

E. Augelli and C. Murphy:

"Ideology: Common Sense in America

Denominational religion: American destiny, isolationism, evangelism, and crusaderism

Of course, long before many Americans turned to science to provide answers to ultimate questions most Americans had perfectly serviceable' answers provided to them by their religion. The particular faiths of the early European colonists still influence many Americans today, even many in that minority of Americans who are not religious. Colonial religion can be -understood as the source of three sets of ideas that are common sense to most Americans. One idea has to do with identity, with who Americans are, with the view that many American's ,have of their own exceptionalism and destiny, the idea of Americans as a chosen people. The second has to do with how to deal with dissent, how to deal with people whose views differ from your own. For many Americans the only ways to deal with people whose ideas differ from your own is to isolate yourself from them (or them from you), convert them, or destroy them. This impulse has its roots in the religious philosophies of the dissenting Protestants who first isolated themselves in North America and employed all three means to deal with dissent in their own society. Finally, we look at the limited American idea of charity which is bound up with assumptions about the exceptionalism of the American people.

Relatively few Americans reject the idea of American exceptionalism. The colonial faith's most pervasive legacy is the American sense of national destiny. In his recent investigation of the cultural sources of the American war in Vietnam, Loren Baritz states that a single sentence written by one of the country's most respected novelists summarizes all that it is to be American. In *Whitejacket*, Herman Melville said:

... we Americans are the peculiar chosen people; the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world.'

Baritz, along with most of the historians of the consensus school, traces messianic American nationalism back to the experience of the first European Protestants who settled in New England in the seventeenth century. Yet, of course, the contemporary transcontinental industrial nation hardly resembles the underpopulated and rough agrarian societies of the early Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Colonies, at least on the surface. Even the ideologies of government are quite different. While the Plymouth Colony of 1620 may have been a place that was unusually democratic and tolerant in comparison to Britain at the time, New England quickly became a land of religious oligarchies, suspicious of foreigners with different beliefs and completely intolerant of any internal dissent. The modern American republic gives a much higher proportion of the population some access to political power and it awards more significant legal protection to dissenters than the Puritan settlements in North America ever did. More than a century ago (and more than two centuries after the foundation of the first European colonies in New England) Karl Marx even used the United States, and even New England's New Hampshire in particular, as examples of the most advanced form of religious toleration in the world. And in America today the nemesis of New England's Puritans, the Roman Catholic Church, has the largest following of any faith. Yet, the sedimentations of seventeenth-century dissenting, Calvinist Protestantism make up the deepest strata of the common sense of many Americans.

Central to the doctrine of the New England Puritans who left England because of their dissent from the established Protestant Church is the Calvinist notion of the Elect; God has chosen some people to enter the Kingdom of Heaven while others, the vast majority suffer preterition. They have been passed over. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony (the most successful of the early dissenter communities in America) the idea of God's election of individuals was transformed into a belief in his election of a whole people; the New England Puritans became the new Israel.'

Even before the American colonies declared their independence from Britain in 1776, New England's Puritans had modified their own self-assured belief that God had only saved a few and that their leaders were surely among the elect. To perpetuate the oligarchy from generation to generation Puritans began to allow the presumption of election to pass from parents to children. From there it was only a short step to accepting the possibility that the Kingdom of Heaven might be open to all, or at least that all should be encouraged to act in this life as part of the Elect by being good members of the faith.'

For the New England Puritans replaced their older view of personal salvation, individual membership in the Elect, with an understanding of their community as Elect, the idea of a collective covenant. The notion of Puritan New

Englanders, and later, of all Americans, as an Elect people lived on long after the original historical philosophy began to be forgotten. Many reasons can be offered for the persistence of the idea. American history has been marked by periodic religious revivals when new (usually Christian, Protestant, and Calvinist) denominations are created, assuring that at all times there are at least some Americans whose self-assurance about their own position as the Elect is as great as that of the seventeenth-century Puritans. Perhaps even more significantly, American politicians, novelists, poets, song-writers, playwrights, and scholars have consistently identified the United States as an exceptional society, a society of destiny, or the new Israel. What began as the core concept of a specific religion in the English colonies of North America, became the code of a civil religion that every American is exposed to throughout his or her life." Baritz ends his book on Vietnam by quoting California Governor Ronald Reagan's set speech from his first triumphant campaign for president. Reagan's themes, and many of his phrases, were the same as those used by the first governor of Massachusetts to his own people there and a half centuries before when the Bay Colony settlers were the first Americans to be told that they were God's chosen people and that their nation must be 'a City on the hill,' a new Jerusalem.

What common experiences do so many Americans have that would make it reasonable to continue to think of themselves as a chosen people, a new Israel, or an Elect? What real events do politicians and writers play upon, reaffirm, and help explain? Perhaps the most important experiences are those that make up the repeated drama of immigration, the experience that most American families share. The drama opens with membership in a despised or down-trodden community, a characterization as valid for today's Indo-Chinese immigrants as it was for the seventeenth century dissenters from England, and just as valid for all immigrant communities in-between: Irish laborers escaping famine in the early nineteenth century, German-speaking liberals in flight from the repression following 1848's unsuccessful revolutions, or farmers leaving the dearth in south-eastern Sweden at the turn of the century. Immigrant survivors have to explain their own success, what makes them different from those they have left behind. American exceptionalism helps provide that answer. Americans have actively worked for their own deliverance simply by immigration. In that way they are like the Israelites who followed Moses. And like the Biblical chosen people, Americans, too, can make their country a holy land.

As Moses himself learned, a community that is to be 'that shining City on the hill' must be one cleansed of all impurities. This was one of the overriding concerns of the early Calvinist communities in America. They had three, usually effective, means of dealing with internal dissent. These means continue to make up much of the repertoire of ways that contemporary Americans deal with internal dissent: exclusion, reconversion, and repression.

