promise was at risk of becoming the realm of symbolic formulas so riddled with clichés as to be devoid of any real meaning.

The result of the election, however, was far from a foregone conclusion. Polls were inconclusive, placing the candidates neck and neck in the race. But John Kennedy had important assets, not least his family's fortune and his father, Joseph Kennedy, "the cold and ruthless patriarch of the family who stopped at almost nothing where the political advancement of his sons was concerned."²⁰⁸ To bolster his chances, Joseph Kennedy advised his son to select as his running mate Lyndon Johnson, the Senate majority leader from Texas that Kennedy's advisers, and especially his brother Robert, despised as an unscrupulous political dealer and a conservative. Johnson could deliver Texas, a vital state for any presidential hopeful's aspirations. His choice of Vice-President was bound to outrage the liberal wing of the party, however. A meeting held with a delegation of the labour movement of the Democratic Party left Kennedy with no doubts. "When Kennedy now introduced the 'possibility' of Johnson, the labour people, remembering Johnson's support of the detested Landrum-Griffin labour bill as recently as 1959, were startled... They doubted whether they could hold their own people in line and predicted mutiny in the convention and a fight on the floor."²⁰⁹ The situation did not bode well for the presidential candidate as the left wing of the party was up in arms against his choice. His brother tried to argue Lyndon Johnson into pulling out for the sake of the party by going to talk to him in his room. During the conversation, "Johnson

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 435.

²⁰⁹ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days – John F. Kennedy in the White House* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), 46 - 47.

picked up the phone to find out what Jack really wanted. Kennedy assured him that he remained the choice, and the deal later sailed through the convention. Johnson, an extraordinarily sensitive man, never forgave Bobby or forgot the insult. In the open, however, he feigned his enthusiasm for Kennedy.”²¹⁰

The 1960 presidential election was one of the closest elections on record in modern America. Kennedy beat Nixon by a mere 113,000 votes out of 68 million votes cast, taking 303 electoral votes to Nixon’s 219 (segregationist Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia won 15 votes).²¹¹ But Nixon would have won if he had taken Texas, where he lost by only 46,000 votes, and Illinois, where he lost by fewer than 9,000.²¹² There were rumours of election fraud in Texas and Illinois and some still call the election a shady affair. “The key to stealing an election is knowing how many votes you need. On Election Night 1960, the Daley machine [Chicago Mayor Richard Daley was Kennedy’s national campaign manager] held back Chicago’s results until Republican-leaning areas in the city’s suburbs and in downstate Illinois had reported their totals.”²¹³ When the results finally came, Chicago gave Kennedy enough votes to win Illinois by less than 9,000 votes, helped by such oddities as a voting precinct where “there were 397 votes – but only 376 voters.”²¹⁴ In Lyndon Johnson’s home State of Texas, there were similar peculiarities, such as in “Angelina County, where in one precinct 86 people voted, but the reported vote was 148 for Kennedy, 24 for Nixon. Meanwhile, in Fannin County, where there were fewer than 5,000 registered voters, more than 6,000 votes were cast.”²¹⁵ Such democratic originality we believe would have fortified the Founding Fathers resolution in favour of the separation of powers in the Republic.

Kennedy was a charismatic leader, whose language stirred his audiences. The speech he delivered at his Inauguration was almost wholly dedicated to foreign policy and it became famous for his inspiring appeal to the nation to advance America’s ideals

²¹⁰ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 439.

²¹¹ The President and Vice-President are not elected directly by the voters but by the States, which have a number of Electors attributed according to their population size. The voters in each State vote for their candidate and the victor in each carries the total number of Electors.

²¹² Lynn Vincent and Robert Stacy McCain, *Donkey Cons: Sex, Crime, and Corruption in the Democratic Party* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Current, 2006), 47 - 48. For Nixon’s own perspective and more details on the matter, see Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Volume 1 (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 277ff.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 46.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

- “ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country.” In his reference to the country’s revolutionary ideals, he stated: “I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago. The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe - the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.”²¹⁶

Inspiring words, but which we find somewhat disappointing for those who expected a New Frontier in domestic policies inspired by a Progressive ideal of government as the engine of munificence. In this lesser-known excerpt of his Inaugural Address, Kennedy reaffirms the long-held belief that the rights of man derive from natural law, they are inherent to every human being since his birth. But how far should government interfere to advance and effect those rights is left without answer. Progressives looking for a champion would have to wait for his successor. His plea to his countrymen not to wait on the country to advance their cause runs parallel with his praise of America’s ideal of individualism and self-reliance in his book, *Profiles in Courage*. Regarding the challenges of the Cold War, and the calls for greater uniformity to meet that challenge, he said that “only the very courageous will be able to keep alive the spirit of individualism and dissent which gave birth to this nation, nourished it as an infant and carried it through its severest tests upon the attainment of its maturity.”²¹⁷ Although a modern Democrat, Kennedy seemed to have his ideas firmly anchored in deep American values of individualism and self-reliance. This ideal, of independent individuals relying primarily on their efforts to overcome life’s many obstacles, he feared would be submerged by the exigencies of external pressures.

Kennedy was a liberal Democrat, which is to say he espoused the party’s social and economic platforms and goals, namely an enlargement of civil liberties and federal intervention to regulate the economy. However, as James Patterson asserts, “Personal predilections reinforced the caution of the Kennedys. Concerning civil rights, as concerning other domestic issues, the President and the Attorney General [his brother

²¹⁶ John F. Kennedy, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1961. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8032> (accessed August 13, 2013).

²¹⁷ John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York and London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 17

Robert] remained cool and detached. While they believed abstractly in the goal of better civil rights, they felt no passionate attachment to the cause.”²¹⁸ When told that African diplomats were being refused service in restaurants en route to Washington, Kennedy suggested they should not do it. When confronted with the answer that it was hard to educate the managers, he replied: “That’s not what I’m talking about. Can’t you tell those African ambassadors not to drive on Route 40? It’s a hell of a road... Tell these ambassadors I wouldn’t think of driving from New York to Washington. Tell them to fly!”²¹⁹

Confidence and charisma Kennedy had in abundance. Enough to raise hopes of change, to see him as the torchbearer of a new generation with new political ideas. “He was poised, handsome, youthfully energetic, and he could literally light up a room. Intellectuals and journalists responded favourably to his dry wit, irreverence, and cool, detached intelligence...in calling for change he appealed to the idealistic hopes of the people. By any standard he was the most charismatic American politician of the post-war era, especially to women and younger people.”²²⁰ Making full use of the political potential of television, he reached out to the media as often as possible, inaugurating the age of televised presidential press conferences. Where his predecessors had presided over a worrying growth of the executive branch and federal government in general, “the extraordinarily telegenic Kennedy greatly accelerated these trends by drawing popular attention to the pomp and circumstance of the office. Kennedy and his elegant wife Jackie invited a parade of famous artists, musicians, and writers to the White House.” Jackie Kennedy appointed fashion designer Oleg Cassini as official designer to the White House. The presidency became the centre of American political and cultural life, attracting media attention to every aspect of its daily routines, the glamour, the social life, and Jacqueline’s fashion choices. “Many reporters, themselves young and liberal, lavished attention on the high culture and taste that the Kennedy’s appeared to bring to government. An air of royalty was enveloping the land of the common man.”²²¹ By surrounding himself with the best and brightest that America could offer as advisers, especially academics from the country’s elite institutions, the White House looked

²¹⁸ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 474 - 475.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 475.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 438.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 460.

indeed like a court, far removed from the frugality and austerity of the Republic's first administrations.

The special aura surrounding his name was firmly established after his death when his widow arranged an interview with *Life* magazine. In that interview, she consolidated the myth by telling the world how Kennedy loved the musical *Camelot*, oft quoting the lines "don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief moment that was known as Camelot." She added that the Kennedy administration had indeed been Camelot, "a magic moment in American history, when gallant men danced with beautiful women, when great deeds were done, when artists, writers, and poets met at the White House and the barbarians beyond the walls were held back... it will never be that way again... There'll never be another Camelot again."²²² His premature death deprived posterity of knowing how his administration would have dealt with the two great issues that tore the country apart in the Sixties: the civil rights struggle and Vietnam. The emotional response to his death prevented a full and detached review of his Presidency and elevated him to inordinate heights in the collective mind. In modern televised politics, it is not about what one does as much as what people believe one can do. Recent popular and media-favourite administrations emulating the charisma of Kennedy's administration, placing style over substance, will have a better chance at being judged by history, although we are of the opinion that the adoration of the mass media will preclude any objective evaluation.

II

Being the focal point of the hopes and aspirations of a country naturally raised expectations about what Kennedy's New Frontier would be like. Far from being a set of ideas, the label was rather a state of mind, a "thrust of action and purpose" as one enthralled follower explains. The best and brightest assembled by Kennedy, the New Frontiersmen "swarmed in from state governments, the universities, the foundations, the newspapers, determined to complete the unfinished business of American society...they proposed to roll up their sleeves and make America over. For another, they aspired, like their President, to the world of ideas as well as to the world of power."²²³ We take it as an attitude of vigorous disposition to get things done, a willingness to use the world of

²²² *Ibid.*, 523.

²²³ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days – John F. Kennedy in the White House* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), 190.

ideas at the service of the world of power. The ideal that guided them was a vision of democracy, to complete democracy's values in America by making American society more just and inclusive.

For the New Frontiersmen, everything seemed possible; the whole government structure was imbued by the same feeling of feasibility. "The currents of vitality radiated out of the White House, flowed through the Government and created a sense of vast possibility. The very idea of the new President taking command as tranquilly and naturally as if his whole life had prepared him for it could not but stimulate a flood of buoyant optimism." Hope and change that Kennedy apparently knew was but a politician's expedient to feed the masses. "The President knew better than anyone how hard his life was to be. Though he incited the euphoria, he did so involuntarily, for he did not share it himself. I never heard him use the phrase 'New Frontier'; I think he regarded it with some embarrassment as a temporary capitulation to rhetoric... In any case, he knew the supreme importance of a first impression and was determined to create a picture of drive, purpose and hope."²²⁴ Thus, it is our contention that in such an atmosphere of charged expectations, the leadership skills of the President would prove decisive in delivering the promised change.

John F. Kennedy's tenure began burdened by pressing foreign policy issues, which would effectively drown out his domestic plans. The challenges he faced would test his inexperience and leadership abilities, his period in office one of the tensest phases of the Cold War. His high ideals expounded in his brilliant rhetoric would have to yield before international expediency and urgency. The most pressing item in the President's agenda was Cuba. After the victory of the Cuban revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro, the Eisenhower administration engaged in a series of attempts to dislodge the new government and regain influence over the island. Open measures included economic sanctions and the severing of diplomatic ties but undeclared methods ranged from infiltration actions to guerrilla operations. Following Eisenhower's predilection for covert operations, and the urgency at removing Castro quickly before he could consolidate his power, the CIA developed a contingency plan for an invasion of the island.

The recruitment and training of Cuban exiles was begun in earnest in a secret base in Guatemala and preparations were made to equip them and organize them into an

²²⁴ Ibid., 193.

army ready to invade the island. The brigade was assembled, trained and prepared and then Kennedy gave the go ahead for the invasion, which took place on April 17. However, at the decisive moment, the President failed to provide crucial air support and reinforcements, not wanting to associate the United States with the operation. However, the media were full of stories about a secret army being readied for an assault on Cuba and all the military equipment and transportation was American. His refusal to send military support ensured that the invasion was a total failure as the Cuban regime was waiting for the landing, and an international embarrassment for the Kennedy administration only three months after his inauguration.

Shortly after, Kennedy met with former President Eisenhower and described the mess that had been made of the Cuban operation. After hearing of the change of plans regarding air support, Eisenhower questioned the President. The transcript of the conversation is, in our opinion, an illustration of the differences in leadership between the two men.

“Why was that called off?” Ike demanded. “Why did they change plans after the troops were already at sea?”

“Well,” Kennedy responded, “we felt it necessary that we keep our hand concealed in this affair; we thought that if it was learned that we really were doing this and not these rebel themselves, the Soviets would be very apt to cause trouble in Berlin.”

“Mr. President, that is exactly the opposite of what would really happen,” Eisenhower said. “The Soviets follow their own plans, and if they see us show any weakness that is when they press us the hardest. The second they see us show strength and do something on our own, that is when they are very cagey.”

“Well, my advice was that we must try to keep our hands from showing in this affair.”

“Mr. President,” repeated Eisenhower, “how could you expect the world to believe that we had nothing to do with it? Where did these people get the ships to go from Central America to Cuba? Where did they get the weapons? Where did they get all the communications and all other things that they would need? How could you possibly have kept from the world any knowledge that the United States had been involved? I believe there is only one thing to do when you go into this kind of thing, it must be a success.”

“Well, I assure you that, hereafter, if we get in anything like this, it is going to be a success.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear that,” said Eisenhower.²²⁵

The former President’s insight on Soviet psychology was proved right later in the year. The Bay of Pigs failure led to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s disdainful treatment of Kennedy at a summit in Vienna the following month of June and to being so emboldened as to take the decision to place missiles in Cuba the following year. As Eisenhower had anticipated regarding Soviet attitude, the simmering crisis about the status of Berlin finally boiled over that summer when the Soviets and their East German allies pressed their own plans about the city by erecting a separation wall around the Western-controlled zone in August, cutting it off from the rest of the world. The purpose was to put an end to the exodus of East Germans fleeing the Soviet regime and to force the Western powers out of the city in order to regain control over its entirety. The wall would become the defining characteristic of post-war Germany, and the most potent symbol of Cold War divisions. Despite the initial optimism, the New Frontier seemed to have encountered its boundaries in Cuba and West Berlin.

John Kennedy’s leadership hit another wall closer to home, in Congress, and upon a subject that had been dear to the constitutional framers. The revolutionaries who fought for independence against the British monarchy were also wary of established religion. Wanting to sever all ties with Europe and its charged history in order to start anew, the existence of aristocratic or religious hierarchies was viewed with suspicion; the liberation of Man demanded a total rupture with the past and its social institutions. Also, the imposition of religious beliefs by the government was viewed as a breach of individual freedom of conscience. As such, the framers were careful to include within the Bill of Rights the proviso of separation of church and state, in the First Amendment, invalidating any corruption of government through religious considerations. By virtue of his Catholicism, John Kennedy felt he had to make sure during his campaign that he was not subjected to any outside interference and that his allegiance lay with the United States Constitution.

²²⁵ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy - Profile of Power* (London: Papermac, 1994), 102 - 103.

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute - where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote - where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference... I am the Democratic Party's candidate for President who happens also to be a Catholic. I do not speak for my Church on public matters - and the Church does not speak for me.²²⁶

The promise of the 1960 election had been that Kennedy would bring about change and great accomplishments. Among them was a proposed education bill to revamp and bolster education in the country, early in 1961. Reform of the education system meant having to balance various interests and sensitive questions including the one that would bring most headaches: whether federal aid could and should go to segregated schools and to Catholic and other religious schools. The American school system is locally supported and locally governed, which meant that the States would have control over the spending of federal aid money. Not wanting to alienate the Southern Democrats, the President was opposed to withholding funds from segregated schools in the 'Solid South' where the Democratic Party ruled supreme. Knowing that "the Southern Democrats would fight, en masse, any bill containing such a restriction... Kennedy was willing to bargain for Southern votes at the expense of his allies' sensibilities."²²⁷ The bill contained nothing regarding religious schools, one way or another, but the matter was given prominence following a statement by Cardinal Spellman of New York: "It is unthinkable that any American child be denied the federal funds allotted to other children which are necessary for his mental development because his parents chose for him a God-connected education."²²⁸ Given the closely divided House of Representatives, the administration feared that the bill would not gather enough support to pass. Despite the Administration's assurances of not withholding funds for segregated schools, many conservative Southern Democrats would oppose federal aid on States' rights grounds since they would see it as an unwelcome federal interference on an issue reserved to the States. Likewise, many Republicans would

²²⁶ John F. Kennedy, "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Rice Hotel, Houston, TX," September 12, 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25773> (accessed August 28, 2013).

²²⁷ Tom Wicker, *JFK and LBJ – The Influence of Personality upon Politics* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), 123.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

oppose it because it increased federal spending and government expansion. Therefore, if the Catholics came out against the bill, their opposition would surely guarantee that it failed to pass in the House.

Kennedy was caught in a quandary as he needed Catholic support but could not afford to be seen favouring the Catholic Church. Furthermore, in his campaign he had stated his opposition to granting public funds to religious schools and had asked electors to judge him “on the basis of my record of 14 years in Congress - on my declared stands against an Ambassador to the Vatican, against unconstitutional aid to parochial schools, and against any boycott of the public schools.”²²⁹ Given his previous statements and his religion, it was imperative, so soon after his election, for Kennedy to demonstrate his impartiality. “By recommending such aid...the President would have shattered public confidence in his integrity and intentions, re-aroused the issue of a Catholic in the White House, and produced even sharper religious divisions in the country at a time when it was becoming plain that he still had to build a broad base of popular support for all that he wanted to do.”²³⁰ In his Education message to Congress, the President quoted the Constitution and its prohibition of aid to non-public schools. “There isn’t any room for debate on that subject. It is prohibited by the Constitution and the Supreme Court has made that very clear. Therefore there would be no possibility of our recommending it.”²³¹ Nonetheless, in a meeting of Catholic leaders in March, the Church hierarchy released a statement on the subject which said that “In the event that there is federal aid to education we are deeply convinced that in justice Catholic school children should be given the right to participate.” And they warned that “In the event that a federal aid program is enacted which excludes children in private schools those children will be victims of discriminatory legislation. There will be no alternative but to oppose such discrimination.”²³²

Caught between the need to appease the Southern Democrats and the need to secure Catholic support in Congress, Kennedy was in dire straits not to have his bill voted down. Thus, in a news conference, Kennedy opened the door to a compromise with Catholic leaders by offering a separate bill for special-purpose loans. Although he

²²⁹ John F. Kennedy, “Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Rice Hotel, Houston, TX,” September 12, 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25773> (accessed August 28, 2013).

²³⁰ Tom Wicker, *JFK and LBJ – The Influence of Personality upon Politics* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), 127.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

²³² *Ibid.*, 130 – 131.

believed that loans to parochial schools were unconstitutional, “he drew a clear distinction: special-purpose loans for, say, building college classrooms or purchasing scientific equipment might be permissible.”²³³ Kennedy was offering an olive branch for compromise, but his about-face regarding opposition to federal support of religious schools raised a political storm. Public indignation and the outcries of Protestant leaders put the President under suspicions of favouring the Catholic Church. Leaders of other religious denominations joined the protests against any form of private school aid and suddenly the country which had avoided the heavy legacy of European religious struggles and placed the secular and the religious spheres on separate levels was witnessing a political row over religious schools. What should have been a non-issue was being mishandled to the point where talk of religious prejudice was brewing and threatening to pull the country apart at a decisive moment in its history. Fortunately, the protests were nothing like the conflicts arising from the opposition between Nativists and Catholic Irish immigrants in the 19th century or the religious persecutions of early colonial Massachusetts. Nonetheless, Kennedy felt compelled to address the nation on the matter and the divisions it was fostering.

I am very hopeful that though there may be a difference of opinion on this matter of Federal aid to education, I am hopeful that when the smoke is cleared there will continue to be harmony among the various religious groups in the country. And I am going to do everything that I can to make sure that that harmony exists because it reaches far beyond the question of education and goes in a very difficult time of the life of our country to an important ingredient of our national strength. So that I am confident that the people who are involved outside the Government, and Members of Congress and the administration, will attempt to conduct the discussion on this sensitive issue in such a way as to maintain the strength of the country and not to divide it.²³⁴

Thus we see John Kennedy echoing the same concerns as the Founding Fathers regarding religion’s place in the country and the dangers of faction. The religious question was surfacing against all expectations and there was the prospect of it becoming a serious issue. The controversies on the subject of religion had kindled

²³³ *Ibid.*, 138.

²³⁴ John F. Kennedy, “The President’s News Conference,” March 15, 1961. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8537> (accessed September 5, 2013).

violent and bloody contests in Europe but although violence was a very far-fetched possibility now, sectionalism in a time of international danger was a prospect to be dreaded. This brings to mind James Madison's warning about faction: "A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points, as well of speculation as of practice;... have, in turn, divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good."²³⁵ Although not about religious sectarianism, the point had been made about the disruptive potential of faction. Unsurprisingly, the bill failed. Political roadblocks kept arising during the processes of negotiation and bargaining for other bills obstructing the path leading to the New Frontier, and raising question marks about the nation's leadership.

Divisions also arose due to the Cuban question. The administration was at odds as to the best way to deal with Castro and recover the island after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Robert Kennedy, the President's brother, had created an interdepartmental Special Group, which was informally known as the 'Cuba project'. Operation Mongoose was the operational division of that group and as Robert Kennedy stated himself, "my idea is to stir things up on the island with espionage, sabotage, general disorder."²³⁶ Co-ordinated by the CIA, the programme recognised that success ultimately required armed military intervention but the CIA was keeping all options open including, as one memo made clear, "the liquidation of leaders."²³⁷ The record was quickly expunged and the mention to the assassination of Fidel Castro was removed. However, as Richard Reeves claims, "liquidation was off the record. But it was never off the table."²³⁸ Meetings between members of the administration and the CIA went on with the subject of leadership removal being brought up by CIA hardliners and rejected at each turn. John F. Kennedy believed it was an easy undertaking but he feared the backlash in Latin America.²³⁹ Hushed criticism spread through the ranks and disaffection grew among the ultras that lamented the President's hesitations.

Division within government was further aggravated after the Vienna summit in June 1961 with Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader. The Bay of Pigs fiasco convinced

²³⁵ James Madison, "Federalist n° 10", in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 43.

²³⁶ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 498.

²³⁷ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy - Profile of Power* (London: Papermac, 1994), 336.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 337.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 265.

Khrushchev that Kennedy was a weak leader and one that could be pushed around into accepting the Soviet Union's terms. During the summit, Khrushchev controlled the talks and bossed Kennedy, taking shot after shot at America's foreign policy and managing to paint Communism as the ideology of freedom. The President was on the defensive, unable to counter the Soviet leader's arguments, tripping into defending dictators such as Franco and Salazar, his allies. "He treated me like a little boy," Kennedy confided after the first rounds of talks; Khrushchev was unimpressed: "he's very young... not strong enough. Too intelligent and too weak."²⁴⁰ Next on the agenda was the German question, which Khrushchev wanted to settle. It was 16 years after the end of the war and there was still no prospect of a peace settlement. In the meantime, the Western powers had agreed to allow a West German state to be formally created and to assume a predominant role within NATO. However, American policy was for a united Germany, free, democratic, and integrated in the Western bloc, something the Americans knew the Soviets would never accept as they feared a resurgent Germany protected by NATO.

Despite all efforts, the Big Four that controlled Germany after the war failed to agree on a peace treaty that would please the two blocs. Khrushchev said he wanted to reach an agreement with the West, but should the United States refuse, the USSR would sign it alone with East Germany and make official the division of Germany. With the peace treaty, the state of war would end and thus access rights to West Berlin accorded following the occupation would be rescinded. Khrushchev was scheming to force the Americans out of West Berlin and take full control of the city. Kennedy replied that it would mean a basic change in the world situation and that now was not the time to upset the status quo. When his Soviet counterpart became angry and said that he would never accept a united Germany where Hitler's generals held high military commands in NATO, the American President retorted that blocking access to Berlin was a violation of the four allies' 1945 agreement, something the United States could not accept. Khrushchev shrugged and argued that if the Americans wanted to go to war over Germany, there was nothing he could do. No one could stop the USSR from signing the treaty and furthermore, any attempt against the sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic, controlled by the Soviet Union, would be considered as an act of aggression and met with the adequate response. "Once again, Kennedy said he hoped the Soviet leader would not present him with situations that so deeply involved the national

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 166.

interests of the United States. He emphasized that the critical American interest in Berlin was access rights. The Soviets could sign a treaty or do anything they liked as long as they did not threaten allied occupation rights in West Berlin.”²⁴¹ And with that Kennedy acquiesced to a permanent and official division of Germany, and of the city of Berlin along with that. Shortly after, the Communists would erect the Berlin Wall. The next year, Khrushchev would raise the stakes by placing missiles in Cuba.

In our opinion, Kennedy’s hesitations and diplomatic failures encouraged the rise of factions, particularly inside the armed forces. A section of the military began questioning the government’s stance and effectiveness against Communism. The insubordination was accompanied by dissemination of extreme right-wing views within the military establishment. “This aroused attention in the spring of 1961 when Major General Edwin A. Walker was relieved of his division command in West Germany after having propagandized his troops with ultra-conservative political materials.”²⁴² A division commander, in Germany, espousing extreme views was a delicate affair to be handled with care. Major General Walker was not discharged: he was reassigned to Hawaii, an amenable reprimand after his conduct in the most dangerous Cold War arena, with the Red Army just across the division line. But his was not an isolated case. The military apparatus had been infiltrated and splinter groups were purportedly forming. A report circulated in Washington corridors about “the formation of an alliance between army officers and right-wing groups under the imprimatur of a National Security Council policy statement of 1958 instructing military personnel to arouse the public to the menace of the Cold War.”²⁴³

Kennedy certainly felt the need to act and look more determined about confronting communism. After the meeting with Khrushchev, which he classified as the “worst thing in my life. He savaged me,” the President engaged in a blunt and frank analysis of what had gone wrong in Vienna. “I think I know why he treated me like this. He thinks that because of the Bay of Pigs that I’m inexperienced. Probably thinks I’m stupid. Maybe most important, he thinks that I had no guts.” He also realised that there was only one remedy to combat such an assessment and control the damages suffered so far. “We have to see what we can do that will restore a feeling in Moscow that we will defend our national interest. I’ll have to increase the defense budget. And we have to

²⁴¹ Ibid., 171.

²⁴² Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days – John F. Kennedy in the White House* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), 645.

²⁴³ Ibid., 645.

confront them. The only place we can do that is Vietnam. We have to send more people there.”²⁴⁴ The decision to increase American involvement in Vietnam would prove fateful, a choice made, we believe, as a result of a clash of personalities. Thus the tangled webs of foreign policy are woven.

The international fallout from the Cuban operation and ultimately the fear of a repeat of the Bay of Pigs prompted John F. Kennedy to adopt Eisenhower’s stealth methods and covert operations. Shortly after the debacle in Cuba, the President was confronted with plans for an assassination plan inherited from Eisenhower’s time in office, that of Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, the brutal dictator of the Dominican Republic. The CIA had been authorised to send arms and sabotage equipment to the Dominican opposition and was ready to go ahead with the plan. However, Kennedy was anxious to avoid a new fiasco and he was even more afraid of the international repercussions should America be seen complicit in murder. Hence, he approved a coded message to CIA operatives in the Dominican Republic stating: “We must not run the risk of U.S. association with political assassination, since U.S. as a matter of general policy cannot condone assassination.” Nonetheless, the message ended with a final remark that Richard Reeves concludes “made it clear that what the President wanted was plausible deniability: ‘Continue to inform dissident elements of U.S. support for their position.’”²⁴⁵

Trujillo was killed on May 30, 1961, but the conspiracy descended into chaos and disorder as the plotters failed to prepare follow-up plans after being betrayed by one of their own. The dictator’s supporters, led by his son, reacted quickly and managed to regain control. There was no clear information about American involvement, which pleased Kennedy, but again division took hold of the administration. Following the confusion and uncertainty, the State Department advised the President to keep the US military from interfering in the Dominican Republic without first knowing who was in charge. The President, who was in a state visit in France, was accompanied by Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles who advised against sending the Marines. The President’s brother and Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defence, were intent on sending the full American might to clear the situation in the Dominican Republic.

²⁴⁴ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy - Profile of Power* (London: Papermac, 1994), 172 – 173.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

“You’re a gutless bastard,” Robert Kennedy yelled when he realized that Bowles was reluctant to bring U.S. warships closer to the Dominican coast... Burned once in the Caribbean, the President preferred to err on the side of caution, and he said that to the Undersecretary.

“Well, I’m glad to hear it,” said Bowles, “and in that case, would you clarify who’s in charge here?”

“You are,” the President said.

“Good. Would you mind explaining that to your brother?”²⁴⁶

Robert Kennedy was Attorney General during his brother’s administration but he also was his personal adviser. His quick-tempered personality and determination helped him during his work as Attorney General, wherein he put his passion and strong beliefs to work for the cause of the Civil Rights movement and also in his fight against organised crime. His campaign against the mafia, in particular, earned him and the Kennedy administration the lifelong hatred of the most important organised crime families in the country. An opinionated man, Robert Kennedy kept his own thoughts about foreign policy, especially regarding the issue of Cuba. After John Kennedy had cancelled Operation Mongoose in the wake of the missile crisis in 1962, Robert was unwilling to drop the issue; he advised his brother on the subject. “I think there should be periodic meetings of half a dozen or so top officials of the Government to consider Cuba... I think this kind of effort should be applied to other problems as well. The best minds in Government should be utilized in finding solutions to these major problems.” The younger brother pressed his opinions as vigorously as he pressed his opinion of himself: “There was an asterisk after ‘best minds.’ At the bottom of the page, Robert Kennedy had written ‘*ME.’”²⁴⁷

Personal sentiments and political considerations would clash again over Vietnam. With the defeat and retreat of France from Indochina and the Geneva Conference in 1954 that divided Vietnam, the region quickly became a new Cold War scenario where the two opposing blocs confronted their global strategies. The Soviet Union and China supported the northern communist state whilst the United States supported South Vietnam, although Eisenhower had been careful not to be drawn into the region. In 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem, a high-ranking Vietnamese nationalist, took command of South Vietnam and placed himself as President of the Republic of

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 152.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 473.

Vietnam. Prior to his rise to power, Diem had chosen exile to escape being killed by the communist factions he opposed.

Diem was an ardent Vietnamese nationalist who hated the French. He was also a staunch anti-Communist and a devout Catholic. A self-exile after World War II, he had settled at a Maryknoll seminary in New Jersey and developed ties with influential American Catholics such as Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, an avid foe of Communism, and Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts. These ties proved useful for cementing political support in the United States, which poured economic and military aid into the South in hopes of making Diem a viable leader.²⁴⁸

However, Diem's rule soon degenerated into a corrupt and dictatorial regime, supported by the United States to prevent an invasion from the communist North. Upon arriving to office, Kennedy kept sending economic and military aid to his old friend, and when the communists increased the pressure over the South, Kennedy sent military advisers accompanied by Special Forces and combat infantry units to train and prepare the South Vietnamese army. Although the President favoured a negotiated truce between North and South, he knew that neither side would agree to it. The communists in the North were determined to unite the whole country under their leadership, and Diem flirted with an inflated sense of destiny, of himself as the only man that could unite the country and save it from Communism. Kennedy seemed to accept this, dropping his plans for a general agreement: "He stuck instead with the effort to promote Diem as the non-Communist leader of a sovereign South Vietnam, even though he recognized – it was impossible not to – that Diem had become increasingly despotic and corrupt over the years. 'Diem is Diem,' Kennedy mused, 'and the best we've got.'"²⁴⁹

Being a committed Catholic, Diem antagonised Buddhists in the country, raiding pagodas and prompting protests and manifestations across the country. His counter-insurgency actions in the countryside, where the communists were gaining ground thanks to his corrupt regime, earned him no friends and even less support. The arrests and murder of opposition members were the final straw. A faction of the South Vietnamese army was ready to remove Diem and assume command of the country via a

²⁴⁸ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 297.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 511 - 512.

coup and intelligence about this reached the United States. The situation was deteriorating rapidly and the rebels were waiting for a nod from Washington. Factions regarding Vietnam were also developing in the Kennedy administration, with the anti-Diem faction maintaining high-level contacts with the army generals opposing the dictator.

A coded telegram was sent to the American ambassador in Saigon with instructions on what to do in the event of a coup there. However, the cable was sent on a Saturday when the top officials of the administration were away, Kennedy being in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, for the weekend. The sending of the message was cleared by lower officials but its contents were not checked for approval as the heads of department responsible for the screening were unable to be contacted during the weekend. Believing that the message had been approved by his chief advisers and officials, Kennedy authorised the sending of the telegram by phone, without knowledge of its contents. As Arthur Schlesinger recalls, the cable, which became official US policy, stated that the American government “could no longer tolerate the systematic repression of the Buddhists... The generals could be told that we would find it impossible to support Diem unless these problems were solved. Diem should be given every chance to solve them. If he refused, then the possibility had to be realistically faced that Diem himself could not be saved. We would take no part in any action; but, if anything happened, an interim anti-communist military regime could expect American support.”²⁵⁰ Kennedy had thus unwittingly given his tacit approval to a coup in South Vietnam.

The next Monday, back in Washington, Kennedy was appalled at the full realisation of what had been done with his consent. Heavy infighting within the administration began immediately as every member of cabinet and top official tried to shake off the blame for the blunder. Kennedy despaired at the bitter exchanges and backbiting: “My God! My government’s coming apart.”²⁵¹ It was too late to repudiate the telegram; a reversal of positions would compromise American credibility in Vietnam. Kennedy accepted the inevitable outcome.

Having received sanction for their actions, the opposition began their preparations, which culminated in a coup in November 1963. Diem and his brother

²⁵⁰ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days – John F. Kennedy in the White House* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), 844.

²⁵¹ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy - Profile of Power* (London: Papermac, 1994), 565.

Nhu, his top adviser, were both killed. “Soldiers had loaded them into the back of a U.S. M-113 armored personnel carrier, driven a short distance, and shot both in the back of the head. The bodies were mutilated with bayonets. The Catholic ascetic who Kennedy had helped project as an anti-Communist saint was buried in an unmarked grave in a cemetery next to the house of the American ambassador.”²⁵² Upon hearing the news of Diem’s death, Kennedy was shocked. As Schlesinger, John F. Kennedy’s hagiographer remembers it, “I saw the President soon after he heard that Diem and Nhu were dead. He was sombre and shaken. I had not seen him so depressed since the Bay of Pigs. No doubt he realized that Vietnam was his great failure in foreign policy, and that he had never given it his full attention.”²⁵³ The next day, at a dinner with friends and having heard a comment dismissing Diem and his brother as just tyrants, Kennedy could not hold himself. “‘No,’ the President said. ‘They were in a difficult position. They did the best they could for their country.’”²⁵⁴ Kennedy had to yield to events that he had set in motion and which had ultimately moved beyond his control. Despite his best intentions and idealism, there were too many blunders accumulating in his administration.

Kennedy redeemed himself during the missile crisis, in 1962, facing the combined Soviet and Cuban pressure and ultimately defeating their attempt. The stationing of Russian missiles in Cuba would have been a strategic and geopolitical defeat of unknown proportions and Kennedy stood his ground, determined not to let his adversaries win the day. The President surprised Khrushchev and Castro with his resolve. The deployment of the Navy and the raising of military status to full combat readiness put the world on the brink of a nuclear war between the two superpowers. The standoff was won by the Americans as the Soviets realised that Kennedy was willing to risk an all out-war over the issue. In the end, Khrushchev blinked, acknowledging that placing the missiles in Cuba was not worth a nuclear holocaust and ordered the retreat of his naval convoy headed for the island. Having been encouraged to challenge a President which he deemed weak, the Soviet leader eventually had to admit that his opponent was not lacking in determination when matters came to a decisive head.

In our view, Kennedy’s handling of the crisis was perfect in that it achieved the intended goal without an open military confrontation. And it was achieved thanks to a tough diplomatic approach that sent the intended message to the Soviet Union, thus

²⁵² Ibid., 649.

²⁵³ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days – John F. Kennedy in the White House* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), 848.

²⁵⁴ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy - Profile of Power* (London: Papermac, 1994), 651.

recuperating some of the lost respect and putting the other side on its toes regarding American leadership. However, Kennedy had to agree to a promise not to invade Cuba, something that provided more ammunition to his enemies who already blamed the President for the Bay of Pigs. The promise allowed Castro's consolidation in power and to critics it marked the President as being soft on Communism. Past events had already dug a vast gap between the leader and the perceptions about his leadership. Impatient and unforgiving hardliners wanted an invasion of Cuba instead of a blockade. Coupled with past frustrations at his international dealings, there was nothing he could do to gain favour with his detractors. Growing faction in the palace usually leads to the downfall of kings. The ruler of Camelot met his destiny on a fateful November day, in Dallas, Texas.

III

Foreign policy was proving too much to be trusted to the shoulders of a single man. The constitutional balance was non-existent when it came to international politics; the executive reigned supreme, highlighting both the President's virtues and his shortcomings. This state of affairs furthers our argument that it is the most vulnerable of all three branches, subject to human nature's dispositions and vulnerabilities so close to the centre of events and vital decisions. The hazards of concentrating the initiative upon the executive arm of the Republic were furthermore highlighted by John F. Kennedy's record at home. "Kennedy's record in the realm of domestic policies was hardly stellar, for three reasons. The first was his own uninspiring leadership in this area. As earlier in his career, Kennedy was a cool and unpassionate politician when he dealt with domestic issues. He identified with moderates, not liberals, whom he disdained as 'honkers.'... Above all, he did not much care about domestic issues." Personal passions dictate preferences and priorities, and Kennedy was besotted with foreign policy. "Foreign affairs,' he once remarked to Nixon, 'is the only important issue for a President to handle, isn't it?...I mean, who gives a shit if the minimum wage is \$1.15 or \$1.25, compared to something like Cuba?'"²⁵⁵ The power to determine the country's strategy and the military might at his disposal were far more appealing to Kennedy than having

²⁵⁵ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 465.

to court congressional leaders, a second reason Patterson points as being behind his domestic difficulties.

Faced with the coalition between the conservative Democrats - coming from the Solid South - and the Republicans, Kennedy was reluctant to defer to men whom he despised and that upheld discrimination as business as usual in their constituencies. Politics is a demanding balancing act of competing egos and expectations. His unwillingness to woo the sectional leaders of eastern liberals and southern conservatives' factions of Democrats in Congress ensured their estrangement from the start of his administration. Kennedy's awkward attempts at persuasion rather than flattery or bullying of congressional Democrats when he needed their support to approve divisive bills were compounded with tactical mistakes that earned him no friends. His proposed bills were thus defeated one by one. In our view, perceptions rule future chances of success, and Congress realised that John Kennedy was failing his job. "The intellectual playboy was not, after all, another F.D.R.; it was not necessary to fear him and it might be risky to follow him. Since a leader requires, above all, the respect of his followers, in losing at the outset the essential respect of the Eighty-Seventh Congress, John Kennedy had lost whatever chance he had to remake his country."²⁵⁶ We would suggest that Congress' realisation that he did not want to be troubled with domestic issues was an added factor that explains why it turned on him.

Finally, Kennedy's detachment from domestic policies led him to rely on specialists, as was illustrated by his tax reform plan. The President had decided to name Walter Heller to head his Council of Economic Advisers, an economist who partook of the new confidence in the field of economics to direct policy. "Heller's enthusiasm brilliantly reflected the rapidly rising confidence that liberals, especially in the social sciences, were developing about the ability of 'experts' to manage American society. This self-assurance, expanding still more in the mid-1960's, excited and energized liberal activism at the time."²⁵⁷ But Kennedy's reliance upon the best and brightest did not endear him to liberals in the tax reform law case. As it happened, Heller wanted to accelerate economic growth and release the economy from an obsolete tax system that threatened to stifle companies and individuals. His plan was to revamp the system and cut taxes across the board to stimulate consumption and production. Individual income

²⁵⁶ Tom Wicker, *JFK and LBJ – The Influence of Personality upon Politics* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), 146.

²⁵⁷ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 464.

and corporate taxes were thus trimmed on all levels, with disposal income jumping to levels that spurred purchasing power and reinvigorated consumption and industrial production to meet the new demand. “The law was estimated to save taxpayers \$9.1 billion dollars in 1964. Heller and others were delighted, crediting the law for the extraordinary economic growth and prosperity that characterized the mid-1960s. The tax cut, they reiterated, proved their contention that social science expertise could fine-tune policy.”²⁵⁸ It also highlighted the President’s conservative instincts, raising questions about his bold liberalism.

Criticism was not late in coming. Opponents charged that Kennedy was increasing the federal deficit, but Heller had taught Kennedy that a deficit under certain circumstances was a good thing. There were constructive deficits and destructive deficits and it all depended on the circumstances.²⁵⁹ This Keynesian approach argued that a moderately high federal deficit could be chanced without serious risk of increasing inflation. The idea of accumulating debt to stimulate growth via tax cuts triggered the usual resentments against the well-off, whom the liberals accused of being the main beneficiaries. “Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith branded the cut as ‘reactionary Keynesianism’ and labelled Kennedy’s announcement as ‘the most Republican speech since McKinley’”²⁶⁰ Nonetheless, thanks to the influence of Heller and other economists, Kennedy was moving away from the national consensus regarding balanced budgets and moving towards embracing the brave new world of deficit economics.

Despite Kennedy’s preference for the glories of foreign affairs, his administration would have to face what was possibly the most important domestic issue before the country. Encouraged by Kennedy’s election and the promise of change, black Americans increased their demands for racial justice and social equality. The year 1961 witnessed a series of actions and demonstrations aimed both at challenging segregation in the Deep South and at drawing the attention of the rest of the country to the appalling injustices that still prevailed in America 100 years after the start of the Civil War. Weary of the long wait in reversing racial discrimination, activists began boycotts and sit-ins at segregated stores and public installations in the South, thus augmenting the

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 467.

²⁵⁹ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy - Profile of Power* (London: Papermac, 1994), 459.

²⁶⁰ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 465.

pressure in the Civil Rights movement's actions. However, the intensity of the struggle would enter a violent phase after the beginning of the 'freedom rides,' wherein activists boarded buses in the North headed to the South and exit at the segregated terminals where they tried to make use of white-only facilities. In the cities where they stopped, the freedom riders were met by armed men and the Ku Klux Klan; the dramatic clashes and the bloodshed marked a turn in the civil rights struggle, with a new and more militant generation of activists determined to engage in more energetic and direct actions. The shift also brought division and tension within the movement itself. While traditional black leaders favoured a gradual change through a moderate approach to protests and the canvassing of political allies, the younger and more strident factions wanted to confront the issue head-on and strive for a revolution in racial politics.

The President, however, had a more pragmatic political view of the issue. During the years 1961 and 1962, Kennedy opted for a cautious approach, preferring to avoid being involved in the protests. "Despite the rising tide of protest, civil rights at that time still did not command great public attention or passionate popular support. JFK, a careful listener of the public pulse, could see no gain in pressing for action, especially from a Congress that was certain to be reticent. If he pushed too hard for civil rights, he risked losing southern support he hoped to get in the 1962 and 1964 elections."²⁶¹ His caution convinced him to postpone campaign promises of civil rights legislation, despite early signs given in his first State of the Union Address, albeit in a brief passage: "The denial of constitutional rights to some of our fellow Americans on account of race - at the ballot box and elsewhere - disturbs the national conscience, and subjects us to the charge of world opinion that our democracy is not equal to the high promise of our heritage." The epigrammatic reference was quickly eclipsed as Kennedy introduced his predilection, foreign policy: "But all these problems pale when placed beside those which confront us around the world,"²⁶² so the speech continued, neglecting any further mention of the plight of black Americans. When the freedom rides started, Kennedy worried not about the beatings activists were subjected to, but about the image of the country abroad. "President Kennedy worried especially that racial unrest in the United States would soil the nation's image abroad and sabotage foreign policy goals that he really cared about... After the riders were arrested and

²⁶¹ Ibid., 474.

²⁶² John F. Kennedy, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," January 30, 1961. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8045> (accessed August 28, 2013).

beaten, he was worried and angry. 'Tell [the riders] to call it off,' he told his civil rights aide, Harris Wofford. 'Stop them!'"²⁶³

The events of April 1963, in Birmingham, Alabama, would signal the beginning of a change in the country regarding the civil rights struggle. Demonstrations and protests that lasted for a month in the city in which students - some of them children - participating in the campaign were met with force, the local authorities violently beating and arresting the protesters. The images of young black students being attacked by police dogs and dragged to jail painfully illustrated the violence and tragedy of the racial problem in America. The drama in Birmingham caught the attention of the nation, stirred its conscience, marking a moment of escalation in the civil rights fight but also one in which the mass of public opinion in the North awoke to the issue, and began siding with the activists. More importantly, the intensification of the conflict convinced many in the Kennedy administration that the time had come for action.

More than a thousand students and activists were imprisoned in Birmingham, including a thirty-four year old Martin Luther King, Jr., a clergyman and leader of the Civil Rights movement. Advocating non-violent resistance methods of protest, Martin Luther King was criticised by fellow clergymen and black leaders for his participation and encouragement of the protests in Birmingham. They argued that his endorsement of direct action protests would be detrimental to the cause and urged him to follow the legal course, through the courts of law instead. However, Martin Luther King was trying to steer a middle course, pressured as he was from radical black movements and the influence of militant leaders such as Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. The latter were engaged in a path of confrontation urging blacks to disengage from white America's oppressive society, a voluntary apartheid that, if accepted and successful, would create a nation within the nation. This encouragement of separation was tantamount to sponsoring group and race identity, instead of an identity based on individual character. The triumph of such a narrow-minded conception would have condemned black Americans to detrimental consequences as they would be closed within a constricted construction of the world, based upon the colour of the skin, and their self-definition emerging as a consequence of opposition to other groups.

King's rebuttal reflected the accumulated frustration of hearing the same calls for calm and patience that had been insisted on for generations since the Emancipation

²⁶³ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 475.

Proclamation. “For years now I have heard the word ‘wait.’ It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This ‘wait’ has almost always meant ‘never.’ It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that ‘justice too long delayed is justice denied.’”²⁶⁴ King addressed the remaining objections, especially the one that opponents to direct action used to portray activists as extremists: the wilful breaking of the law. “Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court’s decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, it is rather strange and paradoxical to find us consciously breaking laws. One may well ask, ‘How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?’ The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: there are just laws, and there are unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that ‘An unjust law is no law at all.’”²⁶⁵ His arguments rested upon the acknowledgment of ethical standards shared by society, which acted as moral compass with which to gauge all laws.

Martin Luther King would proceed to expand on his theory of just laws and their relation to the cause of civil rights in America. “How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law, or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust.”²⁶⁶ Hence, segregation is unjust because it debases and lowers blacks in America, denying them their human dignity and negates the words of the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal. King wanted natural rights for black Americans, and this philosophy coupled with his Christian faith led to a doctrine of a higher law commanding all laws of Men and according to which there could be no compromise with evil laws. Therefore, he continued, “I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court because it is morally right, and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong.” His critics would accuse him of being a radical, an enemy of the rule of

²⁶⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Negro is Your Brother (Letter from Birmingham Jail)”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1963, Volume 212, No. 2, 78 - 88.

http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/letter_birmingham_jail.pdf (accessed October 21, 2013).

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

law, intent on subverting the Constitution. But the claim that the law must obey to moral principles in order to command obedience was not novel in American history. Defence of civil disobedience stretched far in American history, to the war against Mexico in 1846-48 when Henry David Thoreau had protested against what he charged was government action contrary to the nation's spirit. However legal in strict constitutional terms, the conduct of the United States government regarding Mexico violated a collective perception of what was right and wrong. The war, Thoreau argued, was unjust and the legal workmanship that sustained and legitimised the military adventure, albeit approved in Congress, was nonetheless a corruption of a higher legal power and of a common sense of justice, hence his appeal for civil disobedience and non-violent protest.

In 1850, Senator William Henry Seward, later to be Secretary of State to Abraham Lincoln, raged against the continuation of slavery in America and against those who argued that the Constitution provided the authority for the existence and extension of slavery in the country. Speaking in the Senate, Seward asserted that although the country belonged to the citizens of the country, the latter had no absolute power over it: they were the wardens of the land. "The Constitution regulates our stewardship; the Constitution devotes the domain to union, to justice, to defence, to welfare, and to liberty."²⁶⁷ Yet there are limits to their authority over the country, moral limits. The law had to conform to moral and superior principles, it was not enough that it collected the consent of men.

But there is a higher law than the Constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain, and devotes it to the same noble purposes. The territory is a part, no inconsiderable part, of the common heritage of mankind, bestowed upon them by the Creator of the universe. We are his stewards, and must so discharge our trust as to secure in the highest attainable degree their happiness... And now the simple, bold, and even awful question which presents itself to us is this: Shall we, who are founding institutions, social and political, for countless millions; shall we, who know by experience the wise and the just, and are free to choose them, and to reject the erroneous and unjust;

²⁶⁷ William Henry Seward, "Freedom in the New Territories Speech (Appeal to a Higher Law)," March 11, 1850. United States Senate.
<http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/SewardNewTerritories.pdf> (accessed October 23, 2013)

shall we establish human bondage, or permit it by our sufferance to be established?²⁶⁸

Knowing the difference between the just and the unjust, good and evil, it was demanded of each to side with the truth. Hence, Martin Luther King could in good conscience advise his followers to resist any laws which failed to live up to Christian principles of morality and justice, laws that failed to recognise that they could not be enforced beyond the limits of human dignity. Following Thoreau's appeal for civil disobedience, King urged his followers to refuse cooperation with a system that oppressed them, confronting evil with the Christian power of love.

Martin Luther King and William Henry Seward were tapping into that most fundamental of principles, the existence of individual rights outside and above any legal framework devised by Man. Thomas Jefferson had argued as much in his Declaration of Independence and their existence gives individuals the right to revolt when government treads upon them. The 1787 Constitution included a proviso which explicitly mentioned the existence of rights that precede those enumerated in the legal code and that belong to each individual.²⁶⁹ These are granted by Natural Law and as Jefferson said, are unalienable and cannot be repealed or contradicted by any positive law. The denial of any higher authority for human institutions and laws is an open invitation for tyranny and injustice as men would have no other rights apart those granted them by other men. The rationalism of the Enlightenment is supplemented with spirit and belief, a transcendental essence that reaches beyond the legal framework to provide it with moral valuation. To trust solely upon Reason would be to commit to its sterility, leaving Man exposed to its levelling of values and arbitrary character.

The Birmingham events changed Kennedy's wary attitude towards the Civil Rights movement. Before Kennedy had embraced the change, his Vice-President, Lyndon Baines Johnson, had already taken the lead and reacted to Martin Luther King's Birmingham letter. On May 30, 1963, Memorial Day, Johnson spoke at Gettysburg to challenge the nation to convert the laws and proclamations about equality from rhetoric into fact. The Vice-President echoed the words of Abraham Lincoln and reminded the sacrifice of those who died in the field of battle.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Amendment IX to the United States Constitution: "The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people."

One hundred years ago, the slave was freed. One hundred years later, the Negro remains in bondage to the color of his skin. The Negro today asks justice. We do not answer him - we do not answer those who lie beneath this soil - when we reply to the Negro by asking, 'Patience.' It is empty to plead that the solution to the dilemmas of the present rests on the hands of the clock. The solution is in our hands. Unless we are willing to yield up our destiny of greatness among the civilizations of history, Americans - white and Negro together - must be about the business of resolving the challenge which confronts us now.²⁷⁰

With his speech, Johnson signalled his position regarding the issue that was dividing America, but he also put pressure on the Kennedy administration to take a more forceful stand regarding the Civil Rights movement. "In this hour, it is not our respective races which are at stake - it is our nation. Let those who care for their country come forward, North and South, white and Negro, to lead the way through this moment of challenge and decision." The fulfilment of the American promise was being deferred on account of timorous action and procrastination. "Until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men's skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact. To the extent that the proclamation of emancipation is not fulfilled in fact, to that extent we shall have fallen short of assuring freedom to the free."²⁷¹

Lyndon Johnson's speech and events forced Kennedy out of his pragmatic immobility. When the Governor of Alabama tried to block access of two black students to the State University, the Presidency decided that it was time to wrest control of the situation and take sides. Kennedy federalised the Alabama National Guard to force the proper execution of the law and addressed the country that same evening. After announcing the federal intervention in Alabama, Kennedy appealed to the nation's idealism and highlighted the discrepancy between the proclaimed ideals and everyday reality, especially given the national effort being made in the fight against Communism.

²⁷⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks of Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson - Memorial Day, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania," May 30, 1963. Austin, Texas: The Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library. <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/630530.asp> (accessed November 11, 2013).

²⁷¹ Ibid.

This Nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened. Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. And when Americans are sent to Viet-Nam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. It ought to be possible, therefore, for American students of any color to attend any public institution they select without having to be backed up by troops.²⁷²

Although one hundred years had passed since Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, its heirs still were not free from injustice and segregation. As such, while this state of affairs persisted, “this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free. We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it, and we cherish our freedom here at home, but are we to say to the world, and much more importantly, to each other that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes; that we have no second class citizens except Negroes; that we have no class or cast system, no ghettos, no master race except with respect to Negroes? Now the time has come for this Nation to fulfill its promise.”²⁷³ Given the resistance encountered to fulfill that promise, Kennedy announced that he would ask Congress to act and pass legislation with the aim of making sure that race was left out of American life and law.

Kennedy transformed the civil rights struggle into a moral question, placing it above and beyond a mere legal or political question.

This is not a sectional issue. Difficulties over segregation and discrimination exist in every city, in every State of the Union... Nor is this a partisan issue. In a time of domestic crisis men of good will and generosity should be able to unite regardless of party or politics. This is not even a legal or legislative issue alone. It is better to settle these matters in the courts than on the streets, and new laws are needed at every level, but law alone cannot make men see right. We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution.²⁷⁴

²⁷² John F. Kennedy, “Radio and Television Report to the American People on Civil Rights,” June 11, 1963. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9271> (accessed August 28, 2013).

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

Calling to mind the existence of fundamental principles that supplant any others, the President used the moral argument to press for more federal powers of intervention. The States, having failed to protect basic citizen rights because of complacency or sheer delinquency, gave the central government the initiative to occupy centre stage and take over a new set of powers that otherwise it would not have. The path was open for a new stage in the growth of federal powers at the expense of its constituent parts. The latter forfeited the opportunity to draw a demarcation line between local and central regulation of a sensitive issue such as the extension of civil rights to their own citizens. Despite having the constitutional tools that would allow them to act and protect their autonomy – namely the 10th Amendment – the South opted to resist change. The Kennedy administration consequently began preparations for Civil Rights legislation to send to Congress which was expected to re-shape American society.

The response was quick in coming. Kennedy was confronted with an angry response from Southern Democrats who started voting against bills coming from the White House ensuring their failure in Congress. Also, racial violence increased after JFK's address. Civil rights leaders were assassinated and racial riots erupted in inner cities. Tensions heightened and reached a breaking point, increasing the threat of growing extremism within the movement itself. The appearance of radical militant splinter groups in disagreement with the pacifist, non-violent approach of senior leaders of the black community appealed to those younger members who claimed such conciliatory methods had achieved little. So much so that when confronted with the organisation of a large demonstration in Washington in favour of the cause, Kennedy feared the potential for violence of such a gathering and tried to tone it down, worrying that it could seriously undermine his civil rights bill. Thus, the White House became heavily involved in the preparations and the organisation of the scheduled speeches and the itinerary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, including the selection of the day. Their efforts to convince organisers to restrain the demonstration were successful. "Participants would be allowed to walk from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial, where speech-making would close the event. It was further understood that that there would be no sit-in on Capitol Hill and the organizers would do their best to have substantial numbers of whites at the rally. Marchers were to dress in respectable clothing. Washington area liquor stores would be closed on the day of the

march.”²⁷⁵ The pressure to contain any excesses continued until the very day of the march, including last minute attempts to soften speeches deemed inflammable. Contingency plans were devised and placed on stand-by. “Kennedy aides stood prepared to disconnect the public address system in case things went awry.”²⁷⁶

Most of all, Kennedy wanted to control the march, making sure there would be no televised racial violence or demands for compensation for past injustices. Asked whether he agreed that black Americans should receive special government help or benefit from quotas for their advancement, the President said no. “I don’t think we can undo the past... In fact, the past is going to be with us for a good many years in uneducated men and women who lost their chance for a decent education. We have to do the best we can now. That is what we are trying to do. I don’t think quotas are a good idea. I think it is a mistake to begin to assign quotas on the basis of religion, or race, or color, or nationality. I think we’d get into a good deal of trouble.”²⁷⁷ The administration’s desire to transform the march into a rally in favour of his Civil Rights legislation was denounced by more radical leaders who saw through the ploy and thus refused to participate in the event. Malcolm X denounced the whole affair as a farce: “The march has been taken over by the government... This is government controlled.”²⁷⁸

Despite its detractors, the March proved a success. Close to 300,000 people gathered in Washington, D.C., to let it be known that the American promise remained unfulfilled. Fears of racial violence proved unfounded as the mass demonstration took place without incidents. The climax of the day would be reached with Martin Luther King’s speech, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. A fine example of rhetorical prowess, his now famous speech makes various references not only to Abraham Lincoln but also to the great foundational texts of the country, the Declaration of Independence and the 1787 Constitution.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long

²⁷⁵ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 482.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 483.

²⁷⁷ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy - Profile of Power* (London: Papermac, 1994), 580.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 580.

night of captivity. But 100 years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination... When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of 'Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.' It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honouring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad cheque which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'²⁷⁹

Martin Luther King's oratorical skill allowed him to merge the black American plight with the nation's history, presenting the civil rights struggle as a continuation of the nation's revolutionary struggle for freedom and democracy. Aware that extremist violence would defeat the cause, King urged the protestors to keep away from the temptation of revenge, reminding them that keeping the moral high ground would yield far greater results. Thus he tried to defuse any potential fears that white America might harbour regarding blacks' desire for retribution and placed the movement firmly within mainstream America. "Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred... We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence... The marvellous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny."²⁸⁰ Trained as a preacher, King made abundant use of references from the Bible to reach deep into America's fundamental idealism, ringing a note of common destiny uniting all communities and races.

In the final part of his speech, King displayed his vision of the future of a country at peace with its idealism, a land where "my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." With this he was also speaking to the black community. Blacks would rise as individuals, as Americans, or they would fall as a community. He

²⁷⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream" - Address delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963. National Archives and Records Administration. <http://www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>, (accessed November 18, 2013).

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

was opposed to the temptations of group identity, the attraction to try and achieve the progress of Blacks as detached from that of the nation as a whole. When the dream is materialised, the aspiration of the Founding Fathers will have been realised and all Americans will benefit from it. The dream of a new nation free from aristocratic rule, where the rule of law and democracy will allow all men to be free: “black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: ‘Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’”²⁸¹ The March was the last major peaceful event of the civil rights era. The coming months and years would witness violence and war, murder and the shattering of dreams.

IV

The civil rights struggle shows the tension within American idealism but also its strength. The fundamental values that underpin the country fasten the groups and individuals around a common code of morals and the multiple perspectives can flourish so long as they work within the agreed framework, channelling the conflict to a positive and inclusive outcome. The core values that buttress the political system command the adherence of the community and despite the tension and the conflicting principles, the country can move forward after a period of turbulence but also of national clarification. This legitimises the political system as well as the various sensibilities. The negotiation and the ensuing resolution is testimony to the agonistic nature of the arrangement, and its vitality. It allows for contestation, disagreement and different interpretations in the pursuit of the ideal. Individuals know that as long as their opinions yield to the higher law that supports the nation, they are free to follow their consciences and pursue their interests, and when they find opposition the system makes for a negotiated settlement. The Civil Rights movement carried its fight within that solid set of principles and because segregation was so obviously against those values the country accepted them, relegating a minority to reflect how un-American their position was.

Despite the success of the march, the revolt had been brewing for a long time throughout American society, not just within the black community. Despite his oratory and popularity, John F. Kennedy’s presidency was in deep trouble. His presidency, we believe, illustrates the liabilities that can result from placing too much emphasis upon

²⁸¹ Ibid.

the Executive, terminating the balance embedded in the Constitution. The separation of powers was intended to avoid tyrannical executives as much as it was to have the branches working as mutually reinforcing divisions. Although the trend had started earlier, Kennedy's aura highlighted the presidency as the new centre of gravity of government and American politics. His popularity amplified expectations that the White House could provide the solutions demanded by the multiple problems and challenges facing the country. Viewed as the engine of government, all hopes were placed upon the shoulders of the single most exposed branch of the constitutional system of government. The Constitution was created with competing centres of government power, depriving any of them of the ability to impose its will upon the others, so as to force compromise and the need to involve all branches into considered reflection about the government of the nation. The trend, now, was for the initiative to rest in the White House and Congress acting to accept or refuse presidential advantage, when not acquiescing with unilateral decision-making.

As James Madison made it clear, the separation of powers built within the governmental framework had a clear purpose: "It is agreed on all sides, that the powers properly belonging to one of the departments ought not to be directly and completely administered by either of the other departments. It is equally evident, that none of them ought to possess, directly or indirectly, an overruling influence over the others, in the administration of their respective powers. It will not be denied, that power is of an encroaching nature, and that it ought to be effectually restrained from passing the limits assigned to it."²⁸² The main architect of the 1787 Constitution had in mind the dangers arising from the concentration of powers in a single body of rule, but also to provide backing for the action of government which is too momentous to be left to a single particular authority. All branches were calculated to participate in the act of government, in order to provide help and advice as to the best course to be followed. To rely on a solitary source of judgment is to narrow the possibilities for correct action. The necessary support to sustain the action of government is located in each branch of government as they negotiate and seek counsel with each other.

The modern prominence of the Presidency is increased by the popularity of the elected magistrate, enhancing the prestige of the Executive office and the growing expectations regarding his administration. More and more, the Presidency is the centre

²⁸² James Madison, "Federalist n° 48", in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 253.

of government and the one that sets the pace of politics in the United States, the model to be followed, indeed the sole leader of the nation. However, the Constitution was not created to enthrone any elected ruler. The philosophy behind the separation of powers is contrary to the notion of a leader: hence the separation. Furthermore, the framers expected the legislative branch to be the pivot of American politics. It is no coincidence that Congress is the first Article in the Constitution, the Presidency being the second. The constitutional delegates intended the Presidency to follow the legislative branch, not precede it, to be the enforcer of its determinations. The Presidency is to carry out the laws and instructions of Congress, taking charge of their proper execution.

But in an age visually over-satiated, the individual Presidency becomes an easier element of recognition rather than a multitude of anonymous representatives diluted in Congress. Television, especially, had a significant impact on politics; it presents the presidential candidates directly to the voters and thus the parties, the mediating agencies between voters and politicians, suffered and lost their traditional role with the people. No longer would the electorate define their allegiance to this or that party and its principles, but directly to the man on the ballot, whom television now thrusts directly into every household's living room. As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. remarks, "As the parties wasted away, the Presidency stood out in solitary majesty as the central focus of political emotion, the ever more potent symbol of national community. When parties were strong and media weak, Presidents were objects of respect but not of veneration... Now voters wanted not only to respect but to adore their Presidents."²⁸³ It is a monarchic impulse that would have depressed the generation of 1776.

Standing out so clearly also revealed the President's understanding of the country's idealism. Issuing from the east coast liberal establishment, Kennedy would naturally be an internationalist absorbed in the faith that the principles of natural law applied everywhere to anyone. But we contend that he was more interested in exporting America's moral values rather than working to see them acted upon at home. We also put forward that the country is constitutionally ill-prepared for an international engagement in accordance to its ideals because the separation of powers impedes a decisive and assertive management of foreign affairs, where effective action depends on unity and consistency. In our opinion, being a soldier Eisenhower regarded the conduct of foreign policy much like the art of military rule; America was not involved in

²⁸³ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 210.

democratic governance but in imperial administration. As such, unity in command was fundamental and multiple commands imply diffusion and disarray. Hence his strengthening of the Executive and sidestepping Congress in this area. Kennedy approached his office with a missionary idealism, but the times and constraints on which he had to act forced a clash between his idealism and realpolitik. He proceeded to act alone, continuing Eisenhower's policy of imperial executive management but we find that he was excessively idealistic and optimistic about his capacities, and that he could have used Congress' pragmatism and ponderation to help him. However, Kennedy was loth to share his transnational stage, jeopardising his presidency's international record and exposing the dangers of an imperial execution of foreign policy contingent on a single figure.

The effects of such pressures and hopes upon John F. Kennedy's administration highlighted the natural shortcomings of the man and the dangers of a system over-reliant on a single figure of power. Nonetheless, the assessment of public opinion has been more favourable than that of history; scholars have to look past the style and iconography of the Kennedy administration to make their judgment. Kennedy's mishandling of the Berlin crisis and Vietnam, with the deposition and murder of Diem, and his overall foreign policy errors added to his inability to whip into line the Southern Democrats in Congress, which lead to a stalemate that blocked his legislative initiatives. With the approaching elections of 1964, Kennedy was vulnerable, his victory far from certain. He went to Texas to try and mend broken fences between his administration and the Southern Democrats; Texas being crucial for his diminishing hopes of re-election. Hoping to rally the State's Democrats to his side for the election campaign, he decided to go to Dallas, where he was shot on November 22, 1963. Notwithstanding, his assassination marked a watershed moment in the country's recent history in that it represented the end of an era that stretched all the way back to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Regardless of the mythologizing that followed his death, Kennedy did not represent a social and political break with the past in any way. In the cutting assessment of Richard Reeves, "Kennedy seemed to be the beginning of the new, though perhaps he was just the end of the old."²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy - Profile of Power* (London: Papermac, 1994), 474.

CHAPTER FOUR

The end of consensus: the ideal

Since the general civilization of mankind, I believe there are more instances of the abridgment of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power, than by violent and sudden usurpations; but, on a candid examination of history, we shall find that turbulence, violence, and abuse of power, by the majority trampling on the rights of the minority, have produced factions and commotions, which, in republics, have, more frequently than any other cause, produced despotism. If we go over the whole history of ancient and modern republics, we shall find their destruction to have generally resulted from those causes.

James Madison, Speech at the Virginia Convention to ratify the Federal
Constitution, June 6, 1788

I

It is a futile exercise to try to imagine how John F. Kennedy would, if re-elected in 1964, handle the coming storm. After an initial increase in America's involvement in Vietnam, before he died he was considering a change of strategy that called for a reduction in the number of military personnel in the country. However, there is no way of knowing how this change would have evolved, especially given that the President was adamant about making a stand in Southeast Asia against Communism so as not to appear soft, a charge his detractors emphasised continually. On the civil rights issue, he was simply a cool and detached spectator for almost all of his time in the White House, having joined the bandwagon only when he realised he could not avoid it. He had a cynical approach towards the civil rights movement, preferring to see it as a political problem rather than a moral issue that questioned the country's idealism, preferring to set his sights abroad. His main fear was that the issue would alienate the Southern Democrats and split the Democratic Party. His private life did not help either.

By the time of Kennedy's death, the stage was set for the unrest that gripped the nation in the coming years. And yet, the country never had it so good; economic prosperity was changing the country. "Jet airliners, interstate highways, direct long-distance telephone dialing, Xerox machines, and Polaroid cameras were speeding up people and life. Air conditioning was making it possible to build new cities in swamps and deserts. New things and new words were appearing almost every day: Zip Codes, Weight Watchers, Valium, measles vaccines, transistors, computers, lasers, 'the Pill', DNA, LSD. Television was becoming an environment."²⁸⁵ Late modern life as we know it was born in the early 1960's. However, amidst all this material comfort, a peculiar disorder was felt throughout American society. "Long years of prosperity allowed Americans to dream that, for the first time in history, the problem of scarcity...might soon be solved. But they also feared that a new and even more devastating world war – fought with nuclear weapons – could break out at any time. Affluence might suddenly give way to annihilation. The backdrop of the 60's was thus a society perched between great optimism and great fear."²⁸⁶ The effects of the global confrontation with the Soviet Union had wider political repercussions, shaping a bipartisan consensus that neither side of the political aisle dared disturb.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 474.

²⁸⁶ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided – The Civil War of the 1960's* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

In essence, American political vigour was stifled, the democratic confrontation and exchange of ideas sacrificed for national unity before the threat of Communism. “The Cold War also chilled political debate at home. Liberals learned to avoid making proposals that smacked of ‘socialism,’ such as a national health insurance, an idea their Western European allies had already adopted. To question the morality of the Cold War sounded downright ‘un-American.’ The need for a common front against the enemy made ideological diversity seem outmoded if not subversive.”²⁸⁷ A barren, grey middle path was being taken without enthusiasm, a general melancholy that was noticed by those most sensible to the emotional state of the community. The state of emergency stopped the national dynamo of ideas, blocking the natural channels through which the tensions and contradictions of the period could find expression. Unlike other moments of crisis - such as the constitutional ratification or the industrialisation, to name but two – there was a stasis in intellectual and public debate which was uncharacteristic. The pressures would erupt violently in the following decade when the voice of the community, silenced in the name of a higher value, that of national security, was heard again claiming a say in the definition of the country’s ethical priorities.

A basic tenet of the American romantic ideal of intellectual challenge and self-development was thus replaced with a stale compromise which anaesthetized the country. “The primary business of government, Democratic and Republican leaders agreed, was to keep the economy growing and the military strong. Conservatives and liberals squabbled over details: whether, for instance, to fund a new wing of B-52 bombers or more science programs in the public schools.”²⁸⁸ The wisdom, and even the desirability, of continuing the enormous effort demanded by the policy of defending the world from Communism was raised by few, Robert Taft among the most straightforward and coherent. But it was also a liberal consensus, dating from the days of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. His social programmes became part of American life, a legacy quickly shared by both parties. Although the Republican Party had fought a bitter fight to prevent the dramatic change, once approved the Republican Party embraced the new vision of a welfare state which liberals had forced through in the 1930’s. The first Republican president since FDR, Eisenhower, acknowledged the new state of affairs as inevitable and even popular, a reflection of the cultural change the country had gone through. “Should any political party attempt to abolish social security

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 11.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 17.

and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history.”²⁸⁹ Republicans had thus resigned themselves to accept the liberal consensus. Where Republicans and Democrats differed most acutely during this period was over fiscal policy. Political complacency and lethargy were the norm.

The nation, up to Kennedy’s administration, was still under the effects of the New Deal and the Cold War emergency. Unsurprisingly, the material affluence and the nuclear terror combined to produce a social divide, especially among the young, the backbone of the coming Sixties’ culture wars. Spurred by an uninspiring political landscape devoid of innovation and imagination, by the time of Kennedy’s tenure in the White House the estrangement of America’s youth was beyond disguise. A chasm had opened up between two very different approaches to the status quo. As Arthur Schlesinger remarks about the period leading to the New Frontier,

In the ‘fifties the young men and women of the nation seemed to fall into two groups. The vast majority were the ‘silent generation,’ the ‘uncommitted generation,’ the ‘careful young men,’ the ‘men in the grey flannel suits,’ a generation fearful of politics, incurious about society, mistrustful of ideas, desperate about personal security. A small minority, rejecting this respectable world as absurd, defected from it and became beats and hipsters, ‘rebels without a cause.’ Pervading both groups was a profound sense of impotence – a feeling that the social order had to be taken as a whole or repudiated as a whole and was beyond the power of the individual to change.²⁹⁰

Kennedy’s death signalled the end of the social consensus but the forces that were to tear it apart had been building since the 1950’s. But why was the ‘respectable world’ so absurd? In 1957, Norman Mailer gave his insight into why more and more of the American youth were turning their backs on what they saw as an incongruous and impossible situation. His opening paragraph addressed the unknown effects of the unease that dominated the minds of his contemporaries. “Probably, we will never be able to determine the psychic havoc of the concentration camps and the atom bomb upon the unconscious mind of almost everyone alive in these years... in the middle of an economic civilization founded upon the confidence that time could indeed be

²⁸⁹ Quoted in Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided – The Civil War of the 1960’s* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 17.

²⁹⁰ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days – John F. Kennedy in the White House* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), 637 - 638.

subjected to our will, our psyche was subjected itself to the intolerable anxiety that death being causeless, life was causeless as well, and time deprived of cause and effect had come to a stop.”²⁹¹ Created by the organized institutions of human society, the horrors of the Second World War and the looming nuclear apocalypse were the reflection of human nature itself. For it was the State, that ultimate materialisation of Men’s spirit, that had carried the organised massacres in the concentration camps and it was competing States that kept the world on the brink of obliteration. “If society was so murderous, then who could ignore the most hideous of questions about his own nature?” Rapidly, then, individualism became something to fear. “A man knew that when he dissented, he gave a note upon his life which could be called in any year of overt crisis. No wonder then that these have been the years of conformity and depression. A stench of fear has come out of every pore of American life, and we suffer from a collective failure of nerve.”²⁹² The sacredness of the individual in American idealism was regarded as almost a danger to national security. The personal moral quest which entails the questioning and challenging of certainties threatened the recommended uniformity and cohesion of the community. The collision between the search for individual truth and the common well-being exposed inner fractures and inconsistencies which the country is still at pains to solve.

Mailer’s essay traces the rise of those that opted out of the collective straitjacket. If all the hard work and care in raising families and creating a respected living could be wiped out in a flash of bright light, then every effort was futile, all life devoid of meaning. Industrial society meant death, organised violence and the smothering of the individual, of all vitality and inner strength. The racial injustices witnessed everyday only added to the sense of impotence.

It is on this bleak scene that a phenomenon has appeared: the American existentialist - the hipster, the man who knows that if our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war, relatively quick death by the State as *l’univers concentrationnaire*, or with a slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled... if the fate of twentieth century man is to live with death from adolescence to premature senescence, why then the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as

²⁹¹ Norman Mailer, “The White Negro.” *Dissent*, Fall 1957.
http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957, (accessed September 2, 2013).

²⁹² *Ibid.*

immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self... to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom and therefore sickness, and one exists in the present, in that enormous present which is without past or future.²⁹³

The answer, then, was to retreat into a life of immediate gratification, into the 'now,' justified as the renunciation of all earthly concerns. This existentialist self-liberation would soon descend into the acceptance of societal self-indulgence and the promotion of alternative lifestyles. Mailer hailed rebelliousness and non-conformism, attacking the liberal consensus and its society as corrupt, numbing and murderous. Modern American society was an engine of oppression, the liberal consensus that had risen out of a new reading of the ideals of the country indicted as a cancellation of individualism and personal experience. The belief held since Franklin Roosevelt that an expanded federal government would provide equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the Revolution was now weakening for both sides of the political spectrum. For some on the Left this expansion was viewed as being really just a form of suppression and control of creativity and individual freedom; in time, radicals would demand progress other than the material well-being guaranteed by the growing welfare state, and into cultural and lifestyle issues.

The attack coming from the Right was carried in the name of the preservation of old values dating from the foundation of the country. Where liberals argued for an enlargement of government intervention in the economy and a widening of its powers of social and political regulation in the name of democracy, conservatives countered with a solid defence of limited government in the name of liberty. Democracy and Liberty being both cornerstone ideals of America, liberals and conservatives differed in their understanding of the hierarchy of values that sprang from the same primordial source. The fragile liberal consensus eventually disappeared under the simultaneous assaults from both sides of the political aisle. Fuelled by economic prosperity and the Cold War, the illusory harmony gave way to a country divided in search of a new direction, between the prosecution of the liberal agenda as insufficient and the invocation of the past as the legitimate guide for the future. The fact that both liberals and conservatives defended their proposals as the materialisation of American idealism argues for the

²⁹³ Ibid.

difficulty of translating unto modern America principles that were initially regarded as a basic demand of all humankind and therefore perennial and immutable.

Literary critic Lionel Trilling remarked in 1950 that “in the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition.”²⁹⁴ Notwithstanding, it was the conservatives who fired the opening salvo in the fight to bring back America’s idealism at about the same time as consensual liberalism reigned supreme. The following year, 1951, William F. Buckley, Jr., aged only 25, fired a conservative broadside against what he charged was the country’s slow drift into statist liberalism and economic socialism, putting an end to the post-war harmony. Fresh out of Yale where he graduated the previous year, William Buckley wrote about his experience as a student there and the undermining of Christianity and free market values that was the norm in his *alma mater*. For the young writer, individualism, religion and capitalism, which he considered to form the basis of American institutions and traditions, were being subverted at Yale in favour of a barely disguised sponsorship of atheism and collectivism. According to him, this attitude was the reflection of the nation’s political atmosphere and was being transported unto education. “I consider this battle of educational theory important and worth time and thought even in the context of a world-situation that seems to render totally irrelevant any fight except the power struggle against Communism. I myself believe that the duel between Christianity and atheism is the most important in the world. I further believe that the struggle between individualism and collectivism is the same struggle reproduced on another level.”²⁹⁵

As a Catholic, Buckley viewed idealism as a moral duty, and the values it propounded the only true field of personal freedom. Atheism and collectivism sprung from the same dry, isolating rationality that makes individuals prisoners of a cold, indifferent logic - the annulment of liberty. Marxian man is the centre of a world without God and without values, the only standards available those his reason can devise and therefore subject to the dictates of contingency and relativism. For Buckley, this amounted to tyranny as the Soviet experience proved. True freedom resided in the observance of a set of values that structured the community and allowed space for individuals to define themselves.

²⁹⁴ Quoted in William F. Buckley Jr., *God and Man at Yale – The Superstitions of Academic Freedom – 50th Anniversary Edition* (Washington, D.C: Gateway Editions, 2002), xi.

²⁹⁵ William F. Buckley Jr., *God and Man at Yale – The Superstitions of Academic Freedom – 50th Anniversary Edition* (Washington, D.C: Gateway Editions, 2002), lxvi.

The significance of his denunciation of the educational mood in Yale resides in his claim that the undermining of free enterprise and limited government was not restricted to Washington, D.C, but began in classrooms all over the country. Young minds were being influenced in favour of principles that directly contradicted America's early ideals and William Buckley gave examples of this attitude that he had witnessed first-hand during his days as a student. There was no overt defence of the imposition of a socialist state, but rather a quiet following of what he called Marx's second approach towards the destruction of the *status quo* and which he claimed was preponderant at Yale. As he defined it: "one [approach] was violent revolution; the other, a slow increase of state power, through extended social services, taxation, and regulation, to a point where a smooth transition could be effected from an individualist to a collectivist society... It is a revolution of the second type, one that advocates a slow but relentless transfer of power from the individual to the state, that has roots in the Department of Economics at Yale, and unquestionably in similar departments in many colleges throughout the country."²⁹⁶ Matching the examples he provided, he described a general atmosphere of disregard and absence of different opinions, a one-sided debate where the arguments in favour of enlargement of government powers and the benefits of economic egalitarianism enforced by federal government were presented without challenge. The absence of an open discussion where arguments from all sides are exchanged and considered, which should be the trademark of higher education and democratic systems, results in the formation of partial and misguided opinions among the student body and public opinion at large. Little wonder, then, that Trilling could assert that liberalism was the dominant ideology in America.

Besides Yale's secularist frame of mind, Buckley was especially caustic regarding its defence of egalitarian economics. A firm believer in free enterprise and competition as typical American values, he attacked the economists advancing social welfare and increased taxation proposals such as inheritance taxes despite the latter having no economic value. Their proposals recognise that they are of marginal revenue for the government's needs but essential for reducing inequality.²⁹⁷ Buckley accuses the proponents of such policies of abandoning their role as academics and economists to become political scientists and in the process transforming economics into a branch of political science with the goal of achieving egalitarianism. The result, he continued, is

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 42 – 43.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 56.

that economics is now a matter of public policy rather than of individual action, denying individuals the freedom to engage freely in the market and letting their interests determine their choices.

To Buckley the secularist and collectivist ideologies being promoted in the centres of higher learning were undermining the nation's soul, corroding its values. But he also condemned the silent consent of the majority of those on the conservative side who remained on the sidelines while the ruling elite slowly pushed the country towards ever-increasing collectivism. However, in spite of all his protestations, William Buckley, Jr. could not escape the rationalisations encouraged by the Cold War. In 1952, barely one year after his polemic book, Buckley contended that he regarded the issue at stake "primarily as one of freedom or non-freedom... The most important issue of the day, it is time to admit it, is survival." The threat to the security of the United States coming from the Soviet Union meant that "we have got to accept Big Government for the duration - for neither an offensive nor a defensive war can be waged, given our present government skills, except through the instrument of a totalitarian bureaucracy within our shores. The question is raised: does it make a great deal of difference if we lose our freedom to a Georgian bandit or to a Missouri ignoramus?"²⁹⁸ Buckley argued that the prospect of reversing the New Deal social revolution was better enhanced under the dominance of the Democratic Party than under foreign occupation.

Still and all, our chances of ultimate victory against an indigenous bureaucracy are far greater than they could ever be against one controlled from abroad, one that would be nourished and protected by a worldwide Communist monolith. Thus, many conservatives, and many Republican's, have got to think this problem through. And if they deem Soviet power a menace to our freedom (as I happen to), they will have to support large armies and air forces, atomic energy, central intelligence, war production boards and the attendant centralization of power in Washington - even with Truman at the reins of it all.²⁹⁹

It is our contention that Buckley illustrates the difficulty and the inevitable contradictions arising from trying to manage a coherent defence of traditional ideals in a

²⁹⁸ William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Party and the Deep Blue Sea." *The Commonweal*, January 25, 1952, 391 - 392.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 392 - 393.

time of acute existential crisis and change. Many conservatives had accepted both the cost and the reach of the federal government and were reluctant not only to scale it back but also to control it. With the coming of the Cold War, the Republican and conservatives' traditional pro-defence positions sharpened their disinclination to weaken the country in any way lest it would reinforce the enemy. With the growing involvement in other nations' domestic affairs imposed by the strategy chosen to wage the fight against Communism, that position was replaced by imperial domination first, and neo-Wilsonian hubris later.

