

Political Science

With enormous numbers of new immigrants, America is becoming dramatically more diverse racially, culturally, and ethnically. As a result, the United States faces questions that have profound consequences for its future. What does it mean to be an American? Is a new American identity developing? At the same time, the coherence of national culture has been challenged by the expansion of—and attacks on—individual and group rights, and by political leaders who prefer to finesse rather than engage cultural controversies.

In *One America?*, distinguished contributors discuss the role of national leadership, especially the presidency, at a time when a fragmented and dysfunctional national identity has become a real possibility. Holding political views that encompass the thoughtful left and right of center, they address fundamental issues such as affirmative action, presidential engagement in questions of race, dual citizenship, interracial relationships, and English as the basic language.

This book will be vital reading for political scientists, historians, policymakers, students, and anyone concerned with the future of American politics and society.

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ONE AMERICA?

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, NATIONAL IDENTITY,
AND THE DILEMMAS OF DIVERSITY

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Editor

T E N

American National Identity in a Postnational Age

Jim Sleeper

That American nationalism eludes not only its critics on the left but also its champions on the right became startlingly clear during the 2000 presidential primaries, when Conservative Republican leaders long associated with flag-waving patriotism scrambled to discredit an American war hero who charged that their own global capitalist "iron triangle" of big money, bad lobbyists, and undemocratic legislation has debased the country for which he fought. Liberals and even some leftists, meanwhile, found themselves casting shy, admiring glances at John McCain's insurgency: on National Public Radio, former Clinton labor secretary Robert Reich marveled that McCain had electrified apathetic citizens who value their patriotism enough not to want it left to Pat Buchanan. In Seattle, World Trade Organization protesters discovered that Third World regimes (some of which their elders had romanticized) were blocking environmental and worker protections that are found, *mirabile dictu*, in American laws. "Our country has many things well worth protecting, and most . . . are social inventions, not individual factories," commented Robert Kuttner, editor of the left-liberal *American Prospect*. "If this idea makes me a protectionist, I wear the made-in-U.S.A. label with pride" (Kuttner 2000, E-7).

These aren't stadium shouts of "U.S.A.!", nor is there racism or imperialism in such stirrings of national pride. McCain tapped what the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas admiringly called the "constitutional patriotism" of Americans who joined the civil rights and antiwar movements to oppose the government on behalf of a civic nation beyond celebrations of "blood and soil," beyond ideological crusades against communism, and even, sometimes, beyond the capitalist pursuit of profit (Habermas 1998, 21). More recently, the American philosopher Richard

Rorty has unnerved some fellow leftists by arguing, in *Achieving Our Country*, that national pride is as vital to struggles for social justice as individual self-respect is, but that the left has abdicated its responsibility to keep American pride on the sound footing set by Eugene V. Debs, A. Philip Randolph, and others who were anything but conservatives (Rorty 1998, 3, 33, 51).

What more propitious moment for an ideologically conciliatory reengagement with American identity and citizenship? Surveying the ruins of the past century's world-saving schemes, Rorty, Michael Lind (in *The Next American Nation*), the political scientist Benjamin Barber (in *Jihad vs. McWorld*), the sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset (in *American Exceptionalism*), and others find the United States pretty exceptional, after all. Not that the country is divinely blessed or racially superior; rather, it's a unique experiment in civic nationalism and a test of the democratic prospect in a postnational dispensation.

The European Union is such an experiment, too, but the American experiment may be the more fateful. First, this country was founded self-consciously, in liberal Enlightenment terms that, for all their violations, have proven more resilient than mystical invocations of white supremacy or other ethnic destiny. Second, the United States has been peopled differently than almost anywhere else—often unjustly, but mostly with a voluntarism too fluid and diverse to be comprehended by old world solidarities or Ford Foundation ethnic corralling under the banner of "diversity." Anomalies like these have made the American nation, for better or worse, the progenitor of the very globalism and cosmopolitanism that have nudged even the EU into being. The United States is deeply, vastly flawed, but not, I think, in quite the ways many of us on the left assumed: riddled with injustices and contradictions though it is, the country's liberal-democratic-capitalist regime has proved too protean, supple, and absorptive to sustain indictments that turn mainly on race, class, and gender. There are other, even deeper problems inherent in social atomization and consequent cultural absurdities that cross racial and sexual lines. These are driven by a "culture" of consumer marketing ever more relentless and intimately intrusive—and ever less racist and sexist. Surely, new and daunting tests of American national and civic culture lie before us.

My argument is that in order to meet those tests, we will have to reckon with American national identity more fully, and less dismissively and destructively. And to do that, we need to rescue the very notion of national

identity from two extreme misconceptions that have palsied our political imaginations and our politics itself.

The first is a widespread misunderstanding of the political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson's characterization of nations as "imagined communities," nourished by sacred myths that commingle blood and soil in a kind of mystical bond. We see that sort of nationalism everywhere, writhing and dying—or, more accurately, inflicting death on millions—in the Balkans, the Middle East, central Africa, and elsewhere. We see it stirring in Austria and even in the United States, where it surfaces in revivals of a white-supremacist manifest destiny and of other, seemingly more benign but, in my view, insidiously destructive notions of non-white racial destiny that sometimes collect under rubrics of multiculturalism and diversity.

But our understanding of national identity has been prejudiced or tainted by more than such eruptions and insurgencies of imagined communities of racist and ethnic belonging. We need to rescue the notion of national identity as well from what I call the "imagined vacuities" of a late-academic, professedly postnationalist, cosmopolitan discourse that considers all nationalism atavistic and outmoded. We should keep a guarded respect for the kind of nationalism manifested in Danish voters' decision of September 2000 not to merge their currency with the Euro. That particular hesitation before the prospect of full European integration was not mainly an eruption of "blood and soil" nationalism but a well-advised hesitation, based in an understanding that something important would be lost in too headlong a rush into the arms (the tentacles?) of global, transnational capitalism.

The Danish, British, and other rebuffs to full European integration suggest that although both Marxists and global capitalists consider nationalism to have been discredited morally and outmoded economically, we still need nations anthropologically and, in the deepest sense, politically, in ways we had better understand. Even if we can agree that human dignity and rights are universal, we can no more rely on a world government or the "global village" than we can on subnational ethnic or racial groups to nourish a predisposition to respect individual rights or a political consensus to defend them juridically.