By far the most likely to be preferred one of these three means of dealing with organized dissent in early Calvinist America was the first, exclusion. Dissenters excluded from the chosen community could continue to think of themselves as Elect and wisely isolated from the impure community which had rejected them. The Puritan's North American environment was particularly conducive to this policy. When religious schisms took place dissenters could simply move west, obstructed only by the less-technologically sophisticated military forces of the native population. The geography of human settlement in the United States records a history of constant, often seemingly petty, religious disputes followed by the removal, isolation, and reaffirmation of the chosen status of the members of the new community, especially in New England, where most towns can trace their founding to a religious conflict in another town (often with the same name) further east. Many American colleges and universities, especially those founded before the civil war (1861-65) have similar histories that can be traced eastward through a chain of older colleges, and older religious schisms, to the first college in America, the Puritans' Harvard. Even after the 'closing of the frontier' at the end of the nineteenth century (the end of the long era in which large tracts of arable land were available at low cost), Americans continued to turn to exclusion of dissenters before considering other policies for keeping the elect community pure. Thus, throughout the Vietnam War, those who protested American policy would be greeted by signs that proclaimed, 'America: Love It or Leave It,' a very hard choice for those who believed in the unique destiny of their country to make.

The Puritans had other, less benign, ways to deal with dissent. They could demand the dissenter choose either to reconvert and then live a closely-watched life within the norms of community, or else be destroyed. In New England Puritan society, unlike (say) in some Catholic cultures, it was never enough for dissenters to confess and propitiate for their sins. Other members had to keep former sinners (and all others who were particularly susceptible to the blandishments of the devil: women and children) under close surveillance to make sure that deviations would be detected and properly punished. For those who refused reconversion matters could be much worse, as the history of the Salem witch trials attests.

The same process of reconversion and surveillance still goes on in the contemporary American religious groups that identify themselves as the Elect, but other residues of this Puritan practice are more pervasive. McClosky and Zaller's figures indicate that many Americans, especially those who identify themselves as more religious, are not particularly tolerant of behavior that deviates from relatively narrow norms, even though the same people are likely to profess an adherence to an abstract principle of 'liberty for all.'¹¹ As a result, many Americans accept a relatively authoritarian concept of 'community,' one that entails indoctrination and little real dissent." For many Americans it is the only concept of 'community' they understand.'⁵ Yet, many Americans

remain frightened by those who limit a dissenter's alternatives to reconversion or repression, and they fight against every manifestation of this impulse in American political life.¹² For example, in *The Crucible*, the playwright, Arthur Miller, offered a powerful depiction of the seventeenth century Puritan witch trials as a condemnation and partial explanation American anti-community hysteria in the 1950s, and Miller's play became a standard part of the high school curriculum in many American schools in the 1960s.

In Puritan New England the impulse to isolate, convert, or repress dissenters played as much of a role in the society's external relations as it did in its internal affairs. The early Puritans believed that the world outside New England was made up of societies less perfect than their own. Certainly there were Elect individuals outside Massachusetts, but there were even more preterite ones, some of who were positively evil. At the very beginning Massachusetts was happy to exclude the rest of the world from the colony and the colony from the rest of the world. How then could the colony be 'that shining city on the hill,' the light to all nations? It could do so only by supporting evangelical movements designed to convert those in the external world who could be converted. In the same way that the Puritans were capable of hysteria and violence when internal dissenters refused to be isolated or reconverted, so the Puritans were just as capable of hysterical crusading violence against those outside their community who refused isolation or conversion. In particular, the Puritans periodically savaged their Native American neighbors who had refused conversion." Many Puritans eventually saw the recalcitrant Indians as a positive evil, as much of an incarnation of the Devil as the endless savage land of North America itself, land which also had to be conquered and civilized.¹⁸ As the next chapter discusses, these Puritan images continue to play a role in the way some Americans deal with foreign relations.

For now we want to focus on the question: why has this Puritan repertoire of isolationism, evangelism, or crusaderism continued to have such a role to play in American political life? Before we can even suggest a hypothesis it is important to point out that this impulse does not characterize the way all Americans deal with all types of dissent. It is much more characteristic, as McClosky and Zaller make clear, of Americans with a strong religious orientation, and, to narrow the group even further, of Americans who are members of conservative Christian denominations."

Two things are important to note about the most conservative of America's denominations: some Baptists and Methodists, Mormons, Pentecostals, 'Pentecostal' Roman Catholics, and various 'Fundamentalist' churches. First, all these religious movements can trace some of their roots back to the British dissenting, Calvinist, Protestant churches of the seventeenth century; today's conservative American Christians, even though most may be found in the American south or west are, in a very real sense, the true descendants of the New England Puritans. Second, almost all of the conservative American

churches began during the periodic 'revival' movements that have swept through American society since the eighteenth century.