These first protestations of discontent towards mainstream culture and political consensus still lacked a formal ideological framework to bind it into a coherent purpose or direction. Disagreement with the status quo was mainly expressed through cultural instruments or episodes. Magazines appeared, both liberal and conservative, which expressed opinions that ran counter to the prevailing assumptions and worked as meeting points and discussion forums for those intent on exploring alternative routes. William Buckley Jr., founded *National Review* in 1955, which has become one of the leading conservative publications in the United States to this day. The year prior, 1954, *Dissent* was launched whose aim it was to aggregate those on the left who did not identify with the existing left politics and ideologies. Attracting a wide range of intellectuals and writers, the magazine had a clear policy of breaking with the conformism and lack of solutions that pervaded the United States at the time of its launch. Some years earlier, in 1951, Jerome David Salinger published *The Catcher in the Rye*, whose main character, young student Holden Caulfield, became a symbol for many in the 1950's. His frustrations and anxiety, arising from his sense of alienation and not belonging regarding the society around him, were felt by a generation of young people in transit from adolescence into adulthood disconnected from the social and cultural expectations of their parents and the social order in general. His rebellious attitude and scorn were followed by other fictional characters, namely in film, who voiced and personified teenage rebellion. *The Wild One* (1953) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) portrayed figures of troubled and defiant young adults. In the first one, Marlon Brando plays the leader of a motorbike gang, bringing to life a part of America that lived in the margins. The film glamorised and glorified the rebel and the violence of gangs living outside mainstream America. James Dean plays the middle-class teenager, in the second movie, who is unable to integrate or accept authority, be it in the family or at school. The generational conflicts thus illustrated in fiction highlighted the

differences between the younger generation - starving to break free from its parents' straitjacket traditional values and compliance with the rules - and the older one, baffled and incapable of understanding the dissatisfaction of the young growing in an age of plenty and vast material opportunities.

The mid-to-late 1950's witnessed a flurry of literary works addressing the desire to challenge and escape the social and political pressures. Most would stress the destructive nature of modern America's obsession with money-making and the reassuring continuities that dominated the country's psyche. Allen Ginsberg wrote 'Howl' which garnered attention for alluding to and representing the estrangement that Mailer would explain in his essay a couple of years later. With his poem, Ginsberg merged sex and drugs claiming that America was oppressing those who did not fall into line with the 1950's façade of suburban harmony and happiness. Under the surface, pain and alienation stalked those who did not fit in with the picture of modern America. In 1957, Norman Mailer would dissect the malaise in 'The White Negro' and make it understandable for all those willing to explore the developments that were taking place under the surface. The same year, Jack Kerouac and Ayn Rand published their tales of individual escapism and rejection of established truths. Whilst Kerouac's semi-autobiographical characters forego materialism and opt for a life on the road, Rand attacks the stifling of individual creativity and capitalist drive sending her main characters into self-exile, away from a predatory governmental machine in *Atlas Shrugged*.³⁰⁰ The epitome of the period's enforcement of conformity was the publication of a book which argued that political ideologies had reached their terminus. Daniel Bell's *The End of Ideology*, published in 1960, contended that the grand political ideas that had motivated the great causes of the past had become exhausted and that henceforth, technocratic politics would dominate. A similar argument heralding the end of ideological alternatives would arise after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but in 1960, with the general atmosphere of discontent building up, Bell was received with rather less expectation than Francis Fukuyama's thesis about the impending global triumph of democracy. Both, however, were proven insufficient by upcoming developments.

³⁰⁰ Written in 1957, the book has since divided opinions into extremes. Its outright defence of individualism is viewed as the apology of self-interest, and immoral by detractors while its defenders see John Galt, the main character, as a martyr and a prophet come to save mankind. It is consistently voted by readers as one of the most influential books and is also consistently shunned from the institutional lists of best books.

The dissatisfaction with the *status quo* was becoming wider, spreading to both Left and Right of the consensus. Whereas left-liberal intellectuals criticized American culture and society as being dominated by a conservative frame of mind, conservatives attacked the decades-long expansion and empowerment of federal government since FDR's New Deal and the slow but gradual decline into Socialism under the influence of an economic liberal agenda. The youth were at the forefront of the building tension. In 1960, a group of students created Young Americans for Freedom, a conservative organisation dedicated to promoting public policies in agreement with their principles. Their founding document, known as the Sharon Statement, upholds limited government, market economy, and the need to strengthen American security against the threat of Communism, in accordance with their defence of the Constitution and the 10th Amendment. In 1962, Students for a Democratic Society emerged, with their own statement, named after the location where it was written, the Port Huron Statement. This student organisation criticised the political establishment and advocated a radical reshaping of the country's democratic system. Both movements were proof of the resurgence of ideology in America and would play key roles in the coming years. Attacked from both sides, the centre would soon collapse, initiating a new period of reckoning and clarification.

II

In 1960, one of the most opinionated Republican politicians, Senator Barry Goldwater from Arizona, wrote a small book that made him the champion of the Right. The book, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, expounded the core beliefs for a programme of defence of individual freedom against large-scale federal intervention. Barry Goldwater outlined a clear, ideologically pure and fearless defence of the need to limit government in order to preserve not only liberty but also the very soul of America by keeping faith with the Constitution. Basic principles of American idealism were being discarded and replaced for their very antithesis. Individual self-reliance, limited government, decentralisation, these were all principles that had shaped the country and that justified Barry Goldwater's assertion that America was fundamentally a conservative nation. The challenge, he argued, was "to demonstrate the bearing of a

proven philosophy on the problems of our time.”³⁰¹ Against those who pronounced conservatism as out of date with modern times, he reached into the very fundamentals of conservative thought. As he explained,

The laws of God and of nature have no dateline. The principles on which the Conservative political position is based have been established by a process that has nothing to do with the social, economic and political landscape that changes from decade to decade and from century to century. These principles are derived from the nature of man, and from the truths that God has revealed about His creation. Circumstances do change. So do the problems that are shaped by circumstances. But the principles that govern the solution of the problems do not. To suggest that the Conservative philosophy is out of date is akin to saying that the Golden Rule, or the Ten Commandments or Aristotle’s Politics are out of date... The challenge is not to find new or different truths, but to learn how to apply established truths to the problems of the contemporary world.³⁰²

Given that human nature is essentially the same throughout time, Goldwater shared in the belief that American idealism reflected the best principles to deal with it in political and social terms. Man did not change, only the setting in which he found himself and the truths of the past remained valid: Man’s most basic urge is the desire to be free. Therefore, all human institutions governing society must have at their creation the aim of protecting individual liberty. History teaches that human nature cannot long be trusted with power for it becomes corrupted by it. The anthropological pessimism to which Barry Goldwater alluded to lies at the centre of conservative political thought and was shared by many of the Founding Fathers. Hence it was that the constitutional convention decided to adopt Montesquieu’s theory of the separation of powers to limit the possibilities of usurpation of government and the establishment of tyranny by dividing power through various centres rather than have it concentrated where it could more easily be captured.

Alexander Hamilton had reminded his readers and supporters of the new constitutional pact that “there is, in the nature of sovereign power, an impatience of

³⁰¹ Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1990), xxiii.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, xxv.

control, that disposes those who are invested with the exercise of it, to look with an evil eye upon all external attempts to restrain or direct its operations... This tendency is not difficult to be accounted for. It has its origin in the love of power. Power controlled or abridged is almost always the rival and enemy of that power by which it is controlled or abridged.”³⁰³ In a polity, that enemy is individual freedom and free Men’s capacity to control government through elections. As such, the division of government into competing branches was a further assurance against the possibility of consolidation of power and its inevitable encroachment upon the rights of the individuals. James Madison elaborated on the subject and its necessity vis-à-vis the realities of human nature.

But the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others. The provision for defense must in this, as in all other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of attack. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.³⁰⁴

Barry Goldwater reminded Americans of these basic tenets that stand behind the governmental framework of the country. The separation of powers and the limitations imposed upon the actions of government were the strongest precautions devised to supplement democratic control, duly inscribed in the Constitution. “And that is what the

³⁰³ Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist n° 15”, in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 72.

³⁰⁴ James Madison, “Federalist n° 51”, in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 266.

Constitution is: *a system of restraints against the natural tendency of government to expand in the direction of absolutism* [italics in the original],”³⁰⁵ whose purpose it was to maximise freedom. With *The Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater renewed the Republican Party along pure conservative lines and gave conservatives in America a clear perspective of their values and philosophical principles. It is not too much to say that Barry Goldwater reminded lovers of liberty what the latter meant and the best way to achieve freedom regarding government at a time when apathy and fear blinded the country. But it also set in motion a cultural war that gripped the nation.

This antipathy toward government and its powers is one of the distinctions between Republic and Democracy. For in his little book, the Republican Senator emphasised that the framers had created a Republic whose checks and balances were aimed at not only keeping tyrants from seizing power but also preventing the tyranny of the masses. The natural antagonism between liberty and democracy, when each is pursued to its ultimate consequences, was acknowledged by the Founding Fathers and they had privileged the former over the latter. This suspicion of government pervades all of American political culture throughout its history. From the Founding Fathers’ cautious tripartite Republic to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s philosophy - that government exists to prepare the rise of the wise Man, to help Men become what they must - to Henry David Thoreau’s dictum that the best government is that which governs the least, the United States were the first country where the Individual mattered more than the State. Barry Goldwater wanted his fellow citizens to believe in the country America used to be by reminding them of what the nation had been created for and how.

Therefore, his proposal was straightforward. Believing that the country was ready to welcome politics designed to restore the Constitution and enforce the true meaning of Republic and limited government, he envisaged the ideal politician thus:

I have little interest in streamlining government or in making it more efficient for I mean to reduce its size. I do not undertake to promote welfare, for I propose to extend freedom. My aim is not to pass laws, but to repeal them. It is not to inaugurate new programs, but to cancel old ones that do violence to the Constitution or that have failed in their purpose, or that impose on the people an unwarranted financial burden. I will not attempt to discover whether legislation is ‘needed’ before I have first determined whether it is

³⁰⁵ Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1990), 12.

constitutionally permissible. And if I should later be attacked for neglecting my constituents' 'interests', I shall reply that I was informed their main interest is liberty and that in that cause I am doing the very best I can.³⁰⁶

Barry Goldwater put an end to the GOP's acquiescence with the political left-of-centre consensus. With his readjustment of the conservative moral and ideological compass, he forced people to declare their position regarding the political developments of the country. His ideas so energised the Republican Party's true faithful that he captured the party's nomination as presidential candidate for the 1964 presidential election.

With Goldwater, the Republican Party ran an unambiguous ideological campaign, focusing on a fundamental opposition with the Democrats. The division ran deeper than mere political differences or political decisions. "We see this as the result of a fundamentally and absolutely wrong view of man, his nature and his destiny. Those who seek to live your lives for you, to take your liberties in return for relieving you of yours, those who elevate the state and downgrade the citizen must see ultimately a world in which earthly power can be substituted for divine will, and this Nation was founded upon the rejection of that notion and upon the acceptance of God as the author of freedom."³⁰⁷ It reached into the nature of moral absolutes. The pursuit of power by those who claim to use it to benefit mankind must be opposed for the worse tyrannies are those born under the justification of equality, albeit a flawed notion of equality. "Equality, rightly understood, as our founding fathers understood it, leads to liberty and to the emancipation of creative differences. Wrongly understood, as it has been so tragically in our time, it leads first to conformity and then to despotism."³⁰⁸

He also echoed Emerson's appeal for government to serve as the facilitator of the development of Man. But that development, both spiritual and material, cannot be directed by external forces. Everyone is responsible for its own development; the choices that rule each one's life cannot be made by anyone else. Hence, each is free to choose the life it wants to live; it must accept the responsibility for its life and the consequences of its decisions. The Constitution is the instrument that limits government

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 17.

³⁰⁷ Barry Goldwater, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in San Francisco," July 16, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25973>, (accessed January 9, 2014).

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

in order to enlarge the field of action of each individual in his pursuit of happiness and personal improvement. “We Republicans see in our constitutional form of government the great framework which assures the orderly but dynamic fulfilment of the whole man, and we see the whole man as the great reason for instituting orderly government in the first place.”³⁰⁹ Fundamental to that achievement of individual improvement is the protection of property rights, for if Man cannot enjoy freely his property and the fruits of his labour he is not truly free. “We see in the sanctity of private property the only durable foundation for constitutional government in a free society. And beyond that, we see, in cherished diversity of ways, diversity of thoughts, of motives and accomplishments. We do not seek to lead anyone’s life for him - we seek only to secure his rights and to guarantee him opportunity to strive, with government performing only those needed and constitutionally sanctioned tasks which cannot otherwise be performed.”³¹⁰ For Goldwater, government exists to maximise freedom and serve those who want to take responsibility for their life because principles and solutions issue from Men rather than institutions.

For this he was attacked as an enemy of the poor, and the Republican Party was labelled as the party of the rich. Goldwater was accused of caring only for the material well-being of his supporters and willing to forget the plight of those in need. Regarding these accusations, he had previously countered that “Conservatism is *not* an economic theory, though it has economic implications. The shoe is precisely on the other foot: it is Socialism that subordinates all other considerations to man’s material well-being. It is Conservatism that puts material things in their proper place - that has a structured view of the human being and of human society, in which economics plays only a subsidiary role.” The defence of property rights was done in pursuance of the ideal of the complete individual and how fundamental those rights are to achieve that goal. “The root difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals of today is that Conservatives take account of the *whole* man, while Liberals tend to look only at the material side of man’s nature.”³¹¹ Liberals reduce Man to a creature of mechanical reflexes, reacting exclusively to material stimuli, based on the simplistic belief that material well-being will suffice to fulfil the individual, with a series of material incentives accounting for his personal realisation. However, Goldwater’s arguments were too theoretical to be

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1990), 4.

summarised effectively for campaign needs and his gruff personality failed to move voters in his direction. His arrogance and love-it-or-leave-it attitude toward his proposals alienated many that sat on the fence waiting to be persuaded.

The election of 1964 was a landslide victory for Lyndon Baines Johnson, the Democratic candidate. The Democratic Party's political machine portrayed Goldwater as a right-wing extremist to great effect, with the liberal media joining the attacks and going so far as to announce that he would go to Germany to meet neo-Nazis in Bavaria.³¹² Unprepared and unaccustomed to the modern attack campaign tactics used by their opponents, the Republican campaign succumbed to successive and successful political ads that depicted Goldwater as a racist. His intellectual arguments regarding strict observance of the Constitution as the best guarantee of freedom were lost in the midst of the hullabaloo of an election campaign. Quick wit and easy arguments won the attention of the mass media in detriment of constitutional expositions regarding the compatibility of States' rights and civil rights. A firm believer in the Tenth Amendment, which precludes any federal intervention in any area not constitutionally attributed to federal government, Goldwater was opposed to federal legislation to end racial discrimination. As he explained regarding the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision regarding school segregation,

It so happens that I am in agreement with the objectives of the Supreme Court as stated in the *Brown* decision. I believe that it is both just and wise for negro children to attend the same schools as whites, and that to deny them this opportunity carries with it strong implications of inferiority. I am not prepared, however, to impose that judgment of mine on the people of Mississippi or South Carolina, or to tell them what methods should be adopted and what pace should be kept in striving towards that goal. That is their business, not mine. I believe that the problem of race relations, like all social and cultural problems, is best handled by the people directly concerned. Social and cultural change, however desirable, should not be affected by the engines of national power. Let us, through persuasion and education seek to improve the institutions we deem defective. But let us, in doing so, respect the orderly processes of the law. Any other course enthrones tyrants and dooms freedom.³¹³

³¹² *Ibid.*, xii.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

To manipulate the law and override the Constitution was to risk a dangerous precedent which in future could be used to impose dangerous limitations on freedom. However misguided the actions and beliefs people held, Goldwater argued that the Constitution was the strongest bulwark of freedom. Local communities and States should be the ones taking the initiative to solve the question of racial segregation. This argument, however, denied the only force in the country that could change the deplorable state of affairs at the time because of the unwillingness of the Southern communities - federal intervention. *Vox populi* is not always *vox dei*. Notwithstanding Goldwater's defence of the Tenth Amendment, the greatest danger to States' rights and the effort to deny government a pretext to interfere in yet another social issue were supporters of States' rights themselves. There was no escaping the feeling that the defence of the Tenth Amendment was done to prolong and preserve racial injustice. As such, Goldwater, despite his praise of equality and censure of racism, was seen as supporting those who had a self-serving attitude towards States' rights and the question of federal intervention. As an expression of this, electoral results showed a significant shift in voting patterns. For the first time since the Reconstruction, Republicans made gains in the South, with Barry Goldwater carrying five Southern States in the 1964 presidential election. This signalled the end of the Solid South for the Democrats as white conservatives there began moving *en masse* to Republican ranks. The Democrats' support of Civil Rights legislation ensured that they lost the white electorate in the South but in exchange won the black vote. This momentous shift in political allegiances has marked the final decades of the 20th century and continues to this day.

Having conquered the party's nomination and lost the election, the GOP establishment was quick to blame Goldwater and his enthusiasts for the electoral debacle. Moderates from both mainstream parties were also quick to point at the result as an example of the perils a party would incur if it realigned itself on an ideological basis and ran a campaign on a pure ideological programme. The country seemed to have changed. Pragmatism trumped conviction. America in 1964 was a country that had moved away from the Republic founded by the framers that Barry Goldwater hoped to renovate. The Republic envisaged by the Founding Fathers was one that required responsible citizens committed to upholding their freedom; a political system that demanded spiritual and even physical courage to survive intact in its initial form. For the responsibility for the citizens' freedom lies with themselves. America's citizens in 1964, especially its urban dwellers, had long ago been changed by city comforts and the

weekly pay check of dependent work. Their character, increasingly voluble and capricious, was becoming more and more unsuited for the rigours of self-government. Since the triumph of industrialism in the late 19th century, and estranged from the simple, hard, rural living that teaches and builds character, Americans had surrendered freedom for security and had been lured by the sirens' call to trust government for the provision of their material needs as well as of their material safety. However, there can be no freedom where Men are dependent on the State for their economic needs. The promise of more benefits entails the demand for more control. Goldwater was late by some 100 years.

The Goldwater surge within the Republican Party did not represent a unifying consensus around the ideological rearrangement. Discontentment with the liberal consensus which had gripped the GOP spawned a series of movements and ideological positions that questioned the establishment and its supremacy within the party. Traditional conservatives were challenged by libertarian proposals and by others of an anarchic hue. The 1960's showed the difficulty in forging a coherent national conservative strategy out of a coalition that included traditionalist and libertarian elements. In 1957, Ayn Rand had published *Atlas Shrugged*, which became a bedside table book for individualists and anti-statists. However, her abrasive personality and the cult-like devotion of her followers allied with her radical proposals to prevent her from becoming an icon of conservative thinking. It ensured that she remained a name that all knew but few talked about, and even fewer dared acknowledge publicly as an inspiration. Other authors, such as Frank Chodorov and Murray Rothbard, would pen their contributions to the individualist and libertarian cause which would organise in the 1970's to become one of the more serious and consistent factions in the Right.

The end of the liberal consensus provided a clear example of the existence of multiple narratives regarding the adaptation and translation of American early idealism into the 20th century. The values of the agricultural Republic of the late 18th-early 19th century were being challenged regarding their validity in a different country in time. The modern United States were mainly an urban-industrial society whose politics were now under the influence of mass media. The narrative of the Foundation was being analysed and its values and ideals contrasted with the practice of the Founders. Many of the latter were slaveholders, which weakened the claims of liberty for all on which the Republic they formed rested. Likewise, being merchants and mostly large landowners whose economic interests differed from the common man and small landowners, their

democratic credentials were challenged and the very system of government of the 1787 Constitution was accused of being a creature born of their economic interests. This deconstruction separated the principles of the country from the actual practice, helping critics to hollow the claim of universality; to them, such fault meant that the ideological supporting framework of the Republic was devoid of meaning. Racial discrimination upheld on the basis of a defence of limited government and federal non-interference further diminished the authority of these values, meant to protect individual freedom. For if the defence of individual liberty claimed the right to discriminate individuals, what value could there be in individual freedom. Society's greater good required the suppression of these antithetical demands, thus justifying the government's interference and limitation of individual and States' rights.

The fragmentation of the Republic's narrative opened the door to a multitude of interpretations about the destiny and meaning of the country which would reveal themselves fully in the years following John F. Kennedy's death. The end of the consensus thus stretched beyond politics into a brooding analysis of the very core and character of the country. The murder of the popular President and racial discrimination painted the picture of a country very dissimilar to the one proclaimed with Independence. The nation failed to recognise itself in those high ideals. The image reflected in the mirror was not that of the virtuous and just Republic but of a country fraught with contradictions, socially disfigured and embarking on dubious actions abroad in the name of imperial dominance. The conscience of the nation violated, the outcome was self-doubt and self-loathing which translated into social violence at a crucial moment of America's post-war history. Kennedy's death also marked the passing of the remaining certainties regarding the meaning of America. Self-doubt destroys dreams more effectively than any failure ever will.

III

The unveiling of the dissatisfaction that lurked behind the scenes extended to the Democratic Party as the next years revealed how far discontent also existed on the Left. The radicalisation of the late 1960's and early 1970's showed the extent of the cultural and political revolution sweeping the country. When Kennedy was laid to rest, Lyndon Baines Johnson, his Vice-President, had already been enthroned as the new President. The relationship between the two had been weighed down by misunderstandings and

incomprehension. As we have seen, LBJ's introduction as Kennedy's running mate in 1960 had been met with consternation within Democratic ranks. However, the Texan was an ardent liberal, a determined supporter of Roosevelt's New Deal and had campaigned in favour of the latter's court packing plan when young. Despite this, Johnson had fallen prey to several personal dispositions that ensured his reputation as a backstage dealer.

His rise in the Democratic Party was facilitated after FDR took the young man under his wing. But he quickly established himself in both the Senate and the party on his own merits, especially as he engaged in making sure he knew as much as possible about as many of his colleagues as possible. It became almost an obsession - and his trademark. As one biographer has it, he "may have been the greatest intelligence gatherer Washington has ever known, and that in a city of information seekers and manipulators. LBJ wanted to know everything, attitudes, prejudices, philosophies, history, strategies, as well as just raw data. A chance encounter in the cloakroom was more than likely a planned interview... Lyndon missed nothing."³¹⁴ This trait made him one of the most effective Senate Majority Leaders ever, but also one of the most feared. As a true *éminence grise* in the Capitol, he worked best behind the scenes, making sure that the subject of his attentions was made perfectly aware that he knew how many bodies were buried and where.

Despite his efforts at wooing liberals from the Democratic Party's eastern establishment, he seldom managed to eschew the regional identification as a Texan and a closet conservative. "Most of them continued to regard him as a smooth and self-serving political operator who had engaged in vote fraud in order to enter the Senate... Liberals also refused to credit him with true instincts for reform. Noting his friendship with conservative southerners... they further denounced him for his support of Texas oil interests, his coolness to organized labor, and what they assumed was his ambivalence about civil rights."³¹⁵ A proud and vain man, eager to be respected and esteemed by those around him, Johnson was constantly given evidence of what he identified as prejudice toward him, especially coming from the eastern liberal press and the 'best and brightest,' the intellectuals that populated the Kennedy administration. Their distaste

³¹⁴ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 262.

³¹⁵ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 529 – 530.

stemmed not only from his perceived faux liberalism, but also because of his personal character and shortcomings.

Not used to being contradicted or having his will thwarted, Lyndon Johnson used his position of power for some less than clear business deals, especially regarding his radio station business in Texas. To deflect possible accusations that he was making use of his political influence to enrich himself, he listed his wife as sole purchaser of the radio company. The Federal Communications Commission, fully aware that Lyndon Johnson, one of the most powerful figures in Washington, was behind the enterprise and duly gave its agreement in less than a month. And LBJ was not shy of personally applying pressure on companies and businesses to advertise with his growing media corporation.³¹⁶ His biographer Randall Woods spares no words about the darker side of his personality, revealed in his relationships with women, especially his female staff. Unlike his predecessor in the White House, who went about his affairs as discreetly as possible, Lyndon Johnson was unabashed and boastful about his affairs and regarded his behaviour as part of the spoils of political office.³¹⁷ Even worse and more repulsive was his coarseness, displayed to anyone “when he was bored or challenged.”³¹⁸ As another historian has it, his insecurities led him to mistreat others: “to humiliate and even to frighten others was to heighten his own sense of himself.”³¹⁹

His insecurities were compounded by his association with the polished and stylish Kennedy clan. He was especially resentful of John F. Kennedy’s popularity and the adulation the media granted him and his administration. His selection for the 1960 presidential ticket aroused deep suspicions among the Kennedy entourage and, once in power, they made sure that LBJ understood he was not one of them. The best and brightest that formed Camelot looked to the Vice-President with undisguised contempt. The target of jokes made by the men and women that surrounded the President, LBJ had to endure the derision and the public discrimination. “The Johnsons were rarely invited to the Kennedy’s small, informal parties, which featured the McGeorge Bundys, the Schlesingers, and Ken Galbraith and his wife; worse, Lyndon and Lady Bird [his wife]

³¹⁶ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 172 – 173.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 287 – 288.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 290.

³¹⁹ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 528.

were frequently the butt of jokes at such gatherings.”³²⁰ Worse still was the open hostility between him and Robert Kennedy, originating from the contempt the latter felt for Lyndon Johnson but made even worse by the smear tactics used by LBJ during the Democratic primaries for the 1960 election. Randall Woods has Lyndon Johnson revealing his human need to be loved by directly searching Robert Kennedy for the reasons behind his disgust. “Bobby, you do not like me. Your brother likes me. Your sister-in-law likes me. Your daddy likes me but you don’t like me. Now, why?” In response, Bobby Kennedy displayed a very human feeling also, one of detestation, claiming that LBJ “lies all the time... In every conversation I have with him, he lies... He lies even when he doesn’t have to.”³²¹

Some authors fail to restrain their disbelief at his political ascension: “How could such a man rise so high in American politics by 1960?”³²² So high, indeed, that he attained the Presidency. The incredulity is heightened by the knowledge that had John Kennedy lived, he would have dropped Johnson as his Vice-President for the 1964 presidential election.³²³ And yet, upon the assassination of the icon of American sophistication he would become one of the more liberal Presidents in American history, achieving arguably more than Roosevelt, responsible for a significant enlargement of the welfare state and federal assistance programmes. Although mocked for his Texan accent and manners or his cowboy hat, Lyndon Johnson had a keen grasp of what determined political success: the voters. The Kennedys were part of the elite and were comfortable with elite politics, but uncomfortable with mass politics which may explain their lack of enthusiasm for social causes. Johnson was a man that could understand and deal with the masses.

Each President’s vision of the common man and his needs illustrates their different relationship with the voters. Upon his nomination as the Democratic candidate, John F. Kennedy had defined a liberal as “someone who looks ahead and not behind, someone who welcomes new ideas without rigid reactions, someone who cares about the welfare of the people - their health, their housing, their schools, their jobs, their civil rights, and their civil liberties - someone who believes we can break through the

³²⁰ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 381.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 401.

³²² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 528.

³²³ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 412 – 414.

stalemate and suspicions that grip us in our policies abroad, if that is what they mean by a 'Liberal', then I'm proud to say I'm a 'Liberal'." ³²⁴ He would go on to explain what he understood to be the meaning of liberalism as part of his political credo.

I believe in human dignity as the source of national purpose, in human liberty as the source of national action, and the human heart as the source of national compassion, and in the human mind as the source of our invention and our ideas. It is, I believe, this faith in our fellow citizens as individuals and as people that lies at the heart of the liberal faith, for liberalism is not so much a party creed or a set of fixed platform promises as it is an attitude of mind and heart, a faith in man's ability through the experiences of his reason and judgment to increase for himself and his fellow men the amount of Justice and freedom and brotherhood which all human life deserves. ³²⁵

Lyndon Johnson, on the other hand, had a gift for building personal ties with the man in the street and expressing plainly the latter's main concerns, and not dwell in political grandstanding. "About all the average fellow wants is a chance to work from daylight to dark... to provide some food for the stomachs of his children, some clothes for their backs and a roof over their heads and a place for them to worship in, maybe a little recreation, and to maintain the freedom and dignity of the individual." ³²⁶ Instead of grand ideals, an understanding of the voter's world and his lesser ambitions.

But Lyndon Johnson was not devoid of a more substantial political philosophy. In an article penned in 1958, he expressed his views regarding political principles in general and in America in particular. His reasoning echoes that of James Madison in his stance against faction and party politics. In the *Federalist Papers*, Madison articulated his fears of national disunity fostered by the "factious spirit" of "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of

³²⁴ John F. Kennedy, "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Commodore Hotel, New York, NY, Acceptance of Party Nomination," September 14, 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=74012> (accessed January 17, 2014).

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Quoted in Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 385.

other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”³²⁷ This passionate pursuit of particular interests by organised groups inevitably spills onto the nation’s political arena with potentially dire consequences. Madison describes the effects, lamenting that “the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties, and that measures are too often decided not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority.”³²⁸

The solution put forward by Madison is to promote “so many separate descriptions of citizens as will render an unjust combination of a majority of the whole very improbable, if not impracticable.”³²⁹ In other words, to multiply the factions and dilute them as much as possible within the whole; as he put it “ambition must be made to counteract ambition.”³³⁰ James Madison believed that the Federal Constitution was the best instrument to protect both individual and minority groups’ rights. By virtue of the liberty given to the States and local authorities to regulate their affairs, the federal system ensures that “all authority in it will be derived from and dependent on the society, [but] the society itself will be broken into so many parts, interests and classes of citizens, that the rights of individuals, or of the minority, will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority.”³³¹ Madison hoped that both the federal constitution and the extension of the country would render party politics unnecessary as the diversity of interests would allow only the formation of groups dedicated to the endorsement of the most general of opinions. “In the extended republic of the United States, and among the great variety of interests, parties, and sects which it embraces, a coalition of a majority of the whole society could seldom take place on any other principles than those of justice and the general good.”³³²

We see Lyndon Johnson agreeing with Madison regarding both partisanship and the assessment that the Constitution was a legal mechanism projected to stymie faction. “Our system of partisan politics – which has come to mean so much to us today – is not a system ordained and established by the Constitution... The spirit of the Constitution is

³²⁷ James Madison, “Federalist n° 10”, in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 42.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 41 – 42.

³²⁹ James Madison, “Federalist n° 51”, in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 268.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 266.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 268.

³³² *Ibid.*, 269.

hostile to the concept of competitive partisanship.”³³³ The design of the federal Constitution forced individuals and factions to negotiate. The different branches of government were independent of each other and jealous of their prerogatives, having different electoral timings which together with the hierarchy of the federation - separating local government from the federal government – ensured that the probability that any one faction controlling all of the structure was very small indeed. The logical conclusion is that the system invited negotiation, reconciling different proposals from different factions.

The constitutional convention had been a triumph of compromise and negotiation and Johnson reminded his readers that throughout American history, compromise had been the cornerstone of the country’s political *modus vivendi*. “With few rare exceptions, the great political leaders of our country have been men of reconciliation – men who could hold their parties together.” Obstinacy and inflexibility had never fared well in America, he continued. “Lincoln never permitted the radical Republicans to drive more moderate elements out of the party. Woodrow Wilson appealed to elements throughout the nation and only went down to failure when he became too doctrinaire and too arbitrary.”³³⁴ Indeed, failure to accommodate disparate positions in the first half of the 18th century had led different sections of the country to retreat into the defensive bastions of principle and dogmatism and from there down to Civil War.

In our view, Johnson argued for a non-ideological nationalism, wherein the nation and the public good would be the only creed to arouse devotion. This nationalism required dedicated men and women serving the country. Certainly during his crucial formative years, Lyndon Johnson believed that a conscious effort to overcome personal interests and ambitions was possible in order to reach a state of awareness paving the way for the decisions that best served the collective. “Lyndon’s utopia was an inclusive society dedicated to orderly growth. Knit more and more closely together, the American people would bring forth and sustain a government that would act positively not only to protect individual rights but to advance the cause of social justice. His notion of the ideal public servant was quite Confucian: selfless, disinterested, humble, introspective,

³³³ Quoted in Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 346.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

and yet dynamic in his dedication to the common good. Respect your elders, your laws, your ideals, and above all, be responsible.”³³⁵

We argue that Johnson had a certain mystical view of the role of the President, responsible for resolving the inner contradictions of the country’s ideals. The great men of substance had the capacity and the duty to recreate a higher truth by synthesising the conflicting nature of America, presenting a new objective and spiritual dimension. In an almost Whitmanesque view of the Republic, Johnson saw himself as the captain of the nation, the skipper at the helm of a ship wherein differing multitudes coexisted and worked around a common goal and a common course mapped by the commander. LBJ’s preference for the voluntary abdication of personal interests in the name of the national and public good - perhaps reflecting his controlling nature and need to suppress dissent – resonated with Madison’s ideal; the 1950’s consensus can arguably be regarded as a triumph of that ideal.

Unlike Johnson, however, the Founding Father had a keener understanding of human nature. Just as he had presented the Constitution and the multiplicity of interests as methods to control the effects of partisanship, Madison also addressed the removal of its causes. But here he acknowledged that the solutions were short of effective. The first one was suppression of liberty, a solution he classified as unwise and a folly. It was also counter-productive: liberty was essential for any hope of conquering the effects of faction; the more liberty, the more factions would arise and thus weaken themselves thanks to their multitude. The second was to give to every citizen “the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests.” Nevertheless, this too was impracticable. “As long as the reason of man continues fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed. As long as the connection subsists between his reason and his self-love, his opinions and passions will have a reciprocal influence on each other; and the former will be objects to which the latter will attach themselves... The latent causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man.”³³⁶ Thus, it was not viable to pursue the path of the neutral and objective citizen that Johnson hoped for. The only cure resided in the control of the effects, by which Madison hoped liberty and the Constitution would both prove more successful.

³³⁵ Ibid., 67.

³³⁶ James Madison, “Federalist n° 10”, in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 42 – 43.

Johnson argued for ideology to be regarded as secondary in American politics. The well-being of the nation ought to be the compass with which politicians in the country should guide themselves. However, the end of the Cold War national consensus augured a resurgence of ideology. Progressives in America looked to government action to promote social justice and assistance. The Progressive Amendments and the turn of the century's labour and economic legislation stand as testimony of the Progressive Era's belief in federal intervention and activism in the name of social and economic goals. Later, Franklin D. Roosevelt increased the presence of government and the regulation of all facets of financial and economic life. However, not all Democrats were Progressives. By the time he announced his political credo, John F. Kennedy also exposed his view regarding government action.

I do not believe in a super state. I see no magic to tax dollars which are sent to Washington and then returned. I abhor the waste and incompetence of large-scale Federal bureaucracies in this administration, as well as in others. I do not favor state compulsion when voluntary individual effort can do the job and do it well. But I believe in a government which acts, which exercises its full powers and its full responsibilities. Government is an art and a precious obligation; and when it has a job to do, I believe it should do it. And this requires not only great ends but that we propose concrete means of achieving them.³³⁷

Past the emergency of the Great Depression and the outrage at the social effects of the industrial age, the fondness for the all-controlling and overbearing government had faded with the emergence of the Communist threat and Soviet-style autocracy. Kennedy's words tread a fine line between defence of government action and the need to stave off any accusations of being sympathetic to any socialist-inspired enlargement of central authority. But some Democrats were Progressives.

³³⁷ John F. Kennedy, "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Commodore Hotel, New York, NY, Acceptance of Party Nomination," September 14, 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=74012> (accessed January 17, 2014).

IV

Liberalism in America was centred on the rights of the individual, and after securing the individual rights of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, it evolved towards securing economic and social rights for the individual. Thus, the development of liberal thinking emphasises the equality of all individuals in their right to benefit from the promises of the Revolution and the country's economic bounty. To achieve this, central government was essential. Its active involvement was perceived as the only way to address, and put an end to, economic inequalities and social injustices. Liberals in America began looking with increasing favour to the federal government as the agent to bring about change in the country. However, we hold that a strong central government runs against one of the main tenets of American idealism. Nonetheless, this tension is one of the main engines providing for the system's vitality and constant search for balance which keeps the country moving and capable of resolving its contradictions.

Generally speaking, the defence of equality hinges on the idea of natural community and the latter's obligations to its members, to ensure that each individual enjoys the opportunities available to the whole. By contrast, liberty is directed to the individual, focusing on the defence of his rights against any attempt to curtail them, especially from government, the political expression of the collective. This tension lies at the heart of the Republic and the Revolution from whence it springs. The Declaration of Independence hails the unalienable rights of the individual and stands as an indictment against tyrannical governments oppressing these rights. On the other hand, the 1787 Constitution is the document that creates and establishes the administration of the community, and its preamble asserts that its authority resides with the people, the many. The Great Seal of the Republic can be seen to illustrate the tension between the individual and the community, liberty and equality. The eagle holds a scroll with the motto *E Pluribus Unum* ('Out of Many, One'), with *Pluribus* on the left side of the eagle and *Unum* to its right. Although it is meant to symbolise the fusion of the multiple races and creeds that populate the country into one nation under a common set of beliefs, it can also be seen to represent the effort required to combine different demands, the public and the individual ones. Unwittingly, perhaps, the eagle's head is turned towards *Pluribus*.

One author addressed the fragile balance between the two ideals and would later become one of the mentors of Lyndon Johnson's state-sponsored Progressivism in America. Herbert Croly published *The Promise of American Life* in 1909 and quickly became influential with politicians that regarded the federal government as the answer to the country's problems - Theodore Roosevelt among them. His book laid the theoretical groundwork for government activism, shaping "what became, under Franklin Roosevelt - followed by Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson - the regulatory state, headed by a strong president, and committed to expanding opportunity and equality."³³⁸ In a time of intensifying socialist challenges to the established order, Croly was trying to find a solution that was legitimate and original to Americans and their ideals. As Allphin Moore observes, "Croly thought that his nostrums represented a novel American response to modernity, balanced between alien European notions of socialism on the one hand, and unworkable laissez-faire individualism on the other."³³⁹ Trying to find a distinctive course, Croly would ultimately provide the rationale for a centralisation of government and administration but that was not Marxist or revolutionary. Realising that Marxism as proposed by Marxists of his time ultimately meant the destruction of liberty, Croly tried to find a compromise between liberty and equality under the guidance of an enlightened and paternalistic national government.

The problems Croly focused on had their origin in 19th century industrialisation, which had disrupted the nation's social equilibrium. To Croly, the traditional Jeffersonian philosophy of agrarian individualism was inadequate to cope with the transformations brought about by the industrial transformation. He argued that the belief in individual enterprise and freedom for individuals to follow their self-interest had given excessive power to wealthy businessmen and created class warfare. Croly was writing in the wake of some of the most violent labour struggles in America, with industrialists' private armies and unions battling each other throughout the country, paralysing whole economic sectors with scores of dead and injured. The unfettered pursuit of self-interest had perverted the American ideal, depriving the working classes of the country's promises to its citizens, he argued.

³³⁸ John Allphin Moore, Jr, ed, *Herbert Croly's The Promise of American Life at Its Centenary* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009). 2.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

In his examination of America's history, Croly identified the opposition between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson as central to explain the causes as well as presenting the solution for the country's problems. Hamilton stood for a strong centralised government, equipped with the necessary legal means to advance the common good. Unfortunately, Hamilton was an aristocrat at heart and distrusted democracy and the idea that common people could rule or even understand the mechanisms of government, let alone put aside their personal predilections and passions. Jefferson, on the other hand, was too much of an individualist and his conception of democracy was wholly inadequate to Croly. "In Jefferson's mind democracy was tantamount to extreme individualism. He conceived a democratic society to be composed of a collection of individuals, fundamentally alike in their abilities and deserts; and in organizing such a society, politically, the prime object was to provide for the greatest satisfaction of its individual members."³⁴⁰ Notwithstanding Hamilton's aristocratic inclination, Croly preferred his nationalism to Jefferson's individualism: "I shall not disguise the fact that, on the whole, my own preferences are on the side of Hamilton rather than of Jefferson."³⁴¹ This preference moulds his philosophy and the proposals he puts forward.

Croly was aware that the Jeffersonian ideal was deeply woven in the fabric of the country's democracy and society. Following Jefferson's election in 1800, his vision shaped the country and its understanding of the governing institutions. "During the next fifty years, the American democracy accepted almost literally this Jeffersonian tradition. Until the question of slavery became acute, they ceased to think seriously about political problems... In this as in other respects the Americans of the second and third generations were merely preserving what their fathers had wrought. Their political institutions were good, in so far as they were not disturbed. They might become bad, only in case they were perverted."³⁴² This produced a lasting legacy which still influenced political thinking regarding government and its role well past the Civil War. In the opening pages of his book, Herbert Croly recognised the influence such accepted wisdom still held. "Inasmuch as it is the honorable American past which prophesies on behalf of the better American future, our national responsibility consists fundamentally in remaining true to traditional ways of behavior, standards, and ideals. What we

³⁴⁰ Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 43.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 49.

Americans have to do in order to fulfil our national Promise is to keep up the good work - to continue resolutely and cheerfully along the appointed path.”³⁴³ However, as regards the accomplishment of that promise, Americans “may never have sufficiently realized that this better future, just in so far as it is better, will have to be planned and constructed rather than fulfilled of its own momentum.”³⁴⁴

The fundamental problem with the Jeffersonian tradition rests with the concept of equal rights, which Croly understands as being incomplete. The principle was fundamentally understood as meaning equal rights for all and special privileges for none. However, a country organised accordingly would create differences among individuals based on their opportunities and possessions. As Croly remarks, “The democratic principle requires an equal start in the race, while expecting at the same time an unequal finish. But Americans who talk in this way seem wholly blind to the fact that under a legal system which holds private property sacred there may be equal rights, but there cannot possibly be any equal opportunities for exercising such rights. The chance which the individual has to compete with his fellows and take a prize in the race is vitally affected by material conditions over which he has no control.”³⁴⁵ The logical conclusion, therefore, is that the protection of certain legal rights, namely the protection of property, is tantamount to the exercise of a privilege by a class of citizens, the property-holders. “Thus in so far as the equal rights are freely exercised, they are bound to result in inequalities; and these inequalities are bound to make for their own perpetuation, and so to provoke still further discrimination. Wherever the principle has been allowed to mean what it seems to mean, it has determined and encouraged its own violation. The marriage which it is supposed to consecrate between liberty and equality gives birth to unnatural children, whose nature it is to devour one or the other of their parents.”³⁴⁶

Croly’s reasoning argues against the dangers of faction - a recurring theme in American political thought - materialised in economic classes. Class warfare endangers democracy because it erodes the ties and responsibilities that bind citizens together. The pursuit of self-interest under the principle of equal rights encourages mutual suspicion, he goes on to argue, which threatens national cohesion. Individual freedom was important, especially in America, where it was an essential factor of national identity.

³⁴³ Ibid., 5.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 181.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 189.

However, here Croly shows his Hamiltonian bias, his defence of the nation over the individual and the need to do everything necessary to uphold national unity interest over citizens' liberty.

The nation has to have a will and a policy as well as the individual; and this policy can no longer be confined to the merely negative task of keeping individual rights from becoming in any way privileged. The arduous and responsible political task which a nation in its collective capacity must seek to perform is that of selecting among the various prevailing ways of exercising individual rights those which contribute to national perpetuity and integrity. Such selection implies some interference with the natural course of popular action; and that interference is always costly and may be harmful either to the individual or the social interest must be frankly admitted.³⁴⁷

His comprehensive analysis of the tension underlying the country's ideals and the expectations therein would now come round to its inevitable conclusion: the subordination of the individual to the nation, manifested through the collective will expressed by the majority. As such, the Constitution itself should submit to popular sovereignty when the latter clashed with the former's rights and guarantees. Croly regarded the Constitution as an outdated text, no longer fit for modern times and the exigencies of modernity, no longer capable of providing for the common good. Whilst the early Republic demanded the kind of compromise the Constitution materialised in order to prevent government from trampling on the individual, times had changed and so had demands; accordingly, the relationship between the nation and the Constitution must change.

The Constitution was the expression not only of a political faith, but also of political fears. It was wrought both as the organ of the national interest and as the bulwark of certain individual and local rights... Now I am far from pretending that these legal restrictions have not had their value in American national history, and were not the expression of an essential element in the composition and the ideal of the American nation. The security of private property and personal liberty, and a proper distribution of activity between the local and the central governments, demanded at that time, and within limits still

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 190.

demand, adequate legal guarantees. It remains none the less true, however, that every popular government should in the end, and after a necessarily prolonged deliberation, possess the power of taking any action, which, in the opinion of a decisive majority of the people, is demanded by the public welfare.³⁴⁸

Vox populi vs vox iustitiae, the law as an impediment against the will of the majority, in this case the demand to alter the Constitution to cater to the needs of the people. The problem, Croly continued, was the excessive legal protection given by tribunals to individual rights when interpreting the law. Not only was the popular will thwarted, but such obsolete preoccupations about individual rights delayed the American promise and risked importing into the country radical methods of change that were un-American and divisive. The people should have the power to take whatever actions required to preserve the public welfare, he argued. Nonetheless,

Such is not the case with the government organized under the Federal Constitution. In respect to certain fundamental provisions, which necessarily receive the most rigid interpretation on the part of the courts, it is practically unmodifiable. A very small percentage of the American people can in this respect permanently thwart the will of an enormous majority, and there can be no justification for such a condition on any possible theory of popular Sovereignty. This defect has not hitherto had very many practical inconveniences, but it is an absolute violation of the theory and the spirit of American democratic institutions. The time may come when the fulfilment of a justifiable democratic purpose may demand the limitation of certain rights, to which the Constitution affords such absolute guarantees; and in that case the American democracy might be forced to seek by revolutionary means the accomplishment of a result which should be attainable under the law.³⁴⁹

The latter referred to the European revolutionary movements that were disrupting the monarchies of the continent and fracturing societies into conflicting factions. The solution, therefore, was to substitute a democracy of individual and, above all, social development for the traditional rugged individualism and self-reliance. Individual fulfilment was best achieved through dedication to the national interest. The

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 35.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 36.

advancement of social goals would in due course favour the individual, allowing each to exercise his uniqueness more fully. Therefore, a coherent national programme of reform was necessary, whether Americans wanted it or not.

It is worthwhile to analyse Croly's line of thought and his proposals because his ideas helped give Progressives a framework for social reform that was uniquely American, and not a European transplant. At its core was the attempt to conciliate the interests of the community with individual liberty. Croly believed that the preservation of the latter while upholding the former required not a necessary antagonism towards individualism but a selective form of individualism, wherein each one trusted his interests to be achieved through the common well-being. However, to achieve this most democratic of ends, the means required did not rely on handing the *demos* a free rein in the process. Croly had a paternalistic vision of the central government and doubted the capacity of the common man, claiming that "the average American individual is morally and intellectually inadequate to a serious and consistent conception of his responsibilities as a democrat,"³⁵⁰ unfit to carry out his responsibilities of discipline and self-denial in favour of the new national mission. Every citizen should sacrifice his independence for the greater good, sowing now to reap from the benefits of common welfare later.

Hence, the new national existence should act as a school, as a training ground preparing the new citizen. "Democracy as a living movement in the direction of human brotherhood has required, like other faiths, an efficient organization and a root in ordinary human nature... A democracy organized into a nation, and imbued with the national spirit, will seek by means of experimentation and discipline to reach the object which Tolstoy would reach by an immediate and a miraculous act of faith. The exigencies of such schooling frequently demand severe coercive measures, but what schooling does not?"³⁵¹ This national school, regardless of its impositions upon the individual, was essential for the national purpose. "The modern nation, particularly in so far as it is constructively democratic, constitutes the best machinery as yet developed for raising the level of human association. It really teaches men how they must feel, what they must think, and what they must do, in order that they may live together amicably

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 276.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 282.

and profitably.”³⁵² In the end, the individual enhances his distinctiveness through the community. The latter’s well-being favours his own.

We could easily argue that Croly’s proposals about unity, of a harmonious community of disparate individuals, represent a quest to reach a consensus about what constitutes the national will and the need to set individual passions aside for the greater good. America, however, is all about confrontation, the dispute of diverging ideas and projects. It is this conflict that energises the negotiation seeking to find an answer which will both complete and overcome its origin. However, for Croly victory, not accommodation, must be the goal.

V

Lyndon Baines Johnson was one of the most Progressive presidents the United States have ever had. His social programmes enhanced the welfare state’s reach and changed the social landscape over which future politics would be fought. Despite his presidential record, Johnson was a divisive figure within the Democratic Party at the moment of his accession to supreme power and an even more divisive when he left. Although he did not share the deeper fundamentals of Progressivism’s and Croly’s tenets - especially the opposition to the natural law and natural rights arguments that underpin the Declaration of Independence and sustain American idealism - LBJ was critical of the Founding Father’s defence of limited government with enumerated powers. Increased government regulation and enhanced executive authority were the two pillars over which he aimed to press for greater federal intervention in public life. His appeals to non-partisan politics stemmed from his desire to see the whole of the political class embrace his ideals for the greater good of the nation, much as Croly had argued. In all else, LBJ was a believer in strong government action for the good of the people, inspired by previous examples of federal activism – such as his role model, FDR – and interventionist presidents like Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln. As he himself put it, “America is many people, from many countries, speaking many languages, many colors, with many different ideas, but moving always closer and closer together. And ever since, I have built my public life on the conviction that progress depends heavily on the narrowing of differences. I do not accept Government as just the

³⁵² Ibid., 284.

‘art of the practicable.’ It is the business of deciding what is right and then finding the way to do it.”³⁵³

Abraham Lincoln was a prime example of a determined leader willing to break the constitutional rules when he deemed it necessary, a necessity that LBJ believed had been fully justified in order to save the Union. His political philosophy was one of non-partisanship, and his understanding of the role of the President and of government was not far removed from the consensus era that preceded his arrival in the White House. He would demand cooperation and acceptance of his proposals, and regard any dissent with suspicion, denouncing a controlling nature arising from his personal insecurities. As his biographer points out, “Johnson feared that his critics were right, that he was not equipped by education or temperament to be president. These doubts stemmed from Johnson’s deep-seated feelings of insecurity, his vulnerability to sharp mood shifts, worries about his health, but also from a mind that was closely attuned to the political realities of the day.” On another account, LBJ voiced his concerns regarding partisanship and his ability to unite the country: “I believed that the nation could successfully weather the ordeals it faced only if the people were united. I deeply feared that I would not be able to keep the country consolidated and bound together.”³⁵⁴

For the new president, the best instrument to achieve this union was the federal government. However, in a familiar reasoning that echoes Croly’s, LBJ and his cabinet were keen to underline the benefits of federal intervention not only for the nation but for the individual as well. “Philosophically, LBJ could not abandon the notion that the federal government was an instrument to be wielded for the good of the people... Eric Goldman [historian and LBJ’s special adviser] urged LBJ to point out that positive action by the federal government actually enhanced individualism in America rather than detracted from it.” In a letter to the President, Goldman argued that the effect of social and labour legislation “has actually been to create much more opportunity for the American to be a genuine individual, with much more chance to express his individual self in both the practical and non-practical sense of living.”³⁵⁵ Despite the optimism, the Johnson cabinet was aware that the recent history of the United States could be seen as a series of attacks against American individualism. Since the days of FDR, the rise of

³⁵³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at the State Capitol in Austin, Texas,” November 2, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26713>, (accessed February 25, 2014).

³⁵⁴ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 520.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 522-523.

government's powers and its interference in people's and businesses daily lives amounted to less, rather than more, freedom. Eric Goldman was careful to put a spin on what he acknowledged to be the true perception from the man on the street. He kept reminding LBJ that the succession of social programmes, from the New Deal to the New Frontier "had enhanced individualism rather than diminished it. State intervention had freed workers from wage slavery, provided the elderly an opportunity to retire, freed black Americans from the shackles of discrimination, protected business from unfair competition. Given the power and characteristics of the modern industrial state, government activism meant more not less choice, more control over one's life, not less."³⁵⁶ Repeated often enough it might just become true.

Croly's diagnosis of industrialisation and its social effects were being taken up and followed by an administration keen on developing its own social agenda. The modern world, thrust forward by the industrial revolution, was changing the nature and scope of individualism. This was the dawn of a modern individualism, which according to Lyndon Johnson and his advisers "was a combination of positive and negative freedoms. The traditional, libertarian notion of freedom emphasized liberty of speech, worship, and assembly, implying protection from avaricious power-hungry individuals, groups, or governments. But for Johnson, Goldman, Moyers, McPherson, and other liberals, there was such a thing as positive freedom that put forward a definition of liberty as not just the absence of external constraint but the enhancement of potential."³⁵⁷ Inspired by FDR's second bill of rights, LBJ would develop the Great Society, a vast legislative programme that would provide for a number of socio-economic rights aimed at expanding the human potential of each American, far surpassing FDR's programmes during the Great Depression.

To achieve such positive new freedoms it was of the essence that private interests should be surrendered for the greater good. However, Lyndon Johnson was not keen on imposing on the citizenry; he believed and argued that individuals should control their passions just as the government, the embodiment of the nation, should set the example by not overstepping its boundaries and indulge in overzealous use of its powers. As Randall Woods explains,

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 546.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 546-547.

If there was a person in American public life who believed that the individual ought to be willing to sacrifice private interests for the good of the community, it was Lyndon Johnson. But he came from a land that valued independence and self-reliance. He did not, like Samuel Adams, want to eliminate private enterprise and convert the United States into a 'Christian Sparta.' The key lay in restraint by government. Citizens of the virtuous republic must be willing to sacrifice, but that willingness could not be abused. It was the duty of the Congress, the president, and the federal bureaucracy not to ask individuals and corporations to sacrifice their interests unless and until it was absolutely necessary. Fundamental to modern individualism, then, was the willingness of the individual to sacrifice and the restraint of government in calling upon that willingness.³⁵⁸

Lyndon Johnson was aware of the difficulties involved with such a request. Kennedy had famously urged his fellow countrymen to ask themselves what they could do for the country, rather than the other way around. Individuals are seldom prone to put aside their personal interests and freedom for the prospect of uncertain future benefits. Especially in modern America, a land of material prosperity ready to convince its citizens to ingratiate themselves as well as express their liberties. LBJ thus understood the importance of individual value systems, of moral values structuring the individual and his worldview.

Issuing from a religious family, LBJ believed that the power of altruism arising from religious belief - the Christian message of unselfish behaviour towards the fellow man - applied also to the world of politics. In a speech to members of the Baptist Church, the president expressed his conviction about moral fortitude in politics. "I am not a theologian. I am not a philosopher. I am just a public servant that is doing the very best I know how. But in more than 3 decades of public life, I have seen first-hand how basic spiritual beliefs and deeds can shatter barriers of politics and bigotry. I have seen those barriers crumble in the presence of faith and hope, and from this experience I have drawn new hope that the seemingly insurmountable moral issues that we face at home and abroad today can be resolved by men of strong faith and men of brave deeds."³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 547.

³⁵⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks to Members of the Southern Baptist Christian Leadership Seminar," March 25, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26130>, (accessed February 25, 2014).

Johnson's view was that Democracy requires men of strong faith, strong democratic values capable of renouncing private good for public well-being. Just as Christians expect paradise in the afterlife, Americans should forsake the immediate pleasures of individualism in return for the happiness of the coming welfare nation. However, this could be achieved in America "only if the separation of church and state does not mean the divorce of spiritual values from secular affairs. Today we have common purposes. Great questions of war and peace, of civil rights and education, the elimination of poverty at home and abroad, are the concern of millions who see no difference in this regard between their beliefs and their social obligations."³⁶⁰ He correctly identified this as a fundamental cornerstone of American idealism. "This principle, the identity of private morality and public conscience, is as deeply rooted in our tradition and Constitution as the principle of legal separation. Washington in his first inaugural said that the roots of national policy lay in private morality."³⁶¹ The American experience is founded on a moral empathy between personal conscience and the philosophical values of the nation which unite the many in a common viewpoint.

Given this austere value system, it is not surprising that the new president frowned with righteous resentment at Kennedy's popularity. The shallow love of public exposure paled when compared with LBJ's self-proclaimed ascetic abnegation on behalf of the common good. His need for total loyalty which grew from his ideological convictions but also from his insecurities was deeply aggravated when the Kennedy court failed to rally round the new president. In a later interview to one of his biographers, Lyndon Johnson gave expression to his understanding of the leader of Camelot. "It was the goddamnest thing. He never said a word of importance in the Senate and he never did a thing. But somehow... he managed to create the image of himself as a shining intellectual, a youthful leader who would change the face of the country. Now, I will admit that he had a good sense of humour and that he looked awfully good on the god-damn television screen and through it all was a pretty decent fellow, but his growing hold on the American people was a mystery to me."³⁶² His desire to replace his predecessor as the leader of liberalism in American politics was expressed the day after JFK's death. Confiding to an aide, he said "I am a Roosevelt

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 527.

New Dealer. As a matter of fact... Kennedy was a little too conservative to suit my taste.”³⁶³

Johnson’s very own brand of liberalism, as defender of the common man, led him to support strong government activism for the good of the people. But despite his pledge before a joint session of Congress shortly after his accession to continue the work of the New Frontier, he did not want to be seen as Kennedy’s man. As his biographer points out, “He wanted there to be no mistake, in Congress’s or the public’s mind, that he intended to take up not where JFK but where FDR had left off.”³⁶⁴ Alert listeners would have marked his pledge to wage war against poverty, a remark that would prove more than mere words of good intent, an early indication of his desire to be the owner of his presidency. But they would also have heard his appeal to union around a programme that would do justice to the country and provide it with a common purpose. “These are the United States - a united people with a united purpose. Our American unity does not depend upon unanimity. We have differences; but... as a people and a government, we can unite upon a program, a program which is wise and just, enlightened and constructive.”³⁶⁵ Lyndon Johnson’s petition echoed the Progressive view of the nation as a community. The new President portrayed America as a family that despite its quarrels shared a common heritage and managed to cooperate thanks to familial duty. However, his metaphor overlooked the fact that a family, as well as a community, is a collection of individuals and that to uphold the interests of the group requires that the interests of each individual be submerged into that of the majority.

In his speech, Johnson had also expressed his adherence to a strict observance of the separation of powers and respect for Congressional independence vis-à-vis the executive. “As one who has long served in both Houses of the Congress, I firmly believe in the independence and the integrity of the legislative branch. And I promise you that I shall always respect this. It is deep in the marrow of my bones. With equal firmness, I believe in the capacity and I believe in the ability of the Congress, despite the divisions of opinions which characterize our Nation, to act - to act wisely, to act

³⁶³ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 432.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 433.

³⁶⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress,” November 27, 1963. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25988>, (accessed March 4, 2014).

vigorously, to act speedily when the need arises.”³⁶⁶ However, in the President’s opinion such observance did not prevent him from taking a very personal interest in the workings of Congress. After all, as his biographer reminds us, “his memory banks were still full of information concerning the political characteristics of the various congressional and senatorial districts and the personal peccadilloes of those men and women who served them.”³⁶⁷

LBJ was the great intelligence-gatherer in American politics, and he expressed no qualms about using that information in his dealings with Congress. Indeed, he advocated a close bond between the President and members of Congress, as the true expression of national unity. As he later observed, “There is but one way for a President to deal with the Congress and that is continuously, incessantly, and without interruption. If it’s really going to work, the relationship between the President and the Congress has got to be almost incestuous. He’s got to know them even better than they know themselves. And then, on the basis of this knowledge, he’s got to build a system that stretches from the cradle to the grave, from the moment a bill is introduced to the moment it is officially enrolled as the law of the land.”³⁶⁸

This intensity was put to good use by the President right from the beginning of his term. Lyndon Johnson used his connections and knowledge of private facts about members of Congress to submit them to his will and ensure passage of his legislative bills. As has been mentioned, his administration was one of the most Progressive the country ever witnessed, putting an end to the age of consensus politics in America. The rumblings of dissatisfaction with the muddling middle path were being heard since the 1950’s and only grew louder during the early 1960’s. By pushing the country decidedly to the left, LBJ shattered the increasingly unsteady conventional views and gave the country a choice, an alternative that contrasted clearly and decisively with the recent past. The electorate now had a real political contest, a clash of ideas about what the country stood for and where it was headed. Always eager for harmony, Johnson terminated the age of consensus in American politics inaugurating a new age of ideological vitality and strife.

We can rightly claim that in scope and sweep, LBJ rivalled FDR’s New Deal. Johnson strengthened his liberal credentials and the electoral prospects of the

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 440.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 440.

Democratic Party by pursuing a social and economic programme intended to combat poverty. Rescuing some of Kennedy's unfinished projects regarding economic policies, LBJ announced in his first State of the Union Address that, "This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America. I urge this Congress and all Americans to join with me in that effort."³⁶⁹ The country was rich, resources abounded thus making the opportunity too good to be missed. He shared the liberal belief that government was an unavoidable force, the only one which possessed the expertise to improve people's lives.

In the same speech, he warned his audience of the challenge to be met. "We have in 1964 a unique opportunity and obligation - to prove the success of our system; to disprove those cynics and critics at home and abroad who question our purpose and our competence." But he likewise appealed to their sense of patriotism and unity. "If we fail, if we fritter and fumble away our opportunity in needless, senseless quarrels between Democrats and Republicans, or between the House and the Senate, or between the South and North, or between the Congress and the administration, then history will rightfully judge us harshly. But if we succeed, if we can achieve these goals by forging in this country a greater sense of union, then, and only then, can we take full satisfaction in the State of the Union."³⁷⁰ This candid petition failed to arouse more hardened politicians, who knew better how his proposals were divisive in themselves. Similarly, the country did not look at poverty equally. Albeit softened by material comforts, the country still believed that each one was responsible for his fortunes in life. The urban, liberal electorate might respond to the President's call, but the rest of the country would look on with suspicion. Randall Woods, in trying to enhance Johnson's achievement by focusing on the resistance, remarks that "Like other crusaders against poverty before him, LBJ would be swimming against a strong tide of individualism in American society, which prized self-reliance and condemned government largesse to the poor as counterproductive."³⁷¹

LBJ engaged in an intense offensive during the first half of 1964, pleading and cajoling not only politicians but the nation as well. In a series of speeches and addresses at various venues, Johnson made sure that his ideas would not fall into oblivion. He had

³⁶⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," January 8, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26787>, (accessed January 6, 2014).

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 450.

idealistic reasons for touring the country selling his domestic war on poverty, and he gave free reign to his liberal faith regarding the powers of government. “What motivated Johnson to fight poverty, in short, was not the worsening of a social problem – higher percentages of Americans had been poor in the 1950’s – but the belief that government could, and should, enter the battle. These optimistic expectations, not despair, lay at the heart of American liberalism in the sixties.” But he also had more practical reasons to press ahead with his socio-economic initiative. “Political motivations further influenced Johnson’s enthusiasm for a war against poverty. He was anxious to draw upon Kennedy’s ideas and to get something passed in order to demonstrate his skills with Congress. He especially wanted to be able to point to solid accomplishments in the forthcoming presidential election.”³⁷² The latter was a particularly worrying issue, since the President and his staff still lacked a coherent strategy by the time of the State of the Union Address. Furthermore, as Kennedy’s successor, he would likely have to battle the dead President’s brother to keep him away from the party’s ticket for the 1964 election. “When LBJ addressed the nation, neither he nor his advisers had a clear picture of the strategy and specific programs that would be involved. He needed a point man. Robert Kennedy let it be known that he would like such an assignment, but Johnson had no intention of giving a sworn enemy such a platform, especially as Bobby was trying to position himself to be the Democratic party’s vice presidential candidate in 1964.”³⁷³ Looking forward to 1968, Robert Kennedy wanted the vice-presidency under LBJ as a springboard for his accession to the throne.

In another message to Congress, the new president explained in more detail his plan, elaborating on the programmes that would deliver victory against poverty. On the back of an \$11 billion tax cut intended to relieve the fiscal burden and thus spur the economy into creating new jobs, he now moved to use the rising economic prosperity to pay for his social and welfare legislation. His goal was to release the powerful forces of the private sector and then harness them and use the new wealth created to fund his new programmes. His policy is summarised by his biographer.

³⁷² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 534 - 535.

³⁷³ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 450.

Throughout his presidency, Johnson would advocate a kind of corporatism, that is, prosperity as a result of labor-management-government cooperation. As a last resort, the federal government should and would compel cooperation, and it would not hesitate to use public monies to finance programs to help those who could not help themselves. Nevertheless, the private enterprise system *was* [italics in the original] the economy. Johnson was determined that he and the federal government would do everything possible to nourish it. It would be the goose that lay the golden eggs of social and economic justice, of a higher standard of living for all Americans.³⁷⁴

That new age of justice and equality would be brought about thanks to a number of new initiatives spawning from a new government department, the Office of Economic Opportunity. This veritable headquarters for the war on poverty would keep itself busy creating a myriad of new programmes. Among them were youth employment schemes, training programmes for those lacking working skills, wide employment initiatives contemplating loans and financial investment guarantees, an overhaul of the food stamp plans and of social security especially through Medicare for the elderly and Medicaid for low income families.

The justification for this drive emulating the New Deal at a time of acknowledged material prosperity and declining rates of poverty was given by LBJ himself. The federal government's reaching hand to those in need, was "an effort to allow them to develop and use their capacities, as we have been allowed to develop and use ours, so that they can share, as others share, in the promise of this nation."³⁷⁵ In LBJ's understanding, America carried at its heart a promise about equal sharing of the material benefits of the country. In his assessment, the new legislation would call upon those less favoured to sit at the table of the continent's plentiful banquet. "It will provide a lever with which we can begin to open the door to our prosperity for those who have been kept outside."³⁷⁶ Democracy was not merely the partaking of government, political and social equality, but also economic and substantive equality. This substantiation was a practical sharing of power and its mechanisms giving all people more responsibilities in the decision-making process.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 451.

³⁷⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress Proposing a Nationwide War on the Sources of Poverty," March 16, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26109>, (accessed March 7, 2014).

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

VI

In this, the President shared a view that had been put forward by Herbert Croly, the midwife of the new social order that was working towards replacing the consensus in America. The Left was quickly organising anew and taking to the field, working on legislation and in federal offices and departments whilst the response from the Right was still in embryonic form, in the process of debate and theoretical restructuring, far from a coherent and organised political framework. Barry Goldwater had lead the new ideological charge within the Republican Party, as preparation for the 1964 presidential elections, but his defeat ensured that the regeneration of the conservatives would have to endure another delay. In this reordering of the political and theoretical pieces in American politics, Johnson and the Left wing of the Democratic Party regarded the meaning of the American promise much as Herbert Croly had redefined it. The fact that Croly is nowadays very much forgotten except in the academic world does not diminish his importance for the Progressive movement. According to Sydney Pearson Jr., “This is not because Croly has somehow been rejected by Progressives, but because the Progressive tradition in American politics has first built on his foundations and then forgotten him. The Left in American politics has been profoundly indebted to him - perhaps more than they know and certainly more than they acknowledge.” Despite being forgotten, his ideas still influence and define the Progressive movement in America. “We can see this abiding influence in both theory and practice. Croly’s influence on the theory and practice of Progressivism is almost like an umbilical cord that cannot be cut without damaging how we understand Croly’s influence and the Progressive tradition in general.”³⁷⁷

Herbert Croly delved into what was the meaning of the American promise for its inhabitants and their expectations about it. He remarked about the vagueness of the meaning of the Promise, questioning what its tangible effects were: “When, however, Americans talk of their country as the Land of Promise, a question may well be raised as to precisely what they mean. They mean, of course, in general, that the future will have something better in store for them individually and collectively than has the past or the present; but a very superficial analysis of this meaning discloses certain ambiguities.

³⁷⁷ Sydney A. Pearson, Jr., “Herbert Croly: Apostle of Progressivism,” March 14, 2013. Makers of American Political Thought Series, The Heritage Foundation. <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/herbert-croly-progressive-apostle>, (accessed February 19, 2014).

What are the particular benefits which this better future will give to Americans either individually or as a nation?"³⁷⁸ Those arriving in America expected to live a better life than the one they knew in Europe. They were escaping from the clutches of history and tradition, which shaped the social hierarchy of which they formed the lower levels. Being at the bottom, they were the least favoured economically, much the principal motivation to emigrate across the ocean where they anticipated better conditions, both socially and economically. "America has been peopled by Europeans primarily because they expected in that country to make more money more easily. To the European immigrant - that is, to the aliens who have been converted into Americans by the advantages of American life - the Promise of America has consisted largely in the opportunity which it offered of economic independence and prosperity." That did not mean that they were not looking for freedom and democracy, since they stood for the negation of the world they knew back in Europe. Nonetheless, as he explained,

Whatever else the better future, of which Europeans anticipate the enjoyment in America, may contain, these converts will consider themselves cheated unless they are in a measure relieved of the curse of poverty. This conception of American life and its Promise is as much alive to-day as it was in 1780... They do not want either for themselves or for their descendants an indefinite future of poverty and deprivation in this world, redeemed by beatitude in the next. The Promise, which bulks so large in their patriotic outlook, is a promise of comfort and prosperity for an ever increasing majority of good Americans³⁷⁹

This argument of materialism is essential in the defence of the better world that Progressives herald. At the heart of Croly's political science lies an anthropological optimism that diverges from that of the Founding Fathers' which regarded human nature as naturally imperfect. As a product of late 19th century scientific confidence and influenced by German historicism and social Darwinism, Croly was part of a growing section of America's educated and comfortable middle and upper-classes who believed that there were no limits to human nature and its capability for perfection. And government expertise driven by scientific progress was the best instrument available to help mankind attain such perfection. "Democracy must stand or fall on a platform of possible human perfectibility. If human nature cannot be improved by institutions,

³⁷⁸ Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 3 - 4.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 9 - 10.

democracy is at best a more than usually safe form of political organization; and the only interesting inquiry about its future would be: How long will it continue to work? But if it is to work better as well as merely longer, it must have some leavening effect on human nature; and the sincere democrat is obliged to assume the power of the leaven.”³⁸⁰ As Sydney Pearson summarises regarding Croly’s optimism about government, “The purpose of political institutions is not to control or to regulate a permanent human nature, but to change that nature by changing institutions not merely for transitory reform, but to effect a permanent change in the human condition.”³⁸¹ Full faith is placed in the power of human reason to reform human nature, to change society for the better and towards the progress of mankind, from the real to the ideal.

To achieve that change in political institutions, the participation of the masses is essential. Theirs is a fundamental role, since they are the catalysts of change, by their pressing demands for more democracy and wider distribution of material prosperity. Therefore, it is the duty of every conscientious progressive to work hard to arouse the multitude, especially those in the lower levels of society. And the best way to go about it is to indulge their needs; but more importantly, they must be made dissatisfied by that indulgence so that they demand more of it.

So long as the great majority of the poor in any country are inert and are laboring without any hope of substantial rewards in this world, the whole associated life of that community rests on an equivocal foundation. Its moral and social order is tied to an economic system which starves and mutilates the great majority of the population, and under such conditions its religion necessarily becomes a spiritual drug, administered for the purpose of subduing the popular discontent and relieving the popular misery. The only way the associated life of such a community can be radically improved is by the leavening of the inert popular mass. Their wants must be satisfied, and must be sharpened and increased with the habit of satisfaction... The mass of mankind must be aroused to still greater activity by a still more abundant satisfaction of their needs, and by a consequent increase of their aggressive discontent.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 400.

³⁸¹ Sydney A. Pearson, Jr., “Herbert Croly: Apostle of Progressivism,” March 14, 2013. Makers of American Political Thought Series, The Heritage Foundation. <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/herbert-croly-progressive-apostle>, (accessed February 19, 2014).

³⁸² Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 14 – 15.

Democracy is not enough; popular participation in elections does not suffice to influence the change. The individuals must be made the agents of change through their dissatisfaction. Industrialism had changed America forever, bringing with it social conflict. Human nature's worst instincts were being stimulated by class warfare and the community suffered division and partisanship. Rather than risk revolution and the violent overthrow of the constitutional order, every effort should be made to change the political institutions, a necessary step towards attaining the desired perfectibility. And this through the fulfilment of human nature's needs, of those more secular in kind. Somehow, Croly seems to argue that a more perfect and moral nature, a higher spiritual state for mankind, will arise from being spoiled by the satisfaction of every individual's desire and impulse.

We think it would be unfair to characterise LBJ's social and economic programmes as mere satisfaction of material wants. His plans included provisions not only to provide welfare but also to help the poor improve their condition through education and job training. Financial aid was given for education and special schemes to acquire skills that could prove useful in the job market. A point of contact between Croly's blueprint for reshaping America and Johnson's was in the acknowledged need to involve the communities, to arouse the 'inert popular masses.' In view of that, hundreds of thousands of jobs were created in poor areas around the country to accommodate the young and those in training programmes. But Johnson went farther and directly engaged the impoverished parts of the country, both urban and rural. He created the Community Action programme, whose purpose it was to "give every American community the opportunity to develop a comprehensive plan to fight its own poverty - and help them to carry out their plans." Rather than waiting for Washington to decide what to do, and how, Johnson proposed that people in poor communities work on a solution with the government providing the means. "This program asks men and women throughout the country to prepare long-range plans for the attack on poverty in their own local communities. These are not plans prepared in Washington and imposed upon hundreds of different situations. They are based on the fact that local citizens are the ones that best understand their own problems, and know best how to deal with those problems. These plans will be local plans striking at the many untitled needs which underlie poverty in each community, not just one or two. Their components and

emphasis will differ as needs differ.”³⁸³ The goal was to let each community decide on the common good, which in turn would also benefit each individual.

These neighbourhood initiatives would be repeated throughout the country hopefully leading the nation toward that better future aspired to, in not only material terms but also morally better, the dawn of a great society. This was Johnson’s vision, his aspiration and his cause, the motivation behind his domestic initiatives; to bring forth the establishment of a fairer society, a better society - an ideal society. In a speech in May 1964, Johnson addressed a crowd of students urging them to seize the opportunity before them to build that great society. “This is a young land and it is a land of young people. There are 2 1/2 times more Americans under the age of 25 than our total population 100 years ago. By the end of the next decade, in 1980, one-half of our people will be younger than 25. So to you of this student body, I say merely as a statement of fact, America is yours, yours to make a better land, yours to build the great society.” The expression was probably novel and the meaning encompassed all his legislative proposals. “And with your courage and with your compassion and your desire, we will build the Great Society. It is a Society where no child will go unfed, and no youngster will go unschooled. Where no man who wants work will fail to find it. Where no citizen will be barred from any door because of his birthplace or his color or his church. Where peace and security is common among neighbors and possible among nations.”³⁸⁴ Thus Johnson found a slogan with which to give his domestic policies a coherent outlook, instead of being simply a series of individual, scattered initiatives. There was a rationale behind them, a vision which gave his national agenda cohesion and a common purpose that reached far beyond its separate elements that was rooted in the Progressive tradition.

Two weeks after that first speech, he gave a second one where he related more closely the Great Society with the idea of excellence rather than just social and economic justice. The American promise was not mere satisfaction of needs, but had evolved into the attainment of an advanced state of social and cultural development, of civilisation. “The purpose of protecting the life of our Nation and preserving the liberty of our citizens is to pursue the happiness of our people. Our success in that pursuit is the

³⁸³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress Proposing a Nationwide War on the Sources of Poverty,” March 16, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26109>, (accessed March 7, 2014).

³⁸⁴ Johnson, Lyndon B. “Remarks in Athens at Ohio University,” May 7, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26225>, (accessed March 7, 2014).

test of our success as a Nation. For a century we labored to settle and to subdue a continent. For half a century we called upon unbounded invention and untiring industry to create an order of plenty for all of our people. The challenge of the next half century is whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life, and to advance the quality of our American civilization.”³⁸⁵ The Progressive aim of individual improvement through the community now lay at the heart of the Great Society. In his speech, Lyndon Johnson associated his legislative programmes with enrichment of the individual’s spiritual nature, the rekindling of his bonds with nature and his aspiration towards the sublime.

For in your time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society. The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time. But that is just the beginning. The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community. It is a place where man can renew contact with nature. It is a place which honors creation for its own sake and for what it adds to the understanding of the race. It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods.³⁸⁶

We can see his indebtedness toward Ralph Waldo Emerson and the assertion that “To educate the wise man, the State exists.”³⁸⁷ To him, the education and improvement of the country’s citizens is the only end of Government; not only a political and economic improvement but also a spiritual one. The political institutions should work for the personal development of every individual. The Great Society was Johnson’s plan to parallel that ideal of a richer life of mind and spirit. The elimination of poverty and the end of racial injustice in America were but the visible and immediate

³⁸⁵ Johnson, Lyndon B. “Remarks at the University of Michigan,” May 22, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26262>, (accessed March 7, 2014).

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Politics”, in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Second Series* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2008), 265.

effects of the federal government's measures. The end product was a new social reality, appropriate dwelling for a new type of enlightened individual.

This new reality, the ideal of human betterment had also been advocated by the forgotten prophet of progressivism, Herbert Croly. Arguing on behalf of a new political organisation that would bring forth economic comfort and independence for all, he said that "the increasing comfort and economic independence of an ever increasing proportion of the population must be secured, and it must be secured by a combination of individual effort and proper political organization. Above all, however, this economic and political system must be made to secure results of moral and social value. It is the seeking of such results which converts democracy from a political system into a constructive social ideal."³⁸⁸ Lyndon Baines Johnson was working for nothing less than that new social ideal. In the years that followed, he applied himself and his administration to pass legislation that would materialise his Great society, complement the War on Poverty, and press Congress to provide for federal funding of his programmes. The Social Security Act of 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, to name but a few, all followed to bring to life his idea of America.

Thus Lyndon Johnson proceeded to augment and strengthen the welfare state in America. And in pushing for such expansive liberal programmes, the president exerted his full strength and concentrated attention upon Congress. The president was determined to work as hard as possible to see that the mass of Americans realised he was on their side and arouse them to action by providing for them. He was the President but also their patron; but above all, he loved being in control. "Johnson worked hard at accommodating congressional sensibilities as any President in modern American history. Again and again, and at all hours, he picked up the phone to call and flatter legislators, among them junior people who had never heard from the White House before. Leaving nothing to chance, he insisted that his political aides be on the Hill at all times. With characteristic crudeness he told them, 'You got to learn to mount this Congress like you mount a woman.'"³⁸⁹ Such suave words were no doubt matched by his persuasive talents in ensuring that his legislation was approved. These same strenuous efforts were carried out to guarantee passage of the Civil Rights Bill.

³⁸⁸ Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 17.

³⁸⁹ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 531 – 532.

In his first speech before Congress after his inauguration, LBJ initiated a cautious demarcation from Kennedy, including on the subject of civil rights. Acknowledging the latter's authorship of the Civil Rights bill awaiting approval, he urged Congress, "as I did in 1957 and again in 1960, to enact a civil rights law,"³⁹⁰ thus subtly reminding his audience that he had been arguing the case long before Kennedy had agreed to concentrate on the issue. As an admirer of national harmony, which he believed ought to be centred in the presidency as the only official elected by the whole body politic, the new leader was not going to overlook Congress as Kennedy had done. Johnson would not risk his administration's legislative hallmarks. Hence he decided to get personally involved in the struggle to pass the Civil Rights bill in Congress, in 1964. The bill threatened to split the Democratic Party and lose the white southern electorate for the Republicans due to the violent opposition of the Solid South to legislation ending racial segregation. Johnson had already been labelled a traitor by Southerners for running on the liberal Kennedy ticket,³⁹¹ so the prospect of passing civil rights legislation threatened the administrations' hold of the Democratic Representatives and Senators in Congress. On the other hand, growing impatience and restlessness among black Americans meant that any delaying of the matter could enlarge the fractures in American society into widespread racial violence.

Despite the political dangers, Johnson pressed forward. Again, Kennedy's presence could be felt close to the President. With the 1964 presidential election on the horizon, Johnson needed to get the liberal wing of the Democratic Party behind him. "Kennedy's measure was certain to pass the House in some form in 1964, but to maintain credibility among liberals, many of whom deeply distrusted him, LBJ had to lead a strong bill through the gauntlet of the Senate."³⁹² And so, LBJ authored a stronger Civil Rights Bill than the one JFK had prepared. Having secured passage of the Bill in the House, the real challenge lay in the Senate where Southern Senators threatened with a filibuster³⁹³ to prevent the Bill from being voted. Senate rules allow Senators to talk

³⁹⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress," November 27, 1963. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25988>, (accessed March 4, 2014).

³⁹¹ Tom Wicker, *JFK and LBJ – The Influence of Personality upon Politics* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), 156.

³⁹² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 543.

³⁹³ Since there is no rule limiting the duration of debate in the U.S. Senate, a Senator can talk for as long as he wishes effectively blocking the vote on any proposal. This is called a filibuster and since 1975 the two-thirds majority to override it has been changed to three-fifths (60 senators), regardless of the number present.

for as long as they want on any subject they wish, effectively blocking the chamber from conducting any business. The only way to override the filibuster was to call on the Senate to vote for a petition of cloture - which required two-thirds of the Senate - to end the debate and force a vote. However, when it came to civil rights the Senate had never been able to gather enough votes to terminate a filibuster and since 1927 it had successfully agreed to cloture for any measure only once.

The filibuster lasted for a record three months. Enlisting Republican support was fundamental to ensure a vote of cloture and passage of the Bill; of the 67 Democratic Senators, 21 came from former Confederate States. Johnson quickly went to work on Everett Dirksen, Senate Republican leader, to ensure the necessary number of votes for cloture. "Over the next several months he spent hours wooing Dirksen, a friend and former colleague, sometimes by inviting him to the White House, swapping stories with him, and drinking with him into the night." But he also kept a careful daily register of the mood in the Senate. "Johnson drove his staff members, keeping them around until late. He regularly quizzed Larry O'Brien, his congressional liaison, on exactly what various senators had said that day, and he kept long tally sheets on senators' names and columns for YES, NO, and UNDECIDED."³⁹⁴ The president engaged in intense pressure also outside the Senate.

He decided to tour the South in order to persuade public opinion to change in favour of the law, and thus isolate the filibusters. In Atlanta, Georgia, the city burned to the ground by the Union armies during the Civil War, Johnson quoted a former Emory College president: "We in the South have no divine call to stand eternal guard by the grave of dead issues." The time had come to put to rest old quarrels. "So I say to the distinguished members of this legislature and their wives, and all of you who have come here to do me this great honor this morning; heed not those who would come waving the tattered and discredited banners of the past, who seek to stir old hostilities and kindle old hatreds, who preach battle between neighbors and bitterness between States. That is the way back toward the anguish from which we all came."³⁹⁵ But he also made use of more generous arguments, dispensing money to win supporters in the Senate. "As the climax neared, the president opened his pork barrel to ensure success. He arranged

³⁹⁴ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 544.