Some people's inclination to dismiss nations as defenders of human rights is partly a legacy of Marxism, which held—citing plenty of compelling evidence—that nation-states are little more than shells or

for warring capitalist elites. Leftists of my anti-Vietnam War generation, enraged at the American capitalist imperium, seldom acknowledged or understood national identity's richer, vitally necessary layers of cultural resonance and nurture—a necessity I will illustrate in a moment. There was something verging on hypocrisy in the few exceptions we made to our contempt for nationalism: people who wanted nations to disappear in the West celebrated the nationalist, often xenophobic passions and claims of Third World regimes and "people's liberation" movements, as well as of Native Americans and other "Indians" (whom some "postnationalists" now laud as "First Nations," without any apparent sense of self-contradiction). It was as if nationalism was good for Vietnam's National Liberation Front or for East Timor or China, but not for Polish Solidarity, and certainly not for the United States, where national pride was little more than a vessel of racism, imperialism, and exploitation.

Such notions linger. A lot of scholarly writing about nationalism is oddly silent about the United States, perhaps because it is too vast, variegated, and dynamic to be subsumed under either mystical invocations of ancient peoplehood or under ideologies of economic and social class that present themselves as functional accounts of nation-building. When this country figures at all in discussions of nationalism, it is as a grudgingly acknowledged anomaly, to be set aside for another discussion, or as an overarching and somewhat sinister imperium that asphyxiates noble solidarities of all kinds, nationalist or otherwise. Americans themselves have been little more helpful in characterizing their nation than have observers from abroad, at least after Tocqueville. Few Americans seem disposed or able to envision a national identity, progressive in the spirit of Abraham Lincoln and Walt Whitman or of Herbert Croly and Randolph Bourne, that is transcendent of the racism and imperialism to which it is so often reduced. It is as if we have forgotten how to talk about citizenship as Progressives did—not as an exclusive and exploitive or cooptive club but as a democratic project that can nourish a sometimes-glorious but, more often, prosaic benevolence across lines of race, sex, and even class.

A deeper, more respectful reckoning with such undramatic American civic and constitutional strengths would indeed challenge some of the racial and religious identities and social pillars to which we defer now so elaborately, and not just to repent or compensate the country's exclusionary past. A colder-eyed reckoning might actually ennoble instead of trivialize such identities, as liberal multiculturalism tends to do, or oppress

them, as some kinds of assimilationism tend to do. The new Americanism I envision would open territory somewhere between the old nationalism's "imagined communities" of blood and soil and the late academy's "imagined vacuities" of postnationalist, anti-American discourse—legacies of American racism and the Vietnam War more than of global forces that have supposedly discredited national pride.

There is no reason to argue that we can or should dispense with imagined communities whose basis is civic, not racial. However much global forces have sidelined nations economically and sometimes juridically, we do still need them politically, in the Aristotelian sense: just as each of us individual bearers of universal, Kantian rights has to uphold them within our idiosyncratic personal bodies and biographies, so must groups of individuals sustain rights within shared structures and storylines, in societies where each of us has a voice and a sense of belonging and we must sometimes be nudged, by laws, to respect. Since men aren't angels, as Madison famously warned, they need legal and civic structures to vindicate their rights and train the young in the arts and graces of public trust (Madison 1961, 322).

Only civic nationalism can do that for populations as diverse as America's, and such civic or republican nationalism must be clearly distinguished from the older, *jus sanguinis* nationalism that sacralizes blood ties through myths of ancient descent that are seldom empirically true. Even though racial and ethnic subcultures may nurture certain important social values and dispositions, the "blood" nationalism of such subcultures can't vindicate the spirit or the reality of liberty and equality for individuals from diverse populations. Nor can worldwide consortia and treaties sustain good societies. But the next American nation, if it could reaffirm its best and highest strengths and rebuild citizenship around them, might advance justice beyond its own borders, without imperialism or exploitation. It could be the bearer, sometimes almost despite itself, of a "progressive" spirit invoked variously by Whitman, Bourne, Rorty, Lind, Lipset, and others. The country is willy-nilly a microcosm of enough of the world to be a crucial model, even if not at all the "city on a hill" of the Puritan imagination.

But the American civic project is imperiled now, perhaps more than ever, by an unrestrained Lockean ethic of work and property that, however well it served society in a Christian, quasi-Calvinist harness (on which even Adam Smith and John Locke relied), has broken from that covenant

and is running wild in a consumer market that is more intimately and deeply (if more subtly) destructive of dignity than any secular, economic force the world has known. It has Americans seesawing between an empty moralism and an emptier materialism. It measures out American individualism increasingly by the slender power it gives individuals to make personal choices in markets that stimulate them ever more intrusively, as atomized consumers. That drains other associations, forcing us to privatize our pleasures and socialize our pains, as Robert Reich has put it (Reich 1987). An older, republican American ethos that Daniel Aaron characterized as "ethical and pragmatic, disciplined and free" (Aaron 1988, 37) is giving way to an ethos more antisocial, apolitical, infantilizing, and absurd—an anomic social decay that masquerades as liberation.

That's not an American exceptionalism to cheer about. Then again, in this nation of brave departures, clean breaks, and fresh starts, we're almost accustomed to concocting identities more or less *ex nihilo*, in a society we've often thought was disintegrating but which turned out only to be reconfiguring itself along somewhat better moral as well as material lines. If we can manage that again, so much the worse for the hand-wringing moralists, angry ideologues, rational-choice "methodologues" among us, and for detractors abroad.

Admittedly, that's a big "if."

An Encounter with Civic Nationalism

Let me begin with what might strike some as anything but an expression of American pride, drawn from my own first direct encounter with civic nationalism more than thirty years ago—an experience of the sort John McCain appreciates now but has said he didn't at the time. One gray, wintry morning early in 1968, I was plodding across Yale University's Beinecke Plaza, a typical junior on my way to class, when I passed a group of undergraduates gathered silently around three seniors and the university chaplain, William Sloane Coffin Jr. One of the seniors was speaking barely audibly, not only because of the gusting wind but because he was trying to find his voice against fear. "The government claims we're criminals," he said, as I leaned in to listen, "but we say it is the government that is criminal in waging this war." He and the others were handing Coffin draft cards just like the ones the rest of us carried in our wallets. They were declaring

that they would refuse conscription into the Vietnam War upon graduation three months hence, when their student deferments would end.