American revivalisms have always found their greatest successes during periods of social upheaval,²⁰ most recently in the late 1960s and early 1970s,²¹ and they have found most of their converts not among the wealthiest, best-educated, and most secure members of the American population, but rather among some of those likely to be victimized by rapid social change, the marginal land-owning rural poor and those without capital.¹² Revivalism, various 'returns' to 'fundamental' ideas of Protestant Christianity, e.g. ideas similar to those of the Puritans, offer converts a way to accept social change as well as a way to act together to respond to it.²³

The role new Protestant denominations have in facilitating collective action may be the key to understanding the success of revivalism. In general, it is difficult for Americans to create new political groups through which collective, self-interested social action can be carried-out. For example, in the two centuries of American government under the prescribed constitution only four major national political parties have been created, the Democrats, Federalists, Whigs, and Republicans. Gramsci sees the widespread American tendency toward (private) repressive political violence as part of the reason for this development:

The history of political parties, and factions cannot be separated from the history of religious groups and trends. Precisely the U.S.A. and Japan offer us exceptional terrain to examine and understand the interdependence between religious and political groups, that is, to understand that any legal hindrance or obstacle of private violence to the spontaneous development of political trends and to their formation as a political party gives rise to a multiplication of religious sects. From this standpoint the political-religious history of the U.S.A. may be compared with that of Tsarist Russia (with the important difference that in Tsarist Russia, while there was no legal political freedom, religious freedom was also lacking and hence religious sectarianism took on morbid and exceptional forms.) In the U.S.A., both legally and in actual fact there is no lack of religious freedom (within certain limits, as the action against Darwinism brings out), and while legally (within certain limits) political freedom is not lacking, it is lacking in actual fact due to economic pressure and also due to open private violence. From this point of view, a critical examination of the judicial and police organization becomes important, showing that they give impunity to and even support private violence intended to prevent the formation of other than the Republican and the Democratic parties. The birth of new religious sects, too, is almost always urged and backed by economic groupings, to channel the effects of cultural-political compression. The huge sums earmarked in America for religious activity serve a very precise political-cultural purpose."

Even creating trade unions and cooperatives appears to be more difficult in the United States than it is in many other countries. Yet it is relatively easy to create new religious denominations. Some scholars even argue that America's liberal legal guarantees of religious toleration explain why Americans are so much more involved with organized religion than people in other industrialized

nations tend to be. Religious toleration has assured that every American can find a church where she is comfortable.²⁶

But the comfort that religious Americans feel with their church probably has little to do with a conscious belief that their church's theology is the best; religious Americans rarely are people who have time to study comparative theology. Instead, it may have quite a bit to do with the way that the 'lived philosophy' of many Protestant denominations has helped marginalized Americans cope with their social position. Perhaps this relationship can be seen most starkly among black Americans. Even before the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which was led by black Protestant ministers, the major black denominations had played a central role in the black social struggle after the civil war. Churches of the National Baptist Convention and the African Methodist Episcopal denomination, as well as many others, provided a way for black Americans to live principles of mutual support and self-help, ultimately providing most of the services (higher education, disaster relief, and support in old age) that would be provided by the welfare state.²¹ Contemporary black leaders may disparage the churches before the civil rights movement for supporting a conservative version of black separatism,²⁵ but those leaders recognize that the older church role was as much a social one as the one taken on by churches today.²⁹

Christianity's highest norm, charity, enjoins all of America's Protestant denominational churches to be, at minimum, sources of mutual support for their own members. Many American churches apply the norm well beyond their own inner community by helping the poor in their locality, country, and the world at large. Even outside the churches, public 'charitable' activities are much more central to life in the United States than in most other industrialized countries. Elite social clubs of college students within the so-called 'Greek System' of fraternities and sororities vie with each other for doing local good works. Every American city houses half-a-dozen or more businessmen's philanthropic clubs building hospitals, repairing homes of the elderly, and raising money for needed traffic lights. Almost every American employer provides a way for employees to give part of every paycheck to local charities. And the average American is much more likely than his or her European or Japanese counterpart to have personally contributed time or funds to an international welfare agency like UNICEF or Oxfam.

Yet, the idea of charity plays an unusual role in American common sense because many Americans tie charity to another residue of Puritanism that glorifies those who give 'charity.' One source of this residue is the New Testament parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus of Nazareth's story of a member of a despised and outcast minority who was the only one who would help a stranger in need. One interpretation of the story says that the Elect, those who have followed the commandment to be charitable, will long be a despised minority, like the Samaritan, or like the Puritans escaping religious persecution

in the old world, and like so many American immigrants. Thus, the act of giving charity can become an act of affirming the belief that one is of the Elect. The burden placed on the recipient of charity is not only one of gratitude, it is also one of recognizing the 'despised' donor as, in reality, something quite different, as one of the Chosen. Moreover, those who accept this line of thought can have little sympathy for the apparent 'charity' of others who are well-off but who appear to revile or despise the latter-day Samaritans.

- As a result of this assumption of their own Election, many Americans are uninterested in the view of their charity that other donors or recipients might have. This can often lead to a kind of misunderstanding between donor and recipient that the Good Samaritan view of charity easily explains away: many Americans do not expect to be thanked for their charity; the Elect must accept that they are a despised people.

Some authors have gone to great lengths to show how this assumption of being a despised but charitable people has placed itself out throughout American history.³⁰ For our purposes it is more important to try to identify a bit more precisely what groups in the contemporary United States would be the most likely to share this view. The most significant group are fundamentalists. As George M. Marsden writes, 'Certainly the most immediate heritage of the fundamentalists comes from their twentieth-century experiences of being a beleaguered and ridiculed minority.'³¹ American fundamentalism grew as a reaction to a new phase of industrialization and scientism, the new ideology of the elite. It was beleaguered in a world of Protestants who had 'strayed from the fundamentals,' joining the false religions of non-Christians, Catholics, and Communists. The fundamentalists, a primarily white, power middle class religion growing outside the geographic centers of power in the United States, perhaps have the most fully-developed Good Samaritan view of charity of any group in the United States, and they share the suspicion and potential for misunderstanding of others that this view entails.

Even though this understanding of charity may tend to characterize non-elites, it can support an elite view that philanthropy should reinforce power, as Barry D. Karl and Stanley N. Katz argue in their Gramscian analysis of American elite philanthropy. The system of charity in the United States has served to justify a minimal state, emphasize the benefits of 'self-help' for the disadvantaged, and excuse the lack of deeper expressions of love by rich 'philanthropists' to poor recipients, and vice versa."