³⁹⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks in Atlanta at a Breakfast of the Georgia Legislature," May 8, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26233>, (accessed March 22, 2014).

for Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall to meet with Carl Hayden of Arizona... [who] had never voted for cloture. But when Udall promised administration support for the Central Arizona Water Project, a massive scheme to divert waters from the Colorado River to Tucson and Phoenix, Hayden offered his vote. To soften the blow for southerners, Johnson arranged for northern urban votes in support of the cotton and wheat bill," traditionally strong economic sectors in the South. He also orchestrated the approval of "\$263 million for the Tennessee River-Tombigbee project, a federally funded enterprise to improve river navigation from Tennessee to the Gulf."³⁹⁶ Eventually the pressure paid off. The filibuster came to an end after Everett Dirksen announced the he and the Republicans were satisfied with the Bill as it was. The vote for cloture duly followed, and was approved by 71 votes for and 29 against. Less than a month later, the Bill passed the Senate, 73 to 27.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a significant piece of legislation. It outlawed most forms of racial segregation in both public as well as private services. Discrimination in employment and public education were made illegal, with the aim of ensuring legal equality, making the Civil Rights Act as one of the most important in recent American history. The Act was complemented the following year with the Voting Rights Act which banned voting discrimination, especially rampant in the South, and a new Civil Rights Act in 1968. The latter focused particularly on guaranteeing equal housing opportunities regardless of race, thus extending the American dream of homeownership to all. Johnson was aware of the magnitude of the law he signed on July 2, 1964, when he confided to an aide that the Democratic Party had lost the South for the rest of his lifetime.³⁹⁷ Nonetheless, for the rest of the country the time had indeed come to accept the change. In November of that year, Johnson won a landslide electoral victory, thus vindicating his decision to push through the legislation. The Republicans, however, besides carrying Goldwater's home state of Arizona also won in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina, States that voted Republican for the first time since the end of Reconstruction, in 1876.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended up protecting women also against discrimination, a goal which it did not contemplate in its original form. In an effort to defeat the Bill in the House of Representatives, Howard Smith, a Representative from

³⁹⁶ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 477.

³⁹⁷ Tom Wicker, *JFK and LBJ – The Influence of Personality upon Politics* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), 6.

Virginia added a last-minute amendment to the article prohibiting discrimination. The article outlawed discrimination on account of national origin, race and religion and Smith proposed the inclusion of the word ‘sex,’ thus making the Bill also address discrimination against women. Smith hoped that the change would further alienate support from the more conservative members of Congress, but his calculation backfired. The Bill was passed in the House, with the proposed amendment, a further step toward social equality. The curious aspect is that at the time women’s movements were still in their early years and were not as vocal and active as they would be a few years hence. The episode is worthwhile as a reflection on human nature and how certain social advances come to pass.

In his *Promise of American Life*, Herbert Croly had talked about the need for strong men, “men of special ability, training and eminence”³⁹⁸ to help guide the nation towards its objectives. In his book, mention of a national purpose abounds as well as the understanding that “democracy, as a political and social ideal, is founded essentially upon disinterested human action.”³⁹⁹ Johnson certainly seemed to be one of those men in 1964. And he certainly wished to be seen as a national leader, consensual, disinterested and devoted to the national interest. His aspiration did not escape his contemporaries. “Always, Johnson wanted to be a *national* [italics in original] leader, not just a sectional representative. For years, his efforts had been toward achieving that goal, and his guidance of two civil rights bills to passage in the Senate had been a direct result. It was the civil rights issue that made sectionalists out of men like Russell and so many others; it was the civil rights issue upon which Lyndon Johnson would win recognition that he was truly a national figure.”⁴⁰⁰ However, his national stature came to a crashing end with the war in Vietnam. He failed to obtain national consensus regarding the conflict and the war in Vietnam became his legacy alongside the War on Poverty. Despite his belief in the virtues of expertise and education, Croly had warned about the dangers of trusting power to elites. For all his faith in the perfectibility of mankind, he nonetheless remained wary about human nature and doubtful of its constancy when it came to wield power. According to him, “in the long run a class is never to be trusted to govern in the interest of the whole community. A democracy

³⁹⁸ Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 170.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁴⁰⁰ Tom Wicker, *JFK and LBJ – The Influence of Personality upon Politics* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), 173.

should encourage the political leadership of experienced, educated, and well-trained men, but only on the express condition that their power is delegated and is to be used, under severe penalties, for the benefit of the people as a whole.”⁴⁰¹ The common good, the national interest, should be the compass guiding the elected administrators of government.

The involvement of the United States in Southeast Asia proved traumatic for the nation as a whole as well as for liberals in particular. Liberals were confronted with the paradox of cheering Johnson’s domestic policies, which were a breakthrough for Progressivism in America, whilst condemning the Vietnam War; they denounced LBJ for the latter while praising his Progressivism as a nationalist ideal. The war showed the limits and the risks of that association, as well as the conflicting shades of reality.

Croly thought that nationalism, represented by a warrior President like Teddy Roosevelt, would cement democracy with a strong national state. The charismatic leader who could somehow reconcile what Croly thought to be the conflicting strains of the Founding became a staple of Progressive historical interpretation that reached its climax in the period from the 1930s to the 1960s. But the linkage of nationalism with Progressivism was torn apart in the Administration of Lyndon Johnson over the war in Vietnam and Great Society legislation. Much of subsequent liberal political thought may be described as an attempt to repair or at least come to terms with that rupture.⁴⁰²

Likewise, despite his victory in Congress, racial violence erupted in the South and spread to the rest of the country, exposing the social fractures present in American society. Lyndon Johnson’s hope that nationalism would cement the union proved illusory. Racial tensions came to a head in the summer with three young activists in Mississippi murdered by the Ku Klux Klan with the connivance of members of the local police. That long summer witnessed a host of bombings and burning of houses throughout the State as white locals tried to intimidate and prevent the work of protesters and activists in support of civil rights. That same August a naval incident in the Gulf of Tonkin, off the coast of North Vietnam, proved decisive for American

⁴⁰¹ Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989),

⁴⁰² Sydney A. Pearson, Jr., “Herbert Croly: Apostle of Progressivism,” March 14, 2013. *Makers of American Political Thought Series*, The Heritage Foundation.

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/herbert-croly-progressive-apostle>, (accessed February 19, 2014).

military escalation in Vietnam. The scenario was set for one the most troubled periods in American history and for the undermining of LBJ's legacy.

VII

The battle for the civil rights legislation saw Lyndon Johnson at his best as national leader, with eloquent and persuasive speeches. He aroused the nation into fulfilling its obligations, but also addressed its conscience, defining the civil rights campaign as a moral imperative and appealing to the nation's Christian beliefs. As president he could not force the country "to integrate their schools or open their doors to blacks, but I could make them feel guilty for not doing it and believed it was my moral responsibility to do precisely that – to use the moral persuasion of my office to make people feel that segregation was a curse they'd carry with them to their graves."⁴⁰³ He made use of Biblical parables and quoted the Gospels often to carry his point and force a confrontation of his listeners with their conscience. In a speech to Congress in 1965 urging passage of the Voting Rights Bill, he underscored the idea that America could only lead the world on the back of moral principles and not military or economic power. "Rarely are we met with a challenge, not to our growth or abundance, our welfare or our security, but rather to the values and the purposes and the meaning of our beloved Nation. The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue. And should we defeat every enemy, should we double our wealth and conquer the stars, and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation." And he ended by quoting from the Gospel of Matthew, "For with a country as with a person, 'What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'"⁴⁰⁴

Although not unusual, the invocation of Scripture and the judgment of God that Lyndon Johnson embraced was, in the words of Randall Woods, "something of a watershed in twentieth-century political history."⁴⁰⁵ Intellectual prejudice influenced liberal politicians and academics to stay away from organised religion or to use Christian teachings and morals to support their arguments; secularism and modernity

⁴⁰³ Quoted in Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 475.

⁴⁰⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress: The American Promise," March 15, 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26805>, (accessed March 7, 2014).

⁴⁰⁵ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 475.

regard religion as unsophisticated and anti-intellectual. Johnson was not so. “Johnson distrusted organized religion to an extent, but he embraced Judeo-Christian teachings, particularly those found in Isaiah and the New Testament. For him, they offered the Western world’s most compelling call to social justice... He was convinced that the U.S. Constitution was the ultimate expression of the Judeo-Christian ethic.”⁴⁰⁶ Johnson’s rooting of the Constitution in the Christian message allowed him to use the latter’s tenets to reinforce his arguments in favour of the civil rights and defeat those of its opponents. But in our opinion he also grounded America’s idealism firmly as the expression of a higher morality rather than a mere rational construct.

For Johnson understood that at the heart of Christianity lays the idea of community and perfectibility. Christ united mankind into a single bond with the Creator and through him all were free from past ignorance and error, to be guided towards the light of eternal Truth. What this meant was that a new age was at hand, one where Man, through Christ, could arrive at God. The wider meaning for political thinking is described by Richard Tarnas: “The Kingdom of Heaven had broken into the field of history and was now actively transforming it, progressively impelling humanity toward a new and previously inconceivable perfection.”⁴⁰⁷ To be Christian meant to be open to the knowledge and comfort of Christ’s teachings and to the new dawn of mankind. To persist in prejudice and intolerance was to renounce Christ and his message and Johnson reminded every Christian in America of it. The US Constitution and the political system it creates are the incarnation of that higher morality, and its validity springs from its aspiration to organise the community - the real - in accordance with the ideal. Its vitality issues from the open discussion it enables on how to accomplish that aim.

Whilst Progressives adhered to reason alone as the instrument of perfection, Johnson broadened his sources to include religion, a powerful source of American thought until secularism and technology made their entrance in the late 19th century. As a liberal appealing to moral codes as structural pillars of a democratic social life, LBJ paralleled early thinkers such as Roger Williams, Thomas Hooker and John Wise. These theorists of liberal inclinations opposed the autocratic Calvinist-inspired theocracy that administered Massachusetts Bay colony in the 17th century and argued for a popular government of church and colony. The religious and political convulsions

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 476.

⁴⁰⁷ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind – Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped our world View* (London: Pimlico, 1996), 121.

of the English Civil Wars were crossing the Atlantic into the shores of the New World. One student of the period summed it thus.

English liberalism had come to believe that social conformity, established in the practice of coercion, with its monarchical state and hierarchical church, must give way to an order founded in good will, that conceived of the political state as a public-service corporation, concerned solely with the *res publica*, or public thing, careful of the well-being of all, allowing special rights or grants to none. The state, it was coming to be argued freely, rightly understood, was no other than society organized to further the great end of the commonweal; no longer must it remain a private preserve for gentlemen to hunt over.⁴⁰⁸

The medieval link between church and political state meant that the Reformation with its questioning of the religious hierarchies spilled into the political organisation of the community and the power of its rulers. The stirrings of liberalism and democratic thought in America began with the battle over state-sponsored church and its attempts at imposing conformity in the minuscule societies of early New England. Kindness and generosity, the teachings of Christ, were the moral standards for the ‘good will’ that was to replace the old order.

In a time when religion and church matters were the determining factors in the shaping of political communities, the disputes between the hierarchical theocracy led by the Mather dynasty and the liberal Congregationalists centred on the role of the administration of the provinces as mirroring God’s will. In short, the differences between the two perspectives resulted from their taking inspiration from the Old Testament, for the autocrats, and the New Testament for the democrats. Both believed that the governments of Men ought to follow the plan of God for mankind but the Hebraic, austere and unforgiving God of Abraham told the Calvinists that hierarchy was essential to secure order and to please him, whilst the God of Love of Paul and the Apostles looked more kindly toward humans and their faults. The early controversies came to determine the thinking and outlook of the early settlers regarding the rule of men and the institutions fostering that rule. The democrats argued that through his Son,

⁴⁰⁸ Vernon Louis Parrington, *The Colonial Mind*, vol. 1 of *Main Currents in American Thought – An Interpretation of American Literature From the Beginnings to 1920* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 51.

God had clearly indicated his belief that human free will was capable of directing Men towards Truth and thus to perfection. Therefore, it was just and proper that as well as being capable of regulating their religious affairs without intermediaries or an elite of sages and Saints, individuals were capable, through compact, of regulating the wider affairs of the community.

Separatists and Independents created new colonies in America guided by two fundamental principles. The first one, the right of each individual to determine his own religious beliefs and to freely exercise them; the second, the right to associate freely with likeminded citizens in organising their church and the institutions that form their credo. It does not require long reflection to recognise in these two the basic principles of democratic organisation. “The principle of religious toleration that was involved in the movement of Independency was the ecclesiastical form of a struggle which, shifting later to the field of politics and then to economics, is still raging about us.”⁴⁰⁹ Lyndon Johnson was the representative of the liberal side of that struggle to foster the democratic conception of Christianity, much as his colonial predecessors had done. But true to his conflicting nature, he also evinced signs that evoked the elitist, closed disposition of the aristocratic leaders of Massachusetts Bay church that the Independents and Separatists tried to overthrow.

Lyndon Johnson displayed a clearly optimistic vision of Man and his capability to be perfected. He was the most visible example of the Progressive tradition and its belief in the power of reason and scientific development working for human enlightenment. Nonetheless, in his willingness to trust the progress of the country to what Croly called the special men, the men of ability and education, LBJ was on a path to elitism. Croly’s distaste for the average citizen, which he considered morally and intellectually inadequate to speed the bright future that awaited them, led him to believe that, as little children, Americans needed schooling, however severe and coercive. That was part of a current of historiography to which Herbert Croly can be considered an heir.

In his belief in human nature, benevolence and perfectibility, Lyndon Johnson was an example of the Progressive tradition. The latter can be considered as an offshoot of what was known in the 18th and 19th centuries as Whig history, the idea that in its march through history mankind is always advancing towards liberty and individual

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 52.

enlightenment. This linear conception of history opposes the circular one wherein all is repeated, much due to an unchanging human nature. Herbert Croly's confidence in science to change humanity and reconstruct society follows the path of Enlightenment philosophers who believed that human reason could reshape society for the benefit of individuals. Perfectibility and illumination were at the reach of all through the establishment of a political order and institutions based on the power of human reason.

However, this linear argument of history presupposes ever greater moments of happiness, a never-ending succession of progress and individual joy. That may be the reason why Whig history has fallen into term of scorn, used to mock those who support those ideas. But it is also the symbol of a rigid, deterministic approach to government and its role. Whig history entails a righteousness that accepts no dissent, for the advancement of civilisation is based on those ideas and their constant improvement. It is the self-righteousness of Herbert Croly when talking of the need to accept the paternalist attitude of the State over the individual – the presumption that the State knows best what is good for the individual - and Lyndon Johnson's constant longing for harmony and communal cooperation, with State coercion if needed to bring about the desired change. This inflexibility and call to unity is in stark contrast with the democratic legacy of the country and of its first democrats, the religious leaders of tolerance and freedom of conscience. The combat against the paternalist, elitist vision of the country in this period was carried forth by people connected with the margins, such as Barry Goldwater and Ayn Rand, people that decried the expansion of federal government, leaving the Democratic Party associated with Big Government and the willingness to interfere in people's lives.

Despite his personality and its shortcomings, as well as his contradictory, selective liberalism, Lyndon Johnson stands as one of the most ideological presidents of the United States, certainly ranking high for those of the post-war years. He put the final nail in the political consensus that had been dominant in the White House, inaugurating a new era of debate and search for alternatives at the highest level of the country's political structure, rekindling the vital forces of American life and thought. Whether knowingly or not, he tapped into some of the most profound currents of American thought to develop his idea of modern America, a country which he considered must be framed by a liberal disposition and shaped according to the more democratic ideals espoused by Progressives. All in all, he was a brand of Progressive based on a religious morality rather than rationality. Issuing from Texas, he brought with him more than a

mere observance to the principles of natural law with a moral duty to complete America. He stands at odds with the eastern liberal establishment and their pious rhetoric in that he effectively implemented domestic change, a change we regard as in tune with the Transcendentalist goal of personal betterment, whilst trying to export that moral duty abroad. This balancing act between the two poles of American idealism – universalism and individualism – we think he understood them as a synthetic approach that would resolve the tension that was building in American society.

CHAPTER FIVE

The end of consensus: the real

Have we not already seen enough of the fallacy and extravagance of those idle theories which have amused us with promises of an exemption from the imperfections, weaknesses and evils incident to society in every shape? Is it not time to awake from the deceitful dream of a golden age, and to adopt as a practical maxim for the direction of our political conduct that we, as well as the other inhabitants of the globe, are yet remote from the happy empire of perfect wisdom and perfect virtue?

Alexander Hamilton, Federalist n° 6, November 14, 1787

I

As stated before, Lyndon Baines Johnson is arguably the most Progressive President of post-World War II America. However, his reputation is disputed, probably more so among his own political family, the Democratic Party. On the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, a revealing public debate erupted regarding an attempted revival of LBJ's standing.

In 2014, President Obama and three of his predecessors gathered to celebrate the legislation, leading the way to a reappraisal of the man who signed it into law. The motivation for this re-visitation arises from what we may consider is a perceived flatness within the current Progressive movement, and the hope that Johnson's example may inspire the current Democratic leadership into action. A sympathetic commentator said: "There is both an opening and a need for such a movement again, focused this time on economic injustice and the injuries of class inequality. The LBJ revival is seen... as signifying a 'leftward tilt' in the Democratic Party, and it's true that progressives are gaining ground." His presidency is seen as "a consensual period when a large and confident majority believed that national action could expand opportunities and alleviate needless suffering. The earthly practical Johnson showed that these were not empty dreams and that finding realistic ways of creating a better world is what Americans are supposed to do."⁴¹⁰ But this was quickly denounced as revisionism.

Regarding the consensual period remark and the ways of creating a better world, Michael Kazin re-centred the debate on the real impact of Johnson's presidency: "Not a word about those countless people in Southeast Asia whose lives reached their unnatural limits when they encountered an American infantryman with an M-16 or a bomb dropped from a B-52." Therefore, "to portray him solely as a paragon of empathy, a liberal hero with a minor flaw or two, is not merely a feat of willful amnesia. It is deeply immoral."⁴¹¹ Bland assessments of the period might be useful for modern political use, but they cannot mask the deeper facts. Kazin concludes his article with a scathing observation. "The great musical satirist Tom Lehrer once remarked that

⁴¹⁰ E. J. Dionne, "On the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, politicians should follow LBJ's way." *The Washington Post*, April 10, 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ej-dionne-on-the-civil-rights-acts-50th-anniversary-follow-lbjs-way/2014/04/09/7250d304-c015-11e3-b574-f8748871856a_story.html, (accessed April 14, 2014).

⁴¹¹ Michael Kazin, "Stop the Revisionism: LBJ Was No Liberal Hero." *The New Republic*, April 11, 2014. <http://www.newrepublic.com//article/117346/lbj-should-not-be-celebrated-liberal-hero>, (accessed April 14, 2014).

awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Henry Kissinger made political satire obsolete. The same might be said for those who would turn the President most responsible for ravaging Vietnam into a great liberal hero.”⁴¹² A complete consideration of Lyndon Johnson cannot help but conclude that the ‘consensual period’ of his time in the White House, if it ever occurred, lasted approximately until his election in 1964. His victory by a landslide against Barry Goldwater marked also the last time that he was able to congregate the majority of the American population around him.

Unlike Kennedy, Johnson was not attracted by foreign policy, seeing it neither as glamorous nor as more important than domestic initiatives. A controlling man by nature who worked hard to master the facts so as to better use them in his favour, he was insecure when dealing with international issues which in turn made him rely heavily on the foreign policy establishment. These advisers were confident about the resources and capacity of the United States to defend democracy and spread its values. Consequently, they advocated a resolute firmness in the face of communist aggression and any attempts to expand its influence. Johnson shared their beliefs, being especially convinced that “the object of the cold war was to restrain the forces of international communism until the system collapsed of its own internal contradictions.”⁴¹³ That confidence was tested by reports coming from South Vietnam which indicated a continuing deterioration of the political and military situation, under pressure from North Vietnam.

There existed a broad national anti-communist consensus which spanned practically the whole of the political spectrum and which supported the idea of intervention to prevent South Vietnam from falling into communist hands. “Gallup polls taken in March 1965 indicated that 66 percent of those questioned believed that the United States should continue to do whatever was necessary to defend South Vietnam from the forces of international communism; 19 percent favored pulling out; and 15 percent offered no opinion. That consensus remained intact through the end of 1967.”⁴¹⁴ Despite this support, Johnson did not have a clear plan of action about what to do in Vietnam. The media quickly perceived this and reported that the administration did not have a foreign policy regarding Southeast Asia, “preferring simply to react to events as

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 484.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 502.

they developed, to limit its role to that of crisis manager.”⁴¹⁵ The President was sensitive to these assessments and he took the criticisms personally, a trait recurrent in him. Shortly after Kennedy’s assassination, he had made the Vietnam issue a personal one by declaring that “I am not going to lose Vietnam. I am not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went.”⁴¹⁶ The influence of individual temperament in shaping events we consider to be stimulated by the personalisation of politics, namely the Presidential ascendancy in American foreign policy decisions.

The allusion to China referred to the 1949 Maoist takeover of mainland China during the Truman presidency, and which weakened the latter both domestically and internationally. Johnson was particularly worried about the political repercussions of a similar development in Vietnam.

I knew that if we let Communism aggression succeed in taking over South Vietnam there would follow in this country an endless national debate - a mean and destructive debate – that would shatter my Presidency, kill my administration, and damage our democracy. I knew that Harry Truman and Dean Acheson had lost their effectiveness from the day that Communists took over in China. I believed that the loss of China had played a large role in the rise of Joe McCarthy. And I knew that all these problems, taken together, were chickenshit compared with what might happen if we lost Vietnam.⁴¹⁷

As reports of the situation in Vietnam became increasingly pessimistic, Johnson was under increasing pressure to act. Throughout the spring and summer of 1964, with the election campaign heating up, Republicans attacked him for his weakness and irresolution regarding Southeast Asia. But on the Democratic side, there were also those who sensed an opportunity. Robert Kennedy, always keen on embarrassing LBJ, harangued the administration for not doing more to protect South Vietnam. “Publicly, Bobby, like Jack, had taken a consistently hard line on Vietnam, citing the domino theory and the Munich analogy, insisting that if the United States did not live up to its ‘commitments’ to South Vietnam, all of Southeast Asia would fall to the communists

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 493.

⁴¹⁶ Quoted in James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 593.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 602.

and America's credibility as an ally would be destroyed." As Randall Woods explains, Robert Kennedy was intent on exploring the situation with an eye on succeeding Lyndon Johnson in the near future. "If Johnson did not play his cards right, the Kennedy's could lead a charge against him within the Democratic Party for losing Indochina through inexperience and indecisiveness."⁴¹⁸ But despite the criticisms and accusations of indecisiveness, Johnson was committed to stopping Communism.

The President was a firm believer in containment to stop Communism, but his internationalism stemmed from his Christian idealism. Communism was not only totalitarian and inimical to human freedom; it was also antithetical to the spiritual and moral character of America. Containment was the right strategy to face the threat of Communism, but it was not enough. "We must, of course, always be on guard against Communist subversion. But anticommunism alone will never suffice to ensure our liberty or never suffice to fulfill our dreams. That is going to take leadership, leadership that is dedicated to economic progress without uneconomic privilege, to social change which enhances social justice, to political reform which widens human freedom."⁴¹⁹ More had to be done to conquer ideological dogmas and their arid secularism that rejected any values or religious beliefs.

Recognising the realities of the world meant the acceptance of the unique role played by America and the importance of keeping true to its principles. The world looked to America for leadership and succour. "The world is no longer the world that your fathers and mine once knew. Once it was dominated by the balance of power. Today, it is diffused and emergent. But though most of the world struggles fitfully to assert its own initiative, the people of the world look to this land for inspiration... And from our science and our technology, from our compassion and from our tolerance, from our unity and from our heritage, we stand uniquely on the threshold of a high adventure of leadership by example and by precept. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.'"⁴²⁰ America's Christian tradition had to be the compass that guided the country's foreign policy. "From our Jewish and Christian heritage, we draw the image of the God of all mankind, who will judge his children not by their

⁴¹⁸ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 507.

⁴¹⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks on Foreign Affairs at the Associated Press Luncheon in New York City," April 20, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26168>, (accessed April 16, 2014).

⁴²⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at a Reception for Members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors," April 17, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26166>, (accessed April 16, 2014).

prayers and by their pretensions, but by their mercy to the poor and their understanding of the weak. We cannot cancel that strain and then claim to speak as a Christian society. To visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction is still pure religion and undefiled.” To forget this tradition, Johnson continued, was to risk the outcome of the struggle and the very soul of the nation. “I tremble for this Nation. I tremble for our people if at the time of our greatest prosperity we turn our back on the moral obligations of our deepest faith. If the face we turn to this aspiring, laboring world is a face of indifference and contempt, it will rightly rise up and strike us down. Believe me, God is not mocked. We reap as we sow.”⁴²¹ Powerful as this was, Johnson still lacked a plan of action for Vietnam that would materialise his Christian idealism. He knew what to do: avoid South Vietnam falling to Communism; he just did not know how to go about doing it.

With the presidential contest looming in the horizon, Johnson opted to bid for time. In a meeting of the National Security Council, he decided that the policy for the time being would amount to achieve maximum effect with minimum involvement. However, this too was quickly perceived for what it was. “Critics of his dithering had a point: he was trying to have it both ways, at least until the election.” Plus, it amounted to bad strategy. “The maximum effect-minimum involvement plan contravened one of the fundamental tenets of warfare: never confront the enemy unless you are far superior in arms and men. To have maximum effect, there must be maximum effort. As Lincoln, Sherman, and North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap understood, victory required unlimited sacrifice of blood and treasure.”⁴²² Meanwhile, Barry Goldwater conquered the presidential nomination at the Republican Convention in July and attacked the presidential wavering in Vietnam and the unwillingness to recognise the nature of the conflict. Vietnam was a new battlefield in the struggle between Freedom and Communism and America could not turn its back on it. “Yesterday it was Korea. Tonight it is Vietnam. Make no bones of this. Don’t try to sweep this under the rug. We are at war in Vietnam. And yet the President, who is Commander-in-Chief of our forces, refuses to say - refuses to say, mind you, whether or not the objective over there is victory. And his Secretary of Defense continues to mislead and misinform the American

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 509.

people, and enough of it has gone by.”⁴²³ The fight against tyranny and oppression required full commitment and a moral courage which was lacking in the administration, despite all the pledges of principled action. “Today, as then, but more urgently and more broadly than then, the task of preserving and enlarging freedom at home and safeguarding it from the forces of tyranny abroad is great enough to challenge all our resources and to require all our strength.” And he ended with a remark that echoed all the way to the White House. “I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.”⁴²⁴ The challenge had been presented: Goldwater would use Vietnam in the campaign, looking to portray Johnson as weak and irresolute against Communism.

Johnson believed in the fight against Communism, but the democratic nature of the system meant that he had to take into consideration popular will. Although the executive was by now at the top of the constitutional pyramid and LBJ was convinced the Presidency acted as an almost spiritual guide to the community, the office’s occupant still had to submit to popular election and confirmation. It reflects the negotiated nature of the American constitutional system and it impacts upon the completion of the ideals of the country. In a way, we might argue that the idealism is hostage to the timings of the democratic system it instituted. Walt Whitman’s multitudes talk amongst themselves and thus the application of the movement arising from the different opinions advances at the speed of that communal negotiation and its periodic settlement.

Just as Johnson was being pushed to action from all sides, intelligence coming from South Vietnam reported an increase in North Vietnamese infiltrations in the South. The military situation in the South deteriorated daily and the North was prepared to make the most of it. Their willingness to fight contrasted with Johnson’s, which was patent to all and defended by none. And so, a choice was made. “Determined to protect his right flank in the forthcoming battle with Goldwater and fearful that North Vietnam’s open commitment to the war in the South might lead to a collapse in the near future, LBJ decided to attack the North. But there would have to be a trigger.”⁴²⁵

⁴²³ Barry Goldwater, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in San Francisco,” July 16, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25973>, (accessed January 9, 2014).

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 513.

During the summer of 1964, covert operations were launched looking to gather intelligence and disable enemy radar and military positions. This infiltration and harassment campaign benefitted from naval support, which patrolled the sea off the North Vietnam coast, in the Gulf of Tonkin. On the morning of August 2, an American destroyer, the *Maddox*, 10 miles off the coast, was attacked by North Vietnamese patrol boats firing torpedoes. The *Maddox* returned fire and avoided the torpedoes, the whole scuffle lasting less than 30 minutes with the North Vietnamese losing one boat. Because there had been no American casualties, Johnson downplayed the incident, but he ordered a second destroyer to join the *Maddox*.

On the night of August 3-4, the American destroyers reported another engagement, returning heavy fire and taking evasive action to avoid torpedoes. As the information arrived in Washington and Johnson ordered retaliatory measures, a review of the engagement was immediately ordered to ascertain the facts. A few hours later, the findings were inconclusive. There were no sightings by either of the destroyers of enemy boats or torpedoes fired with the weather accounting for the sonar reports that triggered the panic. Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense for both Kennedy and Johnson, was still trying to conclude whether or not a second attack had taken place when news arrived that someone had informed the press of the events. "There was no going back, then, he and Johnson concluded. If the administration were to take the position that evidence of the second attack was ambiguous, and not follow through with retaliation, it would open itself to charges of deception and cowardice."⁴²⁶ Other historians do not try to attenuate the administrations' motivation. "No American ships were hit, no men wounded or killed. McNamara and Johnson nonetheless chose to use the reports as pretext for a show of toughness that they had been seeking to make for some time."⁴²⁷ On the evening of the 4th, while the Air Force was attacking torpedo boat bases and support facilities, Johnson addressed the nation to announce that United States ships had been attacked without provocation. He afterwards met with the congressional leaders and told them he was going to ask for a joint resolution.

The initial reaction to this intention was opposition, but Johnson made clear how he proposed to have his way. "Some of our boys are floating around in the water,"⁴²⁸ he

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 515.

⁴²⁷ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 603.

⁴²⁸ Quoted in Randall B. Woods, *LBJ – Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 515 – 516.

pleaded the congressional leadership. The next day he addressed Congress to ask for the resolution under the terms of the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty (SEATO) signed by Eisenhower. Arthur Schlesinger claimed that the administration had a draft of the resolution “prepared months before and awaiting the occasion,” which then was rushed through Congress “in a stampede of misinformation and misconception, if not of deliberate deception.”⁴²⁹ The resolution passed the House of Representatives unanimously and, after a half-hearted debate, the Senate duly passed it with a vote of 88 to 2. The text of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution states that “Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”⁴³⁰ This congressional authorisation was both vague and generous enough to allow the President to use force if necessary. But in doing so, it gave the President war-making powers without further authorisation from Congress, the branch of government to whom the Constitution entrusted that power.

This we argue was the logical consequence of Truman’s and Eisenhower’s methodical reinforcement of the Executive. The accumulation of powers evolved to the appropriation of powers from other branches which for Johnson was only natural and necessary to his conception of the President as the synthesiser of the national will. With Nixon this rationalisation would be taken to its cold and inexorable conclusion, with an attempt to place the Executive above and beyond the law and the Constitution.

Opinion polls taken right after the incidents and before the vote, showed a wide support for the administration’s plan to have a strong resolution approved by Congress. Caught in a patriotic surge amidst an anti-communist culture, Congress found it better not to deny the President his wish, and appropriately signed a joint resolution giving the President powers to use the military without a declaration of war, thus surrendering one of its main prerogatives. In fact, Congress placed all powers upon the President, committing the whole country to his decisions by stating that “the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.”⁴³¹ It was left

⁴²⁹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 179.

⁴³⁰ Joint Resolution of Congress, PL 88-408, August 10, 1964. U.S. National Archives & Records Administration. <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=98&page=transcript>, (accessed April 18, 2014).

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

at presidential discretion to determine when and how to involve the military power of the nation. Later, at the height of the protests against the war in Vietnam, the resolution's legality was contested, its constitutionality questioned. Congress finally felt strong enough to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, and approve the War Powers Act, in 1973, over Nixon's veto.

But that was later. Armed with the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and supported by an expansive understanding of the constitutional powers of the President, Johnson felt excused from having to seek congressional authorisation to commit troops in active warfare in Vietnam. His understanding of the constitutional separation of powers was clear. The Presidency was not merely the executor of congressional decisions. Validated by its election by the people, it had a wider role. In 1966, with the war in a crescendo, he clarified all misunderstandings. "It was only 20 months ago that the people of America held a great national election. The people of 44 States of this Union, including the great State of Nebraska, gave me a direction and voted me a majority for the Presidency of this country. I believe that their vote was a trust, that as long as I held this high and most responsible office and gift of the American people, that I would do my best as President of the country, as Commander in Chief of the Army. Now, there are many, many who can recommend, advise, and sometimes a few of them consent. But there is only one that has been chosen by the American people to decide."⁴³² Not only did he have the backing of a majority of the electorate, he also had a majority of the States. This double electoral confirmation, then, LBJ seemed to regard as a plebiscite sanctioning his new decision-making powers, affirming his role as the neutral and objective man who would operate in favour of the nation's interests.

Talking two years after the Tonkin Gulf incidents, LBJ seemed to imply that the election had confirmed his leading the country into war in Vietnam following Congress' resolution. Much like Herbert Croly had anticipated, the pursuit of the national interest should be the guarantor of the democratic leaders' disinterest and trustworthiness. However, Johnson's militaristic nationalism failed to rouse the nation and proved to be short of the people's consensus. If in the beginning popular support was patent, the national will was harder to gauge as the years progressed. Herbert Croly believed that popular will was supreme. However, even after the protests against the war had become

⁴³² Johnson, Lyndon B. "'Two Threats to World Peace' - Remarks in Omaha on the Occasion of the Sending of the Five-Millionth Ton of Grain to India," June 30, 1966. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27695>, (accessed April, 18, 2014).

vociferous and violent LBJ maintained his stance regarding American involvement in Vietnam, which we take as confirmation that he considered that once validated in his role as leader and warden of the national truth he was emancipated and free from seeking further confirmation. The truth was a reality and it therefore could not be permanently subjected to the impulses of the multitudes. The tension decided itself in a moment of resolution and the movement had to be taken to its natural conclusion, for which the captain was responsible. However, this risked an absolutism disguised as conviction, and Johnson realised this only too late.

At the time when Congress escaped its responsibilities about the country's policy in Southeast Asia, there were some 23,000 American military personnel in Vietnam. In February 1965, the Viet Cong carried out a suicide attack against an American base in the city of Pleiku, in South Vietnam, killing and wounding several soldiers. In response the President authorised the beginning of an aerial bombing campaign against North Vietnam, code-named Rolling Thunder. This triggered an increase of regular military engagements involving American soldiers and by the end of 1965 there were close to 185,000 US troops in Vietnam. When 1966 closed, that number had more than doubled to 450,000 to reach half a million men in 1968. Casualties – which included those killed, wounded and missing - followed the trend, starting at 2,500 in 1965 to arrive at 130,000 in 1968. American deaths totalled 58,000 for the whole conflict and more than 153,000 wounded.

Nationalism, understood as the pursuit of public interest, became a controversial justification for Lyndon Johnson's administration. Despite Croly's best hopes, nationalism failed to guide the national leader, the 'exceptional man,' towards a clear understanding of the core public interest regarding Vietnam. His domestic legacy, though, is impressive, for better or worse: the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, Medicare, Medicaid, Head Start, labour law reform, urban renewal and environmental legislation, food stamps, the National Endowment of the Arts and the National Endowment of Humanities, immigration reform and fair housing laws. But he also gave America the Vietnam War. Probably no one was as aware as he was about the consequences of the war upon his legacy. Talking after he retired from office, he acknowledged it in his customary language. "I knew from the start that I was bound to be crucified either way I moved. If I left the woman I really loved – the Great Society – in order to get involved with that bitch of a war on the other side of the world, then I would lose everything at home. All my programs. All my hopes to feed the hungry and

feed the homeless. All my dreams.”⁴³³ Still, as Patterson remarks, “he chose the bitch.”⁴³⁴ The result is a fascinating paradox, the epitome of the dangers looming over the relationship between human nature and power which still divides opinions.

II

The rebellion and discontent that was brewing since the mid-50’s would materialise and aggregate with the Vietnam War. The war’s human cost and the feeling that America’s participation was wrong stimulated the anti-war movement, which encapsulated all the anger and aspirations for change. The war acted as a focal point that concentrated all the disparate motivations challenging the status quo, from youth estrangement towards modern consumer society with its appeal to conformity, to the Civil Rights struggle, although the latter predated the war and had a momentum of its own. However, the progress of both came together to produce one the most critical social periods in the country’s history. “Here was the volatile combination that created the upheaval known as ‘the sixties’ – the convergence of society’s most excluded members demanding full access to all its benefits, with the children of the affluent middle class rejecting the social mainstream.”⁴³⁵ While black Americans could point to tangible aspects of their lack of freedom and discrimination in America, white middle class teenagers were part of the most comfortable social classes in America.

The comfortable circumstances of the ‘silent generation’ of the 1950’s did not suffice to ease the unease of young white students. “Never before had so many of the leisured young had a chance to spend so much so relentlessly to indulge their tastes.”⁴³⁶ In spite of this, the age group that rose in protest in the Sixties used that affluence to express its restlessness and unease towards society. Their parents’ prosperity, if anything, seemed to be part of the problem. Their grievances stemmed from a redefinition of the concept of freedom. Instead of material deprivation and suffered injustice, “students spoke of loneliness, isolation, and alienation, of powerlessness in the face of bureaucratic institutions, of a hunger for authenticity that affluence could not

⁴³³ Quoted in James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 597 – 598.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London and Oxford: Picador, 1999), 288.

⁴³⁶ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto and New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 29.

sate.”⁴³⁷ Norman Mailer’s 1957 essay, *The White Negro*, advocated an existential nihilism that inspired some to follow a search for meaning in life through instant gratification. As Mailer had noted, the meaning of life lay in the search, guided by one’s deep inner passions.

To be an existentialist, one must be able to feel oneself - one must know one’s desires, one’s rages, one’s anguish, one must be aware of the character of one’s frustration and know what would satisfy it... To be a real existentialist must be religious, one must have one’s sense of the ‘purpose’ - whatever the purpose may be - but a life which is directed by one’s faith in the necessity of action is a life committed to the notion that the substratum of existence is the search, the end meaningful but mysterious; it is impossible to live such a life unless one’s emotions provide their profound conviction.⁴³⁸

Small groups of bohemians, choosing self-imposed exile from conventional society lived lives of self-righteous poverty and indulged in sexual libertinism and exotic practices. These rebels, however, failed to provide a practical and consequential alternative other than rebellion and hedonism. The majority of middle and upper class youth longed for a replacement, an opposition to their parents’ dominant culture. The more political and philosophically aware hoped to transform society, achieving something more than mere life-style changes, moving beyond the consensus and reinvigorating true left-wing policies that would fracture the American political tradition and re-shape the country and its institutions.

The election of John F. Kennedy had brought with it a sense of endless possibilities. The young and charismatic President seemed to personify all the hopes and aspirations of America’s youth. “What had been underground flowed to the surface. After all the prologues and precursors, an insurgency materialized, and the climate of opinion began to shift, the way spring announces itself with scents and a scatter of birdsong before the temperature climbs to stay. And then it was as if, all over the country, young people had been waiting for just these signals.”⁴³⁹ The author’s poetical reminiscences, however, are destroyed by other authors’ assessments of the President

⁴³⁷ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London and Oxford: Picador, 1999), 288.

⁴³⁸ Norman Mailer, “The White Negro.” *Dissent*, Fall 1957.

http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957, (accessed September 2, 2013).

⁴³⁹ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto and New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 81.

and the latter's opinion regarding precisely such idealism. "Ironically, the man who became identified, for most Americans, with a new birth of liberalism was a thoroughly practical politician of the old school who tended to view idealists and moralists as sentimental fools."⁴⁴⁰ This bitter false start persuaded many that real change had to be achieved from outside the establishment.

To move beyond the oppositional culture, typical of a generational divide, into a new birth of social and economic alternatives required more than disenchantment. It demanded individual action, to declare oneself the agent of change. Because of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 and its crushing by the Soviet Union, many Western Marxist intellectuals began to distance themselves from the authoritarian character of the Communist Party and Joseph Stalin's legacy. Alienated from the centralised and discredited nature of the official party line, the disillusioned left-wing radicals rejected the traditional Communist focus on class struggle and labour issues and initiated a new approach to politics that was centred on a defence of individual liberation from repressive social and economic structures. A new left was arising, particularly among politically active university students.

The election of John F. Kennedy became a focal point for the hopes of youth. As the grandson of Irish immigrants and Catholic, he was regarded as an outsider to a national political establishment that was still strongly Protestant and Anglo-Saxon. He therefore encapsulated the expectations for change from the younger generation that wanted to challenge the status quo. In a way, Kennedy did feel the need to challenge the existing limits, to extend the frontiers of American politics and society internationally, a feeling he summarised in his administration's programme, the New Frontier. Sensing the energy building up in the restlessness of a youth that aspired to break free from the constraints of their elders, he channelled the youth's natural idealism to engage with the world through the Peace Corps. This is a volunteer programme aimed at promoting world peace and friendship and in which young Americans work abroad to help different peoples in any capacity they may contribute. This was a perfect example of American internationalism at its most benign and romantic, aiming to foster mutual understanding and comprehension, stimulated by the notion of a single human network of individuals sharing the same problems and aspirations.

⁴⁴⁰ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided – The Civil War of the 1960's* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57.

In 1960, Charles Wright Mills⁴⁴¹ wrote an open letter addressing this new generation of radical students as the New Left, an expression that quickly became their defining term. In his article, Mills restated how the political and intellectual consensus in America had been decisive in drowning ideological debate and the emergence of alternative solutions for contemporary problems. “It is no exaggeration to say that since the end of World War II in Britain and the United States smug conservatives, tired liberals and disillusioned radicals have carried on a very wearied discourse in which issues are blurred and potential debate muted; the sickness of complacency has prevailed, the bi-partisan banality flourished.”⁴⁴² This bi-partisan banality dominated national politics since the end of the war in 1945, an institutional conformity that insisted on putting national interest above ideological aspirations. Mills railed against the pressure that had undermined liberals and Progressives and created an establishment which believed that in “the West there are no more real issues or even problems of great seriousness.” If any problem did arise, the regulated capitalist economy would see to its solution. “The mixed economy plus the welfare state plus prosperity - that is the formula.”⁴⁴³ The defence of private property and the right to dispose freely of it, as well as individual affirmation and self-interest remained at the core of America’s political culture, embraced and protected by the establishment. Meanwhile, issues pertaining to social justice and most clearly racial justice stood out as moral indictments against a country which was almost exclusively focused on international policies and too little on satisfying the American ideal of individual fullness.

New Deal liberals harboured deep suspicions regarding businessmen and corporate capitalism, and the country’s economic structure but did not actively try to overthrow it. Although Franklin Roosevelt incorporated many social demands from protest groups and even adopted some of the fiercest rhetoric of socialist parties, he was not intent in subverting America’s economic and political system. His purpose was to preserve the American way of life as far as possible, aware that free enterprise and free markets were intrinsic to the way American society defined itself, and that to challenge

⁴⁴¹ Born and educated in Texas, Mills was a sociologist who acknowledged Marx’s influence in his worldview but in its humanist perspective rather than the programmatic and revolutionary one. In this he departed from Croly, who looked for a unique American answer to the problems of industrialisation and argued for the prominence of great leaders as the representatives of the national will. Mills advocated a brotherhood of Man, a popular form of democracy, differing from Croly’s hierarchical society with a ruling elite of detached and objective, democratic, rulers in command.

⁴⁴² C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left.” *New Left Review*, n° 5, September-October 1960. <http://www.marxists.org/subject/humanism/mills-c-wright/letter-new-left.htm>, (accessed April 26, 2014).

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*

this would imperil his hold on power. Consequently, he shifted his political positions according to perceived changes in the electorate. In the wake of the Great Depression he wanted to keep at bay the extremists and populists who argued for a total reconstruction of the political and economic organization of the country, and who threatened to erode his electoral base. In order to achieve that, he set out to save capitalism from itself,⁴⁴⁴ by building a strong regulatory and interventionist federal government to control and oversee the industrial and financial sectors. Thus, Roosevelt thwarted those in his administration who hoped to see a significant ideological reshaping of the country and the economy. After 1945 liberals had to reconcile themselves with the structure of the economy helping to bring about a national consensus concerning the continuance of capitalism albeit under the watchful eye of Washington. With the end of the consensus, especially following the growing unrest with the involvement in Vietnam, liberals and Progressives again looked to change the political and economic framework of the nation.

But Charles Wright Mills did not look to the Soviet Union as an inspiration for that change. He refused to toe the Communist party line, refusing to acknowledge official party direction and control over his thinking and his actions, as well as over the New Left. Given the damaging reputation of the Soviet intellectuals and politicians, which had reverted to a mechanical defence of the petrification of the Soviet system, Mills sought to distance himself and align the New Left as a separate and untainted movement for real change. Therefore, the movement would have to find its own ground, moving away from both the Old Left - which looked to unions and the working classes as the pillar of the ideological revolution - and liberal New Dealers who had cooperated to preserve the economic and political establishment. The New Left's proposals, then, refused violent revolution and the uprising of the working classes, and focused instead on an ideological restructuring of society and its institutions, a change that Mills recognised that for the time being was still a utopia. "What needs to be understood, and what needs to be changed, is not merely first this and then that detail of some institution or policy. If there is to be a politics of a New Left, what needs to be analysed is the structure of institutions, the foundations of policies. In this sense, both in its criticisms and in its proposals, our work is necessarily structural - and so, for us, just now -

⁴⁴⁴ Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here – Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 74.

utopian.”⁴⁴⁵ To change the economic and political organization required a change in the ideological frame of mind of America’s society. To advance such a revolution of the mind, as opposed to a violent overthrow of the system, demanded an intense intellectual work of public re-education and awareness. The New Socialist Man would be an individual with a new mind thinking new thoughts and developing new attitudes, emerging only after getting rid of the erroneous ideas of individualism and freethinking.

The inevitable conclusion was that labour could not be the trusted to achieve such social re-education. Strategies that relied on the working classes to be the driving force for change needed to be cast aside. “What I do not quite understand about some New-Left writers is why they cling so mightily to ‘the working class’ of the advanced capitalist societies as the historic agency, or even as the most important agency, in the face of the really historical evidence that now stands against this expectation.” The Industrial Revolution’s social and economic conditions, in which the working class had risen as the principal agent of change, had transmuted into a different social and economic reality. “Such a labour metaphysic, I think, is a legacy from Victorian Marxism that is now quite unrealistic. It is an historically specific idea that has been turned into an a-historical and unspecific hope.” According to Mills, the only adequate agency of change for the new social realities, therefore, rested with intellectuals, namely the young intellectuals uncontaminated by the stale conformism imposed by the establishment and propagated by their elders. “It is with this problem of agency in mind that I have been studying, for several years now, the cultural apparatus, the intellectuals - as a possible, immediate, radical agency of change. For a long time, I was not much happier with this idea than were many of you; but it turns out now, in the spring of 1960, that it may be a very relevant idea indeed...Who is it that is thinking and acting in radical ways? All over the world – in the bloc, outside the bloc and in between - the answer’s the same: it is the young intelligentsia.” He trusted that the young students’ idealism was the key, and that youthful enthusiasm could not be stopped. “The Age of Complacency is ending. Let the old women complain wisely about ‘the end of ideology.’ We are beginning to move again.”⁴⁴⁶ In the campuses of America’s universities a fringe minority restlessly trying to find a role for themselves heard Mills’ battle cry. Harmonizing his urging to change the ideological foundation of the nation

⁴⁴⁵ C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left.” *New Left Review*, n° 5, September-October 1960.
<http://www.marxists.org/subject/humanism/mills-c-wright/letter-new-left.htm>, (accessed April 26, 2014).

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

with their academic training and belief in the social sciences' ability to change human nature, they indeed began to move.

Student organisation materialised with the formation of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which revitalised scattered student activist groups and gave them a unified and more articulate structure. In 1962, SDS held its first national convention, in Port Huron, Michigan, and presented its official manifesto outlining their objectives and ideology. The Port Huron Statement was an agenda for a generation “bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit,” a generation whose coming of age had arrived after “maturing in complacency.” They were awakened by “the presence of the Bomb,” which “brought awareness that we ourselves, and our friends, and millions of abstract ‘others’ we knew more directly because of our common peril, might die at any time. We might deliberately ignore, or avoid, or fail to feel all other human problems, but not these two, for these were too immediate and crushing in their impact, too challenging in the demand that we as individuals take the responsibility for encounter and resolution.”⁴⁴⁷ Once awake, the young idealists took notice of other problems, namely racial segregation at home, imperialism abroad and general inequality despite the affluence of the upper echelons of society.

Much of the statement reflects the disillusionment of the student movement with contemporary America, criticising the political institutions and society's apathy and lack of vision. They felt the urgency of the moment and the realisation that despite their moral idealism they were a minority in the country. “Our work is guided by the sense that we may be the last generation in the experiment with living. But we are a minority - the vast majority of our people regard the temporary equilibriums of our society and world as eternally-functional parts. In this is perhaps the outstanding paradox: we ourselves are imbued with urgency, yet the message of our society is that there is no viable alternative to the present.” In fact, throughout the text there is a continuous appeal to utopia and daring to dream, as well as an idealism that is aspirational in its romantic appraisal of Man. “We regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love... Men have unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity. It is this potential that

⁴⁴⁷ Students for a Democratic Society. “The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society,” June 11-15, 1962. <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html>, (accessed May 1, 2014).

we regard as crucial and to which we appeal, not to the human potentiality for violence, unreason, and submission to authority.”⁴⁴⁸ This belief in the potentialities for development we believe harks back to Emerson and Transcendentalism’s appeal for individual self-improvement.

For Emerson, the goal of government was to create the conditions for individual perfection and inner growth. The attainment of a higher degree of consciousness that would fulfil all of Man’s potential would be reflected in the country’s institutions. “The highest end of government is the culture of men: and if men can be educated, the institutions will share their improvement, and the moral sentiment will write the law of the land.”⁴⁴⁹ To be whole, mankind must be free to develop and grow, to concentrate in each of its members an awareness of totality and unity with itself and the community, between Reason and Nature. Only thus could each individual exploit his inner sense of being, of belonging to him and to something higher than himself, creating his own experience and his own relationship with the whole. The wise man, the man of character, is the whole.

To educate the wise man, the State exists; and with the appearance of the wise man, the State expires. The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary. The wise man is the State. He needs no army, fort, or navy, - he loves men too well; no bribe, or feast, or palace, to draw friends to him; no vantage ground, no favorable circumstance. He needs no library, for he has not done thinking; no church, for he is a prophet; no statute book, for he is the law-giver; no money, for he is value; no road, for he is at home where he is; no experience, for the life of the creator shoots through him and looks from his eyes.⁴⁵⁰

This totality is the consummation of government; the emergence of the perfect character the ultimate objective of the State. Only thus could people achieve a greater moral and intellectual consciousness and understanding of themselves and of all that surrounds them. The proponents of the Port Huron Statement identified fully with that.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Politics”, in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson – Series I & II* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2008), 260.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 265.

The goal of man and society should be human independence: a concern not with image of popularity but with finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic: a quality of mind not compulsively driven by a sense of powerlessness, nor one which unthinkingly adopts status values, nor one which represses all threats to its habits, but one which has full, spontaneous access to present and past experiences, one which easily unites the fragmented parts of personal history, one which openly faces problems which are troubling and unresolved: one with an intuitive awareness of possibilities, an active sense of curiosity, an ability and willingness to learn.⁴⁵¹

To achieve this, the students relied on fraternity between all, on relationships based on the pursuance of peace, and the kingdom of Love on earth. “Human relationships should involve fraternity and honesty... Loneliness, estrangement, isolation describe the vast distance between man and man today. These dominant tendencies cannot be overcome by better personnel management, nor by improved gadgets, but only when a love of man overcomes the idolatrous worship of things by man.”⁴⁵² Much as the Transcendentalist revolt against materialism and excessive rationalism, the SDS argued for an enhancement of the spiritual side of humanity to rule over human affairs.

In order to achieve that goal, the SDS envisioned a political system of participatory democracy, one that would allow members to take part in the decisions that directly shaped their life. The document appealed for “the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation.”⁴⁵³ Completing the divorce from the Old Left, and its association with Stalinism’s entrenchment of a ruling elite, the New Left modernised the 1776 Revolution’s grassroots call for the establishment of a Democracy, Thomas Paine being the most vocal and prominent advocate of the revolutionaries’ egalitarianism. During the final days of the Articles of Confederation, when the delegates to the constitutional convention gathered in Philadelphia, the popular demands for a direct and equal say in

⁴⁵¹ Students for a Democratic Society. “The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society,” June 11-15, 1962. <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html>, (accessed May 1, 2014).

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

the young nation's administration erupted with the Shays Rebellion. Ultimately, the framers opted to contain the democratic urges by instituting a Republic, rather than a Democracy. Although the popular sovereignty was the foundation of the new Republic, the popular will was to be filtered through a system of representation and divided branches of government that would balance each other.

The criticism of the SDS was reminiscent of previous condemnations by Progressive writers at the turn of the century against what they perceived was an oligarchic Republic. When they proposed that "decision-making of basic social consequence be carried on by public groupings," the early revolutionary egalitarian ideal was evident. Furthermore, they argued, "the economic experience is so personally decisive that the individual must share in its full determination; that the economy itself is of such social importance that its major resources and means of production should be open to democratic participation and subject to democratic social regulation."⁴⁵⁴ With this, the SDS was realigning itself along the lines of the debate carried on by Progressives like Randolph Bourne. Writing in the early years of the 20th century, Bourne condemned a system where only a minority owned any property at all, leaving the majority dependent on the propertied classes. Economic freedom was thus denied to the majority, kept also from participating in the decisions that shape the country and their everyday life. Bourne argued for a democracy that would enable the people to determine the ideals and institutions of the country as well as its social and industrial organisation. Only with a true democratic system of government were the masses of common people equal participants in the decisions that decided the country's future.

Far from being novel and revolutionary, the Port Huron Statement was steeped in an entirely American idealist tradition. The utopian individualism of Emerson and Transcendentalism's philosophical romanticism coupled with the egalitarian spirit of 1776 to produce a most nostalgic call for America to go back to its roots, to drink again from one of the most powerful sources of American idealism. The originality of the New Left resided less in its proposals than in the fact that it was removing itself from European socialism and its emphasis on rigid ideological solutions to address social and economic problems. Here was a New Left that looked to the bleakness of its times and whose proposition was to arouse the individual to find his own path to freedom, rather than rely on ideology. Far from conforming to formulaic solutions, the democratic

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

regulation of the economy they advocated was to be placed at the service of each individual to achieve his independence. The SDS opened the door to personal preferences regarding the participation in the community of love. “Human brotherhood must be willed,”⁴⁵⁵ rather than coerced from above as happened in the Soviet bloc. As Todd Gitlin, who was involved directly with the SDS, acknowledges regarding the statement, “Only in America could an organisation of the Left have sounded such ringing praise of ‘human independence.’ Emerson, the prophet of self-reliance, could have trumpeted the selfsame notes.”⁴⁵⁶

The libertarian strand of the SDS was mostly engaged against the economic corporate capitalism of modern America, “which excludes the mass of individual ‘units’ - the people - from basic decisions affecting the nature and organization of work, rewards, and opportunities.” Amidst the national prosperity, “poverty and deprivation remain an unbreakable way of life for millions in the ‘affluent society,’ ... while military defense is the main item of ‘public’ spending.”⁴⁵⁷ The student movement linked the economic structure of modern America with the need to finance and upgrade a novel creation in American history. The recent development of the country had produced “the most spectacular and important creation of the authoritarian and oligopolistic structure of economic decision-making in America,” the military-industrial complex. Denounced by Eisenhower, it was “the powerful congruence of interest and structure among military and business elites which affects so much of our development and destiny. Not only is ours the first generation to live with the possibility of world-wide cataclysm - it is the first to experience the actual social preparation for cataclysm, the general militarization of American society.”⁴⁵⁸ Militarisation was also the key to protect and prolong the oligopoly that ruled the country. One reality of modern America sustained the other. Although the establishment advertised itself as the Welfare State, the SDS dubbed it the Warfare State.

While condemnation of the transformation endured by the Founding Fathers’ Republic was unambiguous, the definition of solutions to counter this was less straightforward. The problem lay in the fragmentation of New Left activist groups, and

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto and New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 108.

⁴⁵⁷ Students for a Democratic Society. “The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society,” June 11-15, 1962. <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html>, (accessed May 1, 2014).

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

their disputes about conceptual doctrine interpretation. Being a reunion of different hues of leftism and student intellectuals, the question of finding for SDS a viable common ground from whence to build positive and specific programmes proved a challenge. The end result was a document that was vague about specific goals and the means to achieve them, trying to harness and satisfy different viewpoints and approaches on how to change the establishment. “The final document did display a seam – joining utopian values to reform proposals at the leftmost reaches of liberalism and social democracy. Was it a seam, though, or rupture? The Port Huron Statement exhibited the same divide that ran through every political declaration, from the League for Industrial Democracy to political parties – the distance between ends and means, between the rhetoric of the desirable and the agenda of the attainable.” The criticism that they lacked a consistent programme was unjust, as their critics were more demanding of the youth movements than of the mainstream parties. Idealists as they were, the student’s moral righteousness felt it deeper than mainstream parties did. “Later on, it was charged against the student movement that it lacked a positive programme - as if any political force in American life had more of one... Radicals, aiming higher, are judged by higher standards - by protectors of the status quo, and by themselves. The movement bristled at the accusation, and suffered from the split, because the values it proclaimed were so luminous, so ambitious; because it insisted that means were ends.”⁴⁵⁹ Likewise, the uncertainty regarding the positioning towards Communism strained relations between members of different ideological shades. Although the New Left was much larger than the SDS, the latter’s teething troubles reflected the diversity of opinions present in a wide movement that was essentially decentralised.

The SDS pressed for direct action protests against injustices, namely against racial discrimination and inequality. Its focus centred mostly in combating these two at a domestic level. Its first years were marked by the small number of its membership. The majority of students in American universities did not react with as much enthusiasm as was expected by those more intellectually aware. It was not until the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam that the student movement began to attract both attention and greater numbers of members. The military escalation, particularly after the spring of 1965, changed the course for both the New Left and the SDS. “Initially engaged on a wide variety of fronts, from civil rights to nuclear disarmament to

⁴⁵⁹ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto and New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 114.

university reform, by the mid-1960's, many SDS founders had left the campuses to concentrate on community organizing in the slums of northern cities. Ironically, just as SDS leaders began to forsake the campus, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement on the fall of 1964 and the Vietnam teach-in movement in the spring of 1965 signalled the growing responsiveness of college students to radical ideas."⁴⁶⁰ The war polarised America, opening the door to a vast anti-war movement that attracted thousands of protesters. The pacifism of youth combined later with the fear of being drafted to fight in the jungle, moving the New Left from initial dissent to street demonstrations and violent clashes with the police. However, the war and the resistance against it both spurred and weakened student radicalism. No longer was the movement able to shape the direction of the change, it was forced to react to events. "Just at the moment when it began to develop a significant national presence, SDS lost the ability to set its own agenda. Starting in 1965, SDS's concerns and the pace of its development were largely reactions to decisions being made in the White House and the Pentagon."⁴⁶¹ Because of this, the movement was forced into an all-or-nothing position: either it managed to end the war or it failed utterly.

The temperament of the masses of new adherents galvanised the protests but contrasted with its more radical core. "The new members who flooded into SDS (dubbed the 'prairie power' contingent because so many of them came from places other than the usual urban centres of radical strength) were less likely to share the theoretical sophistication or intellectual ambitions of the group's founding generation." Less ideologically motivated, their main concern rested with the desire to end the war, rather than work for an overhaul of American society and its social and economic structures. "The new breed tended to be unschooled in and impatient with radical doctrine, intensely moralistic, suspicious of 'elitism' and 'bureaucracy', and immersed in what was just starting to be referred to as the 'counterculture' of casual drug use, sexual experimentation, and rock music."⁴⁶² Hedonism and personal liberation trumped social and economic theory; emotional and moral righteousness against the war overpowered any analytical analysis and tactical strategies conceived to strike at the system.

⁴⁶⁰ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, "The Failure and Success of the New Radicalism," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930 – 1980*, ed Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 213.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁴⁶² Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin. *America Divided – The Civil War of the 1960's* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 171.

III

As the war in Vietnam intensified, so did the protests. Sit-ins, marches, draft-card burnings and clashes with police became a recurrent feature in many college campuses and urban centres. Coming in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, the anti-war protest contributed to the collapse of Lyndon Johnson's desired national consensus, his appeal for all Americans to unite under one great whole of which he dreamed of being the leader. During the 1964 campaign, his appeal for the building of the great tent of democracy seemed to anticipate the fate of his decision to involve America deeper in the Southeast Asian conflict, with the protests, the acrimony and bitter social fracture pitting one part of the country against another. How was the country to move forward, he asked his audience, how to build a better future for America? "Not by eating on ourselves, not by blaming each other, not by dividing up in harassing groups that can find something wrong with what their fellow man does. We are going to build it by uniting our people, by bringing our capital and our management and our labor and our farmers all under one great Democratic tent, and saying to all of them, 'Contribute your part, do your share, and you will share in the fruits that are ours.'"⁴⁶³ Johnson's vision of patriotic unity to face the nation's challenges evaporated. However, things did not look so good for the protesters either. As the war developed, so did the gap between radicals and moderates, between those aspiring to real change and those whose support for the cause rested on its pacifism.

Throughout 1965 and 1966, the marches and rallies against the war attracted greater numbers of people and the anti-war movement won national prominence, at a par with the Civil Rights Movement. Although students were still the majority of the participants, increasing numbers of common people became involved. The manifestations took a dramatic turn during 1965 with three cases of self-immolation in protest against the war. Adding to this, the confrontations with the police inevitably followed the occupation of public buildings and different attempts at storming the Pentagon. The Port Huron Statement's appeal for a New Left "with real intellectual skills, committed to deliberativeness, honesty, reflection as working tools," dedicated to stirring "controversy across the land, if national policies and national apathy are to be

⁴⁶³ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at a Fundraising Dinner in Minneapolis," June 27, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26348>, (accessed May 7, 2014).

reversed,”⁴⁶⁴ failed to produce tangible results. The war in Vietnam dragged on and the numbers of US troops increased. Tom Hayden, one of SDS’ leaders and the principal author of the Port Huron Statement, acknowledged the paltry results and the need to change tactics. “Having tried available channels and discovered them meaningless, having recognized that the establishment does not listen to public opinion – it does not care to listen to the New Left – the New Left was moving toward confrontation.”⁴⁶⁵ Dissent was to give way to active resistance. Other leaders and radical members urged the need to adopt a strategy of radicalism that would make common cause with the liberation movements that were springing around the world, particularly in Africa.

Many New Left and SDS members had a firm belief in the individual’s capacity for moral improvement. As can be seen from the Port Huron Statement, they were also convinced of their role as moral educators of the masses, their responsibility as agitators of consciences and influencers of public opinion. Theirs was the task of shaping and directing the latent sentiments of society towards their fulfilment and, thus, accomplish the next forward movement of history. The democratic evolution of the masses is the march of history in the world, the incessant development of mankind’s capacity for reason and freedom. However, the establishment’s inflexibility had frustrated the more impatient of those awaiting the next step in human evolution and decided to resort to more forceful methods to further the progression of history. The drift toward a more radical and violent attitude appealed to the more ideological members who refused to compromise with the establishment. Short in credible alternatives and preferring to believe that means create ends, they were attracted by the emerging apologies of violence as an instrument of change.

But another rift was also taking place, separating the idealist New Left from emerging radical black movements. Although it would be an error to identify the black Civil Rights movement with the New Left, throughout the early years the anti-war and New Left activism looked to the Civil Rights movement for inspiration but especially for authentication. “However much changed in the politics of the white New Leftists from the early to the late 1960’s, the one constant was their impulse to look to their

⁴⁶⁴ Students for a Democratic Society. “The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society,” June 11-15, 1962. <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html>, (accessed May 1, 2014).

⁴⁶⁵ Quoted in Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto and New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 285.

black counterparts for direction and validation.”⁴⁶⁶ Thus, young whites followed the powerful Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) into marches and protests in favour of racial equality in the South, outnumbering blacks in many occasions. White student’s participation attracted national media, helping the cause to gain nationwide attention, but SNCC leaders quickly questioned the real motive why the national conscious was being aroused. “Where had all those television cameras been when only blacks were being beaten, incarcerated, and murdered in Mississippi? Stokely Carmichael [SNCC leader] concluded that depending on sympathetic whites for political cover was, in itself, a concession to racism.”⁴⁶⁷

Despite Martin Luther King’s best efforts to keep the Civil Rights struggle as a national endeavour, an achievement for the whole of American society, frustration with the lack of authentic progress was taking its toll among the leaders of the movement. The rising anger produced organisational and then ideological fragmentation, the latter shattering the initial inclusiveness of the movement. At the time that Martin Luther King was celebrated worldwide with the Nobel Peace Prize, symbolising the alliance between the races in the fight for justice, Malcolm X⁴⁶⁸ was preaching black separatism and the need for black Americans to rely on their own efforts to achieve freedom. Suspicious of white Americans and their motives, the young radical ridiculed mainstream black leaders and their rush to accept the gifts and prizes handed to them by whites. “I know that every time that whites join a black organisation, you watch, pretty soon the blacks will be leaning on the whites to support it, and before you know it a black may be up front with a title, but the whites, because of their money, are the real controllers.”⁴⁶⁹ King was just a puppet for the establishment. On his worst days, Malcolm X viewed King as a traitor and a lackey, pandering to whites for whatever concessions they would be willing to give.

The language of Black Nationalism was attacked by Martin Luther King, who understood that it would alienate white America and hurt the cause. Nonetheless,

⁴⁶⁶ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin. *America Divided – The Civil War of the 1960’s* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 172 - 173.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁶⁸ Malcolm Little converted to Islam while in prison and began preaching the superiority of blacks, their need for self-determination and separation from white America. Having joined the Nation of Islam upon his conversion, he later separated while continuing his activism. Although he stopped preaching racism and violence, he maintained his defence of black nationalism and separation. He was murdered by members of the Nation of Islam on February 21, 1965.

⁴⁶⁹ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin. *America Divided – The Civil War of the 1960’s* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 174.

Malcolm X's message had a broad appeal among an increasingly disillusioned and angry community that was sorely in need of a burst of self-confidence. While King had been confident that "we will reach the goal of freedom... all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America,"⁴⁷⁰ Malcolm X argued that the destiny of the black community was separate from that of America because blacks did not need America, and should enforce their freedom and distinct condition using violence if need be. He was murdered in February 1965 by members of the Nation of Islam, a separatist group with which he had fallen out earlier.

From the perspective of some black Americans integration was impossible, and undesirable. Separatism was espoused in all realms, including that of religion. Whilst King was a prominent Christian minister, Malcolm X converted to Islam. Biblical references permeated Martin Luther King's speeches, especially the narrative of Exodus, "a mainstay of black preaching that interpreted the Africa-American experience as a divinely guided progress toward Canaan, the promised land of freedom."⁴⁷¹ The biblical account of the escape from Egypt featured notably in King's last speech, delivered the day before he died. "The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars." God works in mysterious ways, and he will not leave his people to suffer in bondage forever. "And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding. Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today... the cry is always the same: 'We want to be free.'" And so he was confident that God would deliver in his promise even if, like Moses, King would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land! And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the

⁴⁷⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Negro is Your Brother (Letter from Birmingham Jail)", *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1963, Volume 212, No. 2, 78 - 88.

http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/letter_birmingham_jail.pdf (accessed October 21, 2013).

⁴⁷¹ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London and Oxford: Picador, 1999), 279.

coming of the Lord.”⁴⁷² Martin Luther King was shot and killed the next day, April 4, 1968.

For King also, history moves with a direction, toward human reason and freedom, even if it is not immediately apparent. Addressing black separatism, he observed that in the great scheme of historical evolution victory could not be achieved with disunion. “We’ve got to stay together and maintain unity. You know, whenever Pharaoh wanted to prolong the period of slavery in Egypt, he had a favorite, favorite formula for doing it. What was that? He kept the slaves fighting among themselves. But whenever the slaves get together, something happens in Pharaoh’s court, and he cannot hold the slaves in slavery. When the slaves get together, that’s the beginning of getting out of slavery. Now let us maintain unity.”⁴⁷³ In his speeches, he always stressed the need to maintain America united, that the goal was freedom and it was common to all segments of American society. Nonetheless, black separatists argued that black people’s history of slavery in America meant that its experience was logically different from that of white America, rendering any possibility of a shared understanding unattainable. As such, their values stemmed from a different heritage and a different set of ideals and outlooks, the one from the dream of emancipation and deliverance, the other from a desire to remain free and pursue happiness. For Malcolm X and the separatists, the exodus from Egypt meant the departure of black Americans from the white Pharaoh’s tyranny, not a common crossing of the desert into a new dawn for a common national identity.

Martin Luther King’s assassination in April 1968 seemed to vindicate the position of those who argued for separation and the use of violence as the only effective means of achieving freedom. Whilst the older Civil Rights movement was guided by King’s aim of integrating the races, the emerging black political separatism emphasised the need for black identity and group power. The proponents of ‘black power’ identified an inconsistency between the invocation of a higher law and the Declaration of Independence, and the non-violent strategy followed by King and the Civil Rights Movement. The natural rights philosophy presupposes the defence of one’s rights when violated, even by force if needed. The defence of the Revolution of the colonies against Britain rested on their right to rebel, to use force to defend their rights. If the

⁴⁷² Martin Luther King, Jr. “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop – Speech delivered in Memphis, Tennessee,” April 3, 1968. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/martin-luther-kings-final-speech-ive-mountaintop-full/print?id=18872817>, (accessed May 9, 2014).

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

revolutionaries could use violence, why could likewise oppressed black Americans not resist by using every means at their disposal? Moreover, separatism was further enhanced by the higher law doctrine which justified not compromising with evil institutions and laws. The precedent for rightful separatism had been established by 19th century radical abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, who called upon the Northern States to separate from the South, dissolving a Union founded upon an iniquitous Constitution which protected slavery. Just as the democratic North and the aristocratic South of the antebellum years had different social and cultural experiences, black Americans argued they issued from a different historical experience that sets them apart from the rest of America.

Precisely because of such historical precedents, we reason that black separatism far from being a consequence of different experiences emerges from a very American root tradition. A central aspect of the American experience is the search for new beginnings, parting with the existing reality to find a new one allowing individual or communal self-determination. The Puritans arriving in the New World were escaping religious persecution and even in the colonies there were instances where appeals for the recognition of differences prompted more movements of emigration to found new colonies. Roger Williams and William Penn advocated separation of church and provincial governments in order that religious minorities might live their faith peacefully. When their appeals were rejected, they left with their communities to found new colonies (Rhode Island and Pennsylvania, respectively). Throughout America's history this has been repeated numerous times, reflecting a predisposition to sever links so as to escape the prevailing order. Starting with the Revolution itself, Americans have engaged in separation to find their own space: the settlers moving West to find economic opportunities, the Mormons escaping religious persecution, and even the South seceding for political and ideological reasons. The impulse to separate and affirm independence from the past is an American reality which we see reflected in black nationalism in the name of self-affirmation.

The failure to identify with the national identity results in a fracturing of loyalties and the rejection of the idea that America is a nation of individuals bounded by a common creed, founded on the idea of liberty and democracy. Instead, argues Schlesinger, the idea arises that "ethnicity is the defining experience for most Americans, that ethnic ties are permanent and indelible, and that division into ethnic groups establishes the basic structure of American society and the basic meaning of the

American history.” This outlook renders impossible a shared commitment to common American values. He goes on to address another, graver implication. “The multiethnic dogma abandons historic purposes, replacing assimilation by fragmentation, integration by separatism. It belittles *unum* and glorifies *pluribus*.”⁴⁷⁴ Philosophically, it denies the faith in the power of human reason to reshape society for the better, regardless of past history and tradition. The inevitable progress of mankind toward a transcendent and unifying consciousness, the ultimate end of history is hampered by group distinctiveness. Thus, different racial and ethnic cultural characteristics breed resentment towards a set of ideals that aspire to provide rules of governance for a universal civilisation, not a set of groups. It negates the historic theory of America, of what it represents in the history of mankind, the democratic Republic comprised of individuals whose freedom and character comes from their obedience to a set of eternal laws and principles applicable to all.

The goal of empowering racial communities through separatism and frenzied awareness of their uniqueness is defeated by the strategy adopted. It aggravates the isolation and segregation of black Americans. “The ethnicity rage in general and Afrocentricity in particular not only divert attention from the real needs but exacerbates the problems... The cult of ethnicity exaggerates differences, intensifies resentments and antagonisms, drives ever deeper the awful wedges between races and nationalities. The end game is self-pity and self-ghettoization.”⁴⁷⁵ Worse still, multiculturalism allows the re-surfacing of the hatreds and resentments that had been concealed by the dominance of a meta-narrative regarding the ideals of the Republic. These aim to rise above racial, political and religious differences to offer to all a new, common, identity for people of differing races, languages and cultures. The disintegration of the American experience along with the rejection of the common core of the idea of America risks an end to the social peace and bring back the establishment of social and historical boundaries that are the breeding ground for conflict, replicating the European fragmentation that the foundation of the United States and its principles tried to eliminate.

⁴⁷⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., “The Disuniting of America,” in *American History, Volume II: Reconstruction through the Present*, 14th ed., ed. by Robert Maddox (Guilford, CT: Dushkin Publishing Group, 1997), 214.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

The assassination of Martin Luther King sparked violent riots across several cities including Washington, Chicago, New York, Baltimore and Kansas City. These followed earlier racial unrest and rioting in New York, in 1964, and the more violent ones in the neighbourhood of Watts, in Los Angeles, in 1965. During the six day violence, 34 people were killed, hundreds of buildings were burned and the California National Guard had to be deployed to control the rebellion. Together with the radicalisation of the protests against the war, the country was going through a storm of social upheaval and chronic low-level urban conflict with recurrent outbursts of violence. Black separatism was on the rise since the SNCC proclaimed Black Power and the Black Panther Party was created as a revolutionary organisation, following an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist socialist ideology.

Third World liberation movements were on the rise and the language of the revolutionaries emulated that of the anti-colonial fighters abroad. In 1969, student radicals coalesced to form the Weather Underground, a terrorist group that launched a series of bombing campaigns and murders in the name of a 'state of war' with the government of the United States. The group sought to ally itself with the emerging black liberation movements to fight the government and bring about a socialist revolution. They aimed to create a united domestic front inspired by a mixture of Marxism-Leninism, Maoism and feelings of white guilt, which provided the basis for the conversion of many radical SDS members. As Todd Gitlin, former SDS president, observes, "Behind that mass conversion was a hunger. Marxism as a practice, traditionally, was among other things the historically certified attempt to reconcile the privilege of socialist intellectuals with their commitment to take the side of the oppressed. If Marxism had no good solution to the problem... at least it acknowledged the problem. Lenin went further and made the bearers of theory indispensable. And so in the late Sixties the student movement cast about for a usable Marxism."⁴⁷⁶ Their call to arms, titled after a Bob Dylan lyric ("you don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows"), "swooped from giddy Third Worldism to a call for 'antipig self-defense' movements and 'cadre organization' on the way to a 'Marxist-Leninist party' and 'armed struggle'... The Weathermen closed with Lin Piao's [Chinese defense minister] title, 'Long Live the Victory of People's War.'"⁴⁷⁷ The hatchet job on the

⁴⁷⁶ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto and New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 383.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 385.

reputation of the groups is concluded with mention to their appeal among their white privileged recruits with class-consciousness issues. “But the Weathermen didn’t recruit through force of argument so much as through style. Their esprit was undeniable. They were good-looking. They had panache. They radiated confidence as if to the manner born. Nor did it spoil their mystique that... Weathermen came from wealth: Bill Ayers, the son of the chairman of the board of the Commonwealth of Illinois electrical combine; Diana Oughton, the daughter of a small-town Illinois banker and Republican state legislator, and great-granddaughter of the founder of the Boy Scouts of America.”⁴⁷⁸ Despite their terrorist activities, and after the frenzy subsided, many made good use of their family backgrounds and social connections to take up jobs and make careers as teachers, academics, education ‘theorists’, journalists and media pundits.

Lyndon Johnson was so aggravated by the anti-war protests and the rising radicalism that he became convinced there was a foreign conspiracy behind it. The possibility that these young students posed a genuine threat was discarded by his administration, however; unrelenting, Johnson’s suspicious nature believed there had to be a foreign master puppeteer organising a wider revolution. He therefore ordered the CIA to initiate a surveillance programme, to follow the protests and spy on the leaders and main associates. He also ordered the FBI to infiltrate the various groups and engage in disinformation techniques to manipulate and confuse them. The CIA programme, called CHAOS, was illegal, since the agency is forbidden from operating domestically. The FBI merely redirected its 1950’s COINTELPRO (Counter-Intelligence Programme) against Communism to target student movements and radical black political groups. However, the CIA could not find any direct links between protesters and any international Communist organisation. Undeterred, “LBJ leaked information to right-wing congressmen that such connections existed. The congressmen then charged, as he had assumed they would, that ‘peaceniks’ were being ‘cranked up by Hanoi,’” allowing the administration to discredit the peace protesters and portray them as traitors operating under the command of a foreign power.

Under the watchful eye of the CIA and FBI, the war was creating a cultural backlash that would affect society and mark the period. The rebellion against the status quo, the dominant social principles and the political system responsible for the war

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 385.

produced a revolt against authority in general but which materialised in a rejection of the older generations' values and lifestyles. A new romantic idealism arose that redefined freedom as the personal liberation of the individual with regard to authority and all social and behavioural constraints. The bohemian circles of artists and writers of the 1950's had already made the argument in favour of the 'here and now,' the need to experiment and test the limits of existence, to obey the "rebellious imperatives of the self... to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom."⁴⁷⁹ A cultural revolution took shape to complement the political one that was expected to occur any day. "For the first time in American history, the flamboyant rejection of 'bourgeois' norms in attire, language, sexual behaviour, and the use of drugs, previously confined to artists and bohemians, became the basis of a mass movement. Its rallying cry was 'liberation.'"⁴⁸⁰

The counterculture's ethos and philosophy were influenced by Herbert Marcuse and his attack on capitalist societies. According to him, the working classes had been corrupted by the abundance of consumer goods made available in America, and was no longer the agent of change. Mass culture and material goods had eliminated the possibility of labour thinking and acting as opposition to the political establishment. Economic prosperity, then, along with political and social freedom, were instruments that reinforced the repressive status quo. Only the outcasts, the outsiders, the unemployed and the young were capable of being aware of their oppression. American freedom was a myth. Therefore, a radical break was necessary, a refusal of that which exists, personal liberation from an economy which instils false needs and stultifies the mind, breeding conformity. Personal liberation was all about fighting conformity and repression, of transcending the material into the inner spirituality. Marcuse delved into the romantic impulse for personal fulfilment substituting passion for reason, material production with personal artistic expression. "Using Freudian insights to advance beyond the Marxian preoccupation with economic man to the realms of myth and poetry, Marcuse replaces Prometheus, the cultural hero of production through repression, with Orpheus and Narcissus, who signify joy, fulfilment, and creative receptivity. Such fulfilment comes not through domination and exploitation but through

⁴⁷⁹ Norman Mailer, "The White Negro." *Dissent*, Fall 1957.

http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957, (accessed September 2, 2013).

⁴⁸⁰ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London and Oxford: Picador, 1999), 293.

release of ‘inherent libidinal forces.’”⁴⁸¹ Marcuse expanded on these libidinal forces essential to individual fulfilment by advocating total emancipation and the end of all types of repression. “Man is free only where he is free from constraint, external and internal, physical and moral – when he is constrained neither by law nor by need.”⁴⁸²

Some read in his book *Eros and Civilisation* a defence of an unconditional surrender to Eros, portraying “unrestrained sexuality as a subversive challenge to a repressive, conformist society.”⁴⁸³ In reality, his ideal of emancipation was more spiritual in nature than the mere suppression of inhibitions. But as Beitzinger notes, “it is the promise of ‘liberation’ upon the release of instincts and the end of repression, along with the vision of a new fluid order of shifting forms and hedonistic gratification, with a corresponding widening and ascent of Eros, which Marcuse presents to the young and the disaffected.”⁴⁸⁴ Other authors stressed the need to restore a primitive individual unity and harmony, lost in the midst of evolutionary development of the human species. Norman Brown’s analysis of modern man centred on its fear of death and went further than Marcuse in his prescriptions. Unlike other animals, Man is aware of its own mortality and the rejection of its ultimate demise produces an inner dissociation that creates individual conflicts and renders life a struggle against his own instincts. This repression of instincts, unlike animals which live their existence in harmony with their instincts, makes men neurotic and unhappy. His solution, consequently, was for a resurrection of the body, of natural instincts in which “the death instinct is reconciled with the life instinct only in a life which is not repressed... the death instinct then being affirmed in a body which is willing to die.”⁴⁸⁵ Only thus could the instincts be reintegrated with the human existence, achieving unity and a higher level of consciousness.