Coffin, who would send the cards to the Selective Service System, was there to bear witness to—and, in a way that I think is important in American civic terms, to *bless*—a courage few of us fully understood. “Believe me,” he said, smiling, a strand of his graying hair aloft in the wind, “I know what it’s like to wake up in the morning feeling like a sensitive grain of wheat lookin’ at a millstone.” It was a kind of Calvinist humor, jaunty in its defiance of “the powers that be” on behalf of a higher power; and something in us grasped at that little ray of hope, because we were scared. For all we knew, these guys were about to be arrested and taken to jail; and many of us who weren’t sure yet whether we were on their side felt morally arrested by their bravery.

I think that we were scared in another way, as well: what these seniors were doing turned upside down any connection we felt to the Second World War experiences of our fathers, whom Steven Spielberg has since brought back, after a fashion, in *Saving Private Ryan*, and whom McCain evokes well, even as a Vietnam veteran. Not far from where we stood that day, the names of thousands of Yale men who had perished in wars were inscribed on the ghostly marble walls of the university’s Woolsey Hall memorial, next to sculpted Periclean citizen-warriors and apothegms such as, “Courage Disdains Fame and Wins It.” Now the draft resisters were challenging us to join them in disdaining fame, but with scant prospect of winning even the posthumous honor the memorial bestowed on those of the age that is past.

There was no escaping these contradictory, wrenching feelings. Most of us felt no such conflict in supporting, from a safe distance, the same period’s civil rights activists in the South. The state governments there might be criminal, but, by the time we were aware of that, the federal government stood with the civil rights movement in ways that strengthened our own moral self-satisfaction in backing it, too. Here on Beinecke Plaza, that same federal government was being condemned and a summons to defy it was being served, in effect, to each of us draft-age men. And yet something in the resisters’ and Coffin’s bearing and speech made them seem as heroically “American” as would Private Ryan and Colonel McCain—and as free of anti-Americanism as Rosa Parks had been in refusing to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery. Parks’s protest was tendered with such dignity, crediting even racist whites with some in-

tegrity, even while exposing their shortcomings, that she helped to redeem even a racist society, reconstituting what was best in it rather than simply trashing or deconstructing it as inherently, eternally damned.

Now, too, on Beinecke Plaza, the students’ performance of civil disobedience was an act of national reconstitution. Jacques Derrida has used variations of the words “performative” and “constative” with some irony to challenge romantic ideas about the signing of the Declaration of Independence: since the “We” who held certain truths self-evident was constituted collectively only by a handful of privileged white men’s performance in signing the document, he says, any suggestion that a larger “We” actually declared independence is a fiction, perhaps an elite sleight of hand (Derrida 1986, 7–12). But Derrida is noting only a truism inherent in all leadership and therefore in many moments in politics. It’s not clear whether he fully appreciates the public alchemy of grave personal risk that made credible the American founders’ performance and, later, the best labor and civil rights activists’ and war resisters’ performance.

With Coffin’s help, the Yale students, too, were *performing* in public a real risking of their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to resist the United States government in the name of the American *nation*. So doing, they were *reconstituting*, or at least *revivifying*, that nation. It was as if American civil society had arisen from a long slumber and was breathing and walking on its own, remoralizing the state and the law; as we watched, the silent, wild confusion we were feeling gave way to something like awe.

We have all had more than enough nostalgia from aging veterans of 1960s protests, paeans to the heroism of a generation that, in truth, wasn’t all that noble. In the 1968 elections more than half of voters under thirty voted for Richard Nixon and George Wallace against Hubert Humphrey. Some people argue, Michael Lind among them, that the Vietnam War was justified morally, even if it was conducted badly (Lind 1999). Still others insist that even those who actually resisted the war weren’t so moral about it; some may have made a virtue out of little more than an elitist, moralist revulsion at getting their hands dirty in an ugly business. Had not universal conscription hung over our heads, few of us would have challenged the war so frontally; when the draft was replaced by a lottery, the antiwar movement subsided. In this view, ours really wasn’t a high civic nationalism on the move, and even the indisputably noble in it was puny beside the evil in America—the racism that some insist is endemic in our national structure and narratives; the militarism; the greed and concentrations

of economic power that generate exploitative, transnational entities and policies.

Yet somehow the antiwar movement did rouse or shame enough Americans to make Lyndon Johnson decline to seek reelection and to drive John Kerry, a Yale who'd fought in Vietnam and is now a senator from Massachusetts, to lead other vets in throwing combat medals back at the Capitol and in storming Senate hearing rooms to confront those who'd sent them. "This war broke my American heart," wrote Carl Oglesby, a literary tribune of the antiwar movement; his heart was "American" because he took seriously the old socialist activist Norman Thomas's admonition not to burn the flag but to wash it. The best of the civil rights and labor movements did that. They envisioned the reconstitution of a democratic people with a particular history and culture through an ongoing, reflexive transformation and experimentation. One of John Kerry's closest friends in later years was John McCain: two men who would have been at each other's throats in 1975 understood that constitutional patriotism can take many forms, and that even lethal disagreements can share in the honor of a commitment to human dignity that transcends narrow self-interest or group interest.

To put it another way, like that quintessentially American music, jazz, American national identity is a rolling synthesis of forces it generates yet doesn't wholly control. We should be impatient with people who can't get past indictments of it. We should match our revulsion at an Oliver North or a Pat Buchanan with our mistrust of those, much closer to the left, who default on the national pride Thomas evoked and, in so doing, let North and Buchanan set the terms of national belonging. "The great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right," said Martin Luther King Jr. in a speech inaugurating the Montgomery bus boycott Parks had sparked. (King 1991, 48-51). That is what made Habermas marvel at the "constitutional patriotism" of ordinary Americans, who drew their strength to resist the state not from fantasies of racial and ethnic destiny but from their love of an experiment that tests, as Lincoln put it, whether republics that rely on higher principles, and on freedom that is based ultimately and irreducibly on personal responsibility and civic virtues, can long endure.

Lest these arguments be tainted by nostalgia for the movements of the 1960s, let me propose that prolife activists—those who remain true to their belief that life is a continuous, sacred current whose beginning and

end shouldn't be set only by the personal decisions of individuals exercising their "rights"—may be constitutional patriots, too, if they peacefully contest opponents' demand that government should suborn and even fund what they think is murder. We may disdain such activists—or others who would curb the First Amendment rights of entertainment conglomerates like Time-Warner—as heartily as cultural conservatives disdained those of us who opposed the Vietnam War or the false racial comity of the old South. But the test should be whether we and they are loyal, as both Kerry and McCain now understand themselves to have been, to a larger framework within which such disagreements can be reckoned with, contained, and kept from spilling over into violence.