Liberalism: competitive individualism, property, and the market

Protestant denominationalism may have had the most wide-ranging impact of any historical philosophy on what most Americans take to be common sense, but it is probably not the most significant part of the common sense of the ruling classes in the United States. That distinction belongs to liberalism.

Liberalism is the source of that lived philosophy of many of the more privileged Americans; it emphasizes social atomism and competition and suggests that people have few responsibilities for each other. Liberalism is also the source of the even more pervasive American insistence upon the importance of private property and the need for private accumulation. Finally, liberalism is the source of the preference that many Americans have for dealing with all social relations through the market.

If one of the United States's founding fathers could be transported from the end of the eighteenth-century to the present day they would probably not be surprised at the degree to which liberal doctrine is taken to be common sense by Americans. If anything they might be surprised at how much some liberal dogmas have lost ground to what to many of the founding fathers would have appeared to be archaic religious sentiments. In 1776 the United States may have been a more liberal nation than it is today. It was certainly a less-religious one. While one scholar estimates that only one in ten Americans would have identified themselves with any established religion at the time of the American war of independence,³³ today the United States is the most religious of the industrialized nations."

Religion, particularly the denominations of the disadvantaged that grew with social upheaval and immigration, probably has encroached upon the mass appeal of some liberal ideas in the United States, especially the appeal of individualism. But, as if to compensate, Protestant denominationalism has served to strengthen other liberal dogmas: private property and the market. At the same time that newer 'scientific' ideologies, especially Social Darwinism, have reinvigorated almost all the elements of liberalism that are common sense to Americans.

Whether one wishes to start with Thomas Hobbes or John Locke or wait until the beginnings of modern political economy with Adam Smith, the core problem faced by liberal theorists has always been what to do in a world in which individuals are social atoms, driven by passions, without responsibility for one another and in relentless competition with everyone else. Albert O. Hirschman's brilliant analysis of the origins of liberalism reminds us that the original problem was one of philosophers worrying about a world in which the passions that drove the war-like princes had come to motivate a significant proportion of the population."

At the time of the American war of independence the British colonies of North America may well have been the sort of place where such anti-social individualism looked like it could run amok. The country included a significant population of men who had little reason to develop any sense of community responsibility. Using relatively comprehensive statistics of one year's emigration from Britain to America in the late-eighteenth century, Bernard Bailyn figures that the new American population was made up of two distinct groups. One, family groups, often Scots-Irish, hardworking, and already Protestants

or ripe for conversion in the new Methodist and Baptist revivals, were hardly people suffering from a fearful competitive individualism. The other group, primarily younger men, fortune seekers, men willing to sell their immediate liberty to get to America where their liberty might be total, were another matter.^{3e} The American frontiers soon filled with super-individualistic, often socially irresponsible adventurers, the men of American frontier novels and Westerns. They accepted, lived, convinced others of the importance of the liberal assumptions of competitive individualism.^{3'}

A number of American films of the last generation (e.g., *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*), mourn the passing of American competitive individualism along with the loss of the frontier to settled agriculture, families, churches, and responsible communities, but the idea has not been completely removed from the American common sense. Attitude surveys demonstrate that it shows up periodically. In the 1970s in particular there was a clear move toward a more aggressive individualism, especially among American men."

The liberal assumption of competitive individualism has also retained its place in the consciousness of Americans by its attachment, since the late nineteenth century, to the philosophy of Social Darwinism. While most Americans might no longer believe that life is and should be a struggle of each man or woman against all others, most Americans do believe that life involves the struggle of groups against one another. Liberalism even contributed to white racism in the United States: because life is a struggle and people only have duties to themselves Native Americans could be eradicated and black people enslaved. When Social Darwinism gave white Americans a 'scientific' basis for their racism, the competitive struggle could be identified as the war between whites and the rest of the world.^{3v}

Yet, liberalism's concern with competitiveness 'even as buttressed by Social Darwinism, has not left America with a monolithic, uniform racism.^{4°} On the other hand, respect for the basic means that the classical liberals saw for dealing with a world of competitive individualism pervades American thinking. American support and respect for private property is almost universal.^{4l}

In classical liberalism property, especially landed property, became the *sine qua non* of human character, the bridge between anti-social drives of the individual and the various market-like means through which the public interest could be served by those pursuing private vices. In Locke's system America itself acts as a sort of safety-valve of less-developed land that can be used to give property to those who will live under the British social contract. American history actually proved something similar to Locke's point. The availability of relatively inexpensive land until well into this century helped make 'The American Dream' of self-sufficient property ownership within the grasp of many Americans. In the United States, more than in many other societies, the popular defense of property is a defense of self-interest, or defense of the

system in which one's own goals can be achieved, as much as it is a defense of the interests of the dominant class.

Yet, if liberalism were the *only* ideological underpinning of private property in the United States the institution would probably be much less legitimate than it is. Within the contradictory consciousness of most Americans there is a great fear of great accumulations of power, prestige, and wealth. It would be difficult for most Americans to fully justify the massive and continuous growth of the private fortunes that capitalism generates if it were not for the way that American religious doctrine works to support private property. At a very superficial level (important, perhaps, to early capitalism but less to the United States today) the Calvinist legacy leaves many Americans with the feeling that accumulations of wealth are a sign of virtue. ⁴² Today, or at any time in the last century, that argument is more likely to be put in Social Darwinist terms even if it is linked to religion, and it is an argument more likely to be given by ideologists of the American upper classes than as the religious argument of those who speak for and to the less-privileged. ⁴³

More significantly for most Americans today, neither liberalism nor Protestant denominationalism provides them with any positive command for taking huge fortunes from those who have them even when those fortunes appear to be ill-gotten; yet, religious ideology, especially the typical American idea of community, prescribes clear negative injunctions against breaking up such fortunes. It would be 'unfair:' it would be 'stealing.' Not surprisingly given the high inverse correlation between religiosity and social status, the largest group of Americans most committed to defending private fortunes are those whose social condition assures that it will be others' fortunes that they defend.^{°°}

Of course, liberalism only sanctions the accumulation of property as a private vice turned into a public virtue under certain-conditions. The struggle to accumulate must go on under conditions that are the same for everyone. No special favors and no use of private (non-economic) power can be granted. Ideally, the market, unregulated by state or private power produces such conditions.