To critics who questioned such utopian and mystic arguments, Brown and others contended that in the present moment of mankind’s history, to think in utopian and mystical terms was not only necessary but urgent. New avenues of human experience needed to be explored, to expand the individual consciousness in search of one’s

⁴⁸¹ Alfons J. Beitzinger, *A History of American Political Thought* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1972), 586.

⁴⁸² Quoted in Alfons J. Beitzinger, *A History of American Political Thought*. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1972), 587.

⁴⁸³ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London and Oxford: Picador, 1999), 294.

⁴⁸⁴ Alfons J. Beitzinger, *A History of American Political Thought* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1972), 588.

⁴⁸⁵ Quoted in Alfons J. Beitzinger, *A History of American Political Thought* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1972), 590.

essence. Reality, that which is true, could only be achieved through visionary experience, making use of the mind's eye. Timothy Leary, psychologist at Harvard, promoted the use of psychedelic drugs – LSD, hallucinogenic mushrooms – to expand consciousness. He carried several experiments at Harvard and after being dismissed from the institution he became a vocal supporter of the use of drugs as the agent of change with which to hurry the social and cultural revolution. By the end of the 1960's, anti-war protesters with long hairs and new clothing styles proliferated along with communes where free love and the use of drugs were the norm. The New Left was now living side by side with the New Age of Aquarius and the multiple forms of personal liberation in a demonstration of the libertarian spirit that marked the period.

The teachings of Marcuse and Brown regarding the release of libidinal, primeval forces caused an impact among the young and helped legitimise the sexual revolution of the 1960's, in time with the advent of birth control pills. But while in the early years the sexual liberation was seen as true freedom by the New Left, - and a slap in the face of the formal and repressed generation of their parents - by the end of the decade roughly half of the movement regarded easy sex in another way. The late 1960's witnessed a renewal of discontent against the establishment, although this time against the New Left male-dominated establishment and their expectations of sexual gratification, looking upon their female revolutionaries as their private harem. For many SDS women "their experience in the national movement was confusing, grating." Besides being underrepresented "there was a disgruntlement that ran deeper than statistics. SDS women felt obscurely uneasy. Men sought them out, recruited them, took them seriously, honored their intelligence – then subtly demoted them to girlfriends, wives, note-takers, coffeemakers."⁴⁸⁶ Women were no longer willing to submit to being the helpers and silent partners of their male counterparts. Their talents and skills went beyond the menial domestic jobs that still needed to be performed in the communes and group homes and they looked to be recognised as equal partners.

As the war dragged on in Vietnam and the political system endured through the protests, men agonised about the delay of change while many young women rejoiced about their newfound sense of liberation from the boy's club. Female activism took the centre stage. "With amazing speed they spawned not only theory but practice – a web of women's health collectives, clinics, legal centers, newspapers, therapeutic groups,

⁴⁸⁶ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto and New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 367.

communes, publishing houses, bands, abortion counselling services, battered women's shelters, rape counselling centers, legislative campaigns, professional caucuses."⁴⁸⁷ The radical wing of the feminist revolt was quick to strike at family life as an instrument of oppression, a prison for women, and to look at men as the enemy. Society was patriarchal, inspired by male values and organising principles whose purpose it was to keep women subdued. The previously sacred family household was now a primary battlefield. Romantic love was 'bourgeois' and degrading for women, portraying them as passive and ever hopeful regarding their male counterpart's intentions. The time to fight back had arrived; women were now actively engaged in fighting for their rights and making sure that no oppressive instruments were left. Words and expressions were purged, rectified, to cleanse them of every trace of sexism, the new discriminatory offence to pair with racism in America's pantheon of injustices. Those failing to acknowledge and accept the new guidelines for names and designations were living proof of the incorrigibility of both social and individual mentalities. The fragmentation of the protest movement was undeniable, and final.

IV

While the country was mired in the jungles of Vietnam, a contagious confidence swept through most of liberal America. Paradoxically, while anti-war protests and racial social divisions threatened to rip the country asunder, a number of factors were contributing to an optimistic belief about the future. Not only were new technological innovations making their impact felt, there was a confidence about modern science's capacity to improve daily life and reduce suffering. The social sciences were highly regarded as being capable of engineering society, and intellectuals took to the task of educating and enlightening their fellow countrymen. Historians, such as Arthur Schlesinger, Richard Hofstadter and Henry Steele Commager, portrayed American history as a march towards democracy, faithful that modern science could help foster a new society and an end to inequality. The nation's history was a long narrative with a clear foundation and ideology and also a clear destiny, one that would ultimately take in all of its citizens despite race, origins and creed, a happy ending for the national chronicle. Economists promoted John Maynard Keynes' theories and the need to spread

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 375.

the national economic prosperity to all through centralised management of the economy. The wealth created by the country was so large that its redistributing by way of governmental policies was seen not only as possible but as natural, thus helping fulfil Providence's design for America.

The Great Society was also a dynamic element during the period here addressed. The rise of expectations regarding the government's interventions and expertise in dealing with problems fuelled a rights-consciousness that brought about an expansion of civil rights and liberties across the social spectrum which came to be termed the Rights Revolution. The Supreme Court was the vital instrument of change via landmark decisions that extended rights in new ways, many of them reaching to minority groups that thus enjoyed legal protection in cases particular to their concerns. Backed by politicians and activist groups that insisted on real change rather than just paying lip service to the Constitution, this interaction produced a significant widening of constitutional freedoms and guarantees. Inevitably, though, this also meant that government was authorised to enlarge its range and scope for intervention as it was required to enforce the new constitutional readings. Hence, liberalism in America underwent a change, shifting from protection of individual rights such as freedom of speech, voting rights, and equality before the law, to rights and entitlements for certain groups. Lyndon Johnson was concerned with making available to all the benefits of American prosperity, real content for real material concerns; after LBJ, Progressives would focus instead on cultural and lifestyle choices and positive discrimination for minorities as a way to compensate for past injustices and present social and material asymmetries.

Liberals rejoiced as the Supreme Court advanced many of their defining issues, but a trend developed amidst this revolution. As Patterson remarks, "These important decisions pointed to a key trend that was to accelerate in coming years: the tendency of people to join groups in defense of their rights and seek legal redress in order to advance them."⁴⁸⁸ In fact, the rise of organised movements was the key feature of the Rights Revolution which continued in the following decades. The end of a myriad of discriminatory practices - racism, sexism, classism, ageism, homophobia, able-bodyism, anti-Semitism... - was actively strengthening group identity and identity groups, competing to enlarge their power and influence through legal action. Sometimes

⁴⁸⁸ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 641.

minorities would clash in their pursuit of entitlements, most often individual liberties would suffer curtailment to allow for increased rights for groups and equality. In their quest, groups risked losing sight of the set of ideals originally designed to govern a universal assembly of individuals, falling into a conception of identity that depended on their belonging to a specific group.

This risked promoting a narrow and limited understanding of identity, which further alienated its members from the wider family of Man. It also led to exacerbated litigation in order to restrict actions of others whenever it offended group sensibilities, thus limiting their own freedom of action as single individuals. Placing the group above themselves, members ended becoming defined not by their adherence to the human family but to a parochial understanding of their condition, breeding resentment and ignorance towards others. It was a post-modernist revolution ending the general narrative, the Grand Truth. What the Supreme Court endorsed was the existence of myriad little truths all vying for power and the establishment of their territory and their special rules. Fragmentation, obscurantism (by keeping the groups closed within their narrative and alienated from any wider understanding) and distrust of the American idea have left many trapped in a relativism that has come to be mere contingency to events and desires.

The Supreme Court's decisions opened the door for an expansion of federal powers, and the erosion of general constitutional principles. Foremost among these was the principle of non-discrimination, which suffered with Lyndon Johnson's Executive Order of 1965 – revised in 1967 – that instructed government agencies and departments to employ 'affirmative action' to ensure that applicants were hired without regard to race, origin, religion or sex. This concept, despite the many legal challenges vis-à-vis its constitutionality, expanded in 1968 when the Department of Labour "elaborated on this order, requiring contractors to prepare ethnic censuses of potential workers."⁴⁸⁹ In time, this developed into the establishment of quotas and the interference of government and courts to enforce the provisions. This new discriminatory explanation of the pursuit of equal employment and opportunity failed to convince those who alerted to the dangers of instituting legalised victimhood needing governmental paternalism. Government intervention to ensure equality became a necessity, anticipated by some and feared by others.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 642.

The Supreme Court's dynamic role in sanctioning the Rights Revolution opened the door to criticism of judicial activism and undue expansion of judicial power. Its decisions became law and set the precedent for further legal development in the areas concerned. The question of the role of the Supreme Court was not new; it had been raised during the very debates of the constitutional convention. And the constitutionality of its power of judicial review was also controversial since its very beginning. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison - in their Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions during the Alien and Sedition Acts crisis of 1798-99 - were among those who argued that the power to judge the constitutionality of the acts of government was a prerogative of the individual States. As a creature of the Constitution, the Supreme Court could not rule on the meaning of the Constitution. John Taylor of Caroline argued that to allow an unelected body the power to veto the laws passed by the elected representatives of the people amounted to subversion of democracy's proper procedures. Not only did it damage the authority of elections and the legitimacy of the elected, it despoiled the authors of the covenant from exercising their right to control the actions of their government.

The qualms about the supremacy of the Supreme Court were aggravated by its active role in making public choices. That responsibility falls upon Congress, the elected body of representatives charged with developing policies and determining those that best correspond to the will of the people. With the pretext of reviewing the constitutionality of State and congressional actions, and even of judging its inactions, the Supreme Court engaged in what Robert Dahl called "judicial policy-making – or if you like, judicial legislation."⁴⁹⁰ As might be expected, he continues, the justices' ideological preferences and biases are reflected in their work, giving it a personal and subjective tone that might be wholly in disagreement with the people's will. The Supreme Court has even substituted itself to Congress, intervening where Congress has chosen to remain silent or inactive, creating policies and regulations that affect society, thus determining what is best for the nation. "American legal scholars have struggled for generations to provide a satisfactory rationale for the extensive power of judicial review that has been wielded by our Supreme Court. But the contradiction remains between imbuing an unelected body – or in the American case, five out of nine justices on the Supreme Court – with the power to make policy decisions that affect the lives

⁴⁹⁰ Robert A. Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (New Haven, MA and London: 2001), 19.

and welfare of millions of Americans.” The question, therefore, arises: “how, if at all, can judicial review be justified in a democratic order?”⁴⁹¹ The power of the Supreme Court has, if anything, augmented during the subsequent decades, consolidating its position as the arbitrator and sole interpreter of the Constitution, subject to the limitations and failings of the Justices.

The government and judicial expansions were not viewed with suspicion by the whole of American society. Progressive intellectuals and politicians welcomed the developments and the growing activism, instrumental to accelerate change which would otherwise be clogged in electoral vagaries and congressional compromises. The constitutional framework, designed to exact as much compromise as possible, was viewed as detrimental and outdated for the purpose of modernising the country, a process which required Roosevelt-like leadership and determination. Confronted with the democratic procedures ingrained in the system, Progressives had no doubt that the error lay with the system and the common view of American democracy. “To be sure, any increase in centralized power and responsibility, expedient or inexpedient, is injurious to certain aspects of traditional American democracy. But the fault in that case lies with the democratic tradition; and the erroneous and misleading tradition must yield before the march of a constructive national democracy.” The obstacles that arise to the progress of the nation are as much due to a false tradition as to the small-mindedness of the average citizen. “The national advance will always be impeded by these misleading and erroneous ideas, and, what is more, it always should be impeded by them, because at bottom ideas of this kind are merely an expression of the fact that the average American individual is morally and intellectually inadequate to a serious and consistent conception of his responsibilities as a democrat.”⁴⁹² An able leader, a chieftain, was the preferred method to supplant the ‘erroneous’ democratic processes - and necessary. Failing that, a concentration of powers on a select body of morally and intellectually adequate officials would do as well.

Liberals and Progressives welcomed the Supreme Court’s activism and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society. His determination in forcing through Congress his war on poverty with its associated social and welfare programmes were held as proper presidential demeanour, albeit his methods might leave room for questioning. Furthermore, positive discrimination was regarded as necessary and beneficial. The

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁹² Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 276.

Jeffersonian ideal of democracy – ‘equal rights for all, special privileges for none’ – was outdated and inadequate for the modern industrial community. The effects of industrialism had put paid to 19th century liberalism’s place in America’s pantheon of public philosophy and its capacity to engender equal opportunities and a well-balanced society. Likewise, the sacred concept of private property and its defence were regarded as a source of inequality and social tension. Early in his book, Herbert Croly had argued the existence of a link between America’s individualism and unequal distribution of wealth. Individuals have different skills, capacities and ambitions which ultimately means they achieve different degrees of success in their lifetime. In time, wealth concentration ensures the formation of social classes. In the United States, this development had been precluded so long as free land in the West was available. But the end of the frontier, announced by Frederick Jackson Turner, along with the industrialisation of the country and the arrival of millions of immigrants meant that the safety valve of free available land was fast coming to an end. Thus, he summarised, the “traditional American confidence in individual freedom has resulted in a morally and socially undesirable distribution of wealth.”⁴⁹³ Not only was it socially and morally undesirable, it was inimical to democracy and dangerous to the country and the national interest. As such, the conclusion was clear. “The inference which follows may be disagreeable, but it cannot be escaped. In becoming responsible for the subordination of the individual to the demand of a dominant and constructive national purpose, the American state will in effect be making itself responsible for a morally and socially desirable distribution of wealth.”⁴⁹⁴

The principle of equal rights needed revising since it was no longer sufficient. For Croly, that meant “to substitute for the Jeffersonian democracy of individual rights a democracy of individual and social improvement.”⁴⁹⁵ This was tantamount to replacing Jefferson with his political and ideological rival, Hamilton. Governmental intervention was necessary to achieve national cohesion, to avoid the social ills of industrialism. But Croly advocated a fair more than intervention; he proposed active discrimination, positive and constructive discrimination on behalf of equality and the public interest. The bias toward one group instead of another to provide advantages was justified as a necessary selective policy to correct the social variations arising from an

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 173.

economic system that produced a natural selection among individuals, the worst-off being collateral damage from the competitive nature of corporate capitalism. The obvious clash with the democratic principle of impartiality was brushed aside lightly: “Impartiality is the duty of the judge rather than the statesman, of the courts rather than the government.” Rather than being the representative of the people, the warden of the people’s rights and liberties, Croly proposed a government that actively promotes its own favourites. His vision was one of taking sides and he proposed that government actively interfere to determine the result of the fight. “In economic warfare, the fighting can never be fair for long, and it is the business of the state to see that its own friends are victorious.”⁴⁹⁶

Croly’s constructive discrimination has a darker undertone to it. The interference with individual action requires a degree of coercion, a limitation of liberties. The national interest was above individual rights; it was to be achieved “not merely by equalizing individual rights, but by controlling individuals in the exercise of those rights.”⁴⁹⁷ Croly defended a return to the conception where the State was more important than the Individual. He understood that the promotion of equality demands restrictions in individual liberty, of the capacity to act freely. Liberty and Equality, Croly acknowledged, were at odds with each other. The democratic ideal implies a loss of liberties, which Croly was ready to accept. “In point of fact democracies have never been satisfied with a definition of democratic policy in terms of liberty. Not only have the particular friends of liberty usually been hostile to democracy, but democracies both in idea and behaviour have frequently been hostile to liberty.”⁴⁹⁸ In the quest to rescue the country from the dangerous social consequences of industrialism, Croly was prepared to placate individual freedoms to maintain social cohesion. His determination was underlined by his belief that the individual found realisation and satisfaction through the community rather than on his own application. But at heart, Croly was a democrat and he recognised that Liberty is a difficult condition to follow in the modern age of democratic egalitarianism. At the root of democracy’s suspicions toward liberty lay a deeper enmity. He quotes the French author Emile Faguet, who outlined the basic antagonism dividing the two. “La Liberté s’oppose à l’Égalité, car La Liberté est aristocratique par essence. La Liberté ne se donne jamais, ne s’octroie jamais; elle se

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 192.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 193.

conquiert. Or ne peuvent la conquérir que des groupes sociaux qui out su se donner la cohérence, l'organisation et la discipline et qui par conséquent, sont des groupes aristocratiques.”⁴⁹⁹ Aristocracy is the enemy of Democracy, and in the age of the average man, aristocratic virtues such as independence and self-assertion are in short supply and even shorter demand. For the champion of the democratic national purpose, liberty was a sort of anachronism that could well be sacrificed in favour of a higher ideal. Croly could add that the word democracy does not occur once in either the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, hence the need to override both.

V

Progressives admired the Promise and its requirement of government tutelage and reinforced executive authority. The creation of an elite that would guide the country to its destiny appealed to a perspective that identified social conflict, and its resolution, in material terms. In Lyndon Johnson they had a champion of active government interventionism in favour of economic discrimination. Most of the American intelligentsia which had come of age in the years following the end of the Second World War and that by the end of the 1960's was beginning to be dominant in faculties and academic circles had veered from the old liberal faith in individualism toward some form or other of centralised planning. Learning about the consequences of late 19th century industrialism and its social effects, and trained during a period of governmental growth, they were imbued with the certainty that scientific knowledge and technical expertise would allow government to respond to all social ills by way of a planned economic system. Like most Progressives, liberal academia also placed emphasis on material conditions, both as the root of social disruption and as the remedy for it. However widespread the conviction, there was no clarification and as the 1960's gave way to the 1970's a new conservative disposition and assertiveness began to emerge.

Critics of mainstream theories that were shaping the country pointed to the deterministic worldview emerging from the emphasis on material conditions. Moreover, they objected to the restricted and simplistic view of Man that it entailed. Individuals were reduced to passive respondents to external stimuli and material incentives, no

⁴⁹⁹ “Liberty is opposed to Equality because liberty is essentially aristocratic. Liberty is never given, is never granted; it is conquered. It can only be conquered by those social groups which have been able to give themselves coherence, organisation, and discipline and are therefore aristocratic groups.” Quoted in Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 193.

longer free agents controlling their lives. This was a mechanical conception of human nature, in which moral choices were determined by economic reasoning. It also understood that human nature was fulfilled only by material considerations, denying depth and complexity to humans, easily satisfied by the wealth accumulation or ease of access to objects. The redistribution of wealth, defended by Progressives as the solution to inequality and the road to happiness, disregarded all other factors that could help bring about individual fulfilment.

The proliferation of welfare payments and subsidies - the analysis of its effects being beyond the scope of this work - was attacked as creating a culture of dependency. Individual dignity was degraded by what some authors considered to be no more than 'incentives to fail' since it provided for those who chose not to work and enticed others to follow suit.⁵⁰⁰ Along with the collapse of status rewards for those who worked hard, the morality of self-discipline and control was subverted in favour of a culture of discrimination of the poor. Critics stressed the collateral effects of affirmative action and positive discrimination, and the cult of victimhood, of being dependent on the State. Being the victims of an exploitative economic system, their poverty was impersonal and independent of their choice or morality. The casualties of fortune, economics or character were denied responsibility for their lives, their free will discounted and treated differently than the rest of citizens, branded and acknowledged as a class of people relying on government funds for perpetuity; they were 'the poor.' Those opposed to welfare contended that the voluntary transfer of wealth arose from a 'white guilt' complex for past injustices, but that its principal motivation was an assumption about the inherent limitations of welfare recipients, a new form of racism. For the practice of welfare did not offer an opportunity to escape poverty, no upholding free individual determination along with moral and educational standards with which to equip the individual to buttress his life. Consequently, welfare changed from being a temporary emergency measure to become a way of life, creating new social distinctions.

As victims, welfare recipients were free from accountability and from having to make moral choices; all responsibility was shifted to society. Nor was this underclass expected to escape its plight. Their liberal benefactors did not recognise, did not imagine they could find within themselves the tools to rise from the lower rungs of society. In their Samaritan aloofness, they saw them as little children in need of

⁵⁰⁰ Myron Magnet, *The Dream and the Nightmare – The Sixties' Legacy to the Underclass* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993).

perpetual care and assistance, never to grow nor develop their skills and their ambitions because, as children, they lived for the present. When in 1965 sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a report about racial equality,⁵⁰¹ reflecting on the issue of family disintegration as the main cause for black poverty, he was shouted down as a racist. The breakdown of the family unit was accelerated by the liberal financial backing which subsidised unwed pregnancies, the report demonstrated. He was accused of blaming the victims, trying to place responsibility for poverty on the individual behaviour and culture of the poor rather than on economic and social structures. The social evils that plagued the country were analysed under Marxist lenses exclusively, with the moral structure and choices of individuals disregarded completely as being of no consequence and alien to their examination. The possibility that the decisive factors might be cultural - behaviour, traditions, beliefs – rather than economic was discarded. It is easier for ideologues to devise, and government officials to adjust incentives and try to eliminate barriers than to transform individuals and cultures.

Welfare threatened to become a poverty trap, keeping people in permanent need of government financial support. Critics pointed out the ideal of individual independence and self-sufficiency that guided the early Republic. Thomas Jefferson wanted America to expand westwards in order to provide enough free land to allow for a nation of landowners. The dream of a democracy of property owners guided his decision to complete the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. He believed that self-sustaining individuals were the bulwark of the Republic. Those who worked for wages were reduced to dependency on their employers. His political adversary, Alexander Hamilton, was not far behind the lord of Monticello in fearing a class of wage-workers or an underclass unable to provide for themselves without assistance. Such a development would lead to a sort of enslavement of the will, a submissive reception of the perspectives of their employers and benefactors for fear of losing their sustenance. “In the general course of human nature, a power over a man’s subsistence amounts to a power over his will,”⁵⁰² he argued. The opponents of Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society and its consequent enlargement of the welfare system argued likewise. They opined that the war on poverty and its redistributive policies created a class of people that lost their

⁵⁰¹ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” Office of Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor (March 1965). <http://www.stanford.edu/~mrosenfe/Moynihan's%20The%20Negro%20Family.pdf>, (accessed March 23, 2014).

⁵⁰² Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist n° 79”, in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p.405.

autonomy and to which politicians pandered in order to get elected. They were targets for demagoguery and populism, promises of more benefits. Their vote was adapted to suit their interests rather than those of the community at large, and such disregard for the wellbeing of the country was exploited by likeminded politicians craving personal power.

Another development was taking place that aggrieved the detractors of economic equality. Besides their disagreement with wealth redistribution, they argued that individual freedom was under threat. The new ideological disposition in favour of the ascendancy of the collective over the individual was reinforced with the rise of group culture. In the years that followed, the demise of the individual was justified as an effort to stop racism, a development that eroded the liberties and rights of the *unum* in favour of a defence of the collective. The new frame of mind began to take hold in campuses, as more and more universities strived to enforce a new social outlook. “When a student sent a memorandum to the ‘diversity education committee’ at the University of Pennsylvania mentioning her ‘deep regard for the individual,’ a college administrator returned the paper with the word individual underlined: ‘This is a red flag phrase today, which is considered by many to be racist. Arguments that champion the individual over the group ultimately privileges[sic] the ‘individuals’ belonging to the largest or dominant group.’”⁵⁰³ The administrator concluded with a summation of the new mode of thinking: “in a pluralistic society, individuals are only as significant as their groups.”⁵⁰⁴ Group identity was becoming the defining characteristic of individuals hence their subordination to the higher interests of their collective, be it racial, ethnic or social and economic.

The negation of the diversity of human faculties and moral standards reflected the denial to accept different degrees and types of wealth. The goal of achieving equality of result for all required the imposition of identity characteristics other than those values and ethical standards adopted by individual free will and that measured one’s worth. The Vietnam War caused victims among conservatives too. The various strands of intellectual reaction against Progressivism and government expansion that were taking shape in the 1950’s emerged in political guise with Barry Goldwater.

⁵⁰³ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., “The Disuniting of America,” in *American History, Volume II: Reconstruction through the Present*, 14th ed., ed. by Robert Maddox (Guilford, CT: Dushkin Publishing Group, 1997), 218.

⁵⁰⁴ Alan Charles Kors and Harvey A. Silverglate, *The Shadow University – The Betrayal of Liberty on America’s Campuses* (New York and London: The Free Press, 1998), 213.

However, the coming of the war split the factions between those conservatives who supported a measure of limiting liberty to pursue the fight against Communism – like William F. Buckley Jr. - and those who were unwilling to sacrifice individual liberty for any cause whatsoever. The war convinced the latter that government and its requirements were ultimately an obstacle to full individual fulfilment and freedom. Their views coalesced to form a political philosophy that looked to enhance the libertarian principles of the Declaration of Independence. Unlike mainstream Republicans who had come to accept government enlargement as necessary to advance certain values and to win the Cold War, libertarians were anti-statist. The defence of liberty meant limited government, decentralisation and autonomy to make individual economic decisions. The latter was associated with free market capitalism and the rejection of government intervention or regulation.

The libertarian philosophy was attacked as simply meaning that freedom consisted of lack of coercion. Instead, conservatives countered, freedom ought to be perceived also as an ethical principle for life encompassing a sense of duty, personal responsibility and virtue, and moral order. Before the split between the two in the late 1960's and early 1970's, conservatives tried to reconcile both. Nonetheless, the dilemma remained. "Was the purpose of conservatism to liberate individuals from intrusive government or to encourage them to lead moral lives? Was its aim... to create the 'free man' or the 'good man'? And if men and women declined to act in a moral manner, could the state, having been expelled from the economy, be trusted to regulate personal behaviour?" The question of responsibility to society was a fundamental one, which separated libertarians and conservatives. "Virtue and unrestrained individual choice are radically different starting points from which to discuss freedom. One sees society as an organic entity united by moral bonds, the other as a collection of autonomous individuals. One blames the problems of modern society on an excess of individualism, the other on an excess of impediments to individual freedom."⁵⁰⁵ Libertarians were thus inherently adversarial towards the welfare state, which they charged as destroying the dignity of recipients and an inhibition to their escaping poverty.

The early rumblings of the coming discord in conservative ranks were heard in 1960. American youth organisations were not restricted to the left. Student activism

⁵⁰⁵ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London and Oxford: Picador, 1999), 310.

spanned all shades of the political and ideological spectrum. In 1960, Young Americans for Freedom was founded, a combination of the various factions of student conservatism. It was one of the first organisations created to promote conservative values, especially a minimal state and individual liberty. It became influential as it spawned a number of groups and institutions devoted to the same cause, turning into a veritable training ground for political action. They proclaimed their allegiance to the Constitution as the instrument with which to enable the government to pursue its rightful functions, these being the protection of political and economic freedom. The minimal political state was the best guarantee of preservation of individual rights, albeit they understood that Communism was a threat to those liberties and that needed to be destroyed. This concession to government action was compensated with a defence of market economy and an end to regulation and interference. So far, the YAF was well within the conventional conservative framework, but that changed in 1969. The radicalisation of the protests against the war in Vietnam extended to the YAF, which opposed the draft as an infringement of liberties. An increasing number of members adopted radical views regarding limited government and non-interference, espousing libertarian and anarchist beliefs. The unsteady cooperation between the different groups lasted until 1971. The disillusionment with Richard Nixon's presidency was the final straw that decided libertarians to leave their association with conservatism and the Republican Party to start the Libertarian Party.

The fringe movement gathered lukewarm support outside the intellectual circles at first, but was given increasing notoriety and acceptance as the years went by. The publication of several books in the early 1970's outlining the philosophy and principles of libertarianism enhanced its visibility and reputation. Following Henry David Thoreau's idea of government, Robert Nozick put forth his ideas for a central administration reduced to bare essential governing functions, leaving the citizen body free to organize themselves and their social relations in his book *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, which became a bestselling sensation. Whilst Nozick fixed libertarianism firmly as a philosophical ideal, Murray Rothbard set out to articulate the political guidelines and principles for its realisation.

Rothbard began by fixing the roots of libertarianism deep in American history. He claimed that the revolutionaries of 1776 espoused libertarian values and that the political system they erected after independence reflected as much. The constitutional frame was designed explicitly to protect individual rights, among them the right to

freely use and dispose of property. The libertarian concept of freedom Rothbard defined thus: “Freedom is a condition in which a person’s ownership rights in his own body and his legitimate material property are not invaded, are not aggressed against.”⁵⁰⁶ The greatest aggressor of all is the State. This is the main difference separating libertarians from the rest. While most regard the State as necessary, albeit in differing degrees of expansion, and others even look to it as the answer to all of Man’s troubles, for libertarians there is no compromise. “For libertarians regard the State as the supreme, the eternal, the best organized aggressor against the persons and property of the mass of the public. All States everywhere, whether democratic, dictatorial, or monarchical, whether red, white, blue, or brown.”⁵⁰⁷ Whilst conservatives would consider the State capable of acting as an instrument to further moral law, libertarians see it as a violator of such a general right as letting free will determine the rules of individual behaviour.

Libertarianism was not devoid of hair-splitting ideological subtleties. Specific points of doctrine divided libertarians from anarcho-capitalists and other branches of right-wing anarchism, much like the fratricidal Marxist partitions. True believers never compromise in their interpretation of the true faith; the self-righteous will brook no doubts. But a common current could be found among libertarians in their general outlook regarding equality. Rothbard singles out the egalitarian theory as the one concept from which liberty was most threatened, and the principle that defines the various left-wing ideologies and movements. Equality as an ethical ideal strives for full equality of all Men. However, “biology stands like a rock in the face of egalitarian fantasies.”⁵⁰⁸ He argues that the egalitarian utopia rests on a refusal of human biology’s diversity. Unable, against all evidence, to recognise that individuals differ in their faculties, talents, biology and interests, egalitarians opt instead to dismiss biology and attribute human variations to economic factors and their manipulation to oppress and lower certain groups. He could add that human inequality is certain to persist as no two people share a common experience from the same phenomenon. Rothbard concludes that “The egalitarian revolt against biological reality, as significant as it is, is only a subset of a deeper revolt: against the ontological structure of reality itself, against the

⁵⁰⁶ Murray Rothbard, *For a New Liberty – The Libertarian Manifesto*. 2nd Edition (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 51.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁰⁸ Murray Rothbard, *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature and Other Essays*. 2nd Edition (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2000), 16.

‘very organization of nature’; against the universe as such.”⁵⁰⁹ The egalitarian perspective relies on abstract reason, not finding support in Nature. But reason denies creativity and cannot create values. Cold, hard reason stands as the opposite of values, and reason will always find that all human values and beliefs have no ontological reality, being mere human constructions and conventions.

This relativism is the foundation for egalitarianism as it allows egalitarians to believe that a new reality can be built. “At the heart of the egalitarian left is the pathological belief that there is no structure of reality; that all the world is a *tabula rasa* that can be changed at any moment in any desired direction by the mere exercise of human will - in short, that reality can be instantly transformed by the mere wish or whim of human beings.”⁵¹⁰ Rothbard points out that egalitarianism is inherently antihuman because it rejects the very structure of what it means to be human: human nature and human diversity. It is troubled by them and dislikes their very existence, much preferring an abstract entity capable of being moulded and shaped according to its uniform projects. Therefore, any egalitarian project will ultimately fall into statist control and oppression because it cannot impose equality otherwise.

In his libertarian manifesto, Rothbard defined a libertarian as “clearly an individualist but *not* an egalitarian. The only ‘equality’ he would advocate is the equal right of every man to the property in his own person, to the property in the unused resources he ‘homesteads,’ and to the property of others he has acquired either through voluntary exchange or gift.”⁵¹¹ Libertarianism, then, exhibits an almost anarchic love of liberty and aristocratic contempt for equality. Critics pointed out that libertarians yielded too much to their anarchic strain, failing to understand that without social order there is no freedom. Just like the Sixties’ counterculture, libertarians risked looking at social order as an infringement upon freedom rather than freedom’s foundation. Their answer to this revealed a generous belief in the innate goodness of Man’s nature. As Rothbard explained, libertarians held but one principle above that of human freedom. “The libertarian creed rests upon one central axiom: that no man or group of men may aggress against the person or property of anyone else. This may be called the ‘nonaggression axiom.’ ‘Aggression’ is defined as the initiation of the use or threat of physical violence against the person or property of anyone else. Aggression is therefore

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁵¹¹ Murray Rothbard, *For a New Liberty – The Libertarian Manifesto*. 2nd Edition (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 50 - 51.

synonymous with invasion.”⁵¹² In this they differed from conservatives, who had a pessimistic outlook of Man, hence the need for social and moral restraints to keep in check his selfish and fickle instincts. For libertarians the best form of society is the free association of individuals, coming together looking to further their interests.

It would be no mistake to trace a link from the opposition between mainstream conservatives and libertarians in America to the 17th century antagonism that Puritans felt towards Dissenters and Separatists. The Calvinist Puritans viewed with suspicion the latter’s radical individualism and horizontal society, preferring a hierarchical and centralised church governance. English Reformation Dissenters and Separatists embraced a rejection of all authority and the establishment of a congregation of the faithful, free from any external authority. Thus released from any outside interference could each individual worship the God of love of the New Testament and live according to the dictates of his conscience. Puritans relied on the Old Testament and a God of wrath, an aristocratic perspective about the governing of the community and the establishment of a unified worship and code of conduct.

Following that link, libertarianism is closely associated with personal emancipation, including in the private life, therefore within touching distance of left-leaning perspectives about personal freedom and rejection of authority as the SDS espoused. Despite the approximation of 1970’s Christian revival to the libertarian position, they differed in the vision of personal affirmation and sexual freedom. Libertarians are more attuned with anarchism than conservatism. In its belief that individuals are capable of organising themselves without government interference, libertarians share a romantic view of man as being intrinsically good, and evil arising from corrupt institutions that oppress mankind. Nonetheless both the conservative revival and the libertarian/individualistic philosophy emerge as reaction against the Sixties leftward march. Coupled with the religious revival of the 1970’s - notwithstanding its multiple and conflicting characteristics⁵¹³ - it acted as a reaction against a certain loss of spirituality and purpose. Its effects would later converge in the Reagan Revolution.

⁵¹² Ibid., 27.

⁵¹³ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided – The Civil War of the 1960’s* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 241ff.

VI

This period was marked by an intense surge of competing proposals, a surge of alternatives to the political conformism that had taken hold in the decades immediately following the end of the war. The requirements of individual mediocrity and social uniformity stemmed from the imperial-like responsibilities abroad. They met an individual disposition and social environment that grew increasingly hostile from the 1950's onward and erupted violently in the 1960's. The success of America's global military and financial-commercial activities was divorced from any deeper cultural motivations. That is to say, the national ethos was still sufficiently centred on the individual and the expansion of his horizons, be it material or spiritual. The legacy of history – nationalism - which binds other countries together did not yet carry enough weight in the United States to rationalise its militaristic expansion or financial domination.

Notwithstanding Lyndon Johnson's will to distribute economic benefits to expand the individual frontier, Vietnam proved to be a greater catalyst of social change. The fragmentation of the national cohesion attested to the challenge to which American values were being subjected. The grand narrative of the foundation was coming under questioning, its applicability in a different society dealing with a changing world under scrutiny. But the changes the country was going through took place within American idealism. In the midst of the storm delivering the country from modernity into post-modernism, the ideas being put forward looked to the very sources of American idealism for inspiration and consolidation. The tension within was thrusting the country forward in search of new ways to complete its project.

Although Andrew Jackson was the first President to claim popular national mandate, Franklin D. Roosevelt enshrined the principle of presidential representation of all of the people. He thus sought to reinforce his legitimacy above that of Congress, opening the way for presidential supremacy in the constitutional order. This allowed him to carry on with his campaign programmes and claim to speak for the nation. Lyndon Johnson followed in the footsteps of his benefactor, claiming that although many could advise and represent, only one was chosen by the American people to decide. This plebiscitary view of presidential elections is an abusive construct, apt to all manner of manipulation due to its indistinctness and ambiguity. As Robert Dahl remarks, "it requires an extraordinary leap of faith to infer the views of voters from

nothing more than the way they cast their votes for president.”⁵¹⁴ The presidential claim to represent the entire nation allows them to assert a popular mandate with which to clothe their policies, rendering them acceptable and legitimised by popular sovereignty. The argument of representation justifies the national scope of their plans as defending the national interest, an argument dear to LBJ.

There are several questions surrounding the presidential popular mandate claim besides extrapolating on the meaning of the vote. The first being that the Constitution does not attribute the election of presidents to the American people, but to the States. These have, in time, surrendered that power to their citizens but the Electoral College still stands as reminder of the original intent, and as filter. Secondly, the assertion that by virtue of their election they alone represent the nation falls short when we consider that the victor is chosen from a contest in which at least another candidate takes part in what sometimes is a bitter and divisive election. Abraham Lincoln could hardly claim that he represented the whole nation when he was elected on the eve of the Civil War. The entire people argument drops to a majority of the electorate, albeit in a race consisting of three or more candidates the outcome may be chosen by a plurality of votes, or relative majority: Lincoln only won 40 percent of the vote and still felt he could speak for the whole to resist Southern secession. Even in a dual contest, however, the claim of national representation is denied by nonparticipating voters and the underage, who certainly can claim to be part of the nation. However, the democratic charm is powerful enough so that people do feel as if the winning candidate can decide for the whole of the community, as if the spirit of the nation had descended upon him the day the ballots were counted.

The more cogent proposals issuing from the turmoil of the period share a distinctive embrace of the 18th century French romantic view of mankind and its scope for perfectibility. Both libertarians and the SDS, through its Port Huron Statement, followed Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his view that Man was naturally good and that society and its institutions were to blame for the perversion of human nature. Rousseau emphasised the relationship with Nature, elevating the sensible and the spiritual in Man as the path to completeness. Societies were artificial substitutes of natural life and inevitably became corrupt, bringing out the worst in human nature. This optimism inspired a philosophical idealism that in America is better illustrated by Ralph Waldo

⁵¹⁴ Robert A. Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (New Haven, MA and London: 2001), 113.

Emerson and the Transcendentalists, which looked to Nature as the source of ethical behaviour.

The Founding Fathers, educated men who received an education in the Classics, were less predisposed to look at their fellow Man with benevolence. Their standing as large property-holders at the top of the new Republic gave them a characteristic cynical outlook regarding those below them and society at large. But even a friend of popular democracy as Thomas Paine considered government a necessary evil. 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”.⁵¹⁵ Libertarians and the Port Huron Statement, however, bear witness to the ideal that it is possible to engage in social life without the need of mediators or umpires. The SDS statement, most notably, called on human brotherhood to fulfil its potential for reason, freedom and love through participatory democracy, devolving more power to individuals. The natural generosity of individuals joining together to rule their affairs was as romantic as Rothbard’s non-aggression axiom underpinning libertarianism. Both trust people to put the common good above their particular wellbeing, a demonstration of civic moral virtue that Paine and the Founders did not consider likely.

Although sharing in the philosophical idealism, the Port Huron Statement and libertarians differ from Lyndon Johnson and Herbert Croly in that the latter trust the State to act as catalyst and assistant to bring about the individual revolution. The government becomes the agent instituting the democratic project, emphasising the egalitarian faith. More of a social betterment project than an individual one since they consider - and Croly certainly does so - that the change will come through societal, common enhancement. The individual is a passive recipient of what has to be assumed is a trickle-down effect, with the ultimate return coming as interest from the investment made in the group instead of each investing on his own wants and needs. The defence of all-out individualism would come under criticism from conservatives who cited the danger of unravelling the social fabric contained in their proposals. However, the romantic appeal to fraternity and harmony met with a favourable cultural atmosphere that followed in the wake of the revolt against the conformism of the nuclear terror years. The rise of new values of love, brotherhood, unity and integrity convinced many proponents of New Age culture that indeed the future conversion of values associated

⁵¹⁵ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, Rights of Man, and Other Essential Writings of Thomas Paine* (London: New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 7.

with a new dawn of mankind was imminent. Time, and events, would delay the arrival of the Age of Aquarius.

CHAPTER SIX

Reckoning

Every body of men invested with office are tenacious of power; they feel interested, and hence it has become a kind of maxim, to hand down their offices, with all its rights and privileges, unimpaired to their successors; the same principle will influence them to extend their power, and increase their rights; this of itself will operate strongly upon the courts to give such a meaning to the constitution in all cases where it can possibly be done, as will enlarge the sphere of their own authority.

Robert Yates ('Brutus'), Anti-Federalist n°80, January 31, 1788

I

The year 1968 was one of the most difficult for modern America, a traumatic national experience. The year began with a joined military offensive by North Vietnam and the Viet Cong against multiple targets in various regions of South Vietnam. The Tet Offensive owes its name to the Vietnamese New Year which that year began on January 30, an attack that caught the Americans and South Vietnamese off-guard, not expecting the enemy to engage during the important celebrations. The surprise attacks included an assault on the US embassy in Saigon, and during the first days the US forces lost control of several cities and key strategic points. The offensive was repelled during the course of the following weeks with the number of enemy dead reaching the many thousands. However, not only did the Americans and South Vietnamese also lose thousands of soldiers, the attack exposed the complexity of the military situation on the ground and the strength of the communist forces, capable of mounting large-scale military operations. Despite all efforts from the Johnson administration to convince the public otherwise, it was now evident that the war could not be won quickly, threatening to drag on for years.

The protests against the war continued with rallies and demonstrations peppering the main cities and college campuses of the nation. Student protests began to focus their attention on universities where opposition against the war mingled with the civil rights struggle. Students took over administration buildings in protest against Vietnam and demanded an end to the universities' collaboration with the military establishment, while black students demanded a change of curriculum to include specific African-American courses. The consequences of the retreat of black Americans into a separatist group culture were beginning to be felt in academia with the development of theoretical 'isms' that reinforced the ghettoisation of black America. In February, three black activists were killed by the police in South Carolina following a sit-in; later, on April 4, Martin Luther King, Jr., was shot dead in Memphis, Tennessee. Violent riots erupted after his assassination, setting ablaze the cities of New York, Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Louisville, Kansas City, and Chicago, leaving dozens dead. In response to MLK's death, the Black Panther movement attacked police officers in Oakland, California, in a gun-battle that left several dead and injured.

The situation naturally spilled to the political arena where Johnson was trying to unite the Democratic Party behind his candidacy for the presidential election later that

year. But the party was as bitterly divided as the country on the subject of the war, and could not come to terms about supporting the President. An avowed anti-war candidate, Eugene McCarthy, had announced his candidacy for the party's nomination. In March, in the New Hampshire primaries, McCarthy lost to Johnson but the latter's margin of victory was small enough to confirm his growing unpopularity with the party's rank and file. A few days later, his old foe Robert Kennedy announced his candidacy. Johnson realized he was caught between the anti-war faction of the party and the Kennedy aura, and not only was his nomination far from assured but even if he secured it the Democratic Party would be hard put to mount a successful campaign against the Republican candidate given the divisions within. Former Governor of Alabama, the Democrat George Wallace, hoped to win the alienated white Southerners running for President on a segregationist platform with the American Independent Party, further splitting the traditional Solid South for the Democrats.

On March 31 LBJ addressed the nation. He restated his belief that the strength of the nation rested in unity and his efforts to achieve it. "I have put the unity of the people first. I have put it ahead of any divisive partisanship." True to his philosophy, he worried about the effects the war was having on American society and quoted another President that had faced civil strife. "And in these times as in times before, it is true that a house divided against itself by the spirit of faction, of party, of region, of religion, of race, is a house that cannot stand. There is division in the American house now. There is divisiveness among us all tonight." The social chaos threatened to undermine what Johnson regarded was the ultimate representative of the community, the repository of the trust of the people and its guide towards the better future.

Believing this as I do, I have concluded that I should not permit the Presidency to become involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year. With America's sons in the fields far away, with America's future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world's hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office - the Presidency of your country. Accordingly, I shall not

seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.⁵¹⁶

It was a surprise statement, an acknowledgement of Johnson's personal failure to be the national, consensual leader he so craved. But the fact was that the nation was fractured, separated. Black militants and police clashed with gunfire exchanged, adding to the casualty lists; more campuses and university facilities were occupied by an increasingly unstable alliance of anti-war SDS elements and radicalised civil rights activists. In October, during the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, two black American athletes raised their fists in a Black Power salute while the national anthem was played in the medal award ceremony. The gesture astonished the nation revealing the depth of the estrangement between black Americans and their country. Accusations of treason and disloyalty from white America were met with counter-accusations of racism and hypocrisy. In September, radical feminists disrupted the Miss America Pageant staging a successful televised protest against what they charged was an exploitative competition, demeaning to women.

A poisonous atmosphere of intense partisanship and general suspicion pervaded the country. The cracks in American society followed along social, economic and racial lines, pulling the country apart. As the protestors realised the futility of their efforts before the inflexibility of the establishment, the protests and demonstrations became more and more violent. A sense of raging hopelessness seemed to command the country. Speaking the day after the murder of Martin Luther King's death, Robert Kennedy reminded radicals from all sides that their actions would achieve nothing. "What has violence ever accomplished? What has it ever created? No martyr's cause has ever been stilled by his assassin's bullet. No wrongs have ever been righted by riots and civil disorders. A sniper is only a coward, not a hero; and an uncontrolled, uncontrollable mob is only the voice of madness, not the voice of the people." The uncontrollable escalation of riots, violence, killings could only end in disaster: "violence breeds violence, repression brings retaliation, and only a cleaning of our whole society

⁵¹⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, "The President's Address to the Nation Announcing Steps To Limit the War in Vietnam and Reporting His Decision Not To Seek Reelection," March 31, 1968. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28772>, (accessed July 23, 2014).

can remove this sickness from our soul.”⁵¹⁷ The country was indeed sick, the American dream tainted with the blood of its citizens, including Robert Kennedy’s, shot two months later on June 5 following his victory in the California primaries for the Democratic nomination. “The victims of the violence are black and white, rich and poor, young and old, famous and unknown. They are, most important of all, human beings whom other human beings loved and needed. No one - no matter where he lives or what he does - can be certain who will suffer from some senseless act of bloodshed. And yet it goes on and on.”⁵¹⁸

The stage was set for a critical election, in a year of violence. The unexpected decision by Lyndon Johnson not to run after his landslide victory of 4 years past was a reflection of the difficulties the Democrats were up against. The war in Vietnam undermined all other achievements - the War on Poverty, the Great Society and the Civil Rights Acts enacted since Kennedy had died. LBJ had left the party a domestic legacy that would have otherwise guaranteed the Party’s unity and victory at the polls, but discontentment against the war was a heavy burden that made any electoral forecasting very difficult for the Democrats. The absence of the incumbent president and that of Robert Kennedy meant that when the Democratic National Convention opened in Chicago to choose the national ticket, the party was without a leading figure capable of rallying the faithful and unite the party. Johnson’s Vice-President, Hubert Humphrey, was the main contender and the favourite of the party’s establishment. However, as a member of the departing administration he failed to convince the anti-war faction of the party.

The convention was held in August, the summer temperature heating the raw passions of the bad-tempered, turbulent delegates. The convention descended into live televised violence between anti-war protestors and the police, brawls amongst delegates, speechmakers insulted by the crowd and a general atmosphere of civil war. Hubert Humphrey won the nomination beating the anti-war candidates, but by the time the convention ended it was clear that the candidate did not have the endorsement of the whole of the Democratic Party.

The chaos at the Democratic National Convention was witnessed by the whole country and it mirrored the national state of affairs. The Republican candidate, Richard

⁵¹⁷ Robert F. Kennedy, “Remarks to the Cleveland City Club,” April 5, 1968. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/RFK-Speeches> (accessed July 27, 2014).

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

Milhouse Nixon, had begun preparing for the campaign early in the year. He had been Dwight Eisenhower's Vice-President but had lost the 1960 presidential election to John Kennedy and the 1962 California gubernatorial election - his home state. The Republican Party machine feared he was not electable, but he managed to beat the other candidates including his main opponent, California governor and former actor Ronald Reagan. An ambitious man, Nixon shrewdly caught the mood of the majority section of American society, the hard-working, patriotic citizens that were disturbed by what was happening to their country. This Middle America was revolting against the excesses of the students and radicals, the violence and the disloyalty towards the country and the fighting soldiers abroad. Nixon understood that he could capitalise on this backlash against the imminent anarchy that was about to engulf the country and ran his campaign on the theme of law and order.

The reaction had been building since the mid-1960s. What prompted the discontentment first was welfare: not so much at the financial cost of it but against what they termed "cheaters, leeches and welfare bums," a class of poor people that lived off social subsidies and did not seek to change their situation. The criticism had a racial undertone, mainly because "black people, while never a majority of welfare recipients, were disproportionately on the rolls because they had especially high rates of poverty and family break-up."⁵¹⁹ This poisoned the debate and only served to deepen the suspicions on both sides of the divide. As Patterson remarks, "working-class people, many of them poor, seemed especially upset by welfare. Many, to be sure, had themselves gone on relief during the 1930's or when tragedy...had hit their families. But they had tried to manage stoically... As soon as they had been able to find work, they did so; the young had often left school in their early teens to support their families." But this work ethic was being eroded by the loafers' example and the appeal of the Sixties counterculture. "What especially bothered many of those who joined the backlash against welfare was that their own children seemed to be tempted by the same 'degraded' values that were luring the 'leeches' on the dole. Many Americans in the younger generation, they believed, were demanding instant gratification. Worse, they thought, these young people were insubordinate, lacking either appreciation for or understanding of the sacrifices of their parents."⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁹ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 673.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 674.

The clash intensified as the older generations considered that the revolt of the young had overshot, giving way to a cultural war. The anger and despair against the establishment and the conformity it sponsored had fallen into open disrespect for all values of society. The decomposition of social and family ties, and basic principles of social conduct and civilised behaviour were decried by the middle classes as breeding ground for violence and crime, which inevitably was charged mostly on young black Americans. The cultural war was no longer about generational differences, but a redefinition of American values and their wider meaning in a fast-changing society. The growing secularism of young Americans, the sexual revolution, the increasing use of recreational drugs, these were some examples of cultural changes that joined with the rights revolution, promoted by the Supreme Court, to confront the American society with a reformation of its values. The opponents were not just older generations but spread to include younger people who did not identify with the new wave; the polarisation was ideological, not just political and would extend for the next decades.

The backlash threatened the Democratic Party directly. Not only because of Vietnam but because of the social chaos into which the country descended because of it. Nixon quickly proclaimed himself the spokesman of the middle and working classes that went about their daily routines and jobs, the silent majority.

It is another voice. It is the quiet voice in the tumult and the shouting. It is the voice of the great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans - the non-shouters; the non-demonstrators. They are not racists or sick; they are not guilty of the crime that plagues the land. They are black and they are white – they're native born and foreign born – they're young and they're old. They work in America's factories. They run America's businesses. They serve in government. They provide most of the soldiers who died to keep us free. They give drive to the spirit of America. They give lift to the American Dream. They give steel to the backbone of America. They are good people, they are decent people; they work, and they save, and they pay their taxes, and they care.⁵²¹

Nixon would run a campaign on law and order but trying not to sound too radical or scare the liberal middle classes. These, alienated by Vietnam and the street

⁵²¹ Richard M. Nixon, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida," August 8, 1968. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25968> (accessed July 22, 2014).

violence, looked to alternatives and Nixon looked back at them. “We live in an age of revolution in America and in the world,” he said, but America was born of a revolution, a continuing revolution that contained the answers to the anxieties of both liberals and conservatives. “The American Revolution was and is dedicated to progress, but our founders recognized that the first requisite of progress is order. Now, there is no quarrel between progress and order - because neither can exist without the other. So let us have order in America - not the order that suppresses dissent and discourages change but the order which guarantees the right to dissent and provides the basis for peaceful change.”⁵²² Nixon had no problem in attempting to play to the prejudices of the liberal electorate, his ambition the potent instrument for the effort. “Just as we cannot have progress without order, we cannot have order without progress, and so, as we commit to order tonight, let us commit to progress.”⁵²³ But Nixon’s strongest asset rested not on his powers of seduction, least of all when directed at Progressive America. He looked and sounded awkward and disingenuous when trying to impress his sincerity and tolerance upon people, and liberals were suspicious of him.

Nixon was a divisive candidate and could hardly help himself. He was known for his partisanship and his avowed anti-communism, the credentials for which he gained during the post-war Red Scare years. He despised liberals and looked at the events of the Sixties with mildly disguised irritation. Writing in his memoirs, years later, he allowed a glimpse of his full colours. “I saw the mass demonstrations grow remote from the wellsprings of sensitivity and feeling that had originally prompted them, and become a cultural fad. And the new sensitivity to social inequalities that was awakened at the beginning of the decade had, by the middle of the sixties, spawned an intolerance for the rights and opinions of those who disagreed with the vocal minority.” And he directed the blame at those in charge, sickened by their timidity. “I had no patience with the mindless rioters and professional malcontents, and I was appalled by the response of most of the nation’s political and academic leaders to them... stricken with ambivalence about their own guilt and doubts about their own values.”⁵²⁴ He had no such doubts or political complexes; in fact he was eager to make his position clear and act accordingly. “I was ready to take a stand on these social and cultural issues; I was anxious to defend the ‘square’ virtues. In some cases – such as opposing the

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Volume 1 (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 438.

legalization of marijuana and the provision of federal funds for abortions, and in identifying myself with unabashed patriotism – I knew I would be standing against the prevailing social winds and that would cause tension. But I thought that at least someone in high office would be standing up for what he believed.”⁵²⁵ During the campaign, Nixon tried to shift attention to Vietnam, knowing that the Democrats were vulnerable on the issue.

But in his acceptance speech he still spoke his mind on domestic affairs. He placed the blame for the rise in crime squarely on the courts which “in their decisions have gone too far in weakening the peace forces as against the criminal forces in this country and we must act to restore that balance. Let those who have the responsibility to enforce our laws and our judges who have the responsibility to interpret them be dedicated to the great principles of civil rights. But let them also recognize that the first civil right of every American is to be free from domestic violence, and that right must be guaranteed in this country.” The judicial system’s almost apologetic attitude towards criminals he attributed to a romanticised view of violence and the rationalisation of the rioters’ actions as a product of society’s racism. “And to those who say that law and order is the code word for racism, there and here is a reply: Our goal is justice for every American. If we are to have respect for law in America, we must have laws that deserve respect.”⁵²⁶

The election gave Nixon the victory, but by a smaller margin than expected. The difference between him and Hubert Humphrey in the popular vote was less than one percentage point (43.4 to 42.7), albeit in the Electoral College Nixon won 301 to 191. But the big surprise was the performance of former governor of Alabama, George Wallace. He carried 5 States, all Southern – Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi – and a total of 13.5 percent of the popular vote. It was a strong showing, the best result by a third party since the 1912 presidential election when Teddy Roosevelt ran for the Progressive Party. Although he knew he could not win the election, Wallace’s strategy was to win enough electoral votes to deny either of the mainstream candidates an outright majority and thus throw the election into the House

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Richard M. Nixon, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida,” August 8, 1968. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25968> (accessed July 22, 2014).

of Representatives, where the Democrats were in control. Once there, he could act as a powerbroker and secure concessions for the South.

In many ways the 1968 election represented a significant shift in political patterns. Despite the result of the congressional elections, where the Democrats lost a few seats but retained their majority in both Senate and House of Representatives, the election realigned the American political system. First of all, to the detriment of the Democratic Party, as the Solid South rebelled against the actions of the Democratic leadership in bringing about the Civil Rights Acts and smashing segregation in the South. The Southern white electorate punished the Democrats, but as Patterson observes, there was a more subtle and more fundamental change taking place besides the racial backlash. “But backlash transcended racial divisions, fundamental though those were to an understanding of American society in the late 1960’s. It stemmed also from rising dissatisfaction with Johnson’s policies in Vietnam and from doubts – well exploited by Wallace and Nixon – about the liberal policies that the Great Society bureaucrats had oversold after 1964. The backlash represented a powerful reaction against liberalism, a major casualty of the 1960’s.” The disillusionment gave way to suspicion regarding the actions of government. “The reaction, as it turned out, was lasting. It affected not only Humphrey in 1968 but also liberals generally thereafter. Polls from the mid-1960’s on showed that smaller and smaller percentages of the American people had faith in their elected officials or in the ability of government to do things right.”⁵²⁷ The Progressive optimism about the capability of government and the expertise of officials to find the solutions to the problems of American society was on the wane.

Government was seen as the source of problems, rather than the answer to them, and elected administrators were viewed as abusers of power. Future events would further deepen the cynicism and confirm the new cycle of suspicion concerning the federal government, a novel feature in American politics regarding delegated power in general. The weariness would henceforth drive away greater numbers of voters, a development that was “disproportionally serious among poor, working class, and lower-middle-class people, most of whom had been life-long Democrats. Never very influential in politics, they seemed to feel even more alienated in the 1960’s and thereafter. Their disaffection with politicians contributed further to the decomposition of

⁵²⁷ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 708.

the parties and to the ability of special interests to play major roles in the governance of the country.”⁵²⁸ The trend would consolidate in future elections as well as the impact of organised groups in determining policy, thus further undermining government in the eyes of the people. More and more, the government failed to represent the interests of the majority of the country’s citizens, proving the fears of the Founding Fathers right when it came to entrustments of power and the influence of elites upon government. In the decades that followed special interests would organise and fill the void left by the defaulters in determining policies, namely economic and financial groups.

Once elected, Nixon aimed to heal the country’s wounds and reunite the nation. He remembered a campaign incident that revealed what the goal of his new life as President should be. “I saw many signs in this campaign. Some of them were not friendly and some were very friendly. But the one that touched me the most was the one that I saw in Deshler, Ohio, at the end of a long day of whistle-stopping. A little town, I suppose five times the population was there in the dusk, almost impossible to see – but a teenager held up a sign ‘Bring Us Together.’” This was like his road to Damascus, almost. “And that will be the great objective of this administration at the outset, to bring the American people together.”⁵²⁹ A historian has the benefit of historical hindsight, and one can be tempted to conclude that given Nixon’s record in the White House he achieved his goal. There was hardly any other President that accomplished such wide agreement, if only in uniting Americans in a deeper aversion and suspicion of politicians. But for now, the sign in Deshler, Ohio, was a poignant reminder of the violence and division of the country.

Popular culture highlighted the social divide, which became more pronounced as the years went by. A television show, *All in the Family*, introduced Archie Bunker as its main character. Archie Bunker was a middle-aged, working-class father and the show followed his daily struggles to adapt to the changes sweeping America. The surprising aspect about him was his bluntness and his rages against blacks, feminists, homosexuals and youths in general, which he regarded as lacking in morals and basic good manners. The show was intended to be a parody about the views and spews of a conservative bigot, but the working and middle-class America identified with him and with his opinions about the social and political issues of the day, and he became their unofficial spokesman. The public loved Archie Bunker and the show became a huge success

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Volume 1 (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 414.

spanning the whole of the 1970's, a rich illustration of the social atmosphere of the decade.

The goal of unity would require from Nixon the strenuous practice of all the skills he possessed. And yet, he had few that he could muster. Born in a family of stern religious parents, Nixon was the second of five brothers. All of them, bar one, were named after kings of England thanks to their mother's love of English history.⁵³⁰ There were three English kings named Richard, all known for the political scandals that marked their reigns. The first Richard, known as The Lionheart, lost his throne because of his crusading in the East. Richard II was deposed amid accusations of usurpation of powers and misgovernment which in the eyes of the country had made him unworthy of being king. The last Richard is the infamous character in Shakespeare's eponymous play, the ruthless and power-starving tyrant that ruled for two years only after having murdered his nephews. In short, all lost power to revolts occasioned by war, misrule or both - disconcerting parallels for those so predisposed.

His personality has been amply analysed in search of clues that may explain his decisions in the actions that led to his downfall. His strict parents, the poverty and early experience with death in the family – he lost two brothers to disease – contributed to his shyness and isolation from others. He had to forego Harvard because his family could not support him financially, opting to study close to home at Whittier College. Disillusionment, deprivation, and death exacted their toll on young Richard Nixon, and a fierce determination to overcome all. He lived in his mind, with his thoughts. Although intelligent and perceptive, his influences left a deep imprint in his views of others, and of the world: he was distrustful and constantly on the lookout for the worse. Richard Reeves portrays him thus: “alone, as he thought or as he watched others, he studied their words and actions and he calculated their motives. Like most of us, he could judge them only by what he knew of himself. More often than not, he thought other people were like him. But they were not. The power and opportunity of the presidency sometimes brought out the best in him, but it brought out more of the worst because he trusted almost no one. He assumed the worst in people, and he brought out the worst in them.”⁵³¹ He expected little from people and regarded them as inherently prone to be bad, a reflection of his own calculating and troubled self.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁵³¹ Richard Reeves, *President Nixon – Alone in the White House* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 13.

His ambition led him to follow dubious paths and his political career was beset with allegations of dodgy and unscrupulous conduct. Early in his ascent he had been dubbed Tricky Dick thanks to his campaign tactics against his opponent in the 1950 US Senate election. The nickname would gain confirmation during the 1952 presidential election when he was embroiled in a controversy about campaign funds and accusations of political favouritism in exchange for money. He defended himself claiming that the only gift he had received was a little dog – named Checkers by his daughter – which in an affected speech he declared he would not return as his daughter had grown attached to it. The episode did not prevent his continuance as the vice-presidential running mate of Dwight Eisenhower, but he was left politically scarred nonetheless. ‘Tricky Dick,’ the nickname would follow him for the remainder of his life.

As Vice-President Nixon was confronted with the possibility of reaching the higher office sooner than he possibly expected. In 1955 Eisenhower suffered a heart attack that prevented him from discharging his duties, raising the prospect of a new presidential succession. For six weeks, during which time Eisenhower was in convalescence, a behind-the-scenes struggle for power unleashed in the administration, pitting Nixon against John Foster Dulles - Vice-President and Secretary of State.⁵³² Eisenhower recovered and won the 1956 elections for his second term in office, leaving Nixon to follow the usual path for the main position in the White House in the 1960 election. His defeat to John F. Kennedy, and the circumstances of it, left him embittered and feeling justified in his cynical view of the world. He engaged in self-victimisation, feeling mistreated by the press and the political world, and after his defeat for the California governorship in 1962 he announced that his concession speech was to be his last press conference, happy to let it be believed that he was retiring from politics. He probably wanted to believe it himself. By 1966, however, he was plotting his return and in his memoirs he states that “I wanted to run for President in 1968, but I wanted to leave open, until the last possible moment, the option of deciding not to run.”⁵³³ In late 1967 he was trying to convince himself that he did not wish to run, committing to paper the reasons why he would not run for next year’s election. But, as he recounts, he reached the end of the page and his instincts told him he wanted the presidency, no

⁵³² Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower – Soldier and President* (London and Sidney: Pocket Books, 2003), 411.

⁵³³ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Volume 1 (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 343.

matter how much he pretended otherwise.⁵³⁴ A couple of weeks later, he announced he was a candidate.

And yet he strived to be better. He left constant notes and memos to himself with advice and reminders on how to be a better man, and how to live up to the office of President once elected. An insecure man, he wanted to be seen as good and worthy of the choice of the people. In little paper notepads Nixon wrote memos and resolutions for himself to follow, “To do lists and ‘to be’ lists – about what he wanted from history, what kind of president he wanted to be, what kind of man he wanted to be. American self-improvement lectures to himself – the most important dialogue in the White House, an introvert’s dialogue with himself.”⁵³⁵ In short sentences, often single words, this lonely man sitting at the top tried to keep his balance as best he could by charting navigational points. He hoped these would allow him to traverse the treacherous waters of high-office. “Cool – Strong – Organized – Temperate – Exciting...Excitement – Joy in Life – Sharing. Lift spirit of people – Pithy, memorable phrases... Extraordinary intelligence – memory – Idealism – Love of country – Concern for old – poor – Refusal to exploit. Yet must be personal and warm.”⁵³⁶ Some are straightforward, others more cryptic, all revelatory of an acute self-consciousness about personal shortcomings and the exigencies of the presidency.

II

The shipwreck that was Watergate obfuscates much of Richard Nixon’s time in the White House. But the scandal belongs to his second term. His first term was marked by a desire to curtail the expanding federal government. Sensing the popular mood of disenchantment with government he had given early indications during the electoral campaign of his ideas for reclaiming power from Washington. He was convinced, he said, “that after a period of forty years when power has gone from the cities and the states to the government in Washington, D.C., it’s time to have power go back from Washington to the states and to the cities of this country all over America.” The federal bureaucracies, he continued, suppressed creative entrepreneurship and stifled creativity, both submerged under the formalities and paperwork of government control. Likewise,

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 359 – 360.

⁵³⁵ Richard Reeves, *President Nixon – Alone in the White House* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 20.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 21 – 22.

the culture of dependency fostered by the liberal dispensation of welfare subsidies amounted to an inhibition of the will, an incentive to personal adjournment. Poverty is not just a condition resulting from loss of income but also a state of mind which a culture of dependency can only prolong. “Instead of government jobs, and government housing, and government welfare, let government use its tax and credit policies to enlist in this battle the greatest engine of progress ever developed in the history of man - American private enterprise.”⁵³⁷ Private enterprise was a main source of American economic development, the basis of its strength and advancement in the world and should be allowed to work at home too.

Nixon had witnessed first-hand the inner workings of government in its enlarged New Deal version, and the effects it had on the economy and individuals. In late 1941 he worked for 8 months in the Office of Price Administration, before joining the Navy to serve in the war. The office’s responsibilities was a pristine example of the minutiae with which the regulatory zeal of government dealt in its attempts to control every aspect of the economy. Nixon was in charge of rationing rubber and automobile tires and the experience showed him how hard it was to impose standard behaviour and limit the free will of people. The effort was futile as people will always try to circumvent any encroachments on their autonomy. But it also illustrated how government grows and multiplies, extending its power over society. All positions and jobs in government being listed and ranked according to strict administrative tables, he was hired because of his legal training as assistant attorney as “a P-3 at \$3,200 a year. I found that others with lesser academic records and not as much legal experience had come in as P-4s, a step higher, and some even as P-5s, at \$4,600 a year.” When he pointed out the discrepancy to his superior he was told to “Build a little staff. Request two or three people to assist you, and then we can raise you to a P-5.” When he observed that he was not in need of staff, the answer was direct. “Then you won’t get a promotion.”⁵³⁸

Nixon failed to share in the enthusiasm of liberals and Progressives who believed that government could, and should, be the answer to all social problems. Following the Johnson presidency, the new President announced that government had gone as far as it could: “we are approaching the limits of what government alone can

⁵³⁷ Richard M. Nixon, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida,” August 8, 1968. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25968> (accessed July 22, 2014).

⁵³⁸ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon, Volume 1* (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 32.

do,” he said. The isolated expansion of federal power had gone far enough on its own. He reprised his belief in individual initiative as the best mechanism to achieve the social good. “Our greatest need now is to reach beyond government, to enlist the legions of the concerned and the committed. What has to be done, has to be done by government and people together or it will not be done at all. The lesson of past agony is that without the people we can do nothing - with the people we can do everything. To match the magnitude of our tasks, we need the energies of our people enlisted not only in grand enterprises, but more importantly in those small, splendid efforts that make headlines in the neighborhood newspaper instead of the national journal.”⁵³⁹ The growth of governmental power and of its influence limits the choices available to individuals, as the State imposes conducts and actions to achieve its goals. Time had come to devolve power to the people and local authorities, the successors to the early communities of voluntary association of free individuals in America.

The argument of decentralisation was as old as America itself. It had been at the heart of the constitutional controversy that opposed colonial America to the British Parliament. The attempt to impose government from London on the colonies following the reorganisation of the empire in 1763 had collided with the American resolve to keep their traditional prerogatives of home rule. They charged the political leaders in Britain of abandoning English liberalism for a centralisation of power that was more akin to the monarchical reign that preceded parliamentary rule. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 had consecrated the supremacy of Parliament over that of the throne, handing power to the rising mercantile class over King and aristocracy. The landed nobility was being supplanted by the new money-economy and the latter had in the philosophy of John Locke the perfect tool to validate its political preferences. Unlike the land-based political form of government which favoured unifying power to better protect its interests, the new rising class preferred limited government to better go about its business without interference. In this they were supported by John Locke.

Thomas Hobbes had advocated the need for strong central government, given that without it life in the state of nature was brutish and short. There was no attachment to any romantic view of human nature; Rousseau was still a few decades away. Locke was a realist, and he agreed with Hobbes that without order each and all were bound to

⁵³⁹ Richard Nixon, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=1941> (accessed August 6, 2014).

lose their right to make use of their freedom and property. “Why will he give up this empire, and subject himself to the dominion and control of any other power? To which ’tis obvious to answer, that though in the state of nature he hath such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the invasion of others.” The romantic view of Man did not dwell in Locke any more than it did in Hobbes, although Locke was less harsh: “For all being kings as much as he, every man his equal, and the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very unsecure.” Hence his conclusion could only be that “the great and chief end, therefore, of men’s uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property; to which in the state of nature there are many things wanting.”⁵⁴⁰ But unlike Hobbes, Locke did not grant full power and privilege to government. The absolutist perspective of the monarchical type of regime that preceded eighteenth-century liberalism did not accord with the notion that government exists to protect property.

The arbitrary impulses and wishes of the King, disposing at will of the lands and fortunes of his subjects were not that different from the state of nature’s unpredictability. Among other limits to the power of the common authority, which included quite naturally the lives of the people, Locke posits that “the supreme power cannot take from any man any part of his property without his own consent.”⁵⁴¹ This in itself was a very agreeable suggestion to the affluent merchants that looked to keep free from royal interference the proceeds of their endeavours. However, John Locke understood that to be effective in its task of keeping law and order, governments spent money which had to be provided by the members of the compact. “’Tis true governments cannot be supported without great charge, and ’tis fit every one who enjoys his share of the protection should pay out of his estate his proportion for the maintenance of it.” Locke’s understanding that property is the origin of political power naturally lead to the conclusion that control of property - financial property - was the key to control power. “But still it must be with his own consent, i.e., the consent of the majority, giving it either by themselves, or their representatives chosen by them. For if any one shall claim a power to lay and levy taxes on the people, by his own authority, and without such consent of the people, he thereby invades the fundamental law of

⁵⁴⁰ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2002), 57.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

property, and subverts the end of government. For what property have I in that, which another may by right take when he pleases to himself?”⁵⁴² To top their newfound clout, the middle-classes grabbed for themselves the power of the purse, effectively terminating the monarchs’ monetary independence and confirming the new state of political affairs. Hence the Parliament as the representative of the whole nation, which they controlled, and with suffrage regulated by property qualifications. The English Whigs regarded this as another step in the march of progress and Thomas Babington Macaulay celebrated the Glorious Revolution and the supremacy of Parliament as such in his *History of England*, portraying a linear development of history towards ever greater freedom.

The implications of the Lockean proviso that men come together to seek the preservation of their property were felt in America. In fact, Locke was a major influence in the ideological founding of the United States, whose ideas can be found in Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence. The defence of private property was regarded as one of the pillars of the American political system, dating from the country’s foundation and the engine of American individualism. The Republic’s historiography developed a renowned school of thought that delved on an economic interpretation of the country’s history – Vernon Louis Parrington, Charles Austin Beard, Richard Hofstadter stand out as prime examples. But despite the latter’s criticism, early American political tradition held to that philosophy of protection of private property as the engine and purpose of government, since it enabled individuals their freedom to pursue their own interests, which following Adam Smith was viewed as being to the benefit of all. Individual economic freedom was more than a cornerstone for American individualism, it was the fundamental element of social wellbeing.

Nixon was following a recognisable idea when he called for the release of the “greatest engine of progress ever developed in the history of man - American private enterprise.” Ayn Rand had argued in favour of uninhibited selfishness as the wellspring of the common good. Nixon did not go so far. Instead, he believed that federal agencies and bureaucracies were inefficient and had grown so as to become an impediment to individual freedom: “A third of a century of centralizing power and responsibility in Washington has produced a bureaucratic monstrosity, cumbersome, unresponsive, ineffective. A third of a century of unprecedented growth and change has strained our

⁵⁴² Ibid., 65.

institutions, and raised serious questions about whether they are still adequate to the times.” The social experiments had produced the crisis of confidence in the capacity of government to do its job. Society should be left to grow and organise in an organic fashion. He was therefore intent on reversing the trend of centralisation, and announced his plan. “After a third of a century of power flowing from the people and the States to Washington it is time for a New Federalism in which power, funds, and responsibility will flow from Washington to the States and to the people.”⁵⁴³ Nixon also had his own vision, branded with its own inspiring slogan.

The New Federalism was mainly aimed at the Great Society and welfare programmes. Making use of the backlash against welfare, he planned not only to reform social programmes but redistribute the tax money among the States. “This new approach is embodied in a package of four measures: First, a complete replacement of the present welfare system; second, a comprehensive new job training and placement program; third, a revamping of the Office of Economic Opportunity; and fourth, a start on the sharing of Federal tax revenues with the States.”⁵⁴⁴ The reform of the welfare system was meant to terminate distortions, some which impacted family life and others that created a deterrent to getting people back to work. Under the present conditions, the system acted as “an incentive for desertion. In most States a family is denied welfare payments if a father is present - even though he is unable to support his family.” It also allowed, for example, “to receive more money on welfare than on a low-paying job. This creates an incentive not to work, and it also is unfair to the working poor. It is morally wrong for a family that is working to try to make ends meet to receive less than a family across the street on welfare.”⁵⁴⁵ But his most ambitious goal was the one directed at the balance of power between Washington and the States.

Before 1913, constitutional constraints prevented the federal government from obtaining fiscal revenue from direct taxes. Federal revenue came from indirect taxes, such as customs duties (tariffs collected on imported goods) and excise taxes. The Constitution limits Congress’ power to levy direct taxes by requiring that they be apportioned among States according to their population.⁵⁴⁶ What this meant was that

⁵⁴³ Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs,” August 8, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2191> (accessed August 6, 2014).

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Article I, Section 2, Clause 3, “Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers,” and Article I,

because apportionment of income taxes was impracticable, the federal government was effectively deprived of a major source of revenue.⁵⁴⁷ This had the effect of limiting the size and reach of the federal government. During the constitutional convention in Philadelphia the power of Congress to lay direct taxes was one of the most contested issues in the debates. The Anti-Federalists argued that giving the federal government the power to tax people directly was unnecessary given how small federal responsibilities were. Indirect taxes, such as those on imported goods, were enough; direct taxes were a different matter. These included “poll taxes, land taxes, excises, duties on written instruments, on every thing we eat, drink, or wear; they take hold of every species of property, and come home to every man’s house and packet. These are often so oppressive, as to grind the face of the poor, and render the lives of the common people a burden to them.”⁵⁴⁸ During the ratification debate the Anti-Federalists warned the people that sooner or later the fiscal burden would be so repressive and demanding that whenever necessary the government would resort to force to collect the taxes: “they will, send the militia of Pennsylvania, Boston, or any other state or place, to cut your throats, ravage and destroy your plantations, drive away your cattle and horses, abuse your wives, kill your infants, and ravish your daughters, and live in free quarters, until you get into a good humor, and pay all that they may think proper to ask of you, and you become good and faithful servants and slaves.”⁵⁴⁹ The Anti-Federalists proposed an anti-direct tax amendment but this was defeated. However, by demanding apportionment of direct taxes, the framers ensured that in effect these would not come to pass.

In 1894, with the Progressive Era’s reaction to the rapid industrialisation of the country and its social effects, Congress approved a federal income tax. The initial purpose was to collect revenue from the higher earners, the great fortunes that had been made with the industrialisation and thus meet the growing conviction that government should intervene in the socioeconomic order to enact labour and welfare measures. The

Section 9, Clause 4, “No Capitation, or other direct, Tax shall be laid, unless in proportion to the Census or Enumeration herein before directed to be taken.”

⁵⁴⁷ For a debate and exposition of the constitutional apportionment requirement, see Calvin H. Johnson, “Apportionment of Direct Taxes: The Foul-up in the Core of the Constitution,” *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal*, Volume 7, Issue 1 (December 1998): 1 - 105.

⁵⁴⁸ Anti-Federalist n° 32, in Bill Bailey, ed. *The Anti-Federalist Papers*, (Folsom, CA: The Federalist Papers Project), 109. <http://www.thefederalistpapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/The-Anti-Federalist-Papers-Special-Edition.pdf>, (accessed June 6, 2013).

⁵⁴⁹ Anti-Federalist n° 26, in Bill Bailey, ed. *The Anti-Federalist Papers*, (Folsom, CA: The Federalist Papers Project), 93. <http://www.thefederalistpapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/The-Anti-Federalist-Papers-Special-Edition.pdf>, (accessed June 6, 2013).

following year, however, the Supreme Court declared the income tax unconstitutional because it was not apportioned as the Constitution demands. This in itself not only prevented Washington from intervening, it also kept the federal budget within well contained limits. In 1913, Progressives welcomed the ratification of Amendment XVI, which had been passed by Congress in 1909 and that changed the apportionment requirement over direct taxes.⁵⁵⁰

The door was open for the financial independence of the federal government, initiating a new chapter in American history. Whilst before Washington had managed to pay its bills and avoid debt - even during times of war by finding ways to fund these without infringing on citizens' and States' rights - since the enactment of Amendment XVI the federal government has amassed a growing debt thanks to budgets that more often than not resort to deficit spending.⁵⁵¹ The increase in revenue has encouraged spending, above and beyond federal takings, perhaps encouraged by the notion that the earnings of tomorrow will pay for the borrowing of today. A second effect has been that the income tax Amendment has made possible a continuous increase of federal government in the form of offices, departments, agencies and the accompanying bureaucrats to run them. It should be explained that, just as the 1894 income tax law, Amendment XVI was originally advertised as being directed at the top earners, the men of wealth that controlled the financial and manufacturing assets of the country. "There can be little doubt that the task of ratifying the amendment was greatly eased because of the understanding that any tax levied under its authority would fall only upon the wealthiest 3 percent to 5 percent of the population; the claim that 'only the rich will pay' was heard in state legislatures across the land."⁵⁵² In time, however, individual incomes would be targeted across the board sparing only the very low earners. As of 2013 individual income taxes account for 47.4% of all federal tax revenue, compared with 9.9% for corporation income taxes. To this should be added another 34.2% issuing from Social Insurance and Retirement Receipts (Social Security and Medicare), which

⁵⁵⁰ Amendment XVI: "The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes on incomes, from whatever source derived, without apportionment among the several States, and without regard to any census or enumeration."

⁵⁵¹ For a detailed account of US Budget historical trends, see Executive Office of the President of the United States. Office of Management and Budget. Historical Tables - Budget of the United States Government -Fiscal Year 2015. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2014. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals> (accessed August 19, 2014).

⁵⁵² John D. Bunker, "The Ratification of the Federal Income Tax." *Cato Journal*, Vol. 1, n° 1 (Spring 1981): 183.

act also as a tax on income. The former sources of revenue that had sustained the federal government until 1913 represent less than 10% of present total receipts.⁵⁵³

This was the Leviathan that Nixon wanted to downsize. The income tax amendment had been a further step in government centralisation, strengthening the latter and distancing it from the American people, rendering democracy more remote and unaccountable. “For a third of a century, power and responsibility have flowed toward Washington, and Washington has taken for its own the best sources of revenue. We intend to reverse this tide, and to turn back to the States a greater measure of responsibility - not as a way of avoiding problems, but as a better way of solving problems.”⁵⁵⁴ Giving back to the communities the instruments necessary to solve their problems meant that they would need financial resources. Nixon wanted to redistribute the fiscal revenues, thus clipping the wings of federal expansion and cutting down on inefficient and large bureaucracies. “Along with this would go a share of Federal revenues. I shall propose to the Congress next week that a set portion of the revenues from Federal income taxes be remitted directly to the States, with a minimum of Federal restrictions on how those dollars are to be used, and with a requirement that a percentage of them be channelled through for the use of local governments... This start on revenue sharing is a step toward what I call the New Federalism. It is a gesture of faith in America’s State and local governments and in the principle of democratic self-government.”⁵⁵⁵

Progressives had long accused the constitutional convention of having destroyed the democratic institutions and home rule traditions of early America. Historians of the economic interpretation school emphasise the class conflicts that decided the constitutional system in 1787. The large money interests were keen to dismantle the town-meeting democracy and decentralised government of the Articles of Confederation, where the people were in majority and ruled supreme over the business and propertied gentry who were in the minority. “Any one who reads the economic history of the time will see why the solid conservative interests of the country were weary of the talk about the ‘rights of the people,’ and were bent upon establishing the

⁵⁵³ Executive Office of the President of the United States. Office of Management and Budget. Historical Tables - Budget of the United States Government -Fiscal Year 2015. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2014. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals> (accessed August 19, 2014).

⁵⁵⁴ Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs,” August 8, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2191> (accessed August 6, 2014).

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

firm guarantees for the rights of property.”⁵⁵⁶ Democratic rule meant majority rule and this meant that property would not long remain protected from the populist urges to establish common ownership of the community’s wealth. The Shays Rebellion had given them a taste of what the popular demands would be in the future under the current conditions. And so the minority of the mercantile and business classes changed their thinking. “They discarded the revolutionary doctrines that had served their need in the debate with England. They were done with natural rights and romantic interpretations of politics and were turned realists. They parted company with English liberalism in its desire for a diminished state. Their economic interests were suffering from the lack of a strong centralized government, and they were in a mood to agree with earlier realists who held that men are animals with turbulent passions, and require a government ‘proper and adequate’ for animals.”⁵⁵⁷ And so, according to this interpretation, the opportunity presented itself with the difficulties and general economic depression that plagued the country under the Articles of Confederation.

The new constitutional model created a Republic rather than a Democracy, a representative rather than a direct democracy where only property-holders could vote; a stronger central government than the one preceding it and whose division in branches, closely monitored and balanced, ensured that the majority will could be kept under control. Despite identifying the popular disfavour with which the new Constitution was received, the historian explains away the successive victories in referendums for ratification with the propaganda of fear that blinded those who had more to lose from the new system. Be it as it may, Nixon touted his New Federalism as re-claiming a measure of that original model of self-government, a return to the ideal of democracy and smaller government that underpinned the Revolution so that the people could take charge of its affairs without interference.