At least we now appreciate a constitutional framework's avoidance of gratuitous violence somewhat better than we used to. Good evidence of this is that several young journalists out of Harvard, such as Michael Ignatieff, Philip Gourevich, and David Rieff, have produced ideologically unsparing accounts of genocidal wars in African and other Third World nations, some of which were fatuously indulged by writers and activists of my own generation simply because they were anti-American. It is almost as if the recent spate of reporting on genocide were a semiconscious corrective of an older cohort's unwarranted romanticism. Not only isn't the United States, even at its militaristic worst, as bad as these disintegrating societies; the country's liberal-democratic-capitalist regime overcomes even the milder litany of complaints that it is unrelentingly racist and sexist. Is gayness inherently "progressive" because American capitalism depends on patriarchal, macho, homophobic strictures? Tell that to *The New York Times* and its advertisers, which are capitalist corporations, last time I checked, and which are driving a change. Does American capitalism depend any longer on racism? Are we sure? Why were the biggest defenders of affirmative action during the Washington State referendum of 1998 the Boeing, Microsoft, and Starbuck's corporations? Perhaps there is something wrong with an identity politics that only revivifies old group reactions to oppressions it should be trying to transcend.

Surely he or she is truly an American who thinks it a privilege and moral obligation to embrace a "to-die-for" identity that can rise above blood and skin and sexuality, and even beyond salvific ideologies and utopias, secular and religious. It entails a commitment to Lincoln's vision. But how do we fashion such an identity? One needn't be a communitarian to see that a civic culture is fragile and that its dispositions to engage

in reasoned discourse, tolerance, self-discipline, respect for rights, and, finally, noble protest don't come from just anywhere. They require nurture and upkeep, energetic pedagogy, citizenship building, and constant public discourse—homely truths and habits that too many of us no longer have at hand. My notion of civic nationalism as the best, even the only, venue for such a project is contested by cosmopolitans who claim to be “above” nationalism, as well as by champions of “blood and soil” solidarities and other subnational groups that claim to be grounded from “below” the nation-state. Let us look more closely at each of these in turn.

Who Needs Nations?

One reason Americans have trouble talking about nationalism is that we take too much for granted the durability of the civil rights protected by our nation-state and its liberal democratic civic culture. We take them so much for granted that sometimes we imagine that they can be assured better by something broader and more cosmopolitan than the national civic culture itself. The political philosopher Martha Nussbaum, for instance, warns that an “emphasis on patriotic pride is both morally dangerous and ultimately subversive of some of the worthy . . . moral ideals of justice and equality” (Nussbaum 1996, 4). In liberal-universalist terms, she's right: we can't draw territorial lines around one populace and say that only there will we grant and protect the human dignity and opportunities we claim are universal rights. Liberal universalists can also cite structural constraints on nationalism: in the nineteenth century, American nationhood was strengthened by the “breakthrough” economic entities and technologies of the industrial age—railroads, telegraphs, and mass newspapers, for example—that brought the continent together and spawned not only national capitalist entities like Standard Oil but corresponding nationalist political movements, like Progressivism, to temper the abuses. Today, however, in this view, national identity has been weakened, even outmoded, by more recent breakthroughs—multinational corporations, mobile labor markets, cheap airline flights, the Internet. These scramble some old lines of color and even class, both between nations and within them, changing settlement and work patterns and making possible new kinds of “imagined community” where ideas, information, and experience are exchanged at the speed of light. From the cosmopolitan point of view, it is only in

reaction to such seismic, kaleidoscopic shifts that some nationalist passions still ignite—defensively, belatedly, and destructively—flushes on the cheek of a dying age.

But what seems philosophically, economically, or technologically outmoded can remain anthropologically imperative. Although it's hard philosophically to reconcile a commitment to liberal-universal rights with drawing and enforcing national boundaries around solidarity and equality, it's just as hard to reconcile philosophizing about what may be good, true, and right for all times and places with how people actually live and move in the world. By universalist logic, no one should have celebrated the British “hand-over” of Hong Kong to China, which, celebrating its own nationalist consolidation against British “colonialism,” posed a very serious threat to such democratic and human rights as the Western imperialists had in fact introduced into a culture with scant experience of them.

Such ironies should confound assumptions that nationalism and human rights are always at odds. Sometimes they need each other. Rorty, Habermas, and Seyla Benhabib remind us, in their different ways, of a cautionary analogy I posed here at the outset: Although as individuals every one of us bears a universal, Kantian dignity, each of us must give that dignity expression in an idiosyncratic physical body and mind whose hopes, fears, loves, and bruises give each of us a distinctive biography (Benhabib 1999, 5). And yet these personal odysseys have meaning and prospects only as they find acknowledgment in cultural and political vessels—that is, in *social* bodies without whose languages, rites, symbols, and institutions no individual's “body” could be human at all. Sustaining social bodies takes hard work. Aristotle said that humans are the noblest of animals under law, the most depraved of animals when they abandon politics in the broad sense. “We are not *born* equal,” as Hannah Arendt put it; “we *become* equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights” through politics, by recognizing one another as consociates when we agree to enter into civic society and to induct the young into it (Arendt 1968, 177–78). It does take a village to raise a child.

But why does it take a nation? Only a nation can be large and diverse enough, and at the same time specific enough, to sustain a liberal civic polity—not a narrowly ethnic or sectarian community—in which people tie group narratives to institutional structures that vindicate universal, individual rights. Again I ask, who or what else besides nations can give or

withhold the right to have rights? Not the Pope. Not the world communist movement. Not the United Nations. Not the World Trade Organization. Here the cosmopolitan critique of nationalism "from above" runs aground: nations remain what the Latin economist Hernando de Soto calls "the skin of the poor" because they alone nourish collective narratives and discourse that sustain a jurisprudence with the legitimized coercive power to protect people's rights (Carey 1999). David Hume, although he was not a liberal, posed the problem well by writing that "the general interest of mankind is better promoted" when "every man consults the good of his own community" than it is "by any loose indeterminate views to the good of a species, whence no beneficial action could ever result for want of a duly limited object on which they could exert themselves (Hume 1966, section V, part II). And Kant foresaw in world government a "soulless despotism."