Critiques of the liberal analysis of markets are legion, and part of the normal political discourse in most countries, but they are neither particularly well known nor accepted in the United States outside of some quarters of the academic community. In a recent attempt to conceive of how Americans could move beyond their faith in markets one of the country's leading political behaviorists, Robert E. Lane, catalogs the vast amount of survey data on American perceptions of the fairness of markets and the unfairness of governmental regulation and concludes that, like it or not, this preference is a 'deep structure' of American politics, even though this 'structure' is largely a matter of perception. Lane argues that such perceptions could change if Americans developed a stronger community point of view (one that extended to the entire nation, not simply to a particular locality or denomination).^{4l}

While Lane advocates such a change, he recognizes how difficult it would be simply because the market preference most Americans have is based on real political experience, the partial proof provided by the American political history in which the market has always been valued even by the most successful reformers. As Vernon Parrington argues, since at least Lincoln's time successful American political entrepreneurs have argued that the egalitarianism preached by the revolutionaries of their time can be achieved through equality of opportunity in the marketplace.⁴⁶ In the US, political institutions that restrict the market to reinforce a broader view of community and demonstrate that government can be just have always functioned in opposition to ideas that are common sense to most Americans. Roosevelt's New Deal is, of course, the most important example, and Roosevelt was able to justify his New Deal on the basis of a new idea of community which attacked the presumptive superiority of the market-place, he justified on the basis of a sort of scientism, the need to experiment within the bounds of the liberal dogmas.

One consequence of the deep support given to the market in America is that even non-elite American movements for social change tend to work for the perfection of the market economy rather than for its restriction. Thus, in the 1970s, in the years before Reagan's election to the presidency, the most significant social movement in the United States was one which defined all Americans as 'consumers,' as people equally interested in perfecting the economic market and, therefore, in doing away with unfair business practices that raise consumer prices, flood the market with shoddy products, or force people to buy things that they do not wish to buy, for example, the electric power produced by nuclear power plants.⁴⁷

Writing in the early 1970s Garry Wills, a perceptive American social critic, argued that the liberal notion of the market was not confined to the popular understanding of the economy but had permeated many Americans' understandings of their own morality.⁴⁸ Wills argued that many Americans metaphorically link their Calvinist concerns about Election and their Social Darwinist beliefs about the survival of the fittest in an idea of 'the moral market,' a struggle to prove the superiority of ones' own morality and ones' own being. Wills, who styles himself a conservative, finds this idea of competing in a moral market for individual virtue frightening and incoherent. But other academic commentators on American society see it as a virtue. People who compete in the moral marketplace are 'achievement oriented,' the essential citizens of a 'modern' society.

Faith in science

Wills's study was written, in part, as a commentary on what he believed to be the passing of liberalism as the dominant ideology in the United States. He predicted that Richard Nixon would be the United States's last 'liberal'

president. Wills argued that Nixon, who always considered himself an outsider in the higher circles of American power, was animated by what Gramsci would call an 'historical' philosophy that was going more and more out of favor with the American elite, even if it remained at the core of the beliefs of the American middle class.

Wills overstates the case. McClosky and Zaller's analysis clearly demonstrates that the American elite remain, for the most part, 'nineteenth century liberals,' dedicated to the free market and competitive individualism.⁴⁹ Still, arguably, a new historical philosophy has begun to supplant liberalism as the central ideology of American corporate managers and has become part of the common sense of most Americans, but it still owes a great deal to liberal roots. Scientism could never have developed its hold on the American consciousness if the ground had not already been prepared by the acceptance of Social Darwinism as means of explaining the rightness of the inequality created in a market society and the acceptance of an extension of the market metaphor to the creation and evaluation of ideas. To many Americans ideas compete and survive in an intellectual marketplace; they are proven by their practical application to existing [problems](#).

American faith in science also finds support in the Enlightenment faith in [progress](#). It was reinforced by the economic success of the first wave of American inventions" and the relatively benign history of the first experiments in industrialism in the United States," as much as by the Social Darwinism that many Americans turned to explain those who failed in the new industrial economy. But a version of scientism did not become an historical philosophy and an ideology associated with an historically important social group until late in the nineteenth century.

The importance of professions in the applied sciences grew in America in the middle of the nineteenth century. The professions, in turn, had a major impact on the growth and development of American industry at the turn of the century, the so-called 'second industrial revolution.' The philosophy of 'systematic management' developed as a guide to controlling the engineering-dominated industries of mid-century, especially the railroads. From there the ideology was adopted as the managerial philosophy of the new industries that developed in the larger, continent-wide markets created by the railroads, industries which, themselves relied upon new scientific applications: the electrical and chemical industries and the industries producing packaged foods and other mass consumption goods. The engineering philosophy came to dominate management in the first gigantic firms that managed the second industrial revolution and it remained central to the management of all of America's major manufacturing industries of the twentieth century: the aerospace and telecommunications industries and, beginning even earlier, the most important, the automotive industry. This was what Gramsci called 'Fordism?' 'Science' was extended to labor-management relations, marketing, and even to

institutions for constantly generating inventions that could be turned into new produces." Scientism became the ideology of the new part of the American governing elite, the managers of the growing private firms and (later) the managers of the growing bureaucracies of American government. Political analyst, Mona Harrington, calls the scientism that the American managerial class applies to problem after problem a 'functionalist' version of the old American 'dream of deliverance; 'S⁵ the shining city on the hill will be created by experiment, efficient planning, and the application of technology.