In due course Nixon decided to couple his devolution plans with a reorganisation of the executive branch. Not only was he willing to cut its financial lifeblood, he wanted to actually reduce its size. In 1971, during his State of the Union Address, he proposed a new set of plans aimed at strengthening his welfare reform and revenue sharing schemes, but also designed “to change the framework of government itself - to reform

⁵⁵⁶ Charles A. Beard, *The Supreme Court and the Constitution*, quoted in Vernon Louis Parrington, *The Colonial Mind*, vol. 1 of *Main Currents in American Thought – An Interpretation of American Literature From the Beginnings to 1920* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 276.

⁵⁵⁷ Vernon Louis Parrington, *The Colonial Mind*, vol. 1 of *Main Currents in American Thought – An Interpretation of American Literature From the Beginnings to 1920* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 278.

the entire structure of American government so we can make it again fully responsive to the needs and the wishes of the American people.”⁵⁵⁸ In his speech, Nixon gave a brief exposition of his own interpretation of the origins of constitutional government in America. His examination acknowledges a similar decentralised political background as the one Progressives praised for the years prior to 1787, but it differs somewhat in the analysis of the objectives of the constitutional delegates and the results achieved with the new governmental architecture. Unlike Parrington’s scrutiny regarding the protection of the business minority, Nixon saw a carefully structured composition that allowed the preservation of the balance of power among the various interests.

As we approach our 200th anniversary in 1976, we remember that this Nation launched itself as a loose confederation of separate States, without a workable central government. At that time, the mark of its leaders’ vision was that they quickly saw the need to balance the separate powers of the States with a government of central powers. And so they gave us a constitution of balanced powers, of unity with diversity - and so clear was their vision that it survives today as the oldest written constitution still in force in the world. For almost two centuries since - and dramatically in the 1930’s - at those great turning points when the question has been between the States and the Federal Government, that question has been resolved in favor of a stronger central Federal Government. During this time the Nation grew and the Nation prospered. But one thing history tells us is that no great movement goes in the same direction forever. Nations change, they adapt, or they slowly die.⁵⁵⁹

Nixon advocated here a cyclical conception of history, rather than a linear, ever progressing movement. The pendulum is ever swinging back and forth, and the dynamics behind events tend to repeat themselves as the forces of history and human nature clash in their attempt at equilibrium. Nixon revealed that he had a fatalistic vision of history, a deterministic idea wherein history has no beginning or end, or goal, but only repeats itself endlessly. Necessity ruled the world. Historical events do not depend on human effort and circumstances develop as they are necessary: “history makes the

⁵⁵⁸ Richard Nixon, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 22, 1971. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=31110> (accessed August 21, 2014).

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

man more than the man makes history,”⁵⁶⁰ he argued. In any case, he certainly understood retrenchment of government as constituting an improvement, a step towards liberty. “The further away government is from people, the stronger government becomes and the weaker people become. And a nation with a strong government and a weak people is an empty shell.”⁵⁶¹ The goal of the country should be not the glory of the government but the wellbeing of its people. Alexander Hamilton’s idea of government had trumped Thomas Jefferson’s; especially since the Civil War, the centralisation of government and its material power had taken precedence over the development of the individual. As Nixon saw it, a return to localism was the best means to reverse the trend and support a rebirth of democracy.

He took aim at the Progressive belief in men of ability and special expertise to lead the country, the notion of an elite of officials detached and rational, standing above the popular currents. “The idea that a bureaucratic elite in Washington knows best what is best for people everywhere and that you cannot trust local governments is really a contention that you cannot trust people to govern themselves. This notion is completely foreign to the American experience. Local government is the government closest to the people, it is most responsive to the individual person. It is people’s government in a far more intimate way than the Government in Washington can ever be”⁵⁶² With this he charged Progressives of an aristocratic distrust of the people with their advocating that a vanguard of dedicated specialists are better at governing. This created a bureaucratic machine that lived for itself, perpetuating its existence and constantly looking for expansion. As he put it, “One hundred years ago, Abraham Lincoln stood on a battlefield and spoke of a ‘government of the people, by the people, for the people.’ Too often since then, we have become a nation of the Government, by the Government, for the Government.” Therefore, he was proposing to Congress a reform of the federal government, starting with the Executive. “I have concluded that a sweeping reorganization of the executive branch is needed if the Government is to keep up with the times and with the needs of the people. I propose, therefore, that we reduce the present 12 Cabinet Departments to eight. I propose that the Departments of State, Treasury, Defense, and Justice remain, but that all the other departments be

⁵⁶⁰ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Volume 1 (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 360.

⁵⁶¹ Richard Nixon, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 22, 1971. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=31110> (accessed August 21, 2014).

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

consolidated into four: Human Resources, Community Development, Natural Resources, and Economic Development.”⁵⁶³ This was a novelty in recent American history: a downsizing of government. Since the New Deal, Washington had followed a route of growth to suit an ideological rationale for intervention. Nixon was aware of the significance of his proposals which opened “the way to a new American revolution – a peaceful revolution in which power was turned back to the people - in which government at all levels was refreshed and renewed and made truly responsive. This can be a revolution as profound, as far-reaching, as exciting as that first revolution almost 200 years ago.”⁵⁶⁴ It was a radical departure from accepted practice and thinking but also a remarkable public relations achievement with its brand new catchphrase: the New American Revolution. In a time when trust in government was at a low, the echoing of a simpler past, of small-town America with its neighbourly attitude was certain to appeal to voters.

The time had come to reject the ‘politics of expectation’ and recover a spirit of self-reliance. In his memoirs Nixon used social critic Henry Fairlie’s phrase to define the period of the 1960’s “when the President held out the promise of solutions by means of federal programs to the problems of poverty and racial discrimination, thereby raising the expectations of millions of people – and, of course, securing the support of millions of voters.” The money poured into the myriad of federal programmes and agencies was lost in the bureaucratic maze and the promise was giving way to frustration and scepticism. “In 1961 John Kennedy had challenged people to ‘ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.’ By the end of the decade, however, many people were asking why the federal government had not done all the things it had promised and undertaken to do for them.”⁵⁶⁵ The expectations had been raised too high and Nixon wanted to introduce a new measure of realism. The idealism of the Sixties he regarded not only as folly, but as financially unsustainable and self-defeating. He cared little for grand gestures of social optimism and inspiring rhetoric, but he was capable of rephrasing JFK for his own profit. “Government must learn to take less from people so that people can do more for themselves. Let us remember that America was built not by government, but by people; not by welfare, but by work; not by shirking responsibility, but by seeking responsibility. In our own lives,

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Volume 1 (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 437.

let each of us ask - not just what will government do for me, but what can I do for myself? In the challenges we face together, let each of us ask - not just how can government help, but how can I help?"⁵⁶⁶ This in 1973, by which time he was still retailing his New Federalism.

The New Federalism, however, would suffer as Nixon became embroiled in his second term quagmire. Despite some lauding it as his major achievement, his contradictory record led some to dismiss his domestic policy initiatives claiming he would try anything as long as it did not cost him votes.⁵⁶⁷ The final assessment tends to dismissal, with or without the cynicism, especially given the practical results. As Patterson summarises, in the end "it did not greatly change the balance of power between Washington and the states."⁵⁶⁸ Such a wretched end to the New Federalism can have a more disparaging reason. According to Richard Reeves, this was partly because it was just rhetoric. Partly it was devised to suit his brooding, isolated personality and his appetite for personal power.

III

Nixon's suspicious nature created an environment of in-fighting within his administration that occasionally threatened to get out of hand. He wanted control and he trusted little. He had a few favourites, people on whom he placed a certain measure of trust. Aides to a distrustful leader, these were equally Machiavellian and plotting. In the meantime Nixon hovered above the fray, trying to achieve the standing as President he constantly committed to paper to inspire himself. As Reeves has it, "Nixon was forever plotting, planning revolutions great and small, sometimes to build a better world, more often just coups against his own staff and Cabinet. He saw himself as a man of ideas, and of surprise moves, his real work done alone with his yellow pads, or with Haldeman and Ehrlichman, his agents of control and organisation, whom he saw as his two arms."⁵⁶⁹ Harry Haldeman and John Ehrlichman – Chief of Staff and Assistant to the

⁵⁶⁶ Richard Nixon, "Oath of Office and Second Inaugural Address," January 20, 1973. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4141> (accessed august 21, 2014).

⁵⁶⁷ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies – The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York and London: The Free Press, 2001), 26.

⁵⁶⁸ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 722.

⁵⁶⁹ Richard Reeves, *President Nixon – Alone in the White House* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 97.

President, respectively – assured Nixon they could bring peace to the Cabinet as a way to prepare their own takeover of the levers of power. They aimed to be in domestic affairs as decisive as Henry Kissinger was in foreign affairs, who worked strictly with the President and had ample room of manoeuvre. Their instrument was the President himself and his quest to have the central role in national matters. “The vehicle of Ehrlichman’s takeover was a paper on executive branch organization prepared for Nixon by Roy Ash, the president of Litton Industries. A document carefully tailored to the President’s preferences, it included this assessment: ‘The many departments involved and the multi-faceted programs to achieve domestic goals preclude the same personal role in domestic affairs as he plays in foreign ones. The President cannot and should not also be the domestic desk officer.’”⁵⁷⁰ Playing to Nixon’s susceptibilities, the two men were creating the New American Revolution.

Personally, Nixon disregarded the details and the idea itself, preferring the catchphrases and the publicity. Reeves claims that “What the President wanted were dramatic announcements to quiet critics in Congress and the press who were saying that his interests at home concerned politics, not governance. And the criticisms were accurate.”⁵⁷¹ He only cared for domestic policies if they had any kind of direct repercussion on domestic politics or if they in any way opened the possibility for him to seize control of government. True to his nature, Nixon was convinced that his orders were being ignored by government officials, who were either incompetent or politically motivated against him. The New American Revolution appealed to him because it would allow him to take charge. “He intended to reorganize and reduce the size of the executive branch of the government and bring it under his own direct control... He intended to personally choose general counsels, public affairs directors and spokesmen, personnel directors, legislative liaisons, and the chief administrative executives of every agency.”⁵⁷² However, his involvement in the intricate minutiae of government only went as far as choosing the people. He wanted to make sure that every level of governmental power was being occupied with men who owed their position directly to him and no one else. Thus is explained his creation of new agencies and federal programmes despite his announced Revolution.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 98.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 544.

One of the offshoots of the romanticism of the Sixties was a growing concern with and an awareness of the close relationship between humans and Nature. The essential bond with Mother Nature was emphasised and relived in multiple communes and collective initiatives during this period. This spurred the conservation movement, which in itself carried a long philosophical and artistic tradition in America. The nostalgia with a certain image of innocence and pristineness of early America inspired 19th century romantic writers such as Henry David Thoreau and landscape painters such as the Hudson River School. The return to a certain idea of America was behind some notable works of art as *The Course of Empire*, a series of 5 paintings by Thomas Cole. The work is remarkable for its depiction of the rise and fall of a classical civilisation resembling that of Rome but which can be understood as a warning to the United States should they forget their historical link with Nature. The abandonment of the original simplicity for the complexities of industrial and imperial existence would presage the destruction of the nation. The covenant with Nature that was associated with colonial America would only stand as long as the historical developments that had taken place in Europe were not emulated in America. Otherwise, the social upheavals and revolutions that plagued Europe would cross over to American shores also. This thesis so enthralled a number of historians that a vital sector of American historiography was centred on it, and was made famous after Frederick Jackson Turner published *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, in 1893. In it, Turner argues that it was the natural conditions of America, the vastness of the unexplored land available and the constant advance to tame the wild interior that fundamentally shaped the country's democratic character.⁵⁷³

Legislative embodiment of this American ideal began taking shape even before Turner's thesis. Yellowstone National Park, the first of its kind, was created in 1872. National forests and wildlife reserves followed and the movement gained new impetus with Theodore Roosevelt. The firebrand patrician was an avid hunter and lover of the open-air living and he expanded the system of protected lands and forests. When Nixon entered the White House, the National Environmental Policy Act was already in effect, a significant piece of legislation that structures all environmental initiatives henceforth.

⁵⁷³ For an interesting analysis of the influence upon American historiography of the idea of America's promise with Nature, see David W. Noble, *Historians Against History – The Frontier Thesis and the National Covenant on American Historical Writing Since 1830* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965).

He was alert to the importance the environment was having in the electorate and he also understood that he had the chance to be at the forefront of the political new ground.

In 1970 Nixon became the first president to talk of environmental issues, in his State of the Union Address. He was President, he had the pulpit and the attention of the media and he made a new image for himself as conservationist and warden of America's historical bond with Nature. "In the next 10 years we shall increase our wealth by 50 percent. The profound question is: Does this mean we will be 50 percent richer in a real sense, 50 percent better off, 50 percent happier?"⁵⁷⁴ It was a passage that evoked the covenant with Nature theory. Would Americans be happier with material possessions, with the complexities of modern life or would they long for the days of simple living, in harmony with Nature. Would they live and love their fellow Americans or would they escape into the amenities provided by industrial consumerism trying to escape from the isolation of modern life?

The industrial race towards a dubious progress had drawn attention to the scarcity of natural resources and the effect of pollution on people's lives. The time had come to reverse the course, to put an end to the age of exploitation of natural resources and begin a new era of careful management of the gifts at the disposal of the country.

The great question of the seventies is, shall we surrender to our surroundings, or shall we make our peace with nature and begin to make reparations for the damage we have done to our air, to our land, and to our water? Restoring nature to its natural state is a cause beyond party and beyond factions. It has become a common cause of all the people of this country. It is a cause of particular concern to young Americans, because they more than we will reap the grim consequences of our failure to act on programs which are needed now if we are to prevent disaster later.⁵⁷⁵

Nixon's conversion was a calculated political move, however. As usual, he had a keen sense toward capturing the public mood. Public opinion polls helped. "Nixon, who had called for several polls during the two weeks he worked on the speech, made notes on the fact that public concern on environmental issues had risen from 25 percent to 75

⁵⁷⁴ Richard Nixon, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," January 22, 1970. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2921> (accessed August 26, 2014).

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

percent at the end of 1969. And the Democrat he thought might be his 1972 opponent, Senator Edmund Muskie, was a leading figure in an upcoming national rally called 'Earth Day' scheduled for April." In itself this does not preclude a real concern with environmental questions. As a politician, Nixon would naturally have to reconcile politics and idealism. Still, in possession of new information Reeves discloses a remark to Ehrlichman that illustrates Nixon's view regarding the issue: "In a flat choice between smoke and jobs, we're for jobs... But just keep me out of trouble on environmental issues."⁵⁷⁶ Later in the year he wrote in a memo to his closest advisers – Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Kissinger – on the priorities and goals of the administration. He skipped any environmental or conservationist observations observing only "You will note that I have excluded the environment. I consider this to be important... I don't want to be bothered with the details. Just see that the job is done." A fairly typical position since below he wrote "I have also not included family assistance, revenue sharing, job training, the whole package making up the 'New Federalism.' I consider this to be important but... don't bother me."⁵⁷⁷ It would appear that the only Nature that stood out when it came to Nixon was his own.

The environmental question was growing and by the time Nixon delivered his State of the Union Address it looked like the great national issue that could heal the fractured nation. It was fast becoming an all-encompassing popular movement and as Patterson remarks, "Nixon had little interest in environmental problems – indeed, he was bored by the issue – but he was savvy enough not to swim against the tide of reform,"⁵⁷⁸ which meant that he would board the bandwagon. When Congress passed a comprehensive list of legislative acts designed to address environmental issues, Nixon duly signed them. Among these was the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which was to enforce environmental regulations and assess the impact of any federal projects before approving them. In time the EPA became one of the chief governmental agencies in the United States with a large regulatory power over the economy, allowed to develop new guidelines for the industry and agricultural businesses. Failure to comply can mean the termination of projects or even the restructuring of whole sectors of the economy. Nixon eagerly signed the executive order

⁵⁷⁶ Richard Reeves, *President Nixon – Alone in the White House* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 163.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵⁷⁸ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 727.

that gave birth to the EPA because it fulfilled his requirements for direct control of important government functions. The EPA reported directly to the White House rather than the Cabinet. For the same reason, he approved a new Office of Management and Budget which centralised all budget functions within the executive and gave the President vast oversight powers over all agencies.

IV

Liberals were less than impressed with Nixon's social and ecological initiatives. The country remained as divided as it ever was mainly because the public could sense that there was an uncoupling between the president's rhetoric and his actual political choices. Because he wanted to lure the white southern electorate, Nixon was emitting ambiguous signals about forcing desegregation in the South, especially regarding schools. He was trying to use freedom of choice as an argument to put off forced school bussing, hiding behind the polls that showed a majority of the population against this measure. During Nixon's administration the phenomenon known as 'white flight' intensified. White middle-class families were abandoning the urban areas to relocate to the suburbs leaving the inner cities to poor minorities. Not only did this occasion a new form of social and economic separation, the ensuing erosion of the urban tax base affected public services' quality in the big cities. Schools and other services suffered a loss of quality as they could not afford to get equipment nor pay for the best teachers. In time the suburbs became synonymous with white America or affluent minorities and the inner cities of 1970's America descended into a spiral of crime and desolation.

No other issue illustrates Nixon's credibility gap than Vietnam. Despite his promise to reduce the number of troops on the ground and seek to end the war, there was an escalation in the bombing campaign, and Laos and Cambodia were invaded. Despite these developments Nixon talked of peace. "I began my presidency with three fundamental premises regarding Vietnam. First, I would have to prepare public opinion for the fact that total military victory was no longer possible. Second, I would have to act on what my conscience, my experience, and my analysis told me was true about the need to keep our commitment. To abandon South Vietnam to the Communists now would cost us inestimably in our search for a stable, structured and lasting peace. Third,

I would have to end the war as quickly as was honorably possible.”⁵⁷⁹ As he saw it, he shared the same desire to end the war as the protesters who heckled him. He resented his unpopularity with the demonstrators, furthering his sense of injury and convincing him that he was disliked for purely ideological reasons. “As I prepared to enter the presidency, I regarded the antiwar protesters and demonstrators with alternating feelings of appreciation for their concerns, anger at their excesses, and, primarily, frustration at their apparent unwillingness to credit me even with a genuine desire for peace... They wanted to end the war in Vietnam. So did I. But they wanted to end it immediately, and in order to do so they were prepared to abandon South Vietnam. That was something I would not permit.”⁵⁸⁰ Perhaps that explains his choice of strategy which only exacerbated the dissatisfaction.

Richard Nixon wanted ‘peace with honour’ in Vietnam and was willing to negotiate with the North Vietnamese in order to secure that. However, faced with the inflexibility of the enemy during the Paris peace negotiations the President appealed to the nation’s support for a new strategy. In an address to the nation regarding the war in Vietnam he replied to those who demanded an immediate withdrawal of American forces in Vietnam stating that “From a political standpoint this would have been a popular and easy course to follow. After all, we became involved in the war while my predecessor was in office. I could blame the defeat which would be the result of my action on him and come out as the peacemaker. Some put it to me quite bluntly: This was the only way to avoid allowing Johnson’s war to become Nixon’s war.” But the times had changed. America was now bound up with the affairs of the world. “But I had a greater obligation than to think only of the years of my administration and of the next election. I had to think of the effect of my decision on the next generation and on the future of peace and freedom in America and in the world.”⁵⁸¹ The country’s future was linked to the future of whole international community; it could not easily retreat from its responsibilities, to turn its back on the world and return to its early isolation. The world had changed and history would not go back. Although shying away from the word, Nixon was admitting that empire was forcing its own laws upon the nation.

⁵⁷⁹ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Volume 1 (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 432.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 434.

⁵⁸¹ Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam,” November 3, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2303> (accessed September 2, 2014).

And so the President had to continue the engagement in Asia whilst trying to fulfil his promise to bring back America's soldiers. In order to achieve this, he gave orders to begin a programme of 'Vietnamisation' of the war.

In the previous administration, we Americanized the war in Vietnam. In this administration, we are Vietnamizing the search for peace. The policy of the previous administration not only resulted in our assuming the primary responsibility for fighting the war, but even more significantly did not adequately stress the goal of strengthening the South Vietnamese so that they could defend themselves when we left. The Vietnamization plan was launched following Secretary Laird's visit to Vietnam in March. Under the plan, I ordered first a substantial increase in the training and equipment of South Vietnamese forces. In July, on my visit to Vietnam, I changed General Abrams' orders so that they were consistent with the objectives of our new policies. Under the new orders, the primary mission of our troops is to enable the South Vietnamese forces to assume the full responsibility for the security of South Vietnam.⁵⁸²

The idea was to shift the burden of combat operations to the South Vietnamese military in order to spare American lives. As long as the North remained adamant in continuing the war America could not leave Vietnam but it could move into a supporting role in the fighting, staying in the rear as the South Vietnamese took to the jungle to fight. The plan was not without risk. The South Vietnamese army lacked the ideological discipline and willingness to sacrifice as the Communists had and the whole establishment was rife with corruption and demoralised. It could not be expected to win the war, as time would prove. On the home front, although the number of soldiers in the field was expected to fall from the half million there, it still did not end the war. Predictably, it fell short of accomplishing both the winning of the war and the peace objectives, pleasing nobody.

But Nixon believed he still had Middle America on his side. He ended his speech in a significant way, making a direct distinction of who his intended target was. "And so tonight - to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans - I ask for your support,"⁵⁸³ was a remark that effectively meant the exclusion of the anti-war protestors and liberals who disliked him. This divisiveness was not unlike Nixon's

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

nature, prone to see as enemies all those who criticised or slighted him. This blow to the promise of bringing the country together was coupled with another decision that reinforced the conviction that 'Tricky Dick' was not to be trusted.

In April 30, 1970, Nixon addressed the nation to inform of a development in the war. He started by confirming a pledge to withdraw 150,000 soldiers during the following year. However, he was also sending US forces into Cambodia. The North Vietnamese had been using the border region with Cambodia as a sanctuary for its armies where they could retreat after their infiltrations in South Vietnam. The government of Cambodia was friendly towards the United States and was fighting a civil war against a Communist insurgency of its own, which had recently been reinforced by North Vietnamese intervention. To allow Cambodia to fall to Communism would mean the encirclement of South Vietnam which would require that US troops stay in sufficient numbers to help the South. North Vietnam was testing Nixon's resolve and attempting to force the country to stay in the fight. Faced with this threat to his plan, Nixon decided to "go to the heart of the trouble. That means cleaning out major North Vietnamese and Vietcong occupied territories - these sanctuaries which serve as bases for attacks on both Cambodia and American and South Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam." And so he informed the nation that as he spoke American and South Vietnamese units were attacking the Communists in Cambodia. As he talked to the nation, with a map before him where he pointed to explain the military situation, he was quick to assure viewers that "This is not an invasion of Cambodia. The areas in which these attacks will be launched are completely occupied and controlled by North Vietnamese forces. Our purpose is not to occupy the areas. Once enemy forces are driven out of these sanctuaries and once their military supplies are destroyed, we will withdraw."⁵⁸⁴ In what was fast becoming a never-ending muddle, America was now forced to enter a neutral country to stop the war.

"A majority of the American people, a majority of you listening to me, are for the withdrawal of our forces from Vietnam. The action I have taken tonight is indispensable for the continuing success of that withdrawal program."⁵⁸⁵ Although this made strategic sense if one thinks of the circumstances that precipitated it, to the average American it was an escalation of the conflict and its spreading out to other

⁵⁸⁴ Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia," April 30, 1970. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2490> (accessed September 2, 2014).

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

countries. The reaction to the decision was violent. Students took to the streets and college campuses to protest. In the worst incident four students were killed at Kent State University, in Ohio, by the local National Guard. On May 8 a hundred thousand protesters descended on Washington, D.C., and chaos took over the city as the army was called to prevent a general insurrection. In the early hours of the next day Nixon surprisingly appeared at the Lincoln Memorial where students had gathered, and talked to them. Although he tried to reach to the young men and women by talking of various subjects which included sports and travel to break the awkwardness of the moment, he came across as insensitive, talking of trivial subjects. Nixon wrote his detailed account of what happened in that singular meeting where he did most of the talking, leaving the students bewildered at the sight of the President trying to sound as one of them.

He came away believing that he had accomplished some kind of rapport with the students, the protesting youth that shouted hateful words at him in rallies and demonstrations. But the press reports about his rambling and inconsequential choice of topics left him frustrated and aggrieved. Above all he felt unappreciated. In a memorandum to his staff about the incident he explained that “Perhaps the major contribution I could make to them [the students] was to try to lift them a bit out of the miserable intellectual wasteland in which they now wander aimlessly around... The only problem is that we seem to lack on the staff any one individual who really understands or appreciates what I am trying to get across in terms of what a President should mean to the people.”⁵⁸⁶ Nixon reveals an acute anxiety regarding his legacy as President, and history’s judgment of him and his administration. But if he accepted that circumstances overpower man’s best designs and intentions - that history makes men more than men make history, as he put it - then there were no intellectual universals which he could search for recourse. The incursion into Cambodia was motivated by military strategic considerations – correct or otherwise is to be debated by military specialists - but the political wisdom of it was certainly questionable. In a social climate fraught with dissension and rebellion because of the war, escalation was certain to worsen the situation. When a similar operation was launched into Laos in 1971 to interrupt the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the domestic state of affairs was untenable.

Nonetheless, Nixon’s foreign policy record was brighter than Vietnam or his domestic one would admit. The President concluded that the way to force North

⁵⁸⁶ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Volume 1 (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 570.

Vietnam to accept a peace treaty regarding the South passed through Moscow, the latter being the main supplier of weaponry that fed the North's war effort. As it happened, the relations between mainland China and the Soviet Union were at a low point with the potential for a full-scale war looming between the two Communist powerhouses. Beijing was eager to replace Moscow as the sanctuary of international Communist faith, of which Nixon quickly took advantage of. In February 1972, following top level secret negotiations led by Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon visited Beijing for a meeting with Chairman Mao Zedong, officially recognising the People's Republic of China. This diplomatic breakthrough was a complete reversal of America's Cold War policy based on an understanding of international relations where idealism had in good measure determined America's isolation of Communist nations. Under Kissinger's direction US foreign policy became more mindful of geopolitical and balance of power considerations – 'Realpolitik' was the order of the day. Kissinger was a student of history trying to find in the lessons of the past the answers to contemporary problems. According to Thomas Noer, who studied Kissinger's view of history, the latter believed that the technological revolution had changed the modern world, and diplomacy had to adapt. The nuclear world meant that decisions and international policies had to be carefully constructed and balanced to achieve stability. Hence, as Noer states, "Most disturbing to Kissinger is the recent impact of ideology on foreign policy. National interests remain stable and make the world situation somewhat predictable, but ideology leads to irrationality and instability."⁵⁸⁷ The danger with American foreign policy as it was lay in the fact that it was guided by moral instincts and crusading ideals, what Louis Hartz regarded a messianic approach to foreign affairs, the internationalist impulse to spread the Revolution.

Being a nation built and sustained by a strong idealism and sense of exceptionalism, the United States had the impulse to shape the world in its image, according to its principles which it perceived as universal and perennial, applicable at all men in all times – an "absolute moral ethos." Faced with a potent competing ideology and as Hartz argued in his study of American liberal thought, liberalism in America develops an uncompromising perspective, absolute, and which tolerates no challenge. Its inability to accept other viewpoints renders it exclusive: "an absolute

⁵⁸⁷ Thomas J. Noer, "Henry Kissinger's Philosophy of History," *Modern Age*, Volume 19, n^o2, (Spring 1975): 187.

national morality is inspired either to withdraw from ‘alien’ things or to transform them: it cannot live in comfort constantly by their side.”⁵⁸⁸

To Kissinger the ultimate goal of diplomacy is to achieve order and stability. Grand ideals about freedom and democracy are an honourable endeavours to pursue but ultimately doomed to failure: “America’s attempt to impose our values and ideology on the new nations is both futile and dangerous,”⁵⁸⁹ as they bring the enmity and contempt of those on the receiving end. Recent involvements seem to have proven Kissinger right. As the dominant power, it could be argued that the United States have the responsibility to lead in the construction of an international architecture that will promote peace and preserve order. It was not so much the objectives of Kissinger’s diplomacy as the methods he used that earned him the hatred of moral idealists. His realism fell afoul of Americans’ romantic view of their country: right and wrong are clearly discernible and America stands for principles of justice and liberty. This Manichean polarisation reacted vigorously to Kissinger’s amoral approach, where right and wrong come in multiple shades or are not relevant at all. The vitriol he attracted has the benefit of illustrating the two worlds and their different worldview.⁵⁹⁰ Albeit a realist his Machiavellian approach can prove unpalatable to a country that regards itself as principled to the point of naiveté, the very opposite of the corrupted European sophistication. The resistance the average American psyche offers when confronted with expediency and pragmatism is a measure of its idealism and the high moral ground whence it places itself. However, as Hartz remarked, America can become blinded by its belief in the universalism of its values.

The aftermath of Nixon’s visit to China largely vindicated the administration’s decision. Fearing a war in its southern flank and the possibility of a Sino-American alliance, the Soviet Union moved quickly to secure an accommodation with the United States. In May 1972 Nixon landed in Moscow for talks with the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev. The talks led to the signing of important arms limitations treaties between the two countries and the beginning of a period of easing of international tensions. This détente between the two superpowers and the settlement with China were instrumental in convincing the North Vietnamese leadership to come to terms with the United States.

⁵⁸⁸ 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), 98.

⁵⁸⁹ Thomas J. Noer, “Henry Kissinger’s Philosophy of History,” *Modern Age*, Volume 19, n^o2, (Spring 1975): 187.

⁵⁹⁰ See Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (London and New York: Verso, 2001), for an example of this.

The negotiations had begun in 1968 but remained deadlocked until 1972 when the North felt the effects of the rapprochement between the US and the Soviet Union and China. Word of the breakthrough in negotiations helped Nixon win his re-election in 1972 defeating Democratic candidate George McGovern in a landslide, the margin of which has since never been surpassed or equalled. In January 1973 all the parties involved signed a peace treaty that effectively ended American involvement in the war. Although the strategy assembled and conducted by Kissinger proved successful – earning him the Nobel Peace Prize, much to the indignation of liberals – the treaty was nonetheless an admission of American defeat. The United States Senate refused to ratify the treaty and in 1975 North Vietnam captured Saigon and conquered the South. The invasion was facilitated by American paralysis as the Senate refused to appropriate money to help the South. Nixon was already out of office following Watergate.

Despite these developments 1973 started auspiciously. Not only did Nixon have a strong popular mandate after the 1972 election, in early 1973 he ended the military draft initiating the creation of a professional, volunteer-only military establishment, made possible by his ‘Vietnamisation’ of the conflict. The President could not only claim a highly popular course of action, but also leave his mark with what was for some an ideological crusade. Libertarians, on the rise in these early years of the decade, viewed the draft as a form of enslavement and denial of people’s rights: “conscription into the armed forces is a blatant and aggravated form of involuntary servitude,”⁵⁹¹ said Murray Rothbard. However, Nixon was not indulging in any philosophical considerations about the role of the military in the modern United States. The international responsibilities ensured that the military apparatus would remain in place, and perhaps reinforced as the individuals engaged in it would now be voluntaries. The country would continue to have a powerful offensive capability, a situation that was far removed from the libertarians’ perspective. “Americans have almost totally forgotten one of the noblest and strongest elements in the original American heritage: determined opposition to the entire institution of a ‘standing army.’ A government that has a permanent standing army at its disposal will always be tempted to use it, and to use it in an aggressive, interventionist, and warlike manner. While foreign policy will be dealt with below, it is clear that a permanent army is a standing temptation to the State to enlarge its power, to push around other people as well as other countries, and to

⁵⁹¹ Murray Rothbard, *For a New Liberty – The Libertarian Manifesto*, 2nd Edition (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 100.

dominate the internal life of the nation.” Libertarians proposed to do away with the enlarged military and return to the policy of the early republic. “The original aim of the Jeffersonian movement - a largely libertarian factor in American political life - was to abolish the standing army and navy altogether. The original American principle was that if the nation was attacked, then the citizens would hasten to join to repel the invader.”⁵⁹² Such ideas adapted to the Cold War sounded naïve to Nixon, to say the least. Still, the end of the draft strengthened the President’s stance and confirmed his re-election numbers.

The realities of the Cold War made no allowance for romantic ideas about the United States, power, and the need to use it to protect the country. In September 1973 a violent coup in Chile ousted the regime of President Salvador Allende. The coup was carried with the assistance of the CIA, and the CIA operated under Nixon’s orders.⁵⁹³ Nixon was especially worried about the cohesion of Latin America and the possibility of other countries in the region following suit. Chile had freely voted for the Marxist candidate Salvador Allende, although he did not win a majority in the country’s Congress. Rather than allow the democratic game to work its equilibrium the President opted to intervene to shape and control the American sphere of influence in the Western hemisphere. The deployment of American power and influence extended to the Middle East. In October 1973 an Arab coalition of nations launched a surprise attack on Israel. The situation quickly became, again, a war by proxy between the two superpowers, threatening to escalate out of control with unpredictable consequences. Sensing the danger to international stability that he was carefully orchestrating, Kissinger negotiated an agreement between Israel and Egypt, the most powerful country in the Arab coalition.

Despite this apparent diplomatic success there was a sense of transience about the global position of the United States. The country was having trouble in upholding both its pre-eminence and the international order it had in great measure created after World War II. Notwithstanding the settlement with China and the rapprochement with the Soviet Union, America in the early 1970’s emanated a feeling of disquiet. The Sixties had unleashed destabilizing forces that threatened to disintegrate the social fabric regardless of Nixon’s pledge to bring the country back together. Added to this

⁵⁹² Ibid., 101.

⁵⁹³ Richard Reeves, *President Nixon – Alone in the White House* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 250.

was a struggling economy with decreasing levels of productivity that was finding it hard to compete with fast-growing economies like Japan and West Germany. Inflation was biting into what little competitiveness and drive the economy could muster. The repercussions of the war in the Middle East, initiated during the Jewish Yom Kippur holiday, accentuated the decline of the United States. In response to the aid Nixon had decided to give Israel the Arab oil producing nations initiated an oil embargo against the United States and other Western nations. Furthermore, oil production was to be reduced and prices raised, decisions that had a devastating impact on America's economy, exposing its oil dependency and general economic weakness.

The economic woes had already caused Nixon to make a crucial decision in 1971. The rising inflation and unemployment was threatening his chances of re-election, and polls continually reflected this. He therefore moved to drastic action by freezing wages and prices to stop inflation, a decision that was counter to all his experience during the Depression in the Office of Price Administration. Although the freeze was to be temporary, for a professed believer in free trade and economics the price controls and manipulation were the acknowledgment of capitalism's problems and a hard blow for the nation. Belief in the American Way was not just stuck in the Vietnamese quagmire, it was also being challenged at home. In August of that same year Nixon went further.

In an address to the nation, the President put an end to the global post-war order. The American economy needed a shot in the arm, a boost to be able to face the challenges presented by its allies which exhibited lower labour costs and more efficient factories and workers, rendering them far more competitive. The solution was to devalue the dollar and thus make American goods cheaper abroad. But since the 1944 Bretton Woods agreements, the US dollar's value was static. In order to avoid the trade wars and speculation over unstable currencies that had done so much to destabilise the world economy in the years before World War II, the United States devised a new global order of free trade and stable currencies with the US dollar acting as an anchor for all other currencies. As such, the value of the dollar was fixed to the price of gold and all other currencies were fixed to the dollar. In his speech Nixon announced the end of the gold standard. "I have directed Secretary Connally to suspend temporarily the convertibility of the dollar into gold or other reserve assets, except in amounts and

conditions determined to be in the interest of monetary stability and in the best interests of the United States.”⁵⁹⁴

There was no talk of the effects such a decision would have on the international order crafted following the war. Neither of the effects it would have on America’s standing. Talking to his constituents the most he managed to say about foreign affairs was to recognise that America had grown weaker.

At the end of World War II the economies of the major industrial nations of Europe and Asia were shattered. To help them get on their feet and to protect their freedom, the United States has provided over the past 25 years \$143 billion in foreign aid. That was the right thing for us to do. Today, largely with our help, they have regained their vitality. They have become our strong competitors, and we welcome their success. But now that other nations are economically strong, the time has come for them to bear their fair share of the burden of defending freedom around the world. The time has come for exchange rates to be set straight and for the major nations to compete as equals. There is no longer any need for the United States to compete with one hand tied behind her back.⁵⁹⁵

Indeed, America now needed both arms to be able to compete and hold her own, let alone that of her allies. No longer backed by any physical commodity (i.e., gold), the dollar was also no longer convertible. Its value was now determined by supply and demand, leaving it exposed to speculation. Fiat money has no intrinsic value, and relies on people’s faith in the country, its economy and management. Likewise, America’s standing in the world henceforth was still central, but it now required also a certain amount of conscious faith in it. The gold that nations stored in Fort Knox was evidence of their commitment and trust in America’s power. “The gold was there as symbolic proof of the backing of American wealth and constancy... The dollar was ‘good as gold.’”⁵⁹⁶ No longer. America was fluctuating, its trustworthiness as uncertain as that of the new dollar. In fact, America was shrugging its shoulders, unable to carry its allies any more, unable to keep its domain.

⁵⁹⁴ Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation Outlining a New Economic Policy: ‘The Challenge of Peace,’” August 15, 1971. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3115>, (accessed September 9, 2014).

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Richard Reeves, *President Nixon – Alone in the White House* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 351.

Arthur Burns, reputed economist and the Federal Reserve Chairman at the time, was unenthusiastic about the decision and told Nixon as much. “I could write the editorial in *Pravda*: ‘The Disintegration of Capitalism.’ Never mind if it’s right or wrong – consider how it will be exploited by the politicians... Once the dollar floats, the basis for trade will change... I would fear retaliation by other countries.”⁵⁹⁷ After the defeat in Vietnam, the Arab embargo added to the woes by exposing the country’s oil vulnerability. The whole system of American post-war order was unravelling. “The wonderful American Century that Henry Luce had foreseen in 1941 seemed to be collapsing early.”⁵⁹⁸ The general feeling of an imminent change of guard in world power was inescapable. America’s enemies were sensing weakness and would move to exploit it. But another consequence was that being no longer shackled by an amount of gold, dollars could be created at will. The printing presses could mass-produce as many dollars as necessary to provide for the myriad social programmes and feed an ever-expanding government.

The admission that America’s bright future was experiencing a dimming of lights was the culmination of a period of disillusionment, slowly gathering pace since the late Sixties. And yet, despite the ultimate collapse of Nixon’s presidency, his administration had an auspicious start. The moon landing on July 20, 1969, was the crowning of America’s victory in the space race against the Soviet Union; the country was asserting its technological superiority and that of its belief system. It was also the fulfilling of John F. Kennedy’s dream laid out in 1962. In the wake of the missile gap fear and the Soviet success with the Sputnik satellite, JFK challenged the nation to shake away the anxieties and live up to its legacy. “This country of the United States was not built by those who waited and rested and wished to look behind them. This country was conquered by those who moved forward - and so will space. William Bradford, speaking in 1630 of the founding of the Plymouth Bay Colony, said that all great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties, and both must be enterprised and overcome with answerable courage.” The space programme was to be a new frontier of freedom, a reflection of the New Frontier at home that guided Kennedy’s presidency.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 357.

⁵⁹⁸ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 785.

For the eyes of the world now look into space, to the moon and to the planets beyond, and we have vowed that we shall not see it governed by a hostile flag of conquest, but by a banner of freedom and peace. We have vowed that we shall not see space filled with weapons of mass destruction, but with instruments of knowledge and understanding. Yet the vows of this Nation can only be fulfilled if we in this Nation are first, and, therefore, we intend to be first. In short, our leadership in science and in industry, our hopes for peace and security, our obligations to ourselves as well as others, all require us to make this effort, to solve these mysteries, to solve them for the good of all men, and to become the world's leading space-faring nation.⁵⁹⁹

The effort to put a man on the moon was to showcase the best of America and of its aspirations. The final frontier of humanity's great adventure was to be conquered by the nation that regarded itself as embodying the best in human nature. To go to the moon was a choice to extend the horizons of Man but also those of science, the light of reason, and the progress of humanity. "But why, some say, the moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask why climb the highest mountain. Why, 35 years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas? We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too."⁶⁰⁰ When Frederick Jackson Turner had grieved about the closing of the frontier in America, in 1893, he had warned about the dangers involved. The loss of an open arena where America's democratic character could be permanently refreshed could only mean the gradual transformation of that character. In challenging the nation to reach for the stars, Kennedy was giving voice to Turner and his appeal for a new source that would feed the democratic current. The demands entailed by the space programme could be a levelling force, a democratic impulse as they required common effort; science is about free enquiry and sharing of investigation, the antithesis of hierarchy and conformism. Space and science were the new frontier of democracy and freedom, fulfilling Turner's requirements for the longevity of America's ideals.

⁵⁹⁹ John F. Kennedy, "Address at Rice University in Houston on the Nation's Space Effort," September 12, 1962. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8862>, (accessed September 22, 2014).

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

The high hopes of the Sixties were somewhat refreshed by the moon landing and the Apollo Space Programme. The country was briefly enthralled by the oneiric appeal of space travel, of leaving earth and its problems, its claustrophobic limitations behind and strive for the stars. However, even the initial awe wore off and the stars lost some of their glitter. There were five further moon landings after the first one and by the time of the last one, the novelty was gone. “The Apollo programme ended on December 19, 1972, with the splashdown of Apollo XVII. By then, the public had become blasé about the ever-present hazards of space as well as the excitement of its challenge. The programme had also begun to fall victim to the introverted attitude that threatened so much new technology in the 1970’s.” But what most riled Nixon was the narrow-mindedness that had taken over the political establishment and parts of the public. “The argument went, as long as one person on earth is poor, not a dollar should be spent on space. In my opinion, however, exploration of space is one of the last of the great challenges to the American spirit. Space is perhaps the last frontier truly commensurate with America’s capacity for wonder.”⁶⁰¹ Such parochialism he viewed as the direct negation of the openness and universalism of American values, the grounding of its ideals which aim to be free to expand and reach farther than any others.

This cooling down slowly extended to the expectations of the Sixties, a toning down of the nation’s aspirations. Nixon was not an inspiring president, failing to dispel the cynicism that was taking over the country regarding his presidency. Even his foreign policy triumphs were viewed askance. “Some critics at the time grumbled that Nixon’s foreign policies primarily reflected calculations of domestic political gain. Was it accidental, they asked, that the trips to Peking and Moscow took place in an election year?”⁶⁰² Although using foreign victories to promote domestic reputation is nothing new, in Nixon’s case it all seemed overly timed, the president and his aides too eager to have the media following every move and record every success. Indeed, people could not let go of the idea that Nixon had an ulterior motive for his initiatives, that all his concerns as President were related to their impact on domestic politics: he cared more for the game of politics than anything else.

⁶⁰¹ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Volume 1 (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 532.

⁶⁰² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 748.

V

In June 1971 the *New York Times* started publication of a collection of documents about American involvement in Vietnam. The *Pentagon Papers*, as they were called, were prepared by the US Department of Defence and commissioned by Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defence under Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. They detailed the secret campaigns and covert operations the United States had engaged in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, implicating Kennedy but also exposing Johnson's manipulations and deceptions. The documents were classified but were leaked by Daniel Ellsberg, a National Security Council member that had been personally chosen by Kissinger. Nixon was quite happy to see the *Pentagon Papers* released to the public as his name was not mentioned and they showed how the Democrats had dragged the country into war. However, they were also a clear breach of executive and national security, a theme dear to Nixon who regarded the institution of the Presidency as sacrosanct. He was further goaded into action by Kissinger himself who feared that his secret diplomatic manoeuvres could be exposed as well. Talking to the President, Kissinger knew which buttons to press. "It shows you're a weakling, Mr. President... these leaks are slowly and systematically destroying us... It could destroy our ability to conduct foreign policy. If other powers feel we cannot control internal leaks, they will not agree to secret negotiations."⁶⁰³ The vindictiveness and controlling nature of Nixon did the rest.

When the Supreme Court invalidated the administration's judicial injunction to stop the publication of the documents by invoking the First Amendment, Nixon decided to take protective measures. With the assistance of his most loyal staff Nixon created his own independent unit of special operations working directly in, and for, the White House; they were calculated to stop leaks, hence the name "plumbers" by which they were known. But the over-zealous desire to protect their chief led the plumbers, commanded by Ehrlichman, to engage in a vendetta against Ellsberg and from there to move on to other illegal activities. In 1972 some of the plumbers were working with the Committee to Re-elect the President (known by its acronym, CREEP...), assigned to carry espionage operations including the tapping of telephones in the Democratic Party's National Committee headquarters in Washington, D.C. Looking to find

⁶⁰³ Quoted in Richard Reeves, *President Nixon – Alone in the White House* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 333.

something on campaign strategy or simply to obtain information that could be used against the Democrats, the operation failed as the undercover team was spotted by a guard at the Watergate complex of buildings where the offices were located. Nixon always denied having ordered the break-in or of having any previous knowledge of it. However, the atmosphere that Nixon fostered in the White House was conducive to such an outcome. He instilled a feeling of persecution in his staff, of harassment by a group of enemies whose names were included in a list that circulated the White House. As Patterson remarks, “Nixon’s super-loyal aides could have no doubt in 1972 about its partisan zeal to embarrass ‘enemies,’ especially in an election year. Like their boss, they were contemptuous of democratic procedures and of the niceties of constitutional protections... In the siege mentality that Nixon incited among his aides, something like Watergate was probably an excess waiting to happen.”⁶⁰⁴

The police investigation quickly established a link between the burglars and a plumber that was still working for CREEP. At this point the President decided to silence the whole affair ordering the CIA to pressure the FBI into quitting the investigation of the case. He feared that other clandestine operations could be revealed as the investigation progressed, namely those carried as part of the Huston Plan, devised by a White House aide named Tom Huston. These included illegal surveillance of people in the enemies list, wiretapping and spying of well-known members of the Democratic Party, using the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to initiate tax audits on the President’s enemies, and paying large sums of money to ensure the silence of the men captured in the Watergate operation. The so-called ‘White House horrors list’ – the compilation of illegal activities, secret operations, blackmailing and assorted undertakings carried out by the White House staff – was a long indictment of Nixon and his administration, which he tried to cover-up by engaging in obstruction of justice and corruption.

The Watergate scandal unravelled slowly at first, with two *Washington Post* reporters – Carl Bernstein and Robert Woodward – publishing developments of the case aided by a whistle-blower known as Deep Throat. The evidence accumulated gradually and in early 1973 they had established the connection between the plumbers and presidential special aides and counsellors, as well as details of the unaccounted money funds used in bribes and to finance covert operations. When the burglars were found guilty in court one of them decided to cooperate in order to get a settlement and

⁶⁰⁴ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 773.

implicated several administration members, untying the knot of secrecy and manipulation that had been tightened by the administration. The judicial and political investigation concentrated on the revelation that Nixon had hidden microphones in the Oval Office which he used to secretly record everything said. His distrustful, suspicious nature ensured that he had hard evidence of all the conversations with his aides, possibly even relating to every aspect of the Watergate scandal and the cover-up attempts. Ordered to release the tapes by a special Senate Committee, Nixon refused and invoked executive privilege as well as ordering his Attorney General to fire the special prosecutor in charge of the investigation. As the world around Nixon started to crumble his staff either resigned or was indicted, leaving him alone. The fight between the President and his enemies dragged for more than a year until the House of Representatives began discussing the terms of impeachment of the President given the evidence that he had obstructed the investigation by abusing his powers. The partial recordings of the tapes that he grudgingly accepted to hand over to the investigating committee disclosed further damaging evidence of corruption and abuses of power to obstruct justice.

In late July 1974 the House voted to impeach Nixon. Rather than face an impeachment trial in the Senate he announced his resignation on August 8. Unrepentant till the end he attributed his decision not to his judicial problems but to political difficulties. "From the discussions I have had with Congressional and other leaders, I have concluded that because of the Watergate matter, I might not have the support of the Congress that I would consider necessary to back the very difficult decisions and carry out the duties of this office in the way the interests of the Nation will require." The 'Watergate matter' as he dismissively called it, "would almost totally absorb the time and attention of both the President and the Congress in a period when our entire focus should be on the great issues of peace abroad and prosperity without inflation at home. Therefore, I shall resign the Presidency effective at noon tomorrow."⁶⁰⁵ The following day he delivered a letter to Henry Kissinger, now Secretary of State, which contained

⁶⁰⁵ Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation Announcing Decision To Resign the Office of President of the United States," August 8, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4324>, (accessed September 25, 2014).

his formal resignation: “Dear Mr. Secretary: I hereby resign the Office of President of the United States. Sincerely, Richard Nixon.”⁶⁰⁶

The morning of Nixon’s resignation his new Vice-President, Gerald Ford, was sworn in as President. Spiro Agnew, his running-mate in 1968 and 1972, had resigned in late 1973 embroiled in corruption charges issuing from the time he was Governor of Maryland. Nixon chose Gerald Ford, the House of Representatives’ Republican leader, as replacement for Agnew. In a first in American history he became the nation’s leader without being elected for any of the top executive offices. A consensual figure in Congress because of his mild and harmless personality, he had been personally chosen by Lyndon Johnson to be part of the Warren Commission in charge of investigating John F. Kennedy’s assassination. Throughout his political career in the House he earned the respect of both sides of the aisle and his name was quickly given to Nixon as the replacement for Agnew. One month after taking the oath of office, Ford issued a “full, free, and absolute pardon unto Richard Nixon for all offenses against the United States which he, Richard Nixon, has committed or may have committed or taken part in”⁶⁰⁷ during the period of his presidency. Ford was attacked for his decision, especially since pardons are given after a conviction has been obtained in court. Nixon had not even been tried yet. The new President was accused of having struck a deal with his predecessor in exchange for the office.

Ford justified his decision with the need to avoid further division and national acrimony at a time when the country was already bitterly fractured. Nixon and Watergate had been “an American tragedy in which we all have played a part. It could go on and on and on, or someone must write the end to it. I have concluded that only I can do that, and if I can, I must.” As he explained, it could be years before Nixon faced a court for his crimes and during “this long period of delay and potential litigation, ugly passions would again be aroused. And our people would again be polarized in their opinions. And the credibility of our free institutions of government would again be challenged at home and abroad.”⁶⁰⁸ The danger of division that so worried the nation’s

⁶⁰⁶ Richard Nixon, “Letter Resigning the Office of President of the United States,” August 9, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4326>, (accessed September 25, 2014).

⁶⁰⁷ Gerald R. Ford, “Proclamation 4311 - Granting Pardon to Richard Nixon,” September 8, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4696>, (accessed September 25, 2014).

⁶⁰⁸ Gerald R. Ford, “Remarks on Signing a Proclamation Granting Pardon to Richard Nixon,” September 8, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4695>, (accessed –September 25, 2014).

psyche hung over it and threatened to engulf it in a storm. That would not do. “My conscience tells me clearly and certainly that I cannot prolong the bad dreams that continue to reopen a chapter that is closed. My conscience tells me that only I, as President, have the constitutional power to firmly shut and seal this book. My conscience tells me it is my duty, not merely to proclaim domestic tranquillity but to use every means that I have to insure it.”⁶⁰⁹ Despite the criticisms, time came to prove Gerald Ford right. His decision earned him the appraisal of many, including the Kennedy family. In an introduction to her father’s book, Caroline Kennedy extolled the pardon as a “uniquely courageous action” for which he received the Kennedy’s Profile in Courage Award. “Ford realized that America needed to begin healing from the wounds of Watergate, and that he was the only man who could make that possible. One month after Ford became president he pardoned Nixon, knowing that it could cost him the presidency.”⁶¹⁰ Gerald Ford did indeed lose the 1976 presidential elections by a narrow margin. Albeit free from involvement in the Watergate scandal and a rather harmless figure, he failed to convince the public that he was the change.

Public faith in politicians and the political system in general had descended to new lows. The already cynical approach was only given further confirmation by Watergate. In his taking of office Ford declared that “In all my public and private acts as your President, I expect to follow my instincts of openness and candor with full confidence that honesty is always the best policy in the end.” Knowing perhaps that his words might fail to soothe the nation he tried to reassure it by claiming that the system was working, that the people could trust the constitutional system and its checks and balances to protect the nation. “My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over. Our Constitution works; our great Republic is a government of laws and not of men. Here the people rule.”⁶¹¹ However, the damage done left a deep gash. As Schulman sums it, “Watergate added fuel to a widespread cynicism about politics, politicians, government itself as an instrument of the collective good. Already weakened by Nixon’s divisive politics, Watergate piled the last straw on the political system. It confirmed the man on the street’s growing distrust of American institutions and

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ See Caroline Kennedy’s Introduction to John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York and London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), xiii.

⁶¹¹ Gerald R. Ford, “Remarks on Taking the Oath of Office,” August 9, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4409>, (accessed September 29, 2014).

American leaders.”⁶¹² Ford was caught up in the same backlash that engulfed the Republican Party in the 1974 midterm elections and that anger led him to lose the presidency in 1976 “to an unknown whose platform consisted of a fairly convincing promise that he would never lie to the American people.”⁶¹³ The country was weary and wary of politics, the disgust pushing people away from government action wishing only to be left alone and away from Washington’s muddy waters and corruption. As such, the high hopes of federal intervention to bolster the expectations and programmes of the Sixties were cut short by a general feeling of unease towards government. Watergate ultimately reinforced a limited government trend that had been slowly building since the turn of the decade.

This new outlook was coupled with a mild nostalgia, a diffuse longing for an America of innocence, of caring small neighbourhoods and closely knit communities. The celebration of the 200th anniversary of independence, in 1976, added to this looking back into the past in search for answers and solace. The festivities celebrated a rural country led by men that were revered by their intellectual honesty, virtue and patriotism. Books, conferences and events only highlighted in the eyes of the country the contrast between the small Republic of 1776 and the industrial, ailing empire of 1976. It was telling that the bicentenary coincided with the remarkable tenure of an unelected President, the offspring of what was perhaps the greatest challenge the country faced to its constitutional system in modern times.

VI

Despite its diplomatic successes Nixon’s period in the White House will always be remembered for Watergate. Détente with Russia and the normalisation of relations with mainland China - ending the exclusion of the Asian giant - have fallen into the realm of academic studies. Just as Lyndon Johnson’s reputation is marred by Vietnam, Nixon’s will always be evaluated through his abuse of power and subversion of the constitutional order. And yet he also ended the war in Vietnam and the military draft.

Cynicism prevails. Arthur Schlesinger looks at the end of the draft as another step Nixon took towards reinforcing his power. As Commander-in-Chief the President

⁶¹² Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies – The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York and London: The Free Press, 2001), 48.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

has control of the armed forces. However, according to Schlesinger, an army composed primarily of non-professional soldiers is hardly reliable for a warring President. “A citizen army is a projection of the whole nation and therefore has the capacity to find means of resisting a President who wants to fight wars in which a nation does not believe. A professional army is by definition a much more compliant and reliable instrument of presidential war. Its members are in the army by their own free choice. Because they believe in their career, they do not have to believe in a particular war.”⁶¹⁴ Besides its compliant nature, Schlesinger reminds his readers of the dictatorial temptations aroused by a strong standing army capable of undermining domestic liberty, a theme also addressed by Alexander Hamilton in one of his *Federalist Papers*.⁶¹⁵ With the end of the draft, the United States would now rely on a standing army composed of highly trained professional fighters dedicated to the business of war. But as Schlesinger notes, this was a massive standing army, well over 2 million-strong and equipped with weapons of mass destruction.

There are vulnerabilities lurking and commentaries to be made about these observations. The first one resides in the remark that a nation will not fight in a war that does not command its trust. But a nation can just as well commit itself to a war of aggression, no matter the arguments presented as justification. The Mexican-American war of 1846-48 and the Spanish-American war of 1898 were supported by great popular enthusiasm; there was no lack of citizens offering their services to fill the ranks of the many volunteer regiments created to fight in what were wars of expansion and empire-building. The commitment of any citizen army is as liable of being manipulated by populist impulses as the professional army by the prospect of career progression. And it could be argued that the promise of plunder and territorial gain for the community works the same effect on the individual, whether he be a regular soldier or a common citizen.

The danger a Republic faces in military terms comes not only from the presence of a standing army. Motivated by loyalty to their leader and dissatisfaction at Congress, the army at the end of the Revolutionary War considered overthrowing congressional government and elevating George Washington as supreme ruler. The Continental Army that fought the British was created for a specific purpose and disbanded shortly after. But the exigencies of modern times required a well-organized military establishment.

⁶¹⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 199.

⁶¹⁵ See *Federalist* n°8.

The time had passed when Jefferson's ideal citizen could substitute weapons for his ploughshare; the citizen-soldier was the bulwark of the Republic. The preservation of the United States' post-war domain had forced the need for a permanent army and the industrial revolution had operated a transformation in the way wars were fought. Under the Cold War geopolitical scenario the discipline necessary to maintain such an army in a state of readiness and effectiveness was wholly new and contrary to the American experience. The individual and democratic impulses conflict with the martial principles of conformity and obedience. The romantic tradition of freedom is sacrificed in the altar where the Nation's spirit is worshipped; individual independence yields to the people's welfare and liberty.

Eisenhower recognised the dangers involved when he contemplated recent developments in his Farewell Address. Although the departing President urged his countrymen to strive to remain alert and knowledgeable so that liberty and prosperity could flourish together, the military-industrial complex was operating a slow change in the structure of American society. The theme of national security has become ubiquitous and corrosive. There is no need to recall Joseph McCarthy to illustrate how fear can be detrimental to the most basic liberties, an episode introduced by fear. The ideological struggle against the Soviet Union had from the beginning been surrounded by a moral urgency to rid the world of Communism and spread America's values. The United States were engaged in a battle that pitted the ideals of 1776 and an unethical, dangerous creed. Nixon's *détente* with Russia and relaxation toward Mao infuriated many in the Republican Party that regarded the negotiations as a dereliction of duty towards freedom and towards God Himself. Personal considerations have no place in a holy cause.

In 1972 the issue of social discipline versus individual vagary and freedom of action reached the Supreme Court. Eight people had been arrested in the city of Jacksonville, Florida, under a municipal vagrancy ordinance. The city aimed to stabilise individual conduct and prevent the deterioration of socially accepted patterns of behaviour in the community by making a criminal activity such actions as "wandering or strolling around from place to place without any lawful purpose or object," and loafing. The Supreme Court reversed the convictions arguing that the ordinance was much too vague. This vagueness not only made illegal activities that are normal and innocent, but gave too much discretionary power to the police. However, the remarkable aspect of the decision was the argument used by the Justices upholding the virtues

inherent to a life of wandering. Not only did wanderers and loafers not present any social danger, their anti-conformist stance was an American attribute. Some of the activities that Jacksonville sought to discipline are part and parcel of the American tradition of self-determination. Some of them could also form part of the preparation for a number of crimes. But as the Court remarked in words that deserved to be reproduced,

The difficulty is that these activities are historically part of the amenities of life as we have known them. They are not mentioned in the Constitution or in the Bill of Rights. These unwritten amenities have been in part responsible for giving our people the feeling of independence and self-confidence, the feeling of creativity. These amenities have dignified the right of dissent and have honored the right to be nonconformists and the right to defy submissiveness. They have encouraged lives of high spirits rather than hushed, suffocating silence. They are embedded in Walt Whitman's writings, especially in his 'Song of the Open Road.' They are reflected too, in the spirit of Vachel Lindsay's 'I Want to Go Wandering,' and by Henry D. Thoreau.⁶¹⁶

To wander is an inward crusade, to embark in search of some inner truth independent from the masses' will. Hence the nonconformist and free-thinking connotation it carries. "Those generally implicated by the imprecise terms of the ordinance - poor people, nonconformists, dissenters, idlers - may be required to comport themselves according to the life style deemed appropriate,"⁶¹⁷ thus submitting to a common denominator. But the free-thinking spirit is a censor, an opponent of mainstream attitudes and majority rule. As a minority, it acts as a conscience to the whole, the repository of unconventional truths and values, the guardian of the spirit of independence of the nation. It therefore presents a danger to any regulating, centralising authority, which is why it holds its importance as an institution of dissent, in itself a tradition in America - one has only to look at the history of the country prior to its independence and immediately after that with the Shays Rebellion and the Whiskey Rebellion.

The revolt against the confinements of society and tradition was retaken by the romantic tradition. Whitman and Thoreau exalted free expression of emotions and spontaneity as a vehicle to escape social uniformity, the oppressor of the self. In

⁶¹⁶ *Papachristou v. City of Jacksonville*, 405 U.S. 156 (1972).

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*

ideological terms this assumes that the individual is all-important, outside the collective structure and independent from it. This defence of the natural-rights philosophy is at odds with an engrossing political State where the individual is a subject. The natural-rights philosophy entails a moral vision of society as the place where Men can be free and respected for what they are, associating freely to build their interests. Society is not an end in itself but a means, a means to enhance liberty and preserve equal rights. The observance and respect for these rights are the basis for the continuance of that association. In order to be moral the group must respect that sphere of personal expression; there must be a pool of shared concepts and beliefs that protects the individual – therein lies the strength of American idealism. With the emergence of the State as the political expression of the community, then, the question is whether the necessary allegiance should be kept by physical force, coercion, or by moral force.

The change from individual to subject illustrates its dependence on the new political sovereignty. In the statist theory of sovereignty that protection is best guaranteed by the centralised, consolidated State. The State is the culmination of a particular perspective about the historical development of individual rights which regards the State as necessary, even fundamental to further and make universal the enjoyment of freedom - a concept of freedom which is somewhat more regulated than the natural-rights one. The enjoyment of those freedoms is provided by the new Sovereign, rather than being innate to all. What rights one has are those inscribed in the law. But we argue that the State must be a moral enterprise, have a moral dimension to its existence as the guardian of Men's freedom, not become just an institution with a paternal caring for its helpless children. The multiplication of high spirits and nonconformists, as the Supreme Court advocates, will be prone to question the origins of that authority, its legitimacy and the reason behind the rationing of what was once considered a birth right. For the State, however, the multiplicity of independent, free-thinking selves with diverse interests, allegiances, and outlooks on life and the general commonweal must be amalgamated into a uniform whole, more easily pliable and managed. Their interests and motivations must be reduced to one of such importance that it will stifle all others, concentrating the individual so as to forget all else: fear in a dictatorship, safety in a less malignant regime.

Nixon was but one of the most stringent and straightforward converts to the ideology of national sovereignty in America. Nixon concluded that in the fight against the ungodly Communists the separation of powers engendered in the Constitution was

an impairment. Best to concentrate as much power as possible to circumvent the vagaries that constitutional procedures entail. He was a Hamiltonian in his defence of consolidation of power in order to guarantee order and stability, the two requirements he understood as fundamental to secure liberty for all. Richard Nixon's presidency was one that tested the constitutional balance in a most challenging way. It also proved the Founding Fathers right about their misgivings regarding Power and its tempting nature and the need to have it controlled. He sought powers expressly withheld from high office, namely the power to declare war and a discretionary use of the military system, and a status of immunity regarding legislative oversight and judicial investigations.⁶¹⁸

Nixon did not act alone, or rather, he was aided by Congress' diffidence and subservience. As Schlesinger remarks, the War Powers Resolution of 1973 carried substantial consequences for both Congress and the executive. Intended to control the President's capacity to commit the country in a war without congressional approval (as per the Constitution – Article 1, Section 8 - Congress has the sole power to declare war), the Resolution states he must go to Congress to ask for permission to use military action after 30 days - later extended to 120 days - of the initial engagement. Instead of restraining the Presidency, it merely induced Congress to approve presidential wars. The War Powers Resolution of 1973 gave statutory authority to the Presidency to begin wars without congressional consent. It merely gave legal confirmation to a practice long held by the executive thus confirming Congress' loss of the war-making power.⁶¹⁹ Nixon was thus concentrating essential powers on himself. The power to declare war (actions in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos); the power of the purse (by appropriation of funds for military purposes); and the power of immunity from legislative oversight (exemplified by the Watergate scandal). The constitutional balance was broken.

The Nixon presidency and the trend followed by previous administrations prompted fears about the progress of what Schlesinger termed an Imperial Presidency. Added to the mentioned appropriation of powers was the increased use of unelected and unaccountable aides and advisors, not unlike a royal court or a private council to determine policy. Likewise the aura of secrecy and executive privilege to circumvent congressional control and judicial enquiries, as was most blatantly observed in the Watergate investigations. Nixon had a monarchical view of the Presidency which he

⁶¹⁸ See Arthur Schlesinger's *The Imperial Presidency* for a detailed account of the progress in executive overreach, and especially of Nixon's presidency.

⁶¹⁹ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 301 - 307.

summed up in his interviews with British journalist David Frost, filmed in 1977. Questioned about his actions as President and their legitimacy he answered that “when the president does it that means that it’s not illegal.” Asked to elaborate on that statement, he explained: “If the president, for example, approves something because of the national security, or in this case because of a threat to internal peace and order of significant magnitude, then the president’s decision in that instance is one that enables those who carry it out, to carry it out without violating a law.” The President marks the law’s reach and where it stops by defining what constitutes national security, which overrides the law – *salus populi suprema lex*. And that because Nixon had a plebiscitary notion of the electoral process. As the embodiment of the people’s will he was the representative of the Republic’s sovereignty, and its warden. He therefore had ample justification to engage in “certain inherently government activities, which, if undertaken by the sovereign in protection of the interests of the nation’s security are lawful, but which if undertaken by private persons, are not.”⁶²⁰ The sovereign was above the common private person; in watching over the nation’s safety, Nixon was above the law.

This identification of the man, the leader, with the nation entailed a perilous personalisation of the presidency. There were other dangers besides the search for kingly powers and immunity from the law. In a nuclear age the risk of a President making decisions without oversight or congressional control was always present. The red button at his disposal could be triggered at command. In the early stages of his presidency Nixon developed an original theory to persuade North Vietnam to sit down and accept a peace settlement. He confided to one of his trusted aides that he wanted to scare them. “I want the North Vietnamese to believe I’ve reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We’ll just slip the word to them that, ‘for God’s sakes, you know Nixon is obsessed about communists. We can’t restrain him when he’s angry – and he has his hand on the nuclear button’ – and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace.”⁶²¹ Nixon denied ever having said or thought about nuclear annihilation of the North. And yet his theory was well known in the upper administration echelons. Nixon was the monarch who, when angry, could not be restrained by his courtiers. He had absolute power. And absolute power tends to make

⁶²⁰ “Nixon's Views on Presidential Power: Excerpts from a 1977 Interview with David Frost,” *Landmark Cases*. 2002. Street Law, Inc. and the Supreme Court Historical Society. http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Page/722/Nixons_Views_on_Presidential_Power_Excercise, (accessed October 7, 2014).

⁶²¹ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945 – 1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 749 – 750.

politics personal. “Nixon’s ‘madman theory.’ He wanted leaders in Hanoi to fear him as a madman capable of reducing their country to ashes rather than be seen as a loser.”⁶²² Nixon could not be seen as a loser; not him, not the leader of the most powerful nation in the world. Despite his fatalistic view of history the accidents of Nixon’s personality made history. The evolution of the presidency as the focal point of American politics and national identification would continue, demanding ever more from the individual occupying the White House. Not only did this continue the downward path of constitutional balance of powers in the long run, it would also exert continuing pressure upon the office to deliver. The President would be called to play several different roles besides Commander-in-Chief and executive leader.

⁶²² Richard Reeves, *President Nixon – Alone in the White House* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 136.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Clarification

And here it may be necessary to compare the vast and important powers of the president, together with his continuance in office, with the foregoing doctrine - his eminent magisterial situation will attach many adherents to him, and he will be surrounded by expectants and courtiers. His power of nomination and influence on all appointments; the strong posts in each state comprised within his superintendence, and garrisoned by troops under his direction; his control over the army, militia, and navy; the unrestrained power of granting pardons for treason, which may be used to screen from punishment those whom he had secretly instigated to commit the crime, and thereby prevent a discovery of his own guilt; his duration in office for four years - these, and various other principles evidently prove the truth of the position, that if the president is possessed of ambition, he has power and time sufficient to ruin his country.

George Clinton ('Cato'), Anti-Federalist n°67, November 8, 1787

I

By the end of 1975 the decline of the United States was becoming evident. The strenuous effort in Vietnam had ended in a humiliating retreat, a scandal had forced a President to resign, and unemployment was on the rise as well as crime. The values of the country seemed bankrupt and pale; the Soviet Union more appealing and established, more alluring with growing numbers of believers in Asia and in the newly independent countries in Africa. Gerald Ford had to acknowledge to the nation the status of the country. "I must say to you that the state of the Union is not good: Millions of Americans are out of work. Recession and inflation are eroding the money of millions more. Prices are too high, and sales are too slow. This year's Federal deficit will be about \$30 billion; next year's probably \$45 billion. The national debt will rise to over \$500 billion. Our plant capacity and productivity are not increasing fast enough. We depend on others for essential energy."⁶²³ The general feeling was of doubt, low self-esteem, and distrust of politicians and their capacity to turn the situation around. The imperial presidency with its concentration of powers had not worked. "The moment has come to move in a new direction. We can do this by fashioning a new partnership between the Congress on the one hand, the White House on the other, and the people we both represent."⁶²⁴ The country was at a loss, unsure of what it stood for and how to find itself again. All the certainties had dissolved, exposing a crisis in America's civilizational values.

The ascendancy of Congress over a damaged Executive was illustrated in early 1975 regarding Vietnam. Emboldened - not least because the scandal-ridden executive branch was being led by an unelected leader - Congress refused Gerald Ford's pleas for the means with which to assist South Vietnam under a final assault by the Communist North. Saigon fell on the last day of April putting an end to a tragedy that had lasted for too long and cost too many lives and treasure. Congress grew more assertive, reversing the trend that had been gaining pace ever since FDR. By the end of his presidency Ford had to plead again before Congress, only this time to remind the nation's elected representatives of their need to respect constitutional boundaries.

⁶²³ Gerald R. Ford, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," January 15, 1975. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4938>, (accessed October 8, 2014).

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*

The exclusive right to declare war, the duty to advise and consent on the part of the Senate, the power of the purse on the part of the House are ample authority for the legislative branch and should be jealously guarded. But because we may have been too careless of these powers in the past does not justify congressional intrusion into, or obstruction of, the proper exercise of Presidential responsibilities now or in the future. There can be only one Commander in Chief. In these times crises cannot be managed and wars cannot be waged by committee, nor can peace be pursued solely by parliamentary debate. To the ears of the world, the President speaks for the Nation. While he is, of course, ultimately accountable to the Congress, the courts, and the people, he and his emissaries must not be handicapped in advance in their relations with foreign governments as has sometimes happened in the past.⁶²⁵

Congress was proving that when it came to abuses of power, a collective body could be as abusive as an individual body of government. And yet, an unusual period of congressional predominance marked the second half of the 1970's, unusual enough in post-war America to be remembered.

It was a period of uncertainty and national introspection. Popular culture reflected the social anxieties arising from the defeat in Vietnam and the economic decline, both of which put the country's strength under questioning. The traumatic Vietnam experience was being approached through the eyes of the soldiers, the returning veterans and their reintegration in society after serving in the jungle. Given the polarisation of American society that the war engendered - the mass protests, the violence, the ideological divisions - Vietnam veterans found themselves regarded as puppets of Washington's corrupt elite, serving the latter's oppressive machinations. Hollywood portrayed them as disillusioned men, ill-fit for post-war life, having trouble readjusting to civilian life. In *Taxi Driver* (1976) the main character is a maladjusted veteran angry at the crime, violence and decadence he observes daily in his job driving a taxicab. The film associates both the effects of the Vietnam War and the social consequences of the economic hard times and general sense of lost references. The returning soldier is confronted with the sordid world of a declining America after witnessing the ignominies of the war. The expected contrast between the jungle and

⁶²⁵ Gerald R. Ford, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," January 12, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=5555>, (accessed October 8, 2014).

home is non-existent. In the end, Travis Bickle, played by Robert de Niro, takes the law unto his own hands and frees a teenage prostitute, and is lauded a hero. However, the message is disturbing, for as Bruce Schulman explains, it “discloses something very wrong about American society. If Travis Bickle is a savior, then what kind of nation has America become?”⁶²⁶ Other films meditated on the issue of the returning veteran (e.g., *The Deer Hunter*, 1978) but one in particular delved on an issue that touched American society to its core.

Apocalypse Now (1979) draws on Joseph Conrad’s book *The Heart of Darkness*. The film dramatizes the opposition between civilisation and human nature, between good and evil, and places its theme in the context of the war in Vietnam. The brutality of the war, yielding to the darkest depths in human nature and perpetrated by soldiers of the most advanced nation on Earth exposed America’s loss of innocence. Unlike World War I and World War II, where the United States fought against tyranny and Nazism, or even the war in Korea where it tried to stop communist aggression, America had engaged in a war whose cause was ambiguous at best, downright imperialistic for some of its bitterest critics. Gratuitous murder, indiscriminate bombings and psychological terror were an indictment of war crimes against America. America had changed, as home as well as abroad. The spread of street crime and decay of urban America were recaptured in several films which portrayed self-appointed vigilantes and tough policemen bending the law to impose some modicum of justice. The country contemplated itself in the mirror and stepped back in shock. It longed to return to a simpler life, to a nostalgic past regarded as friendlier and more virtuous, stable and reliable. Watergate and Vietnam were regarded as the antithesis of America and its values.

And so it was that Americans woke up to a new reality, a new portrait of themselves and the meaning of their country. After a remarkable period of almost 30 years the heady dreams of economic prosperity and political supremacy in a world of global peace and democracy came to a crashing end. James Carter campaigned for the 1976 presidential election portraying himself as an outsider to Washington, an anti-establishment candidate. He sealed the Democratic Party’s nomination by way of not being the more well-known establishment candidates that ventured forward for the nomination. He used a simple message, centrist and anti-ideological, based on the

⁶²⁶ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies – The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York and London: The Free Press, 2001), 149.

promise that he would be different from recent occupants of the White House. He captured the nation's desire for a distancing from the politics-as-usual shenanigans that were the norm in the capital and presented himself as an idealist, the representative of a simpler and more honest form of doing politics. "It is time for the people to run the government, and not the other way around."⁶²⁷ He positioned himself as one of the common mass of people. Still, Carter was far from being an outsider. Although relatively unknown on a national level, he had been involved in politics since 1962 and was versed in the dark arts of compromise and bargaining enough to have been elected Governor of Georgia.

But in his speech of acceptance of the Party's nomination for President, Carter launched a tirade against the nation's elites. Both those in their Wall Street office as those sitting in the country's multiple elected offices came under fire. "Too many have had to suffer at the hands of a political economic elite who have shaped decisions and never had to account for mistakes or to suffer from injustice. When unemployment prevails, they never stand in line looking for a job. When deprivation results from a confused and bewildering welfare system, they never do without food or clothing or a place to sleep. When the public schools are inferior or torn by strife, their children go to exclusive private schools. And when the bureaucracy is bloated and confused, the powerful always manage to discover and occupy niches of special influence and privilege."⁶²⁸ This from a State Governor who had kept a close eye on the 1972 Democratic nomination and was a devoted Kennedy supporter, one of the great political clans in America.

Carter was elected thanks in good measure to his image as being above and beyond Washington's bickering and politicking. He was the promise of a new post-partisan era free from ideological straitjackets, free to govern in the interests of the people rather than the party, looking for common sense rather than abstract programmes. He avoided labels, in particular that of Progressive, preferring to be seen as a reformist of mores and of the dreaded establishment he was so keen on distancing himself from. His talk of reconciliation and his gentle smile assured the nation that he was no Johnson, nor Nixon, which was enough to win the election and unseat Gerald

⁶²⁷ James Carter, "Our Nation's Past and Future: Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York City," July 15, 1976. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25953>, (accessed October 27, 2014).

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

Ford. However, the fantasy of a new beginning without party quarrels or congressional deadlocks - of a new America that was somehow to be impartial, detached and objective - fell foul of the economic circumstances of the period and to a more subtle undercurrent that flowed across the nation's psyche. First of all, the naïve idea that America could become an insipid social-democracy was an out of character idealisation of the country. The country had been founded on a clash of ideas, of expectations on how to steer the community. The early Republic had been almost torn apart by competing perspectives about politics and government's role. America is nothing if not ideological. Carter was missing the plot. Second, the country did not expect the President to be a sort of bland diplomat of the constitutional dialogue between the people and the several branches and agencies of government. The country was tired of secrecy and manipulation, but what it longed for was for a champion that would defend its virtues and make it feel good again.

In the bicentennial of Independence the grand expectations of the 1776 Revolution that was to change the world had to be toned down. James "Jimmy" Carter's inaugural address was a low-spirited affair, a sad look on a sad nation. How to rouse that nation was his task, but one which he failed. Trying to rally the audience the best he managed was to say that "Two centuries ago, our Nation's birth was a milestone in the long quest for freedom. But the bold and brilliant dream which excited the founders of this Nation still awaits its consummation. I have no new dream to set forth today, but rather urge a fresh faith in the old dream." A profoundly religious man, modest and unpretentious, he signalled his own feebleness as a leader. "You have given me a great responsibility - to stay close to you, to be worthy of you, and to exemplify what you are. Let us create together a new national spirit of unity and trust. Your strength can compensate for my weakness, and your wisdom can help to minimize my mistakes." Although he does not have to be a hero, the President is the one people look up to. Carter achieved the dubious feat of admitting his weakness and that of the nation as a whole. "We have learned that more is not necessarily better, that even our great Nation has its recognized limits, and that we can neither answer all questions nor solve all problems. We cannot afford to do everything, nor can we afford to lack boldness as we meet the future. So, together, in a spirit of individual sacrifice for the common good, we

must simply do our best.”⁶²⁹ The dreams of human progress and betterment were outside the reach of government, he recognised. But he also placed limits in the ingenuity and pioneering spirit of America. No more the challenge to defy the odds, to reach for new heights, to dream big. America was no longer exceptional among the nations of the world and could only strive to do the best it could, as best it could, trundling along.

Two weeks after his taking of office Carter had to deliver a confirmation of the nation’s economic vulnerability. After the 1973 oil shock subsided the nation quickly forgot about its energy dependence. Its industry was highly reliant on cheap oil and natural gas which also fuelled a society addicted to automobiles and road transportation. The combined effect of a lack of planning and awareness of the changing trends in energy geopolitics delivered its full, hard blow in the winter of 1977. “The extremely cold weather this winter has dangerously depleted our supplies of natural gas and fuel oil and forced hundreds of thousands of workers off the job... the real problem - our failure to plan for the future or to take energy conservation seriously - started long before this winter, and it will take much longer to solve. I realize that many of you have not believed that we really have an energy problem. But this winter has made all of us realize that we have to act.”⁶³⁰ To a people living in a nation of great empty spaces, free to roam and seek meaning in the vastness of the land, the open road was the symbol of its limitless nature. The American spirit, the ‘can-do’ attitude were rooted in the continental sprawl; the American love affair with the automobile was not only due to the great distances to be covered but to the idea of independence, epitomised by personal mobility. The settlement of the arid areas of the West was made possible thanks to transportation but also because of the development of thermal comfort technologies such as air-conditioning, which required reliable and economical supplies of energy. To this gregarious and impatient people, Carter urged containment and frugality. “All of us must learn to waste less energy. Simply by keeping our thermostats, for instance, at 65 degrees in the daytime and 55 degrees at night we could save half the current shortage of natural gas.”⁶³¹ Although sensible, his meticulous observations and

⁶²⁹ James Carter, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=6575>, (accessed October 14, 2014).

⁶³⁰ James Carter, “Report to the American People- Remarks From the White House Library,” February 2, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7455>, (Accessed October 14, 2014).

⁶³¹ Ibid.

detailed suggestions further damaged the self-assurance of an exhausted and sceptical country, especially one with over 106 million cars circulating.⁶³² The American frontier had indeed closed, and with that it seemed that the frontier of the mind was closing also. The feeling of endless possibilities that had inebriated the American people after the war had left a bitter taste, the hangover from an extravagant festivity.

Although Carter had campaigned as an outsider criticising the establishment and the Washington politics-as-usual demeanour, the new President quickly fell afoul of the nation. High unemployment and inflation drained what little sympathy the country was ready to extend to the political class and Carter did himself no favours by constantly reminding the nation of his own doubts about his performance. “As President, I will not be able to provide everything that every one of you might like. I am sure to make many mistakes. But I can promise that your needs will never be ignored, nor will we forget who put us in office... If we are a united nation, then I can be a good President. But I will need your help to do it. I will do my best. I know you will do yours.”⁶³³ In a nation that had seen too many strong, assertive Presidents, where the constitutional balance had been set off course by the ascendancy of the Executive, here was a man that wanted to reverse in a couple of years an emotional structure that had been 40 years in the making. This required not only a President willing to be self-effacing about his office and yield the driver’s seat to Congress, but also a Congress and people willing to shoulder their responsibilities.

James Carter wanted to be honest and open with the American people so they could trust him. He wanted to build a new bond between the Presidency and the nation after the imperial isolation of the Johnson and Nixon years. To that end he believed he could be candid and show himself as the man he was: vulnerable and doubting, an anti-hero. In a speech in 1979 Carter addressed the social and economic problems that afflicted the country and the problems his leadership was having trouble dealing with. He began by quoting a number of opinions that had reached him about his leadership, on live television. Some of them were unflattering. “Mr. President, you are not leading this Nation, you’re just managing the Government.’... ‘If you lead, Mr. President, we will follow.’... ‘When we enter the moral equivalent of war, Mr. President, don’t issue

⁶³² James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant – The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

⁶³³ James Carter, “Report to the American People - Remarks From the White House Library,” February 2, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7455>, (Accessed October 14, 2014).

us BB guns.’’ Far from being fazed he welcomed the remarks about the general lack of confidence regarding his leadership and even seemed to agree with them. But the problem, he continued, was not just of his making, it was due to a deeper cause which no legislation in the world could repair.