Religious and Marxist attempts to soar on grand humanist rhetoric about individual dignity to transnational utopias have soured too often into inquisitions and gulags because they didn't comprehend Hume's and constitutional patriotism's way of attaching homely, communal sentiments to liberal, universal truths. American civic culture does that. At its best, it comprehends the legal scholar Frank Michelman's observation that "the right to have rights depends upon the receipt of social recognition and acceptance . . . that is, on one's juridical status within some particular, concrete community" (Michelman 1996, 200–204). Civic nationalism may not be a philosophical solution to the dilemmas of securing human rights, but it is the only institutional solution anyone can rely on.

It isn't only certain varieties of Marxism and religion that violate this understanding. The right to have rights can't be upheld by transnational corporations or by the Internet (or by movements linked through the Internet), either. Not only that: The evidence so far is that global capitalism generates an overclass that is no longer bound in any enforceable way to nurturing, political communities of workers. When transnational managerial elites in effect secede from national social responsibilities, the world their investments are creating loses its capacity or desire to vindicate the right to have rights—to help people judge and act as free persons.

So we end up needing nationalism to serve humanist universalism. When Hume's "limited objects on which [citizens] can exert themselves" and the political consensus and trust that surround such communities thin out or fail, some people do seek succor in separate racial or religious

camp or in a proliferation of personal memoirs and private adventures that try to reinvent plausible social constructs; here the opposition to nationalism "from below," in subcultural or personal secessions, reveals its own limitations. Too often such communities and identities, some virtually concocted by their own would-be elites, abandon the universal for dreams of racial and other exotic destinies that exclude more people than civic nationalism ever could—and that, not incidentally, subordinate, to ethnic or religious demagoguery, the personal autonomy of those they do claim to empower. And most subnational groups have proved hopeless as defenders of human rights, except episodically and tactically, on the way to new "nationalist" formations.

It isn't often emotionally satisfying to ponder how to balance "rights" and equality through civic nationalism, but only prosaic national, institutional protections of rights can sustain the personal freedom and equal dignity most of us seek. No one should claim that civic nationalism can flourish without subcultural wellsprings, religious faith, or world-embracing visions of social justice. The point is that those things need social and juridical vessels that actually work, just as even cosmopolitan individuals need nurture in physical bodies that work.

A bitter irony in store for those who ignore this lesson is that their purported cosmopolitanism can become a Trojan horse for elites whom no one has ratified. That was the warning implicit in the Danish vote against adopting the Euro, and if it is not heeded, precipitous globalism can prompt darker, reactive retribualizations that are worse than civic nationalism. Joseph Bove, the French farmer who tore the roof off a McDonald's restaurant under construction in his native Provence to protest U.S. taxes on the Roquefort cheese he produces, came to the World Trade Organization demonstration in Seattle not so much because he cared about living wages and environmental standards, especially in the Third World, but because he wanted to defend his own economic and cultural ways. Fair enough, perhaps: his rhetoric soon transcended his narrower interests. But the French protest against crass American commercialization, justified though it certainly was, wasn't the moral or political equal of young American and Canadian protesters' insistence on anti-child labor laws and minimum wages for people in poor countries they'd never visited and in which they had no obvious material stake. *That* kind of protest was a true extrapolation of civic nationalism, in the spirit I first encountered in college.

Against this example, Nussbaum's caution that nationalist sentiments can end up subverting humanist values and can even curdle into racism and militarism is a truism, little more helpful than a warning that individual self-respect and pride can turn into self-aggrandizement through force and fraud. Of course, they can. But both personal and national aggression must be channeled and socialized; they can't be wished away by people who pronounce them dangerous. We don't decline to ride horses because they are strong and can throw us; we break them in. That's what civilization requires. Why are there contact sports? It's not clear whether Nussbaum has any idea. Yet it's when we fail to engage and elevate the prideful aggressions that drive nations that we get *The Fight Club*, the Nation of Islam, white militias, and urban gangs—filled with young men hungry for nobler rites of passage toward arts and graces of public trust, amid broader horizons.

What's So Unusual about the American Nation?

When we think about rites of passage, it's worthwhile to think of American civic nationalism as a citizenship-building project whose genius has been to temper the universal with the parochial *without succumbing to the tribal*. The nation was founded with that balancing act in mind. Even while climbing only slowly out of history's muck and slime and the country's own internal contradictions and hypocrisies, the United States has done quite a lot to enlarge and defend the right to have rights, even in Mississippi, even at Yale's Beinecke Plaza. Cultural identities reflect the human need to generate collective narratives, memories, rites of passage, and bonds of affection, and to find one's individual self within such narratives. If the larger society isn't providing them, subgroups of all kinds will try. But not all such subgroups sustain liberal principles. Groups based in "blood and soil" seldom do. Only a democratic national community can harness communal needs to universal values. It's when it doesn't that a Louis Farrakhan or Aryan militias emerge.

It is disturbing, therefore, that many Americans now accept as beyond question the notion that there is a substantial correlation between culture and color. They do so not out of conviction as often as because such assumptions seem to be in the air they breathe and the water they drink. In discussions of campus "diversity" programs, I often give students pause

by asking a young champion of "diversity" to "tell me three specific things you'd like me to presume that I know about you if I know only your race or ethnicity." Most people find such a question difficult because, when push comes to shove, they value their ethnic affinities far less than they do freedom to choose their interests and memberships and even to leave behind racial or ethnic labeling. The point is not that there aren't cultural differences deserving respect but that they shouldn't be concocted or promulgated to command respect. If true diversity depends on respect for a range of differences that is broader and deeper than colors on a racial spectrum, such respect requires that we accent and enrich the broader and deeper commonalities that sustain the disposition to respect one another across lines of race and ethnicity. Precisely because the country *is* so diverse racially, ethnically, sexually, and religiously—complex beyond any coding of it, as the census is discovering—we should all be working overtime to identify common bonds and nurture them in rites of passage that give us the civic leadership we need. The point is not that racial narratives should disappear, but they shouldn't become the central organizing principles of civic or political life.

When they do become central, some people respond to color-coded cultural, institutional, and governmental signals by making careers out of cashing in on ethnic identity, not just in preferments or subsidies, but moralistically, as if hoping to reap a kind of cachet. There is a bitter irony in this: just as the women's movement has been breaking down assumptions about sexual differences—so that knowing only a person's sex entitles one less often to presume anything about that person's inclinations or capacities—"diversity" advocates are "discovering" one new racial difference after another. It's as if, when postmodernists and queer theorists who favor gender bending turn to race, they become racial *conservatives* by trying to *conserve* and enhance racial differences.