It is important that it was engineering, applied science, rather than theoretical science that was the source of American faith in science and technology. The particular American faith in science supports an essentially anti-theoretical attitude. Most Americans expect science to give results, to show that things can be done and they have an extreme distrust of theories, abstractions that often suggest that certain things just cannot be done. This distrust of theory explains why many Americans, especially American managers or those who aspire to be like them, insist that they have accepted no ideology, no system, but are only guided by practical [considerations.](#)⁵ The theoretical unities so essential to scientific investigation and to the accumulation of scientific knowledge leave many Americans unimpressed. Thus, we should not be surprised that in a country where the vast majority of people express some faith in scientific progress, about half of the adults find the Biblical account of creation preferable to Darwin's.⁶

This faith in science yet distrust of theory created an interesting paradox when the tools of the systematic management movement were first applied to government. American social sciences grew at the turn of the century with an explicit goal of applying scientific knowledge to the problem of government. This led to a call for government regulation that one historian notes was, quite self-consciously, 'an impulse without a philosophy, an instinct rather than a conviction.'⁷ In part because America's early reforming social scientists distrusted moves to set the principles behind their proposals in a broader theoretical context, later 'scientific' economists operating on the basis of the liberal principles that have such a 'matter of fact' and 'non-ideological' status in the US, found it easy to dominate the new professions. Similarly, when systematic management actually was extended to government, first in the regulatory movements at the turn of the century and later in the Franklin Roosevelt administration, the move was justified as experimental and anti-theoretical leaving the reforms presumptively suspect and only waiting for any evidence that they were 'not working' as well as might be expected.⁸

Experimental method, then, not theory, gives Americans their trust in science. Scientific experimentation produces solutions to problems and makes things possible, or, at least that is the presumption. Some historians would put down the American faith in experimentation, tinkering to get things to work better, to the laziness and carelessness of a people whose ancestors went

searching for pots of gold at the end of the rainbow, a free lunch, in the new world. A better explanation might be the one Gramsci seems to favor in his work on 'Americanism and Fordism,' the experimental tinkering and systematic application of technology that many Americans like has some positive results. It assured that American industry would grow to dominate world markets and it gave workers in the privileged sectors where science was first applied a relatively good deal.

Of course, not everyone in America was happy with the rise of scientism in the late nineteenth century. Traditional American intellectuals, disgusted by the factory and the engineer, searched for alternatives.⁹ And the churches of the newly disadvantaged, the rural poor and the lower middle classes excluded from the new privileged sectors, rebelled. Today's fundamentalism began as an anti-modernist, anti-scientific, and anti-industrialist movement directly before the first world war.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the managers and owners of industries of the second industrial revolution responded in kind. The Rockefeller family, for example, supported the movement for social modernism by endowing the University of Chicago and the Federal Council of Churches (which was designed along engineering-management lines to 'administratively consolidate the denominations along the lines of big business') and by creating the anti-fundamentalist Riverside Church in Manhattan, a massive modern-gothic cathedral complete with Darwin and Einstein carved under a statue of Christ on a side portal.¹¹

The Rockefellers were no more successful in uniting the denominations into one Calvinist conglomerate than they were at stopping the rise of fundamentalism. Yet the view of science held by the fundamentalists of the late twentieth century differs a bit from the views of their founders. As George Marsden argues, the fundamentalists' 'empiricist' search for the truth of God in basic texts has easily been assimilated with the technological side of American society, technological thinking--that does not wrestle with theoretical principles.¹²

Elements of contradictory consciousness in America

Political scientists who follow America's consensus historians tend to emphasize the compromises and accommodations that go on when a new ideological strain, like scientism, confronts older assumptions. That is in keeping with their conclusions, exemplified by Samuel P. Huntington's that there is a single liberal 'American Creed' that pervades American society. It is hard for those who accept this 'dominant ideology thesis' to explain why those American commentators who most identify with classical liberalism act like it is so embattled.¹³ Our starting point in Gramsci's understanding of ideology makes us emphasize something different, the contradictory historical sources of contemporary American visions and the uneven distribution of faith in

différent elements of thé American Creed across différent parts of American society.

Our starting point also makes us cast our net a bit wider than thé scholars of thé consensus school do. We must be concerned with thé contradictory consciousness of thé mass public as much as thé lived philosophies thé American elite. In contrast, a Harvard Business School professor, George C. Lodge, whose *New American Ideology* remains one of thé most thought-provoking studies of American contemporary American consciousness, ends up writing only about thé changes in consciousness that have occurred because of thé rise of technologically-sophisticated production processes and thé large firm. He assumes that these ideas have been set on top of a bedrock of liberal principles shared equally by all Americans. But, in thé end, because he ignores thé religious convictions that are at thé base of thé contradictory consciousness of most Americans, Lodge focuses on a conflict (liberalism versus thé philosophy of systematic management) that may only be relevant in that simplified form to a small part of American society, thé corporate and intellectual elite.

A historian of American Protestantism, Martin E. Marty, provides a better general analysis. Marty argues that thé baffle between technological philosophies and nineteenth-century liberalism represents rapid changes and ideological ferment in thé upper strata of American society which belie thé réal stability of what we would call thé contradictory consciousness of thé general public, thé affirmation of thé principles of denominational Protestantism along with thé libéral faith in property and markets." That constellation of (often contradictory) beliefs has as much claim to be called thé single 'American Creed' as does liberalism *per se*.