The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our Nation. The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America. The confidence that we have always had as a people is not simply some romantic dream or a proverb in a dusty book that we read just on the Fourth of July. It is the idea which founded our Nation and has guided our development as a people. Confidence in the future has supported everything else - public institutions and private enterprise, our own families, and the very Constitution of the United States. Confidence has defined our course and has served as a link between generations. We’ve always believed in something called progress. We’ve always had a faith that the days of our children would be better than our own.⁶³⁴

The difficulties, he claimed, were not to be found in his administration alone but with the people also. The great lessons of the Founding Fathers had been lost as the people moved away from its past. The crisis of the American spirit was a crisis of citizenship; Americans had forgotten the meaning of democracy and the responsibilities it involved. Individuals were the principal protagonists in the great democratic experiment that had begun 200 years ago and theirs was the duty to shape democracy and continue the search for freedom. That faith was now lost, substituted with devotion to serve the god Mammon. “But just as we are losing our confidence in the future, we are also beginning to close the door on our past. In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities, and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we’ve discovered that owning

⁶³⁴ James Carter, “Address to the Nation on Energy and National Goals: ‘The Malaise Speech’,” July 15, 1979. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32596>, (accessed October 14, 2014).

things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose."⁶³⁵ So the fault was not in the stars but in Americans themselves that they were underlings. Carter was within touching distance from conservatives who argued that the effects of the radicalism of the 1960's lasted beyond that decade. The counter-cultural irreverence had eroded the respect and trust in social and political institutions. The new attitudes toward parental and public authority, coupled with sexual liberation had affected the reverence for family and country. The madness of that period, they claimed, had stimulated a hedonism that was destroying the moral fibre of the country. This was Carter's lecturing, his moral chastening of America, blaming the nation for its doubts about itself and about him. He was trying his best and he was being as frank and direct as possible, treating Americans as partners in the great national enterprise and not as subjects. And they were failing.

The cure, he continued, was not in government action. People too often complained about government and all the while turned to government for solutions, demanding answers to their problems. And so he scolded his partners for their materialism and self-pity. He quoted from a visitor but clearly meant the words as his own. "We've got to stop crying and start sweating, stop talking and start walking, stop cursing and start praying. The strength we need will not come from the White House, but from every house in America."⁶³⁶ With the economy in the doldrums, the heavy industrial core of the country closing due to increased competition from foreign products, unemployment and crime rising, Carter did himself few favours by blaming the nation.

James Carter was a good man, an internationalist, a champion of human rights. His greatest desire was to foster abroad America's valuation of freedom and democracy. He believed in the best of the romantic humanitarian ideals that underscored social equality and wanted to see them expanded abroad. But he was a gentle man unable of being decisive at a time when the nation was in need of direction, of someone that would lead it from the desert. The presidency had become the focal point of the nation's desires, expectations, needs. Although he must be praised for trying to restore a sort of balance to the constitutional system, especially after the Johnson and Nixon administrations, Carter's period in office suffered from a general perception of too

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

much soft power and not enough direction. This in itself raised questions about the country's strength and the President's willingness to put that strength to use. But it also questioned whether that was a symptom of a rejection of violence as an instrument of policy. After Vietnam, force was regarded with revulsion as an expression of imperial bullying. But there was also the trauma of war, defeat, and the fracturing of society.

The best traditions of American idealism and religious piety combined within Carter. The messianic fervour that Louis Hartz claimed was behind America's engagement with the world gained with Carter a longing to make amends, to atone for America's sins and strive for the salvation of the country. The President set the tone for his time in the White House in his inaugural address by quoting scripture from the Book of Micah in his opening words: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." With the Vietnam War still fresh in the nation's mind, Carter announced the beginning of a new spirit guiding America's political decisions with the outside world. What the outcome of this new direction would be he could only hope. "And I join in the hope that when my time as your President has ended, people might say this about our Nation: that we had remembered the words of Micah and renewed our search for humility, mercy, and justice...I would hope that the nations of the world might say that we had built a lasting peace, based not on weapons of war but on international policies which reflect our own most precious values. These are not just my goals - and they will not be my accomplishments - but the affirmation of our Nation's continuing moral strength and our belief in an undiminished, ever-expanding American dream."⁶³⁷ No more viewing the world as a balance between powers where order was the main goal but rather a return to the organising of the world around the ideals of America. But this time by way of atonement and dialogue.

One of the first actions of Carter's administration was the return of the Panama Canal. In his understanding of the need to show America's goodwill and determination to reset relations with its neighbours, the President signed the treaty that transferred the Canal back to Panama, which was ruled by an unelected military autocrat. In this he was in the minority, for the people did not agree with the return of the Canal. Ronald Reagan expressed the majority's opinion about the question in characteristic fashion: "We

⁶³⁷ James Carter, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=6575>, (accessed October 14, 2014).

bought it, we paid for it, it's ours, and we aren't going to give it away to some tinhorn dictator."⁶³⁸ Despite the opinion polls that constantly showed that Americans opposed the handing over of a strategic and vital asset, Carter proceeded anyway, convinced that the operation marked "the commitment of the United States to the belief that fairness, and not force, should lie at the heart of our dealings with the nations of the world."⁶³⁹ Carter emphasised fairness as the symbol of equality, the cardinal principle that he believed ought to be the standard by which nations engaged with each other. The original Panama Canal Treaty of 1903 had been an unequal affair imposed by a stronger nation over a weaker. The relations between the United States and its neighbours had been marred by an unequal standing and the former's use of its force to tip the scales. As to the popular judgment of his action the President, as always, was serenely confident that the good sense and innate benevolence of the people would make it see the justice of the deal. "This opens a new chapter in our relations with all nations of this hemisphere, and it testifies to the maturity and the good judgment and the decency of our people."⁶⁴⁰

The President's affability and general decency toward others was a welcome change from Johnson's coarseness and Nixon's trickery. But he was also the opposite of Kennedy's splendour, to give an example of a popular and beloved resident of the White House. The President had come to symbolise more than the Executive and the Commander-in-Chief: he was required to fill several roles, to placate popular anxieties and needs. Despite some successes in domestic policy Carter was deserting his position as Symbol-in-Chief, that most vital role of the modern President: the personification of the nation's history and character. The social and economic changes the country had experienced - industrialisation, the ascendancy of corporate capitalism, depression and world war – and the ones still in operation, from the post-war economic and military dominance to the rights revolution, had altered the country's inner political workings. The cooperative nature of industrialism and capitalism had submerged the individual and lessened its natural freedom. The division of labour and specialisation of workers had created a dependence on the product of the work of others to complement needs. A factory worker relies on the work of others for food since he has no time to farm his

⁶³⁸ Quoted in Garry Wills, *Reagan's America – Innocents at Home* (London: William Heineman, 1988), 330.

⁶³⁹ James Carter, "Panama Canal Treaties Remarks at the Signing Ceremony at the Pan American Union Building," September 7, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=6592>, (accessed October 17, 2014).

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

own. But the myth of the individual effort, of the lone pioneer conquering the West is ingrained in the country's identity. The individual hero is the ideal of America but he has no chance to fulfil his romantic destiny in the modern industrialised urban jungle. As such, someone is required to keep the act alive, to personalise the myth and play it to ease the dissonance between reality and the ideal. The President is the symbol of that individualism, the Hero straddling the land conquering social and economic injustice, and upholding the law before Communist gun-slingers that threaten peace.

Alas, Carter underperformed. His compassionate, religious low-profile and desire to do well worked against him. He was far from being a Kennedy and he was unable to inspire the nation. His image problem was made worse in the run-up to the 1980 elections. Determined to alter the usual support for dictatorial regimes friendly towards America in the region, Carter ordered that support be conditional on each country's human rights record. Several dictatorships lost the aid that kept them in power and the Sandinista Front in Nicaragua (named after a guerrilla fighter that opposed American occupation, no less) took power following a revolution that overthrew the local autocrat. A few months later a military government was established in El Salvador following a revolution, but despite their conservative background the new government initiated a series of nationalisations of important sectors of the economy. This managed to alienate both the ruling elite and the revolutionary movements; civil war ensued. Honduras and Guatemala were also experiencing social and political upheaval. Central America was convulsing under the pressures of communist-inspired revolutions and civil war. The traditional preserve of American intervention, the area was slipping from its hands. Stability was shattered and American interests feared a repetition of what had happened in Cuba with nationalisations and economic loss. Carter was blamed for not handling the situation and for letting Communism spread in America's backyard. The raiders were threatening the peace of the town and the sheriff was nowhere to be found.

II

The year 1979 proved tumultuous for American foreign policy interests and the effects impacted heavily on the Carter administration. In February another traditional ally of the United States was toppled in a revolution. The Shah of Persia was deposed amid a popular revolution and was welcomed by Carter as an exile in the United States. The new government - a theocratic regime ruled by the Ayatollah Khomeini - quickly

turned against America portraying it as the enemy; the latter's support of the Shah's rule and the protection granted him after he fled did not help. In November a mob stormed the US embassy in Teheran and took hostage the embassy staff and guards. The situation lasted for well over a year during which all diplomatic efforts of the Carter administration failed, as well as a military rescue operation. The international embarrassment was only surpassed by the domestic feeling of impotence. To make matters worse Iranian oil production was disordered and exports suffered. The decrease in the global supply of oil triggered a new energy crisis emulating that of 1973, and the effects were particularly felt in the United States and the West, both heavily dependent on oil.

In December of 1979 the Soviet Union intervened in the Afghan civil war, effectively invading the country. In a show of American resolve Carter responded by boycotting the 1980 Olympics in Moscow and cancelling the sale of grain to the Soviet Union. Although the second had a serious impact on the strained Russian economy, the general feeling of impotence was aggravated. Carter looked weak and hesitant. The Central Asian Great Game was retaken, this time with the United States in the previous role played by the British Empire. The geopolitical implications were momentous; Russia's search for warm water ports in Asia could lead to control of the Eurasian land mass. The occupation of the region would augment its influence, power, and profits as well as acting as a facilitator for an invasion of the Indian subcontinent and beyond. But it also meant that the Communist threat was about to break free from the containment ring that US diplomacy had erected since the start of the Cold War to stop the Soviet Union. With the loss of Iran and its oilfields to the Islamic regime of the Ayatollahs and Central America on the verge of revolution, the overall geostrategic consequences could effect a global isolation of the United States. Its Western European allies would succumb, unable or unwilling to shoulder the dangers of fighting back against the rising tide. Instead of organising the world according to its values and economic preferences, America would be left to fight alone for its survival.

Among conservatives and Cold War warriors infused with the moral urgency to defeat Communism, détente was to blame for America's loss of control of foreign events. Carter's image was of no help either; he was perceived as too soft and more worried about human rights than with confronting the Soviet Union. At home he failed to rally the nation. Disillusionment with Carter was eventually given expression with the ballots cast in the 1980 election but had begun to seep from within his own

administration. His speechwriter, James Fallows, expressed his disappointment with the President in an essay published in 1979 which pinpointed several of Carter's limitations. Although the wider public liked the man, James Fallows identified the problem with the leader. "He thinks he 'leads' by choosing the correct policy; but he fails to project a vision larger than the problem he is tackling at the moment." This lack of vision Fallows attributes to a weakness in the President's reasoning. "I came to think that Carter believes fifty things, but no one thing. He holds explicit, thorough positions on every issue under the sun, but he has no large view of the relations between them, no line indicating which goals (reducing unemployment? human rights?) will take precedence over which (inflation control? a SALT treaty?) when the goals conflict. Spelling out these choices makes the difference between a position and a philosophy, but it is an act foreign to Carter's mind." Like any good academic he could see all sides to a question and admit to the rationality of each without making a decision for any. "He is a smart man but not an intellectual in the sense of liking the play of ideas, of pushing concepts to their limits to examine their implications. Values that others would find contradictory complement one another in his mind."⁶⁴¹ A peace-making administration nature was as natural as his conciliatory mind. Unable to cut across the aisle, to divide the world and takes sides, he was the President that tried to please everybody.

Fallows goes on to mention one example that addresses the core of America's idealism and the tension within. "During the campaign, he used to say that our nation was the first to provide 'complete compatibility' between liberty and equality. This pained me more than anything else he said. I sent him notes and told him in person that these two terms were like city and country, heaven and hell: the tensions between them shape much of American society. But Carter continued to make the same statement, and I realized it was not because he was vulgarizing his ideas for the crowd, but because he genuinely believed what he said."⁶⁴² In his mind the coalescing of those two fundamentals made perfect sense because he could not see them as opposites even when their implications were pushed to their limit. In trying to be all things to all people he pleased no-one. There was no choosing sides and arguing its merits over another position, there was no passion to inspire. Watching Carter acting imperturbable and

⁶⁴¹ James Fallows, "The Passionless Presidency – The Trouble With Jimmy Carter's Administration." *The Atlantic*, May 1979. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1979/05/the-passionless-presidency/308516/>, (accessed October 27, 2014).

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*

detached, the electorate became detached in its turn, alienated from a President that failed to lead and enthuse.

And the nation needed both direction, commitment and a cause. The late 1970's America was immersed in economic and social problems. Besides stagflation and energetic vulnerability the country was flagellated with deindustrialisation of traditional manufacturing and engineering heartlands and the consequent urban decay of cities that relied on industry as their main economic sector. Unemployment and crime filled the void in what had been thriving communities. Notwithstanding some domestic successes, particularly the rebalancing of the constitutional system and its shared power structure, the Carter administration also had to contend with a fractured society. Despite the Civil Rights era and its advances, racial relations were still far from ideal. Legislation of the period that addressed the problem of discrimination gave credence to the law of unintended consequences. School segregation, the original focus of *Brown v. Board of Education*, continued to be the stage where America's social prejudices and fears were bitterly performed. Although the law did not impose racial quotas, "By 1979, it was estimated that 1,505 American school districts educating more than 12 million students were operating under orders to achieve better racial balance. These orders affected nearly 30 percent of all public school children."⁶⁴³

One method used particularly in the North of the country was to implement bus services to pick children from neighbourhoods with greater racial diversity. Formerly the preserve of white middle-class families, busing forced them to share their schools with greater numbers of children from minorities. Some families moved to the predominantly white suburban areas abandoning the cities, thus further contributing to urban decay thanks to the loss of fiscal revenue from wealthier ranks. White flight from urban centres complemented the suburban phenomenon and indeed accelerated it. The Supreme Court ruling of 1974 in *Milliken v. Bradley* gave judicial validation to the flight of prosperous white middle-class families from urban public schools. "In Boston, the number of white students in the public schools dropped from 45,000 in 1974 to roughly 16,000 by 1987."⁶⁴⁴ One example of a singularity that was becoming commonplace in the more affluent liberal districts of America.

⁶⁴³ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant – The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 21.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

The separation of the races was compounded with resentment towards programmes like affirmative action. These sought to promote social mobility but amounted to racial quotas and fostered a new source of anger that further poisoned the debate and did little to bridge the social and economic gap. From universities the practice extended to the job market. Critics complained of reverse discrimination and some beneficiaries talked of stigmatisation for feeling that their place in college or at the company they worked for was undeserved in the eyes of their colleagues. The social atmosphere was heavy with accusations and distrust, with liberals that defended the programmes denounced as elitist, 'limousine liberals' that sent their children to exclusive private schools while attacking working class whites as racist for opposing school integration and affirmative action.

Carter failed in his attempt to heal the nation's wounds. Despite his best wishes the nation remained deeply divided and embittered. Weakened by a lack of confidence stemming from a faltering economy and diminishing international standing, the United States wanted above all to believe again. Since 1963 the nation had gone through the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy; the Vietnam War; Watergate and Nixon. Trust in the unique values of the country and the constitutional system were at a low, but politicians and Washington D.C. were regarded as the worst of what the country had to offer: turnout at the 1976 elections was the lowest in a generation. Carter's conciliatory course, trying to steer a middle path that would please everyone eventually left him alone between disgruntled factions that mostly just wanted to escape from the peatbog America had become. Cynicism stalked the land, and people doubted that the good days would ever return.

Leadership is about pointing the way, making choices, risking being divisive but making sure that people have a clear path before them. But the mood of the nation must coincide with what the prospective candidate has to offer. The 1980 presidential election introduced a candidate that was both in tune with the electorate's distrust of government as well as with its desire to escape the present situation. The weary nation longed for a return to more innocent days, a yearning to leave behind all the scepticism and disappointment. A sort of homecoming after a long journey that had taken the nation from Dallas to Memphis, from Vietnam to Iran where the American hostages still waited for their own return home. The man that tapped into that tempestuous current of feeling was also one of the most disruptive, a man with clear ideas about the world and

about what he wanted to achieve. For him there was no indecisive middle ground, no world-weariness and no doubts regarding the meaning of America. Time had come for the nation to make choices.

After his career as a Hollywood actor, Ronald Reagan captured the nation's political attention in the 1964 presidential elections. Barry Goldwater had decided to run that year for President "because I have not heard from any announced Republican candidate a declaration of conscience or of political position that could possibly offer to the American people a clear choice in the next presidential election." In his candidacy announcement he stated that his determination was to offer that choice. The country could not afford to keep postponing decisions that were vital, that struck at its very identity and purpose. "We must decide what sort of people we are and what sort of world we want - now and for our children. My candidacy is pledged to a victory for principle and to presenting an opportunity for the American people to choose. Let there be a choice - right now and in clear, understandable terms."⁶⁴⁵ Despite his loss Barry Goldwater did indeed stir the murky waters of the post-war political consensus. But he was much too abrasive and rational.

Ronald Reagan simplified the terms of the choice. Democrats working to elect Lyndon Johnson centred the election on the themes of peace and prosperity, claiming that America had never had it so good. Speaking on a televised broadcast before a live audience, Reagan re-centred the debate. "This is the issue of this election: whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American Revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capitol can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves."⁶⁴⁶ Reagan's speech verbalised the purpose and ideas of the new conservative movement that was to take the Republican Party by storm. This new conservative disposition, forceful in its defence of early America's ideal of individual freedom, was determined to reverse the Progressive wave that had been in control of the country and that they considered had not only failed in their humanitarian motives but endangered liberty. As Reagan put it, "if government planning and welfare had the answer - and they've had almost 30 years of it - shouldn't we expect government to read the score to us once in a while? Shouldn't they be telling

⁶⁴⁵ Barry Goldwater, "Senator Barry Goldwater 1964 Candidacy Announcement," January 3, 1964. <http://www.4president.org/speeches/barrygoldwater1964announcement.htm>, (accessed October 31, 2014).

⁶⁴⁶ Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing," October 27, 1964. Heritage Foundation Primary Sources. <http://www.heritage.org/initiatives/first-principles/primary-sources/a-time-for-choosing-ronald-reagan-enters-the-political-stage>, (accessed October 31, 2014).

us about the decline each year in the number of people needing help? The reduction in the need for public housing?”⁶⁴⁷ But the opposite was happening and liberals in government now talked of the need for more social and welfare programmes to end poverty. Lyndon Johnson had even announced a grand war on poverty to be fought alongside the one in Vietnam.

In the campaign trail Lyndon Johnson gave his audiences a review of his new ideas. Almost 30 years after the New Deal, LBJ was publicising a vast new package of social and economic plans; as he said, “must get on with our work because there is so much to do.” He was envisioning the Great Society, the brainchild of his Progressive belief that government experts could engineer a society that was more just and egalitarian. Talking in Pittsburgh the Democratic candidate outlined his motives. “The Great Society is when America’s promise and her practice come together. The Great Society just isn’t a dream of mine. It is as real as tomorrow, and it is yours for the working at it... we set our sights high, higher than we expect to get, at least higher than we expect to get right away, for we know that all we need to do in this country is to decide to do it. We’re as big as our ideas. We’re as strong as our purposes. So here is the Great Society. It’s the time - and it’s going to be soon - when nobody in this country is poor.” And he continued, painting the future in bright colours, offering his vision of a social paradise about to unfold in America. “It’s going to be the time when every older man and woman has not just full social security, but it has meaning and it has purpose, and it has pleasure. It’s going to be the time, as I said, when we have a job for everyone who is willing to work, and he is going to be paid a decent wage. It’s the time when every false distinction - of what your race is, or your creed is, or your sex, or how you spell your name, or where your folks came from, or how you pray – it’s going to be a time when none of that makes any difference.” It was a sight to be seen, this coarse, unreliable man letting himself get carried away by his own words and promises of Eden on Earth. “Yes, under the Great Society, they want me to spell it out so I am just going to give you a little preview of it tonight. It’s the time when every slum is gone from every city in America, and America is beautiful. It’s the time when man gains full dominion under God over his own destiny. It’s the time of peace on earth and good will

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

among men. The place is here and the time is now.”⁶⁴⁸ But in his speech - the same day LBJ delivered his - Reagan made use of his typical good-natured charm to deconstruct the war on poverty. After so many years of liberal welfare how could the President say that poverty was still to be conquered? What had gone wrong thus far?

But now we're told that 9.3 million families in this country are poverty-stricken on the basis of earning less than 3,000 dollars a year. Welfare spending is 10 times greater than in the dark depths of the Depression. We're spending 45 billion dollars on welfare. Now do a little arithmetic, and you'll find that if we divided the 45 billion dollars up equally among those 9 million poor families, we'd be able to give each family 4,600 dollars a year. And this added to their present income should eliminate poverty. Direct aid to the poor, however, is only running only about 600 dollars per family. It would seem that someplace there must be some overhead.⁶⁴⁹

As Lyndon Johnson praised the merits and promises of egalitarianism, Reagan attacked them as expensive and wasteful. But his point was primarily the Progressive idea that chosen leaders, men of talent and expertise in Herbert Croly's words, knew the answer to common people's daily problems. This entailed a disparaging view of people - unable to decide what is best for them and therefore undependable - and thus the need for greater government intervention in the affairs of people. The latter was anathema to conservative purists and proponents of limited government.

In his address Reagan defined the two main political arguments that would follow him throughout his career. He railed not just against the "little intellectual elite" but also against the socialised view of people as a herd to be steered at will. The dangers of unbound government and protection of individualism would be his two pillars, and a Jeffersonian interpretation of the Constitution his tool of rational validity. The first was a dangerous necessity, following Thomas Paine's description, and the freedom of the individual the goal of the Constitution in its enumeration of the limited powers of the first. Hence his reaction against those who attacked the Constitution and the American

⁶⁴⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at the Civic Center Arena in Pittsburgh," October 27, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26674>, (accessed November 3, 2014).

⁶⁴⁹ Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing," October 27, 1964. Heritage Foundation Primary Sources. <http://www.heritage.org/initiatives/first-principles/primary-sources/a-time-for-choosing-ronald-reagan-enters-the-political-stage>, (accessed October 31, 2014).

system of government claiming they were inadequate for modern needs and an impediment for the betterment of society. “Senator Fulbright has said at Stanford University that the Constitution is outmoded. He referred to the President as ‘moral teacher and our leader,’ and he says he is ‘hobbled in his task by the restrictions of power imposed on him by this antiquated document.’ He must ‘be freed,’ so that he ‘can do for us’ what he knows ‘is best.’ And Senator Clark of Pennsylvania, another articulate spokesman, defines liberalism as ‘meeting the material needs of the masses through the full power of centralized government.’”⁶⁵⁰

The language itself was monarchist and implied that people ought to wait to whatever the leader determined they should receive. Added to that was the dilution of the individual in the remarks and the suggestion that it was not as important as the whole. “Well, I, for one, resent it when a representative of the people refers to you and me, the free men and women of this country, as ‘the masses.’ This is a term we haven’t applied to ourselves in America.” America was the land where government served the people, not the other way around. Where the individual had primacy and priority over government. The term ‘masses’ implies a subservience to power, individuals as subjects rather than sovereigns. And this meant that government had the authority to override any particularisms that opposed its generalisation and regulatory oversight in search of the common good. “But beyond that, ‘the full power of centralized government’ - this was the very thing the Founding Fathers sought to minimize. They knew that governments don’t control things. A government can’t control the economy without controlling people. And they know when a government sets out to do that, it must use force and coercion to achieve its purpose.”⁶⁵¹

Ronald Reagan had been a Democrat before switching to the Republican Party, in 1962. The reason for his change is the same underlying his 1964 speech, the defence of individual freedom. He would famously explain that his values had always been the same but those of the Democratic Party had changed and, therefore, he had not left the Democratic Party, the Party had left him.⁶⁵² In his memoirs he recounts how the Depression and his father influenced him toward the Democratic Party and he quotes Thomas Jefferson as presenting the values he adhered to and that drove him to join the

⁶⁵⁰ Ronald Reagan, “A Time for Choosing,” October 27, 1964. Heritage Foundation Primary Sources. <http://www.heritage.org/initiatives/first-principles/primary-sources/a-time-for-choosing-ronald-reagan-enters-the-political-stage>, (accessed October 31, 2014).

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² The line “I didn’t leave the Democratic Party, the party left me” was used by Ronald Reagan in several speeches throughout his political career.

Party. “Democrats consider the people the safest depository of power in the last resort; they cherish them, therefore, and wish to leave in them all the powers to the exercise of which they are competent... the equal rights of every man and the happiness of every individual are now acknowledged to be the only legitimate objects of government.” He continues quoting from Jefferson and his argument that the small government is the best government and by restating that the Democratic Party changed in the 1930’s. “But during the depression, the Democrats began to repudiate many of these principles while creating a government that grew ever larger and increasingly demanded the right to regulate and plan the social and economic life of the country and move into arenas best left to private enterprise.”⁶⁵³ Reagan’s belief in individual freedom had not changed; the Democratic Party had drifted away from limited government as the best protection of individualism toward a centralising perspective. The two would not meet again.

Like others in the fringe he refused to follow the consensus that dominated the political landscape in the 1950’s and early 1960’s and which many Republicans accepted as inevitable. Regarded as an extremist in his positions, Reagan took to heart Goldwater’s quote that extremism in defence of liberty is no vice. He was no moderate in his political views and would countenance no middle course in his aim to uphold liberty. Following the Republican defeat in the 1974 midterm elections he opposed calls from moderates to widen the party’s electoral base. These moderates within the GOP feared that the ideological positions of the party were alienating the voters, to which Reagan denounced that “what they meant was to fuzz up and blur even more the differences between ourselves and our opponents.” The people, he argued, ached for choice: “Our people look for a cause to believe in. Is it a third party we need, or is it a new and revitalized second party, raising a banner of no pale pastels, but bold colors which make it unmistakably clear where we stand on all of the issues troubling the people?” Against those who called for a move towards the centre Reagan accused them of having made their peace with big government and its interference in people’s lives. The solution was to present clear alternatives, to demarcate the Party from the modern bureaucratic State and offer the electorate solutions that did not try to emulate the Democrats. “A political party cannot be all things to all people. It must represent certain fundamental beliefs which must not be compromised to political expediency, or simply to swell its numbers. I do not believe I have proposed anything that is contrary to what

⁶⁵³ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (London and Sidney: Hutchinson, 1990), 119.

has been considered Republican principle. It is at the same time the very basis of conservatism. It is time to reassert that principle and raise it to full view. And if there are those who cannot subscribe to these principles, then let them go their way.”⁶⁵⁴ Reagan and his band of followers would stand their ground and fight the engrossing central government. Events and the weariness of the nation were pushing the country towards his philosophy and the defence of traditional American values.

III

In his candidacy announcement Barry Goldwater had pledged that “I will not change my beliefs to win votes. I will offer a choice, not an echo. This will not be an engagement of personalities. It will be an engagement of principles.”⁶⁵⁵ Goldwater was trounced in the 1964 contest, his abrasive personality and off remarks costing him the election. But Reagan had both the principles and the personality. Reagan’s capacity to capture in a short sentence the mood of the audience and the issue of the moment to drive home his argument are well-known. Likewise, his captivating and smiling personality both worked for him. In 1970’s grey America, beset by industrial decay and urban crime, Carter’s uncertain gloominess and his lack of brightness were overpowered by his opponent’s telegenic optimism.

His cheerfulness and easy humour, which he was never afraid to make us of even during high-level political meetings and conferences, belied his childhood years in Illinois, the son of an alcoholic Irish Catholic father and a devoutly religious mother. Under the influence of his mother Reagan adopted her religious faith, opting to follow her into the Disciples of Christ Protestant church rather than his father’s allegiance to Rome. Financial difficulties during the Depression forced the family to relocate several times to where his father could find work. Nonetheless, despite starting working at a young age both Reagan and his older brother attended a local denominational college, from where he moved on to work in radio. As a baseball announcer at a radio station in Des Moines, Iowa, he became known for his vivid accounts of games, made more striking given that he was not present at the stadium, the reports of the games in

⁶⁵⁴ Ronald, Reagan, “Let Them Go Their Way,” March 1, 1975.

http://reagan2020.us/speeches/Let_Them_Go_Their_Way.asp, (accessed November 5, 2014).

⁶⁵⁵ Barry Goldwater, “Senator Barry Goldwater 1964 Candidacy Announcement,” January 3, 1964. <http://www.4president.org/speeches/barrygoldwater1964announcement.htm>, (accessed October 31, 2014).

progress received via telegraph and passed on to him in little pieces of paper. With those in hand he recreated events, painting an imaginary game that resembled the real one in the score sheet only. His ability to capture the intensity of the games without witnessing the action became something of a legend and spurred his storytelling prowess. One episode tested him particularly, one that he retold many times.

During one such game the wire went dead. Since his radio station was not the only one transmitting the game Reagan was afraid that his listeners would switch to a competitor. “So, I decided to let Jurgens [the batter] foul off the pitch, figuring Western Union would soon fix the problem. To fill in some time, I described a couple of kids in the stands fighting over the foul ball.” However, the signal still kept silent. There were no reports coming from the game and he decided to have the batter hit some more foul balls while he waited for the wire to jump back to life. “By then I was in much too deep to admit the wire was dead, so I continued to let Jurgens foul Dean’s pitches, and his string of foul balls went on for almost seven minutes.” As it happened, the batter was eliminated on the first ball pitched. Reagan’s account, however, had placed the player on the verge of a new record. “For days, people stopped me on the street and asked if Jurgens had set a record for foul balls. I’d just say ‘Yeah, he was there for a long time.’ I never admitted a thing.”⁶⁵⁶

As Garry Wills argues, Reagan’s time as radio announcer honed his skills both as a creator of credible narratives and at being attuned to his audiences’ needs.⁶⁵⁷ Skills that would prove decisive in his future career and help characterise him as a master political performer. Unlike what would have been expected his radio listeners did not mind that Reagan gave them an imaginary account of the game. They actually preferred it. “They knew he was not there. They gloried in the fact. His skill at ‘visualizing’ was praised in the papers. People were invited to the Crystal Palace at the Iowa Fair Grounds to watch him as he invented the game from scraps of paper.”⁶⁵⁸ This in itself would rate as just an anecdote but in his analysis of Reagan’s appeal to the American people, Wills sees in it the reason behind the accord between the two. The relationship is founded on the willingness to believe what Reagan has to offer. “There was a complicity in make-believe. What Reagan feared when the line went dead was, at one level, a simple matter of professional pride... But the deeper concern was for what gave

⁶⁵⁶ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (London and Sidney: Hutchinson, 1990), 73.

⁶⁵⁷ Garry Wills, *Reagan’s America – Innocents at Home* (London: William Heineman, 1988), 111.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

rise to those skills, the demand for illusion in the first place. If Reagan had been forced to admit (or subtly to convey) the fact that the line had gone dead, he would have broken the continuity of pretense.”⁶⁵⁹ So both sides knew that when addressing the audiences Reagan gave them a reality that was rooted to the truth but that was also a visualisation of that reality, one that avoided embarrassing contradictions or flaws. It was an idealised, finished version of reality.

In his political career that willingness for pretence worked to even greater effect. Aware of the nostalgia felt by the nation, of the longing for a return to simpler days, escaping from the present pessimism and disillusionment, Reagan appropriated as his message a return to innocence. He reconciled Americans with their past making the nation believe that it was still a country of hope, of individual independence and courage, without guile or malice. Reagan himself embarked in this without malice. His success comes from the fact that he believed that narrative; he was credible because he was sincere in his protestations of American exceptionalism. “With Reagan, the perfection of the pretense lies in the fact that he does not know he is pretending. He believes the individualist myths that help him play his communal role. He is the sincerest claimant to a heritage that never existed, a perfect blend of an authentic America he grew up in and of that America’s own fables about its past.”⁶⁶⁰ The pioneering spirit of the early settlers and the desire for freedom populate his imagination as does the image of the democratic and egalitarian West that Frederick Jackson Turner popularised. After Vietnam and Watergate, Americans had a need to believe again and Reagan offered a polished version of the country for those who could not come to terms with the recent past. As Wills remarks, “the achievement most people put first in Reagan’s presidency is that he made Americans feel good about themselves again. What can be bad about feeling good?” The country was ready to accept his stories because they caused no harm, quite the contrary. They were uplifting, educational and patriotic. Love of country became fashionable again; America was again the land of the free, home of the brave.

Thus Ronald Reagan fulfilled the most important role the modern President has to perform: that of leader and comforter. Americans could stop censuring themselves as Carter had done. They were not to blame for they were innocent; the fault lay somewhere else. He also encouraged the nation to action and regeneration, reawakening

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 94.

the sleeping energies that had been slumbering during the 1970's and which Carter failed to revive. Here was a man embodying the nation's myths about the American Hero; not just because he had played the part in Hollywood during his acting career but because he truly believed in the myth of the lone cowboy dispensing justice and opening the West to civilisation. His fascination with freedom saturated his political message and he profited from the Democrats' focus on social and economic equality to set himself as the defender of liberty. "Freedom,' indeed, became the watchword of the Reagan Revolution, and in his public appearances and state papers, Reagan used the word more often than any other president before or since. Reagan's years in office completed the process by which freedom, having been progressively abandoned by liberals and the left, became fully identified with conservative goals and values."⁶⁶¹ Reagan picked up the discarded badge and used it to adorn his coat of arms in a struggle which he saw as the fulfilment of America's destiny.

Unlike Thomas Jefferson's Empire of Liberty, Reagan's vision of the special role of America rested on a religious duty rather than an altruistic Enlightenment understanding of the responsibility to help spread freedom around the world. He often remarked about the country's destiny to fulfil a Higher Mission and America as the last best hope of mankind. "You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We'll preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we'll sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness."⁶⁶² One of his better known passages evokes the image of the revelation of America as a new beginning, the arrival of the Pilgrims and the vision of the continent as the land of God for the benefit of the righteous. In 1974 he quoted John Winthrop and his speech of encouragement *A Modell of Christian Charity* of 1630, given aboard the ship that brought the Pilgrims to the New World. "We will be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world."⁶⁶³ English in their loyalties and their conception of the world despite their escape from religious oppression in their homeland, the Pilgrims were unwittingly initiating God's Great Plan. For Reagan, the Revolution and Independence in 1776 were

⁶⁶¹ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London and Oxford: Picador, 1999), 320 – 321.

⁶⁶² Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing," October 27, 1964. Heritage Foundation Primary Sources. <http://www.heritage.org/initiatives/first-principles/primary-sources/a-time-for-choosing-ronald-reagan-enters-the-political-stage>, (accessed October 31, 2014).

⁶⁶³ Ronald, Reagan, "We Will Be a City Upon a Hill," January 25, 1974. First Conservative Political Action Conference. http://reagan2020.us/speeches/City_Upon_A_Hill.asp, (accessed November 7, 2014).

the culmination of the march of ideas of freedom and democracy and the birth of the United States had a meaning that reached beyond symbolism. Following in the steps of Thomas Paine he believed that America could start the world anew; it had a duty to uphold and lead the fight for liberty everywhere, for the Declaration of Independence was not just that of the United States but of all mankind. “We cannot escape our destiny, nor should we try to do so. The leadership of the free world was thrust upon us two centuries ago in that little hall of Philadelphia. In the days following World War II, when the economic strength and power of America was all that stood between the world and the return to the dark ages, Pope Pius XII said, ‘The American people have a great genius for splendid and unselfish actions. Into the hands of America God has placed the destinies of an afflicted mankind.’ We are indeed, and we are today, the last best hope of man on earth.”⁶⁶⁴ Sitting atop its hill of moral righteousness America would shine like a fiery beacon guiding mankind, unique among the nations of the world.

Ronald Reagan had a black-and-white idea of freedom and its preservation, a philosophical absolute over which people had to take sides. Neutrality was not an option, one had to be for or against it. He charged his speeches with a moral urgency portraying a fight between light and dark. In his worldview there were no ambiguities and America always stood for the right things against the threat of totalitarianism. The elections of 1964 were a matter that went further than divergent viewpoints about America’s main ideals: it was a contest that pitted not just Republicans versus Democrats but the friends of liberty against a slow slide towards despotism. “You and I are told increasingly we have to choose between a left or right. Well I’d like to suggest there is no such thing as a left or right. There’s only an up or down: up, man’s old - old-aged dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order, or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism.”⁶⁶⁵ After defeating the Kaiser’s imperialism and Nazism, Communism was next in America’s list of monsters to defeat.

Reagan’s worldview was akin to the cinematic western mythology of his Hollywood days - the ‘good guys’ in white hats against the ‘bad guys’ in black hats – with a touch of spiritual analogy for context. There were no doubts in his mind about who played the two roles in the much bigger stage of world politics. The difference between the two systems was like the one separating light from dark, good from evil.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ Ronald Reagan, “A Time for Choosing,” October 27, 1964. Heritage Foundation Primary Sources. <http://www.heritage.org/initiatives/first-principles/primary-sources/a-time-for-choosing-ronald-reagan-enters-the-political-stage>, (accessed October 31, 2014).

If a visitor from another planet were to approach earth, and if this planet showed free nations in light and unfree nations in darkness, the pitifully small beacons of light would make him wonder what was hidden in that terrifying, enormous blackness. We know what is hidden: Gulag. Torture. Families - and human beings - broken apart. No free press, no freedom of religion. The ancient forms of tyranny revived and made even more hideous and strong through what Winston Churchill once called 'a perverted science.' Men rotting for years in solitary confinement because they have different political and economic beliefs, solitary confinement that drives the fortunate ones insane and makes the survivors wish for death.⁶⁶⁶

In a curious, perhaps unsuspecting summoning of Joseph Conrad he attributes the Soviet Union the role of the colonialist superpower making use of technological and industrial advances to further its exploitation of both Nature and Man. Industrialism and the machine were wreaking havoc upon human nature, lured by the perspective of power under the respectable cover of bringing salvation to the dependent peoples. The effects are bleak both for conquered and conquerors. "Only now and then do we in the West hear a voice from out of that darkness. Then there is silence - the silence of human slavery. There is no more terrifying sound in human experience, with one possible exception. Look at that map again. The very heart of the darkness is the Soviet Union and from that heart comes a different sound. It is the whirring sound of machinery and the whisper of the computer technology we ourselves have sold them. It is the sound of building, building of the strongest military machine ever devised by man."⁶⁶⁷ The race for industrial progress is twisted into a tool of terror, shaped into an arms race with the power to destroy all of humanity just as in *Heart of Darkness* the ultimate horror is the realisation that the monster in the mirror is Man contemplating himself. One cannot but help think that Francis Ford Coppola was answering Reagan with his movie *Apocalypse Now*, of 1979, showing how the United States could also embark in an imperialistic aberration with the napalm carpet bombings and the uncritical killing via air strikes causing devastating moral effects on both sides of the conflict. The military arsenals of both superpowers made no ethical judgements: both were equally capable of destroying

⁶⁶⁶ Ronald Reagan, "The New Republican Party," February 6, 1977. 4th Annual CPAC Convention. http://reagan2020.us/speeches/The_New_Republican_Party.asp, (accessed November 6, 2014).

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

the world. But Reagan did not blink nor did he doubt. Covered in his veil of childlike innocence he managed to put all that behind: the foul intentions were on the other side. “Our military strategy is designed to hopefully prevent a war. Theirs is designed to win one.”⁶⁶⁸

Barry Goldwater’s defeat became a cautionary tale about the dangers of following an ideologically pure programme. But this fear was dismantled with Reagan’s victory in 1980 - he had already lost twice in his bid to become Republican presidential candidate in 1968 and in 1976 - and that of his clear-cut conservative programme proposals to reduce regulation and limiting government. Conservatives to the right of the Republican Party exulted with his election and many that had worked hard for Goldwater in 1964 felt vindicated at last: Goldwater’s ideas and vision for America had eventually won the country’s favour, although it had taken some time. “We - 27,178,188 of us - who voted for him in 1964 believe he won, it just took 16 years to count the votes... In 1980 Goldwater’s message was given wings by Reagan’s mellifluous voice, which had first been heard by a broad political audience in October 1964 in a nationally telecast speech for Goldwater.”⁶⁶⁹ As George Will remarks in the same article, despite all the promises and rage, dissent on the Left eventually succumbed to a sulking retreat into college campuses, closing in on itself. Richard Rorty attacked this ‘spectatorial’ Left which contributed nothing to the battle of ideas, no alternatives and no projects to speak of, preferring to hide behind high theory and intellectual concepts that baffle and alienate the common Man.⁶⁷⁰ On the other hand, the rebellion on the Right ultimately rose to power. Reagan’s victory was the victory of the fringes of the Republican Party, not just Barry Goldwater but Milton Friedman – he became Reagan’s adviser for economic matters – and even Ayn Rand, who had been a supporter of Goldwater and who could find some solace in Reagan’s defence of individualism.

This conservative wave – which had taken 16 years to form - swelled from many disparate sources but had in common a disillusionment with big government and big policies that promised to solve all and did nothing of the sort, with the political scandals and the economic meltdown of a regulated economy. It is true that some of Reagan’s

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ George F. Will, “The Cheerful Malcontent.” *The Washington Post*, May 31, 1998. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/may98/will31.htm>, (accessed, October 31, 2014).

⁶⁷⁰ See Richard Rorty, *Achieving our Country – Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998).

policies such as tax cuts and the abridgement of government's economic regulation had been attempted by Carter, but the latter's image problem had failed him and failed his policies. It was for Reagan to successfully implement them. Hence it is that even a Democrat as Barack Obama points to Ronald Reagan as a revolutionary and transformational president. He is right in understanding that Reagan correctly interpreted the moment of the nation and embodied the wishes of the people. Campaigning for the Democratic nomination in 2008, Barack Obama interpreted how Reagan changed the nation's trajectory. "I think Ronald Reagan changed the trajectory of America in a way that Richard Nixon did not and in a way that Bill Clinton did not. He put us on a fundamentally different path because the country was ready for it. I think they felt like with all the excesses of the 1960s and 1970s and government had grown and grown but there wasn't much sense of accountability in terms of how it was operating. I think that people... he just tapped into what people were already feeling, which was we want clarity, we want optimism, we want a return to that sense of dynamism and entrepreneurship that had been missing."⁶⁷¹

Government had become too big and unaccountable. The Progressive policies of Lyndon Johnson in particular had created a bureaucratic machine that could rival the one FDR created during the Depression. The Great Society failed to move forward, bogged down in paperwork, promoting taxes and regulations rather than social justice. The long post-war economic boom and political consensus had reached its end in the Sixties and was buried in the Seventies. Time was now for questioning government and look for a new model that would replace the old one. Reagan's merit arises from his re-shaping of the meaning of America, looking back to the source, to the foundational years and which appealed to both Republicans and Democrats. In a time when the country was shedding the previous social and political arrangements, nostalgia about the romanticised early years of the Republic ensured the majority's loyalty. Reagan profited from this idealistic vision of the past that filled the gap in the 1970's; the future he offered to America was anchored in the past. In this, he was truly transformational.

Despite his ideological commitment and the admiration he elicited, his political consistency was shaky at first and despite his electoral successes he managed to displease dedicated conservatives. His early Democratic days he explained away as we

⁶⁷¹ Barack Obama, "Interview with George Stephanopoulos of ABC News," January 27, 2008. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=77313>, (accessed November 17, 2014).

have seen by attributing to the Party a change which he could not follow. He never made a secret of his admiration for FDR, and he tried to emulate him in creating a close relationship with the people by making full use of the media. Reagan's family was saved from hardship by the public works programmes spawned by the New Deal, his father having been employed in the bureaucratic system that orbited around it. As governor of California, Reagan increased taxes - a fact he justified as necessary in order to close the budget deficit and which liberals made a point of mentioning as often as possible. He also signed into law a bill liberalising abortion and a no-fault divorce law. The first he came to regret and attribute to political inexperience, having taken place in the first months of his governorship. Both flew in the face of conservative and religious views on life and marriage.

There was a religious revival during the late 1970's which Reagan also secured on his way to the presidency despite his actions during his governorship. This was an important addition to the Reagan campaign, both in numbers as in activism but mainly because it was coveted by both parties as it had kept itself out of politics altogether. "Many had consistently refused to vote. To engage in political activity, they had believed, was to depart from the realm of the spirit and to soil themselves – and their churches – with the corruption of the secular world. Some of these devout Americans continued in the 1960s and 1970s to abjure political activity. But a series of events brought a wave of evangelical Protestant into organisations like the CWA [Concerned Women for America] and into the mainstream of American political life by the late 1970s."⁶⁷² Among these was the liberalism of the Supreme Court which had enabled the Rights' Revolution. The Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*, in 1973, which affirmed the right to abortion matched with others regarding prayer and Bible reading in public schools, and obscenity laws.

These decisions helped tip the religious movements towards political involvement and sparked a cultural war that lasted beyond Reagan's time in the White House. Alarmed at what they perceived as growing licentiousness in American society, the self-confident and increasingly self-aware religious Right mobilised to try and put a stop to it. In 1979 the movement organised politically as the Moral Majority, led by a Baptist preacher named Jerry Falwell. This was a major departure for the religious groups from their previous political absenteeism and one that became a veritable game-

⁶⁷² James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant – The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 135 – 136.

changer in American politics for decades to come. “In forming the Moral Majority in 1979, Falwell and his like-minded religious conservatives moved boldly into the partisan wars. This was a historic breakthrough that carried him beyond the single-issues battles in which he had previously participated. Falwell made it clear that the Moral Majority was a political, not a religious, organization, and that it was a broad conservative coalition open to people of all faiths.” The political views were summed by the leader as “pro-life, pro-family, pro-morality and pro-America,” and as Patterson remarks, “The Moral Majority, though relatively quiet concerning economic issues, was cool to labor unions, environmental causes, and social welfare programs, except for those that helped people who were sick, aged, or unemployed as the result of a depression.”⁶⁷³ With 50 million Americans claiming to be born-again Christians,⁶⁷⁴ this was an enticing electorate, one that no party could afford not to woo.

The resurgent religious movement, albeit not as powerful as a Great Awakening, was changing society but was far from being a homogenous group. So much so that there were doubts as to whether they would vote for Reagan or Jimmy Carter in 1980. First of all, Protestant groups were more active than Catholics, for instance, while the question of the separation of church and State was not so clearly defined with the latter. Protestants were adamant regarding the issue as they feared that Catholics - for whom attending church was a question of affirming their ethnic identity but not of submitting to the Vatican’s instructions - would benefit from federal support for their schools. But especially because Catholics tended to gravitate toward the Democratic Party as they occupied mostly blue-collar jobs and the Catholic social doctrine looked to workers as the natural recipients of its teachings. The Moral Majority was led by Protestants and looked to Protestants to fill its ranks; their relationship with Catholics and Jews was troubled despite efforts for closer cooperation.

Winning the support of this significant bloc of voters required politicking of the highest sort. Carter was a Southern Baptist, a confessed born-again Christian and as President had regularly called for a new morality in American politics and society. He was thus likely to perform well among the religious electorate. Perhaps because of this and his own poor record with the causes espoused by the Moral Majority, Reagan campaigned hard to charm it. Although Carter was not complacent in pursuit of the prize, Reagan was unabashed. Despite the divisions, evangelical religious groups tended

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 141.

to dominate the movement and their traditional values favoured a conservative outlook, and Reagan did not lose time in reminding them he shared their outlook. He hired a senior Moral Majority executive to help in his election campaign and presented himself at a non-partisan national religious meeting in Dallas, Texas. Before an audience of 15,000 evangelicals Reagan made it clear that he knew the gathering was not meant to sanction any candidate, but nonetheless made sure they knew he was the only candidate that had appeared at their reunion. “I know you can’t endorse me, but I want you to know that I endorse you.”⁶⁷⁵

This demonstration of political resourcefulness was invigorated by stressing the moral dimension of the Cold War. His portrayal of Communism as ungodly and therefore immoral appealed to conservatives who demanded a tougher stance in the conflict against the Soviet Union. Lambasting détente and stressing the urgency of defeating Communism, religious conservatives found Reagan’s rhetoric about America as the special nation destined to fulfil God’ Plan, heart-warming. Reagan would preserve this advantage throughout his presidency with further references about the evil nature of the Soviet regime. This was no mere opportunism. Reagan was a conservative as he had made clear throughout his political ascendancy in his numerous speeches. Opponents pointed to his belligerent talk which threatened an escalation with the Soviet Union and his political positions were regarded as outmoded, the product of resentment at the Progressive re-shaping of the country in the last decades. He made no pretence of being anything other than a conservative, positioned to the right of the Republican Party. Because of this, he was confronted with a splinter candidacy from Republican Congressman John Anderson. Running as an independent, Anderson attracted middle-of-the-road Republican voters who viewed Reagan as leaning too much to the right of the Party.

As Patterson notes, by the time the 1980 election arrived Reagan “scarcely paused to rethink his opinions. Knowing where he wanted to go, he steered a straight and usually predictable course, even if others, less set in their ways, perceived rocks and other hazards in his path. Reagan’s stubborn certitude continued to appall his opponents, but it fortified an ideological consistency, as his supporters perceived it,

⁶⁷⁵ Quoted in Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies – The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York and London: The Free Press, 2001), 216.

which was to be a major source of his considerable political popularity.”⁶⁷⁶ Reagan believed that it was possible to return America to his preferred version of its past, a self-deception into which the Moral Majority also engaged with equal certitude and added self-righteousness. Both Ronald Reagan and the Protestant revival which the Moral Majority embodied stood for something that no longer existed. But one in which they passionately believed. The power of their proposals lay in their commitment to the truth of it. To Reagan, America was truly a special nation, God’s own country, set apart from the rest of the nations of the world to lead the charge for the betterment of mankind. It was the land of self-reliant people, capable of doing anything by themselves without help from government. For the emerging evangelical movement, Americans had always been deeply religious and respectful of God’s commandments and the proof rested with the power He had given America to be a force for good. It is true the Founding Fathers worried about religion in that it could interfere with government - hence the needed separation of the two - but did not look on religion as having to be abandoned, believing morals were fundamental to balance government and structure society. Reagan and the Moral Majority wanted to bring religion back to the heart of American society.

The coming together of different movements - the Silent Majority, the Moral Majority, the New Right intellectuals that backed Goldwater - coalesced into reinforcing not just the Republican Party but conservatism in America. The fundamental Protestant individualism of the Moral Majority paired with Reagan’s return to first principles in order to shape the new ones that would guide America into the future. But it also benefitted from former liberals, intellectuals mostly, who had become disillusioned with Lyndon Johnson’s Progressive policies. Having crossed the aisle to join the conservatives, they were derided as neoconservatives, or neocons for short. They brought with them the intellectual training and framework inherited from their New Left days and opposition to Stalinism’s infiltration of Liberal America. Although rejecting most of the proposals from their youth they retained a very assertive stance about the need to aggressively encourage democracy and freedom abroad. “Neoconservatives, in Irving Kristol’s famous definition, were ‘liberals mugged by reality.’ They were former leftists who came to share conclusions with conservatives, but whose rightward tilt seemed more practical, less motivated by crusading principle, closer to the mainstream

⁶⁷⁶ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant – The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 147.

of American political debate.”⁶⁷⁷ Their influence would be felt some years later, but their arrival at conservative shores signalled a new influx of energy and determination that sowed debate and ideas from which the Republican Party reaped a bountiful political harvest.

Collected within the GOP these several springs flooded the party with new plans that revitalised conservatives; Republicans were teeming with projects for America. As Patterson remarks, by 1980 “Liberals were becoming defensive. As Democratic senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York warned at the time, ‘Of a sudden the GOP has become a party of ideas.’”⁶⁷⁸ Reagan’s optimism and energy transformed this combination into a winning formula. What is more, as James Wilson pointed out, this was not the product of some blind hatred of Liberal and Progressive triumph. It was not due to some rejection of modern America, taking refuge in an escapist yearning for a return to the ‘good old days.’ Wilson wrote in the wake of Reagan’s victory for California governor warning that his victory was the beginning of a conservative ascendancy that would take over the nation. It was not merely the matching of fundamental Protestant individualism with hatred of big government and a hunger for moral values. Conservatives were proposing alternative routes for the future rather than just complain about the present and look to the past with nostalgia. “They are not ‘rootless’ or yearning for ‘small-town simplicity’ or profoundly irritated by all the hustle and bustle; they are acquiring security, education, living space, and a life style that is based in its day-to-day routine on gentility, courtesy, hospitality, virtue. Why, then, are they so discontent? It is not with their lot that they are discontent, it is with the lot of the nation. The very virtues they have and practice are, in their eyes, conspicuously absent from society as a whole.” Whilst liberals and political institutions insisted that these were matters of private conscience, conservatives insisted that they be reintroduced in the political debate. “Surveys I have taken, and others I have read, indicate that the single most widespread concern of middle-class Americans is over the ‘decay of values’ - evidenced by ‘crime in the streets,’ juvenile delinquency, public lewdness, and the like, but going much beyond these manifestations to include everything that suggests that people no longer act in accordance with decent values and

⁶⁷⁷ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies – The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York and London: The Free Press, 2001), 204.

⁶⁷⁸ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant – The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 133.

right reason.”⁶⁷⁹ The country needed to reform, an appeal also made by Carter but which had failed to energise conservatives thanks to his lacklustre performance. On the opposite pole, Reagan was the quintessence of confidence with his can-do attitude ensuring both his victory and that of those who wanted the country to set a new course for its future based on principle and virtue. Liberals would forever lament his legacy. “Reaganism would become America’s prevailing political culture. Ronald Reagan, that bone-chilling extremist, would become a venerated national father figure – the grinning, impossible-not-to-love undertaker burying the casket of liberal reform and 1960s public purpose. His ready smile and preternatural optimism would mock the malaise, the irony, and the foreboding that soaked through the Seventies America.”⁶⁸⁰

IV

Ronal Reagan was elected by a comfortable margin, even with John Anderson gaining some 7% of the vote. Reagan managed to attract many Democrats dissatisfied with Carter, winning some traditional Democratic strongholds. His victory dispelled fears that an outright ideological campaign could win. Gone were the days of the consensus and old musty proposals too afraid to rock the boat of American politics. The clash of ideas had produced a choice, a clarification. Entering the White House, he assured his electorate that the office would not temper him neither soften his political views. In an ideologically tinted speech he summarised in his Inaugural Address the many problems facing the country, from inflation to unemployment, and the moral weakness that affected the country’s self-confidence. With characteristic simplicity and using common-sense language, he accused the offender. “In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem. From time to time we’ve been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by, and of the people. Well, if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else?” To those who thought he might be embarking in light-hearted posturing, he announced his intention to undo decades of

⁶⁷⁹ James Q. Wilson, “A Guide to Reagan Country: The Political Culture of Southern California.” Commentary, May 1967. <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/a-guide-to-reagan-country-the-political-culture-of-southern-california>, (accessed November 26, 2014).

⁶⁸⁰ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies – The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York and London: The Free Press, 2001), 217.

generous government growth by liberals. “We are a nation that has a government - not the other way around. And this makes us special among the nations of the Earth. Our government has no power except that granted it by the people. It is time to check and reverse the growth of government, which shows signs of having grown beyond the consent of the governed.”⁶⁸¹

The remark about the consent of the governed as the litmus test for the actions of government was a familiar one and that his audience could easily understand. Thomas Jefferson had made use of it to affirm that the powers of government arise from the consent of the people and hence popular rebellion is justified whenever government steps outside its boundaries. For Reagan such a rebellion was justified as there were signs that Washington had grown beyond those boundaries without consent. According to Steven Hayward, “This was one of the few substantive references to the Declaration of Independence in modern presidential rhetoric, but this was not unique for Reagan. One analysis found that Reagan quoted the American Founders more often than his five predecessors combined. As President, Reagan made reaffirming the founding a central concern not only of his rhetoric, but also of many of his actions, especially in his appointments to the judiciary and in the high-profile public campaign, conducted chiefly by Attorney General Edwin Meese, on behalf of restoring the understanding of the ‘original intent’ of the Constitution.”⁶⁸² In his interpretation of original intent Reagan also expressed an old argument in favour of a rebalancing of powers between Washington and the States. “It is my intention to curb the size and influence of the Federal establishment and to demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the Federal Government and those reserved to the States or to the people. All of us need to be reminded that the Federal Government did not create the States; the States created the Federal Government.”⁶⁸³ This remark - which can be traced all the way back to the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1799 written by Thomas

⁶⁸¹ Ronald Reagan, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>, (accessed December 3, 2014).

⁶⁸² Steven F. Hayward, “Ronald Reagan: Conservative Statesman.” *Makers of American Political Thought Series #09*, June 4, 2013. The Heritage Foundation. <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/06/ronald-reagan-conservative-statesman>, (accessed June 12, 2014).

⁶⁸³ Ronald Reagan, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>, (accessed December 3, 2014).

Jefferson and James Madison – was the basis upon which Reagan would foster his devolution programme.

While Nixon, for example, wanted to cut inefficient and outsized bureaucracies, taking revenge on a civil service which he considered biased against him, Reagan looked to reduce the power of the central government and employ tax money more responsibly by returning some of it to the States. In his 1979 candidacy announcement, he warned his audience that “We must force the entire federal bureaucracy to live in the real world of reduced spending, streamlined function and accountability to the people it serves. We must review the function of the federal government to determine which of those are the proper province of levels of government closer to the people.” Again using language that echoed that of the Founding Fathers he went directly to the Constitution for support, making plain his Jeffersonian interpretation of the powers of government. “The 10th article of the Bill of Rights is explicit in pointing out that the federal government should do only those things specifically called for in the Constitution. All others shall remain with the states or the people. We haven’t been observing that 10th article of late. The federal government has taken on functions it was never intended to perform and which it does not perform well. There should be a planned, orderly transfer of such functions to states and communities and a transfer with them of the sources of taxation to pay for them.” Besides returning the Constitution to its original sense of balance, this strict constructionism would have a direct consequence. “The savings in administrative overhead would be considerable and certainly there would be increased efficiency and less bureaucracy.”⁶⁸⁴ This final appeal was in tune with his belief that government was the cause of the problems facing America.

Because the States are required by law to have a balanced budget, Reagan was confident they would be more cautious with their money. Also, operating closer to voters, these would carry a watchful vigilance of the way local legislatures spent their taxes. But he was also aiming at damaging liberal interests groups which operate rather less successfully at local level. Working better as lobbies close to the federal centres of power, Reagan hoped that giving more power to the States would stop liberals from influencing government money and its fiscal policy. The candidate was trying to strike a double blow against big government and its allies.

⁶⁸⁴ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks Announcing Candidacy for the Republican Presidential Nomination,” November 13, 1979. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=76116>, (accessed November 7, 2014).

But the question was whether the country was prepared for such a reversal of fundamental policies. Nixon had also proposed a measure of devolution to the States, but his problems blighted his programme and all was for nought. Reagan was less disposed to be encumbered by it by personal problems or collective doubts. In his inaugural, which he had written himself, he ended in a high note of optimism, typical of the man about to occupy the Oval Office. And yet, the country had been tested in unprecedented ways in the last decades with the Sixties' revolutions, the trauma of a murdered president and civil leaders, defeat in Vietnam, and Watergate. The 1970's ended on a low key, the country emotionally exhausted and seemingly aimless, politically wounded, weak internationally, having to deal with what looked like the sunset of its period of dominance: blinded by nuclear terror, stunned by Russian boldness and humiliation at Iranian hands. At home, moral upheaval paired with economic collapse. With the oil shock and deindustrialisation the country was losing the edge in heavy industries and manufacturing; with the rise in fuel prices, inflation ensued and was followed by unemployment as gates closed in auto, chemical and steel factories leaving millions out of a job and the economy in the doldrums. Stagflation was the new word to explain the double bind but to many it sounded more like flagellation. Collectively, Americans felt a big failure waiting to happen at any moment. Reagan was undaunted. Warning his fellow citizens of the sacrifices ahead before a return to normalcy, he concluded that they were neither daunting nor unique. They did require, however, "our best effort and our willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds, to believe that together with God's help we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us. And after all, why shouldn't we believe that? We are Americans."⁶⁸⁵ And Americans were God's chosen people.

For a born storyteller, the first months in office proved a treasure trove of happenings and events worthy of retelling. On the day of his swearing-in Iran released the 52 American hostages, ending their 444 days of captivity. Negotiations had been carried out by the Carter administration after a failed rescue attempt resulted in the death of 8 soldiers in the rescue team. The Shah, one of the bones of contention in the dispute, died in July and in September Iraq invaded Iran. Suddenly the Iranian anger

⁶⁸⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>, (accessed December 3, 2014).

towards the United States mollified, aware that American armaments and weaponry would be vital for survival against Saddam Hussein. In due course the Carter administration hammered out a deal with the leaders in Tehran but not quickly enough to change the course of the election. The release ended up coming as a present to the newly elected President, a symbol of changing fortunes. During the war between Iran and Iraq, America would sell weapons to both sides, bleeding the Iranians dry of both money and blood. The latter's recently unfrozen assets in US financial institutions were ultimately not enough to pay for the guns and ammunition needed to fight the enemy that was slaughtering the Iranian army with American weapons. Profit merged with revenge and blood would call for more blood in the Middle East.

Death stalked the joyful and confident President early on, though. In late March, barely 70 days after his inaugural, Reagan was the victim of an assassination attempt. One of the bullets fired at him lodged close to his heart and he was rushed to hospital. In his memories he recounts how fear took over him. "I realized I could hardly breathe. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get enough air. I was frightened and started to panic a little. I just was not able to inhale enough air." The whole episode would eventually showcase Reagan's spirit and the optimism and good-natured approach to problems that he wanted to instil. As he recalls, while he was lying semi-conscious waiting for surgery, he felt someone holding his hand, a "soft, feminine hand." It was not that of his wife, Nancy Reagan, so "It must have been the hand of a nurse kneeling very close to the gurney, but I couldn't see her. I started asking, "Who's holding my hand?... Who's holding my hand?" When I didn't hear any response I said, "Does Nancy know about us?"⁶⁸⁶

Reagan was fully aware of the nature of leadership the modern President is called to perform. He is to be not just the political leader but has to lead the nation's feelings in order to shape the proper mental and emotional response for whatever task lies ahead. In an era of visual politics and constant news releases, the former actor was keenly aware that to look the part was as important as acting the part. With a bullet lodged in his lung he still managed to perform his presidential duty as keeper of the nation's essence and the need to set the example. "When one of the doctors said they were going to operate on me, I said, 'I hope you're a Republican.'" The cheerful stoicism in the face of possible death was like a seed that Reagan planted in the soil of

⁶⁸⁶ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (London and Sidney: Hutchinson, 1990), 260.

America's fragile 1970's subconscious. What would grow from it was epitomised in the answer he received from the surgeon. "Today, Mr. President, we're all Republicans."⁶⁸⁷ The America that emerged in the 1980's was an America of good-feelings. Not 'all Republicans' but 'all Americans' coming together around what was best in the nation, the all-American principles and values that people quickly could identify with. The President himself was the all-American entertainer, communicator and educator, bringing together the nation and healing the wounds. And as with his performance, Reagan blamed someone else for the nation's damages, never the country, and the country thanked him for it.

His approval ratings shot up as the news bulletins and updates reported his good-humoured attitude to the shooting and his high-spirits during the recovery. His fortitude and positive outlook would set the example and push the country out of the self-pity and defeatism where it delayed. He was more popular than ever and this allowed his political acumen to reveal itself shortly after. Reagan had been elected with a promise to change the American economy, reducing regulation and taxes in order to release the smothered economic energies. Economic growth would be achieved by tearing down the barriers for companies and industries as well as for consumers. A believer in the free market, Reagan wanted to reduce government spending which ultimately meant going for the social legislation that liberals had passed in the last decades. In order to cut spending he proposed to reduce income and capital taxes to make the money more available for consumption and investment, which his advisers told him would spur the economy and create jobs. Predictably, opposition to his attack on the liberal social programmes would be fierce. Having been released from hospital in mid-April with his poll ratings soaring, he "kept a fairly low profile until April 28, when he emerged to give an eagerly awaited televised speech to a joint session of Congress. Still recovering, he seized this dramatic, emotionally charged occasion to call upon the legislators to enact his tax and spending programs. How could Congress defy such a popular man?"⁶⁸⁸ The new tax legislation was to be a reordering of fiscal policies and a reversal of decades of liberal social policies. Nonetheless, after 3 months of wooing, compromise and negotiations, Reagan managed to get the Bill passed with the approval of 48 Democratic Representatives. Reagan was a hard-line conservative but he knew

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 261.

⁶⁸⁸ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant – The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 156.

that to get his way it was better to negotiate and compromise rather than to persist in trying to pursue an all-or-nothing policy.

Besides lowering income tax rates the new tax act made some deep cuts in domestic spending, terminating some public aid programmes, thus fulfilling some of his campaign pledges. But he also accomplished a more significant outcome, one that would open a new cycle in American politics. As Patterson remarks, “In securing these large goals, Reagan greatly advanced the salience of conservative ideas, thereby driving liberals – then and thereafter – onto the defensive. His successes wowed many seasoned observers. Reporters spoke of the ‘Reagan Revolution’ that he had wrought in fiscal policy.” With liberals and Progressives in the defensive and public opinion still suspicious of big government, Reagan and conservatives would now have the entire decade to redirect the country’s political course. Some commentators wrote that Reagan’s success in passing the tax bill was “the most formidable domestic initiative any president has driven through since the Hundred Days of Franklin Roosevelt.”⁶⁸⁹ In changing the nature of American political development Reagan became a symbol in himself besides that of embodying traditional American values. He is also the founder of a new era in American politics with people talking of a before and an after Reagan’s presidency. However, Reagan’s determination in increasing the country’s military clout to face the Soviet Union, coupled with the tax reductions, ensured growing budget deficits that would haunt his presidency and damage his economic reputation.

Nevertheless, Reagan’s go-getting philosophy would work against his ideal America. Coupled with his unconditional defence of individualism and free initiative, it would further erode the civic values and morals that he so longingly wished to see blossom anew. In 1981 Reagan passed new tax-cutting legislation with the aim of releasing the country’s entrepreneurial spirit and kick-start the economy. But in a time of rising consumerism with an increasing plethora of goods available the message was passed that money-making was the path to happiness and personal fulfilment. Throughout the 1980’s the economic recovery would breed prosperity but also indifference, arrogance and greed. The culture of the period was illustrated by the resurgence of Wall Street, lifted by Reagan’s economic policies. His tax cuts and slashing of bureaucratic impediments to economic initiative had a huge impact, releasing funds and energies that propelled the financial sector to stratospheric heights.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

The ensuing 1980's professional ethos was typified by the rise of the self-styled Masters of the Universe, young corporate tycoons that amassed fortunes with a cut-throat approach to business. The rise of the yuppies ('young urban professionals') and their hunger for success at any cost were depicted in the movie *Wall Street* (1987) where main character Gordon Gekko - a Master of the Universe himself - tells his young ambitious protégé that 'greed is good.' At about the same time Tom Wolfe wrote *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, where the egotism and pride of the affluent only heightens the underlying tensions haunting American society during the decade. The excesses and social extremes of the era were perhaps unwittingly aided and abetted by a President that hailed individualism as the creator of all good, failing to recognise human nature's dark side.

Reagan was underestimated by liberals and Democrats, who vented their frustrations by stressing his acting background and how unprepared he was for the job. But instead of feeling aggrieved he stayed his course and carried on with his mixture of good-humour and common-sense populism, and using to his benefit his opponents' misjudgement of him. As Gil Troy points out, "Rather than rethinking liberal fundamentals, Democrats preferred to caricature Reagan as a lucky boob whose public relations elixir bewitched Americans. The result was a series of Reagan 'upsets,' from his election in November 1980, through his string of congressional successes in 1981, through his reelection in 1984, and including his managing of Mikhail Gorbachev and the twilight of Communism. Reagan made a career of being underestimated – thanks to the arrogance of Democrats and reporters."⁶⁹⁰ In the summer of his first year in office Reagan would both prove his determination and his adversaries' misunderstanding of him. Following a series of displays of discontent the air traffic controllers union called a strike in August 1981, albeit the law forbade strikes by government employees. When Reagan called them back to work, citing the law, the strikers remained defiant and Reagan gave them an ultimatum. It should be pointed out that the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) had publicly supported Reagan in the 1980 election. Notwithstanding, after failing to comply with his orders he fired some 12,000 controllers and replaced them with military personnel and other staff related to air traffic control. Those fired were banned from working as federal employees again.

⁶⁹⁰ Gil Troy, *Morning in America – How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 9.

His decisiveness and refusal to yield to pressure was deemed worthy of a radical and crude. Accused of not having a proper grasp of the depth of government matters, critics attributed this to his short attention span. Garry Wills explores the simplicity of this argument with an explanation of his own. “The truth, more likely, is that he has a good feel for the public’s short patience with uncertainties. Investment in long-term gains, across intervening disturbances, is hard to justify if one has that constraint in mind. Being ‘the great communicator’ is a matter of remaining understood, step by step, never breaking the sequence of easy exposition.”⁶⁹¹ A natural-born performer, Reagan knew that to capture the audience and keep it focused the flow of events has to be kept at a regular pace and clearly identifiable. His actions during the strike sent a powerful signal to all other unions and reshaped labour relations in America for years to come. However, because the public easily followed the plot and the sequence of events did not drag on indefinitely in a dispute that would enervate the electorate, Reagan was able to make clear his position and set the tone of his presidency. Clarification, however critical, is usually favoured over hesitation and timorousness and he knew it.

This trait was again tested in the years following the implementation of his economic programme. The tax cuts and expansion in military expenditures were condemned as a sop to the wealthiest echelons of American society and a dangerous escalation of the Cold War. In economic terms they contained the potential for a rapid rise in public debt with accumulating yearly budget deficits. Reagan shrugged off the criticism and gave the green light to the Federal Reserve to increase interest rates in an effort to reduce inflation. The tightening of the money supply added to the budgetary troubles and a severe recession ensued in 1982. Reagan’s popularity immediately fell as unemployment rose, the main indicator of modern presidential economic performance. Notwithstanding the drop in the polls, the President did not break with Paul Volcker, the Federal Reserve chairman, keeping faith with the interest rate policy set by Volcker. But he did backpedal when it came to the tax cuts: in a move that disappointed many of his economic supporters Reagan cut a middle course and raised taxes slightly to deflect both Democrats’ charges of favouring the rich and try to reduce the budget deficits which kept on rising.

By the end of 1983 the economy began to grow again and would keep on growing to record the highest growth rates since the end of World War II. His decision

⁶⁹¹ Garry Wills, *Reagan’s America – Innocents at Home* (London: William Heineman, 1988), 357.

to stay true to his belief while remaining flexible enough to accommodate some adjustments paid off in the end. A measure of his commitment to economic freedom and relaxation of rules can be found in the slashing of federal regulations that constricted the economy. The Federal Register - which lists all federal agency regulations - had been growing all through the 1970's, the veritable emblem of big government. It had grown by 19 percent under Lyndon Johnson and an astonishing 121 percent under Nixon, a Republican President. When Carter left office, it stood at 87,102 pages, a rise of 27 percent from his predecessor.⁶⁹² When Reagan left office, it had shrunk to 53,376 pages.⁶⁹³ The 1980's were afterward marked by a remarkable economic boom, the social and moral consequences of which, however, we have mentioned before. Inequality in access to the newfound prosperity would ensure that the 1980's would alike be remembered as a time of increasing gaps between the haves and the have-nots.

The presidency of the man who came to epitomise the decade was abnormally plagued by scandals which led to record numbers of convictions. That the American people kept faith with Reagan throughout the many crisis that rocked his administration and still hailed him as one of the greatest leaders after he left office is a testament to his political power and control. But also to his charisma, for in dealing with the many successive blows he always managed to convince Americans of the sincerity of his pleas for innocence. A trusting man he was, capable of relying on his aides and officials - unlike Nixon - but should such an accomplished performer be so trusting as to be unaware about the character of politics and power? The President had an acute sensitivity for his audiences' temperament enabling him to fine-tune his performances accordingly so as not to lose his listeners; he did nonetheless lose the plot most remarkably in a number of lobbying scandals that involved favours to Republican candidates and financial contributors. The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, to name two of the most prominent scandals, were used to channel money and/or political influence to people linked with the administration.

Nonetheless, his first term ended on a confident note and he faced his re-election brimming with optimism. This he allowed to overflow and determine the theme of his

⁶⁹² Gil Troy, *Morning in America – How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 32 – 33.

⁶⁹³ Andrew E. Busch, *Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Freedom* (Lanham, Maryland and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 80.

campaign in 1984. Following his claim to rescue American optimism from the bleak 1970's, Reagan now trumpeted that it was 'Morning in America.' The slogan was appealing, popular and highly successful. Despite the recession of 1982 the President could boast a recovering economy and a growing sense of prosperity among a majority of voters. One of the issues that nonetheless engaged the campaigners was Ronald Reagan's age and his fitness for the job. He was 73 and showing signs that the intensity of office and demands of the campaign were taking their toll on his body and mind. During the drive for re-election he had made some odd and confused remarks and the fatigue was evident in some of his showings, early manifestations of Alzheimer's disease that would eventually take him years later. But far from being discouraged or intimidated by it, he used his charm and congeniality to shrug off critics and disarm his opponent, Walter Mondale, who had been trying to capitalise on the gaffes. Reagan had performed poorly in an initial debate with Mondale which only strengthened the rumours about his health. In a subsequent debate - on the subject of defence and foreign policy - one of the panellists, Henry Trehitt, diplomatic correspondent for the Baltimore Sun, directly questioned Reagan about his ability to perform the duties of the presidency in the highly charged atmosphere of a recrudescing Cold War.

Mr. President, I want to raise an issue that I think has been lurking out there for 2 or 3 weeks and cast it specifically in national security terms. You already are the oldest President in history. And some of your staff say you were tired after your most recent encounter with Mr. Mondale. I recall yet that President Kennedy had to go for days on end with very little sleep during the Cuban missile crisis. Is there any doubt in your mind that you would be able to function in such circumstances?

Not at all, Mr. Trehitt, and I want you to know that also I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience. If I still have time, I might add, Mr. Trehitt, I might add that it was Seneca or it was Cicero, I don't know which, that said, 'If it was not for the elders correcting the mistakes of the young, there would be no state.'⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Kansas City, Missouri," October 21, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=39296>, (accessed December 22, 2014).

The laughter and applause of the audience were enough to dispel the mist of doubt that had surrounded the President. The Great Communicator was back; Reagan looked as sharp and witty as always and the election became a formality. In a rejuvenated, vibrant country, Reagan was indeed the elder statesman, the sage old man watching over a nation busy going about business and the pursuing wealth. He was a father-figure, the *Pater Patriae* ever vigilant and protecting. However he would have liked this assessment, his trusting nature and love for his country blinded him to the abuses being committed during his watch and the growing disparities that would exact their revenge in the coming decades. Much as Reagan acted as what Walt Whitman would call the Poet - the interpreter of America and its spirit, illuminating the country's virtues and hopes - the country's longing for innocence and a return to the ideals of the Revolution captured him. He let himself believe in the romantic notion that Americans were pure and disinterested, therefore unable to do wrong. Having stepped out of history and its institutional and hierarchical trappings, Reagan believed that Americans had shed their human nature to give birth to a new race of people, the sons and daughters of a New World. In his old age he was as naïve as he was in his youth, a quality endearing in a senior but one which would force the young to correct the elder statesman's mistakes after he left.

Morning in America was a refrain that had been used before. Nixon, for one, had used the theme to refine his campaign with a veneer of novelty, a necessity in a former Vice-President and veteran of so many elections. In accepting his nomination in 1968, with Vietnam in the background of voters' minds, he greeted them with the sight of the promised land of peace with honour. "My fellow Americans, the long dark night for America is about to end. The time has come for us to leave the valley of despair and climb the mountain so that we may see the glory of the dawn - a new day for America, and a new dawn for peace and freedom in the world."⁶⁹⁵ Almost a half year later he announced that the country was at the threshold of crossing into that gentle morning, the light just peering beyond the horizon. "We have endured a long night of the American spirit. But as our eyes catch the dimness of the first rays of dawn, let us not curse the

⁶⁹⁵ Richard M. Nixon, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida," August 8, 1968. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25968> (accessed July 22, 2014).

remaining dark. Let us gather the light.”⁶⁹⁶ Alas, it was just the reflection of the aurora far to the north; Americans were woken up early only to find that their darkest hour had not yet come to pass. Some hailed the awaited dawn only 10 years later; to others it failed to materialise altogether leaving them in a permanent dark gloom.

The masses would gather in national catharsis during the 1984 Olympic Games held in Los Angeles, a celebration of the nation’s purification from past sins. As a pageant of youth, athleticism and energy, it was the perfect display of the qualities Reagan wanted to emphasise. It was also a patriotic event, with the flag of the United States supplanting the Olympic rings for much of the televised broadcasts. The victories of individual American athletes were lauded as national victories, the people sharing in the pride and the belief that America’s sporting prowess was the expression of its moral virtue. The absence of the Soviet Union and its allies - in response to America’s boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics – eased the parade of medals and triumphs going America’s way. But the jingoistic fervour was not abated nor did the victories feel less sweet to the nation united in celebration. America was back, standing tall and proud once again.

Morning in America was all about a return to first principles, to the belief in the innocence and goodness of God’s chosen people. It symbolises America itself, the nation that can do no wrong and is destined to spread freedom to mankind. Hollywood’s commercial box-office hits were an indication that the tastes in popular culture, in cinematic terms at least, were showing some signs of the shift taking place in the national disposition. The 1970’s film industry had given the American public its fair share of frightening stories wherein characters confronted mysterious entities taking possession of teenage girls (*The Exorcist*, 1973), killer sharks terrorising small communities (*Jaws*, 1975), and deadly alien creatures (*Alien*, 1979). These had all been blockbuster movies and the anxiety and fear that pervaded in them could not fail to find some parallels with the country’s own sense of danger and disquiet. The communities under threat in the movies felt helpless and isolated from the wider world, either trapped in a spacecraft or in claustrophobic seclusion at home, in a small island off the coast of New England. Likewise did America feel forlorn, under siege and restricted to its boundaries, unable to change world events that impacted upon its shores with increasing

⁶⁹⁶ Richard Nixon, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=1941> (accessed August 6, 2014).

violence. Feeling mistreated and hopeless, lashing out violently was a possible response. In *Carrie*, a 1976 horror movie that became a huge success, the main character kills all of its abusers and her own mother, only to perish herself in a blaze. The country was haunted by the many Freudian interpretations and suggestions, a mirror of the deep traumas left by the bitter experiences since 1963.

The attitude to war was tellingly expressed in movies, from a dark *Apocalypse Now*, in 1979, to a World War II farce such as *1941* (also from 1979). Imperial ambitions and hubris - and the resultant damages to the nations' ethos - were denounced in a film that would spawn both sequels and prequels but also a cult following: *Star Wars* (1977). The sophisticated and powerful empire that attempts to subjugate the galaxy is fought by a band of roving warriors and heroes, a ragged assembly which alluded to the revolutionary colonists struggling against the British Empire for independence but likewise to the ill-equipped Vietcong bands that fought the United States in the jungles of Vietnam - the former a look into the virtuous past to remind the nation of its less than honourable present. The success of the franchise rested on its unpretentious good vs. evil dichotomy and was balanced with a complex psychological drama opposing father and son, the diverging generations fighting for the soul of the future of the galaxy. A lighter, more mocking touch was given by the movie *Stripes* (1981), a good-natured war-comedy movie where military discipline and pomp are flagellated mercilessly along with the Cold War standoff.

Although the 1980's still gave audiences a pessimistic look into the future with *Blade Runner* (1982), the general outlook began to brighten up. The rise of lazy good-natured comedies lifted the mood, as if the strain of the 1970's had given rise to a more laid back attitude, with not much to worry about. Mass culture feature films captured the changing tide and quickly developed action adventure movies that far from portraying terrible ordeals testing the heroes, prompted instead displays of confidence and exuberance. Steven Spielberg directed a few of the big commercial successes of the decade, starting with the adventures of an intrepid and rather unorthodox archaeologist in *Indiana Jones* (1981) followed by a number of sequels that exploited his quirky and gallant bravery in the face of danger. Danger, albeit present and potentially terrifying, was always overcome without major injuries to life and limb but also without great moral compromising. The country no longer feared the unknown and even those who dwelled in the final frontier became less threatening. Whereas Ridley Scott's *Alien* franchise was synonymous with death and horror for all those attempting to brave the

unknown, Spielberg's *E.T.* (1982) presented a complete opposite view of what lay beyond the known horizon. This was followed by the *Goonies* (1985) an innocent look on teenage adventures, a field that would prove fertile ground in an age when youth and freshness were worshipped in the national altar. The supernatural also suffered a remake, with whatever frightening evils waiting in the afterlife humorously dispatched in *Ghostbusters* (1984), by Ivan Reitman.

In 1985, *Back to the Future* was another big success in which the main characters go back to the 1950's, the decade of consensus and apparent idyll for the middle-classes just before the turmoil of the Sixties that shattered the national peace of mind. The praising of that age of uniformity and predictability so appealed to Ronald Reagan that he quoted it in his 1986 State of the Union address. Talking days after the Space Shuttle *Challenger* disaster, Reagan was undeterred by the tragedy and urged the nation to heed the call of history and "reach for the stars." The time had come for "America to be all that we can be."