In urban centers, such line drawing can become poisonous, as in the jury deliberations in New York City's infamous "Central Park Jogger" case a decade ago. A young white woman had been raped and bludgeoned by several young black and Hispanic men. Racial demagogues and even some academic racialists were portraying the defendants as victims of a lynching, although they were manifestly guilty, some having confessed tearfully on videotape upon realizing what they had done. At one point in the deliberations, according to some reports, a Puerto Rican juror slammed his fist on the table, glared at two black jurors across the room, and said, "All

right, all right; I'll vote to convict Ramon Santana if you'll vote to convict the black guys" (Sleeper 1998, 39). If such an attempt to broker justice racially was actually made by this juror, thinking himself the delegate of a race as he weighed individuals' guilt or innocence, we should have no difficulty in calling his thinking "un-American." Failure to retake that phrase from those who used it to redbait Communists in the 1950s would cheat universalism as much as patriotism.

The jogger case incident shows negatively why emphasizing ascriptive identities to expose abuses can end up reinforcing the abuses as well as the identities. It's one thing to show that false claims of comity and transcendence have suppressed truths about exclusion and oppression; it's another to leave people thinking there's been nothing *but* oppression. We'd be better off acknowledging that even if white racism could be dispelled, even if every broken heart could be mended and every theft of opportunity redressed, people would find other ways to divide and oppress, for ultimately the evil is not racism but the fear of freedom behind it that American rites of passage should teach us to face down and transcend.

Imagine if such rites of passage yielded movie producers who'd cast a Puerto Rican Jimmy Stewart in the role of a juror who persuades fellow jurors to abandon racial brokering for justice in tense deliberations during a jogger trial. We need leadership brave and savvy enough to point beyond identities that are negative, identities that shout, "I am excluded; therefore I am," or, "I am transgressive! Therefore I am." Some may ask whether we'd have anything of any value left to share if ethnic affinities lost all weight in our social equations and race receded in importance to the equivalent of differences in hair or eye color among whites. The answer, as Ellison said, is that "blood and skin do not think;" human beings are so much more protean, so much more creative than race doctors would have us believe.

As Randolph Bourne put it—and this was in 1916—"Only America, by reason of the unique liberty of opportunity and traditional isolation for which she seems to stand, can lead in this cosmopolitan enterprise. Only the American—and in this category I include the migratory alien who has lived with us and caught the pioneer spirit and sense of new social vistas—has the chance to become that citizen of the world. America is coming to be, not a nationality but a transnationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. Any movement which attempts to thwart this weaving, or to dye the fab-

ric in any one color, or to disentangle the threads of the strands, is false to this cosmopolitan vision" (Bourne 1992, 262).

Bourne had a friend, Mary Antin, a Russian-Jewish immigrant whose memoir of becoming an American, *The Promised Land*, is too often remembered as a tract for assimilation. In fact, it was both a poignant reflection on parochialism and a testament to the nation that had made her a citizen of the world. Reflecting in 1941, in her last published essay, on the European Jews' debacle, Antin wrote, "Not to dissociate myself from the Jewish lot, but to establish the more unassailable bond, I here declare that the point where I come to life as a member of modern society, where my fullest sense of responsibility is kindled, is deep below the ache and horror of the Jewish dilemma, at the juncture of social forces where I see the persecution or belittlement of a group—any group, whether of race, creed or color—as an attack on democracy" (Antin 1997, 1).

That is the fruit of the schoolgirl's paeans to George Washington; those who would dismiss Antin as a flag-waving patriot miss the truth that American patriotism was her stairway to liberal universalism; it may be a measure of liberal deformity today that we do not appreciate her message for what it was. Who, indeed, helps to express and uphold Bourne's and Antin's vision now? They and other turn-of-the-century Progressives were part of an open elite of public intellectuals, artists, and activists who reweave the national tapestry by posing Bourne's challenges. I think that he would condemn now, as "false to this cosmopolitan vision," not only white supremacists and Anglo-Saxon assimilationists but separatists of any color or kind who would try to "disentangle the threads of the strands."

In 1993, when I was a political columnist for the *New York Daily News*, I questioned Mayor David Dinkins's resort to the metaphor of the city as "a gorgeous mosaic" of racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual groups. I noted that while a mosaic's pattern can be beautiful, each of its tiles is rigid, fixed in place, unable to change its color or shape. Not only doesn't a mosaic describe the malleability of most groups or their individual members in a city as fluid as New York; even if we accept the metaphor and everyone is a tile, who is the glue, the bonding agent, looking out for the whole? Or, for that matter, who is the solvent, the acid that sometime undoes the glue and helps new patterns, new wholes, to form?

The question seemed beyond the mayor's reckonings, but in a democracy the answer should be that each of us sometimes devotes himself or herself to being glue or solvent, to standing for the whole. There is a

special role for intellectuals, artists, political activists, and leaders of all kinds in stimulating new configurations. There are, of course, false prophets, demagogues, hustlers of one group identity or another, ethnocentric and political hacks, not to mention self-appointed revolutionary or "nationalist" elites that become oppressors of imagined communities or proletariats, which often prove reluctant to follow them very far. Mosaics can congeal around such duplicitous and warring elites only when people are corralled and kept apart by their leaders.

In more promising American terms, each of us might be raised in a particular racial or ethnic subculture, but each of us could graduate from it at times (or forever, if we want to), to participate in a larger civic culture that is "thick" enough to live in, on its own affectional, race-transcending terms. Again, it isn't that religious or racial narratives should disappear; it's that they can't become the central organizing principles of a democratic civic or public life, and that someone has to nourish this common culture, or we are all lost.

If our ethnocentrism has shown some capacity to correct itself, it has done so for at least one reason too few of the cosmopolitan progressives among us seem to grasp: One of this country's deepest and still strongest religious traditions acknowledges a contradiction in the heart of liberal universalism by portraying knowledge, through the Garden of Eden myth, as an apprehension of the world haunted by a serpent and a corruptible couple of humans. That understanding and the epistemological humility it ought to protect gives liberalism a modest advantage: it acknowledges the imperfectibility of politics within which personal freedom takes root.