Yet, Lodge does make an important point by emphasizing thé unresolved ideological contradictions created by thé extension of thé faith in science through larger firms and big government. Bureaucratization of work and politics undermines both thé popular legitimation of American society provided by thé liberal belief in thé overarching good of individual action in markets and thé denominational belief in thé maintenance of community by isolation, conversion, or repression; neither thé welfare state nor thé big corporation nor even thé big union maintain themselves primarily through repression and all of these institutions make implicit claims about thé importance of communities larger than thé ones many Americans accept. It may well be correct to argue, 'a serious légitimation problem has existed for American institutions since thé Great Depression.'⁶

Notes

1. Frances FitzGerald, *America Revised* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979).
2. Important and representative works in this school include, Daniel Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), Richard

- Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), and especially Louis A. Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in American Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1955). Analyses of contemporary political events based on thé conclusions of thé consensus school include Mona Harrington, *The Dream of Deliverance in American Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1986) and George C. Lodge, *The New American Ideology*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1986).
3. Herbert McClosky and John Zaller, *The American Ethos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).
4. McClosky and Zaller, 228-33.
5. McClosky and Zaller demonstrate clear différences in thé ideological makeup of elite groups as compared to thé mass public. Their own distinctions tend to emphasize thé political activism among thé élite rather than job category, income, wealth, or other factors more clearly indicative of social class. Nevertheless, they use thé relatively well-documented correlations among political involvement, education, and wealth in their own analysis.
6. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, ed. and trans. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 279-80, 306-18.
7. Quoted in Loren Baritz, *Backfire* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1984), 26.
8. Karl Marx, 'On thé Jewish Question,' in T. B. Bottomore ed. and trans., *Early Writings* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 9, 23.
9. Perhaps thé most elegant scholarly discussion of thé genesis of thé American idea of Americans as a chosen people is Sacvan Berkovitch's, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).
10. Berkovitch, 94.
- II. A key source of this argument is Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* (New York: Seabury, 1975). In Karl Lamb's in-depth study of thé political attitudes of twelve American families during thé Watergate era he found that in his small upper-middle class sample, religious affect had been almost completely transferred to thé state and nation. His respondents believed in God, but they believed even more in America, and believed that *part of* being a good citizen was to be involved in some way with organized (usually Christian and Protestant) religion. The pattern he saw was consistent with survey data on American religious attitudes. *As Orange Goes: Twelve California Families and the Future of American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 154.
12. Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).
13. McClosky and Zaller, 38.
14. David Little even argues that Calvinism's original force comes from this ability to impose a legitimate, authoritarian order on a confused world, *Religion, Order, and Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
15. In *The New American Ideology* George C. Lodge suggested that this was changing. The book was written in thé early 1970s and, perhaps, represented a bit of wishful thinking on Lodge's part. Lodge, a professor at Harvard Business School, felt that Americans needed a stronger idea of community (a notion that membership in society had a long list of rights and duties associated with it) in order for thé United

- States to successfully reemerge in its position as the leader of the world economy at the end of the structural adjustments in the world economy that he saw appearing in the early 1970s. The last decade did not live up to his hopes. (On the contrary, Marsden, in fact, argues that fundamentalists have created some of the most successful 'new' communities in America in recent years, and these are on the old Puritan model, 'Preachers of Paradox,' 161.) Lodge's most recent project is both an attempt to develop a comparative explanation of America's lack of a deeper idea of community and a political tract aimed at convincing American industrialists and (to a much lesser extent, labor leaders) that they should foster the development of such a concept. The result is a series of comparative case studies of something like the 'common sense' in nine industrial or semi-industrial countries. Despite the grounding of the work in an idealist research design, it provides an excellent basis for indicating what is unusual in American common sense and what is typical of the ideological basis of all industrial, capitalist societies, George C. Lodge and Ezra F. Vogel, eds, *Ideology and National Competitiveness: An Analysis of Nine Countries* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1987).
16. One noted American historian sees American conformism and intolerance primarily as reflections of American class consciousness, a sort of immigrant's fear of slipping back down the status ladder to become just like those off the boat. This makes the impulse hard to fight against, but makes the fight even more worthwhile. Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 414.
 17. In *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), Martin E. Marty argues that Protestantism was always a major support for those who wanted to remove Native Americans.
 18. The earliest American novels even grew out of 'captivity narratives' that emphasized the conflict between the 'gond' settler and the Indian 'savage' and his vast continent as a source of evil and terror, Richard Chase, *The American Novel and the Tradition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), 11.
 19. McClosky and Zaller, 43.
 20. On the longer historical picture see Robert T. Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) and Linda K. Pritchard, 'Religious Change in Nineteenth-Century America,' in Charles Y. Glock and Robert N. Bellah, eds, *The New Religious Consciousness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.), 297-330.
 21. George M. Marsden, 'Preachers of Paradox,' in Mary Douglas and Stephen Tipton, eds, *Religion and America: Spirituality in a Secular Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 160.
 22. From 1955 to 1965, for example, during the childhood of the post-war 'baby boom' generation, almost all American denominations grew. But after 1965 the middle-class and upper-class churches diminished while lower-class Protestant churches continued to grow; see Wade Clark Roof, 'America's Voluntary Establishment: Mainline Religion in Transition,' in Douglas and Tipton, 135. The other side of the same phenomenon is that it is only in the religions of America's upper classes, for example, Episcopalianism and Unitarianism, that the 'crisis of religion' or the idea of 'God's death' has ever been much of a problem; see Peter L. Berger, 'From the Crisis of Religion to the Crisis of Secularity,' in Douglas and Tipton, 14-24.
 23. Stephen Tipton demonstrates that the most successful of the new American religions of the 1970s, even those rooted in Asian philosophies or psychoanalysis rather than Calvinism, spread an achievement ideology similar to the Puritan's, 'The Moral Logic of Alternative Religions,' in Douglas and Tipton, 79-107.
 24. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere (QC)*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), III, 1666-7.
 25. Gramsci argues that because religion and politics are both conceptions of the world, where you have an apparent political unity you find a proliferation of churches and religious sects and where you have apparent religious unity you find a proliferation of parties. The difference between (say) Italy and the United States, has to do with the particular historical traditions of the countries not with any greater fundamental agreement in one country or the other (*QC*, II, 1021).
 26. Marty (p. 74) argues that American denominations are like price fixers sharing a single market. The only way an American can 'buy' cooperation with others to deal with new social problems is to choose a denomination.
 27. See Handy, 174, 271.
 28. The criticism made, for example, by Jesse Jackson and earlier by Martin Luther King, Sr. and his son.
 29. Robert N. Bellah reminds us that the American cultural revolution of the 1960s began in the civil rights movement, in the black churches, and ultimately in the integrationist Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call for a universal return to the Christian imperative of love. The counter-culture, as much as resurgent right-wing fundamentalism, were both responses to the same social pressures and both were cast in similar language. Interestingly, it was only the upper-class counter-culture movement that lost the religious language retained by the civil rights movement and by the fundamentalists; see, 'New Religious Consciousness and the Crisis of Modernity,' in Glock and Bellah, 337.
 30. Walter Allen, *The Urgent West: An Interpretation of the Idea of the United States* (London: John Barker, 1969), 105-10.
 31. 'Preachers of Paradox,' 160.
 32. 'Foundations and Ruling Class Elites,' *Daedalus*, 116 (1987): 1-40.
 33. Handy, 145.
 34. David Ma-W, 'Received Dogma and New Cult,' in Douglas and Tipton, 112-13.
 35. *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).
 36. *Voyagers to the West. A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1986).
 37. Allen, in *Urgent West*, finds much deeper roots in Western society for this sort of individualism and is surprised that the philosophical justifications for such individualism did not appear until much later, perhaps (say) with Max Stirner and his deep belief in the privacy of property and his moral justification for letting others fend for themselves. Cf., Pio Marconi, *La liberta selvaggia* (Venice: Marsilio editori, 1979).
 38. J. C. Veroff et al., 'Comparison of American Motives: 1957 Versus 1976,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39 (1980), 1249-62, cited in Baard B. Knudsen, 'The Paramount Importance of Cultural Sources: American Foreign Policy and Comparative Foreign Policy Research Reconsidered,' Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Anaheim, 22-9 March 1986.
 39. Russell Blaine Nye notes that as early as 1854 influential works were published in