And tonight I want to speak directly to America's younger generation, because you hold the destiny of our nation in your hands. With all the temptations young people face, it sometimes seems the allure of the permissive society requires superhuman feats of self-control. But the call of the future is too strong, the challenge too great to get lost in the blind alleyways of dissolution, drugs, and despair. Never has there been a more exciting time to be alive, a time of rousing wonder and heroic achievement. As they said in the film 'Back to the Future,' 'Where we're going, we don't need roads.'⁶⁹⁷

The nation's appetite for these movies revealed its growing optimism and jovial outlook on life. Even the attitude to the war in Vietnam began to change with *First Blood* (1982), where a traumatised veteran is cornered into what is depicted as justified retaliation. The audiences' sympathetic reception of the movie signalled a reassessing of the war and the redemption of the veterans that had more often than not been vilified and estranged by society, preferring to ignore the war and their plight.

⁶⁹⁷ Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," February 4, 1986. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36646>, (accessed January 2, 2015).

For Reagan, the Protestant strain that most influenced his vision of the nation was the idea of the elected people; America was the chosen land by Providence to redeem the world. This meant that he ignored or failed to see the many historical subtleties of his idealised past. It carried the notion that the country was not just one of many nations, but the special one destined by God to achieve great things. The country was not immersed nor submitted to the dictates of human history; there was a Higher Plan afoot. The righteous nation could therefore step out of historical determinisms, human nature's accidents and fluctuations or economic forces, and commit itself to pure ideology. Reagan's righteousness transpired more clearly in his attitude towards the Soviet Union and the significance of the Cold War in the grand scheme of things. He never hid his distaste of Communism, and he viewed détente and balance of power politics as a subversion of America's virtue and its divine mission. In his rationalisation of his opposition to accommodation he claimed the Russians used the thaw to pursue their goals unimpeded. "Our relationship with the Soviets was based on 'détente,' a French word the Russians had interpreted as a freedom to pursue whatever policies of subversion, aggression, and expansionism they wanted anywhere in the world. Every Soviet leader since Lenin, up to and including the present one, Leonid Brezhnev, had said the goal of the Soviet Union was to Communize the world."⁶⁹⁸ It was therefore America's mission to stop this and defend democracy in the world. The real malaise, he explained, arose from the lack of commitment to the country's principles and moral responsibility. "During the late seventies, I felt our country had begun to abdicate this historical role as the spiritual leader of the Free World and its foremost defender of democracy. Some of our resolve was gone, along with a part of our commitment to uphold the values we cherished."⁶⁹⁹

Reagan ended the pragmatic approach to foreign affairs that guided the country in the Seventies. The balance between desired ends and possibilities gave way to a policy of moral absolutes. Liberals attacked the end of détente as dangerous and fundamentalist, prompting Arthur Schlesinger to quote Henry Kissinger approvingly regarding the pursuit of an international balance of powers.⁷⁰⁰ Reagan's worldview was

⁶⁹⁸ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (London and Sidney: Hutchinson, 1990), 265.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁷⁰⁰ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1987), 57.

not historical in the sense that he understood nations to be the product of change and contingency; the present shaped by the past and by circumstances. Rather, Reagan viewed the world through a moral structure, countries being on the side either of good or evil. They were immutable in their pursuits because framed by models of right or wrong. His view was ahistorical: countries were now what they were yesterday and would be tomorrow. Reagan firmly believed that Americans had stepped out of history, therefore shaping their destiny. Unlike Nixon, Reagan believed that man makes history, the latter's actions and choices determine the outcome of events more than these command his decisions.

Upon taking office Reagan stepped up his rhetoric against the Soviet Union and began a massive military arsenal build-up. Oblivious to those who pleaded that he was dangerously escalating the arms race which could push the world to the brink of nuclear war, Reagan reset the country's foreign policy to include a clear moral compass. America was to redeem the world no longer just by example, but take an active role and hunt for those monsters abroad that John Quincy Adams had warned against; the democratic institutions would be put to use in the crusade to slay the Communist Hydra. "I believe that... that any issue that comes before me, I have instructed Cabinet members and staff they are not to bring up any of the political ramifications that might surround the issue. I don't want to hear them. I want to hear only arguments as to whether it is good or bad for the people - is it morally right? And on that basis and that basis alone, we make a decision on every issue."⁷⁰¹ No empirical approach, no consequences, no taking into account the foreseeable results. Reagan would do the ethical thing and leave the results to Providence, which he believed would ultimately guide the country and the world to the right place. However, this moral absolutism was contradicted by successive events of foreign policy in which Reagan opted for considerations of national interest rather than following a strict moral imperative.

The spread of so-called wars of national liberation - not just in Central America but Africa as well - promoted and abetted by the Soviet Union, were accumulating and testing America's capacity and resolve. With the invasion of Afghanistan the Russians were launching a direct attempt at moving from Central Asia to the Indian sub-continent. But not only were they threatening to increase their influence globally, they

⁷⁰¹ Ronald Reagan, "Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Louisville, Kentucky," October 7, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=39199>, (accessed January 5, 2015).

were also crushing any attempt at freedom within their sphere of influence as was happening in Poland with the repression of the Solidarity trade union movement. Years later, Reagan would explain his basis for his foreign policy with his frustration at the advances of Communism and the Soviet's subversion campaigns. "I decided we had to send as powerful a message as we could to the Russians that we weren't going to stand by anymore while they armed and financed terrorists and subverted democratic governments. Our policy was to be one based on strength and realism. I wanted peace through strength, not peace through a piece of paper." This was to be followed by a change in rhetoric, an escalation in words to emulate the escalation in the arms race. "In my speeches and press conferences, I set out to say some frank things about the Russians, to let them know there were some new fellows in Washington who had a realistic view of what they were up to and weren't going to let them keep it up."⁷⁰² And set out he did. Those who claimed that his anti-communist rhetoric would soften once elected were dismayed to hear him label the Soviet Union as "the focus of evil in the world", an "evil empire," and the Cold War as a "struggle between right and wrong and good and evil."⁷⁰³

His moral absolutism he felt was being vindicated by empirical evidences, such as the economic deterioration of the adversary. With the information available regarding the situation in the Soviet Union, Reagan felt confident that he could pile even more pressure on the decrepit evil empire. Talking in London to British MP's, he used the tenets of Communist eschatology that forecasted the post capitalist world to predict the ultimate demise of the Soviet system. "In an ironic sense Karl Marx was right. We are witnessing today a great revolutionary crisis, a crisis where the demands of the economic order are conflicting directly with those of the political order. But the crisis is happening not in the free, non-Marxist West, but in the home of Marxist-Leninism, the Soviet Union. It is the Soviet Union that runs against the tide of history by denying human freedom and human dignity to its citizens."⁷⁰⁴ The contradictions of the Communist system were conflicting with the materialist view of history and the location of the source of human freedom.

⁷⁰² Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (London and Sidney: Hutchinson, 1990), 267.

⁷⁰³ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida," March 8, 1983. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41023>, (accessed January 8, 2015).

⁷⁰⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Address to Members of the British Parliament," June 8, 1982. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42614>, (accessed January 8, 2015).

The dimensions of this failure are astounding: A country which employs one fifth of its population in agriculture is unable to feed its own people. Were it not for the private sector, the tiny private sector tolerated in Soviet agriculture, the country might be on the brink of famine. These private plots occupy a bare 3 percent of the arable land but account for nearly one-quarter of Soviet farm output and nearly one-third of meat products and vegetables. Overcentralized, with little or no incentives, year after year the Soviet system pours its best resource into the making of instruments of destruction. The constant shrinkage of economic growth combined with the growth of military production is putting a heavy strain on the Soviet people. What we see here is a political structure that no longer corresponds to its economic base, a society where productive forces are hampered by political ones.⁷⁰⁵

The collapse, he continued, would be inevitable: the release of individual energies and pragmatism was the only path to ensure survival in the petrified world beyond the Iron Curtain. But instead of waiting for the “march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history,”⁷⁰⁶ Reagan was determined to accelerate history by giving it a helping hand. Confident in the morality of the free enterprise system, he would use it to speed the end of Communism and prove capitalism’s superiority. His strategy to achieve that end required full rearmament and the renewal of the military arsenal in order to pile further pressure on the Soviet Union’s failing economy. He intended to spend whatever it took to keep ahead in the arms race, whatever the financial burden. As he reasoned later in his memoirs, the United States had a powerful trump card. “The great dynamic success of capitalism had given us a powerful weapon in our battle against Communism – *money*. The Russians could never win the arms race; we could outspend them forever. Moreover, incentives inherent in the capitalist system had given us an industrial base that meant we had the capacity to maintain a technological edge over them forever.”⁷⁰⁷

The technological edge would materialise in a speech delivered to the nation, whereupon he announced a new defence strategy. Contrary to his claim of an imminent breakdown of the Soviet economy and America’s capacity to outspend them to

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (London and Sidney: Hutchinson, 1990), 267.

bankruptcy, Reagan justified his new plan with the need to meet Russian military build-up. “There was a time when we were able to offset superior Soviet numbers with higher quality, but today they are building weapons as sophisticated and modern as our own. As the Soviets have increased their military power, they’ve been emboldened to extend that power. They’re spreading their military influence in ways that can directly challenge our vital interests and those of our allies.”⁷⁰⁸ To offset this new vitality and America’s inability to keep up with the Soviet stockpiling of nuclear intercontinental missiles, he was launching a strategic defensive initiative to neutralise their arsenal.

The President used language that would appeal the most to the American penchant for invention, discovery, and its pioneer spirit. Beyond the mountains lay a new frontier of open fields and prosperity, and its riches would come to the aid of the country proving once more the superior worth of Capitalism and human ambition. “Let me share with you a vision of the future which offers hope. It is that we embark on a program to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive. Let us turn to the very strengths in technology that spawned our great industrial base and that have given us the quality of life we enjoy today.” He proposed a new frontier romance with new tales of exploration and daring search for that ever elusive security, embodied in the project that would protect America from nuclear weapons. “What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant U.S. retaliation to deter a Soviet attack, that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies?”⁷⁰⁹ The proposal to build a shield against nuclear weapons was as fantastic and bold as to earn the name Star Wars, taken from the futuristic movies about the struggle between Good and Evil. The technology required did not fall short of the one envisaged in the space trilogy, with laser weapons and the deployment of supersonic interceptors to destroy incoming missiles. Reagan was inviting Americans to dream the great dream, to take a bold new step and expand into space, the final frontier.

Whether he thought the goal achievable or not remains to be known. He probably did believe it, expecting America’s ingenuity and determination to triumph in the foreseeable future. To those who charged that the project was impracticable and ultimately useless - given that the system would be overwhelmed by the thousands of

⁷⁰⁸ Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security,” March 23, 1983. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41093>, (accessed January 8, 2015).

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

missiles on the Soviet arsenal and by those travelling at lower altitudes - Reagan countered with his usual optimism and confidence. His enthusiasm sprung from his certainty that the goal of freedom was the fulfilment of a higher order, and that America could not fail if it kept true to its destiny as the redeemer of mankind. "But America is too great for small dreams. There was a hunger in the land for a spiritual revival; if you will, a crusade for renewal. The American people said: Let us look to the future with confidence, both at home and abroad. Let us give freedom a chance."⁷¹⁰ The pioneer was also a pilgrim clearing a path for Truth to keep marching on. The restoration of America and its spiritual mission was complete after the dark days of the Seventies, and Reagan was its deliverer. "I've never felt more strongly that America's best days and democracy's best days lie ahead. We're a powerful force for good. With faith and courage, we can perform great deeds and take freedom's next step. And we will. We will carry on the tradition of a good and worthy people who have brought light where there was darkness, warmth where there was cold, medicine where there was disease, food where there was hunger, and peace where there was only bloodshed. Let us be sure that those who come after will say of us in our time, that in our time we did everything that could be done. We finished the race; we kept them free; we kept the faith."⁷¹¹

His moral stance on foreign affairs would face some difficulties, especially since it implied intervention abroad to change other nations' internal order to restore a predetermined external order. But the traumatic experience in Vietnam made intervention more difficult to accept. To evade this Reagan would start with less demanding initiatives, emulating the Soviet 'wars of liberation' strategy by supporting groups fighting Communist regimes and governments fighting Communist insurgencies. Afghanistan was perhaps the most obvious and well-known instance of a war by proxy against Soviet intentions but the United States were also involved in Africa and Central America. This tested Reagan's moral claims since he placed victory against Communism above any other considerations, leading to the support of infamous regimes and political leaders only because they were committed anti-Communists. The South African apartheid system was not condemned until later in his presidency and Ferdinand Marcos, the authoritarian leader of the Philippines, and Jean-Claude Duvalier, the despot of Haiti, are the most prominent examples of unpalatable figures

⁷¹⁰ Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 25, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40205>, (accessed January 19, 2015).

⁷¹¹ Ibid.

whom the United States kept friendly terms with. The violations of their populations' human rights, which had been condemned during the Carter administration, were overlooked when Reagan was in office. The ends justified the means and defence of rulers that were key allies in the war against the Communist threat tinted American foreign policy with a Machiavellian hue that spoiled the much vaunted moralism of doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way; rather, Reagan gave credence to the claim that the Lord's work is carried in mysterious ways, enough to bewilder and amaze the observer.

Reagan's support for what he termed 'freedom fighters' would backfire dramatically in the case of Nicaragua. While determined to keep funding the Contra insurgency fighting the Sandinista government, the Reagan administration was also trying to release six hostages held by the Hezbollah group in Lebanon. In a plan that involved a number of parallel negotiations and operations, the Iranians agreed to convince Hezbollah to release the hostages in return for American weapons to be shipped via Israel. Reagan admitted that he was aware of the proposed exchange, although denying that it was an arms-for-hostages deal. In his memoirs he appeals to the emotions of his readers to justify his decision, claiming that his mind was focused on freeing the hostages. "As I've said, I felt a heavy weight on my shoulders to get the hostages home. We were coming up to another Christmas season with American citizens held captive far from home, separated from parents, wives, and children, deprived of basic freedoms, and subjected to almost unspeakable living conditions. What American trapped in such circumstances wouldn't have wanted me to do everything I possibly could to set them free? What Americans *not* held captive under such circumstances would not want me to do my utmost to get the hostages home? It was the president's duty to get them home."⁷¹² The situation could perhaps be manageable but for the decision to use the funds from the sales of the weapons to finance the Contra warfare in Nicaragua.

Reagan adamantly denied any knowledge of this development but when the press published the story in late 1986 the repercussions hit the administration hard. Several senior officials were indicted and resigned, and the President's reputation was badly hurt, the whole affair adding to the list of scandals that plagued the tenure of a man committed to resurrect the pride in American virtue. The worst consequence came

⁷¹² Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (London and Sidney: Hutchinson, 1990), 513.

from the abandonment, once more, of the moral high ground in favour of a practical approach. Furthermore, it proved counter-productive, as the tactic of taking hostages looked to be enough to make the United States yield to demands. Internally, the administration's actions were a violation of congressional decisions regarding the financing of insurgencies in Central America. Suddenly the nation was facing the spectre of another President acting against the constitutional framework and surrendering to the temptation of abusing his prerogatives barely a decade after Nixon and Watergate. Despite the effects on his popularity Reagan survived this too, the blame shifted to his advisors. Where Nixon's sweaty, suspicious nature failed to win the public's pardoning, Reagan's grin and optimism carried him beyond the fallout of the scandal back to the good graces of the nation.

The year 1983 was again a dramatic one in foreign events. In March, Reagan launched his economic war against the Soviet Union with the announcement of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) programme, thus opening a new and more serious phase in the Cold War escalation that added to the aggressive moral rhetoric and military arsenal build-up. A new surge of international activism prompted the President to send troops to Lebanon as part of a multinational force aiming to stop the civil war that raged there. Given America's support of Israel - which had invaded Lebanon in 1982 - and antagonism with Iran, America's intervention in Lebanon was not welcomed by the Muslim factions involved in the war. In April the US embassy in Beirut was bombed in a suicide attack which killed over 60 Americans with the Islamic Jihad claiming responsibility. Several minor attacks continued until October when another Iranian funded armed movement attacked the military compound that housed the US Marines stationed in Beirut. The bombings killed 241 soldiers and was followed by a second attack on the French headquarters which killed another 59 servicemen. The Shia militia Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the suicide attack. The death toll severely strained Reagan's resolve despite his claims that America would stand fast and live up to its international responsibilities not matter the costs. However, by February next year the President handed terrorists victory by ordering the Marines to withdraw. The embarrassing retreat along with the sale of arms to Iran in exchange for the return of hostages indicated that despite all claims to the contrary, America could be pushed to submit when in the presence of resolute groups.

The confrontation with irrational adversaries proved beyond Reagan's endurance. Faced with an enemy that also claimed to have God on its side and to be

carrying God's mission, Reagan was shown both the dangers and the limits of morals in politics. To be a true believer in one's destiny and special relationship with the divinity one must be ready to sacrifice all. Moral absolutism means absolute obedience to a higher command. While Reagan claimed to be restoring America to its true path as the Lord's redeemer of humanity, he nonetheless knew that martyrdom was not the country's calling. Reason and pragmatism were the tools that the country used to fulfil its destiny as the special nation. Such limitations were not shared by other pursuers of the Truth as the suicide bombers that attacked in Beirut. His Presidency was not as righteous and uncompromising as his oratory, nor could it be; but it was enough to confront an equally ideological yet rational adversary. The initial reaction in Moscow to the escalation threatened to push the world to the brink of a confrontation between the two superpowers. In 1983, following the announcement of SDI, international tension looked about to reach a breaking point. While the United States were bogged down in Lebanon, in September a Korean civilian airliner was shot down after it had accidentally flown over Russian territory. All passengers and crew on board died, including 61 Americans. Having at first denied having shot down the plane, the Soviet Union eventually accused the United States of using the civilian plane for an espionage mission and of attempting to engender a *casus belli* to start a nuclear war. The tragedy marked another low point in East-West relations and was feared as the harbinger of doom. After the incident both sides placed their military on high alert. Shortly after, precisely two days after the bombing of the US Marines' barracks in Beirut, Reagan gave the go-ahead for the invasion of the tiny island of Grenada in the Caribbean.

Critics were quick to claim that the invasion of the island was a diversion from the disaster in Beirut. However, Reagan had given direct indication months before of developments in the area and the danger that the presence of Cuban military advisors posed to the United States. "On the small island of Grenada, at the southern end of the Caribbean chain, the Cubans, with Soviet financing and backing, are in the process of building an airfield with a 10,000-foot runway. Grenada doesn't even have an air force. Who is it intended for? The Caribbean is a very important passageway for our international commerce and military lines of communication. More than half of all American oil imports now pass through the Caribbean."⁷¹³ The strategic implications

⁷¹³ Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security," March 23, 1983. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41093>, (accessed January 8, 2015).

alone were worrying, but Reagan identified the situation as being a direct threat to American homeland security. He warned that it was part of a Soviet plan to extend its reach and directly challenge the United States close to its borders. “The rapid buildup of Grenada’s military potential is unrelated to any conceivable threat to this island country of under 110,000 people and totally at odds with the pattern of other eastern Caribbean States, most of which are unarmed. The Soviet-Cuban militarization of Grenada, in short, can only be seen as power projection into the region.”⁷¹⁴ If Reagan had hoped to force the Soviet Union into a corner with his economic war, it looked as if his gamble had failed. The Soviets were responding in kind, with a new resolve and taking the fight to America’s backyard.

As the righteous approach to foreign policy threatened to hasten Armageddon, the Soviet leadership was a showcase of the crumbling Soviet system itself. Since 1982, three Soviet leaders had died – Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko – prompting the election of Mikhail Gorbachev in March of 1985. Gorbachev was part of a new generation of Soviet politicians born after the 1917 Revolution and with a new outlook, more focused on providing for the needs of the population than exhausting scarce resources to prepare for war. Through the regular exchange of letters Reagan and Gorbachev slowly moved in each other’s direction, initiating a gradual thaw in Cold War tensions. The Great Communicator and his Soviet counterpart managed to build a relationship of trust that evolved into one of friendship as Reagan claimed in his memoirs: “As I look back on them now, those first letters marked the cautious beginning on both sides of what was to become the foundation of not only a better relationship between our countries but a friendship between two men.”⁷¹⁵ The two leaders eventually met in five summits, the first one in 1985 in Geneva. In 1987, in a summit in Washington, they achieved a diplomatic breakthrough with the signing of a nuclear treaty, the first pact to reduce US and Soviet nuclear arsenals. After another summit in 1988, this time in Moscow, Reagan proclaimed that a new era in US-Soviet relations had begun. Prior to that meeting Reagan had already felt confident enough to challenge Mikhail Gorbachev about his intentions, live before the international media in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin: “General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (London and Sidney: Hutchinson, 1990), 612.

gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”⁷¹⁶ Reagan would not see the fall of the Berlin Wall as resident of the White House. In the 1988 elections his Vice-President, George Bush was elected President and he would superintend the transition from the Cold War into a New World Order.

VI

One of Ronald Reagan’s final acts as President was the signing into law of the Civil Liberties Act, in 1988, which acknowledged the actions of the federal government during the forced confinement of American citizens of Japanese descent during World War II. The Act also provided a public apology from the United States and for compensation to the survivors. The grand circle was thus closed, having lasted from Pearl Harbor to the fall of the Berlin Wall. The interregnum had lasted almost 50 years but the path was now clear for the postponed American Century.

Reagan played a crucial part in bringing to an end the suspension of what he believed was an historical inevitability. As he stepped down the forces of history were busy at work. The Soviet Union was losing its grip over Eastern Europe and as the restructuring of its economic and political structure was reaching its limits, a systemic disruption would lead to the dissolution of the country. In China, Deng Xiaoping had been for some years opening China to the world and was now looking to Moscow and learning the lessons of Gorbachev’s *perestroika*. Following Nixon’s diplomatic accord with Beijing, Carter recognised the People’s Republic of China in 1979, coinciding with Deng’s arrival to power in China. He sponsored a change of course, merging the country’s brand of Marxist ideology with a more practical espousal of free market economy principles and allowing foreign capital to invest in the country gradually easing restrictions on private enterprise. Deng’s reforms paved the way for China’s development into one of the world’s biggest economies, currently vying for economic supremacy. Deprived of Soviet funding and backing, many smaller Communist regimes either buckled under the weight of internal contradictions or adopted reforms that signalled the end of their experiment with Communism. Events seemed to prove Reagan right regarding his prediction about Communism being left in the ash heap of history.

⁷¹⁶ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin,” June 12, 1987. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=34390>, (accessed January 24, 2015).

Reagan opened a new era in American politics, the influence of which is still very much felt. Just as FDR inaugurated an age of consensus around liberal policies, Reagan's fiscal conservatism, defence of private initiative and the free market, and decentralisation are all principles that carry great weight in American politics to this day. In social terms the Reagan era shaped a generation just as the Depression, FDR, and World War Two formed those who came of age in 1940-45 just as the Sixties defined the latter's children. There is an America before Reagan and another after Reagan where optimism and renewal became an integral part of the formative years of the baby boomers' children. As consensus built up around the values and beliefs of America, patriotism again became something to be celebrated without second thoughts or embarrassment. That consensus regarding the meaning of America would extend into the following decades suffusing the political landscape and ultimately determining international events. Upon leaving office Reagan looked back and reflected on his presidency. "And in all of that time I won a nickname, 'The Great Communicator.' But I never thought it was my style or the words I used that made a difference: it was the content. I wasn't a great communicator, but I communicated great things, and they didn't spring full bloom from my brow, they came from the heart of a great nation - from our experience, our wisdom, and our belief in the principles that have guided us for two centuries. They called it the Reagan revolution. Well, I'll accept that, but for me it always seemed more like the great rediscovery, a rediscovery of our values and our common sense."⁷¹⁷

That reawakening of meaning was as much about the impact of domestic government over the individual as a rediscovery of the significance of America in the wider context of world affairs. And it was as much a renaissance of past ideas as a reconstruction of new ones by Reagan. For Reagan understood that much of politics is about performing, and that the presidential pulpit is also a stage. The modern Presidency is not confined to leadership but involves storytelling, communicating national events as part of a national narrative, and authenticating the national experience as part of a unique idea. The better the performer, the better the audience's response. And Reagan was a good performer because he believed the story and the myths unreservedly; in the story and the myths he created. Some were rooted in the national experience, others he

⁷¹⁷ Ronald Reagan, "Farewell Address to the Nation," January 11, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29650>, (accessed January 26, 2015).

adapted, and others still he just believed must have been true. His candid innocence about it all made it easier to willingly bypass the inconsistencies, like a veil that allowed one to perceive but not discern. America became a willing participant in the play. As Gil Troy concludes, after the turmoil of the Sixties, the debacle of Vietnam and Watergate, and the hopelessness of the Seventies, “Reagan saved the presidency from irrelevance, showing that the ability to shift the national conversation and set the national tone was in and of itself a valuable asset and a significant role, even at a time of increasingly sclerotic government. Reagan’s influence continues because in so many ways, whatever his shortcomings and flaws, the vision he projected of himself was the vision of themselves most Americans wanted to see.”⁷¹⁸ We may add also that the vision he projected of America was the one most Americans wanted to believe.

Reagan was as much President as history-maker, as his convictions shaped the country in the 1980’s and beyond. Realising it or not, Reagan contradicted Nixon’s view of the relationship between man and history. Reagan believed that Man’s destiny was in his own hands, that nothing was impossible and America offered the best example of the land where anyone could remake its personal history. “To me our country is a living, breathing presence, unimpressed by what others say is impossible, proud of its own success, generous, yes and naive, sometimes wrong, never mean and always impatient to provide a better life for its people in a framework of a basic fairness and freedom. Someone once said that the difference between an American and any other kind of person is that an American lives in anticipation of the future because he knows it will be a great place. Other people fear the future as just a repetition of past failures. There’s a lot of truth in that. If there is one thing we are sure of it is that history need not be relived; that nothing is impossible, and that man is capable of improving his circumstances beyond what we are told is fact.” The land of opportunities was itself free from any social, economic or historical restraints, it was a new land where history moved not in cycles but advanced indefinitely towards its ultimate completion.

There are those in our land today, however, who would have us believe that the United States, like other great civilizations of the past, has reached the zenith of its power; that we are weak and fearful, reduced to bickering with each other and no longer possessed of the will to cope with our problems. Much of this talk

⁷¹⁸ Gil Troy, *Morning in America – How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 347.

has come from leaders who claim that our problems are too difficult to handle. We are supposed to meekly accept their failures as the most which humanly can be done. They tell us we must learn to live with less, and teach our children that their lives will be less full and prosperous than ours have been; that the America of the coming years will be a place where - because of our past excesses - it will be impossible to dream and make those dreams come true. I don't believe that.⁷¹⁹

Far from being limited by historical laws of recurrence, America represents the movement of history toward freedom. Reagan's critics lambasted his political moralism but it stemmed from his belief that events were not random but rather part of a greater Plan. The American spirit is grounded on respect for this Plan. Likewise, politicians could only succeed by keeping true faith with the principles laid out in the foundation of the country. "The basis of those ideals and principles is a commitment to freedom and personal liberty that, itself, is grounded in the much deeper realization that freedom prospers only where the blessings of God are avidly sought and humbly accepted. The American experiment in democracy rests on this insight. Its discovery was the great triumph of our Founding Fathers, voiced by William Penn when he said: 'If we will not be governed by God, we must be governed by tyrants.' Explaining the inalienable rights of men, Jefferson said, 'The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time.' And it was George Washington who said that 'of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.'"⁷²⁰ Man could not dissociate himself from the Supreme Being; it could not stand alone trusting solely on Reason for it would in the end uphold that all values and standards are human creations without any objective validity, and that, as such, any principle is as good as the next, rendering impossible any absolute principles. Deprived of any moral values, Reason would prove the downfall of Man, and his enslavement. Unlike Marxism, with its faith in mankind to rise and free itself from God, Reagan was optimistic about the future of Man so long as it did not accept the deterministic view that the world was fashioned by material conditions. "Freedom prospers when religion is vibrant and the

⁷¹⁹ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for the Republican Presidential Nomination," November 13, 1979. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=76116>, (accessed November 7, 2014).

⁷²⁰ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida," March 8, 1983. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41023>, (accessed January 8, 2015).

rule of law under God is acknowledged... I believe that communism is another sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages even now are being written. I believe this because the source of our strength in the quest for human freedom is not material, but spiritual.”⁷²¹ Reagan reversed the Marxist priority, placing the ideal at the source of the real world and shaping the latter. As we shall see, Reagan was echoing a school of thought that linked the spiritual with historical progress. And it also represented a profound faith in Man’s capacity for improvement, not being restricted to human nature’s constraints and weaknesses. As both an anthropological optimist and a believer in Progress, one cannot help but regard Reagan as more of a classical liberal than a conservative.

As he stepped down, events seemed about to prove him right. Not only was the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc tottering dangerously, Communism was on the retreat. In his final address to the nation Reagan took aim at his domestic critics by pointing to the results achieved by his moral approach to politics. “Countries across the globe are turning to free markets and free speech and turning away from the ideologies of the past. For them, the great rediscovery of the 1980’s has been that, lo and behold, the moral way of government is the practical way of government: Democracy, the profoundly good, is also the profoundly productive.” But Reagan was not a moral absolutist. His policies and actions were marked by a keen sense of practicality albeit guided by a moral compass. Rather than detachment, he preferred to anchor himself firmly in a set of rules and principles he believed were the reflection of the spirit of the nation. However, any assessment must take into consideration the moment into which he entered office. Carter was as profoundly religious as Reagan or perhaps more, but he arrived at a time of difficulty and doubt for the country. Had Reagan won in 1976, how much would he have accomplished? The economic situation would hamper him as it did Carter, probably undermining his presidency in a fundamental way. On the other hand, the nation was still in a mood of hardening cynicism, with a further oil shock and continuing deindustrialisation on the way. Both the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran crisis would leave the nation feeling impotent. By 1980, the country was demoralised and spiritually exhausted, and ready for change.

What followed was not as easy as it might seem to those looking back. But despite the obstacles and difficulties the United States triumphed in the end. Rather than

⁷²¹ Ibid.

paying attention to political calculations, Reagan had placed his trust in the people's common sense and desire for liberty. Since the 1950's, growing tribute to expediency had accompanied nuclear terror and disenchantment. Reagan adopted a return-to-first-principles strategy in search for answers to the nation's challenges. What he found and what he concocted from it vindicated his method. It gave the nation substance, a moral reserve on which to fall back on in moments of doubt and danger, a conviction that right makes might. "The lesson of all this was, of course, that because we're a great nation, our challenges seem complex. It will always be this way. But as long as we remember our first principles and believe in ourselves, the future will always be ours. And something else we learned: Once you begin a great movement, there's no telling where it will end. We meant to change a nation, and instead, we changed a world."⁷²²

⁷²² Ronald Reagan, "Farewell Address to the Nation," January 11, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29650>, (accessed January 26, 2015).

CHAPTER EIGHT

History revisited

And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people - the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. Seventy years ago we escaped from thrall; and, besides our first birthright - embracing one continent of earth - God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark, without bloody hands being lifted. God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. In our youth is our strength; in our inexperience, our wisdom. At a period when other nations have but lisped, our deep voice is heard afar. Long enough, have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in us, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we can not do a good to America but we give alms to the world.

Herman Melville, *White-Jacket or The World in a Man-of-War*, 1850

I

Soon after Ronald Reagan left the White House the world began to experience momentous political change. As the convulsing Soviet Union loosened its grip on Eastern Europe, several countries began adopting tentative reforms, the momentum of which was quickly seized by their populations to push for greater change. Simmering protests and mass demonstrations in Poland culminated in a partially free election in April 1989 giving Solidarity the victory. The following May, Hungary started a process of reform also. After popular pressure intensified, the government decided to open its borders with Austria. Thousands of people, mainly East Germans, grasped the opportunity and escaped to Western Germany. As events gathered pace, commentators feared Soviet intervention to stem the flow. However, not only was Gorbachev not sending the Red Army he advised the East German government to reform and change, whereupon the floodgates burst wide open. The metaphor materialised in November 1989 as the people of East Germany began demolishing the Berlin Wall, symbol of the Iron Curtain that divided Europe.

The revolt spread to the other countries of the Warsaw Pact and from there to other countries that orbited the Soviet Union. Having retreated from Afghanistan in early 1989, Moscow stopped its sponsorship and financial backing of Communist regimes: the global Communist structure maintained by Moscow crumbled wherever it had established itself. The speed of events surprised many in the United States, not least the CIA who failed to anticipate what was about to happen. The new President, George Bush, tried to keep pace with the unfolding developments. Helmut Kohl, the West German leader, moved quickly amid the confusion and shock to obtain sanction for reunification with East Germany despite opposition from his European allies. On October 3, 1990, Germany was again a single nation. Throughout 1990 several Soviet republics declared independence and by the end of 1991 the USSR was formally dissolved. Yugoslavia collapsed amid civil war in 1992 and Czechoslovakia split into two in 1993. The redrawing of borders and international reordering was unlike anything seen since 1945. With the rush to begin the world anew many issues were left unresolved and a host of new conflicts arose which had been dormant, frozen for 40 years by the Cold War that now ended.

The time was for celebration and heady expectation. Many looked to the world ahead with renewed confidence and tried to make sense of it all. Some looked to history

for guidance and analysed what was happening as the emergence of a new age. In his Inaugural Address in January 1989, George Bush sensed the gathering wave of democracy as the way of the future. “For a new breeze is blowing, and a world refreshed by freedom seems reborn. For in man’s heart, if not in fact, the day of the dictator is over. The totalitarian era is passing, its old ideas blown away like leaves from an ancient, lifeless tree. A new breeze is blowing, and a nation refreshed by freedom stands ready to push on. There is new ground to be broken and new action to be taken. There are times when the future seems thick as a fog; you sit and wait, hoping the mists will lift and reveal the right path. But this is a time when the future seems a door you can walk right through into a room called tomorrow.”⁷²³ The winds of change brought with them good tidings and the confirmation of the superiority of liberal democracy. The future, he augured, would be one of liberty coupled with prosperity achieved thanks to the embracement of Capitalism.

There was a sense of congratulatory self-satisfaction and vindication in the administration. In the long battle against Communism the free market had proven to be a better provider than the planned economy. There was no need to look for new ideologies or forms of government. “We know what works: Freedom works. We know what’s right: Freedom is right. We know how to secure a more just and prosperous life for man on Earth: through free markets, free speech, free elections, and the exercise of free will unhampered by the state. For the first time in this century, for the first time in perhaps all history, man does not have to invent a system by which to live. We don’t have to talk late into the night about which form of government is better. We don’t have to wrest justice from the kings. We only have to summon it from within ourselves.”⁷²⁴ Democracy and the free market arose as the best interpreters of the innate desire for liberty within each individual. The general feeling was that the long search for the good government had ended.

A few months later a scholarly article elaborated on the notion that the search for the best form of government had indeed reached an end. In his essay, Francis Fukuyama contended that the triumph of the United States in the Cold War represented also the final vindication of political and economic liberalism. Having been challenged during practically the whole of the 20th century by competing alternatives - from fascism to

⁷²³ George Bush, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16610>, (accessed February 5, 2015).

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

Communism, and Prussian absolutism right at the beginning of the century - liberal democracy had defeated all of its opponents to emerge as the only convincing, working form of government. As such, he claimed, "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." Fukuyama distinguished between history as human progress and history as the succession of events. What concerned him was the march of history as the advancement of an Idea, the search for a meaning underlying the succession of events. "This is not to say that there will no longer be events to fill the pages of *Foreign Affairs's* yearly summaries of international relations, for the victory of liberalism has occurred primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world. But there are powerful reasons for believing that it is the ideal that will govern the material world in the long run."⁷²⁵ America had won the Cold War and it seemed it had also won the battle of ideas, defeating Communism and establishing liberal democracy as the world conquering ideology. There was no need to invent new forms of social and political organisation. All that remained was to establish it globally.

Fukuyama's ideas regarding the existence of a purpose for historical development were linked with the work of German philosopher Friedrich Hegel. Fukuyama's interpretation of Hegel is itself based on Alexandre Kojève's reading of his ideas. According to Hegel history is driven by the impulse of several contradicting forces that operate in the realm of human consciousness, better understood as ideas, "in the sense of large unifying world views that might best be understood under the rubric of ideology. Ideology in this sense is not restricted to the secular and explicit political doctrines we usually associate with the term, but can include religion, culture, and the complex of moral values underlying any society as well." With Hegel the dialectic process between the ideal world and the real world meant that history advanced slowly but surely toward a final resolution. History could be grasped as a teleological narrative of mankind's spiritual and ideological evolution. Therefore, "understanding the underlying processes of history requires understanding developments in the realm of consciousness or ideas, since consciousness will ultimately remake the material world

⁷²⁵ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, Summer 1989. <http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm>, (accessed January 24, 2015).

in its own image.”⁷²⁶ Karl Marx borrowed heavily from Hegel but he altered the relationship between the material world and the world of ideas. To Marx, the former was the main driver of historical development and the establishment of a communist system of ownership of the means of production would resolve all historical contradictions with the elimination of social classes and the triumph of social and political equality.

Whereas Marxists still await the end of history, Hegel was firmly convinced that history had ended in 1806. In that year Napoleon had defeated the Prussian army at Jena and Hegel saw the event as the triumph of the ideals of liberty and equality heralded by the French Revolution. The victorious march of the French armies represented the spreading of the highest principles mankind had developed and which could not be improved upon. They represented the apogee of human political and social reasoning and although they were not yet universal in their application, they were final in that they represented the end of the progress of ideas. History as a chain of events would continue, especially now as humanity would strive to spread those final values globally. In fact, and according to Fukuyama, the 20th century was such an eventful period because the wars that ravaged it were fought for the extension of the principles of liberty and equality against rival systems of governance. Thus, for him, 1989 meant that western liberal democracy had just conquered the last remaining serious ideological alternative, and represented the termination of humanity’s ideological evolution.

Fukuyama’s claim for an end to history rests on his assertion that Man has, at least for the foreseeable future, found in liberal democracy the “best regime, or more precisely the best of the available alternative ways of organizing human societies (or again, if one prefers Churchill’s formulation, the least bad way of doing so). It most fully (though not completely) satisfies the most basic human longings, and therefore can be expected to be more universal and more durable than other regimes or other principles of political organization.”⁷²⁷ To prove his point Fukuyama pointed to the growing number of working democracies in existence from the advent of the French Revolution to the present. Although there had been fluctuations in that number, the general trend had been upward. Since the proclamation of the Rights of Man and its association with democracy as the best formulation for human freedom and dignity, the

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

⁷²⁷ Francis Fukuyama, “Reflections on the End of History, Five Years Later.” *History and Theory*, Vol. 34, n° 2 (May 1995): 29.

idea had been gaining ground and widespread acceptance worldwide. As the author reflected some years after his initial work, “The assertion, then, that liberal democracy constitutes the ‘end of history’ does not depend on the short-term advances or setbacks to democracy worldwide in 1994 (or 1989, or 1939, or 1806, for that matter). It is a normative statement about the principles of freedom and equality that underlay the French and American revolutions, to the effect that they stand at the end of a long process of ideological evolution, and that there is not a higher set of alternative principles that will in time replace them.”⁷²⁸

When he put forward his arguments for the end of history in 1989, Fukuyama had written of the triumph of the West, not military victory but a victory in the realm of consciousness as the Western idea supplanted all others. The number of democracies worldwide was one indicator but so was the spread of Western culture and consumer habits. Capitalism as the best provider of most of man’s economic needs had also been vindicated, Fukuyama argued. And this was because the very idea of a “coherent and directional transformation of human societies that affects the whole, or nearly the whole, of mankind,” rested on the concept of economic modernisation. This was vital for the perception of a purposeful universal history. “Prior to the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe, there could be a high degree of continuity in history: Chinese civilization, whether one looks at political organization, family life, or economic production, did not look terribly different in the Han dynasty than it did in the Sung or even Ch’ing periods. But with the development of the scientific method, a process of economic development began that has encompassed virtually the whole of humanity.” While this meant that human history developed slowly until the 16th century, the scientific revolution accelerated the process both materially and ideologically. And rather than being a European phenomenon, the ensuing economic organisation that emerges is common to all cultures. As he remarks, “the broad outlines of the process - urbanization, rational authority, bureaucratization, an ever-ramified and complex division of labor - can be found in all developing cultures,” which prompted his conclusion that “What is remarkable about the process of economic modernization is its universality as a goal.”⁷²⁹ The link between industrial development and capitalism arises since he claims that the inner dynamic of “technology necessarily points toward market-oriented forms of economic decision-

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

making.”⁷³⁰ At the close of the Cold War, then, it was understandable to see the end of history as the triumph of the American system, since it was from its inception defined by both democracy, free enterprise and economic initiative.

The search for the best form of government was given a decisive spur during the Enlightenment, when Reason was employed to effect that discovery. And before the French Revolution another revolution had completed the establishment of a new government founded on the principles of liberty and democracy. The importance of the American colonies’ rebellion to the wider world was quickly advertised by Thomas Paine. Their struggle for freedom was also a fight against oppression, and the desire to establish a more just and egalitarian form of government. In a world of reigning monarchs and aristocrats “The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind.”⁷³¹ The colonists fighting for independence had the opportunity to start the world again and when the great debate surrounding the ratification of the Constitution of 1787 began, Hamilton warned his readers of the general significance of the Republican form of government. Derided in feudal Europe, republicanism meant the ability of the common man to participate in his country’s decisions, to which aristocrats claimed he was unfit and unprepared.

It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force. If there be any truth in the remark, the crisis at which we are arrived may with propriety be regarded as the era in which that decision is to be made; and a wrong election of the part we shall act may, in this view, deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind.⁷³²

The United States of America were the location where the most advanced theories on government of the time were established. The Founding Fathers and their

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁷³¹ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, Rights of Man, and Other Essential Writings of Thomas Paine* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 3.

⁷³² Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist n° 1”, in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 1.

successors were in no doubt about the idea of America and that it represented the best in human political thinking and the most honourable in terms of ethical judgment.⁷³³

Throughout the nation's history the exceptional character of its political constitution and its wider symbolism were a main feature in the political actors' and commentators' discourse. America's form of government was deemed so special that President Monroe used it as the rationale behind his warning to the European powers to steer clear of any intervention in the Americas. The monarchic regimes of Europe were fundamentally different from the American Republic, and the latter's preservation depended on being free from any undue influence from autocratic forms of government. "We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers to declare that we should 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."⁷³⁴ In 1847, James Polk concluded that the United States were living proof that Republicanism worked and was the best exponent of the values of democracy. Despite all attempts to denigrate popular government as impractical, America's success closed the argument: "the problem no longer remains to be solved whether man is capable of self-government. The success of our admirable system is a conclusive refutation of the theories of those in other countries who maintain that a 'favored few' are born to rule and that the mass of mankind must be governed by force."⁷³⁵ During the worst days of the Civil War, Lincoln reminded his countrymen that the world watched on as the United States fought for its survival. The contest concerned not just the American Republic but the cause of democracy worldwide. "Fellow-citizens, we can not escape history. We of this Congress and this Administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor to the

⁷³³ See Henry Steele Commager, *The Empire of Reason – How Europe Imagined and America Realised the Enlightenment* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), in particular Chapter 9, "Americans Realize the Theories of the Wisest Writers", for a summary of the theoretical achievements of the Enlightenment and their application in the new nation's Constitution.

⁷³⁴ James Monroe, "Seventh Annual Message," December 2, 1823. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29465>, (accessed February 17, 2015).

⁷³⁵ James K. Polk, "Third Annual Message," December 7, 1847. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29488>, (accessed February 2, 2015).

latest generation... We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail.”⁷³⁶

The belief that the independence of the United States marked a significant point in human history was so poignant from the start that the coat of arms, or seal, for the emerging Republic made direct reference to it. Commissioned in 1782, the Great Seal includes in the reverse side the date 1776 and the legend under it ‘Novus Ordo Seclorum’ (A New Order of the Ages), to signify the beginning of the American Era, the era of popular government.⁷³⁷ Most Americans recognised there had been other systems of government, periods marked by some sort of consensus around a particular form of political organisation. “In almost every century since the day that recorded history began, people have thought, quite naturally, that they were creating or establishing some kind of ‘new order of the ages.’ But in the scheme of civilization from which ours descends I suppose that we can recognize that in approximately 2,500 years there have been only a very few ‘new orders’ in the development of human living under a thing called Government.” But none had witnessed democracy become as highly esteemed and widespread as since the United States were formed. The first stirrings of democratic thinking began in Europe but had to cross the sea in order to find fertile soil for development. “Those beginnings found their freest development in the colonies that were organized along the seaboard of North America. There, by the processes of trial and error, democracy as it has since been accepted in so many lands, had its birth and its training. There came into being the first far-flung Government in all the world whose cardinal principle was democracy - the United States of America. We must accept that as fact because, truly and fundamentally, it was a new order. Nothing like it had ever been seen before. We must accept it because the new order spread into almost every part of the civilized world.”⁷³⁸ In 1940, when the most vigorous attempt to eradicate democracy was under way in Europe, Roosevelt voiced his belief that the world order of democracy could not be defeated.

But by the following year, the conviction that the American system represented the culmination of human civilisation was encouraging a different understanding. In

⁷³⁶ Abraham Lincoln, “Second Annual Message,” December 1, 1862. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29503>, (accessed February 4, 2015).

⁷³⁷ U.S. Department of State, *The Great Seal of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Public Affairs, 2003).

⁷³⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Address on Armistice Day, Arlington National Cemetery,” November 11, 1940. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15898>, (accessed February 4, 2015).

1941, Henry Luce, another member of the ruling elite, called on his countrymen to bring forward the American Century, marked by American global leadership. The winning of the war would see the spreading of the American system and its values - democracy and the free-market - sponsored by international institutions and the attendant framework of international affairs, all supported and protected by the United States. The high expectations of reshaping the globe had to be put on hold for the duration of the stand-off with the Soviet Union, but once that final obstacle was cleared many in the United States believed that the time had at last arrived for the establishment of the American Century, a new Augustan age of world peace and prosperity under the protection of American arms.

II

It is not surprising, then, that the idea of a new world order acquired new significance with the end of the Cold War. Although Fukuyama denied that his end of history advanced the idea of American global leadership, many came to associate his thinking as justifying the emergence of a new international structure under American tutelage and the ensuing establishment of democracy and capitalism – the latter mainly associated as an American value – as reigning political principles all over the world. The opportunity was too good to be missed or to remain in the sidelines as inspiring force, the mighty lighthouse of freedom; students of the realist school of international relations are aware that human nature abhors a power vacuum. The world was leaving one epoch and starting a new one: of the two superpowers, only one remained. All around it, nations - notwithstanding the odd anachronisms - were realigning their internal politics and ideologies in favour of more liberal approaches. And yet, it was the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev who spoke of the formation of a new post-Cold War world order. He proposed international cooperation to avert aggression and to promote prosperity, a world order where the great nations of the world – not just the United States and the Soviet Union – would work together to advance peace but also to solve the main problems affecting the globe.

Gorbachev's initiative caught the United States new leadership unprepared. Ronald Reagan had managed to build a friendly relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev and, to a degree, both trusted one another. However, as events gathered pace it was obvious that Reagan was not to be the man leading the United States into that new dawn

of world history. That task would fall to his Vice-President, George Bush. A former director of the CIA, Bush had been the perfect right-hand man. Although having challenged for the Republican nomination in the 1980 primaries, Bush and Reagan quickly forgot the bitter and bloody campaign to become an effective team in the White House. Subdued, Bush waited patiently biding his time for the constitutional 8 years and his chance. But as with other Vice-Presidents, living under the shadow of a popular President has the effect of rendering one difficult to see. When the moment came, Bush had to fight hard to win the 1988 presidential election; a victory that was seized after a campaign promise that would come back to haunt him later: no new taxes. After 8 long years in the shade, Bush arrived at the White House in an encouraging period for those keen on historical legacies. Unlike Truman regarding Stalin, Bush trusted Gorbachev and liked him personally. But he had been surprised by Gorbachev's talk of international solidarity and wanted to take back the initiative. So far, he was playing catch-up.⁷³⁹

The new President's staff, on the other hand, was wary of the Soviet leader's real intentions. Gorbachev was wooing the Europeans with talk of a strategic partnership between East and West, effectively driving a wedge between Western Europe and the United States with the potential to undermine NATO. His National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft, was aware of the risks. "He [Gorbachev] was trying to kill us with kindness, rather than bluster. He was saying the sorts of things we wanted to hear, making numerous seductive proposals to seize and maintain the propaganda high ground in the battle for international public opinion. The unilateral force reduction initiatives contained in his December United Nations address had little military significance, but the speech had struck a responsive chord among many and won him much approbation, putting the West on the psychological defensive." Scowcroft's fear was that the West would lower its guard only to regret it later, a prophetic warning only to those who fail to understand the motives and rationale of power. "Everyone was tired of the Cold War and even leaders such as British prime minister Margaret Thatcher were now declaring it over. My fear was that Gorbachev could talk us into disarming without the Soviet Union having to do anything fundamental to its own military structure and that, in a decade or so, we could face a more serious threat than ever before."⁷⁴⁰ Scowcroft's estimate missed the mark by another decade, but Europe's

⁷³⁹ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft. *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 8 - 9.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

misconceptions and the re-emergence of Russian nationalism have indeed caught the West off guard.

The United States were left scrambling for an idea but mainly struggling to keep hold of its influence in Europe. The idealism of the new order of the ages was replaced by the calculation that, in order to preserve the prominence that allowed it to maintain an international system that reflected its principles and preferences, the United States had to assert its leadership. The battleground was, again, Europe. The European integration project was viewed with uncertainty. Although as a trading bloc it was regarded with encouragement, its possible emergence as a rival in global affairs caused much anxiety and would certainly imperil America's position in the continent. Among the many questions facing a dazed administration still trying to come to terms with all that was happening "there was the question of potential European unification. Were we looking at a potential new superpower in Western Europe? There had always been some US ambivalence about the prospect of European unity. It was not clear whether the implications of European integration and unification were good or bad for the United States. A European pillar might make NATO more efficient. Could it also be a substitute for US forces?"⁷⁴¹ Despite the Wilsonian defence of self-determination, Germany's quick move toward unification was a further element of tension and nervousness. A unified Germany had the potential of becoming the economic powerhouse to match the Russian military might; although a remote prospect, if combined they would be a powerful rival. Gorbachev's vision of a shared European home from the Atlantic to the Urals would naturally challenge the United States in all fronts. In the Bush administration there was cause for alarm. "Scowcroft pointed out that the United States was losing the battle with Gorbachev over influencing the direction of Europe. The Soviet leader was preaching that the Cold War was over and we should be dismantling its structures (although he said little about the future of Soviet forces in Europe). If we looked as if we were just dragging our feet, the Europeans would cease to follow and the Soviets would seize the international agenda. The President agreed that Gorbachev had undermined the US leadership, and he wanted to go to the NATO summit in May with a series of bold proposals that would put us in front."⁷⁴² If nothing was done, the new world order could just become a new version of the old one.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁴² Ibid., 43.

The dreams of international democratisation and harmony were quickly dissipating as China cracked down on protesters in Tiananmen Square, and rising nationalism erupted into bloody conflicts in Europe and elsewhere. Gorbachev's project foundered amid rising nationalist tensions within the Soviet Union which kept him busy and eventually irrelevant as the Soviet Union dissolved. In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait and annexed it as a result of nationalist claims that Kuwait was in fact a former part of Iraq. Together with the Soviet Union's eclipse this gave Bush the opportunity he needed. Although he still had no clear original idea to counter that of Gorbachev, he would appropriate it and with the demise of the Soviet Union place the United States alone at the helm of the new world order. Speaking before Congress on the subject of the Iraqi invasion George Bush spoke of the common vision with Gorbachev using the same expression, that of a new world order of partnership between nations. "Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak. This is the vision that I shared with President Gorbachev in Helsinki." Despite their shared vision there was a finer point that Bush introduced in the speech: cooperation, yes, but with a clear leader: "Recent events have surely proven that there is no substitute for American leadership." What form would that international cooperation take in practical terms? The new era was to be marked by frankness and sincerity, and the President was very clear in his exposition. "At home, the material cost of our leadership can be steep. That's why Secretary of State Baker and Treasury Secretary Brady have met with many world leaders to underscore that the burden of this collective effort must be shared. We are prepared to do our share and more to help carry that load; we insist that others do their share as well. The response of most of our friends and allies has been good. To help defray costs, the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE - the United Arab Emirates - have pledged to provide our deployed troops with all the food and fuel they need."⁷⁴³ In short, the US would provide the force, the rest of the world would provide the money.

Following victory in the Gulf and the end of the Soviet Union, the United States looked around only to realise that it was finally alone at the top. As the sole superpower

⁷⁴³ George Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit," September 11, 1990. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=18820>, (accessed February 22, 2015).

it could look to the world with new eyes, and from above. Seen from above, everything looks simple. Paul Kennedy in his *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* had written that the great powers decline because their economy is stretched to its limits trying to sustain political and territorial ambitions - imperial overstretch. But how could that fate befall the United States when it had no territorial ambitions and, via international partnerships, it could meet the huge expenses of maintaining its military in permanent global state of readiness? Hegemony seemed assured and global consensus reigned regarding the role of America as the warden of world peace. At last everything seemed to have fallen into place for America to fulfil its destiny.

If any dangers were to arise they would come from rogue states that defied the international structure. Despite the harmony, the United States had to remain vigilant for this new chapter in human history was as much promising as it was unknown. "The present international scene, turbulent as it is, is about as much of a blank state as history provides, and the importance of American engagement has never been bigger. If the United States does not lead, there will be no leadership. It is our great challenge to learn from this bloodiest century in history. If we fail to live up to our responsibilities, if we shirk the role which only we can assume, if we retreat from our obligation to the world into indifference, we will, one day, pay the highest price once again for our neglect and shortsightedness."⁷⁴⁴ American leadership was good for the world because it prevented international chaos. A grand covenant would therefore be struck with the United States assuming the role of peacekeeper funded by the nations interested in stability and predictability in global affairs.

Thus, the 'new order of the ages' resolved into a form of international management of issues lead by the United States. The anticipated American Era was mistaken as the triumph of American style of democracy and the acceptance of a Pax Americana, with the United Nations as the rubber stamp international forum used to legitimise the status quo. For any ideological nation to triumph in such a critical contest as the Cold War, the ensuing proliferation of systems of government not unlike its own would not fail to be regarded as tacit approval of its values. And of the recognition of its supervisory guidance in ushering a successful transition to democracy. Consequently, the peaceful dissemination of America's values of government justified world leadership as necessary to protect peace and self-determination; expediency justified as

⁷⁴⁴ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft. *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 566.

supreme idealism. If those values were the culmination of human experience toward the best form of government, self-evident and therefore naturally aspired to by all, surely in time they would prevail over any attempt by minor dictatorships to disrupt the international structure. After all, democracy had withstood the mighty Soviet assault; the likes of Cuba and North Korea were nothing compared with the Red Army, nor was it predictable that they would become role models for other nations. Nonetheless, recognition of human nature's flaws necessarily leads to preventive measures and the creation of mechanisms of defence. Thus it can be argued that America's desire for leadership was rooted in old-fashioned anthropological pessimism, stemming from the fact that there were still some nations that failed to rise from the darkness into the light of America's values that now spanned the globe.

There is an evolution in the ideology of relations with the distant world, situated beyond the immediate borders of the United States. The early Republic lived in terror of losing independence to the great European powers - France and Great Britain - and the Founding Fathers urged distance and as little contact as possible. With the war of 1812 the country asserted its independence and eschewed its fears towards Europe. From the Monroe Doctrine of protection of the newly-independent republics of South America, through to Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier nostalgia as necessary to preserve America's democratic character, there is a signal shift in favour of engagement with the faraway world which culminates with Henry Luce's altruistic replacement of Europe as the paramount civilising power for the benefit of the whole world. But the rationale behind these developments lurks in the shadows. The Monroe Doctrine's claim to safeguard America's values against nefarious influences from Europe laid the foundations for its supremacy in the Western Hemisphere. Frederick Jackson Turner arguably justified expansionism as necessary, which would come with the Spanish-American War and the occupation of Cuba and the Philippines, and Henry Luce's empire-building recycled the benevolent justification that it would serve to promote the advancement of less industrialised countries. If the 'novus ordo seclorum' was about freedom from monarchic impositions and aristocratic enforcement of privilege, the belief in a standardised set of values for all would naturally run counter to self-determination and autonomy. Resistance was to be expected.

Early difficulties centred round nations reluctant to leave behind nationalism and embrace the enlightened age of multinational harmony. Iraq was quickly defeated but its

leader Saddam Hussein managed to remain in power thanks to a decision by George Bush to stop the advance of US forces rather than continue to Baghdad. As Kuwait was liberated, Yugoslavia began to fall apart. Released from the Russian straitjacket, nationalist tensions began to assert themselves in Eastern Europe and although Slovakia and the Czech Republic parted amiably, the situation in the Balkans descended into armed conflict. One by one the several communities declared independence and as what remained of the federal government tried to stop the breakup, war spread to the rest of the federation. The reordering of borders was not confined to Europe alone. In Somalia, Eritrea, Yemen, Armenia and Azerbaijan, armed conflict flared up and episodes of violence took place in other regions as the world convulsed under the released pressure bottled up for half a century. Early successes in imposing American supervision in Panama were forgotten. Chaos looked to prevail despite American leadership. And by 1992, Bush lost the re-election battle to Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. Although Bush had reached record favourable ratings during the Gulf War the electorate did not forget his promise not to raise taxes. The economy proved to be a more important factor in the elections than George Bush's victorious war in the Middle East or his promise of a new world following the end of the Cold War.

Bill Clinton made the most of the economic recession that hit the country in the final years of Bush's administration. Together with the latter's broken promise not to raise taxes, Clinton was able to dodge questions about his character and his ideology. Denounced as a progressive liberal by conservatives, Clinton was initially viewed as a candidate intent on a return to a government of tax and spend. Notwithstanding, Clinton successfully portrayed himself as a Third Way liberal pushing the Democratic Party to the centre. Embracing fiscal conservatism and friendly towards business, Clinton was able to return the Democrats to the White House without falling foul of the financial and political legacy left by Reagan and which dominated the country. Despite Clinton's rebranding, talking of his party as the New Democrats, conservatives were unimpressed and warned of a radical threat to the achievements of the 1980's. Clinton's past was scrutinised, especially his record during the 1960's when he was a student. Opponents charged him with avoiding the draft during the Vietnam War and of substance abuse, namely marijuana. In a famous moment of the campaign, Clinton acknowledged that he had indeed smoked the drug but had not inhaled. This would not be the last time that Clinton side-stepped delicate questions by making recourse to the finer points of semantic detail in the subjects at stake.

Republicans wasted no time in exploiting the issues regarding Clinton's past, portraying him as a poster child of Sixties radicalism. During the Republican National Convention to nominate the party's candidate, Pat Buchanan, a leading conservative, made a scathing attack against Bill Clinton and his attempt at refashioning the Democratic Party as a model of centrism. Although he had campaigned for the Republican nomination, Buchanan withdrew his candidacy and came to support Bush's re-election delivering a rousing speech during the Republican Convention. The gathering was made famous for being the last major public appearance of Ronald Reagan, who spoke in defence of his legacy and George Bush. Buchanan's speech was more abrasive and polarising. He accused the Democrats of deception and of dressing up "as moderates and centrists in the greatest single exhibition of crossdressing in American political history... The American people are not going to go back to the discredited liberalism of the 1960s and the failed liberalism of the 1970s, no matter how slick the package in 1992." Knowing that Bush's economic record was poor, he concentrated on the President's foreign record quipping that "Bill Clinton's foreign policy experience is pretty much confined to having had breakfast once at the International House of Pancakes." No matter how amusing, the remark only highlighted the Republican's uneasiness at addressing domestic policy. Therefore, the best route was to highlight the political and ideological differences separating the two in an attempt perhaps of scaring the electorate by rendering Clinton as an extremist.

The President, he said, was "a defender of right-to-life, and a champion of the Judeo-Christian values and beliefs upon which America was founded. Mr. Clinton however, has a different agenda. At its top is unrestricted abortion on demand."

Elect me, and you get 'two for the price of one,' Mr. Clinton says of his lawyer-spouse. And what does Hillary believe? Well, Hillary believes that 12-year-olds should have the right to sue their parents. And Hillary has compared marriage and the family, as institutions, to slavery and life on an Indian reservation. Well, speak for yourself, Hillary. This, my friends, is radical feminism. The agenda that Clinton & Clinton would impose on America: abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, women in combat units. That's change, all right. But that's not the kind

of change America needs. It's not the kind of change America wants. And it's not the kind of change we can abide in a nation we still call 'God's country.'⁷⁴⁵

In one single speech, intended to portray Clinton as a dangerous menace to traditional America, Buchanan managed instead to scare the public with his violent accusations and doomsday prophecies about a Democratic victory. And this during a wide consensus in the country regarding Reagan's revolution and at the height of a conservative wave in national politics. His brand of values sounded dangerously reactionary, intolerant of other positions. The defence of freedom sounded like the imposition of a particular version of what freedom was. In his speech, it was the Republicans that sounded like extremists. "Friends, this election is about more than who gets what. It is about who we are. It is about what we believe and what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America." Although the economy was in a downturn, Americans were still reaping the benefits of the 1980's boom. And with the end of the Cold War the old fear of nuclear annihilation was fast becoming a memory of the past. Americans certainly did not want to return to the Sixties and Seventies, and the social and political violence. After those dark days of internal anxieties and external menace, the appetite for a cultural war was low. And Clinton, although harassed by doubts about his character, did not look like a dangerous radical ready to overthrow the Constitution and bomb Capitol Hill. His talk of the economy sounded much closer to Americans than Buchanan's call to arms to "take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country."⁷⁴⁶

The economy was the big issue of the campaign as the country was involved in a financial depression that traced its roots to the deregulation and euphoria of the 1980's. One sector particularly hit was that of real-estate through the Savings and Loan associations which helped finance home buyers to fulfil their share of the American dream - ownership of one's house. The dream of home ownership was as old as the United States. Most migrants who arrived at the British colonies in North America were

⁷⁴⁵ Patrick J. Buchanan, "Address to the Republican National Convention in Houston," August 17, 1992. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=78575>, (accessed March 3, 2015).

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

attracted by the possibility of owning their plot of land. In Europe, the small farmer tilled land but this belonged to some lord or bishop, and he was unable to possess land of his own and keep the proceeds of his work. America had such a vastness of land that it could spare enough of it to all newcomers. And there were no aristocracies nor religious orders ready to claim a share of the crops. Thomas Jefferson saw in this the roots of egalitarianism and democracy in America, believing that an independent yeomanry was the best guarantee of freedom. He was a tireless defender of the development of free landowners and worked to increase their numbers. Suspicious of the embryonic industrialism growing in the cities of the North and of the urban merchant classes, he believed that agriculture was the soul of the Republic. Industry depended on a steady flow of dependent workers, unfree and at the mercy of their employers. His defence of agrarianism rested on the belief that only free citizens could defend the country as they had a real stake in it; wage-workers, on the other hand, were not truly free as they relied on others for their survival, which made them prone to opt for personal considerations rather than the welfare of the community.

The triumph of industrialism in the late 19th century did not kill the idea of land ownership, but saw a metamorphosis. To be a property holder was still the realisation of the American dream but in time the idea emerged that owning one's home was the next best thing, which benefited from the need to stem discontent among the working classes who lived in small houses with no conditions and had to pay rent for it. During the Depression new federal agencies were created to facilitate the opportunity for millions to buy their house. The idea was to promote the formation of a property-owning democracy, a modern, urban replica of Jefferson's agrarian democracy. Widespread homeownership was lauded as an American virtue, a true accomplishment worthy of a nation of free citizens and the federal government launched a series of incentives, including federal insurance of deposits and mortgages. The result was a rise in the number of loans and the consequent increase in the percentages of homeowners. With the end of World War II and the return of the millions of veterans, construction intensified and developers created the suburban phenomena to offset the lack of space in the cities. To broaden the social base of the rising property-owning class laws were approved to force creditors to lend to poorer people and racial minorities.

The early 1980's deregulation made it easier for Savings and Loans associations to lend money and invest beyond mortgages. Construction of new houses boomed to meet the rising demand as money was made more available and more and more people

could afford the lending requirements. New projects were being daily approved and construction changed the landscape of many a peaceful rural area as new suburbs mushroomed close to the big cities of America. Soon supply overshot demand creating a bubble of vast proportions. As early as 1986, building companies and Savings and Loans were closing their doors as property prices fell. But the problem became a federal burden as the deposits of these associations were federally insured. Through the late 1980's and early-nineties the country watched helplessly as the crisis unfolded and the housing federal agencies were called to the rescue. The numbers involved were enormous. "The final cost of the Savings and Loans crisis between 1986 and 1995 was \$135 billion (around 3 percent of GDP), of which taxpayers had to pay \$124 billion, making it the most expensive financial crisis since the Depression."⁷⁴⁷ The ideal of a property-owning democracy had exacted a huge price but its pull was so strong that financiers and government soon devised new financial vehicles and opportunities for people to buy their house.

III

The Clinton administration coincided with a new period of bitter disappointments, domestically and abroad. Besides the financial meltdown that hit the homeownership dream, Clinton's liberal policies - in healthcare reform especially - foundered and any further attempt at major legislation was cut short with the 1994 congressional elections which awarded Republicans control of both House and Senate for the first time in 40 years. He did win a few minor victories but he likewise collected a number of blunders and earned the mocking contempt of the media who focused rather on his mistakes than on his achievements. There was also the conservative frame of mind that still commanded the nation's ideological predispositions. Progressive policies that relied on government activism were seen as belonging to the past, especially after the end of the Cold War. Republican congressman Newt Gingrich, a dedicated foe of the President, expressed the general attitude by saying that the Clintons "were going against the entire tide of Western history. I mean centralized, command

⁷⁴⁷ Niall Ferguson, *The Ascent of Money – A Financial History of the World* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 260.

bureaucracies are dying. This is the end of that era, not the beginning of it.”⁷⁴⁸ History marched with a purpose, a direction which drove it away from centralised government. After taking a majority in Congress, Republicans proceeded to undermine the President and the concentration of powers in Washington. To achieve this Republicans moved to extend Reagan’s devolution programme to municipalities, also with the aim of weakening the power of the federal government by depriving it of funds. But Clinton was fiscally prudent and one of his greatest accomplishments came with the balancing of the federal budget which not only saw a decrease of federal spending as a percentage of GDP but also managed to end successive years with rising surpluses, a feat not achieved since the late 1960’s. This, together with the disastrous defeat of 1994, ensured that Clinton would remain committed, and perceived, as a moderate for the remainder of his presidency.

With the end of the Cold War, expectations that the world would become a safer and better place quickly evaporated. Early signs seemed to confirm the serene visions of peace when Clinton welcomed Israelis and Palestinians following successful negotiations to settle the conflict between the two. The shaking of hands between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat on the White House lawn before a multitude of the world media was the symbol of a new era of harmony and peaceful resolution of disputes. However, religion looked to be taking the place of political ideology as the main driver of differences and source of violence, visible in several separatist movements and civil wars from the Balkans to Southeast Asia, and terrorist attacks were also on the rise, especially those with religious motivations.

The era of good-feelings in foreign affairs was nipped in the bud before it could realise all the hopes for the new future. Problems in Somalia, Sudan, the Philippines, Bosnia, India, were casting doubt over what the new international reality would be like. One of the most maligned analysis of the future of international relations was presented in 1993 and was made famous through the years by the strenuous and vehement attempts at proving it wrong. Contrary to proponents of the new world order of peaceful coexistence and settlement of disputes, Samuel Huntington put forward his hypothesis that “the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most

⁷⁴⁸ Quoted in James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant – The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 330.

powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.”⁷⁴⁹ Rather than a new Augustan age of imperial supremacy and prosperity through global trade routes, Huntington predicted that America would have to face a world divided in groups of countries of likeminded doctrines and worldviews.

What this implied, first of all, was the death of the ‘end of history’ thesis with its universalisation of ideas regarding the relationship between citizens and the state. “Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion. The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear. They are far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes.”⁷⁵⁰ And are also compelling elements of self-identification. For Huntington, people revert more quickly to subjective elements of identification than objective ones: a person more readily defines itself, and marks its status, by its religion or national history than by its human essence.

If so, it means there is no common denominator to which Man automatically returns to when ideologies and institutions are removed, as Fukuyama suggested. The increased rate of globalisation, Huntington contended, rather than bringing people closer together and enhancing mutual comprehension, intensifies civilizational consciousness and awareness of the differences between cultural groups. And he claimed also that economic modernisation, which Fukuyama saw as walking hand in hand with the liberal democracy, was one of the main culprits: “the processes of economic modernization and social change throughout the world are separating people from longstanding local identities. They also weaken the nation state as a source of identity. In much of the world religion has moved in to fill this gap, often in the form of movements that are labeled ‘fundamentalist.’” As for the self-evident values of liberal democracy, they were rejected in favour of ancient original values because of the very pre-eminence of the West.

⁷⁴⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993: 22.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

The growth of civilization-consciousness is enhanced by the dual role of the West. On the one hand, the West is at a peak of power. At the same time, however, and perhaps as a result, a return to the roots phenomenon is occurring among non-Western civilizations. Increasingly one hears references to trends toward a turning inward and ‘Asianization’ in Japan, the end of the Nehru legacy and the ‘Hinduization’ of India, the failure of Western ideas of socialism and nationalism and hence ‘re-Islamization’ of the Middle East, and now a debate over Westernization versus Russianization in Boris Yeltsin’s country. A West at the peak of its power confronts non-Wests that increasingly have the desire, the will and the resources to shape the world in non-Western ways.⁷⁵¹

The spread of the values of human dignity and individual rights under natural law yielded to the morality of the group to which each individual is a part of. Although the masses enjoyed Western culture and were particularly attracted to American popular culture, they still held on firmly to their communities’ principles and traditions. The hope that liberal democracy would be adopted as the standard government framework slowly faded away as each region and culture asserted its own response to the question of the best form of organising the community.

Likewise, the role of America as the global peacemaker and problem-solver was rejected. The prevailing mood in international affairs seemed to be that the field was again open for anyone now that the Cold War constraints were over. While the stakes had been too great to allow for independent freelancers and lone wolves, forcing everyone to tread carefully, the end of the great death match reopened the door for old political strategies and the pursuit of national self-interests and assertions of regional dominance. The old rivalries and political games between countries were back with a vengeance, especially since all the other major regional powers regarded Pax Americana as a poorly disguised attempt at keeping potential competitors from challenging the United States and the West. Samuel Huntington’s analysis vindicated that belief. “During the Cold War the primary purpose of arms control was to establish a stable military balance between the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union and its allies. In the post-Cold War world the primary objective of arms control is to prevent the development by non-Western societies of military capabilities that could threaten

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., 26.

Western interests. The West attempts to do this through international agreements, economic pressure and controls on the transfer of arms and weapons technologies.”⁷⁵² Although national governments did not openly challenge American pre-eminence yet, in Somalia the refusal to accept international interference was displayed in violent fashion.

American intervention in the local civil war ended abruptly when US Special Forces in Mogadishu were faced with an onslaught by local rebels that killed and wounded over 100 soldiers. The humiliation was capped with the macabre display for international television of American dead bodies being dragged through the streets of the city by jubilant crowds. Less than two weeks after this, American soldiers were prevented from disembarking in Haiti and forced to return home. They were to assist in training the local police force and prepare the democratic transition of the country. Clearly, the Haitians were not interested in receiving lessons about keeping democratic order. Whereas Haiti represented a part of the world that traditionally fell within the United States influence, Clinton was criticised for committing troops in Somalia, a place that most Americans and never heard of and where there were no apparent American interests. Any hopes of a warming to American domination were dashed; the world would not willingly accept moral impositions. If the United States wished to shape the world according to its principles and interests it would have to do it the old fashion way: with boots on the ground and prepared to accept the loss of lives. Domestic support was thin, at best, and after the images broadcast from Somalia it only existed amidst the political and intellectual elites in Washington. Perhaps as a result of this waning appetite for intervention in far-away and obscure places, when news of the genocide in Rwanda reached American shores the Clinton administration refused to use the word ‘genocide’ to describe the situation and kept on the sidelines for the 3-plus months during which close to a million people were killed.

Nothing of that magnitude had ever happened during the Cold War, and the succession of events, coups, wars, massacres and violence after its end was confounding. And while most of the world looked to the United States for some reaction, some response to all that was taking place, Americans kept away from Rwanda and were blamed for it in a case of ‘damned if you do, damned if you don’t.’ No wonder

⁷⁵² Ibid., 46.

that, as Patterson remarks, “Perplexed, some Americans seemed to be almost nostalgic for the Cold War era, when a simpler bipolar world had confronted them.”⁷⁵³

In early 1993, Muslim terrorists tried to explode the World Trade Centre. Albeit unsuccessful, the attempt was a pilot for what happened later in 2001, and also a reminder that the United States were not immune to having the terrorist menace striking on its home soil. In April that year another incident claimed the lives of over 80 people - 27 of them children - in Waco, Texas, when federal agents stormed the complex of a religious sect that had entrenched itself amid allegations of possession of illegal weapons and sexual offences toward children. In 1995 a detonation destroyed a federal building in Oklahoma City killing 168 people. Timothy McVeigh, the man accused of the terrorist act, claimed he acted in retaliation for what had happened at Waco. Decorated for bravery in the Gulf War, Timothy McVeigh was sentenced to death and executed in 2001 having always maintained that he had acted alone and that he wanted to make a political statement about the intrusive role of the federal government and protest against its use of force against American citizens.

The attack shocked the nation and the following year Bill Clinton signed into law new anti-terrorism legislation which gave the federal security system sweeping powers for the protection of the people and the state. The new legislation was attacked by several commentators who saw it as an ominous development and a violation of constitutional liberties. It also fuelled the suspicions of groups of people who claimed that the federal government had grown beyond its constitutional limits with illegal accumulation of powers and that it is waging a secret war against the liberty of its citizens to protect its authoritarian drift. The rise of militia movements is one of the most notable phenomena of the 1990's and can be seen as the right-wing equivalent of the radical left movements that opposed the Vietnam War engaging in the execution of violent actions to overthrow the government. The goal of the local militias and assorted opponents of federal government is to combat the latter's intrusions into private lives and the erosion of civil liberties, and preserve what they consider to be the original system of government established by the Founding Fathers.

Gore Vidal, the man of letters, befriended Timothy McVeigh and wrote in his defence arguing that Oklahoma had been a conspiracy the knowledge of which the FBI

⁷⁵³ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant – The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 337.

was fully aware of. Not only did it know about the plot, it had infiltrated the militia group that planned the attack and had shied away from acting because it wanted to pressure President Clinton into approving widespread anti-terrorist legislation.⁷⁵⁴ The great writer had by then already penned an article decrying the daily abuse of civil liberties, and claiming that the proliferation of federal security agencies were like “so many Jacobins at war against the lives, freedom, and property of our citizens.”⁷⁵⁵ The government, he continued, had effectively torn the Bill of Rights apart. Electronic surveillance, federal violation of the Fourth Amendment’s protection against unreasonable searches and seizures (all in the name of combating terrorism or as part of the war on drugs, lately in the name of national security), I.R.S. seizure of property without due process of law: all these exercises of power in a land where people pride themselves of living in a country born of the conviction that the state exists to serve the people and not the other way around.

In the same article Vidal gave voice to McVeigh’s side of the story. A keen reader of history, politics and the US Constitution, McVeigh believed that the modern federal government was the symbol of oppression and terror; Oklahoma had been a reprisal for the actions in Waco and Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and the general federal war against individual freedom. He claimed that he was at war with the federal government and that the bombing in Oklahoma was a counter-attack, an act of war akin to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The comparison was intended to show that in war the accomplishment of military objectives sometimes involves the inevitable death of innocent civilians. If the United States had done it with such terrible slaughter and justified it in the name of saving the lives of thousands, then the lessons of history could not fail to be learned. McVeigh spoke just once during his trial. Asked if he wanted to speak, he said: “I wish to use the words of Justice Brandeis dissenting in *Olmstead* to speak for me. He wrote, ‘Our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or ill, it teaches the whole people by its example.’”⁷⁵⁶ The use of the state security apparatus as coercive instrument to restrain and monitor its citizens was indeed a powerful example, from which many took their own conclusions.

⁷⁵⁴ Gore Vidal, “The Meaning of Timothy McVeigh,” *Vanity Fair*, September 2001.

<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2001/09/mcveigh200109>, (accessed March 11, 2015).

⁷⁵⁵ Gore Vidal, “Shredding the Bill of Rights,” in *The Last Empire – Essays 1992 – 2000*. (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 413.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 418.

At home, Bill Clinton was his own worst enemy. His final years in the White House were marked by his involvement in scandal and his impeachment trial. His affair with Monica Lewinsky has become a symbol of his time as President and one that will likely define him both as a man and a politician. Already damaged by other sexual harassment charges that dated from his time as Governor of Arkansas, Clinton again succumbed to his animal instincts while President. Having at first denied any wrongful relationship with the young intern, Clinton was later forced to acknowledge to the nation that he had been less than straightforward in his prior statements. His public humiliation was initiated by the investigations of independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr, which culminated in the public revelation of the details of the affair and the precise definition of the sexual acts performed. The national discussion of the facts and background of the case were arguably the low point of the modern Republic in that the country was discussing the details of the intimate life of a President and what exactly constituted sexual intercourse, material hardly worthy of the attention it received by a stunned nation. Kenneth Starr's investigation concluded that the President had lied, committed perjury and had tried to obstruct the course of the investigation and of judicial proceedings. With his reputation firmly established as a philanderer he now had to fight for his political career and legacy as impeachment articles were passed in the House of Representatives.

Accused of perjury and obstruction of justice, Clinton faced the Senate in only the second time an acting President of the United States was tried for impeachment, the first one being Andrew Johnson in 1868. Whereas Johnson had been tried for challenging the vindictiveness of the radical Republicans during the Reconstruction years that followed the Civil War, Clinton would go down in history as being tried for his misbehaviour following adultery. The trial began in early 1999 and ended with the acquittal of the defendant. Although the Republicans had a majority in the Senate, the vote failed to collect the necessary two-thirds majority to convict and remove the President. Clinton's impeachment, like Andrew Johnson's, was a congressional attempt to remove a President that the majority disliked. Johnson was an impediment to the Republican's intentions for the defeated South, and Clinton, notwithstanding his dishonourable conduct, was the target of a highly charged and partisan political atmosphere. But in a larger sense it was also a reaction from a waning Congress faced with a resurgent Executive.

The years that followed Nixon's downfall had witnessed a congressional reaffirmation filling the vacuum left by a disgraced Presidency. We have seen how Ford had to ask Congress to allow him to discharge his duties. Ronald Reagan restored the Executive, not through a forceful assertion of supremacy but by crafty negotiation and seduction of members of Congress where Democrats had a majority. This resurgence was confirmed during Bush's tenure with his management of the end of the Cold War and victory in a successful war in the Middle East. By the time Bill Clinton arrived the Presidency was again the foremost branch of government. A successful impeachment would rein back the Executive and send a powerful message to future Presidents of the fate that would befall them should they incur in the displeasure of Congress. Instead, the impeachment trial confirmed the obedience of elected representatives of the people to the dictates of party interests and of Congress yielding to the Executive. Not that it meant that Capitol Hill was now subjected to the White House, quite the contrary. Presidents now had to tread carefully whenever their party did not control one or both houses of Congress, and could feel more at ease to disregard the latter if they had a secure majority there. The only victor, then, was political partisanship and the party organisations that endorsed candidates and elected officials. And to keep the party machinery well-oiled and humming, election financing was of the essence. The door was now open for special interests to make their influence and financial clout felt more strongly.

In 1995 the Clinton administration introduced its National Homeownership Strategy whose goal was to increase the number of low-income families owning their homes. With the Savings and Loans debacle still fresh in people's minds, Clinton wanted to rekindle the middle-class dream and make it accessible for working-class families. By the year 2000 he hoped to have extended to an additional 8 million families the American Dream of homeownership. This expansion would strengthen the economy and fundamentally support the country's families. Clinton's vision of the benefits of his strategy went far beyond the mere financial and economic gains; it would address family disintegration, repair the social tissue and redefine American society. "We just had a report come out last week asserting that it may be that up to one-third of our children are now born out of wedlock. You want to reinforce family values in America, encourage two-parent households, get people to stay home? Make it easy for people to own their own homes and enjoy the rewards of family life and see their work rewarded. This is a big deal. This is about more than money and sticks and boards and windows.

This is about the way we live as a people and what kind of society we're going to have."⁷⁵⁷ And he proposed to achieve this without increased spending nor new legislation, instead rewriting the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) of 1977 which had been designed to address discrimination in bank lending.

Banks loaned significantly less to low-income families and minorities, which reflected in the lower percentages of homeownership among minorities and inner-city inhabitants. Since its inception, the CRA had been revised and altered but since the 1980's and Ronald Reagan's deregulation drive, the rules and criteria for financial evaluation prior to approval of loans had been gradually loosened. The keywords in the Clinton's National Homeownership Strategy were flexibility and relaxation. The Community Reinvestment Act was again revised to pressure banks to make lending more accessible to low-income neighbourhoods. Although it is debatable what impact this had on the housing and financial crisis that struck a decade later, the strategy did encourage a tolerant lending atmosphere. Homeownership is deeply ingrained in the American Dream as we have seen. Bill Clinton was only following on the footsteps of previous presidents and so were his successors. George W. Bush, his successor, talked of an Ownership Society and in 2002 he also pushed for an enlargement of the dream, extending it to those of lower incomes. "Owning a home lies at the heart of the American Dream. A home is a foundation for families and a source of stability for communities. It serves as the foundation of many Americans' financial security. Yet today, while nearly three-quarters of all white Americans own their homes, less than half of all African Americans and Hispanic Americans are homeowners. We must begin to close this home-ownership gap by dismantling the barriers that prevent minorities from owning a piece of the American Dream."⁷⁵⁸ In many ways, the unbridled pursuit of this ideal set the stage for the financial excesses that caused the great recession later.