Americans have done this in a unique way that deepened faith without clinging to doctrine or ecclesiastical rule—indeed, often by defying them. When Coffin quipped that he felt like a sensitive grain of wheat looking at a millstone, he reminded us students that the resisters were drawing on something that passes rational understanding: Coffin's own conservative, very American Calvinist theology, with its emphasis on personal communion with God outside of ecclesiastical frames, strengthened his stand against the dominant temporal powers (Oppenheimer 1996). By separating church from state, the founders managed brilliantly to expand both civil and religious liberty; freedom from state coercion necessitated and strengthened voluntarist religious impulses like Coffin's, which in turn suffused the legal system with a moral depth it wouldn't otherwise have had. By keeping American understandings of personal dignity and liberty

free of doctrinal or priestly—and therefore corruptible—frames, separation of church and state reinforced presumptions of natural rights while rejecting arbitrary claims of divine right in politics.

Arguably, in consequence, "Only America has united nationality and universality, civic and spiritual selfhood, secular and redemptive history, the country's past and paradise to be, in a single synthetic ideal," as Sacvan Bercovitch puts it (Bercovitch 1993). *The country rests on an expectation of faith without an imposition of doctrine*. Rorty speaks similarly of American civic culture's need to save its religious impulses and capacity for awe without institutionalizing the infantile needs for security he associates with established religions (Rorty 1998, 15–21). But this is a balance too many liberals have lost, and the price they pay for ignoring questions of faith is that fundamentalists rush in where liberals fear to tread.

One might also believe that America is "exceptional," not in being divinely blessed but in being the anomalous bearer of so many prospects. Precisely because the United States is the progenitor of many of the seismic economic, technological, demographic, and cultural shifts I've mentioned, and because it has been struggling with some of the consequences for more than two hundred years, mightn't this country actually stimulate new configurations of human dignity, or serve as a training ground for expressions of them that transcend its origins?

Americans take their peculiar nation-state so much for granted that we don't think about what its absence would do to "the right to have rights." Secure in our regime, we still take eighteenth-century assumptions about natural rights almost for granted, and that is both a strength and a weakness. To the extent that we don't realize how bad things could get, we tend to think that any gap between assertion and implementation is an abyss that must be crossed. The strength in this is that it makes us sally forth in crusades as constitutional patriots in the ways Habermas admired—in civil rights, ecology movements, antisweatshop movements, in the best of the WTO protests, even in the leavening electoral ventures of John McCain, Bill Bradley, and Ralph Nader. The weakness is that when such efforts post only limited gains, or when new abysses open as quickly as we have crossed the old, some moralists and idealists fall into despair.

We are better off on those relatively rare occasions when civic nationalism wells up significantly from society's margins, as it did in the civil rights movement, when ordinary people struggled to secure recognition and decency as well as opportunities and advantages. Herbert Croly posed

that part of the challenge in nationalist, not Marxist terms: "So long as the great majority of the poor in any country are inert and are laboring without any hope 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 that 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" (Croly 1964 [1909], 22).

Rorty, quoting Croly, says the left wrongly considers nationalism itself such a spiritual drug. It can be, just as personal pride can be self-deluding. But many in the academy are captive to such cautions about national sentiment, and they wonder why their politics has no traction off campus. "Americanization" should denote an ambitious project to build the sort of citizenship the late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan invoked when she chaired the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform in 1995. Calling for new programs to Americanize immigrants, she noted that "Americanization earned a bad reputation when it was stolen by racists and xenophobes in the 1920s, . . . but it is our word and we are taking it back" (Pickus 1998, xvii). We need to nourish the nation on behalf of something transnational that comes not only from a Barbara Jordan, Norman Thomas, Rosa Parks, or Yalies on Beinecke Plaza, but from many, many others.

An Open Elite and a New Challenge

American constitutional patriotism and the identity that grows from it rests on a civic-democratic project requiring an open elite of democratic leaders—people skilled, like Coffin or Parks and others I've cited, in the arts and graces of intergroup communication and of standing for the whole. Such an elite is "open" to anyone willing to undergo its arduous rites of passage, as Rosa Parks did, as those Yale seniors on Beinecke Plaza did. An open elite doesn't admit everyone; it uses vigorous public discourse and judgment by acknowledged leaders to stimulate and certify people of all types and stations who've shown intelligent passion to nourish the whole, to relieve cruelty and humiliation, to strengthen others' dignity and skills.

Rosa Parks, for example, was a seamstress in a department store, but she was also the secretary of her NAACP chapter; she had been trained

to do what she did on that Montgomery bus and was prepared—as much as any powerless, private black person in the South could have been at that time—for the vilification and violence that would come with taking her case to court and to the streets. Membership in America's open elite can and sometimes must be like that. Compared to Parks, the war resisters at Beinecke Plaza couldn't have been more privileged, and, of course, they were white, while the war they were trying to stop was being fought by an American army disproportionately nonwhite. Yet they risked everything they had to stop it. The point of both the resisters' and Parks's stories is that an open elite isn't grounded or justified in racial or class ties.

I've said that American national identity tries to balance the universal with the parochial without succumbing to the tribal, and that it relies on faith even while assuring freedom from doctrinal or ecclesiastical coercion. But we are losing these balances, and I want to close on that note of concern.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber described how that ethic, based in both individual liberty and responsibility, in both materialism and delayed gratification, unleashed but also tempered entrepreneurial capitalism and also tempered it (Weber 1958). Arguably, only within the tensions of such a paradox can a "democratic" nation hope to balance personal freedom and social obligation in ways that advance both liberty and equality. But such advances today are imperiled by a post-Lockean ethic of work and property that, however well it functioned in quasi-Calvinist harness, has burst from its original social covenants into a consumer marketing that is relentlessly, intimately intrusive and deeply degrading.

Ironically, but happily enough, consumer marketing has decoupled blackness a little from class and from sex, confounding "liberationist" leftists and cultural conservatives alike. Until relatively recently, white segregationists of the South conflated blackness with sexual license and moral decay, which they said caused black poverty. In reaction, many liberal whites and blacks embraced romantic racialist notions that ended up recycling the old segregationist assumptions: like the by now emblematic "radical chic" partygoers at Leonard Bernstein's cocktail reception for Black Panther thugs in his Manhattan aerie, too many liberals and radicals transmuted an exotic blackness and sexual license into an imagined source of their own "liberation" from their middle-class restraints and anomie, if not of the poor's liberation from poverty.