- the United States ranking the various races and setting out the doctrine of the struggle between them. *Society and Culture in America, 1800-1860* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).
40. McClosky and Zaller (p. 70) report that only about half of the American public believe in general racial hierarchies or abstract racist theories.
 41. McClosky and Zaller report over 90 per cent approval of private property on a variety of different measures (p. 122).
 42. Handy notes, John Locke, the "philosopher of the American Revolution," drew on the political capital of the Reformed tradition in his seminal essays. Therefore many Calvinists could accept his political philosophy even though his theological views were tinged with Enlightenment thought' (p. 139.) Little emphasizes that for the early Protestants business was a special realm of human freedom because it helped assure that men would not be idle, following the liberal argument, it turned the vice of greed into the virtue of diligence (p. 123).
 43. See Jim Moore, 'Herbert Spencer's Henchmen: The Evolution of Protestant Liberals in Late Nineteenth Century America,' in John Durant, ed., *Darwin and Dignity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).
 44. McClosky and Zaller, 140.
 45. 'Market justice, Political justice,' *American Political Science Review*, 80 (1986), 383-402.
 46. Vernon L. Parrington, *The Romantic Revolution in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1927).
 47. See Robert D. Holsworth, *Public Interest Liberalism and the Crisis of Affluence* (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1980). Holsworth demonstrates that consumer movements of the 1970s replicated the arguments and political tactics of earlier, largely unsuccessful movements for social change in the United States.
 48. Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* updated version (New York: Bantam Books, 1979).
 49. McClosky and Zaller, 248.
 50. Wills's analysis of the consequences of this phenomenon, which builds upon Herbert Marcuse's, is especially cogent, 318-25.
 51. Nye, 24.
 52. *Ibid.*, 29.
 53. In the United States, unlike earlier in England, the availability of free land helped keep wages in the first factories relatively high and working conditions far superior to those in Europe. However, with the first cyclical downturns in the American industrial economy things changed somewhat. Capitalists encouraged immigration to lower the wage bill. Still, industrial workers in the United States began and remained the highest paid in the world, at least until the nineteen seventies.
 54. The most important works on the rise of the large American firm and its relation to the engineering philosophy are Alfred D. Chandler, Jr's *Strategy and Structure* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962) and *The Visible Hand* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977). Also see David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) and JoAnne Yates, *Control Through Communication* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming).

55. See Harrington.
56. Commager, 3.
57. Eileen Barker, 'Let There Be Light: Scientific Creationism in the Twentieth Century,' in Durant, 186.
58. Commager, 217.
59. This is Hartz's basic analysis and critique of the Roosevelt reforms and is the basis for Lodge's argument as well.
60. Nye, 277.
61. John Durant, 'Darwinism and Divinity,' in Durant, 36.
62. Moore, 88.
63. Marsden, 161.
64. *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
65. E.g., R. Q. Armington and William D. Ellis, *More: The Rediscovery of American Common Sense* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1984).
66. 'Religion in America Since Mid-Century,' in Douglas and Tipton, 274.
67. Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins, 'Spiritual Innovation and the Crisis of American Civil Religion,' in Douglas and Tipton, 232.