Bill Clinton's administration was still very influenced by the spirit of deregulation that characterised all of the 1980's, fostered by Reagan. The economic prosperity induced a feeling of euphoria and the belief that Wall Street could do no wrong. The aura of success surrounding the financial sector saturated the Washington corridors and put pressure on the administration to relax restrictions further. In 1999,

⁷⁵⁷ William J. Clinton, "Remarks on the National Homeownership Strategy," June 5, 1995. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=51448>, (accessed March 23, 2015).

⁷⁵⁸ George W. Bush, "The President's Radio Address," June 15, 2002. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25063>, (accessed March 25, 2015).

Clinton signed the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act which repealed part of the Glass-Steagall Act, a piece of legislation dating from the Depression. Enacted following the excesses of the late 1920's, the law forced the separation of commercial banks and investment banks. The new law, however, allowed banks to offer a full range of services from investment to commercial and insurance. Although regarded as legislation that would streamline banking operations by avoiding piecemeal services to customers, the move was opposed by those who feared the development of new excesses that could endanger the economy.

One critic sees the new act as “the culmination of a \$300 million lobbying effort by the banking and financial-services industries,” and ranks it as one of the decisions that led to the crisis.

The most important consequence of the repeal of Glass-Steagall was indirect - it lay in the way repeal changed an entire culture. Commercial banks are not supposed to be high-risk ventures; they are supposed to manage other people's money very conservatively. It is with this understanding that the government agrees to pick up the tab should they fail. Investment banks, on the other hand, have traditionally managed rich people's money - people who can take bigger risks in order to get bigger returns. When repeal of Glass-Steagall brought investment and commercial banks together, the investment-bank culture came out on top. There was a demand for the kind of high returns that could be obtained only through high leverage and big risktaking.⁷⁵⁹

The investment culture was reinforced when the following year Clinton signed the Commodity Futures Modernization Act which exempted credit-default swaps from regulation. Financial and investment vehicles such as derivatives and credit-default swaps became commonplace and their usage mushroomed with little or no supervision, adding to the danger. Securitization of mortgages and the spread of risks through the combination of mortgages with different credit risks were the new rage in the financial markets since they were guaranteed by the federal government.

Both Democrats and Republicans waived banking regulation as an obstacle to the goal of increasing homeownership in America, especially among minorities and low-income families. George W. Bush was as eager to be popular as Clinton, and as

⁷⁵⁹ Joseph Stiglitz, “Capitalist Fools,” *Vanity Fair*, December 10, 2008.
<http://www.commondreams.org/views/2008/12/10/capitalist-fools> (accessed March 23, 2015).

easy to lobby as his predecessor. Even before the September 2001 attacks, George W. Bush passed tax-cuts legislation directed at corporations and upper and middle-income families which flooded the economy with money, stimulating credit. Excessive borrowing ensued, especially since interest on loans was tax deductible, a further incentive to credit. Together with the Federal Reserve's lack of supervision came the practice of forging the accounting numbers of companies, which involved not only accounting firms but rating agencies. These continued to award high ratings to corporations with cash problems and whose profits were only a hypothesis, unsustainable by the real figures. The collapse would follow shortly.

IV

The troubles of the Clinton administration were seized by the Republican candidate for his campaign promise to return the White House to its dignity as national household. George Walker Bush, son of President George Herbert Walker Bush, had battled his own personal demons when younger and was not without faults, particularly relating to drinking. Bush junior had to deal with his image as the wayward son of a President until he rediscovered religion and became a born-again Christian, mending his ways and his life. The religious connection proved pivotal in his political life as well as contributing to his worldview. Following the family penchant for politics, George W. Bush engaged in politics, but only after his involvement with baseball did he receive national recognition which helped kick-start his political career. After working in the oil industry he decided to invest in the Texas Rangers baseball team, becoming part owner. Rather than watching his team from his corporate box seat he became involved in the day-to-day management and operational activities during his five years with the club. The relationship proved fruitful, especially for Bush who benefited from the growing popularity to win the Texas governorship in 1994, thus making his entrance in the national political stage.

As Clinton prepared to step down from the presidential pulpit, Bush launched his bid for the Presidency. With support for economic liberalism and conservative values still dominant, he wished to enlarge his appeal with a call for compassionate conservatism, the Republican equivalent of the Third Way and thus pushing the GOP to the centre. With the President unable to run again, the election was wide open and moderate voters would be key to secure victory. His religious support was made more

palatable for moderates and liberals by using faith-based organizations to spearhead his outreach policies to those in need. It also looked to reduce the level of government intervention on social issues as it believed that such problems were solved best by private groups and charities rather than by expensive and bureaucratic federal programmes. Throwing money into problems was not only expensive, it was also inefficient for it failed to respond to greater needs than material ones. “Government cannot do this work. It can feed the body, but it cannot reach the soul. Yet government can take the side of these groups, helping the helper, encouraging the inspired. My administration will give taxpayers new incentives to donate to charity, encourage after-school programs that build character, and support mentoring groups that shape and save young lives.” America was a promise of economic fulfilment but it was also a promise of individual improvement, of moral advancement to occupy the land with character. “Prosperity can be a tool in our hands - used to build and better our country. Or it can be a drug in our system - dulling our sense of urgency, of empathy, of duty.”⁷⁶⁰ Affluence without understanding or awareness for others bred isolation. As Ralph Waldo Emerson had put it, what was all the wealth for, what was the purpose of fortune and property if it did not feed the soul and raise the individual to greater heights, and to help his fellow Man?

Despite the moral urgency and the usual good intentions that follow a new President to his office, the Bush administration was tarnished from the start, not least due to the controversial manner in which he reached the White House. With 245 electoral votes against Al Gore’s 270, the outcome of the election hinged on Florida’s 25 votes for the Electoral College. Designed to act as a check to the popular will, the Electoral College was also the symbol of the federal nature of the presidential election. States elect Presidents and although Al Gore commanded the nationwide popular vote, early counts indicated that Bush had the lead in Florida. After the Democrats demanded two recounts - upon which Bush’s lead grew narrower after each one – the Republicans went to the Supreme Court for help. Accusations of impropriety and outright fraud did not stand and with the deadline for certification of the election approaching, the highest court in the land ordered a stop to another recount and thus forced the acceptance of the last valid results. As a show of democratic maturity the country did not fall into disorder

⁷⁶⁰ George W. Bush, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia,” August 3, 2000. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25954> (accessed April 5, 2015).

and patiently waited as events unfolded, and when the decision finally came it peacefully accepted the ruling. But after a partisan ruling by the Supreme Court it was hard not to feel that unseen interests had made their influence felt in yet another election in the United States. Under a dark cloud, George W. Bush entered the White House of the Republic to initiate an administration that was regarded as the second part of a political dynasty.

Less than a year into his new job all promises and plans were forgotten as the world watched in horror the dawn of yet a new chapter in America's history, one that owing to its immense power and reach would carry the world with it. History was again moving, and in the past 15 years it had increased the speed of its motion. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union had brought German reunification, an event that in itself symbolised closure from World War II and German imperialist ambitions. The dreams of global peace under America's benevolent pre-eminence came to nought in the morning of September 11, 2001. In between, genocide, war in Europe and the fragmentation of the world order had occurred in quick succession. The illusions were crushed under the weight of the falling New York skyscrapers. It happened 11 years to the day after George Bush's new world order speech in 1990. From hope to despair, the country was to be reinvented anew as it had been by the Civil War, industrialism, the Depression, World War II, and global ascendancy. What events followed after that day are well-known, but the long term effects remain to reveal themselves fully. It may be many years before one can truly understand what influence the attacks had on the country and what shape will America take in the future. As for the ideals that had withstood the nation through past metamorphosis, what is to be of them?

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes - a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter - tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning -

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 1925

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, 1951

I

The 20th century was a period of momentous change. Historically eventful, it was also remarkable for technological developments and social changes that transformed human life. The acceleration of change in the more developed societies is probably what most observers will notice. The differences between life in the West in 1901 and in 2001 are greater than those between 1801 and 1901, and greater still for the preceding century; but life in the 18th century was not as different from that of the 19th as was the contrast between the latter and the 20th. A French farmer in 1701 could easily find resemblances both social and technological with Napoleonic France, but an Englishman mourning the death of Queen Victoria would feel alienated in Tony Blair's England. No society could remain the same, not after the revolution in transportation, for example, and all that it entailed for physical and social mobility. Air travel has probably had the most effect when it comes to expanding outlooks and attitudes by making available new cultures and customs to the common man, by enabling the mind to wander freely into new possibilities, free from the mental limitations of the local village or town. Not after the digital revolution and the speed with which information is exchanged, the potential of which is still to be fully explored. Likewise, America is not the same, not after Hollywood, Hiroshima and the Moon landings to mention but a few. A society changes after industrialism and corporate capitalism have transformed life, after the post-war supremacy and the shaping of the global economic and political configuration. If history is moving with a purpose, then it must be close to reaching its goal because the speed of its motion has increased significantly.

America changed yet again after the twin towers collapsed in 2001, but the effects are still to be fully comprehended - both for America and the wider world. People's lives are again being refashioned, priorities reorganised, perspectives both widened and closed. One common denominator: the nostalgic look to the past. The myth is there, but unreachable, lingering only as a homesickness, a longing for America. But then the question follows, paraphrasing Crèvecoeur: what is America? Naturally, the answer to that question is different depending on the understanding about the meaning and purpose of America. Broadly speaking there can be detected two diverging positions, or attitudes, about the latter. Not completely opposite, but rather moving away from a common source. They act not as exclusive, dogmatic ideas but more as grand coalitions of differing intensity and outlook in their temperament, wherein several

points of contact exist between the two. One a cosmopolitan, internationalist outlook of an America with a mission; the other a more insular, cautious approach which looks to advance the idea of America at home.

They shift and meander, not quite defined and rigid and acting more as elusive dispositions or national personalities. Not having the heavy burden of historical experience the Europeans have, for instance, and which determines their national character and outlook, America owes nothing to the past; it is actually anti-historical as it affirmed its independence as the negation of all the traditions, institutions and hierarchies - the paraphernalia of centuries that defines Europe. If other countries are burdened by their past, America is indebted to its future, to the ideal she tends to as she is the representative of the cause of mankind, as Thomas Paine had it. But like Janus, the god of beginnings and transitions, she is captivated by two different views; not unidimensional in her spirit but split into two regarding her role in the grand scheme of things: is she a passage or an ending, does she work for the single individual or for the whole of mankind?

The internationalist frame of mind shares a sense of destiny about the country's mission to spread the values and principles upon which it was built. Its claim is vindicated by the existence of a liberal international order that has largely preserved peace and stability among the great powers for the past 70 years. Conflict is perhaps inescapable but any major conflicts comparable to the two world wars that ravaged the first half of the 20th century have been avoided. They point to the fact that the institutions and regulations that emulate America's preferences and principles for free trade and free enterprise have for the most part engendered economic prosperity for those countries who have joined the system the United States created. Their claim is further justified with the country's responsibility in protecting and maintaining that system, as the benevolent hegemony of the United States is necessary to avoid the decline of the world order or its outright collapse with the consequent return to international tribalism and war. The concise version of this point of view runs parallel to Theodore Roosevelt's defence of empire as being the best environment for law, order and peace, with the United States as the ultimate patron of human civilisation thanks to its universal values. Their expansionism is sustained in the belief that the country is exceptional in its ideals and by its form of government which embodies them. They drink from the romanticism which created the country and infuses their willingness to intervene in world affairs with a messianic desire. Their optimism extends to their

conception of Man, which they believe is a creature free from past constraints or biological determinisms and is everywhere ready to reach higher.

The idea that America represents Man's last best hope is shared by the country's inward-looking counterpart. It also regards America as the symbol of something greater than itself but disagrees with the expansionist disposition. Rather, it is more pensive, brooding and worrying about foreign intervention. It fails to see the appropriateness of pushing for the advancement of liberty and equality abroad when they are still unfulfilled at home. Much remains to be done to establish the Empire of Liberty in the United States before hurrying to institute it abroad. It is not even convinced of the wisdom of trying to replicate it abroad as it is aware of human nature's many quirks, the high sunny mountains but also its deep shadowy valleys, and the different outlooks and cultures. One strand of this perspective believes that contact with the outside world entails a corruption of the national spirit, an invitation for the vices and malice of the Old World to contaminate the purity of the New World. What was cast outside with separation from Great Britain in 1776 will return to lead the nation astray. Critics and missionaries call it isolationism. One of the best interpreters of its ruminations was Emerson and his ultimate question about what was the purpose of the ideals of the Revolution, the Constitution and the political body, if not to elevate and advance the individual? Inward-looking, this side of the national character realises that before going out to save mankind, the country needs to ensure progress for its own citizens. America for them is still an experiment which must be successful at home before being exported abroad.

The divergence between the two was felt since the first involvements with the outside world. If the introvert nature of the country secured victory when it defeated Woodrow Wilson and his plan to attach the United States to the League of Nations in 1920, the extrovert dimension has managed to stay on top after 1945. Nonetheless, as we have seen, Truman had to continually warn and cajole his countrymen into accepting that the defence of democracy abroad was the best way to guarantee safety at home, and in doing so kept the nation committed with the outside world and refashioned a new sense of purpose. Willingly, of his own, or just following the path his predecessor had opened, Truman was as decisive for modern America in its foreign policy as FDR was in domestic affairs. He created the conditions for America's continued presence in the world after the war ended, and not only set up the structure but also established the

general plan of action. Therefore, victory in the Cold War over the Soviet Union cannot help but be regarded as a vindication of this choice. The heady days when the world seemed on the brink of universal peace were compounded by the realisation that the American system of democracy and liberalism looked like the *right* system and was being accepted, in adapted forms and shapes but still recognisable as such, over a wide area of the world. The relevance of the internationalist choice was displayed in the process of democratisation that many countries went through and the multiplication of free market economies.

Nonetheless, throughout the second half of the 20th century the internal tensions erupted violently after the death of John F. Kennedy. The violence of that eruption was as much because of Vietnam as it was over the question of racial segregation and social injustice, as much against the increasingly distorted compulsions of the internationalist commitments as for the lack of progress in achieving at home what was being advocated abroad. It was hoped that Kennedy could somehow conciliate the two, advance the cause of individual betterment with a virtuous foreign policy but his assassination, as well as those of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy epitomised the fatal disconnect between the two poles. The missionary approach had produced a biased structure that had become self-aware and with a will of its own, which was willing to defend itself and its power. Dwight Eisenhower had warned against its rise and the dangers of misplaced power. Reagan's intense rhetoric against the Soviet Union and his use of collective national memories of times past - factual or otherwise - were perhaps necessary as a device to close the gap at a crucial moment. The disasters of Nixon's presidency and the 1970's malaise threatened to launch the country into an abyss. Temporarily, at least, Reagan managed to bring the two sides together around what both most believed: the idea of America as the land of liberty. The innocence of the early days was evoked to reenergise the nation as the city upon a hill, the beacon of freedom for the world, and the promise of delivery for God's chosen people. Again, victory in 1991 looked like the confirmation of his unashamed moral approach. Reagan understood that for an ideological country the summoning of its strength had to be done by appealing to its ideals and professed moral virtues. If Truth resides in its manifestation, then how a people sees itself must be accurately reflected in the daily public experience.

Despite the criticisms, Fukuyama looked to have made a correct interpretation of events following Reagan's retirement. The principles of liberty and equality emerged

from the Cold War without any serious competitor in sight. At least for some years the belief was that the world would converge toward their political materialisation. But in order for a system to be ethically legitimate it must be sustained by a code of moral standards and these must in turn be shared or accepted by those adopting the system. Doubts emerged almost immediately about the possibility of this happening, with Samuel Huntington in the lead. America's efforts during the last decade of the 20th century to materialise its role as sponsor of change toward democracy and as keeper of the peace were met with increasing resistance abroad and frustration at home.

The grand expectations ended with the attacks of September 11, 2001. They are nothing short of a watershed in American history, on a par with other events or developments already mentioned. They stand as a transformational moment, one that generations hence will look to as inaugurating a new period in American history. Only they will be able to fully realise the combined impact and changes wrought from then to their time. For us remains the awareness of a change of course taking place. Besides the psychological impact of the attacks themselves, there was the emotional realisation that the continental United States had been struck at its core - something that Pearl Harbor failed to produce - and which singlehandedly dissolved the feeling of protection by the physical isolationism provided by two oceans. The exposure heightened the sense of vulnerability and fear led the nation to surrender itself to agonising impotence and righteous rage. On the other hand, the attacks launched the messianic fervour underpinning the internationalists into overdrive. Fuelled by the idea that the normal, slow and gradual, processes of transition taking place were insufficient and inadequate, the Bush administration embraced the idea of using armed force to ensure a speedy and effective transition to democracy in other countries, a forceful intervention to disseminate its values. This was to be done under the aegis of the War on Terror, which works as conceptual replacement for the Cold War.

The first diplomatic consequence of the attacks of September 11 was the activation of a Cold War mechanism that had never been necessary. The North Atlantic Council met in an emergency meeting on September 12 and declared that the attack was an action covered by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which states that an armed attack against one or more of the Allies in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against all. Designed to create an American shield to protect Europe from a Soviet assault, NATO was invoking its collective defence mechanism for the first time,

and with aide crossing the Atlantic in the opposite direction to the one needed originally. Shortly after, the Bush administration turned its sights on Afghanistan where the prime suspect of masterminding the attacks was believed to be living. Intelligence gathering pointed to the Taliban controlling the country as being the protectors of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, the terror organisation. When the Taliban refused to surrender bin Laden the United States launched an invasion. George W. Bush declared a War on Terror and the Afghan operation was intended to capture bin Laden and dismantle al-Qaeda. But the wider goal of the war on terror was to destroy any terrorist organisation anywhere and prevent further attacks. Together with pinpoint military operations to eradicate terror cells, the United States would use economic and military sanctions against any country that was known to, or suspected of harbouring terrorists. Using language reminiscent of Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush accused three countries of sponsoring terrorism and of seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction, namely nuclear weapons, labelling them the Axis of Evil: Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

The desire for revenge thus combined with the religious undertones of a new mission to rid the world of evil. Righteous retribution would be joined by a new ideological push for American global leadership. The proponents were the neoconservatives and they argued for a more aggressive role in international affairs in order to preserve American pre-eminence and shape the world. The United States should move from diplomatic and economic initiatives to military enterprises not only to defeat potential threats and thwart rivals but also to impose its values and interests abroad. This imperial design is completely at odds with the nation's character but was again cloaked in the language of pre-emptive action to protect national security, the perpetuation of the Pax Americana abroad to better protect freedom at home. The internationalist agenda was moved to a new level, no longer a benevolent altruism to promote good but a belligerent self-righteousness determined to intervene to impose its truth. Many of the ideologues that formed the Project for a New American Century, their organisation, found ready acceptance as advisors in the Bush administration.

The end of the post-Cold War illusions of global harmony and liberalism's victory did not diminish the internationalists' motivation. If Pax Americana was being rejected then its forceful imposition should be pursued. To accept the existence of multiple valuations would be tantamount to accepting that American ideals were just one more of a variety of differing and often competing standards, none of which could be regarded as representative of the high point of human ideological evolution. The

certainty that America represents universal values lies at the core of the country's notion of itself. To the New American Century faithful, a new world order would have to be born to fulfil America's destiny as redeemer of mankind. But if they used Henry Luce's watchword, his methods were left behind. They would convince the Bush administration that a more vigorous persuasion was necessary and desired to help bring about the end of history.

Thus came about the second instalment of the Iraq war. Under international surveillance since the first war, Iraq was subjected to regular inspections by the United Nations to verify the terms of its disarmament programme. Delaying tactics and lack of cooperation from Saddam Hussein had already been met with bombing campaigns from America and its allies to force the regime to yield. The continued reluctance was seized by the Bush administration to claim that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction and that it had high-level contacts with al-Qaeda. Regime change became the mantra used to test the new American resolve to shape world affairs and Iraq was to be a trial run for the new methodology. The war began in 2003 and although the military victory was never in question, the outcome was arguably not what the administration expected. Not only were there no weapons of mass destruction found but the idea that the US soldiers would be welcomed as liberators fell short of expectations. A violent insurgency followed with al-Qaeda taking advantage of it to seize positions inside Iraq it did not have before. The casualty lists mounted daily and as more and more soldiers were sent to the area the insurgency acquired the tone of a resistance movement against a new Western Crusade. Samuel Huntington's clash of civilisations was denied at every instance but the fact remained that the conflict was tinted in religious tones, a revolt against the attempt to impose foreign values on a centuries-old civilisation.

Other military operations part of the global war on terror ensued but with Iraq descending into a Vietnam-like quagmire in the desert, political resolve slowly faded. Although morale was high in the months and years immediately following 2001, American society's 9/11 rage quickly dispersed as the lack of solutions or plans became painfully obvious. The nation's appetite for new commitments of the kind turned into revulsion and threatened to repeat the social chaos of the Sixties and Seventies. In the process America surrendered some of its ethical principles with the treatment of captured terrorists kept incarcerated at the Guantanamo Bay military base, outside United States territory and therefore outside civilian legal jurisdiction. Along with the

sequestration of suspects all over the world and their detention without trial, Guantanamo represents one collateral effect of the war on terror that impacted the country and an example regarding the new path taken. At home, those effects were even more noticeable. And ominous. The fear of new attacks on home soil was the pretext for the creation of a security apparatus unlike anything ever seen.

Ideologically, the authority of liberal democracy as the right system of government was by now contested outside its heartland. It lost intellectual support thanks to the crisis of Western philosophy, and the universality of the Western understanding of human rights is openly challenged as alien and a form of neo-colonialism in many parts of the non-Western world. Although elections did take place in Iraq and Afghanistan, its consolidation in the region was far from assured. The expected political homogenisation of the globe did not take place and in many areas democracy is under threat or being transformed as a tool to validate the perpetuation in power of local rulers and authoritarian regimes. In Central Asia, parts of Africa and Latin America, muscled democracies or outright soft dictatorships have emerged, making use of elections to legalise their rule. On the strict level of ideas, liberal democracy as the best materialisation of universal values is having more difficulty in asserting its legitimacy as more and more societies revert to local and more immediately recognisable forms of administration, even where elections are held. The Arab Spring left a bitter taste as electoral returns indicated that Islamic parties - opposed to Western values and representative democracy - were the people's favourites to rule.

The rise of the self-styled Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is a denial of America's efforts to democratise the region. But it is also a rejection of any notion about the universality of human liberty and equality, or progress as it seeks to implement a medieval-style caliphate. Religious identification trumps any thoughts about a common humanity, and the voluntary submission to hierarchy and social and political inequality attracts many young people in Europe and the United States who have fled their homes to join IS, raising troubling questions. In the Far East, where cultures emphasize family and group objectives above individual needs or desires, democracy and liberal values are still regarded as a threat to many local regimes and ways of life, and contrary to the cultural ideal of collective harmony as they instil faction and are conducive to social disruption. If natural law seems logical and universal in its defence of equal human

rights and liberty for all, its political weakness vis-à-vis local cultures and religion raises doubts regarding the inevitability of its adoption.

Even in countries that embraced democracy after the Cold War (Russia, for example) the establishment of nationalist and populist governments superseded the early desire to live in a democratic regime. In China the ruling elite has managed to adopt free-market economics - one of Fukuyama's instruments of liberalisation - without relinquishing its power or changing the authoritarian nature of the regime. Having access to consumer goods seems to be enough for the Chinese society, for now at least. The disappearance of a functioning state in Somalia, as in other countries such as Afghanistan or Yemen, is indication that the operating factor in the liberal transition has failed to unify local societies and to centralise properly the institutions of government. Although the legitimacy, the morality even, of human rights and values of liberty and equality can hardly be contested, the indispensability of its political translation does not seem to be evident. The idea that they would become the universal common denominator for all peoples looks to be still somewhat distant as societies cling to culture, religion and group for standards of behaviour and identification. The end of history can arguably be said to have ended in the realm of ideas, as the principles of democracy and political equality are generally the best at providing for individual recognition, dignity and respect, and therefore social stability and peace. They represent the high-water mark of human rational evolution so far, and it seems unlikely that they will soon be improved. But despite their ideological victory their actual, practical establishment in the form of liberal democracy - if one accepts this system as their best political interpretation - is still largely challenged outside the West. They remain as a legitimate, acknowledged aspiration, frequently used as rhetorical tool, but not the primary elements of identification when organising societies' political arrangement.

That is not to say that there is no purpose to history but it does raise questions about the linearity of its course, or rather of its inevitability after the American and French Revolutions. The absence of a discernible direction in history raises deep questions about the nature of America and its broader meaning. If history is directional but its values are not immediately manifest then what does America stand for if not for Providence's project? The claims of American exceptionalism rest on it seeing itself as the representative of the best of human principles and enlightened rationalism in the pursuit of the best form of government. The country's Constitution and the system of government it creates are grounded on those principles and aim to represent the best and

most balanced form of government available. Furthermore, the internationalist perspective regards America as history's catalyst of change but this is now under a cloud of doubt as well as history's need of America for its consummation. The Wilsonian dimension of America is left in a predicament, noticeable in the hesitations and half-hearted leadership in the international stage. Barack Obama's administration approached the Libyan crisis in 2011 with reluctance, developing a strategy labelled as leading from behind wherein other NATO countries would take on the more immediate military burden. In Syria the famous red lines were crossed by the Assad regime without great consequence apart from arms supply to the opposition. And while the events in Ukraine denote a willingness to steer the country into the Western orbit, the follow-up after the Russian reaction has shown itself to be little more than words and promises. This estrangement from the world is a symptom of war-weariness following Iraq and Afghanistan and the toll exacted by the financial crisis, that is to say of the whole burden of international responsibilities and the failure to see them through.

With the end of the Cold War, America believed it would at last fulfil its destiny as the herald of the new order of the ages. Although Ronald Reagan made much of America as the city on the hill and talked about good versus evil in world affairs, he was nonetheless a pragmatist and seldom did he stray from a realist approach in foreign policy. With the end of the stalemate the internationalists felt at last free from balance of power constraints and could exorcise past compromises required by the geopolitical standoff. As Walter Russel Mead remarks, the end of history was never far from American elites' minds.

The disappearance of geopolitics reinforced a second tendency in American foreign policy that further hampered American ability to perceive and respond to the new challenge. That is the habitual American tendency, fruitlessly bewailed by actors as different as George Kennan and Henry Kissinger, to approach international politics through some combination of moral and legal ideas in an uncomplicated atmosphere of Whig determinism. The default worldview of American intellectuals and officials is that some combination of liberal capitalist economics and liberal political values is carrying the world swiftly and smoothly toward the triumph of Anglo-American values. Americans believed they were living through the end of history long before Francis Fukuyama wrote his book; that free markets and free government will bring the

world right is one of the deepest convictions of the American mind. Ask Woodrow Wilson. Moralists and legalists were both very comfortable in the post Cold War world in which American hegemony seemed to have created a flat, global reality in which moral and legal questions trumped geopolitical ones.⁷⁶¹

In great measure, the internationalists' current crisis of confidence in America's role as the founder of a new order or new stage in human history has spilt over to the international order. The current global troubles and perception of purposelessness of international institutions - created by the United States - reflect the country's self-criticism regarding its motives and abilities. The debacle in the Middle East and the recent economic troubles have put the country on the defensive and the internationalist elite has lost much of its confidence in engaging with the outside world. The relativist approach regarding American exceptionalism was voiced by President Obama when he said "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism."⁷⁶² Critics pointed out that if all countries are exceptional, then none is, and that America's values were being demoted to just another set of available standards of political behaviour, further dampening their authority.

The rejection of America as the best interpreter of universal values was followed by an attempt at its imposition by regime change. When this also failed, America was confronted with the reality of a world that refused to follow its lead and emulate its system. The subsequent withdrawal from active and decisive foreign engagements and the hesitations of the internationalists have been taken advantage of by the individualist strand of America's soul. While the former are in a contemplative retreat, the latter are busy trying to refocus America's attention to individual advancement at home. The Emersonian perspective is trying to use the Wilsonian's pause for breath to redefine the country's sense of identity. For some this is optimistically regarded as a reorientation of foreign strategy. The inherent belief in the final outcome allows for a withdrawal without great consequence to the world order created by the United States. "Troubled by

⁷⁶¹ Walter Russell Mead, "The End of History Ends" *The American Interest*, December 2, 2013. <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2013/12/02/2013-the-end-of-history-ends-2/> (accessed June 10, 2015).

⁷⁶² Barack Obama, "The President's News Conference in Strasbourg," April 4, 2009. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=85959> (accessed June 8, 2015).

the costs and the risks associated with two unsatisfactory foreign wars and longing to redirect resources from the defense budget to domestic priorities, a significant number of foreign policy analysts inside and outside the current administration have developed a theory of benign realism. This theory holds that the United States can safely withdraw from virtually all European and all but a handful of Middle Eastern issues and that as an ‘offshore balancer’ the United States will be able to safeguard its essential interests at low cost.”⁷⁶³ However, this optimism is betrayed by recent developments.

As America processes early 21st century events that question its belief as the champion of a teleological view of history, its global power is slowly being chipped away. The loss of influence in the great stage of world politics is accompanied by a waning of its authority and capacity of persuasion. The diminishing allure of its ideals is matched by the emergence of rivals vying for regional supremacy as they cannot yet challenge the United States for global hegemony. Notwithstanding, China has been making overtures toward a global affirmation of its capacities namely through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a financial development institution. The bank, sponsored by China, is designed to rival the international financial order created by the United States after World War II. With China holding almost a third of the shares of the bank, the United States have objected to it and pressed their Asian allies not to join. However, in a clear rebuke to the country its allies in the region have already declared their participation including Australia and South Korea. More worryingly still was the decision by key European allies to take part in the new endeavour, namely the United Kingdom and Germany along with most of the European Union’s members. With the adhesion of Russia, India and Brazil, the United States are left isolated in this question and facing the emergence of a rival global financial system.

China is also developing the Silk Road Fund which aims to improve its trade routes with Central Asia, thus spreading its economic influence and reach. Both the Silk Road and the AIIB are part of a Chinese strategy to use its financial clout in order to increase its international influence. In the case of the AIIB, it aims to redefine the economic and trade rules in Asia effectively sidestepping the United States in the region. Unable to counter the initiative the United States are left to watch as China begins a

⁷⁶³ Walter Russell Mead, “The End of History Ends” *The American Interest*, December 2, 2013. <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2013/12/02/2013-the-end-of-history-ends-2/> (accessed June 10, 2015).

pro-active strategy to assert its predominance in a strategically crucial region with the support of important European countries.

II

The recent international events have not failed to produce an impact in the country. As it witnesses religion and culture delaying the completion of its international mission, America is confronted with history - understood as the accumulation of social and political complexity. Rather than bring forward the end of history the country faces its effects at home. Frederick Jackson Turner revealed the anti-historical nature of American idealism: a perpetual movement forward to avoid historical progress. This constant search for the unknown in order to avoid the stasis that fosters modernity effectively meant that America was a migratory reality, incapable of settlement lest it changed its essence. The Frontier was the real America, outside time and space, and to stop the frontier meant letting history catch-up and work its transformations. Evading both foreign entanglements and government bureaucracy was of the essence to maintain the link with Nature and Providence, and the country's uniqueness. The preservation of the Republic's principles as the land where individual advancement was its chief concern demanded a Jeffersonian simplicity. The rejection of European-like administrations and their continual search for power was a rejection of history, of its evolution and the resulting social and political turmoil. However, while industrialism and the end of the frontier period opened the doors to historical progress, after 1945 the country deliberately plunged into the troubled waters of international history. What, then, are the consequences of the increasing complexity we have traced since the end of World War II?

Franklin D. Roosevelt enlarged the federal government as a way to combat the Great Depression but Truman continued the expansion after the war amidst the beginning of the greatest period of economic prosperity recorded in the country. As we have seen, the argument of national emergency at the beginning of the Cold War had to be complemented with scare tactics about the defence of America's freedom, and McCarthyism turned out to be useful in silencing and intimidating those who might object to the development of such a vast administrative machinery. By 1953 the internationalists had the decisive organisational instruments to advance their mission abroad and the cowed consent of the population at home. For without a governmental

bureaucracy and massive military apparatus as the one created after 1945, the organisation and preservation of the system of world governance reflecting America's principles would not be possible; America's active foreign messianism required an authoritative supporting structure, namely a military build-up and readiness to engage whenever that world order was threatened. Although he did little to abate its power, by the end of Eisenhower's tenure the military-industrial complex had become such a threat as to warrant a presidential warning to the nation. Nonetheless, he was one of the main architects of the military alliances buttressing America's domain, and of the offices and departments supporting the emancipation and eventual supremacy of the executive branch of government.

Created as a country where for the first time the individual mattered more than the State or the Government, this evolution represented a departure regarding the original experiment. The independence of the 13 colonies had taken place against the centralising intentions of the British Empire and the foundation was marked by a clear desire to diffuse power among the several branches and levels of government, local above federal, as well as against the existence of a standing army. The modern centralisation of government and military runs contrary to this spirit and signals the end of the individual's pre-eminence. We have traced the social and political evolution since 1945, allowing us to glimpse the gradual erosion of individual rights and liberties in general. But after 2001, the argument of national security has taken a much sharper and darker precedence, with the overriding of many of the tenets that were assumed to be fundamental for the nation's identity and progress. Below we will take a look at some of the ways in which these are being overturned by the enlarged federal apparatus that has been built after the successive wars.

Building upon the security developments of the previous half-century and the fear of new terror attacks, new powers and prerogatives were passed in 2001 and the following years. Homeland security became a priority endowed with its own federal Department with close to two hundred new agencies and administrations whose ostensible goal it is to ensure the country's safety, and to protect the American way of life. Following the attacks, Congress passed the Authorisation for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists (2001) which grants the Executive special authority to use all necessary and appropriate force against those the President determines were responsible for the attacks of September 11. The President now has exceptional powers to use

unrestricted force against anyone he defines as a threat or to have attacked the country. This legislation was used to engage in military action abroad against terrorist groups or countries sponsoring and harbouring terrorists but also to detain indefinitely people who are suspected of participating in or supporting terrorism.

This authorisation of use of force abroad was complemented with the USA Patriot Act of 2001. Its aim is to deter and punish terrorist acts in the United States and around the world, extending in time and space the range of the Authorisation for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists. The key change is that now the federal security apparatus can also operate inside the United States in order to enhance domestic safety and strengthen security controls. The most critical development, however, was done under the provisions of Title II of the Patriot Act referring to enhanced surveillance procedures and which grants increased powers of investigation to various government agencies and bodies. The slow accumulation of power has in effect given rise to a security state with exceptional emergency powers vested upon the President. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), there has been a dramatic rise in the number of American citizens subjected to electronic surveillance of their telephone, email and social media accounts by federal law enforcement agencies. The revelations of Edward Snowden have confirmed the widespread surveillance carried by the National Security Agency (NSA), both domestic and foreign, and the systematic violation of Americans' privacy in the name of national security, a clear breach of the Fourth Amendment.

An investigation by the Washington Post in 2010 concluded that the security and surveillance world thus created has become “an alternative geography of the United States, a Top Secret America hidden from public view and lacking in thorough oversight.” According to their findings, “1,271 government organizations and 1,931 private companies work on programs related to counterterrorism, homeland security and intelligence in about 10,000 locations across the United States.” This veritable Leviathan includes over 854,000 people with top-secret security clearances and does not represent the actual number of people employed by this other world since the total number is unknown. Likewise, no-one knows how many programmes exist or how much money is spent. As in all bureaucracies, inefficiency is rampant: “Many security and intelligence agencies do the same work, creating redundancy and waste. For example, 51 federal organizations and military commands, operating in 15 U.S. cities, track the flow of money to and from terrorist networks. Analysts who make sense of

documents and conversations obtained by foreign and domestic spying share their judgment by publishing 50,000 intelligence reports each year - a volume so large that many are routinely ignored.” The system has become so complex and unmanageable that it is impossible to say if the country is indeed safer.⁷⁶⁴

The lack of coordination and the general confusion that comes from such a gigantic structure is acknowledged by those involved. The failure to prevent and stop attacks in home soil has been met with demands for more funds and more specialists. The answer to any problem is the demand for more of the same. After one such terrorist attempt on an airliner, “The Department of Homeland Security asked for more air marshals, more body scanners and more analysts, too, even though it can’t find nearly enough qualified people to fill its intelligence unit now. Obama has said he will not freeze spending on national security, making it likely that those requests will be funded.”⁷⁶⁵ Intelligence and security agencies have existed in the United States since World War I, but the sheer scale and implications nowadays are unparalleled and are perhaps the inevitable result arising from an ambitious international agenda, the consequence of imperial hubris.

We have seen how different Presidents’ actions have contributed to the slow accretion of powers in the executive branch of government. Truman used his powers as Commander-in-Chief to bypass Congress regarding military matters, but we believe that it was Eisenhower who concluded that the Constitution was inadequate to cope with the realities of an internationalist America. The necessary concentration of power required by an imperial administration of world affairs capable of responding quickly to events in a volatile international environment is lacking in the 1787 Constitution. A military, meticulous mind such as Eisenhower’s realised that the Executive would have to assert its authority regarding a collective, unhurried and deliberative Congress. What followed was the steady growth and affirmation of an office that has become the real centre of power in the United States. After Johnson elevated the Presidency as engine of national legislation using the structure put in place by Eisenhower, Nixon tried to place the presidency above and beyond even judicial control. Richard Nixon’s actions represent the logical corollary to the development of Presidential powers to face the growing

⁷⁶⁴ Dana Priest and William M. Arkin. “Top Secret America - A Hidden World, Growing Beyond Control,” *The Washington Post*, July 19, 2010. <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/articles/a-hidden-world-growing-beyond-control/print/> (accessed March 22, 2015).

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

demands of imperial government abroad and internal expectations at home as the primary force directing American politics.

The end of the frightened consensus and the demands of a new internal thrust in favour of social justice and individual recognition had the effect of justifying again the growing federal administration. We have seen in Part Four how Herbert Croly supplied the ideological justification for the expansion of federal government in order to deliver the American promise. If Progressives matched the Jeffersonians in their desire to emphasise America as a democratic, civic project of individual autonomy and enhancement, they nonetheless differed in their understanding of the role of government. Lyndon Johnson took Croly's conceptual framework and modernised the federal government as the agent that would materialise the egalitarian project. His various Great Society programmes all sought to satisfy the internal perspective whilst also keeping the foreign dimension unaltered with the war in Vietnam. His effort to keep the two poles fulfilled represented a surge in federal responsibilities and a further step toward government taking a central role in American life with the President as manager, failing to please anyone in the end.

Although the decades after Watergate have witnessed a receding of Presidential aspirations at full independence and liberty of action, after 2001 and under pretext of the war on terrorism a new theory has been developed regarding the pre-eminence of the executive vis-à-vis the other branches of government. Its promoters call it the unitary Executive and argue that the Presidency holds all of the powers of the executive branch and that these in turn cannot be controlled or abridged by the legislative or the judiciary. Hence, when acting as Commander-in-Chief its actions cannot be reviewed by the courts nor controlled by Congress. In effect, this means that the President rises above the checks and balances of the Constitution. In matters where the Executive is in charge it would also be without supervision or oversight. Added to the emergency powers this gives the President a vast field of action unburdened by congressional vagaries and political troubles. The conclusions were drawn by Al Gore: "President Bush has pushed the implications of this idea to its maximum by continually stressing his role as commander in chief, invoking it as frequently as he can, conflating it with his other roles, both domestic and foreign. And when added to the idea that we have entered a perpetual state of war, the implications of this theory stretch quite literally as far into the

future as we can imagine.”⁷⁶⁶ The war on terror, as diffuse in geography as lasting in time, allows for the establishment of an imperial Presidency in all but name.

There are those who openly argue that the separation of powers is impractical for the modern United States.⁷⁶⁷ A post-industrial economic powerhouse and global power cannot be subjected to the quirks of congressional committees and have its capacity for decision impeded by congressional obstruction. The partisanship bickering between Congress and the Obama administration regarding the debt ceiling has produced moments of consternation at the inability of coming to an agreement and resulting in a government shutdown. The fear of faction that James Madison warned of seems to come alive as the country is held captive to the disputes between the branches of federal government, further strengthening the calls for the Executive to bypass Congress in order to streamline government action and increase administrative efficiency.

As we have seen, the internationalist drive has been the main catalyst for the enlargement of federal government and the concentration of powers in the Executive. This concentration of powers erodes the rule of law as the President takes decisions that sometimes run against the Constitution, as do his new powers. Abandoning the rule of law opens the door to the rule of men, weak and dependent on their passions and needs. Sitting at the top of the pyramid the President is also the office most exposed to emotional turmoil and personal preferences. This is a violation of the spirit of the foundation of the country as the separation of powers was established not just to create a system of checks and balances between the branches of government but also to forestall any undue accretion of power in a single individual. The monarchical accumulation of powers was an experience present in the minds of the ex-colonists as they struggled for independence and one they did their utmost not to replicate in the new Republic. As Scott James puts it, “there is little gainsaying the fact that citizens have come to expect presidents to supply the primary direction and motive force to American politics in a way that most of the Framers of the Constitution never envisioned - indeed, in a manner most of the Framers explicitly sought to proscribe.”⁷⁶⁸ Hence the need to focus our

⁷⁶⁶ Gore, Albert. “Former Vice President Gore Delivers Remarks on Constitutional Issues,” January 16, 2006. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/16/AR2006011600779_pf.html (accessed June 15, 2015).

⁷⁶⁷ The attacks against the constitutional separation of powers were evident in Nixon’s actions but also committed to paper by some of his aides. See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: New York: Mariner Books, 2004), 253.

⁷⁶⁸ James, Scott C. “Historical Institutionalism, Political Development, and the Presidency,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*, edited by George C. Edwards and William G. Howell, 51 – 81 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 59.

attention on the individual in executive office as he becomes increasingly the one on whose judgment questions are decided.

We have looked at how Presidents have attempted to take for themselves a plebiscitary power arising from elections and personify the will of the nation; monarchical tendencies which are necessarily corrected by the Constitution but that successive Presidents have ignored. The imperial Presidency decried by Schlesinger regarding the Nixon administration gains a whole new meaning after the Patriot Act and the subsequent rulings pertaining executive command. Presidents no longer just govern and administer the country, faithfully executing the laws. They have moved beyond causes to shape the country and leave their mark in history; they are now guardians of the nation, and have the means for it, not just nationally, but with the end of the Cold War they set their sights to the international arena as well. President George Bush, the first of his name, looked to a total emancipation of the Executive from popular will or Congressional oversight in foreign affairs. In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse and the horizon of international opportunities that opened as a consequence, he claimed that the presidential office should be the focal point between the people and its international destiny, even at the expense of the popular will.

The importance of presidential leadership is probably greater now than ever. From a domestic perspective, the president must take seriously his constitutional role as the chief foreign policy-maker, developing objectives and setting priorities, doing what is right for all even if it is unpopular, and then rallying the country. The challenge of presidential leadership in foreign affairs is not to listen to consensus, but to forge it at home and abroad. Nowhere is this leadership more critical than in creating a new domestic consensus for the American role in the world. There should be no question that we must face future challenges head on, without reverting to the isolationism and protectionism of the earlier part of the century.⁷⁶⁹

Here was the opportunity to shape the world, to shape history itself. All that was needed was to have the country accepting the reasoned judgment of its leader, foregoing popular will. Whilst Lyndon Johnson viewed the President as the synthesis of conflicting perspectives, construing through their fusion a new national resolve, the first

⁷⁶⁹ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 566.

Bush believed that the President knows best and decides for himself what the national idea is and then forces it on the country. LBJ resigned when he flirted with a similar understanding and realised it would never be accepted.

The appropriation of powers by the Executive, overtaking the other two branches of government, has made the Presidency the real focus of power in the United States. The States, the original parties to the constitutional compact, have been relegated to a secondary and almost irrelevant position thanks to the predominance of the federal government in almost every aspect of life. The erosion of the original separation of powers has been slow but steady. Since Lyndon Johnson, the Executive manages a bureaucratic establishment that provides for a host of social programmes besides ensuring internal security through a series of federal bodies and agencies reaching throughout the land.

This power has only increased the individual's dependence on a paternalist government, "an immense and tutelary power which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications and to watch over their fate," as Alexis de Tocqueville would put it. "That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent, if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks on the contrary to keep them in perpetual childhood... it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances - what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?"⁷⁷⁰ And as the diagnosis was clear, so was the cause: "The principle of equality has prepared men for these things: it has predisposed men to endure them, and oftentimes to look on them as benefits."⁷⁷¹ But whilst the expansion of government powers was initially justified in the name of procuring one of the most fundamental of principles sustaining the American ideal, it has most recently been achieved in the name of national security.

This controlling and vigilant administration assures government's decisive influence, prompting dire warnings from various sources, not least because of concerns regarding security. Questions of constitutional interpretation have allowed a growing intrusion of federal government in areas originally not under its domain. The expanse of federal regulations is matched by the proliferation of federal agencies, departments and

⁷⁷⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (London: Everyman's Library, 1994), 2:318.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2:319.

offices whose task it is to impose the government's will and assist in its trying to fulfil its promises of progressive equality and social justice. At the top of this immense structure stands the President, distributor of offices and patronage, the munificent benefactor of a host of dependants, people who look up to him to have federal aid to satisfy their needs.

The dangerous rise of the Presidency that we have followed as the main centre of power since 1945 has lately been reinforced in dramatic fashion when acting as Commander-in-Chief. Targeted killings have become a weapon of choice in fighting terrorism, mostly via the use of aerial drones. Although a relatively inexpensive and risk-free way to eliminate enemies, the method drew criticism and suspicion after it emerged that two US citizens suspected of terrorism were killed by a drone strike in Yemen in 2011. Shortly after, it was revealed that a Justice Department report concluded that under the Authorisation for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists the President can order the killing of American citizens if they are believed to be working for terrorist groups even if there is no imminent attack on the country. The President has therefore the right to order a death penalty without due process, an arbitrary decision outside the sanction of the law and in clear violation of the Fifth Amendment. In a reversal of the spirit of independence against the arbitrary rule of the British monarch, the President now has the power to act as judge, jury and executioner in the name of national security.

The regression has been reinforced by the National Defence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012, signed into law by President Obama. The law, which outlines the budget and outlays of the United States Department of Defence, includes two sections in its Title X, Subtitle D (sections 1021 and 1022), which provide for the indefinite detention of anyone deemed by the government to be involved in terrorism, including American citizens arrested in the United States. The persons so detained are to be held in captivity not by civilian authorities but by the military. As with the death warrants, the President can now order anyone arrested without appeal for habeas corpus.

Supporters of these developments claim they are necessary to fight terrorism and protect the country. However, they amount to a marked violation of civil liberties and individual rights specifically protected by the Bill of Rights. If national security is worth a restraining of freedom, then democracy has failed and terror won for to use such expedients is tantamount to instilling on its citizens a state of fear and insecurity in their

lives and freedom. Moreover, it is not clear that democracy has no better means of defending itself and its citizens.

When Lincoln suspended habeas corpus during the Civil War and used military tribunals to enforce the law, the Supreme Court ruled that the President did not have the power to resort to military tribunals when the civilian courts and government authority were still functioning. Despite the severity of the situation the country was not under martial law and the rights of citizens could not be curtailed. In words that have resonance to the present abridgment of liberties and protected rights, the Supreme Court confirmed that “it is the birthright of every American citizen when charged with crime, to be tried and punished according to law... By the protection of the law human rights are secured; withdraw that protection, and they are at the mercy of wicked rulers or the clamor of an excited people.” The establishment of emergency powers above and beyond individual rights runs against the national character and serves as a pretext for those intent on overthrowing democracy. As the Court reminded the nation in 1866,

The Constitution of the United States is a law for rulers and people, equally in war and in peace, and covers with the shield of its protection all classes of men, at all times, and under all circumstances. No doctrine, involving more pernicious consequences, was ever invented by the wit of man than that any of its provisions can be suspended during any of the great exigencies of government. Such a doctrine leads directly to anarchy or despotism, but the theory of necessity on which it is based is false; for the government, within the Constitution, has all the powers granted to it, which are necessary to preserve its existence; as has been happily proved by the result of the great effort to throw off its just authority.⁷⁷²

Even the Civil War was no excuse to inaugurate an age of military rule. The Founding Fathers had created a government of laws, not of men. The argument of exceptionality and emergency to reverse constitutional liberties is a pernicious one, and as Benjamin Franklin would say, those who sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither.

Speaking in 2006, former Vice-President Al Gore gave voice to the consternation pervading these national developments. The expanse of discretionary

⁷⁷² *ex parte Milligan*, 71 U.S. (4 Wall.) 2 (1866).

powers collected by the Executive and the security state were a sad change for a country that had rebelled against the unpredictability of aristocratic rule. The expansion of executive power to include the power to decide over the life of American citizens without trial amounted to the subversion of the rule of law and the start of the rule of one man. And absolute power knows no bounds. “Can it be true that any president really has such powers under our Constitution? If the answer is yes, then under the theory by which these acts are committed, are there any acts that can on their face be prohibited? If the president has the inherent authority to eavesdrop on American citizens without a warrant, imprison American citizens on his own declaration, kidnap and torture, then what can’t he do?”⁷⁷³ Summarising President Eisenhower, those who act as if freedom’s defences are to be found in suppression, suspicion, and fear confess a doctrine that is alien to America.

The American doctrine holds that all have a right to self-preservation which in turn implies a right of revolution against despotism or arbitrary rule using its power against the people. The spirit of independence that moved the colonies was directed against arbitrary rule. Among the list of complaints against the British king and which served as justification for the colonies’ decisions to rebel were the following acts of legislation by the king:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:⁷⁷⁴

These complaints are unnervingly similar to some of the most recent condemnations regarding legislation passed in the name of national security. The current state of affairs regarding Executive overreach and usurpation of powers stems

⁷⁷³ Albert Gore, “Former Vice President Gore Delivers Remarks on Constitutional Issues,” January 16, 2006. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/16/AR2006011600779_pf.html (accessed June 15, 2015).

⁷⁷⁴ *Declaration of Independence*.

directly from the developments in constitutional interpretation regarding the role of the President since 1945.

The vast federal and administrative machinery is of course a tempting target for those seeking to benefit from it, not just the political class but the financial and business elites as well. For the amounts of money and contracts available are a bountiful source of revenue that most would not overlook. As has been noted, the rise of special interests orbiting the political body has been favoured by the growing disaffection of the electorate with politicians since the 1970's - resulting in America having one of the lowest voter turnouts in the world - which weakened parties and allowed organised groups to play a greater role in politics. The growing obedience of elected representatives to party interests and their dependence on financial resources for elections ensured that monetary clout became an increasingly dominant factor.

Ours was the first revolution in the history of mankind that truly reversed the course of government, and with three little words: 'We the People.' 'We the People' tell the government what to do; it doesn't tell us. 'We the People' are the driver; the government is the car. And we decide where it should go, and by what route, and how fast. Almost all the world's constitutions are documents in which governments tell the people what their privileges are. Our Constitution is a document in which 'We the People' tell the government what it is allowed to do. 'We the People' are free.⁷⁷⁵

So spoke Ronald Reagan in his Farewell Address. And yet, judging by recent developments and research into the political decision-making process, the people seem to have lost its power to tell government what to do. A recent study confirms just that. Using a vast empirical data set of 1,779 policy cases from 1981 to 2002, Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page examined the dissimilar influence wielded by different sectors of American society. Their investigation concludes that economic elites have a disproportionate influence in the corridors of power in relation to other social groups. "The central point that emerges from our research is that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S.

⁷⁷⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Farewell Address to the Nation," January 11, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29650> (accessed January 26, 2015).

government policy, while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence.”⁷⁷⁶ The two researchers examined the massive amount of data by income level and then determined how often each income level or organised interest groups’ preferred policy was ratified by Congress for the period in question. The statistical analysis yields clear results: “Not only do ordinary citizens not have uniquely substantial power over policy decisions; they have little or no independent influence on policy at all. By contrast, economic elites are estimated to have a quite substantial, highly significant, independent impact on policy... Similarly, organized interest groups... are found to have substantial independent influence on policy.”⁷⁷⁷ The power of money is such that even large popular majorities are not assured of getting the policies they want. The data shows that more often than not, when legislation preferred by the mass of anonymous citizens was enacted it so happened because the economic and financial elite also supported that legislation.

The conclusion they arrive at is unfavourable, a condemnation of modern American politics. “In the United States, our findings indicate, the majority does not rule - at least not in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes. When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites or with organized interests, they generally lose. Moreover, because of the strong status quo bias built into the U.S. political system, even when fairly large majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it.”⁷⁷⁸ Despite the formal symbols of democracy present in America the truth is that, functionally speaking, the country’s political workings are far from reassuring for the future of democracy in America. “Americans do enjoy many features central to democratic governance, such as regular elections, freedom of speech and association, and a widespread (if still contested) franchise. But we believe that if policymaking is dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America’s claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened.”⁷⁷⁹ Although the word is never used, the country comes closest to being under oligarchic rule.

A witness to events closer in time to the period analysed by Gilens and Page, Simon Johnson is not shy of the word. A former Chief Economist of the International

⁷⁷⁶ Martin Gilens, and Benjamin I. Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens.” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 12, Issue 3 (September 2014): 565.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 572.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 576.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 577.

Monetary Fund - a cornerstone institution of the financial post-war American world order - Johnson wrote about the role played by American elite financial interests in the 2008 crisis and how they manipulated the federal government into the solutions devised to solve the problem. The deregulation process initiated by Reagan was the beginning of the ascendancy of the financial industry, an empowerment fuelled by all successive administrations in their pursuit of popular electoral gains and fast profits for a struggling economy in the wake of the house market crash. Wall Street quickly showed itself to be an important money engine, with huge profits that increasingly became vital for the whole of the economy. "From 1973 to 1985, the financial sector never earned more than 16 percent of domestic corporate profits. In 1986, that figure reached 19 percent. In the 1990s, it oscillated between 21 percent and 30 percent, higher than it had ever been in the postwar period. This decade, it reached 41 percent. Pay rose just as dramatically. From 1948 to 1982, average compensation in the financial sector ranged between 99 percent and 108 percent of the average for all domestic private industries. From 1983, it shot upward, reaching 181 percent in 2007."

Inevitably, this success gave Wall Street great political leverage and effectively resurrected an oligarchy that had been greatly reduced since the Great Depression. As we have seen, Joseph Stiglitz attributes to the repeal of the Glass–Steagall Act a significant portion of the blame for the events that followed. Simon Johnson completes the reasoning and attributes it the return of the plutocrats. "The great wealth that the financial sector created and concentrated gave bankers enormous political weight - a weight not seen in the U.S. since the era of J.P. Morgan (the man). In that period, the banking panic of 1907 could be stopped only by coordination among private-sector bankers: no government entity was able to offer an effective response. But that first age of banking oligarchs came to an end with the passage of significant banking regulation in response to the Great Depression; the reemergence of an American financial oligarchy is quite recent."⁷⁸⁰

The fear of an oligarchic takeover in the United States is as old as the country itself. Thomas Jefferson fought the establishment of a Bank of the United States on the grounds that it would benefit merchants and financiers and ruin the small farmers and artisans. Andrew Jackson was more effective than Jefferson when he shut down the second Bank of the United States, the successor to the earlier one. Believing that the

⁷⁸⁰ 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).

Bank was a ploy to favour speculators and oligarchs to the detriment of the majority of the population, Jackson fought a political war to have the bank closed, which he accomplished in 1836. However, the danger to the egalitarian and democratic nature of the country has materialised, according to Simon Johnson because the financial world began first by filling the void left by a disaffected electorate and then by making use of its money in electoral campaigns. But more recently it has managed to embody a vital piece of the internationalist mechanism of American global power.

The American financial industry gained political power by amassing a kind of cultural capital - a belief system. Once, perhaps, what was good for General Motors was good for the country. Over the past decade, the attitude took hold that what was good for Wall Street was good for the country. The banking-and-securities industry has become one of the top contributors to political campaigns, but at the peak of its influence, it did not have to buy favors the way, for example, the tobacco companies or military contractors might have to. Instead, it benefited from the fact that Washington insiders already believed that large financial institutions and free-flowing capital markets were crucial to America's position in the world.⁷⁸¹

This led to a collusion of the two centres of power, with the transit of individuals between the two ensuring that the views of the financial world were included in domestic and foreign decisions. Johnson names the bankers that have served in various administrations and politicians which took up jobs in New York after leaving their office. And as further evidence for the study made by Gilens and Page, Wall Street has managed to have legislation approved to fight the crisis which best served its interests and not as was arguably best for the country as a whole. As Jefferson and Jackson suspected, the country's wealth was used to rescue the oligarchs when in trouble: the successive bailouts buttressed the banking industry at the taxpayer's expense.

The response so far is perhaps best described as 'policy by deal': when a major financial institution gets into trouble, the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve engineer a bailout over the weekend and announce on Monday that everything is fine. 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

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

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)... This was late-night, backroom dealing, pure and simple.⁷⁸²

All the while, the government “has taken extreme care not to upset the interests of the financial institutions, or to question the basic outlines of the system that got us here.” According to Simon Johnson, the measures taken by the federal government at the time have left the financial industry’s system and deregulation virtually intact. “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.”⁷⁸³ What are we to make of all this and the tensions arising from their consolidation in modern America?

III

Looking at modern America one is left to paraphrase Louis Vernon Parrington: if the goal of America is the material prosperity and splendour of the State, then all is according to the plan and in line with the final outcome of the positions sponsored by Alexander Hamilton and the internationalist Wilsonians. But if the goal is the benefit and growth of the individual, as set out by Thomas Jefferson and the Transcendentalists, then America is failing.

We put forward the argument that America is a country where contradiction and conflict are part of the nature of its idealism. And also that it is this essential engagement of opposites that transports the country forward, a dynamo propelled by the contrasting perspectives and positions within, which reach a moment of synthesis after negotiation. Tension and disagreement have been common throughout the country’s history. The spirit of nonconformity and contradiction at the heart of the American

⁷⁸² Ibid.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

character was given full expression with Transcendentalism, the engine in the search for perfection and expression of the self. Rather than a hindrance we regard contradiction as a strength, the veritable trademark of American idealism much like Walt Whitman expressed it in his poetic vision of America (Do I contradict myself?/Very well then I contradict myself,/I am large, I contain multitudes).⁷⁸⁴ Whitman sang America as the great democratic nation. Americans have never been a single, homogenous and uniform breed of people. They were born of diversity, and multiple views. America was born of revolution and intent on individualism; it is also a nation of conflict among groups and among individuals. Obedience to their conscience surpasses obedience to the laws. As Seymour Martin Lipset pointed out, “the American revolutionary libertarian tradition does not encourage obedience to the state and the law,”⁷⁸⁵ but rather to their own morals. Nonetheless, they share a common, democratic respect and loyalty for a set of common values and principles which protects their most basic rights: freedom and equality.

As stated before, America is a civic project, democratic, of individual autonomy. We use the word democratic not in its political or philosophical sense but in its etymological meaning as ‘the many’ coming together around a common goal. As Walt Whitman expressed it regarding the self, contradiction arises from the multitude of perspectives vying to make themselves heard. We hold that the same is true for America as a whole, the congregation of many different people from the various corners of the world with their multitude of opinions, interests and passions but that the country offers an ideal of peaceful, democratic coexistence that allows each one the preservation of its space of autonomous self-improvement. From its contending and multiple different points of view has come rebellion, conflict and disorder. But the country has held together nonetheless, managing to accommodate more often than not the differences.

The accumulation of tension within the system gives rise to periodic moments of upheaval that have been resolved by social, political and even institutional adjustments and redefinitions. The romanticism, naiveté almost, of the Articles of Confederation which aimed to extend the popular governments of the colonial period was faced with the harsh realities of the first years of the Republic. Several rebellions threatened the viability of the new country as people contemplated the necessity of curtailing the

⁷⁸⁴ Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”, *Leaves of Grass*.

⁷⁸⁵ Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 21.

protection of the wide sphere of personal and communal autonomy to make way for a more stable and efficient central government. Republicanism trumped the democratic idealism of the Revolution and the 1787 Constitution, coupled with the Bill of Rights, emerged to subsume both positions.

Slavery was the most salient aspect of the Civil War, and the most obvious contradiction regarding the foundational ideals, but its existence in the South was based on a number of common national principles. The plantation aristocracy claimed that States' rights allowed for each community to decide on its economic and social organisation, effectively pitting self-determination against equality and liberty for slaves. The emotional undertones of the contest made for a fatal breakdown cancelling the possibility of a peaceful resolution. Instead, a violent clarification of the system took place. The fact that States' rights and decentralisation were used to protect the peculiar institution weakened their legitimacy and opened the door to greater centralisation. The individual, agrarian Republic was replaced by industrialism and mass proletariat, ending the dream of a Republic of free men and heralded new tensions and demands for reform. The Progressive Era was a protracted period of change and adaptation that despite outbreaks of violence was resolved through negotiated adjustments. Likewise, as we have seen, the Sixties were a moment of contradiction between the moralism of the internationalist perspective and domestic shortcomings perceived by a significant section of the country.

The many strive for self-improvement as given substance by Transcendentalism but whose roots can be traced to the Pilgrims' Protestant piety and personal redemption. Hence anti-statism is the dominant political culture, a reflection of the values on which the philosophy of the Revolution rests. The Constitution and the principle of limited government are the incarnation of that philosophy, of that common ethical ideal that endeavours to protect the personal sphere that will allow individuals to engender their path to perfection. Nonetheless, the principle of rebellion is imbedded in the country's character. Challenge and conflict are present since the colonial period, the colonies themselves having been established by dissenters.

The emergence of communal organisations before the establishment of any political authority over them - repeated throughout the colonial and frontier days - was the key feature behind the spirit of 1776. As such, Americans' rights existed long before the institution of government and they established a sphere of individual autonomy out

of reach from government. The principle of rebellion against authority was well established in the nation's character and implicitly enshrined its first legal framework, the Articles of Confederation. Although the 1787 Constitution abolished the Articles, the idea that political authority was not to be trusted and openly defied permeated the sentiments of the early Republic and was given clear sanction by Thomas Jefferson when he said that "I hold it 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. An observation of this truth should render honest republican governors 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." This validation of revolutionary activism is captured by the current proliferation of patriot groups that question the federal security agencies and protest at the violations of civil liberties. And even the turbulent and violent nature of dissension and revolt was anticipated by Jefferson. In the same letter to Madison he said: "Malo periculosam libertatem quam quietam servitatem [I prefer dangerous freedom over peaceful slavery]. Even this evil is productive of good. It prevents the degeneracy of government and nourishes a general attention to the public affairs."⁷⁸⁶

We hold that the division at the heart of America regarding involvement with the outside world has been resolved in 1945 in favour of intervention. Also, we believe that serious debate about that intervention has been poor or altogether non-existent for some decades. This has triggered a series of events and political and constitutional developments that have created new points of stress. And while this tension is inherent to the system, its build-up prompts moments of clarification through democratic negotiation - with the exception of the Civil War. As we have seen in the previous section, there are important contradictions in present-day America, a severe departure from the original idealism and its principles as to require another such moment of reckoning and redefinition. And we believe that a moment of reckoning is due, prompting a new period of interpretation and adjustment. The spirit of the nation is not opposed to the internationalist disposition per se, but very much opposed to the expansion of federal government experienced today, and most especially the security

⁷⁸⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *On the Need for a Little Rebellion Now and Then*, letter to James Madison, January 30, 1787. <http://www.earlyamerica.com/early-america-review/volume-1/jefferson-letter-madison/> (accessed June 25, 2015).

state that emerged after 2001. The latter is anathema to a country where discord and rebellion against authority is still regarded as a virtue. But it also flies in the face of the democratic faith of the revolutionary principles. The rise of the surveillance state is the defeat of the founding principles of self-government and the belief in the permanent progress of Man.

We hold that material, quantifiable factors, namely the United States' debt and poor economic performance have the potential to trigger such a moment of clarification. The enormous defence budgets coupled with the various Social Security, entitlements and healthcare programmes have put the nation on the brink of fiscal collapse. This state of affairs has created an unsustainable level of debt which has also produced slow economic growth because of excessive bureaucracy and taxation needed to fund spending. America is effectively bankrupt.

Current US Federal debt is about \$18 trillion, and amounts to gross outstanding federal debt issued by the United States Department of the Treasury. US GDP is close to \$17 trillion. However, the debt value above does not include state and local debt, agency debt - debt issued by federal agencies and government-sponsored enterprises - and most importantly it does not include long-term unfunded liabilities of entitlement programmes like Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare, and now Obamacare. According to the most recent estimates, the fiscal gap - the difference between the spending commitments and the taxes projected to cover these commitments - stands at \$210 trillion.⁷⁸⁷ Although the government and Congress have a long practice of hiding the real fiscal condition of the country aided by the media, the effects on the economy are already showing.

Poor economic performance has been the new normal in America. While it is true that creditors have been trusting America's economy to grow and meet its fiscal commitments, we believe that such leniency stems in part from the fact that America is still the pre-eminent nation in the world, the indispensable nation. However, we also believe that recent challenges to American global hegemony and the perception of its own disenchantment with internationalism, together with the maelstrom of the current global crisis - the volatility of which makes it impossible to predict future developments - have the potential to force the United States to face its creditors and its fiscal gap.

⁷⁸⁷ Laurence J. Kotlikoff and Adam N. Michel. "Closing America's Enormous Fiscal Gap: Who Will Pay?" Mercatus Working Paper, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, June 2015.

Therefore, the moment of reckoning will either be prompted from a national conversation on the issue or forced from outside events.

To tackle the fiscal gap through taxes alone would require “immediately and permanently raising all federal taxes - including personal income taxes, corporate income taxes, excise taxes, and Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) payroll taxes - by 58 percent.” But as the authors warn, “Taxes are not the only way to close the fiscal gap. In reality, it will take some combination of both tax increases and spending cuts to address the burgeoning debt... No adjustment that sufficiently addresses the fiscal gap will be small.”⁷⁸⁸ In fact, there is no alternative to address America’s fiscal problem without slashing defence budgets and entitlements (Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and Obamacare) which will in turn prompt a serious national debate, an agonising introspection about the meaning of modern America. Either the nation is still intent on materialising its messianic destiny to spread the gospel of the Revolution, and continues to spend on defence and the military apparatus, or it severely curtails its Progressive ambitions. The day of reckoning looms closer and a realignment will be unavoidable, triggering another cyclical period of turmoil.

As with other moments of tension and conflict, the moment of clarification will come through the clash of different perspectives regarding the idea of America. We believe that the current bitterness and exacerbated political partisanship in and outside Congress reveal a growing failure to achieve viable negotiations in time to avoid disaster. We also think that the first stirrings of the national debate that will redefine the meaning of America have already begun, and have very recently been expressed at the top of the political and constitutional hierarchy, i.e., in the Supreme Court of the United States and prompted by a highly divisive issue such as gay marriage.

Despite the momentum in favour of gay marriage the question was in the hands of States’ voters and in some of them referenda had denied the expansion of the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples. The voters in the State of California, among the most liberal in the country, twice voted to ban same-sex marriages (Proposition 22, in 2000, and Proposition 8, in 2008), only to see supporters of gay marriage appeal to the courts to thwart the popular will. The positions were defined during the appeals as the advocates of equality based their arguments not on popular

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

democratic sovereignty but on claiming constitutional principle, the foundation for the rule of law. Failure to convince their peers to change other State laws across the nation convinced supporters of gay marriage to take their case to the Supreme Court. In a 5 - 4 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the high Court has recently determined that same-sex couples may exercise the fundamental right to marry in all States. The question is not whether gay marriage is right or wrong but the manner in which the ruling came about, and the legal and political implications for the future. The original design of the judiciary was that the courts should not substitute their social and economic beliefs for the judgment of legislative bodies, who are elected to pass laws. The latter are the proper legislative body of the Republic. The Court's opinion for the ruling exhibits a new interpretation of American idealism gaining ground. But in the dissenting opinions one can clearly hear the language of America's original ideals as they were and how they differ from the Court's majority opinion. The clash is a vivid portrayal of the fight for the soul of the country taking place.

Obergefell v. Hodges can arguably be regarded as a most illuminating example about the nature of the tensions present in modern America and the principles upon which it has been founded. Whereas the majority has recourse to arguments of equality, the dissenting Justices make their arguments based on the defence of liberty. The former read into the Constitution and the Fourteenth Amendment the existence of rights that include the protection of same-sex marriage, namely the Equal Protection Clause. However, the dissenting opinions focus on the constitutional legacy of the ruling and the violation it entails for liberty for the Court has usurped a fundamental right of the people, that of self-government.

Focussing on the question of the democratic process and the right of the people in each State to decide freely their definition of marriage, Chief Justice John Roberts dissented writing regarding the Court's decision to overturn the electoral majorities that "this Court is not a legislature. Whether same-sex marriage is a good idea should be of no concern to us. Under the Constitution, judges have power to say what the law is, not what it should be. The people who ratified the Constitution authorized courts to exercise 'neither force nor will but merely judgment' (Federalist n° 78). Although the policy arguments for extending marriage to same-sex couples may be compelling, the legal arguments for requiring such an extension are not. The fundamental right to marry does not include a right to make a State change its definition of marriage." Notwithstanding, the five Justices for the majority took on themselves the role of deciding for the whole

nation regarding the issue. “Today, however, the Court takes the extraordinary step of ordering every State to license and recognize same-sex marriage. Many people will rejoice at this decision, and I begrudge none their celebration. But for those who believe in a government of laws, not of men, the majority’s approach is deeply disheartening. Supporters of same-sex marriage have achieved considerable success persuading their fellow citizens - through the democratic process - to adopt their view. That ends today. Five lawyers have closed the debate and enacted their own vision of marriage as a matter of constitutional law... Just who do we think we are?”⁷⁸⁹

According to Roberts, the majority ruled based on a peculiar interpretation of the Constitution and their understanding of what those principles ought to mean. The decision of the majority is not only not based on principles of law, but “it seizes for itself a question the Constitution leaves to the people, at a time when the people are engaged in a vibrant debate on that question. And it answers that question based not on neutral principles of constitutional law, but on its own ‘understanding of what freedom is and must become.’” And therein lies the rub of the issue facing the country: the differing interpretations regarding the basic values.

Aiming at the deeper question he identified a new interpretation of the meaning of the principles upon which the country was founded and the process of having them forced on the country using the *vox iustitiae* whenever *vox populi* is not sufficient to effect the desired change.

The elevation of the fullest individual self-realization over the constraints that society has expressed in law may or may not be attractive moral philosophy. But a Justice’s commission does not confer any special moral, philosophical, or social insight sufficient to justify imposing those perceptions on fellow citizens under the pretense of ‘due process.’ There is indeed a process due the people on issues of this sort - the democratic process. Respecting that understanding requires the Court to be guided by law, not any particular school of social thought... The role of the Court envisioned by the majority today, however, is anything but humble or restrained. Over and over, the majority exalts the role of the judiciary in delivering social change. In the majority’s telling, it is the courts, not the people, who are responsible for making ‘new dimensions of freedom . . . apparent to new generations,’ for providing ‘formal discourse’ on

⁷⁸⁹ *Obergefell v. Hodges*. 576 U.S. ____ (2015). http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf (accessed July 3, 2015).

social issues, and for ensuring ‘neutral discussions, without scornful or disparaging commentary.’⁷⁹⁰

With its ruling the Supreme Court has established that its “reasoned judgment” stands above that of the public, and that it knows better. Hence, the democratic process can be overridden to make way for new interpretations of freedom and equality, subject to the shifting currents of social progress. Joining in dissent, Justice Antonin Scalia writes “to call attention to this Court’s threat to American democracy.”

It is not of special importance to me what the law says about marriage. It is of overwhelming importance, however, who it is that rules me. Today’s decree says that my Ruler, and the Ruler of 320 million Americans coast-to-coast, is a majority of the nine lawyers on the Supreme Court. The opinion in these cases is the furthest extension in fact - and the furthest extension one can even imagine - of the Court’s claimed power to create ‘liberties’ that the Constitution and its Amendments neglect to mention. This practice of constitutional revision by an unelected committee of nine, always accompanied (as it is today) by extravagant praise of liberty, robs the People of the most important liberty they asserted in the Declaration of Independence and won in the Revolution of 1776: the freedom to govern themselves.⁷⁹¹

He concludes with a warning regarding the accumulation of power by unelected judges. “Today’s decision will also have a fundamental effect on this Court and its ability to uphold the rule of law. If a bare majority of Justices can invent a new right and impose that right on the rest of the country, the only real limit on what future majorities will be able to do is their own sense of what those with political power and cultural influence are willing to tolerate.” Justice Clarence Thomas followed the same line of argument reminding the country what the original intent was for independence, and the effects of imposing a particular view against the popular will of more than 30 states.

The Court’s decision today is at odds not only with the Constitution, but with the principles upon which our Nation was built. Since well before 1787, liberty has been understood as freedom from government action, not entitlement to

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid.

government benefits. The Framers created our Constitution to preserve that understanding of liberty. Yet the majority invokes our Constitution in the name of a 'liberty' that the Framers would not have recognized, to the detriment of the liberty they sought to protect. Along the way, it rejects the idea - captured in our Declaration of Independence - that human dignity is innate and suggests instead that it comes from the Government. This distortion of our Constitution not only ignores the text, it inverts the relationship between the individual and the state in our Republic. I cannot agree with it.⁷⁹²

Other instances of judiciary law-making have been observed by making use of statutory interpretation of meanings and redrafting of laws.⁷⁹³ This will clash with the Constitution and the fundamental philosophy of the Revolution. If the current relativist impasse of modern thought persists, it will become a potent weapon against the Constitution and any other form or principles and values as it will try to impose a moral egalitarianism that will raze to the ground any ideals or principles. For if values are mere constructions that represent the prejudices and interests of the majority, if nothing can truly be known and if truth itself is unknown or non-existent, then any and all principles of American idealism are false and the constitutional structure that embodies them is just an oppressive tool that needs to be torn apart.

Liberty and freedom consist in having government under laws by which people's lives and their property remain their own. In a Republican form of government, the sovereign people yields its power to representatives that rule according to the principles set out by a Constitution. In the United States those principles affirm a separation of powers among three branches of government and that where the Constitution remains silent regarding powers, they are reserved to the people or the States. The shocking revelation comes from the realisation that both internationalists and radical egalitarians aim to defeat these principles. "The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny."⁷⁹⁴ America is entering a post-constitutional order where the principles of constitutional law are no longer the foundation of government and the separation of

⁷⁹² Ibid.

⁷⁹³ In the cases of *King v. Burwell*, 576 U.S. ____ (2015), and *Arizona State Legislature v. Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission*, 576 U.S. ____ (2015).

⁷⁹⁴ James Madison, "Federalist n° 47", in *The Federalist or, The New Constitution* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 247.

powers no longer holds nor is desired, for government must have free rein to act as the sole provider of the people. The constitution is viewed as an impediment and a nuisance to discharging of proper administrative functions in the post-constitutional culture.

One is reminded of Alexis de Tocqueville's warning about those trying to reshape the character of a nation, the hubris implicit in the belief that they can change the nation and the world.

When, after many efforts, a legislator succeeds in exercising an indirect influence upon the destiny of nations, his genius is lauded by mankind, while, in point of fact, the geographical position of the country, which he is unable to change, a social condition which arose without his co-operation, customs and opinions which he cannot trace to their source, and an origin with which he is unacquainted exercise so irresistible an influence over the courses of society that he is himself borne away by the current after an ineffectual resistance. Like the navigator, he may direct the vessel which bears him along but he can neither change its structure, nor raise the winds, nor lull the waters which swell beneath him.⁷⁹⁵

And the waters can become treacherous in a country where the past lives and is constantly used to shore up all actions and policies. For a country born of revolution, that means that rebellion is part of that invocation and always present in the country's culture. And as Jefferson supported 'a little rebellion' now and again, so does the Chief Justice conclude about the illegitimacy of governing without popular consultation and the danger of the Supreme Court losing the respect of the nation. The consequences for the future can be seen in the past.

The Court's accumulation of power does not occur in a vacuum. It comes at the expense of the people. And they know it. Here and abroad, people are in the midst of a serious and thoughtful public debate on the issue of same-sex marriage. They see voters carefully considering same-sex marriage, casting ballots in favor or opposed, and sometimes changing their minds. They see political leaders similarly reexamining their positions, and either reversing course or explaining adherence to old convictions confirmed anew. They see governments and businesses modifying policies and practices with respect to

⁷⁹⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (London: Everyman's Library, 1994), 1:165 – 166.

same-sex couples, and participating actively in the civic discourse. They see countries overseas democratically accepting profound social change, or declining to do so. This deliberative process is making people take seriously questions that they may not have even regarded as questions before. When decisions are reached through democratic means, some people will inevitably be disappointed with the results. But those whose views do not prevail at least know that they have had their say, and accordingly are - in the tradition of our political culture - reconciled to the result of a fair and honest debate. In addition, they can gear up to raise the issue later, hoping to persuade enough on the winning side to think again... But today the Court puts a stop to all that. By deciding this question under the Constitution, the Court removes it from the realm of democratic decision. There will be consequences to shutting down the political process on an issue of such profound public significance. Closing debate tends to close minds. People denied a voice are less likely to accept the ruling of a court on an issue that does not seem to be the sort of thing courts usually decide.⁷⁹⁶

This exposition of the intensifying tension between two conflicting perspectives within one of the highest bodies of the government is remarkable for two reasons. The first is that it is done by recourse to arguments of principle, their interpretation and implications thereof. The second is for lifting the veil on the potential for disruption of the system because the democratic negotiation of the tensions is deemed impossible because the democratic principle is being disregarded. Self-government is being bypassed in favour of rule by decree. The insinuation is that people might vent their dissent and anger through civil disobedience. A flaring of the principle of rebellion needs only a trigger - be it a financial event or a continued series of social and political problems - as has happened in other critical periods of US history: Lexington and Concord, the Shays Rebellion, Lincoln's election, industrialisation, the sinking of the Lusitania, the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, the attacks of September 11, 2001. Given the state of the country's finances and its economic problems, we believe that either a sudden negative movement of the financial markets or a protracted period of serious monetary difficulties has the potential to cause grave social and political problems which will release the tensions accumulated in the past decades.

⁷⁹⁶ *Obergefell v. Hodges*. 576 U.S. ____ (2015). http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf (accessed July 3, 2015).

The Constitution created a form of government that was limited in scope and reach, and established the rule of law as the best safeguard of the rights of individuals. And yet the current application and exercise of government powers is antithetical toward the original idealism. And what is worse, there has been so far little in the way of debate regarding this development and the presentation of alternatives. Despite the contradictions, the debate is silenced by the national security mantra in favour of federal and executive accumulation of powers. We believe that a national discussion regarding the fundamentals of the American project has to emerge in order to offset the present state of affairs and reduce the growing tension. American idealism is about the clash of opinions, the struggle from whence originates its equilibrium, a process of political agonism where the struggle itself is what defines the country. The present predominance of one view must be counterbalanced through a process of anamnesis, of rediscovery of the idea of America and of the importance of contradiction in achieving a synthesis. The inexistence of an opponent means that there is no forward movement, only stasis. Instead of agonism, there is growing antagonism and a process of bitter fragmentation and violent resistance.

Therefore, if the current inertia persists the tension could challenge the democratic system of negotiation created by the Constitution. As the Judges in dissent have pointed out, debate tends to close people's minds. The Civil War was one such moment when negotiation succumbed to ideological entrenchment and gave way to open antagonism. The debate which we believe has to focus on the fundamentals of the American project will have to address the Constitution that embodies that project. If the system of government set forth is outdated then the Constitution is unsound, meaning that the principles upon which it has been created are no longer valid. A new moral structure will have to be put forward and a process of soul-searching initiated, which can only mean a serious questioning of America itself. On the other hand, if the original ideas are still valid, then the political system must be reset to some of its original form. The rediscovery of the idea of America entails a process of profound political, and social, changes that will have to find common ground between the two poles, a new combination that will preserve its idealism and take into account the changes of modernity.

The subject of this thesis is complex and if the conclusion looks straightforward it is because the path and the facts are clear and actual. The country's political system

and culture is a vigorous reflection of the country's moral principles, and events since 1945 render the outcome almost self-evident. Our conclusion is clear but not superficial. The apparent simplicity is explained by the deeper ideological questions that shape the United States. The country is intensely ideological and there is a philosophical substratum and dynamic profundity which define and impose themselves on events. The conclusion that a conceptual debate is unavoidable emerges almost inevitably from the nature of the country's ideological foundations.

This thesis is a radical statement in defence of American idealism and its moral foundations. We hold that even if its revelatory character is unsuitable for practical application in other cultures it is still nonetheless the best set of ideals available to meet the needs and aspirations of individuals. And therein perhaps lies the difficulty of its acceptance by others. Being determined by history, they are cultures bound by common memories and mores which define other ways of doing things, of interpreting and interacting with reality, effectively forming the national group. Lacking this constraint and heritage, both by design and by lack of historical burdens, America is by definition the land of the individual, of the private commitment with the world. Americans have no other references than looking for their own morality in order to deal with others. And here lies the strength and permanence of America's idea: that individuals can come together and join in common bonds of society because the covenant under which they agree to live is structured by a set of moral principles that are beneficial to all. If it is not, then what other principles can best deliver in terms of the human yearning for freedom and dignity? The burden lies on those who claim that they are not valid for the present times and conditions to put forward other principles and prove their worth.

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