But capitalism, "the system," as we called it then, has proved more supple and absorptive than even its strongest defenders anticipated. Groping with racial challenges the left and liberals helped to pose, it has shuffled the racial deck enough so that color doesn't correlate so clearly with class or with sexual liberation—at least not as we look ahead down most economic and cultural trend lines. Reports of racism's demise are greatly exaggerated, yet "race is over," as Stanley Crouch puts it, because, whether in segregationists' or cultural radicals' hands, it offers little leverage against new entertainments that demoralize and divert *black and white together* from the civic and economic work we need to do. When people as unlike one another as C. Dolores Tucker and William Bennett join hands against Time-Warner to protest mindlessly violent and degrading entertainment; when more complacent blacks and whites can sit together in television-studio audiences clamoring for rituals of degradation that titillate their most intimate impulses, race *has* lost its traction both for and against threats to civic comity that run as deeply through American life as racism itself.

Consider, too, the newly emblematic "white-on-white" tragedies in the Columbine High School massacre in Colorado and its analogues, which have decoupled race from youth violence in the American mind. Think, as well, of the "Bill and Monica" and even the "Clarence and Anita" shows—real-life soap operas that advance the disassociation of race from sexual license. So thoroughly, indeed, has consumer capitalism shuffled our libidinal as well as racial decks that it is even comfortable peddling sexual degradation. Those Calvin Klein-*cum*-kiddie porn ads that showed up a few years ago on the sides of public buses in New York City had been put there by private investors in free markets, not by people pursuing leftist or liberal agendas; it was nonmarket, civic forces that removed them.

Chilling commercial insinuations of sadistic violence, sexual torpor, and cynicism into our daily lives deepen despair and inequity, not by dividing people along racial or sexual lines, and not by uniting them against spiritual and cultural exploitation, but by atomizing the social alienation. In effect, they induce or sometimes intimidate weak individuals of all colors and sexual orientations to drop out of public discourse, one by one, deflating politics, which is our only recourse to "the right to have rights."

We have no more helpful a vocabulary to describe this kind of decay in our public life than most Americans had to describe racism in, say, 1940. The old passion plays against racism and sexism no longer work because

"the system" they used to condemn doesn't need so much of the racism and sexism that powered the sacrifices of white, male managers. No longer can even queer theorists imagine gayness as inherently "progressive" or even transgressive, let alone subversive of a putatively "patriarchal," homophobic capitalism; any reader of *The New York Times* news columns and advertisements knows that much of today's capitalism *embraces* gayness in its typically vapid, commercializing way. (Conservative defenders of "bourgeois" values such as Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz who oppose the new sexual pluralism will have to break with corporate capitalism in order to sustain their beliefs. But if they did that, they'd lose a lot of their influence. So trust them to finesse their discomfort.)

Yet the moral challenge is real, and not only for partisan cultural conservatives. The best labor, civil rights, and other social movements should be worried, too, by the capitalization of sexuality and even of racial identity in niche marketing. Once, progressives could appeal to consensual moral and civic narratives that were already dear to most of the larger society: The narrative dramatized by the civil rights movement, for example—a twentieth-century rendering of the Exodus myth on the evening news—linked the passions of the aggrieved to myths and principles that were very widely shared, or at least professed. The protesters revived a common moral and civic language; they didn't drain it in mocking, bitter defiance. They understood that when one group's idea of oppression is another's idea of justice, only civic and legal processes rooted in common beliefs can keep otherwise irreconcilable camps from spiraling off into a violence that terminates civic life. No matter how justified the most exemplary protesters felt in recoiling from racism into separatism and violence, they didn't withdraw from civil society or assault it by taking the law into their own hands; they didn't lie to the public or vilify it or speak in a mystical tongue others couldn't understand.

A society that loses shared beliefs and a common language and the little daily expressions of trust that grow from them degenerates into a slippery web of contracts and rights that can't be moved morally. It sinks into anomic litigation and the huckstering of political cardsharps. It snuffs out civic virtue to buy a false peace through brokering in racial or market terms, eclipsing principle and courage in personal and political exchanges. It drifts witlessly, from alarm to alarm.

Yet both liberals and conservatives have forgotten these truths. Neither camp seems to have anticipated that while negative liberties of "free

markets" and "free speech" are indispensable in loosening oppressive strictures, they don't by themselves actually liberate anyone. It's not enough to break sexual and other taboos to lift what Herbert Marcuse called "surplus repressions" if we leave unchallenged stark inequalities or, amid relative prosperity, the alienation and melancholy shadowing the unchecked commodification of our talents and desires (Marcuse 1966, 274). No wonder some flee commercial pseudoliberations for the succor of racial and sexual camps, where mythic roots beckon but identities are often more concocted than nourished. The chief peril to American civic health isn't the left's utopian/totalitarian impulses or the right's libertarian/fascist vagaries but the "bread and circus" decadence that is reminiscent more of the late Roman Empire than of the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany and that is coming our way via the tube, the Internet, the casino, the sex shop, and the psychiatric clinic, where even irreducibly moral crises are medicated away. It is driven less by the left than by the quarterly bottom line and by the marketing division. The next American civil rights movement, alongside drives to organize the unorganized, will have to repeal the "civil rights" of conglomerates that do what they want in our public and even private lives yet restrict our speech and actions in their own corporate realms.

This imbalance between expressive and associative power now hobbles our discourse. It won't be addressed by ideological leftists or rightists or by the terminal cynicism that has drawn so many from the civic center. The rewards of deconstructing civic nationalism in those ways are passing, not because our sins are gone but because we are already well convicted of them and need now to reenvision and build.

Wistful in our diffuse, new disaffection, Paul Simon sang in "An American Tune,"

We come on the ship they call the Mayflower
 We come on the ship that sailed the moon
 We come in the age's most uncertain hour
 And sing an American tune.
 But it's all right, it's all right,
 You can't be forever blessed.

No, you can't. But decency needs a home. It won't be sustained by tangled abstractions about rights or by rubrics that countenance a corpo-

rate "free speech" driven by prurience, sadism, or greed. Nor can civil society be saved by those too wracked by guilt to love their country. "America is the greatest of opportunities and the worst of influences," wrote George Santayana in *The Last Puritan*; "Our effort must be to resist the influence and improve the opportunity" (Santayana 1995). We can only hope that young readers will find the strength and savvy to do that in civic rites of passage that forge such power and wisdom.

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